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# The Conflict between Morality and Sexuality in the Poetry of Kamala Das

*Dr. Balbir Singh\**

Kamala Das is one of the most significant contemporary Indian poets writing in English. She has received wide acclaim and many awards for her poetic achievements. Her poetry has been both praised and criticized on account of her frank and uninhibited expression of sexual desires of a woman, and her satisfaction and frustration on this account. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyze the conflict between morality and female sexuality in the poetry of Kamala Das. Morality is a very broad and relative term and defies a general definition. By morality I mean the social and familial values, traditions and norms and an individual's obligation to conform to them. At the outset I want to make it clear that the analysis of the poems of Kamala Das is not confined within the strict ethical theories. Needless to say that all the normative ethical theories overlap to some extent and ethical values are relative. But I shall be mainly guided by the concepts like "Intuitionism", according to which "the prima facie moral principles are self-evident" (LaFollette: 9). In the opinion of Jeff McMohan, "A moral intuition is a spontaneous moral judgment, often concerning a particular act or agent, though an intuition may also have as its object a type of actor, less frequently, a more general moral rule or principle (93-94). My evaluation of her poetry will be based on "virtue ethics" which is especially concerned about inner stasis of character and motivation. (LaFollette: 10).

Sexuality broadly refers to the individual's instincts for sexual relationships (though its real purpose is procreation). But here the focus will be on a person's tendency to fulfill those sexual desires which are denied by the society due to various reasons. For instance, the sexual desires of a minor, lunatic or a married person are not permitted by the society. Though in western society these issues have been resolved to a large extent (with doubtful results, though), in India they cannot be set aside even after the successful feminist movement. The concept of marriage has also undergone a sea change recently and there has been demand for unconditional freedom in sexual relations. But these are highly complex issues and the whole social fabric is at stake.

Women's liberation movement began in 1960s in the west though its full impact was slightly late in India. This period saw the full flowering of Indian writings in English. Bijay Kumar Das rightly observes: "It is only in the 1960s that Indian English poetry began to exist independently with a stamp of originality and authenticity" (115). But it was also a transitional period for Indian writings in English. The female writers were aware of the women's liberation movement in the west but they were still not free from the old sexual taboos of Indian society. Kamala Das was a bold writer and, irrespective of her traditional background, treated sex explicitly in her poetry. She was perhaps the first woman writer in India to express this conflict of morality and female sexuality. Though in her poems she clearly mentions her identity we should not assume that she herself is the protagonist of all her poems. As Chakravarty observes, "Kamala Das's writings gain their vitality from her personality. It appears to the reader that the woman and the poetess merge in Kamala Das" (4). In fact, the descriptions of sexual adventures in her autobiography *My Story* so closely resemble those of her poems that it will not be wrong to assume that she herself is the persona in her poems. The poems like "An Introduction" and "Composition" reinforce this inference.

Though Kamala Das defiantly reveals her sexual adventures she is torn between social taboos and sexual urge. Otherwise one would not find so much melancholy and self-pity in her poetry. The age when Kamla Das wrote had not witnessed the full force of the women's liberation movement in India. Otherwise she would not have encountered so much resistance or suffered so much embarrassment on account of either her poetry or her prose work.

Kamala Das is perhaps the first Indian feminist poet writing in English. Before her no woman writer wrote about love and sex so explicitly and defiantly. Iyengar observes, "Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world" (680). She frankly expresses the predicament of an Indian woman under pressures of various kinds. Dwivedi also asserts, "Not only in her poetry, but also in her

essays Kamala Das comes out as an unofficial spokesman of the Indian counterpart of the women's 'lib' movement in the West..." (120). She candidly lays bare her experiences of love and sex with her husband and with lovers.

Dwivedi says, "As a poet of sharp feminine sensibility, Kamala Das gives vent to the hopes, fears and desires of womankind. She has been the champion of woman's cause in all her writings..." (119). But obviously she is confined to the amorous hopes and fears of an Indian female. In most of her poems she is least concerned with their social, economic and familial plight. Though in poems like "An Introduction" she complains about the pressure and constraints a woman encounters in society and family for being a woman, her main focus is on man woman relationships. In such poems she seems to be advocating the cause of women. Mohapatra says, "But in common, these poets [Kamala Das and Plath] speak about feminism and emancipation of women" (129). Undoubtedly, Kamala Das challenged the typical silence of Indian woman regarding her sexuality. Nayak observes, "Sex repels them both [Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das] and they visualize the colossal figure of the male as a primitive terror in identical terms" (76). Here Mr. Nayak does not sound convincing. Kamala Das does not seem to be repelled by sex. In many poems her persona is found enjoying sex and in others she even begs for sexual favor at the strangers' doors.

The general critical opinion regarding her poetry is that she is obsessed with love or that her love is unrequited and so she turns to unbridled sexual relations with various people. The distinction between love and sex cannot be overlooked. Hers is not what we may call spiritual love which finds expression in Platonic sonnets or the songs of Meera Bai (though in her later poetry she did try to mould her love in spirituality in the tradition of Radha and Meera Bai). She was obsessed with sexual urge and this is evident in most of her poems. Otherwise she would not have been so vehemently opposed to and dissatisfied with her husband. In those days nuptial knot was considered to be sacred and the husbands could not be so easily disposed off. They were the main social obstacles in the fulfillment of a woman's wayward wishes. This feminine sexual urge assumes a serious dimension and ramifications in her persona who is a married Indian woman in 1960s. Her poetry alternatively describes her ecstasy when her sexual desires are fulfilled, and the despondency and the frustration when they remain unfulfilled. But the tension due to the unfulfilled desires is visible so clearly in her poetry. Moreover, the tension created by these wishes on the one hand and social taboos, restrictions and family demands on the other is the real source of her mental torments.

In "A Hot Noon in Malabar" she remembers with nostalgia her childhood days at her ancestral house. For about nineteen lines she describes the normal and ordinary society and objects. But suddenly her mind drifts to "wild men, wild thoughts, wild love" which upset her tranquility and in the end for her "To / Be here, far away, is torture" (21-22). Perhaps in her tender age she had the experience of sex with some stranger and the phrase "wild love" suggests the intense pleasure of sexual fulfillment.

Some critics are of the opinion that she indulges in extramarital relations to find true love. In this context Arora observes, "She develops extramarital relations to quench her thirst for love" (72). How can extramarital relations provide one everlasting joy and peace? At best they can satisfy the physical urge of sex which is inevitably followed by pangs of guilt and self-pity. "The Sunshine Cat" intensely shows acute self-pity and guilt feelings after sexual gratification with partners other than her husband:

They did this to her, the men who knew her, the men  
She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish  
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor  
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher, and the band  
Of cynics she turned to.... (1-5)

In the last two lines of the poem we find her "a cold and / Half-dead woman, now of no use at all to men" (21-22). This shows her dependence on her sexual charms for her identity. After the loss of her youth and beauty, she thinks that she is a useless member of the male-dominated society. It implies that a woman can be useful to a man only for some benefit or more precisely for her physical assets. This is obviously a pre-feminine movement situation. If this is the case, what will be the fate of

all those women who have lost their youth? Arora observes, “She becomes a feminist writer by making her women conscious and providing them wings to rise and flutter and hence constructing a collective identity” (67). The statement sounds as if she is a radical feminist taking up the cudgels on behalf of the oppressed and exploited women. But in case of Das this does not seem to be true. She herself is grappling with the moral values imposed by the society and trying to reach a sort of balance and reconciliation. If the critics, on the basis of her later poems like “Ghanshyam”, conclude that she has attained a spiritual solution of her dilemma, they have not evaluated her later poetry in the right perspective. This is a stage when she has lost her physical beauty and sensual desires. The spiritual streak visible in these poems is a kind of alternative to fill her inner void.

“The Looking Glass” is replete with sexual images as if arising out of hot passion of physical lust. If the man mentioned here is husband, the persona is happy and satisfied with him and there is no ground whatsoever of her grumblings against him as we find in “The Sunshine Cat” and “The Freaks”. But he does not seem to be the husband. In all probability he is the old lover with whom she enjoyed full sexual satisfaction. Now she is re-living those orgasmic moments. But after separation from him she again becomes sad:

but living

Without him afterwards may have to be Faced. (17-19)

Her sensual “body which once under his touch had gleamed” becomes “drab and destitute” (23-24). Presumably when the female body is deprived of its sensual pleasures and is not used by man, it gets shriveled and old. “The Looking Glass” is a perfect poem of sexual fulfillment and content till the seventeenth line. There is no dilemma or conflict of any kind. No social obstruction or dichotomy of lover and husband is visible here. They are one. The poet here describes pure and unmixed emotions of love and sex consummating each other. But the jarring note begins with the word “but”. If the man who is the source of such a perfect sexual fulfillment sometime leaves her, she will be in a miserable condition.

Arora remarks, “She has the emotional involvement in sex while for the man the skin communicated pleasures are momentary” (75). This does not seem to be convincing. How can it be that man is not involved emotionally in sexual act or, inversely, that female is involved emotionally and not just enjoying her sensual lust? Both the man and the woman achieve perfect happiness and joy when they are engaged in the act of love emotionally as well as physically. Arora hits the nail on its head when he remarks, “Her nymphomaniac nature is responsible for her misery” (76). Her temptation for indulgence in extramarital amorous relations is the real reason of her despair and frustration. Because free indulgence in sensual pleasures is not permissible in traditional Indian society. It brings in its train feelings of guilt, sin, self-loathing and misery.

In “An Introduction” we find the protagonist in another situation as here she demolishes all kinds of moral barriers:

It is I who drink lonely

Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,

It is I who laugh, it is I who make love

And then, feel shame.... (52-55)

This is a very significant poem. Here she discloses perhaps her first sexual experience at the age of sixteen:

For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the

Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me

But my sad woman-body felt so beaten (27-29).

There might be a suggestion of a close relative who initiated her in sexual adventures. But after this apparently painful experience it becomes a habit full of joy and pleasure. After that she lives a wayward sensual life drinking “lonely / Drinks at twelve” (52-53). But such kinds of sensual adventures result more often than not in shame and repentance. Arora says, “Kamala Das expresses her deep despair and disappointment over her marriage with an unfeeling man who proved to be an obstruction on the way of her exploration of the self” (82). She often blames her husband for not

understanding her emotions. Here we observe the usual tendency of a sensitive person to put the whole blame on others. Firstly, who can say for sure that her husband is an “unfeeling man” and secondly, how can such a man prove to be an obstruction in her self fulfillment. If he had been an obstruction, he would not have allowed her to publish such poems describing personal sexual experiences. Moreover, a person has to explore his self-hood and identity himself. If she is dependent upon her husband for realizing her identity what kind of self-dependence she has.

“The Freaks” is a poem full of rare poetic vitality. In the first four lines the persona expresses total disgust for the lover or husband. The origin of this hatred is physical organs of the male which are the instruments or media of sensual pleasure. This has nothing to do with mutual understanding or love as she calls it. And still his “Nimble finger-tips unleash... skin’s lazy hungers?”(10-12). The line “Who can / Help us who have lived so long / And have failed in love?” shows that the man is her husband (12-14). She cannot separate from him as a really feminist woman can and does in this postmodern society (12-14). Why does she engage in sexual act if she feels such revulsion for the lover or husband? She is suffering under the psychic burden of age-old social moral values. And so it causes discord and tension. Is it necessary to have sex with strangers in search of love? Why can’t she find love without sex in a brother, sister, parents, and a stranger? Her total dissatisfaction after the act is obvious:

The heart,  
An empty cistern, waiting  
Through long hours, fills itself  
With coiling snakes of silence .... (14-17)

She admits that “To save my face, I flaunt, at / Times, a grand flamboyant lust” (19-20). She does not merely show off a “grand lust”; she cherishes a sexual lust which her husband fails to satisfy. In “The Old Playhouse” she gives vent to her bitterness and disgust for her husband:

You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured  
Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed  
My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices  
You called me wife. 10-13

Perhaps such lines have prompted Iyengar to make the following comment: “While her sensibility seems to be preoccupied with love and lust, it finds love invariably petering out into lust, and lust merely eating itself to the point of nausea” (679). Here she pours out all the venom in her heart against her husband because he ignores her female ego. His sexual act is hateful and disgusting to her because it fails to satisfy her. Under his heavy male ego she feels crushed and turns into an insignificant nonentity. As a result she feels a kind of mental vacuum and despair in her heart. Under his “monstrous ego” she becomes a “dwarf” (16-17). The final outcome of her married life is this:

My mind is an old  
Playhouse with all its lights put out. (26-27)

In this condition she searches for a male who can satiate her sexual urge. Mohapatra tries to link the loneliness and psychological vacuity of the poet to her peculiar confessional mode of expression: “It is because the confessional poets are aliens who fail to conform to the establishment and don’t make definite statement in terms of traditional and cultural values. This rejection of established norms of judgment springs from psychic disintegration of extreme mental state” (122). Mental vacuity and disintegration do not necessitate a deviation from the path of morality. There are a number of means and responses to neutralize this psychic disintegration. Her wild desires won’t leave her at peace. Why doesn’t she go to her husband? Confessional mode does not necessarily require non-conformity to social and moral values nor is it a corollary of the latter. In fact, the extreme love and care of her father and grandmother in her childhood haunts her. She can neither forget that period of time nor re-live in that period. In “Glass” she says, “I’ve misplaced a father somewhere, and I look/For him now everywhere” (21-22). In “My Grandmother’s House” she feels the nostalgia for her childhood days because at that time she enjoyed radical innocence. She was not troubled by unfulfilled desires or any kind of dilemma. The critics who say that she did not enjoy the attention and care of her family members do not seem to be convincing. She had all the love and security of a joint

family in an ancestral house. Also, there is no evidence that her husband failed to provide her security and comfort after marriage. This is only her boundless sexual desire which tortures her and plunges her in gloom and despair. Mohapatra rightly says, "The failure to arrive at love with satisfaction leads her in the claustrophobic world of the self, the wounded self" (128). And to neutralize the claustrophobia of the inner void she again approaches a lover. Nayak comments:

The revelation that love and matrimony are poles apart prompts Kamala Das's persona to search for a lover. Each affair though starts with freshness, intensity and exhilaration, ends up in despair. Her lover is incapable of giving her a blissful experience. Very soon the lover proves to be just another husband. Each relationship, however, succeeds only in intensifying her frustration and loneliness, and the poet turns to poetry as the exclusive medium for its cathartic release." 78-79

This is again her frustration and loneliness which leads her to indulge in extramarital relations with more strangers. In "The Invitation" the persona ruminates about committing suicide due to the gnawing despair in her heart. She is

...diseased  
With remembering,  
The man is gone for good. (12-14)

He seems to be the lover with whom she enjoyed the fulfillment of her carnal desires.  
On the bed with him, the boundaries of  
Paradise had shrunk to a mere  
Six by two.... (19-21)

The lines again suggest sexual obsession of the persona which deprives her of contentment and peace. In "Composition" she admits that she is fed up with love, tenderness, family relationship and friends and now

I must  
Most deliberately  
whip up a froth of desire. (63-65)

She is fully aware of the situation of men and women as far as marital and extramarital sexual relations are concerned. In the later part of this poem she says:

What I am able to give  
is only what your wife is qualified  
to give.  
We are all alike,  
we women.... (89-93)

The reverse is also true. What a stranger is able to give her, is only what her husband is qualified and authorized to give her. Again, men are also all alike. Many of them want to have sexual relations with as many women as possible if social restrictions are lifted. For that matter, they are more likely to be polygamous. So what is the need for begging for love (or sex) at so many doors? Now even she admits that there was the usual enjoyment of marital sex between husband and wife. Her husband seems to be a man of common sense and pragmatic approach. Kohli asserts that when Kamala Das speaks of love outside marriage, she is not really propagating adultery and infidelity, but merely searching for a relationship which gives both love and security (qtd. in Chakravarty 4).

Man has been able to constitute the fabric of social and moral tradition in order to live a peaceful and happy life. One cannot be given unbridled liberty in the matters of sex which is a sacred activity for the sake of survival of human race. But Kamala Das is conscious of social boundaries and constrictions. Still, as a poet she voices the emotions of all ordinary human beings. She becomes the spokesperson of all Indian women who suffer this dilemma. Thus she is perfectly playing her role as an artist. Nayak pertinently remarks, "After all, every sensible person knows that any tangible human relationship can flourish within the bounds of society" (74). Though society demands normalcy from the individual the latter cannot survive in isolation and needs fellow human beings for his wholesome, meaningful and peaceful existence. But the sensitive persona of Das's poems doesn't accept her plight and constantly gives voice to her miserable dilemma in her poetry. As Singh points out, "...the severer

the suffering or higher the ecstasy of the artist the nearer to perfection will be his art" (xiv). She fails to reconcile to her predicament and suffers due to this tension. And this dualism and tension provides the rare intensity, vigor and beauty to her poetry.

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## Nature : A Medium and Message in Poetry

Kulbhushan Kushal's

*Dr.Narinder Kumar Neb\**

Nature has been the subject of different forms of art and its treatment, particularly in poetry has drawn specific attention of the readers and the critics alike. The poets like William Wordsworth, P.B.Shelley, Robert Frost and many more have celebrated different hues of nature for different purposes and from different perspectives. Their treatment of nature points out how nature acquires different interpretations and meanings. Sometimes it appears as a divine spirit, a holy mother and friend of man, at others; it plays the role of a tyrant and violent force that acts as a supernatural agency to punish human beings for their wrong doings. It provides a still and static scenic background comprising beauty or turns into an active agent to impact human existence on earth. In whatever form it appears, nature forms a prominent part of thematic as well as artistic elements in poetic expressions. Different elements of nature including vegetation, animals, and creatures often acquire symbolic significance that awards complexity to poetic creations and enrich their texture. In contemporary Indian English Poetry, the treatment of nature marks a noteworthy presence in spite of the overwhelming presence of a host of contemporary socio cultural issues emerging against highly capital oriented, technology savvy world. In the changed scenario, nature appears as a prominent concern in the poetry of commonly called eco-conscious writers who concentrate on the evil impacts of exploitation of nature and destruction of ecology resulting from man's lust for wealth and materialistic interests and unprecedented intervention of technology. The present paper is aimed to explore and analyze how Kulbhushan Kushal, one of the most prolific contemporary poets, presents nature in his poetry.

The four books *Shrinking Horizons*, *Rainbow on Rocks*, *Whirlpool of Echoes* and *Songs of Silence*, that form of the corpus of Kulbhushan Kushal's poetry though mark a noticeable presence of elements concerning nature do not, of course, make him a poet of nature in the limited sense of the word. Nor does his treatment of nature bring him under the group of poets that Indian-English poets from the North-East may be said to form. These poets like Tensula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, Mamang Dai, Bhupati Das, Nigamananda, M. Dasan and a host of others present nature in way that in their poetry, "Nature as foster – mother or preserver / destroyer or the source of sustenance of human life and culture has been hailed." (Nigmananda Das: 2007:147). The way nature intervenes Kushal's poetic utterances demands a study of his poems that brings out the relevance of nature for the exploration of socio-cultural, psychological, moral and existentialist issues. The subtle and implied significance of nature in its various forms that one finds in Kushal's poems avoids direct representations of environmental damage or the political struggle that forms an obvious interest for the eco-critics. His poetry rather underlines the need to address issues concerning human relationship with nature that have a refining impact on him and bring awareness that nature is not just an inanimate existence; it has the potential to awaken man's moral sensibility. Therefore, in his poems, "The non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell, 1995: 7-8). Such a presence of nature in Kushal's poetry relates his perception of nature to human existence.

Kushal's treatment of nature forms an attempt to make sense of human existence on earth by relating it to the existentialist belief that essence precedes existence. The assumed presence of certain transcendental values, forms of behaviour and norms that help define the natural or 'fundamental' forms the basis of this understanding of life and nature. Such an understanding results in perceiving certain aspects of life in terms of the 'natural' and the 'unnatural'. It also marks a modernist belief in established standards related to life, art and nature. Therefore, there is an element of constant despair and regret over the loss of these values that often finds expression in modernist literature. In Kushal's poetry, this concern is presented through the divide between the real or the natural and the virtual or the artificial. In 'Face of the Mask', how human beings put on appearances and conceal their natural or the real motives finds concentrated expression. It shows how even one's face turns into a mask by profiling the virtual and the superficial:

A face is the best mask  
For all seasons  
For all reasons  
For all treasons  
(RR p. 28)

The exercise of using faces as masks is coordinated to maintain decorum against the real, instinctive or natural expressions. And the result is,

Devastating decorum has  
Debilitated our souls  
(R.R. P. 29)

Seeing life and nature in essentialist terms, Kushal exposes the attitude of the contemporary people that brings out their straying away from the fundamental established values. The poet criticizes this approach through the contemporary synthetic ideas about human relationships including the mother-child relationship.

In the poem 'Sanitized Mother', the interlocutors, one representing the child and the other representing the contemporary degenerated, pragmatic views bring out the changed perception in the following way. The first interlocutor says:

Please take real mothers away  
Substitute please

and the substitute that the other interlocutor like a shopkeeper offers, marks the commercial and business like understanding of human relationships resulting in commodification of these relationships. He says that he can provide:

The mother you may display  
In your drawing room  
And show to all those  
Who matter not  
(R.R. p. 39)

Here the intervention of nature marks the building of a perception contrast. Mother in terms of nature is one who nourishes the child and is the embodiment of love, warmth and protection. But the changed perception has reduced it to a mere object of display. Such an attitude also reveals how man's changed perception of human relationships is indicative of his attitude towards nature: both nature and human relationships have only ornamental functional and use oriented. It shows how Kaushal ascribes value perceptions to nature in its elemental and human contexts.

The value perceptions added to the objects and phenomenon of nature also finds expression in the poetry of most celebrated English poets like William Wordsworth and Coleridge through their naturalizing the supernatural and super-naturalizing the natural. Nature as such does not carry an autonomous, independent meaning in itself. It is the perceptive mind that adds meanings to otherwise independent processes and objects of nature. In the same way, the presence of certain 'basic' 'natural' essential features of human life are related to human perception instead of having some observable, tangible existence. Kushal's poetry marks his attempt to interpret human life by relating human behaviour to different functions that nature performs. Sometimes he uses intuitive, telepathic, emotional and mystic modes to relate the human and the natural. Instead of the rational and the scientific he uses fictive and imaginary modes to trace the link between the human and the non-human or the natural world. In his poem 'Intimate Strangers' he brings out the intuitive nature of the bond between the human and the non-human in these words:

I wonder  
How I am related with the tress  
They have never been my classmates  
They have never played with me  
They Know not my language  
Yet,

I have seen them trembling  
When there is an earthquake  
I have seen them frightened  
When the lightning  
Strikes across the skies  
I have seen them lost in meditation(SS. p. 27)

It shows how an inherent though unspoken and invisible bond does exist between man and nature that defies all logical and rational explanations. But in the changed scenario nature is understood in scientific terms that fail to see the significance of the traditional bond that existed between man and nature. Such a bond helped people realize the significance of nature in the forms other than the apparent , immediate and based on logic . Kushal expresses these views in the following lines:

It's queer to say  
A tree is a girl  
And a mountain  
A meditating sage  
It's queer to read  
Meanings in the moon  
And curse in the howling of an owl  
To predict  
The events to come  
On the studies of eccentricities of cats  
And the sneaky movements of rats  
(R.R. p. 54-55)

The implied significance of nature in terms of humanistic values forms another thematic strain in Kushal's poetry. The poet seems to aver that more and more man strays away from nature and runs in pursuit of the virtual and the cosmetic, the greater is his fall into unethical and inhuman practices. The inner void and a sense of loss result from man's pursuit of a world without spiritual bliss. Peace and contentment, divine grace and fellow feelings suffer a natural demise when man ignores the message repeatedly conveyed by nature. The disturbances and imbalances in the world of nature become symptomatic of corruption in character and adulteration in the purity of thought. Such a scenario that propagates commerce oriented, usage impacted attitude towards nature marks infiltration of these elements even in human relationships. Man's attitude towards nature and its objects influences his relations with the human world around. As envisaged in India's traditional cultural ethos, compassion, love, grace and gratitude towards the bounties of nature form a part of man's religion or 'dharma' or basic nature. It can be ascertained from the Vedic hymns in which the host or the yajman while organizing yajnas expresses his devotion, thankfulness and prayers to nature in its various forms. For example, in the Vedic Shanti Path or Prayer for peace, an appeal is made to Nature in its various forms to seek its blessings. In its translated version it can be presented as follows:Unto the Heaven be Peace, Unto the Sky and the Earth be Peace, Peace be unto the Water, Unto the herbs and Trees be Peace, Unto all the Gods be Peace, Unto Brahma and unto All be Peace, And may We realize that Peace. Om Peace, Peace,Peace.But man has lost contact with nature and forgotten that unwarranted intervention into the affairs of nature can play havoc with human life and cause immense destruction. Kushal expresses these ideas in the following lines:

Sirens were furious for centuries  
Their songs have been invested  
With lurid meanings  
Their gestures with lusty invitations

Planting of marines  
In their wombs  
Made them furious

Floods are here again  
To remind us  
How our anarchy has robbed  
The peace of the earth

And how our ears have stopped  
Listening to the music  
Of water, fire, earth  
Ether and wind

R.R.59

The destruction caused by nature in the form of floods and earthquakes is the result of taking nature for granted and treating nature as an object to be used and exploited. It marks the significance of the Vedic view of nature in which nature is not a hostile element to be dominated or conquered rather it has divine qualities. On the other hand the ecologists and the poets supporting these ideas also advocate preservation of environment without treating nature as a divine force: "Deep ecologists reject merely technical solutions; because these constitute yet another form of human dominance", and sharing the concern of the deep ecologists these poets, "advocate a bio-centric world which recognizes non-human world as having value independently of its usefulness to human beings, who have no right to destroy it except to meet vital needs." (Waugh 2006:36). In Kushal's poetry the views about nature seem to be closer to the Vedic understanding of nature and life.

How a deviation from these ideas and perceptions results in a divide between man and nature that consequently marks thanklessness and ingratitude that man shows towards nature ultimately resulting in loss of divine grace and blessings of nature forms the major concern in his poem 'Seasons'.

Creation of beautiful images capturing intuitive impressions in Kushal's poetry marks the presence of nature that defies rational and the logical. Occasionally, he develops a fantastic world of romance through visuals involving strange and mystical forms of nature. It brings out the creative ability of the human mind that results in tracing the logic of the illogical. The development of such scenes and images exhibits the functioning of the faculty of imagination that weaves a charm of the wonderful. An example of Kushal's creative use of nature into mesmerizing images can be observed in these lines:

There are mountains deep  
In the sea where  
Sirens dance  
On the beat of whirlpool  
Clad in stars  
Putting their celestial hands  
On the back of  
Fading face of the moon  
Moving forward  
For a wild kiss (R.R. 23-24)

Nature in its unorganized unregimented form realized in Kushal's poems marks proximity with the natural, instinctive and irrational functioning of human mind. Reasoning restricts the natural flow of mental processes and the mind in the categorization of the world into the natural human and supernatural does the same. Images of nature that appear in Kushal's poems often form an attempt to capture the functioning of the mind. The poet himself admits, "My poems broadly mirror psychic concerns that are explorations of different aspects of human consciousness. They profile a psychic quest for integrated meaning of flight of imagination and try to understand the fabric of response and the texture of questions". Neb,2008:47

Kushal's concern for nature emerges from his poems concentrating on the adverse impact of unreasonable use of technology and massive destruction of environment for material progress. Empowered by unprecedented development and use of technology man has defiled, destroyed and subjected nature to extreme exploitation. Consequently, nature too has turned hostile to man and from

being a mother, guide and friend it has turned into a terrible destructive force. The implied message of preservation of environment and ecology can be traced from many of his poems like 'Vengeance'. Kushal's themes include the growing divide between the natural and the virtual world: though existing together, both the worlds appear to be strangers to each other. The technology is vehemently striving to regulate and micro control both natural and human domains. The poet, therefore, fears that the natural objects, under the impact of technology, would not be able to perform their functions

I have another fear  
We shall invade the sky  
And all the twinkling stars  
The naughty moon  
Will not play tricks  
And his mighty wand

Will not make the waves delirious(Whirlpool of Echoes p.62)

Through his treatment of nature, Kushal also expresses his belief in the elemental formation of human body. The five elements earth, water, fire, air and the sky are understood to be the constituent that constitute human body. And the body ultimately is understood to dissolve in its original state into these elements. These ideas are tactfully and very artistically interwoven in the poem 'Neck to Neck'. The transformation of the human body into its elemental form in death has been conveyed through the suicide of a former. It shows how it is nature that always ultimately forms as source of bliss and releases man from the sufferings and pains of the material world. The process of nature in this poem is developed as a parallel to the transformation of human body into its elemental, spiritual form.

Kushal's attempts to trace the link between man and nature results in the use of different objects of nature as symbols and metaphors. It is the symbolic and the metaphoric significance of the words like rocks, trees, rainbow, birds, fish, etc. that relates them to the human world. In his poem 'rocks' he seems to look at human beings in terms of 'rocks' to show the lack of emotional worth, sincerity and basic human values in contemporary social life. Sans these values human beings themselves have turned into rocks that mark the lack of divine or sublime element in the man. Human relationship like the isolated existence of rocks, mark a sense of unbalancing, harmony and self-centeredness. Apart from this, the very presence of human beings on this earth seems reduced to mere rock-like existence. Man's ingratitude towards his environment, ecology and nature has destroyed his surroundings beyond recognition and this has the potential to cause great harm to human civilization. Eugene P Odum also suggests, "If man does not learn to live mutualistically with nature then like the unadapted parasite he may exploit his host to the point of destroying himself" (Odum, 1995: 233).

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# Life Behind the Veil and Beyond: A Study of Imtiaz Dharker's Poetry

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The poetry of Imtiaz Dharker is an inimitable blend of simplicity and spontaneity. Her poetry, to use Wordsworth's words, is a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Beginning with an attack on the prescriptive religion which has stifled humanity, the effortless ease with which Imtiaz conveys her message creates an atmosphere of purity, freshness and innocence symbolic of nature untouched and undisturbed by the craftiness and crookedness of human civilization.

Dharker's cultural experience spans three countries: Pakistan, the country of her birth, and Britain and India, her countries of adoption. It is from this life of transitions that the themes of her poetry are drawn. Imtiaz regards herself as a Scottish Calvinist Muslim and her poetry is a confluence of three cultures. It reflects and depicts her deeply sensitive and keenly insightful understanding and response to these three cultures. Her sincerity in handling the issues of social, cultural and religious significance sensitizes the reader equally well. The delicacy and the tenderness that run in her verses awaken us to the wrongs and songs of the daily life of women under the norms, rules and sanctions laid down by the patriarchal society. The present paper proposes to map Dharker's poetic journey focusing on the fascinating change in the style and tonal texture of her work with each successive publication.

Dharker's first book, *Purdah* (1989), explored a somewhat interior politics by probing the multiple resonances of the veil. The poem, 'Purdah-I', in this collection, is a discreet protest and an eloquent criticism of the tradition of veil strictly sanctioned and imposed on Muslim women. Our attention is focused on the turning point in the life of a Muslim girl when she suddenly becomes conscious of her sexual growth, others are perhaps more conscious:

One day they said she was old enough to learn some shame. And – Purdah is a kind of safety. [...] The cloth fans out against the skin much like the earth that falls on coffins after they put the dead men in. (Nine Indian Women Poets 50)

The line is deliberately kept ambiguous as the situations which girls face in the world may be different. It implies that when the world (especially the male gaze) starts seeing her as an object, the girl ought to respond by taking recourse to purdah. 'The cloth fans out against the skin': this is an interesting aspect of the purdah that during the early phase of having the purdah, a girl sees it as being separate from her, but as the final lines of the poem make clear, it soon becomes part of her identity and comes to be associated with her perception of herself and the outside world. Dharker further writes that the woman in the purdah is – carefully carrying what we do not own: between the thighs, a sense of sin. People around are the same; their looks are changed with a purpose

People she has known Stand up, sit down as they have always done. But they make different angles in the light, their eyes aslant, a little sly. (Nine Indian Women Poets 50)

Here, Dharker is trying to suggest that for men, irrespective of the way they may relate to a woman in age or station, there is a process of objectification at work; men who look at her may not do so directly as the words 'aslant' and 'sly' indicate, and this is a sign of men's hypocrisy.

'She stands outside herself,' that is, the girl is able to distance her personality from her physical state and consider herself as a subject; in doing so she realizes how heavily dependent she is on the patriarchal structures that govern social norms and conventions; the purdah in a way, enables her to develop this kind of critical perspective, but she also knows that it is extremely limiting because it prevents her from exercising her freedom as an individual.

Analyzing the stifling effect of the purdah, Eunice de Souza regards "purdah not just as concealing garment but as state of mind" (48). Purdah is suppressive and deadening to the intellectual awakening and growth of a woman and it is damaging to her personality. Purdah is a symbol of alienation and isolation from the outside world. It is a wall between the woman and the world. The

result is that she is devoid of the first hand experience and the enlightenment this world has to offer. There is nothing refreshing in it; it curbs and restricts the speech and full expression; it is a repression of will and choice. Her mind and memory are stuffed with impressions from other women; their consciousness of sex and the feeling of sin associated with it grow to a stifle:

Voices speak inside us, Her plight is really miserable and evokes sympathy- Wherever she goes, she is always inching past herself, as if she were a clod of earth, and the roots as well [...]. (Nine Indian Women Poets 50)

The woman looks around,  
Scratching for a hold between the first and second rib. Passing constantly out of her own hands,  
into the corner of someone else's eyes . . . . (Nine Indian Women Poets 50-51)

The lines reflect her desperation as even the purdah is no defense against the peering eyes of men. Moving further on, Dharker writes:

while the doors keep opening inward and again inward. (Nine Indian Women Poets 51)

Thus, her space is figuratively limited to her own world as the doors opening inward reveal her seclusion. The purdah restricts her vision of the world as well as her experience of life in the ordinary sense, which is available to others but not her. The 'veil' or the 'purdah' serves to secure her condition or safety from prying eyes, but the fact that it is also a cultural weight that she cannot easily overwhelm is apparent here. Such ambivalence is deliberately embedded into the textual fabric of the poem, which demands a nuanced reading of the complex circumstances in which a girls' adoption of the purdah is located. Thus, she is constantly engaged in the process of self examination, trying to make sense of her own situation and the world around her.

'Prayer' is another poem of discrimination against women. The scene is set outside the mosque where the observer, perhaps the poet herself, is denied entry. She expresses her strong resentment against man's writ which reigns supreme even in the house of God. Even God seems to have yielded to man's dictate. We are told that "The place is full of worshippers", all poor; their sandals with soles, heels and thongs "forming a perfect pattern of need" are ragged and mended many times. They are thrown together in a heap – like a thousand prayers washing against the walls of God.

They appear to be the hopeful prayers of the poor. The observer is quite ironical when she questions out of sheer curiosity:

What prayers are they whispering? What are they whispering?

The answer to this question lies in not saying anything and the message is conveyed in willful and tactical silence, in the subtle irony of the question itself. The poet sees no hope in a world of inequalities.

More penetrating is Dharker's Purdah-II where the poet is fiercest in her silence and kaleidoscopic depiction of the veiled Muslim women in an alien social, cultural, political and religious atmosphere. We hear the compassionate voice of the speaker but not her views. This voice forcefully expresses her serious humanistic and feministic concerns and the poet achieves marvelous artistic success in the fulfillment of her poetic purpose. It is a poem about many women and all merge into one. The movement of the poem reminds us of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. All these women in the poem merge into one woman; they are all subject to the same servitude – physical, psychological, social and cultural. Those who try to break out of it with the hope and dream of a free new world, face uncertainty and suffer excommunication. So the poem is an undaunted criticism of the way the society works against the freedom, dignity, will and choice of women even in an alien land. In the poem this land is England.

The tenet of the Islamic faith, 'Allah-u-Akbar', comes as a reassurance and a comfort even in the alien land. The early morning call comes and the mind throws black shadows on the marble. The speaker reveals how Muslim women offer namaaz in a strange land.

A group of twenty women hears the mechanical recitation from the hustling pages of the holy Koran without understanding a word, its meaning or sense. This is the shallowness of the traditional education with no light of knowledge. These words are nudged into the head as a pure rhythm on the tongue. They rock their bodies to this rhythm and this gives to them a sense of belonging. The 15-year old, new Hajji who had "cheeks pink with knowledge and startling blue eyes," throws a flower slyly on the book before a girl. It was the offering of the same hand with which he had prayed at Mecca. Imtiaz, perhaps, is hinting at the sanctity of love in this sanctity of prayer. The impact of this incident is so powerful that it brings about a great physical and psychological change in the girl and she is unmindful of the punishment on the Doom's Day.

You were scorched long before the judgement,  
by the blaze. Your breasts, still tiny, grew an inch.

This was a turning point in her life and her dreams were colored with the brightest shades. A girl from Brighton, Evelyn, noticed this blooming change in her –

I see you quite different in head.

The visible change results in her traditional marriage. All these girls are fated to live and die with no will or choice of their own. They are "unwilling virgins" who had been taught to bind – their brightness tightly round, whatever they might wear, in the purdah of the mind.

This veil is not only a concealing garment but a purdah of the mind. And "They have all been sold and bought." Men who appeared in their life earlier or men about whom they dreamed are a thing of the past, a matter of history. These girls simply surrender without any question:

Night after virtuous night, You performed for them, They warmed your bed.

Faith alone makes up for the years of loss. They made many sacrificial ceremonies to save the man and the child and what tense and dreadful moments those were looking to and waiting for the justice of God,

God was justice, Justice could be dread.

How ironical it is that these women observe purdah from God even!

The mood of the speaker is calm and poised throughout and the voice evokes compassion for the sorry mess in the life of these girls and women. The poet awakens us to the degrading and dehumanizing effect of this social, cultural and religious sanction. The speaker is well-acquainted with many such women – their past and their present. She has a round of daily meetings with them and, "I can see behind their veils." She can even recognize the region to which they belong before they speak. Some of these women dare and break cover. The speaker wants to share the experiences of these females who have been reduced to mere ghosts in such inhuman conditions:

Tell me what you did when the new moon  
sliced you out of purdah, your body shimmering through the lies.

The speaker tells us about two girls, the swan-necked and tragic-eyed, Saleema and Naseem. Saleema had learnt from the films that the heroine was always pure and untouched. She surrendered herself to the passion of the mad old artist and wondered "at her own strange wickedness." Still there is worse in store. She gains age after losing her youth and womanhood in the continuing process of being bought and sold, annual pregnancies and marrying again. Again she receives a sign of life behind the veil, finds another man and becomes another wife, begging approval from the rest. She is badly bowed under the burden of such a life.

Naseem's encounter with the English boy brought to her a promise of freedom. However, her elopement brought shame and disgrace to the family. She was remembered among the dead at Moharram. Thus, women continue to suffer behind the veil. It is totally devastating to the female personality and psyche.

Dharker's *Purdah* is, thus, a biting and compassionate portrayal of women coping not only with oppressive traditions and social practices, but with challenges of modernity and the demands of changing mores.

Dharker's next collection was titled *Postcards from God* (1994), in which many of the poems had overtly political overtones. An anguished god surveys a world stricken by fundamentalism in these powerful poems. This was a much more difficult book because the quietness was banished. Rage had turned some of the poems into posters, the images into slogans. The overtly politicized language revealed itself as the only way to confront the tragedy of late 1992 and early 1993 when India was rocked by the riots that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in northern India by right-wing Hindus. The events at Ayodhya changed many things for Indian Muslims; Imtiaz's poetic register recorded that change.

Reviewing the book in *Poetry International Web*, Arundhati Subramaniam writes, "With *I Speak for the Devil*, the poetry journeys further. The landscapes of the self, the metro and the country expand to embrace the world." In an interview with Subramaniam, Dharker reflects, "If the starting point of *Purdah* was life behind the veil, the starting-point of the new book is the strip-tease, about what happens when the self 'squeezes past the easy cage of bone'." In other words *I Speak for the Devil* starts at a point where the claims of nationality, religion and gender are cast off, to allow an exploration of new territories, the spaces between countries, cultures and religions."

With her latest collection, *Leaving Fingerprints* (2009), Dharker does leave behind indelible imprints on our psyche. For a diasporic writer like her, the finger print has a special appeal, with its suggestions of permanence, immutability and above all ownership. As the collection opens, the fear of effacement rises to the surface in poems such as "Her Footprint Vanishes" which begins:

She disappeared without a trace, they said. If there were footprints on the sand, the sea got there before anyone saw and wiped her off the face of the earth.

However, as one reads on *Leaving Fingerprints*, one witnesses a contrast that Dharker builds up between annulment and permanence. This bleak, blank image of annulment – the nameless woman, the unreliable no-man's-land of shoreline and the second-hand reporting of "Her Footprint Vanishes" – contrasts tellingly with a series of poems, in the later part of the collection, set on the south coast of England around history-steeped Hastings, in which images crisp up and colours deepen in terrain that has acquired stability from the stamp of the past. Sea frets and shifting sands are replaced by dense reds, blues and greens and a reassuring litany of solid station names, told like beads on a rosary: "Tonbridge passes. High Brooms. Tunbridge Wells, Wadhurst and Stonegate." In the place of the washed-out footprints, of the earlier poem, are concrete historical "dates" that mark the ground like "bigger boot prints, / pressed in harder" (*Leaving Fingerprints*).

It is the endless interweaving of a handful of symbols and meanings that gives *Leaving Fingerprints* the coherence that distinguishes it as a collection. Like a fingerprint – the image is inescapable – each poem here is a representative fragment of the whole; each exhibits a facet of the themes of the collection and explores it through the plain but robust iconography of rivers, hands, trees and soil which Dharker establishes.

The poetry of Imtiaz Dharker has, thus, travelled an interesting path – from the trauma of cultural exile and alienation to a celebration of unsettlement as settlement; from an anguished indictment of *purdah* where "the body finds a place to hide" to a defiant removal of the "black veil of faith/ that made me faithless to myself" and the "lacy things/ that feed dictator dreams". An accomplished artist and documentary filmmaker, she holds an important place in the world of Indian poetry in English.

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## **A Sense of Loss in the Poetry of**

## **Agha Shahid Ali**

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A sense of loss is indeed a complex phenomenon and it is quite difficult to define it in a straight statement. Its thematic interpretations are embedded with psychological, emotional, artistic, social and realistic approaches. The most engaging approach which relates to a sense of loss originates from a situation of doubt or when "a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason", (Ellmann, 71) as it is stated by John Keats. Long back, Johann Wolf Von Goethe in his essay, "Escape from Ideas", pointed out the main reasons which normally contribute to the state of doubt. He interpreted this context with reference to both human beings and the work of art. Referring to the behaviour of human beings he points out the peculiar nature of the German people who often behave in strange way due to their deep thoughts and ideas "which they seek in everything and fix upon everything, they make life much more burdensome than is necessary." (Ellmann, 69) Further Goethe tries to understand the concept of art and religion in the same vein. Underlining the mystic of those artists who made religion art and created a state of doubt, Goethe explains the fact, "religion stands in the same relation to art as any other of the higher interests in life. It is merely to be looked upon as a material, with similar claims to any other vital material. Faith and want of faith are not the organs with which a work of art is to be apprehended. On the contrary, human powers and capacities of a totally different character are required. Art must address itself to those organs with which we apprehend it; otherwise it misses its effect. A religious material may be good subject for art, but only in so far as it possesses general human interest." (Ellmann, 70) Friedrich Nietzsche, the great philosopher and theorist seems to attribute skepticism as one of the chief factors which adds to the creation of state of doubt and ultimately leads to a sense of loss. This is elucidated in Nietzsche's own words when he states, "one should not be deceived; great spirits are skeptics. Zarathustra is a skeptic. Strength, freedom which is born of the strength and over strength of the spirit, proves itself by skepticism. Men of conviction are not worthy of the least consideration in fundamental questions of value and disvalue convictions are prisons. Such men do not look for enough, they do not look beneath themselves: but to be permitted to join in the discussion of value and disvalue, one must see five hundred convictions beneath oneself-behind oneself." (Ellmann 98-99) Continuing his argument further, Nietzsche underlines the fact that even the concept of a spirit, freedom, power of existence do not escape from the effect of skepticism.

A sense of loss, no doubt, is deeply related to the state of unconsciousness which passes through various psychological processes. Sigmund Freud is credited with the presentation of a well-knit theory in this regard. The starting point of his investigation is based on the state of consciousness which according to him emanates from "both inside and outside the science of psychology, are satisfied with the assumption that consciousness alone is mental, and nothing then remains for psychology but to discriminate in the phenomenology of the mind between perceptions, feelings, intellectual processes and volitions. It is generally agreed, however, that these conscious processes do not form unbroken series which are complete in themselves; so that there is no alternative to assuming that there are physical or somatic processes which accompany the mental ones and which must admittedly be more complete than the mental series, since some of them have conscious processes parallel to them but

others have not. It thus seems natural to lay the stress in psychology upon these somatic processes, to see in them the true essence of what is mental and to try to arrive at some other assessment of the conscious processes. The majority of philosophers, however, as well as many other people, dispute this position and declare that the notion of a mental thing being unconscious is self-contradictory.” (Ellmann, 100)

Agha Shahid Ali, Kashmiri-American poet who was born in 1949 was brought up in Kashmir, the land to which he had a deep sense of belonging. His early childhood appeared in the post-partition era, after Pakistan was carved out from India. Kashmir remained a dispute, an issue about which the whole world was concerned. It is an issue of aspiration of the people who remained on this side of partition line (India) and that part (Pakistan). The desire of the people to merge these two parts and have an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir and the ongoing conflict of peoples therein, followed by and the anguish, agony, bloodshed and terrorism had prevailed since then and it continues even now. It is against this background that the poet grew up and reflected in his poetry- the ethos and turmoil of his motherland. Later on when he went away and made home elsewhere in New Delhi and in parts of the U.S.A., the thought of having lost his beautiful country, Kashmir, made him write the anthology titled *The Country Without a Post Office*. Ali grew up in Muslim-Hindu-Kashmiri-Indian cultural ethos. His mother was from the heartland of India portraying the mixed culture of Muslim and Hindu mythologies. Himself from Persian-Arabic Hindu- Shivaite culture of Kashmir and the third, the western culture of British colonism made a beautiful trinity of cultural impact and from this rich cultural heritage. Ali writes his poetry which pleads of the great loss of his mother and motherland, friends and foreign land, his beloved, Kashmir and his love for life. Though a poet of great sensibilities he portrays gloom and loss.

In *The Country Without a Post Office*, country that Ali is referring to is Kashmir which is seen as a post office of an archive for letters with doomed addresses. The very title of the anthology is suggestive of the complete and all-pervasive sense of loss for the poet. There was a time when Kashmir was called as the paradise on the earth and now due to militancy every family directly or indirectly has been affected by the conditions that are prevailing there for the past twenty years. He has written about the young boys who lost their lives and how they were tortured either by the militants or defence authorities. In the poem “I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight” he writes, “Drippings from a suspended burning tire, are falling on the back of a prisoner, the naked boy screaming, “I know nothing” (13-15). In Kashmir many families have lost their only sons and have become sonless. But Ali is still hopeful that the conditions in Kashmir will become normal. In the same poem in the end he writes, “I’ve tied a knot, with green thread at Shah Hamdan, to be, united only when the atrocities, are stunned by your jeweled return” (52-55). Shah Hamdan is a shrine in Kashmir where both Hindus and Muslims tie knots with green thread. It is a kind of ritual which is supposed to bring peace and love between the two communities. Though Ali writes about loss but he is a poet with hope. In all his writings, he ends on a positive note. He is hopeful that one day everything will be normal.

In the poem, “Dear Shahid” which is in the form of the letter describes the condition and feeling of insecurity the people go through everyday in Kashmir. He writes that every person whosoever leaves his home “carries his address in his pocket so that at least his body will reach home” (2-3). In the same poem he has also written about the torture the people of Kashmir are subjected to, he writes “men are forced to stand barefoot in snow waters all night. The women are alone inside. Soldiers smash radios and televisions. With bare hands they tear our houses to pieces” (5-8). But this does not mean that Ali has lost all hope. He is hopeful that the day will come when everybody will be united and conditions will become normal. He writes, “And, if God wills, O! those days of peace when we all were in love and the rain was in our hands wherever we went” (23-25).

Ali was wise enough to know that Kashmir is a forgotten struggle. That’s why he has made reference to more prominent modern conflicts like Bosnia, Palestine, Chechnya and Armenia. But Ali considered Kashmir as both the most beautiful place and land of sufferings. Through the poems of this anthology he has brought to the forefront the feelings of the people their pain, sufferings and anguish.

They are still waiting for that day when their pain would come to an end, whatever the people of Kashmir have experienced in the past two decades, the bloodshed, losing the dear ones and losing the peace for which the Kashmir was known. The impact of pain of the people of Kashmir on Ali was so strong that he not only mourned the death or pain of the people of Kashmir but all the tourists who visited Kashmir when militancy was at its zenith and their suffering at the hands of terrorist or defence authorities. The poem, "Hans Christian Ostro", was written in memory of Hans Christian Otto, a tourist who was killed by a group of militants Al-Faran. He writes:

And those defunct trains-Kashmir Mail,  
Srinagar Express-took  
pilgrims only till the last of the plains.  
...And draped in rain  
of the last monsoon-strom,  
a beggar, ears pressed to that metal cry,  
will keep waiting on a ghost-platform,  
holding back his tears, waving every train  
Good-bye and Good-bye.  
("Hans Christian Ostro," 1-3, 31-36)

Initially the poem "The Country without a Post Office" was published as "Kashmir without a Post Office" in the *Graham House Review*. But after revising it he changed the name. The title of the poem derives from an incident that occurred in 1990, when Kashmir rebelled against Indian rule, resulting in hundreds of gruesome and violent deaths, fires, and mass rapes. For seven months, there was no mail delivered in Kashmir, because of political turmoil gripping the land. A friend of the poet's father watched the post office from his house, as mountains of letters piled up. One day, he walked over to the piles and picked a letter from the top of one, discovering that it was from Ali's father and addressed to him.

The poem is divided in four sections. The epigraph of Ali's poem is from one of poet Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Terrible Sonnets," which is "... letters sent. To dearest him that lives alas! Away." The epigraph itself is suggestive of sense of loss which Ali experiences every now and then. In the first section of "The Country Without a Post Office," the narrator returns to a country (Kashmir) where a "minaret has been entombed" (2). A minaret is a tower, used in Islamic architecture, from which a muezzin calls the faithful to prayer. Minarets are usually located at the corners of the mosque. The person climbing the stairs and reading "messages scratched on planets" (5) also evokes the image of an astrologer. When he begins canceling stamps, he evokes the image of a postal inspector.

The second stanza might refer to any of the numerous battles in Kashmir. The conflict in the 1990s involved Muslim militants rousting more than one hundred thousand Pandits (Hindus) from Kashmir Valley, also known as "Paradise" for its beauty, in an effort to secure control of the valley and state. He writes, "empty? Because so many fled, ran away, \ and became refugees there, in the plains,\ where they must now will a final dewfall to turn the mountains to glass. They'll see\ us through them-see us frantically bury houses to save them from fire that, like a wall, \ caves in. The soldiers light it, hone the flames, burn our world to sudden papier-mache inlaid with gold, then ash" (9-13). The "us" and "them" the speaker refers to in the twelfth line are the Hindus and Muslims, the two dominant groups of the region. The soldiers burned homes and entire villages during the unrest. In Islam, the call of the muezzin is the call to prayer, called salat, which is performed at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and night. With no muezzin, there is no prayer in the city. However, the speaker maintains, "We are faithful," (22) suggesting that they, like the other side, are fighting back, burning houses.

In the second part of the poem, images are repeated but used in different contexts. The fire and the dark of the first section are now words on a card found in the street, appropriate for a poem about a country that has ceased postal delivery. The speaker offers his own hands to "cancel stamps" and open the lines of communication. The second stanza introduces a character the speaker obviously wants to communicate with, but cannot. There is no nation named on the stamps because Kashmir is a disputed

territory, fought over by India and Pakistan, and is not independent. The speaker looks for this person through the smolder and ruins of burned houses. In the last stanza, the speaker uses silence and fires as symbolic images that may give him a clue to the direction he should take.

In the third part of the poem, the speaker takes on the role of the muezzin, exhorting people to come to him and buy stamps before he dies. The “glutinous wash” refers to the backs of the stamps. In the second stanza, the speaker addresses his own heart. He is having discourse with different sides of himself. The fire he has inside is the fire of being, the various identities that Ali has cultivated as an Indian born Kashmiri. Ali was torn apart by the fighting between the Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir, empathizing with both sides. In the last stanza, the speaker has found his own voice by discovering “the remains” of the voices of others, specifically the muezzin who has died.

In the last part, the speaker reads letters that have piled up, the communication of lovers. In his role as muezzin, he likens his cries to “dead letters sent / to this world whose end was near.” In the second stanza, there is a shift from “we” to “us,” signaling the recognition that those sending the letters and those receiving them are the same person. The speaker has now descended into a realm of madness, of undifferentiated identity. He is lost, seeing only his own “Mad silhouette.” In the final stanza, he uses the letters of a prisoner to figuratively comment on his own desperation and situation. The poem takes a more obvious personal turn in the last few lines when the speaker admits, “I want to live forever,” suggesting that his own death is imminent.

Thus, evidently it may be stated that Ali was obsessed with the sense of loss and he eulogised it time and again in a beautiful way by celebrating the darker aspects of life yet he could maintain like Eliot the graceful style of writing by using appropriate images and diction according to the requirement of a specific situation.

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## Uncovering Humanism through Satire: Kolatkār’s Jejuri

## A Study of

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Arun Kolatkār, one of the leading literary voices of his generation has contributed immensely towards raising Indian English poetry to its present canonical status. His poetry demonstrates indisputably that Indian poetry has come to acquire a distinct identity of its own. Earlier Indian English poetry was mimetic. Unable to resolve the duality of the position inherent in the rootedness in the age old culture and the impact of western education, the poet sought refuge in romantic escapades. However the dichotomy between the two value systems—traditional roots on the one hand and acquired modern culture on the other has become a poetic reality today. The self-conscious voice of yester years has therefore been replaced by authentic voice of its own. This paper is an attempt to explicate Kolatkār’s *Jejuri* from the vantage point of irony to illustrate how his use of the technique of indirection enables him to authentically depict the contradictions of the situation.

*Jejuri*- perhaps the most compelling and celebrated as well as the most challenging of all Kolatkār’s works stands apart from the body of Kolatkār’s writings by virtue of profundity of thought, subversion of intellect, subtle use of irony and brilliance of its composition. Published in the Bombay journal—Opinion Literary Quarterly in 1974, it appeared in book form in 1976 and won the Commonwealth Poetry Award in 1977. A quaint sequence of 31 poems enacting a temple trip to Jejuri—a pilgrimage town 59 km south-west of Pune in Maharashtra, *Jejuri* reveals Kolatkār’s

uncanny gift for rendering the ordinary and commonplace into fantastic, weaving a series of events into a pattern and questioning the structured assumptions and approaches to issues and things. This paper is an attempt to explicate Kolatkar's *Jejuri* from the vantage point of irony to illustrate how his use of the technique of indirection enables him to authentically depict the contradictions of the situation.

*Jejuri* is in the true tradition of the religious satires undertaken by Swift and Chaucer. While as Swift stated quite succinctly that his satiric ends in *The Tale* were to expose "the numerous and gross corruption in religion and learning" through "Satyr that would be useful and diverting," Kolatkar maintains silence on the matter (Swift, 1920). His enigmatic silence coupled with his tone which is at times caustic, and at times humorous, tantalizes the reader into an exploration and unraveling of the text.

Kolatkar uses a plethora of ironic and distancing techniques which yield their full import to the scrutiny of an intellectually alert and emotionally mature reader. The central vehicle he employs to deal with religious beliefs and practices is parody, a literary technique employed not in the old-fashioned sense referred to by Johnson as a "kind of writing in which the works of an author or his thoughts are taken and by a slight change adapted to some new purpose" (Nicholas, 1971). But in the modern sense—to insinuate attack upon the style, structure or content by means of subversive mimicry, pretension, or lack of awareness in its original. This makes parody a kind of literary criticism, "working chiefly through imitation, exaggeration and distortion" (Fowler, 1973). It enables Kolatkar to impart to the book an extraordinary richness and variety.

Kolatkar has parodied not only the religious form, a pilgrimage, but also the religious beliefs and observances. The most palpable is the evocative title *Jejuri* which though connoting faith and religiosity demonstrates its comic absurdity through the very subversion of its content. Kolatkar appears not in his own proper person but as a persona/traveler. Kolatkar's choice of a persona—Manohar as narrator instead of his own proper person is a ploy to make his readers willingly suspend his disbelief and make his message more effective. What interests the traveler/persona is not the shrines and the Gods in the sacred land but the secular atmosphere prevalent in the religious locale. This disparity between the form and content, between the expected piety and the prevalent commercialism accounts for the irony running through the thread of the whole book.

What unsettles the reader at the very outset is the insouciance of the persona, his attention to trivial details, and his straightforward, matter-of-fact tone in describing a religious experience. S.K.Desai maintains: "the protagonist goes to Jejuri not as a seeker...nor as a pilgrim....He is a kind of a traveler...a tourist" (Naik, 1985). The persona sets out on the pilgrimage on a "state transport bus" more out of a desire for sightseeing than for enlightenment and spiritual solace. He is more enchanted by the place than by the ruling deities and devotees. His fascination for the externalities to the dire negation of the spirituality, his disregard for the old man "with a caste mark on his forehead" is disconcerting and sets him apart from the devout pilgrims. Disconnected from his fellow travelers,

your own divided face in a pair of glasses  
on an old man's nose  
is all the countryside you get to see "The Bus"

The most outstanding quality which arrests the attention of the reader is the persona's stance which takes in its embrace all the things—animate as well as inanimate—and endows it with life. Like Whitman, he believes subject-object differences are not real. Here the persona resorts to reduction, exaggeration, distortion and juxtaposition to achieve the desired effect. The ordinary doorstep, in "The Doorstep" for instance is metamorphosed into "a pillar on its side." The inanimate unhinged "heavy medieval door" like the conduit pipe in "Water supply" is invested with life. The bold, temple rat that scuttles over the statue of Malhari Martand in the house of God is placed on par with the temple priest. The abode of gods generally associated with brightness are here "dark" and in a state of ruin.

The ironic intent of *Jejuri* derives its force from the unstated paradox of the letter and spirit of religion. Kolatkar's concern here is for the gap between what is and what should be, between the institutionalized religions as observed by men of his day and the real one concerned with the salvation of soul. He records with utmost sincerity the minutest details of the miracles of things seen, felt or experienced. One can't help being impressed by a man who is rapturously involved in all created things. The dilapidated temples, wretched hills, the temple rat, the temple priest sans godliness, an old woman, and all the things he comes across, however, have been depicted as they are with a tongue-in-cheek humour, which is a mask for merciless realism.

The priest and his son have been delineated ironically. The anxiety of the priest as he looks at 'the long road winding out of sight' and wonders "will there be a puran poli in his plate?" reminds us of the pleasure-loving Monk, who passes his time eating, drinking and merry-making in Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*). The bus finally arrives and "stands/purring softly in front of the priest" with

A catgrin on its face  
And a live ready to eat pilgrim  
Held between its teeth "The Priest"

The food imagery is quite satiric. The matter-of-fact tone is easy to get wrong. Ostensibly it is an indictment of the hollowness of temple priests who observe religion only in name and are out to exploit the innocent pilgrims. But what Kolatkar is in reality insinuating through the seemingly irreligious concerns of the worldly minded priest is the deleterious/baneful impact of socio-economic pressures on religion. Crass materialism is wreaking havoc on human life. It has not spared religion also. Religious practices of secular provenance are therefore nothing but a corollary of this major paradigm shift in socio-economic set-up. True religion is inconsistent with the present scheme of wealth and power.

The delineation of the priest's son and an old woman reverberate with similar subversive concerns and demonstrations. Naïve and superficial, the priest's son makes a pretense of moral superiority and invulnerability but his narration of the traditional temple legends betrays lack of faith and exposes the gaps in his self – a self divided like the poet-persona's between skepticism and faith.

Do you really believe that story  
You ask him  
He doesn't reply  
But merely looks uncomfortable  
Shrugs and looks away "The Priest's Son"

What seems to be a manifestation of his religious proclivities is in reality a desperate struggle for sustenance.

Again, in "An Old Woman" we see an old woman grab hold of the persona's sleeve offering to "guide" him to the Horse shoe shrine. This is a common sight at places of worship in India. Irritated by this act, the persona tries to free himself from her stranglehold. Her pathetic cry/ ejaculation: "what else can an old woman do/on hills as wretched as these?" disturbs the persona into a tragic awareness of the harsh reality. Like the priest's son, who has adopted the vocation of a "guide" in sheer desperation, the woman has nothing to fall back upon and is battling against all odds for survival. This brings to the fore with renewed intensity the economics of the matter and the desperate struggle for sustenance rather existence in this holy town. The world about the persona collapses and the temple town *Jejuri* is shorn of its religious aura/loses its sheen.

And the hills crack  
And the temples crack  
And the sky falls

With this agonizing awareness comes the realization of the futility of any effort to retrieve the hopeless situation.

And you are reduced  
To so much small change  
In her hand. "An Old Woman"

Confronted thus with the unpalatable reality, the persona undertakes an exploration of the temple town Jejuri where there is a profusion of Gods:

What is god  
And what is stone  
The dividing line  
If it exists  
Is very thin At jejuri  
And every other stone  
Is god or his cousin "A Scratch"

The emphasis again is on the unsavory features—dilapidation, neglect and degeneration—for ugliness is a real fact. The erstwhile Maruti temple, which is "no more a place of worship" but "Heart of Ruin" providing shelter to /houses a "mongrel bitch and her puppies" is, therefore "nothing less than the house of god." That the dividing line between god, stone or cowshed is thin is reiterated in another section where Manohar, the bemused pilgrim confuses a cowshed for a temple. The description of 'Yeshwant Rao' "only a second class God" who is placed just "outside the main temple" is an ironic reminder of the structured hierarchy even among gods. 'A Low Temple' which houses its "gods in the dark" juxtaposes blind faith and orthodoxy of the obdurate priest with the skepticism of the pilgrim. The priest's insistence that the deity has eighteen arms despite proofs to the contrary leaves much to be desired./explained. The persona, however, quits the scene without allegiance to any view. Critics consider the persona's silence in this matter as an expression of Kolatkar's own unresolved paradox regarding matters of faith. This seems to be further reinforced in the poem "Makarand" which depicts Makarand defying the religious code through his initial reluctance to perform a "puja" with his "shirt off" and finally conceding to the sacred norms:

I will be out in the courtyard  
Where no one will mind  
If I smoke. "Makarand"

Kolatkar's stance which is a quaint admixture/amalgam of faith and doubt, piety and irreverence, belief and skepticism has provoked much criticism. While to some critics this noncommittal tone is a covert expression of his of pointed attack on religious hypocrisy, to others it is a kind of gimmickry. This is however far from true in regard to the secular character of the book. One has only to take a closer look at his poems to see that this is another manifestation of his creed that as god has created everything one thing is as good as another. His emphasis is on the inner spiritual reality that is the abiding substance behind the externals. This for him is the sum and substance of true religion.

Kolatkar has transcended the physical barriers of time and space to merge the animal with the human and divine. There is no denying the miracles he has wrought through his all-encompassing visuals of Jejuri. His unifying vision obliterates distinctions and embraces all. Oneness of spirit in the sense advocated by Chaitanya is thus accomplished here. This leads to enlargement of sympathies and discovery that even a measly creature like rat is a miracle. Viewed in this light, Kolatkar's **Jejuri** in the ultimate analysis is an espousal of true religion, the essence of which lies in expressing universal sympathy, reaching out to the highest and penetrating to the lowest form of life.

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## **Poetic Representation of Gays in Hoshang Merchant 's Yaarana: The Poetic Problematic of Homophobia**

*Dr. Rohit Phutela\**

It has been accepted on all hands that, the success of any artistic endeavour like poetry depends upon its appeal to the patrons of the art and its in reliving the tradition, experience and knowledge of life around and not just borrowed, second hand – even plagiarized – information or hearsay, thereby making undignified comparisons with conventions. It has been almost true in the Indian context too whereby the poets have etched multifarious pictures of Indian sensibility and the Indian social and cultural panorama drawing upon the lines of their predecessors. Among this hive of events lies another discourse of the Indian life, specifically not Indian unlike other instances but a universal and guarded one, which had been left unexpounded earlier due to many social and cultural negations of the country. It is the Gay and Lesbian experience which was left largely undone in the chronicles of the Indian English poetry and which needs a discursive parley beside other sociological trends of Indian life. The present paper discusses some of the prevalent trends in the Gay writing in general and gay poetry in India in particular with special references to the poetry collection edited by one of the leading gay writers of India Hoshang Merchant.

Literature written by and about gays and lesbians has been highly visible and has attracted considerable critical attention since the 1960s all over the world. Whether through fiction, drama, poetry, or autobiography, homosexual literature typically explores issues of gender and identity, as well as the influences of ethnicity and social class on the individual. The open affirmation of one's avant-garde sexual preferences is still a taboo, especially in historically conventional countries like India, and may invite the wrath of the 'straight' or the conformist public inspiring personal, economic, and social prejudices. Consequently, many homosexual writers have heavily utilized metaphors and allegories in their works rather than address overt themes of gender identity or sexual preference. To begin with, gay and lesbian literature is an offshoot of gender criticism which views sexuality not as something natural or innate or 'chromosomal' but a social construct, a learned behavior, a product of culture and its institutions. The gender critics vehemently oppose the dichotomy of homo- and hetero- sexuality and go against the essentialism of identity and gender advocating constructionism. Michel Foucault, in his influential *The History of Sexuality* sketches the construction of sexuality as a technology of social construct, an effort to construct an identifiable meaning for people in societies. Thus, the 'identity categories' like 'gay' and 'straight', 'tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for libidinal contestations of that very oppression' (Butler 1992: 14-15). Butler further argues that the concept of homosexuality is itself a part of homo-phobic (anti-gay) discourse and historically, first used in Germany, preceded the invention of the corresponding term 'heterosexual'. It turns out that the term homosexuality gets recognized as a consequence of the crystallization of the notions of homosexuality. Seemingly, gay or lesbian literature flourishes on the post-structuralist tonic which deconstructs binary opposition rejecting first the absolutism attached to the difference between the paired opposites and a belief in the possibility of reversing the hierarchy of these pairs privileging the second term rather than the first one. In gay or lesbian studies, homosexual / heterosexual get deconstructed in the same way.

Dwelling on the same 'fluidity of identity' precept pertaining to sexual identity, and specifically gay studies, Eve Sedgwick in her *Epistemology of the Closet* considers how coming out of the closet or revealing one's gay traits is not a single absolute act. The confiding of one's homosexuality in others presupposes the need of a discretionary behavior, to be 'in' or 'out' is not a simple dichotomy or a once and for all event. Degrees of concealment and openness co-exist in the same lives (Sedgwick 1985: 23). In other words, there ought to be a mixed societal response, neither ennobling one nor degenerative one, making the gay identity a complex of chosen allegiances, social position and professional roles, rather than an absolute inner essence. It is, as though, left to the gays to decide about the kind of lives they wish to lead and the cultural practices they want to exercise. This is supposed to give this niche section of the cultural domain a leeway to observe their social and cultural positions and operate in the normative discourse of the society as normal or heterosexual (as it is the norm of a rational society) subjectivities.

But it is also the instrument of social control, as per Foucault, which wields all the power and the diktats of the same call the shots appropriating the social behavior as moral or immoral. Such a power structure is particularly, and historically, tilted in favour of the heterosexuality abandoning its 'other' as demonic and reprehensible especially in the countries with 'culture of shame' like India. The cultural rubrics of machismo and chivalry situating manhood only in the adventurous conquering of the women as exemplified in elopement or courtship has always prevented the homosexuality from replacing the heterosexuality as the standard cultural practice. Notwithstanding the etymologically foremost homosexual identity, its exercise as a standard deviation is sometimes undercut with heretic connotations. It is, in many instances, the rejected 'Other' in the distinction between the normative 'self' of heterosexuality and the constructed homosexuality though the former is very much a part of the latter. "The 'Other', in these formulations is as much something within us as beyond us, and 'self' and 'other' are always *implicate* in each other, in the root sense of the word, which means to be intertwined or folded into each other." (Barry 1998 :145) It is always the 'Other' which is discredited due to the fixed social patterning of the human behavior and is always subdued due to its difference and the potential backlash from the superstructures. The gay behavior or identity too sometimes is made to feel different or marginalized and their traits are identified as a 'heterodoxy' (which, seemingly insinuates the *homo/ hetero-* binaries) or aberration. The gay writers or the writers writing about gays bring into frame such social responses towards this 'queer' generation which is not always outrightly castigated or excommunicated but also not approved as standard behavior. The images drawn from the contemporary cinematic or Television representations allow the homosexuals space in the mainstream (through sitcoms like *Will and Grace* and serious cinema like *Brokeback Mountain* in Hollywood and *Page 3* in Bollywood) but a counter-space occurs as even these highly successful representations dwell on the ludicrous or the horrific discourse of the gay existence marked with violence and repulsion. The poetics of normalcy and the blurring of the distinctions between the mainstream and the fringe need a discursive debate. The job of the gay critic then becomes identifying this distinctness and establishing a literary tradition of 'classic' gay writers. The homosexual aspects of some of the canonical writers like Shakespeare, Eliot, Auden, etc are also unearthed to expose and counter the 'homophobia' of the mainstream literature denigrating and ignoring the homosexual reality. The scope of this paper will be, however, restricted to study Hoshang Merchant's anthology of poetry and prose about gay writings titled *Yaraana* with focus on various aspects of Indian gay poetry and the socio-cultural situations of gays in the country.

Hoshang Merchant in his 'gay' anthology touches the multi-hued fabric of the social reception of gays in the Indian superstructures of education, politics, religion, family structure, etc. The ways in which the gays are perceived in the country – as the 'Other' of the straight society, as the produce of 'homophobia' of the shame culture of the country, as the ludicrous or the caricature of the norms abiding citizenry, as the humanity filled with guilt and ignominy or as marginally accepted human harvest, Merchant has revealed all the facets of the fact how the gays feel in India. The poems in this

anthology voice how 'coming out of the closet' for a gay is a huge risk on one's social standing in India and the mindfulness with which the gays survive to avert the moral policing by the self-professed preservers of the Indian culture like the 'saffron brigade' and other hardliner outfits. Unlike the eunuchs, with which they are sometimes confused with in India, the gays don't have a local habitation and a recognized identity leading them to live twin lives sometimes i.e. bisexuals. Marriages [with women] are accepted to escape the public shame but a consternation follows due to the 'other' tendencies obscuring the problem further. The poems in this collection deal with this ignominy and the stalemate of the gay men perceived by some gay as well as straight [self-proclaimed] writers giving full vent to the controversial presence of this human spectrum.

The first poem of the collection "Public Meeting and Parting as Private Acts" by Firaq Gorakhpuri translated by Merchant himself sets the tone of the agenda whereby the forthright 'gay love' is depicted with a tinge of cautiousness. The title of the poem has antithetical signifiers in the form of 'Public' and 'Private' needling at the concoction styled existence of the gays in India. Coming out of the closet is impregnated with fear and the gay identity fails to get unshackled of the fluid texture of 'in' and 'out'. The public display of love is avoided despite the tremendous fondness for each other due to the need and practice of various degrees of concealment of the gayness and the absence of an inner essence and absolutism to achieve some political ends as per Eve Sedgwick.

This colored cloth hides a secret joy  
There's current playing under the shroud of the grass  
Love grudgingly is no love, friend  
Go! Now you have no sorrow from me  
Nevertheless my life is spent  
Either remembering or forgetting you (1)

Here the color is emblematic of the ecstasy experienced by the persona due to the meeting with the beloved while masking a guilt and misery. The "current" or the sparks are flying but they are coupled with a grudge and the impending severance which are reasons enough for dampening the spirit. The romantic stuff suddenly gets dashed to pieces with a cold realization and it is this binary opposition which the gay poetry encapsulates.

Sultan Padamsee's "O Pomponia Mine!" reflects the same sentiments but with a different stroke. Here a romantic evening is envisaged by the two gay lovers in the popular fictional mode of cinema and candy floss pulp fiction. The way the gay lovers dress up for the 'special evening' of togetherness is generic and falls in line with the romance narrative of the mainstream heterosexuality. An excerpt:

Shall I knot my tie a little more superbly,  
.....  
You will your black, I think,  
The new one, made of Agatha's heirloomed lace, (39)

The dialogues reflect the subtlety of a heterosexual celebration of the high-end elite class (with wife or mistress) as is conspicuous in the ties, black suits (in the manner of ladies' black designer gowns), etc. Other poetic lines about the hair and the smile of the gay lover blur the discursive differences between the sexes and the identity thus seems to get constructed, in the gender critics mode, as per the desires of the characters in the interplay. Though the anxiety about coming out of the closet persists since the lovers lack the courage to brave the orthodox chill of the society, yet the pleasure derived can't be underrated:

They shall never know,  
This is the toxin that adds flavor to our life,  
Never Know  
That you are not my mistress nor my wife. (40)

The revelation in the end is fraught both with a triumph (for having a great time) as well as disappointment (of the burden of keeping secret) highlighting the absence of any inner essence as discussed above.

In the poem “Epithalamium” by the same poet Padamsee, the dialectics of marriage and mistress are subverted weaving the mythical and the biblical to highlight the threats enshrined in the heretical doctrine of homosexuality. Disguised references to Jesus Christ and the mythical archetypes of Marius and Lenia in the poem lend the narrative of homosexuality a new dimension of collective consciousness. The mythical and historical elements merge to give the homosexual theme a creative tension. Lenia lusts after Marius to be her consort oblivious of the latter’s skewed preoccupations.

And you who have lain with me often,  
Is custom not enough for your embrace?  
I have not taunted you in your moments,  
Nor shrewed you in the hours before the sun  
When my body was hot with expectation,  
And your as impotent as a sterile man. (41)

Marius’s apathy clearly indicates his dilemmatic situation but he professes many times in the poem about his allegiance to womanly love after witnessing the crucifixion of a dissenter, remotely Christ. It is the fear of getting crucified for dissenting against the conventional that shrinks him from overtly accepting his sexual orientation. Such a position of Marius speaks for the entire gay continuum in India whereby the crucifixion or beleagueredness in the manner of Jesus Christ is the consequence of practicing homosexuality. Despite the fact that he has been rendered impotent and sterile due to a different sexual orientation, Marius persists in the relationship which speaks for the imposed bisexuality of the gays. Such a constant switching among various roles and positions or fluidity of the identity marks the gay existence. The roles of an ideal husband of a woman and the lover of another man are the binary opposites which he is supposed to play skillfully. The stress of this kind of existence is expressed by Merchant in the introductory part of the book where he writes: “Marriage then for the homosexual, is passé. Love in a dark world is not. Homosexuality as is known in West does not exist in India. Most men are bisexuals. Or, to put in another way, most homosexuals get married due to societal pressures. Most adjust to a double life, so do their wives”(Merchant 2010: xvi). Marius too returns ‘defiled’ by [St.] John with a seeming remorse or weariness, but vows womanly love from thereafter.

For the body of John stroked my body  
And the full lips of John  
Stroked my body–  
.....  
The winds came down from  
The mountains and Marius spelt again  
In the arms of a woman (46)

The shifting allegiances and sham promises is also the part of same switch-overs.

But Marius’ switching identity, homosexuality and heterosexuality, takes the gay polemics to another domain of “homosociality” (Sedgwick 1985: 124) which represents the various bonds between men that are necessary to maintain a society, especially those that involve the transmission of status and property through women marriage, birth and so on. Though this may sound antithetical to the quintessential gay culture, yet Sedgwick observes their collapsing into each other in practice and literature finding the origin and reflection of homoeroticism within homoerotic practices themselves. Marius’ amorous designs with John and returning to Lenia at night embodies this homosociality whereby he fancies the homosexual love but also requires the social license by staying attached to a woman.

A sinking feeling is visible in Namdeo Dhasal’s “Gandu Bagicha” whereby the barrenness of a formerly lush green garden is symbolic of the internal desolation of a gay heart. The socially

complicated identity of gay prevents the subject to derive pleasure from the carnality and the entire act of love-making appears dry and numb.

No Flower  
No leaf  
No tree  
No bird  
Only Kama's play  
Musk scent  
The sound of dry leaves underfoot  
O my love, O the beauty of gardens! (77)

The dirge for the aridity of the place is juxtaposed with the scent and the act of physical intimacy whereby at one time he calls out his beloved and at the other laments the deformity of the garden. The feeling of ecstasy is diluted by the external environment's coldness and passivity symbolic of the liminal gay identity marred by the social oppression. The constant anxiety of getting 'exposed' is another factor leading to a stigmatized existence

The deafening roar of chaos  
And the death of doom  
The stigma of secret love  
Its life  
The dead of separation  
The sympathetic grave  
Loveliness and magic fear  
Behind every word lurks a shamed face. (78)

Here too the pull of two different forces is evident preventing the gay subject from achieving fulfillment.

Among all the social disparagement, the one from the family is the most disturbing one and the personas in the poems of this collection have attributed special importance to the responses of the parents to the act of disclosure of homosexuality. The traditional family discourses are subverted heightening the prevailing apprehension and guilt. Ravi Ratti's poem "Beta" is about the same helplessness and anxiety. The guilt and shame from the parents is a heightened form of agony as is expressed in the following lines:

Mother keeps her jewels  
in a box full of dreams  
.....  
Father waits for the day  
I bring a crimson bride  
Yet if I sit on a white horse  
it'll be an empty ride. (107)

The "empty ride" denotes the feeling of hollowness and remorsefulness for having been inadequate in the social and cultural paradigms dictated by parents. The culpability of failure to live up to the idealism of a "Beta" or son, at being 'unproductive' or 'sterile' for the family augments the plight of Indian gay as expressed by Rakesh Ratti. Similarly, the persistent questionings and the expectations of the family, especially mother whose obsession with the son's moral turpitude in the matters of sex draws the male child towards homosexuality [sometimes] as pointed out by Merchant: "This prohibition/ obedience syndrome breeds an ambivalent attitude in the young boy towards mother in particular and to women in general. Either you worship the Madonna or the Mother Goddess as in Latin (or Hindu) cultures or you denigrate women as in the Anglo-Saxon (or Muslim) cultures". (Merchant 2010: xiii) The contentious generalization of Merchant touches another unsettling gay reality. The alienating and painful experience is visible in Adil Jussawalla's "Song of a Hired Man":

Alone by the sea now,  
Count my gains,

Singing of hope means  
a little less pain  
a little more change—  
that seems to be all (159)

Thus, Hoshang Merchant brings forth the stealthy reality of the gay section of the Indian society through his uninhibited candor and the political will to earn a recognition for his lot in the form of tolerance and acceptance if not respect too early. The poems in the collection graphically present the constant tug of war between rampant male-male sexual desire and the deafening silence surrounding same-sex love in contemporary India. Through touching all the facets of homosexuality in India and its consequent situations like disgrace, guilt, imposed bisexuality, alienation and anguish Hoshang Merchant's poetry anthology turns a new leaf in the gender studies in India which hitherto was confined to feminism as the only sphere of gender discourse. It successfully separates the gender and sexual differences and examines the interplay between and within them. The way these differences interact in *Yaraana*, it gives the clues how, by and large, power operates in the culture producing this kind of text.

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## New Voices of Dissent : A Study of Bombay Woman Poets

*Dr. Tripti Choudhary\**

The modern Indian poetry in English has been the poetry of dissent. Nissim Ezekiel bugled its arrival with his first poetic volume *A Time to Change* (1952). Since then poets like A.K. Ramanujan, Gieve Patel, Jayanta Mahapatra, Dom Moraes, K.N. Daruwalla, R. Parthasarathy have written poems with higher or lower pitch of dissent. This dissent is three-fold: dissent from the native poetic tradition, dissent from the colonial poetic tradition, and dissent from the milieu. The modern Indo-English poets, particularly belonging to 1970s and 1980s, defied their poetic predecessors like Tagore, Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu both in their choice of urban, contemporary, unromantic themes and experimentation with prosody. Many Indo-English poets chose the 20<sup>th</sup> century British and American poets like Auden, Eliot, Pound, Stevens as their model. But as they matured as poets, they deviated from their role models by writing poetry of distinct Indian flavour particularly in distinct Indian idiom. Most of the Indo-English poets are nonconformists as they do not accept the social, economic and political set-up of their times per se. In this regard woman poets are ahead of male poets. Therefore, Kamala Das, the grandmother of Indo-English poetry, emerges as a staunch rebel in her poetry. Many woman poets have trodden the path shown by her. The notable among these woman poets are Monika Verma, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Eunice de Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, Melanie Silgado, Menka Shivdasani, Sujata Bhatt.

The present paper aims to study the group of woman poets who have been associated with Bombay in one way or the other much like their male counterparts including Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel, Saleem Peeradina, Manohar Shetty, Ranjit Hoskote. Known as the Bombay woman poets this group includes: Eunice de Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, Charmayne d'Souza, Melanie Silgado, Menka Shivdasani, Tara Patel, Kavita Ezekiel and Mukta Sambrani. The present paper aims to do a comprehensive study of these new voices of dissent.

Kamala Das remarked in one of her poems:

The tragedy of life  
is not death but growth  
the child growing into adult.

(“Composition”)

No doubt, by child she meant the girl child. In our patriarchal society, for a girl child the experience of growing up is an experience of self-oppression, self-effacement, gender bias and tyranny. Das protested against the conventional womanhood in patriarchal society that marginalizes, suppresses, oppresses woman and the same protest is quite loud in the poetry of the Bombay woman poets. Almost all the woman poets have hit hard at the idea of woman in conventional society. Imtiaz Dharker in her poem “A Woman’s Place” expresses her anger in the following words:

Mouths must be watched, especially  
if you are a woman  
A smile should be stifled  
with your sari-end  
no one must see your serenity cracked  
even with delight. (Purdah 55)

Tara Patel gives an insight into the fate of a woman’s life in a male-dominated world in her poem entitled “Woman”.

A woman’s life is a reaction  
to the crack of a whip  
She learns to dodge it as it whistles.

(Prasad 276)

The woman in Menka Shivdasani’s “The Game You Play” asks:

Football is another world  
Where men belong  
What the hell am I doing  
Kicked around  
Just because I’ve got this leather hide?

(Prasad 276)

Charmayne D’Souza wittily remarks in the title poem of her poetic volume *A Spelling Guide to Women* (1990) : “Woo men/womb men/woe men/whim men/warm men/who, men?/no woman.” Mukta Sambrani in her poem “The Same” poignantly expresses how “growing into adult” becomes “tragedy of life” for a girl child.

This is the same woman  
as the girl in the picture, mister  
only a little older  
Her mother has slapped her cheeks flat  
..... someone has had her dreams  
Someone has had her stories  
This is the same woman, mister,  
The girl child in the picture  
This is the same.

(Naik 192)

These few examples reveal the Bombay woman poets to be feminist but their dissidence from patriarchy is not always direct. Most of these woman poets have written poems on the themes of

father-daughter relationship and moth-daughter relationship in which they rebel against their upbringing.

Most notable among poems on these two themes are Eunice de Souza's "Forgive Me Mother", "For My Father, Dead Young", Melanie Silgado's "For Father on the Shelf", "Goan Death", Kavita Ezekiel's "Family Sunday" and Dharker's "Purdah II", "Going Home", "Zarina's Mother" and "Choice". Like Mamta Kalia's "Tribute to Papa" de Souza's, Silgado's and Ezekiel's poems are confessional in nature wherein they deal with their love-hate relationship with their parents. De Souza expresses here conflicts with her parents when she says to her mother "In dreams/ I hack you" ("Forgive Me, Mother") and "I killed my father when I was three" ("Autobiographical"). Silgado's "For Father on the Shelf" is quite startling:

Father, you will be proud to know  
you left something behind.  
The year you died  
I inherited a mind.  
Wherever you are, will you  
turn your index finger away?  
And now I'm writing with my life  
The price of an inherited crutch.

(Papke 75)

The poem highlights Silgado's ambivalent attitude towards her father who is "both villain and hero of the piece." The poet has a mixed feelings of pride, love, apology and hurt, shame and rebellion towards the father. A sense of shame and disgust arises out of father's drinking habits. These woman poets rebel against their parents in their poems but it is not always easy to rebel. This is conveyed by Dharker's poem "Choice" which begins with the rebellion of a woman who tries to escape with her own child her mother's fate but ends with a haunting remembrance of her own mother.

to look through darkened windows at night,  
Mother, I find you staring back at me.  
When did my body agree to wear your face?

(Purdah 49)

Sambrani's "Dear Father" and "An Apple for Mother" are also important poems to register the poet's protest against conventional parents who are the first important agents of patriarchy.

The second important agent of patriarchy is the institution of marriage which continues the oppression and exploitation of a woman till she lives. The Bombay woman poets are educated, modern, economically independent and many are widely-travelled, single women. Therefore, it is natural to find in their poetry a dissent from the institution of marriage. D'Souza "Strange Bed Fellows" sums up marriage as an arrangement wherein :

Her mangalsutra  
will be a bullet  
to her breast,  
... my garland  
a hempen rope  
around my neck.

(Naik 190)

The colour prejudice governing arranged marriages is satirically revealed in de Souza's "Marriages are Made" and "Mrs. Hermione Gonsalvez". Dharker in her poems on the theme of marriage depicts how the wife becomes "Another Woman" from what she was after years of shopping, counting "her coins out carefully", cooking and waiting for her husband. One is reminded of Kalia's poem "Anonymous" wherein the housewife says:

I'm Kamla  
or Vimla

or Kanta or Shanta  
I cook, I wash,  
I bear, I rear  
I nag, I wag  
I sulk, I sag.  
(King 155)

It can be said that the Bombay woman poets' unromantic treatment of marriage and romantic love is qualified by Patel's poetic volume *Single Woman* (1991) which dwells on the attractions and dangers of being single.

The Bombay woman poets' dissent is not limited to the strictures of patriarchy. Their poetry expresses their anger, their frustration at the tedious nature, sheer monotony of the modern mechanized existence. They desire "nirvana" amidst the anxieties, dishonesties, hypocrisy and basic ugliness of ordinary life. Shivdasani's *Nirvana at Ten Rupees* (1990), a careful selection of her best poems written during a period of twelve years, is a noteworthy example in this regard. Religious and cultural dissent mark the poetry written by de Souza and Dharker. De Souza's first poetic volume *Fix* (1979) "was denounced from the pulpit of St. Peter's in Bandra and Adil Jussawall said that if she continued on the same lines, she would soon be denounced at St. Peter's in Rome" (Surendran 47). The reason being that de Souza severely criticizes her Goan Catholic Society in her poems. She defies her community for its bigotry, sexual prudery and hypocrisy and oppression of women. Her poem "Catholic Mother" reveals how the Catholic Church denies women the control of their bodies and reduces them into child-producing machines. The poem "Sweet Seventeen" is about how religion prevents women from knowing about their bodily functions. "Feeding the Poor at Christmas" exposes the vanity and self-interest that motivate the gesture of charity. De Souza also denounces her society for its bias against the Hindu India and the alienation felt by many Goan Catholics towards Hindu India. In her poetic volume *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988) de Souza evokes the Hindu iconoclasts of time long past to identify with the Hindu India.

Dharker follows the footsteps of de Souza. She too openly opposes her Islamic cultural background in her poems. Her "Purdah I" and "Purdah II" poems best exemplify this. The poems depict how culture uses shame to repress female sexuality and the independence of spirit and teaches a woman to denigrate her own self. Purdah makes a woman realize "between the thighs, a sense of sin" ("Purdah I", Purdah 14). "Purdah II" is a powerful poem of the experiences of Muslim women in diaspora and it "criticizes the arrogance and intolerance of the Muslim culture and the racism of the other side" (Papke 79). The patriarchal religion uses tradition and sense of history to teach "unwilling virgins" in "stranger's land" "to bind/their brightness tightly round,/whatever they might wear,/ in the purdah of the mind" ("Purdah II", Purdah 16). The poem "Grace" shows how religion treats female menstruation as impure ("She trails the month behind her/We are defiled"). The poems in Dharker's *Postcards from God* (1994) are expressions of her political dissent. Her poems like "6 December 1992", "8 January 1993", "The List" are concerned with politics, communal riots in Mumbai in 1993. Her poems "Namesake", "Adam's Daughter", "Adam from New Zealand", "Living Space" deal with the social injustice of poverty and she protests against sensational dealing with suffering in the world of the poor. Having worked in the impoverished slums of Dharavi for the making of a documentary film, Dharker writes poignantly of the precarious spaces which are slum-dwellers "Living Space". Bruce King rightly remarks that Dharker's poetry "is consciously feminist, consciously political" and "the poetry of commitment and politics is seldom as successful" (321, 326) as hers.

To conclude, the Bombay woman poets have carried forward the female poetic tradition of dissent initiated by Kamala Das. At the same time they have enriched the tradition by writing poetry which is unique expression of their specific realities. Their poetry share a number of common themes but the expression is distinct in each woman poet. This paper highlights the common thematic concerns of these new voices of dissent and shows how their dissent is varied-hued: personal, social, political, religious and cultural.

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### **Three women, one voice: A critique on the Poetry of Mamta Kalia, Sudha Iyer and Imtiaz Dharker**

*Dr. Shelly Dutta\**

Indian poetry in English by women has undergone several phases of experimentations in terms of themes and expression in the last sixty years. Remarkable changes in domestic, professional and public spheres are responsible for the depiction of varied hues and colours of human life on the poetic canvas. A host of stylistic and thematic novelty has marked the growth of Indian poetry from its inception during colonial days down to the post-independence and post-modern periods. Increased metropolitan activities, urbane life-styles, globalization, discotheque and café culture, hi-tech gizmos and gadgets for communication, internet along with exposure of mass media and the recent interdisciplinary advancements in the fields like sociology, physiology, psychology and anthropology have not only broadened the mind-sets of the people but have also revolutionized the modern life and literature.

The present paper is a critique of the poetry by Mamta Kalia, Sudha Iyer and Imtiaz Dharker. These three women represent three successive generations of women-poets. Mamta Kalia wrote in seventies, Sudha Iyer wrote in nineties while Imtiaz Dharker started in eighties and is still penning poetry. All these women-poets exhibit resistance towards the orthodox social and religious codes which debilitate woman's spirit and negate her identity outside the role of a mother/wife/lover.

Kamala Das is indisputably the first Indian woman-poet who shocked and mesmerized readers with her highly original, confessional, uninhibited and severely introspective mode of poetic expression. Deriving inspiration from Das, the women poets started questioning the patriarchal system and began to articulate resistance and self-confidence through their writings. All the three women poets under study have marked skill in the use of language and creative expression, characterized by variations in versification, metre, line-length, syntax and use of other poetic devices. The critical appraisal of their poems includes the discussion on their innovations of style, form and technique.

Mamta Kalia has published two volumes of English poems so far, namely *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems* (Calcutta: WW, 1970) and *Poems' 78* (Calcutta: WW, 1978). To her, writing poetry has a cathartic effect. "In my hour of discontent / I neither shout nor rant / I simply fill ink in my pen /

And spill it with intent.” (‘My Hour of Discontent’, Poems ’78, 17). The thematic variety of her poetry stretches from idealism, tradition, culture, politics, love, marriage, family, modernity to society and its various burning issues which demand immediate attention. With a distinctive tone and a view point peculiarly her own, she brings to the fore, the horrid reality of the contemporary life. Autobiographical flavour suffused with a sharp intellectual sensibility lends a unique charm to her writings. Unlike most of the women poets, she exhibits a fair amount of wit in her verse.

The title poem of her debut verse-collection begins with a set of interrogative sentences having implications of dissent with a father’s idealism. She speaks with tangy irreverence about many ‘sacred cows’ of the Indian culture, patriarchy, parenthood, patriotism, to name a few. In an innovative style, she figures out an opposition not only towards the male dominance over women but more specifically, towards women’s acceptance of the male dominance: “Who cares for you, Papa? / Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean / words, clean teeth? / Who wants to be an angel like you? / Who wants it?” (‘Tribute to Papa’, TPOP, 8)

Apparently, it appears an ordinary conversation between a modern daughter and a Victorian father but actually it is a shocking and hair-raising criticism of changed priorities, changed mind-sets, newly acquired life-styles and above all, modern life and living. She feels disheartened to find that her father could not acquire wealth and riches all through his life and led a poor and wretched life. She finds it hard to defy the sacraments of her tradition-ridden father. Quite shamelessly, she defends the craving of sexual liberty of the young generation: “Everything about you clashes with nearly / everything about me. / You suspect I am having a loveaffair these days, / But you’re too shy to have it confirmed. / What if my tummy starts showing gradually / And I refuse to have it corrected? / But I’ll be careful, Papa, / Or I know you’ll at once think of suicide.” (TPOP, 8)

The poem reaches its climax when Kalia shocks her readers by bringing them face to face with the shameless youth. Culture, value-system, respect, traditionalism, patriotism, idealism have relegated to the background while opportunism, treachery, modernity, pretence, show-off, artificiality are dominating in the modern times. Kalia smells a change in the values, beliefs and ideals in the contemporary society and dares to portray the same on her poetic canvas. The woman with a modern sensibility in her courageously discards the idealism and didacticism of her father. Without mincing words, she openly tells her father that the present world has no room for his ideals, values and morals and that he sounds a complete misfit in the modern society.

Kalia’s style is direct, candid and conversational. The most striking quality of the poem is its natural speech rhythm which makes it easy to be read, especially to the urban readers. The poem progresses with a debate on the questions raised in the beginning and the closure is marked by the persona’s acquiescence into the object of interrogation. It moves like a river in spate which aggressively transgresses its banks but after a brief upheaval, calms down and regains its normalcy.

She shows marked deviations in the structure, line-length, metre, syllable-count and stanza-structure. The line-length varies from three to twelve words. Regular rhyme has been dispensed with. However the poem attains rhythm with the stylistic devices of alliteration, assonance and repetition: “Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?” She epitomizes an awakened and audacious twenty-first century woman who possesses the guts to question, judge and finally reject the patriarchal norms imposed on the fair sex down the ages. She represents a modern woman who has the bravado to raise voice against the set patterns of patriarchy.

Like Kamala Das and Gauri Deshpande, Kalia also jostles with the ground realities of life. Her poem, ‘Sheer Good Luck’, forcefully voices crime against women that has taken the shape of a cancerous ulcer in modern times. She startles the readers by giving her poem an unexpected and a sudden start. She presents three discomfiting situations which a woman could face in her life. The first situation is quite shameful and disturbing. She voices kidnapping, abduction and rape of innocent girls/women in our society. No woman, whether of six months age or of sixty years of age, finds herself safe and secure in our society.

In the second situation, she imagines herself being married to a man “with a bad smell’ and turns “frigid” as a “frigidaire”. This image evokes the picture of hundreds or even thousands of

women who turn unresponsive, cold as an outcome of a forced marriage. Not only these women lose their own identity and power of decision-making but also could not fulfill their desires, wishes and dreams. They have to bear their husbands in all their acts. The expression, “a man with a bad smell” not only implies the imposition of masculinity but also carries undertones of sexuality.

The last supposition brings to the fore, the evil of illiteracy and ignorance rampant in women residing in the rural and backward areas of the nation: “I could have been / an illiterate woman / putting thumb-prints / on rent-receipts.” This picture apart from depicting illiteracy and ignorance on the part of women also takes to task the men-folk who misuse their unawareness. These lines tear off the mask of hypocrisy from the face of patriarchy which uses or misuses women-folk as rubber-stamps to materialise their own thwarted and unfulfilled dreams.

The poem culminates to a close with an under-statement: “But nothing ever happened to me / except two children / and two miscarriages.” Kalia amuses her readers by referring to her children and miscarriages. With her versatility and creativity, she transforms the atmosphere of gloom and despair into a jovial and good-humoured one. Her style is informal, direct and intimate. The poem begins with a supposition which is intensified by insertion of several contrastive images and is brought to a closure on a note of satire and wit.

‘Against Robert Frost’ is a fine example of social and political criticism. This six-liner poem is best read as a whole: “I can’t bear to read Robert Frost. / Why should he talk of apple picking / When most of us can’t afford to eat one? / I haven’t even seen an apple for many months- / Whatever we save we keep for beer / And contraceptives.”(TPOP, 21) Kalia expands the horizon of her imagination with the growing lines of the poem. Starting with her personal liking and disliking, she moves on to the national issue of price-hike and poverty and finally, glides to an ever-increasing trend of over-indulgence towards drinking and sex around the globe. In a very free and frank manner, she acknowledges the fact that she has not “even seen an apple for many months.” If this is the state of affairs of the upper-middle class families then what would be the plight of the poor people?

However this poem has been written in seventies but it has not lost its appeal in the contemporary times. On the contrary, it has become more pertinent and piercing as the prices of all the commodities have been soaring high at the sky-rocketing speed since that time. What to talk of the poor masses, things have gone out of reach from the hands of so-called well-to-do families in the present times. In the last couple of lines, she makes a dig at the changed needs and priorities of people.

The poem has a direct, chatty opening, an argumentative progression and a closure marked by a statement of personal resolution. No structural formality has been observed but the redeeming feature is the undercurrent of irony that strengthens the theme of the poem. The syntax is informal and relaxed while the theme is very bold and urbane.

Even today, Kalia’s poetry has not lost its sheen and relevance. Following the tradition set by Das and Kalia, the contemporary women poets reflect the undercurrent of violence in women’s lives in their poetry. Eunice de Souza comments: “Nearly thirty years after they were first published, the poems remain fresh.” (T P: C P : 1999, 58-59)

Sudha Iyer has three collections of verse to her credit namely: *Evening Bells* (Nagpur: Akshaya Mudra, 1993), *Twilight Rhymes* (Calcutta: WW, 1999) and *On the Edge* (Calcutta: WW, 2003). Her poetry encompasses a wide variety of themes. With an acute feminine sensibility or more precisely, feminine assertiveness, she has chosen poetry to express reality. The weight of the unintelligible world presses her sensitive soul to unburden herself by writing poetry. To Iyer, life is a mixed fair of joys and sorrows and she portrays the same pleasures and pangs of mortals on her poetic canvas. She skillfully employs the poetic devices of irony, satire, sarcasm, contrast and juxtaposition. One finds plenty of fresh phrases, startling similes and metaphors in her poems. She uses language with an extraordinary liberty and flexibility.

Her ‘Outdated’ presents a humorous and an engaging dialogue between a father and a son but underneath the surface, it proves to be an unpleasant revelation which confronts the readers with the contemporary social reality. A mischievous streak peeps through the opening stanza: “You are

outdated, Sir / You don't dye your hair. / In everything and everywhere / Grey should not grey appear.  
/ Make it black or red. / For who can face the truth? ('Outdated', EB, 8)

Outwardly, it appears that the son is making fun of his father's appearance but beneath the surface, it connotes to the clash between the two generations, or more precisely between age-old value-system and treacherous, deceitful, pretentious modern life-style. Interestingly, the mischievous and humorous tone at the outset, lends the poem a brilliant take-off to the heights of poetic pleasure and later towards the revulsion of truth. At wordy level, it seems that the duo is talking about the dying of hair but the conversation brings to the mind; dying, pigmenting and colouring of all that is wrong, ugly, old, not presentable because, "For who can face the truth?"

In addition to this, the suggestion of the son to make hair either "black or red" needs an explanation. Black colour is suggestive of mystery, complexity and melancholy while red points at passion, lust, anger and violence. All these traits are synonyms to the life-style of the younger generation who believes in achieving success by any means. Further, the son who stands for the new generation, while putting on display wretchedness and disrespect of the highest rank, yells in full-blown voice: "You got no right to be living / in this age. / Like grandpa's clock / You should be disposed of." Finding himself unable to impose his own life-style on his father, he turns reckless and insane to the extent that he compares his father's life with his grandpa's clock and reveals his intention of disposing him of. Abandoning old things is a peculiar trait of the modern generation but hardly do they visualize that growing older is a cosmic law of nature and they are not an exception to this law.

- 'Two Faces of Politicians' is a trenchant satire on crafty, wily and self-serving politicians who feed on scams and scandals. The title itself sets the tone of the poem. In the first stanza, Iyer reveals how they strive to perpetuate their existence through their progeny at the cost of the masses. She metamorphically exposes the ulterior and hidden agenda of these tricky politicians: "They rivet their hawk-eyed gaze / on visible horizons / seven generations distant / imagining glamour coursing along / their own blood / through all their progeny." ('Two Faces of Politicians,' TR, 63)

In the second stanza, Iyer uses an evocative simile to lay bare the shamelessness, shallowness, treachery and double-dealing of the politicians. They proudly carry a "ringed dark halo" of scams and scandals "like Saturn's ring" with them. In the present times, double-dealing, treachery, greed for money and power, self-promotion and self-obsession have become synonyms to our 'worthy' politicians. The third stanza ironically calls the future generation of these crafty politicians as "obscure offshoots". The sting of irony becomes penetratingly deeper when the devious political leaders wishfully aspire to reach the unreachable and wish to achieve the impossible like Icarus. These crooked politicians crave to "perpetuate" their own existence even beyond the "inevitable end of all mortals." Pretending to be God themselves, these iniquitous politicians "fondly" lock the luck of their descendants in the safe deposits of "Swiss banks" but hardly do they visualize the uncertainty of the Destiny.

The anger of the poetess becomes scathing and unsparing in the penultimate stanza. Utterly unresponsive to the call of their conscience, these greedy and self-obsessed politicians keep on amassing gold and silver by unfair and foul means. She satirically calls them as "supposed custodians" of our nation who shamelessly shout slogans of "Garibi Hatao" but on the contrary, work day and night to eradicate "Garib" from our society! Bringing the poem to a close, she concludes the whole matter by saying that the real and ugly face of the politician stands revealed sooner or later.

This 38 lined poem exhibits six stanzic divisions running into six, five, eight, six, five and eight lines respectively. The subject of the poem has been dealt with in a matter-of-fact style. The tone is scathing and unsparing. The progression of thought is linear upto stanza 3 but thereafter there is a sudden stop, as Iyer turns contemplative and sees through the inevitable future of the corrupt politicians. The poetic devices of alliteration: "of scams and scandals, / like Saturn's ring," (lines 9-10) and assonance: "with ill-gotten ingots of gold" (line 28) lend a melodious hearing effect.

Imtiaz Dharker has written four self-illuminated books of poetry: *Purdah* (OUP, 1989), *Postcards from God* (Penguin, 1994; Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 1997), *I Speak for the Devil* (Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2001; Penguin, 2003) and *The Terrorist at My Table* (Bloodaxe 2006; Penguin, 2007). All

her verse-collections are accompanied with her own line drawings. Her cultural experience spans three countries and she acknowledges her rapid shifting from one place to the other. However, she does not call her frequent shifting and displacement as an exile. On the contrary, she celebrates her global experience and perceives it as an exhilarating sense of life at the interstices.

Her poem "Purdah I", understands purdah in its wider sense. To Dharker, it is not just the concealing garment rather it exercises a complete control over the life of a woman. She perceives purdah as a woman's prison-house. Using a third person's narrative, she opens her poem in an ironic mode: "One day they said / she was old enough to learn some shame. / she found it came quite naturally." (originally published in *Purdah*, NIWP, 1997: 50)

She vehemently protests the practice of wearing burqua by women in Islamic culture. She strongly believes that Islam uses shame not only to repress women's sexuality but also to install it as a barrier against their spiritual, intellectual and emotional independence. Burqua leads women to falseness, ambiguity, distrust and isolation. While criticizing the practice of wearing purdah, Dharker contrasts it to shoveling mud on the coffin of a dead person: "Purdah is a kind of safety. / The body finds a place to hide. / The cloth fans out against the skin / much like the earth that falls / on coffins after they put the dead men in."

The poem is formally structured. Each stanza perceives burqua as a metaphor to express the woman's experience which is followed by ironic, humorous, sad, angry and somber comments by the poetess. In the poem, Dharker builds up tension by juxtaposing her observations and drawing comparisons and hence, spells her protest against patriarchy.

It has eight unequal stanzaic divisions having three, five, five, five, six, eight and five lines respectively. Dharker experiments with the line-length, syllable-count, metre and diction. The syntax is punctured by the use of various punctuation marks. A fresh and original simile is embedded in the texture of the poem: "The cloth fans out against the skin / much like the earth that falls / on coffins after they put the dead men in." (lines 6,7,8). The regular rhyme has been dispensed with however at places, the poem exhibits alliteration and assonance.

'Crab-apples' puts on display, the sense of alienation and displacement experienced by the immigrants. Humorously, Dharker tells how her mother tried to overcome the sense of displacement and alienation in the foreign land. The poem is best read as a whole: "My mother picked crab-apples / off the Glasgow apple trees / and pounded them with chillis / to change / her homesickness / into green chutney." (ISD, 17)

This short poem not only exhibits a sense of alienation but also acknowledges adaptation of people towards the new culture along with the previous one. It presents how people in alienated lands carve for their culture, flavour and food-habits. The act of the lady to pound "the Glasgow apple trees" with "chillis" to get a flavour of "green chutney" is heart-touching. The "green chutney" connotes to the Indian/Pakistani cuisine where meals are termed as incomplete without "green chutney". This single sentenced poem is adorned with brevity and candidness.

In 'The Location' Dharker, whole-heartedly owns the fact that the devil rests within us only. She reveals her finding in a lighter vein: "The devil is real. / Power exists. / You can smell it feel it touch it / between the items on / your shopping-lists." (ISD, 66) Parallel to the anti-hero concept, she perhaps wants to convey that in the modern life and living, one cannot compartmentalize the types of characters around. We are human beings with varied emotions, feelings, sentiments, beliefs, opinions, responses, complexes and mood-swings. Consequently, negative thoughts, at times, may overpower the positive ones.

Quite daringly, she makes an honest confession: "The devil was in me, / walking in my feet, / living in my clothes, / owning one half / of my heartbeat." Unhesitatingly, she admits the fact of devil being residing in her. This confession, in a way makes her a mouthpiece of the whole human species. The poem exhibits five stanzaic divisions with unequal lines. Syntax is broken and the diction is thin. The poem achieves hearing effect by repetition: "The devil..." (lines 1, 7, 11, 16).

Monika Varma, a practising poet and an astringent critic pleaded that the poetry by Indian women should be a little “more than sighs and thighs,” (SCIEV: 1992, 3) and the three selected women poets namely-Kalia, Iyer and Dharker do not annoy Varma in this respect. These three women in one voice touch upon a fair amount of social issues in their writings. Instead of digging the past, they promote creative writing related to the contemporary life and living. The critical appraisal of their poetry undertaken in the paper clearly reveals their concern not only for their locale and personal experiences but also for the social and political upheavals of the society.

These women poets have not only broadened the thematic concerns of IPE but have also shown how words and images - simple, suggestive and highly evocative - can recite the music of their anguish and agony, their griefs and beliefs, their observations and reflections with no sign of pretence. This real, serious and genuine response to their observed and lived experiences is very much a part of our daily life and invariably, an essential ingredient of their poetic art. Not only have they excelled in technical competence but also in the depiction of the contemporary life with objectivity and rationality. These women poets daringly present the feminine perspective of various contemporary issues with an Indian sensibility.

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## **Socio-cultural Consciousness in Contemporary Indian English Poetry**

*Dr. H.S.Arora\**

Indian English Literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. If one observes the contemporary poetic scene in Indian English today, one is convinced of its emotional depths and intellectual range. Indian English poets are genuinely worried about the predicament of modern existence and are conscious of the challenges confronting life. Their poetry is the part of the process of modernization which includes urbanization, industrialization, mobility, independence, social change and increased communication in the form of films, television, journals and news papers.

The post-independence Indian English poetry has gained in both strength and variety an appreciable position. It is rooted in and stems out from the Indian environment and reflects its mores.

The major poets of this period are Nissim Ezekiel, Kamla Das, Jayanta Mahapatra, Shiv K. Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, Keki N. Daruwalla and many more who are in fact instrumental in rediscovering values and latest trends rampant in Indian society which is a large body of concepts, ideas and feelings. These poets not only reflect India's socio-cultural and political reality but also confirm that an Indian poet is firmly rooted in its culture and soil. Contemporary scholars and academic critics have been rather lukewarm about studying several lesser known and current poets like O.P. Bhatnagar, I.K. Sharma, P. Raja, Pritish Nandy, Imtiaz Dharker, Som Prakash Ranchan and scores of others who are unpolluted by the so-called public school morals and stances. It can not be overlooked that all these modern poets write with an awareness of their milieu and environment and share the central core of contemporary realities of Indian society as they also get shaken by the cultural and socio-political upheavals in and around their surroundings.

O.P. Bhatnagar, one of the most leading voices of Indian English Poetry, views the writing of poetry as a socially significant act, synonymous with life. He is fully conscious of the milieu in which the Indian poet in English lives as well as of the duty which an Indian poet in English is expected to perform. Not sight, but insight is in what he writes. The various social problems that agitate the conscience of a common man are the subjects which make his poetry vibrant and appealing. Themes like social consciousness political awareness, corruption, criminalization of politics, degrading character and bribery among the national leaders, division of society by communalism, casteism, linguism, regionalism and the utter loss of values in our social set-up, have been touched by the poet in a remarkably sensitive and superbly sarcastic way which has still not been surpassed by any poet of modern Indian English poetry.

In his first collection of Thought Poems, Bhatnagar throws ample light on the question concerning God who can never be resolved out in going round the temple by the worshipper. According to Bhatnagar, only a true artist can expound and seek Him out :

We may go round and round the temple  
yet never be around God.  
We may go round and round an idea  
yet never be around a thought.<sup>1</sup>

The Gandhian Concept of non-violence is very well expressed in the poem Non-Violence and Violence. Like Gandhi Ji, Bhatnagar feels that even non-violence has its limits :

If one strikes you once  
I invite him to do it again;  
If one takes off your shirt  
Offer him to remove whatever remains.<sup>2</sup>

O.P. Bhatnagar's notable poem The No Man's Land is a clarion call of awakening wherein the poet expresses the idea that freedom has brought no change in the life of the common people who are still living in the dark dungeon of poverty and illiteracy. The movement of liberation was raised by the masses, and when the efforts and sacrifices of the masses resulted success, only few privileged men captured throne of the country and continued ruling over the nation under the garb of democracy. The poet rightly observes :

Before the British came  
The land was not ours :  
After they left,  
It was not ours too  
The land belongs to those who rule ;  
The others merely inherit  
The no man's land.<sup>3</sup>

I.K. Sharma, in the poem If I die Tonight presents a very amusing picture and the conversation people indulge in while attending the last rites of a dead body. The poet uses a subtle picture of poetic wit as a tool to create amusement, through the generation of humor, irony, or surprise. In the poem, the persona thinks of and narrates the incidents that would follow his immediate death.

If I die tonight/messages'll come from far and wide/Once pyre on fire, the work is done,/subjects scatter on surrounding sands,.../The runaway rise in prices, petrol,/grade running, permit, control,/all hike high with hungry flames/to oracle, miracle, poll debacle...<sup>4</sup>

Acclaimed as one of India's most exciting and innovative poets in English, 60 year old Journalist, Translator, Filmmaker and Graphic Artist, Pritish Nandy has published 17 volumes of poems and his latest release AGAIN<sup>5</sup> encapsulating 72 poems has been launched on May 27, 2010. The youngest recipient of Padma Shree at the age of 28, Nandy presents a very poignant and emotional picture of the people living in the decadent city of Kolkata in his most popular poem Calcutta if You Must Exile Me. Through irony and realism, the poet sensitizes the reader to the injustice, disorder and anarchy which have maimed the society. The poet voices his anger and protest and dissatisfaction while taking us on a journey into the interior part of the social system that breeds so much of misery, depravity, callousness and corruption. Calcutta is in fact only a symbol for the whole malaise and the poem reveals many scars and wounds that blotted out its cultural pride and ripped the mask of its face. The poet pathetically pens the chaos of the city: Calcutta they will tear you apart Jarasandha-like/they will tie your hands on either side.../they will burn you at the stake.../if you feel like suicide take a rickshaw to Sanagachhi and share the/sullen pride in the eyes of women who have wilfully died/Wait for me outside the Ujjala theatre and I will bring you the blood/of that armless leper who went mad before hunger and death met in/his wounds.../and I will show you the hawk who died with Calcutta in his eyes/Calcutta if you must exile me destroy my sanity before I go.<sup>6</sup>

Today Indian English poetry is no longer a poetry solely written by those living in India or necessarily by those born in India. It has become a global network of writers settled in many countries. There is Sujata Bhatt in Germany, Tabish Khair in Denmark, Saleem Peeradina, Meena Alexander and Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni in the United States, and Vikram Seth and Sudeep Sen going back and forth between India and England. Then there is Imtiaz Dharker, from a British Muslim Pakistani family, who has become an Indian poet. Dharker was born in Pakistan, raised in Glasgow, and now lives between London and Mumbai. She describes herself as a Scottish Muslim Calvinist and her rebellious spirit unmask the socio-cultural and socio-religious effigies. The intensity and eloquence of her life and poetic accomplishment have dumbfounded the male chauvinists not only inside the Islamic social, cultural and religious setup but also outside it. An Islamic lady, she questioned the validity of moments entwined by her faith that she is born with and the freedom that she aspires. Her anthology *Purdah and Other Poems* biographically circumscribes her birth into a Muslim family in Pakistan, her education in England and her marriage to a Hindu. Friends ! However true the history is, it is a pale truth that woman remains to be a mere woman. Her suffering is as old as the hills and has been felt across time. The poem *Purdah* presents woman as a symbol of oppression, subjugation, subordination and an object of sacrifice on the altar of social conventions and traditions. *Purdah* is a male imposed symbol of domination and seclusion symbolizing the eclipse of a Muslim Women's identity and individuality.<sup>7</sup> A woman cannot afford to rise, and to pander to the male ego, has to remain on her knees even if she has superior capabilities than her male counterpart.

In or out of *Purdah*. Tied, or bound.

Shaking your box to hear  
how freedom rattles...<sup>8</sup>

In another poem entitled *A Woman's Place*, Dharker ironically writes :

Mouths must be watched, especially  
if you're a woman. A smile  
should be stifled with the sari-end.<sup>9</sup>

The poetry of Lahore born modern Indian English poet Som Prakash Ranchan is deeply rooted to our great Indian tradition of myths and cultures, epics and scriptures. He has conveyed his experience with his highly chiselled skill. It is viewed that his voice in his poetry is neither of an extrovert nor an introvert but consists of the polyphonic echoes, predominantly of a controvert. In the poem, 'Swan Song', Ranchan talks of the tragic and mystic experience of assimilation of the instant and the epoch, referring to the atmosphere as well as human contamination and uncertainty :

In the length of a second me absorb,

Evacuate. Empty points in vacant space.  
... Joining moment to moment,  
burning dust to rose incandescence, reconciling  
the instant and the epoch?<sup>10</sup>

The major themes in his poetry are love, sex and companionship, poverty, birth and death and the sense of boredom and horror arising out of the anguish of urban life experiences. Kumar often selects a simple and unpretentious fact or incident and develops it into a meditative experience. In his poetry one has to learn to live with suffering which is as integral to life as death. He imagines an end to this suffering only in death. The poet simply picks up a situation, describes the suffering that torments his characters and then leaves it for the readers to ponder over it. In the poem Rickshaw-Wallah, the poor rickshaw puller toils hard in the blazing sun of summer to earn his living. But he is unable to earn enough money to procure even the bare necessities of life for him and his family. Whenever he takes a passenger in his rickshaw across the city lanes,

he computes the patches  
on the street's tattered shirt  
beyond the municipality precincts,  
and at his home  
in a slummed roost,  
the mother hen is gagging  
her chicks' full-throated cries  
for a few grains of rice.<sup>11</sup>

The poor fellow endlessly continues "pulling his cross/on a bellyful of questions ..." which always remain unanswered.

The protagonist in the poem To a Prostitute deserts his loyal wife for a harlot. He is one among those who visits brothel for carnal pleasure. The poet compares the body of the prostitute with the walls and pillars of monuments that the tourists visit and after they are contented, they write their addresses and depart and forget them thereafter.

I have come to join/the congregation/wash my hands at the same fount/where other have dropped their fingers/and walked away./On your forespent thighs/juvenile tourists who had/only a glimpse of/the inner shrine/have left rude etchings/of name, place and time.<sup>12</sup>

In yet another poem Indian Woman, Kumar describes the Indian women making a queue near a well for water, waiting for their men's return. Here the poet wishes to draw the image of rural and tribal India come alive in the poem :In this triple baked continent/Women do'nt etch angry eyebrows/On mud walls/Patiently they sit/Like empty pitchers/On the mouth of the village well.../waiting for their men's return.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, it may be confidently concluded that in the past Indian English poetry had to witness multiple social struggles on various levels that motivated a number of poets to scribble their pen dipped in the ink of protest. It is an eternal truth that poetry never dies and poets dare to do, what most people are frightened to do. Indian English poetry has achieved a distinct identity today. Despite continuing attacks on the Indian English poets, their place in modern Indian culture is now well recognised. I am sure that the impending generations would certainly learn from them how to create art based on facts of life.

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## **Post Colonial Angst : Selected Poems of Parthasarathy and Dwivedi**

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The process of colonization began in the eighteenth century and the chief powers engaged in colonizing activity were England, France and Spain. Later Germany, Russia and Portugal followed suit. India became a colony of Great Britain in the nineteenth century. In general, colonies existed for motives of exploitation, expansion and cultural domination. The colonial experience was accompanied by pain, distress and anguish and the experience was certainly a bitter one for the colonized. Though economic exploitation was the chief motive of the colonizers, yet it could not be underscored as the sole motive. The colonizers, through their wily process of cultural colonization, were capable of achieving absolute control over the various aspects of the lives of the colonized people. The colonizers brought about the process of cultural colonization in a clever, calculated manner. At the outset, the colonizers propagated several myths in the colonies. Those myths were tailor-made to condition the mindset of the colonized people. The myths propagated the idea that the Westerners (the colonizers) were superior and that the colonized people were inferior. That process of colonization was so subtle that the natives were impelled by it. The propagation of myths was ably supported by Western education. The colonized people were so attracted by the colonizing culture that they remain unfazed by the cultural invasion made by their imperial masters. Their ties with their own cultural traditions were slowly and gradually snapped as a result of western education. The be-all and end-all of western education was the suffusion of cultural elements. Such suffusion of culture was not done for humanitarian purposes; it was done with the desired objective of furthering their selfish interest in the colonies. The English historian, Macaulay, who is remembered for advocating education in India in the English medium minced no matters when he stated that his purpose of English education in India was, “*to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect*” (*Colonialism/Post Colonialism* 85).

As a sequel to Macaulay’s policy the Indians became receptive to English culture but they were still treated contemptuously by their English masters. This paper purports to study how the colonial experience was accompanied by pain, distress and anguish by two poets of the post independence period, namely Parthasarathy and Dwivedi.

The two sections of Parthasarathy’s *Rough Passage*, ‘Exile’ and ‘Trial’ should not be read merely as autobiographical poems. In both the poems, the reader feels that there is a conflict between two cultures, the West and the East. This results in a tension in the mind of the poet and the poet makes a sincere attempt to resolve the tension.

In ‘Exile’, the poet, instead of glorifying the English culture, was critical about it. He spoke of his deep roots in the Tamil language and culture and how he had a feeling of rootlessness in England

when the English culture was grafted on his thought process. During those days he had turned his back to Tamil culture. The poet had a passionate love for English literature and thought that he would be a true devotee of English language and culture one day. Both by day and night, he had read the great works of English literature with the hope that one day he would certainly identify himself with them. But his hopes were dupes:

He had spent his youth whoring  
after English gods. (*Rough Passage* 68)

Once Parthasarathy began to live and work in England, he felt as though he were a fish out of water. At home in Tamil Nadu, he exuded confidence in the Tamil language. His confidence in the Tamil language suffered a rude jolt once he showed obeisance to the English language; such was the impact of colonial culture. The poet made an introspective study of colonial culture and this accounted for the futility of his dreams about England. It signalled his growing disenchantment with his early English utopia:

There is something to be said for exile  
You learn roots are deep,  
The language is tree, loses colour  
Under another sky. (*Rough Passage* 35)

The poet realized that his coming to England was an exercise in futility. The English sky was in no way different from the sky of India. There was no extraordinary radiance in it. Turning his gaze to socio-economic realities, the poet averred that even the beggars of England are no better than their counterparts in India. Golf clubs and bars were agog with people drinking and merry making. They all had the quotidian of colonial culture in them:

What have I come  
here far from a thousand miles?  
The sky is no different.  
Beggars are the same everywhere.  
The clubs are there, complete with bars and golf – links  
The impact of the West on India  
is still talked about  
though the wogs have taken over. (“*Rough Passage*” 71)

The post colonial angst was not only witnessed by the readers in the poetry of the Indian poets of the late sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, but also witnessed in the fiction of the same period. Anita Desai’s fictional character, Dev, in *Bye, Bye Blackbird* voiced similar feelings against the British culture. His experiences and cultural shocks were eye-opening to him. He stated, “*I wouldn’t live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted*” (*Bye, Bye Blackbird* 17).

The poet Parthasarathy, very much like Dev of *Bye, Bye Blackbird* had cultural shocks as a British Council Scholar at Leeds University, England in the mid sixties of the twentieth century. The poet realized that his English was not idiomatic enough to match English standards. But he was foolishly basking in the false glory of his proficiency of the English language. He discovered to his dismay that contemporary England with all her trappings of colonialism was a dirty place, unlike his previous ideal of it. He was shocked to find the British intelligentsia exhaling racial prejudices and retaining their imperialistic attitudes towards India and the Indians. He learned the harsh truth about England what other students had often learnt after going there: A love of English literature does not make an Englishman. The poet had forsaken Tamil and embraced English in as much as Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the legendary poet of Bengal, who, in the mid nineteenth century, had given up Bengali for everything English. Of Parthasarathy’s central concerns, Prof. Brijraj Singh observed that Parthasarathy, born in 1934 and coming to maturity with national independence, feels caught between two cultures and his poem is a declaration of independence from British literature and the idealized colonial vision of England. (*Chandrabhaga* 3, Summer 1980, 49 – 74).

Parthasarathy rejects all the superficial trappings of English culture. The “cigarette stubs”, ‘the empty bottles of stout and crisps’, ‘the tweed’ and ‘grey flannel’ cannot reassure the British against

the immigrant status of the Indians. The British label the Indians 'coloured' and make hurtful observations such as

.... It's no use trying

To change people. They'll be what they are. (*Rough Passage 27*).

There is no mutual respect between the Indians and the English. The unclean habits of the English makes the poet spew when he thinks of them:

Lanes full of smoke and litter,  
With puddles of unwashed  
English children. (*Rough Passage 27*)

The sight of Westminster bridge, the Thames, and the sight of unwashed English children no longer stimulate the poet. Even the figure of Queen Victoria, in whose reign much of the colonizing activity took place is no longer stimulating to the poet:

Victoria sleeps on her island  
Alone, an old hag,  
Shaking her invincible locks. (*Rough Passage 29*)

It is from his linguistic illusions that the sense of disorientation arose in Parthasarathy's poetry. Much of his sense of exile stemmed from the shattering realization of the super imposition of the new English culture on the old Tamil culture at a greatly accelerated rate of change. His shocking realization that he would not be able to return to the Tamil culture that he had left behind, added to his sense of distress. It was not wrong to surmise that Parthasarathy was projecting what Alvin Toffler called 'Future Shock'. Briefly speaking, future shock is a sense of dislocation that an individual suffers when he suddenly plunges himself into an environment which is diametrically opposite to that of his own; an environment which has different set of conceptions of time, space, work, love and religion. Such an environment acts as a stumbling block to any hope of retreat and does not permit the individual to move to a more familiar landscape. Such a cultural shock breaks down all modes of communication. The individual becomes shatteringly aware of the death of permanence owing to the sickness of change.

S.C. Dwivedi, a contemporary poet shows the prevalent mood of disillusionment associated with post-colonialism. His earlier volume of poems *Ek Aur Savera (Another Dawn)* is characterized by mysticism, which is a popular theme in Indian poetry. The affirmative note of commitment with which the poem makes its beginning, brings it close to the opening section of T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* (Death by water). He declares his moral purpose when he states vehemently that his purpose is to emphasize the importance of commitment and dedication and do away with the glorification of false gods.

Dwivedi's second volume of poems is entitled, *Epiphanies And other Poems*. In *Epiphanies*, the reader is at once struck by the essential religious temper of the poem. The poet exhorts his readers to regulate their lives according to the tenets of the Vedas. They are instructed to pay their obeisance to God, to rid themselves of their sinfulness and shun all worldly pleasures.

One of the poems in *Epiphanies* bears the title *Indian Poetry*. True to its title, the poem is a reassertion of the Indian tradition of art. To Walter Pater and his followers art is for art's sake, but with Dwivedi, art should be pursued for moral ends. Dwivedi extols art for its ability to infuse wisdom and to realize idealistic goals. The imagery of a nectarine pitcher is very appropriate. Its capacity to contain the implacable truths of the Vedas, the sublime messages of the Upanishads or the ideals held dear by Rama and Sita impart uniqueness to it:

Like a pitcher of nectar it contains,  
Vedic truths, Upanishadic messages,  
The ideals of Rama and Sita .....

It returns the silence that we carry in our hearts. (*Epiphanies 38*)

A strong current of sensuousness runs through Dwivedi's poetry. Like the true Aryan or Greek he is drawn to the manifold beauties of the earth that appeal primarily to the senses. The sensuousness suddenly takes a religious turn that borders on mysticism as in these lines of the poem:

I want to feel the scent of the earth  
The scent of sunbaked earth after rain,  
Scent that welcomes you on Indian soil,  
The hot and dry summer of Chait and Baisakh....  
I would rather be  
That stone which becomes a pedestal of Shiva temple. (*Epiphanies* 43)

Dwivedi's principal weapon is the satire. It is through the literary device of satire that Dwivedi dilates upon the post-colonial situation in *Topiwallah*. The 'Branded People' pilloried in *Ek Aur Savera* once again become the target of Dwivedi's censorious criticism. Just as Shakespeare uses the play scene (The Murder of Gonzago) in *Hamlet*, and the Sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth* as Objective Correlatives in the play, similarly, Dwivedi treats the Topi as objective correlative to satirise the hypocrisy and the feudal outlook of the people. The ever-changing identity of the Topi is a recurrent pattern in Dwivedi's poetic carpet. The Topi becomes a symbol of fooling everybody in the poem.

The influence of T.S. Eliot is unmistakably felt in the narrative art of the poet. *The Waste Land* opens with the voice of the narrator, but then the narrative voice becomes the voice of the character in the poem. In Dwivedi's poem there is the voice of the Sutradhar (the puppeteer); this voice shifts to the Topi-wearer. The Topi-wearer is emblematic of the priggish, hypocritical ruling class that lords over the humble, subdued working class, represented by the Topi-seller: The Topi-seller who peddles his wares speaks in an ironical understatement. The Topis that he sells are covered with glossy papers and further, You will look like a *prince* in this topi ( *Topiwallah* 118)

After the Topi-seller hawks his wares, the Sutradhar (the narrative voice) asks two consecutive questions that are somewhat linked to the post-colonial situation. In colonial India, the topi was the insignia of feudal aristocracy. But in democratic India, it has lost its importance. Therefore, the poet questions the futility of insignia in post – colonial India. The pressing need of the hour is the forestalling of deaths arising out of starvation:

Where is the roti-show,  
Why this Topi show?  
Many had died without bread in the city,  
But not one among million died for a topi  
(*Topiwallah* 122)

The Topi-seller has decided to sell his topis. He is hell-bent on showing his identity because by revealing his identity he will be able to garner votes in plenty for his political party. The be-all and end-all of his hawking activity is to win elections at all costs. So, his act of selling topis is congruous with the type of democracy that he is practising in post-colonial India.

My topis are necessary for democracy ....  
Buy one from me and me a minister.  
Either in U.P. or M.P.  
These are the most backward States  
Where most people wear *Dhotis*  
And only few wear *topis*  
And few people are wise,  
And the wise will always rule. (*Topiwallah* 123)

The poet now focuses his gaze on the activities of the Topi-wearer. The reins of administration of the country are now in his hands. He has learnt from his colonial masters how to divide and rule

and he subtly practices that policy in a post-colonial India. He translates his policy of schism into practice to keep his power and self intact:

Topi is civilized man's concern  
A politician's burden  
Carried lightly, softly and smoothly on head  
As he sits on Dunlopilo chairs. (*Topiwallah* 123)

To the Topi-Wearer, the Topi becomes a symbol of status, both political and social. He exhorts its readers to don a Topi and acquire legendary qualities. By inserting allusions from Satan's speech to the fallen angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, by equating the Topi-Wearer to the tragic heroes of Shakespeare and the wicked characters of the Indian epics, the poet is able to show his uncanny ability of combining the high and the low. Such comparisons and equations impart a roundedness of contour to the character of the Topi-Wearer and make him a less repulsive figure than before:

By a Topi and be a He man or Superman  
Arise, awake or be forever doomed,  
The choice is yours.  
To die like *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*  
*Ravana* or *Kansa*  
A head without Topi perplexes and retards.  
(*Topiwallah* 124).

It is amusing to see the way in which the Topi-Wearer uses his Topi as a shield to keep his adversaries at bay.

The Indian politician is shameless to the core and the Topi-Wearer who represents him, is no exception. The cloak of hypocrisy which the Topi-Wearer holds tenaciously throughout the poem, drops suddenly as the poem limpidly draws to its finale and reveals the crude nakedness of the speaker:

Pouring old wine into new bottles,  
We all provide to be real audience.  
Talking and selling these topics,  
I move from place to place.  
I love to sell different topis to different people  
And meet different people through different tongues. (*Topiwallah* 127)

The select poems of both the poets taken up for study belong to the post-independence period. Both are critics of the post-colonial situations but both differ in their treatment of the subject. Parthasarathy's poem makes an introspective analysis of the post-colonial situation and highlights the truth about himself : his inability to come to terms with the post-colonial culture in England. His decision to go back to his Tamil language and culture makes sense. The message which can be culled from his poems is simply this: it is ideal on the part of a poet to find his roots in his own language and culture and it is wrong on his part to ape blindly the colonial culture.

Dwivedi, on the other hand makes a serious study of the post-colonial situation in India in the contemporary age. The socio-political tendencies of the age come within the whiplash of his satire. The so called bigwigs of Indian democracy are ruthlessly satirized because they are instrumental in shattering our moral, political, social and cultural values.

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## Major Trends in Contemporary Indian English Poetry: A Feminist Perspective

*Sutanuka Ghosh Roy \**

Indian women for ages have been in the whirlpool of pain and suffering. William Bentick, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar and others have contributed immensely for the upliftment and restoration of their rights. The orthodox Indian society is yet to 'free' the Indian woman fully from its tentacles. However there has been a change in contemporary times—

Woman today  
Is not a mere mirror  
That magnifies the image of her man (135) <sup>1</sup>

These lines are an explosion of the pent-up feelings, which has long been gathering. This revolutionary spirit is a common trait among all the contemporary women writers in Indian writing in English. Their poetry more often than not becomes writing about women. Be it the tortured verse of Kamala Das, the detached poetry of Mamta Kalia, the sadness and loss in Gauri Deshpande's poetry—the poetry of these poets is born of their intense experiences as women. In this paper an attempt has been made to assess their poetry on its own merits irrespective of their gender, and also to analyse why gender makes all the difference.

History shows us that Language and its evolution has been the male prerogative. As a result, literature by women tends to get marginalized because of the disparate tendencies of reception to their writings. In writing poetry women are allotted personal but not public space. She is allotted neither a political or rhetorical voice. Kamala Das writes:

I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power, and can repeat them like  
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with  
Nehru [ ] (SIC 59)

In traditional Indian society women both individually as well as collectively, are excluded from the centres of power. All they can do is just to repeat 'the names/ Of those in power'. This involves a mimicry of the discourse of 'politics' itself. Commenting on this, Jeremy Hawthorn writes, 'the subversive potential contained in the forced and (often overtly) half-hearted adoption of the style or conventions of a Dominant authority- whether national- CULTURAL or GENDER- political.' <sup>2</sup>

With regards to the new trends and techniques in women's poetry there is a remarkable movement connecting the domestic with the public spheres of work. In their works we find the independent self asserting itself. This assertion is reflected in the imagery, rhythm, even in the punctuation of their works. These women have made 'their language' their strangest weapon. They have introduced in it a new array of thematic contents. New voices are there to relate their experiences in their art from a broad spectrum of styles.

Kamala Das is one of the pioneering post-independence Indian English poets who have contributed immensely to the growth of modern Indian English poetry. 'Das's sensitive awareness of her surroundings—their sordidness, boredom, ugliness and horror—and her love and passion gives

strength to her poetry.<sup>3</sup> Right from her early childhood she has been subjugated by the patriarchy. The society has always a different set of rules for a girl-child. She is told to:

[...] Dress in sarees, be girl,  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook  
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
Belong, cried the categories. Don't sit  
On walls or peep through our lace-draped windows.  
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or better  
Still be Madhavikutty. It is time to  
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.  
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a  
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when  
Jilted in love..... (SIC 60)

The Patriarchal society always expects the woman to play the second fiddle. In fact her very 'identity' is at stake. This identity, as I.G. Ahmed asserts, can never be tethered to her 'name' that, like her roles, was given to her by 'somebody else', and that too, for mere 'convenience'.<sup>4</sup> In her personal life she tries to cast off her personal and speaks for the inclusive gender identity:

[...] I am every  
woman who sees her love [...].

The 'I' as Rama Kundu explains, does not try anymore to deny her womanhood.<sup>5</sup> Even in her love-life the woman is expected to be passive, playing a secondary role. She can never 'run' or 'flow' like a 'river'. She only 'waits' like the 'ocean'. Whereas the man proudly asserts his identity:

[...] Who are you [...]  
[...] it is I.[..]. (SIC 60)

The male ego 'I' is a sword in its 'sheath'. This 'sheath' also protects the sword, and the sword easily cuts through things.<sup>6</sup> An analysis of her poems reveals that 'from the very start the speaker seems to speak from the consciousness of interfering voices and she struggles against this attempt to impose any readymade or traditional constructs upon her.'<sup>7</sup>

In poems like *An Introduction*, *Spoiling the Name*, *A Hot Noon in Malabar*, *The Flag*, *The Inheritance*, *Smoke in Colombo*, *Blood*, *Home is a Concept*, *At Chiangi Airport*, 'they', 'he', 'she', 'you', and the 'Other-I's affect the intonation of the speaker. 'The commonness of assumed basic value-judgements constitutes the canvas upon which living human speech embroiders the designs of intonation.'<sup>8</sup>

Another significant poet is Gauri Deshpande. The canon of her poetry includes three collections, namely, *Between Births* (1968), *Lost Love* (1970) and *Beyond Slaughterhouse* (1972). "She (Gauri Deshpande) is a mature poet, aware that neither passion nor disillusionment are simple emotions and the texture of her best poetry is accordingly complex. Most of her verse is marked by a sense of sadness and loss".<sup>9</sup> Like Thomas Hardy she often finds the evil outweighing the good and believes— this human life almost a puny adventure. "her poetry deals with the minutiae of every day life, the coming of a lover, the death of a puppy dog, ingratitude of children. Everything is grist to her mill, from city with its greasy caress and harsh endearments to a treescape".<sup>10</sup>

In *A Change of Seasons* she writes about the bodily malaise, in *Family Portraits*, she graphically and minutely talks of Iru's hypocondria and gloom:

She withheld that Kingly proboscis  
From us all: none, obviously, fit  
To carry the fire, passion, despair  
Fortitude it stamped on her.

In *Migraine*, the underlying note of sadness and loss is conspicuous. There is a modern note of disillusionment and boredom,

It will retreat in the night for a month or two,  
You can resume human disguise till its next advent

And masquerade as person, sane, intelligent,  
Loved and desirable, Till the next time then  
*Migraine* ll 25-28).

In *The Female of the Species*, she speaks of the modern hollowness, lovelessness and money-loving ungrateful children:

You sit with them and talk,  
She sews and you sit and sip  
And speak of the rate of rice  
And the price of tea  
And the scarcity of cheese  
You know both that you've spoken  
Of love and despair and ungrateful children ( ll-11-17)

Thus the pall of gloom and pain is all over Gauri Deshpande's poetry.

Another poet who is equally vocal of the discrimination of the gender in the Indian society is Tejdeep. In her two volumes of poems *Caught in a Stampede* with 69 poems and *Five Feet Six and a Half Inches* with 40 poems we meet a new woman. As G. S. Radhakrishna writes, " she writes about her various personal— woman, daughter, mother, wife, police officer— with the sensitivity of the woman, daughter, mother, police officer—with the sensitivity of the woman and the observant eye of a cop. The most moving poems, are those about the predicament of being a woman and a wife in a gender-biased society".<sup>12</sup>

Like Kamala Das Tejdeep questions whether a woman in a male dominated society has an ' identity' of her own. In poems like *Habeas Corpus*, *At the Firing Range*, *Ambushed* there is a tussle between her two selves—the professional and the personal, she writes,

It is difficult for a  
Woman to compete  
With seven billion  
Males at work  
For the loaves and medals.  
In *At The Firing Range* , she tells us:  
Woman like elastic  
In underwear  
To hold all, hide all  
Bind all to committed shape  
Woman, the dip irrigated  
Home maker  
The last to reap  
The last to yield  
To the law breaker.

Throughout her poetical journey, she carries this emotional baggage with her . In a poem she even challenges the dichotomous nature of God itself:

Why is it that  
God has two  
Goddesses by his side?  
Why are they dwarfed  
Magnificence and size?

It seems strange that even the goddesses are dwarfed in magnificence and size whereas 'God' himself is dwarfed by being a silent observer. She writes about the rainbowed life, life seen in various hues—ranging from her own personal ones, man-woman relationship, the bitterness of life, the fears—" Life" is sad afterall. I would not say that my poems are entirely autobiographical but they are certainly based on my experiences".<sup>13</sup> She has left a mark in the field of Indian English poetry.

Writing about the self is not self-exposure; it is a model of how we make the self-available visible, accessible to others.<sup>14</sup> This is very true about the poet— Mamta Kalia. She is a distinct voice in contemporary Indian English poetry. In her poetry she readily amalgamates the themes of love, marriage, family life and society. Her two distinct characteristics are her chisel-sharp intellectual quality and her autobiographical flavour. She has got two collections of poems published from Writers Workshop, Calcutta. They are *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems* (1970) and *Poems 1978* (1979). We find a conflict between the father and the daughter in *Tribute to Papa and other Poems*:

Who cares for you Papa?  
Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?  
Who wants to be an angel like you?  
Who wants it?  
You are an unsuccessful man, Papa.  
Couldn't wangle a cosy place in the world.  
You have always lived a life of limited dreams (306)

Sujata Bhatt creates a 'space' in her poetry in which the construction of home/nation constantly takes place through images harp on the specificities of their identities. She writes, "When I am most deeply absorbed in writing a poem, I feel that I am 'translating' images and sound rhythms and an emotional "tone" into words". The 'home' imagery is recurrent in her poems:

But I have never left home  
I carried it away  
With me—here in my darkness  
In myself. (*The One Who Goes Away*)

It is with this emotional baggage that she recognizes and celebrates her own identity. We often see that she writes about mythical tales (*Monkey Shadows*), for she never forgets her own roots. *For My Grandmother* reminds us of Kamala Das's *Composition* where she laments over the death of her Grandmother.

She often laces Gujarati words to title her poems—'Udaylee' (*Brunizem*, 15) and 'Sherdi' (17). Actually she is so rooted in her culture that she is never displaced. Though she writes in English, she offers a kind of resistance to the flow of English language itself, by using Gujarati words. In *History is a broken Narrative*, Bhatt, represents her post-colonial consciousness:

History is a broken narrative.  
Pick a story and see where  
It will lead you,  
You take your language where you get it.

Her poems are chiefly poems of self-experience and self-definition. She deeply honours her heritage as well as her Western self-confidence. As a result we often see the twin metaphors of loss and recovery in her poems. Her poems bring a new consciousness as well as a fresh air to the Indian English poetry.

Lakshmi Kannan, a bilingual writer in Tamil and English is a well-known poet of Indian English poetry. In this male dominated society she is aware of her own emotions, psyche as well as her exact *locus standii*. The woman has to endure disgrace of different modes in our society. The elders throw words of caution :

No, no, don't run,  
Don't take long strides, Don't raise your voice,  
Be a everyman, be moderate in everything  
Be a model of mediocrity. (113)

Woman,  
Tugged by occult pulls  
The female cycle secret  
Throbs with the star (116)

Lila Ray comments, 'Lakshmi Kannan's task has been the task of every woman, the task of discovering herself for the 'I' is confined even with an appendix of a name, an age and a sex'.

Lakshmi Kannan's poetical works include *Going Home* ( translated from Tamil by author, 1999), *India Gate* ( 1993), *Parijata* ( 1992).

Meena Alexander hears voices of her village- women she left behind when she migrated to United states. On the other hand Suniti Namjoshi speaks of the legitimate rights of the lesbian community.

It has famously been argued that men and women are made in culture. However the reality shows us that the very identity of a woman is challenged and her space has been constricted in the present socio-cultural structure. The poems by contemporary Indian women poets have become a phenomenon in itself. The journey that started with Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu is a continuous journey. These contemporary women poets writing in English are no doubt at par with their male counterparts. The emergence of these large number of women poets writing poetry in English is itself one of the most significant feature of post-independence poetry. Hope these new feminine voices create new terrains!

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## Exploration of Peace and Social Respect in Kamala Das's poetry

*Barinder Kumar\**

Woman in Kamala Das's poetic world always struggles to achieve a peaceful destination where she can sit and can heave a sigh of relief after undergoing myriad kinds of adventures (physical, sexual and spiritual) and soul searching efforts. But her endeavors seem failing as the hostile world, in

which she lives, does not come up to her expectations because her ambitions are too high and her efforts are too humble and targeting. Consequently, the female voice in Kamala Das's poetry apparently dangles between two worlds- one of sanity which is overshadowed by her social surroundings and well established traditions guiding human deportment, particularly of women how to behave and go about in the society and two, her psychological phenomenon which is prevailed upon by her emotional upheavals. Psychic manifestations, emanating from Kamala Das's long voyage from childhood experiences in her grandmother's house to her life partner's loveless attitude towards her emotions reveal woman's helplessness in male -dominated society which forces her to feel psychologically ambivalent. Das's woman is seen making earnest efforts searching for real love which could cool down her young lustful anxieties in young age and spiritual alignment with god (Lord Krishna) in her last leg of life. In Das's poetry, moral inhibitions and social restraints force feminist voice feel oppressively snubbed which ultimately, force her to seek rebellious pursuits by breaking man- made laws of the society. How the delicate soul of a sensitive woman gets crushed and butchered, when her instinctive desires are not responded by the world around, remains pivotal point of Das's poems. Unhealthy environment forces woman feel depressed, frustrated and ultimately alienated which forces her to look at the world around her through colored binoculars.

Woman of Kamala Das's poetic world is wearing distinctive attire as Das is strikingly different from her predecessors, contemporaries and succeeding poets because the themes, expressions and language of her poetry and prose are markedly unconventional and innovative. Two prevalent but contrasting features characterize Kamala Das's poetry: one, her desire to love and be loved and two, her wish for death when life appears quite frustrating. The theme of love in all its divergent forms and shapes dominates her poetic arena. Sometimes love takes the form of her nostalgia for her grandmother who symbolizes a happy, loving home, and at other times, it becomes a woman's quest for love from a lover or a husband. Her ardent yearning for love can be gauged from the fact that she feels she has in her veins the blood of her ancestress' that preferred to marry more than one husband. Her vigorous quest for life and love confronts multiple difficulties and hardships which end up in frustration. The unhappy marital life of her parents, the callous and emotionally devoid attitude of her husband, the amorous advances of her so-called lovers and the severance of her roots from Malabar- all result in so much helplessness and frustration in Kamala Das that they bred in her a negative tendency which is reflected in a number of her poems and her autobiography *My Story* (1976) and in a number of her articles and short stories. Being a confessional poetess the woman does not find it appropriate to express her real hunger and hesitates in wording her private secrets and emotions. Mina Surjit Singh finds in Kamala Das's poetry "confessions of private humiliations of varying pathological degrees and kinds of proliferating images of failure in short, by a literal self exposure."<sup>1</sup>

Kamala Das shows woman's explorations for respect from her partner in her physical relationship which manifests her quest to eliminate real love and spiritual sterility. She in famous poems, "The Freaks"(1965) published in *Summer in Calcutta* and "The Invitation"(1967) in *The Descendants* feels plunged into dire straights from where she endeavors to extricate herself but social and mental restraints do not lend moral and spiritual strength to make her feel encouraged. As a result, negative thoughts start creeping into her psychological ambience. Soul searching to achieving mental peace in loveless environment remains the dominating factor in the poems. Frustrations and helplessness make the female persona think on negative lines as goes to the extent of calling herself freakish and contemplating suicide. Woman voice in Das's poems doesn't feel having satisfactory answers to her queries as her tensions seem intact throughout her mental struggle as Devindera Kohli avers," It is difficult to say whether Kamala Das succeeds in resolving her tension between physical and spiritual aspects of love".<sup>2</sup>

Unsatisfied and spiritually barren woman in "The Freaks" explores the inner feelings of real existence in her surroundings in socially expected duties in Indian society. The female is closeted with her husband in the bedroom away from the world outside and busy in love making. In spite of their physical and sexual gratification, peace and comfort seem eluding the interlocutor as her desire lie only in the sensuous fulfillment. Her man is absorbed only in lustful activity which is not genuine love

in the eyes of the female partner. Her quest lies in the emotional fulfillment through love making as she questions:

‘...Can’t this man with Nimble finger-tips unleash  
Nothing more alive than  
Than Skin’s hungers?’ (The Freaks)

The failure to materialize her desired aim of life makes her mentally unstable as she calls herself a freak and she fails to find words to appropriately address her emotional callings. Being a woman she hesitates in instructing her lover what her real needs are. Despite their longstanding togetherness, they have failed to understand each other. She doesn’t expect any outside help that will come to their aid as they both have failed:

‘..... Who can  
Help us who have lived so long  
And have failed in love?’ (The Freaks)

Kamala Das doesn’t hesitate in truthful explication of psychic vibrations of frustrated woman who is on the verge of mental derangement. “The Invitation” is a descriptive exploration of the psychic conflict of a terribly upset and love-sickened woman whose lover has left her in the lurch without giving her any promising assurance of his comeback. In her intensity of love, she had developed intimate-physical relationship with him and consequently, she has been expecting his return which reflects her deep faith in him. The poem can also be taken as a dramatic account of the struggle of disintegrated mind, as she remains tentative about her future course of action- to live in hope or to die in frustration. This is what Bruce King means when he avers that Das’s poems are not concerned so much with sexual act or love but are “involved with the self and its varied, often conflicting emotions, ranging from the desire to security and intimacy to the assertion of the ego, self-dramatization and feelings of shame and depression.”<sup>4</sup> As Kamala Das is autobiographical in her poems as descriptions in her autobiography -*My Story* poetess herself. “The Invitation” reveals the desperate mental state of a woman stung by love who looks both ways- her future prospect of a blissful companionship with her sweetheart, and the eventuality of death in his absence. Being nostalgic, she recalls the time when she was enveloped in ecstatic pleasure emanating from physical intimacy, but now in his absence she is only left with remembrance of those moments. Now a fast fading hope- a hope which cannot keep her optimistic beyond a point and, resultantly, what takes the place of this emotion in her is the feeling of annihilation and negative tendency. The most quoted, ‘Shakespearean human predicament’ as faced by Hamlet, to live or to die-(to be or not to be) is the dilemma which haunts female’s mind, and is the basic point of “The Invitation.”

The undecided woman in “The Invitation” finds herself in deep state of psychic ambivalence as the poem is in the form of a dialogue between the sea and the beloved-the former inviting the latter to end herself in it, implying the discontinuation of her life whereas the latter emphasizing optimistically that her lover is expected to comeback. The poem too can be viewed as a dramatic portrayal of the two sides of her mind-the positive one which insists her to wait for the lover even if she has to experience terrible anxious moments, and the negative-which comes in the form of the sea-inviting her to commit suicide. The sea endeavors to overwhelm her mind by putting forward substantial logical arguments. Apparently, both the voices are of the Das’s own in which her inner struggle is manifested. Her two selves are engaged in opposing arguments-one driving her to bring an end to her life and the other striving to resist it with double energy. The female feels staggering as the hope of reunion with lover fades and the sea’s proposal gathers a corresponding force and validity, whereas her opposition to the sea’s invitation appears gradually crumbling, though she earnestly attempts to put with a difficult situation and tantalizing offer. In other words, the poem is the externalization of Kamala Das’s inner struggle as she, by looking at the positive, makes an effort to prevail upon the overwhelming negative forces to save herself from the physical annihilation even if she has already become ‘a wasteland’.

Kamala Das explores the staggering state of mind of the beloved by referring to the pulsating pain in her head as if somebody were clenching his fist in it. Her predicament originates from being at a cross road where she has to decide whether to continue treading on the path of love which has

proved quite a frustrating experience or to adopt the path of death which promises end of her miseries but which might as well eliminate the chances of her ever leading a blissful time with her lover. The stormy invasion of negative forces brings to her on the verge of contemplating suicide aiming to liberate herself from a life of physical barrenness. Mina Surjit Singh views that Kamala Das in “her frustration-driven delirium,.....reads in the waves of the sea an invitation suggesting her to commit suicide,”<sup>5</sup> as it is seen in the words, “Come in, Come in”<sup>6</sup>. The beloved also finds that since her prospects of living a further joyful life are mostly non-existent, there is nothing to be deprived of by the discontinuation of her earthly connection, rather, it would be a profitable addition to the sea when she concedes to tantalizing offer of drowning herself into it.

Her vehement refusal to submit to the invitation of the sea is the manifestation of her psychic weakness. Time and again she brushes aside idea of ending her life because of her wavering mind. She does so in various tones and words because the chances of her having an energetic life are not completely bleak, and the sea seems to her as Devinder Kohli terms it, “a constant distraction, a nagging threat, and beckons her towards negation.”<sup>7</sup> In one corner of her finer self, she still likes to bank upon the memory of a wonderfully nice moments when her lover had made her life so blissful as if they were in a heavenly abode. Because of her past memories she turns down the first proposal of the sea:

Oh Sea, let me shrink or grow, slosh up, Slide down, go your way  
I will go mine. (The Invitation)

Fully engrossed in nostalgia of her ecstatic union with her lover, she declines the sea’s idea to end her life if even the mental agony caused by the absence of her sweetheart happens to be heart piercing. She fails to erase memories of cheerful past when her lover came for a brief union with her, though intermittently, “as a fish coming up for air” (ll.10-11). However, those moments of physical intimacy were so ecstatic, so cozy’s sweet that made her so grateful that they cannot be obliterated from her mind even though much water has flowed since their last meeting. Those indelible moments of happiness sustain her in troublesome times and shape an embankment which keeps out the intrusion of negative and pessimistic notions in her mind. Her harping on “summer’s afternoon” when she along with her partner laid on beds with limbs inert and “cells expanding into throbbing suns” makes her stay on and gain mental strength. Devinder Kohli feels that the female persona “resists all temptation by recounting the self-contained intensity of the moment of sexual love”.<sup>8</sup>

The woman’s failure to take a final decision ‘to live or not to live’ stresses her mind, making her a person of dangling nature. The recurrence of the negative feeling with equal resistance makes her person of introspection forcing her to continue to be ambitious to live if even she has to face social ostracism. Her divided self ponders over the question of conceding or declining the sea’s offer, because for her the past as Alka Nigam feels, “is a symbol of security, love and freedom” whereas the present “stands for insecurity, pretensions and bondage of society. Her consciousness lies stretched between these two poles; it is drawn towards the positive past but held back by the negative present”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, she refuses to accept the towering proposal of the sea- as-lover to embrace death. The memory of her ecstatic experience in the arms of her lover has made such fascinating impact on her mind that she decides to continue living merely on its remembrance. The concept of spiritual love sustains her in the times of frustrations and mental agony. Nazreen Ayaz feels that the beloved “yearns for a kind of love which is a spiritual experience though through sexual relationship.”<sup>10</sup> She tries to gain strength from as she says:

..... As long  
As I remember, I want no other  
On the bed with him, the boundaries of  
Paradise had shrunk to a mere  
Six by two and afterward, when we walked  
Our together, they  
Widened to hold the unknowing city..... (The Invitation)

She seems here obviously gaining vitality from her sexual experience with her lover. It was the height of pleasurable interaction which one scarcely accomplishes in life and consequently, her heart fills up in happiness so much that an unfamiliar city gets colored according to their ecstatic vision.

In spite of her strong resistance to the proposal of the sea, the negative side still hangs over her mind. Since death, being impartial is inevitable to every mortal creature. The sea-as-lover contrasts the cessation of physical existence of a person on the land with that in the sea. Obviously, referring to the Hindu rites of cremation of dead bodies in the fire as one of the last rites the sea points out that the death on a funeral pyre with a burning head is devastating and more painful than the death by drowning in the vastness of the water. Fortunately, she has been offered an opportunity to get a better ending. The death in water would definitely be more comfortable as it will be like take a cold bath. She shivers at the idea of having human body tied to the bier and crumpled into a funeral pyre which is natural occurrence in the cremation of a dead body in burning. But in drowning, the body gets freedom on the bottom of the sea. Unlike the burning on the funeral, the dead would keep its head in an easy position on the pillow of anemones in the deep waters. In the eventuality of death, the sea assures her a comfortable death than she could ever have had on the land.

Woman in Kamala Das's poems is easily swayed by the love and affection from the people she interacts and equally, she gets threatened when she declines their offers. Search for love and security are her inherent weaknesses. Sensing that the sea has felt angry and it might denounce her to fend her loneliness;

....but I tell you, the sea  
Shall take no more, the sea  
Shall take no more No more.... (The Invitation)

the resistance seems succumbing to the invitation. But while accepting the offer of dying in the sea, she continues to have good feeling toward her lover. Even on the verge of death her ambivalent posture remains intact. Her dying statement is full of warmth for him as she is remorseful on her decision because the soft and logical arguments have made her brittle as she foresees her lover in the sea, "The Sea was our only witness. How many times I turned to it and whispered, oh, sea, in am at in love, I have found my Krishna."<sup>11</sup> The idea of taking the sea as her lover has been very dominant throughout her life because in her life she has been toying with the idea of ending herself in the sea: "Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of my loneliness which is not unique in anyway but is natural to all. I have wanted to find rest in the sea and an escape from involvements."<sup>12</sup> Her disequilibrium is the result of her search for the right man who showers upon her love and affection. The turbulence and struggle of her mental state shows her ambivalence in the last lines of the poem:

The tides beat against the walls, they  
Beat in childish rage.....  
Darling, forgive,  
how long can one resist?(The Invitation)

In "The Looking Glass", the poetess seems searching peace and happiness in sheer surrendering to the male ego as she avers that God or Nature has made male body more powerful and enduring. The only way possible for woman left lies in the acceptance of the fact that her complete submission will bring her true satisfaction and she will never have to repent afterwards:

Be honest about your wants as woman  
Stand nude before the glass with him  
.....  
Gift him all that makes you a woman.(The Looking Glass)

The suggestion implies that the surrender should be without any preconditions and that will bring moral and social respect for her which are essentials for stable womanhood in Indian social milieu.

Kamala Das's other poems, such as "The Dance of the Eunuchs", "The Wild Bougainville", "The Old Playhouse" etc. also show woman struggling to search true peaceful existence which for

sensitive woman is not an easy thing to achieve. But in the “Looking Glass” and “Poet, Lover, and Bird watcher” Das forcefully exhorts women of her times to be firm and strong in making decisions and fulfilling responsibilities toward themselves and the society. Das’s such philosophy and attitude result from her own experience of life as she realized that true happiness lies in making bold and firm decisions. Kamala Das’s poetry and philosophy towards life are interconnected; therefore, she makes consistent efforts to show the path to suffering woman to wriggle out pathetic living and passive attitude of life.

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## **The Trend of Tussle with the Surroundings: Society and Nature in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra and A.K. Ramanujan**

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Poetry written anywhere in the world would have its particular immediate context. While poets write, it is obvious they would refer to their environment, social and natural, in which they exist with their fellow beings. Though the choice of themes might differ among them individually, their poetry would remain their natural response to the conditions of their existence. Christopher Caudwell in his book *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* in the chapter “The Birth of Poetry” regards poetry as the natural and collective response of society to its environment: “Thus the developing complex of society, in its struggle with the environment, secretes poetry as it secretes the technique of harvest, as part of its non biological and specifically human adaptation to existence”(28).

Incidentally, what is true about poetry may be true ,in a sense, about all literature, too. Northrop Frye in his essay “Literary Criticism” discussing the form of literature as a whole as the content of

criticism as a whole points to the “larger questions,” i.e. “why man produces literature, what it does for society, what its connections are with other uses of mother tongue”(81). It is, perhaps, pertinent here to observe that literature is one of the ways humanity adopts consciously or unconsciously to cope with its experiences in nature and in society.

With the above idea of poetry, or literature on the whole, in my mind, I have decided to explore in the present paper an evident trend of the contemporary Indian poetry in English as reflected in a few poems by Nissim Ezekiel , Jayanta Mahapatra and A.K. Ramanujan. In these poems the poets seem to be grappling with certain harsh realities staring them in the face in their neighbourhood.

The first three poems discussed in the paper seem to indicate spontaneously the respective response of these poets to certain occurrences or situations in their social circle. The remaining three poems probably point, to some extent, to the attitude of these poets to nature. Here again, they appear to be responding to what is around them.

We can begin our discussion with Nissim Ezekiel. Surya Nath Pandey equates Ezekiel with Eliot “who founded the Modernist movement in the British literature”(76) and observes that he is a “keen and perceptive observer” who “is quick to mark the deficient point and grapples with it with his self-effacing disposition”(82). In his “Night of the Scorpion” He poetically grapples with certain very strange beliefs held by a large section of Indian people. The peasants and the holy man in the poem seem to represent these beliefs in a dramatic way. The poem of forty eight lines begins with the narrator remembering the night when his mother was stung by a scorpion. The conditions conducive to the coming of the scorpion into the house are vividly described. It had rained for ten hours steadily and the scorpion was forced to take shelter under a sack of rice in the house. After stinging the mother, he went back into the rain.

Up to here (7<sup>th</sup> line), we find the narration quite matter of fact, with no extra meaning loaded on it. In the eighth line the peasants of the neighbourhood are introduced as sympathizers and helpers. From here onwards the poem acquires an ironical and satirical tone, which continues till the forty fifth line. The last three lines of the poem have irony tempered with kindness. Rajeev Taranath has, perhaps, rightly remarked , “ The `Night of the Scorpion’ absorbed irony into the poem structure”(01). Our analysis of the poem in the present paper is an attempt to indicate how irony and satire get the lion’s share in the poem.

The peasants living in the neighbourhood came running “like swarms of flies.” Since the peasants moved in like flies, it is reported (to keep the image natural but it looks more ironical) that they “buzzed the name of God a hundred times/to paralyse the Evil One”(09-10). We observe that the people coming for help are Indian to the core as there are very subtle hints here and there in the poem to suggest this. The God-Satan rivalry hinted at in the above reference is, however, intriguing. It is , perhaps, designed to lessen the severity of the satire on certain beliefs in India or its purpose for poet might be to keep himself neutral at best, or, perhaps, he simply wants the attention of the Christian readers of the poem.

The peasants used lanterns and candles while searching for the scorpion but they did not find him. In the following lines the poet highlights one of the superstitious beliefs held by them:

With every movement that the scorpion made  
his poison moved in mother’s blood, they said.  
May he sit still, they said. (16-18)

It is also a curious belief of the peasants that suffering burns down the sins of one’s previous births and also decreases the misfortunes of the one’s next birth. They wished the narrator’s mother a very happy outcome of her suffering:

May the sins of your previous birth  
be burned away tonight, they said.  
May your suffering decrease  
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.(19-22)

Incidentally, the belief of the Indian people in the cycle of birth and death, the transmigration of the soul, the movement of soul from one body to another after death, is underlined in the above lines.

It is a popular belief among the Hindus that due to the sins committed during one life time one has to take another birth after death to receive punishment for these sins. As people continue to commit sins in every lifetime, the cycle of birth and death continues indefinitely.

The peasants in the poem also represent a sizeable number of people in India who superstitiously hold that desire and ambition in life are evil. Even the Bhagavad-Gita is interpreted by some to endorse this view. The poet attacks this belief in a covert manner and even seems to make fun of it. The peasants are here praying for the woman stung by the scorpion:

May the poison purify your flesh  
of desire, and your spirit of ambition,  
they said, and they sat around  
on the floor with my mother in the centre,  
the peace of understanding on each face. (27-31)

It seems the stinging is being seen here as a blessing in disguise. The above prayer is being said when the narrator's mother is writhing in pain, twisting "through and through" and is "groaning on a mat" (34-35). The scene presented here seems to point out that these people have got their values seriously wrong. Anisur Rahman in his book *Form and Value in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel* remarks that "Ezekiel's poetry is basically concerned with the exploration of values"(19). He adds : "This awareness is achieved but only after reaching a particular point of illumination when the poet is able to discriminate and choose"(19). I believe what Rahman has said in the above words about Ezekiel's poetry stands illustrated in the foregoing discussion of the peasants.

We now turn to Jayanta Mahapatra who is "one of the very few poets widely published abroad" and who "is indisputably a major poet with a distinctively unpretentious and powerful voice"(Prasad V).

Mahapatra's hermit-like meditateness and his contemplative bent of mind are revealed in his poem "The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" in his picturesque rendering of a house, a brothel in Calcutta. The protagonist in the poem is a typical Indian. In some respect, the poem may appear to be like the one we have just discussed. It deals with the thinking and the beliefs peculiar to the Indian people. However, their beliefs in this poem point mainly towards their attitude to sex. In the preceding poem, we had only a slight hint at it in the reference to the desire as evil.

The narrator who might well be the inner self of the protagonist addresses him as 'you' and in the very first line in the poem invites him to enter the whorehouse:

Walk right in. It is yours. (1)

This request pre-supposes certain hesitation and reservation already present in the mind of the protagonist, desiring to visit the house. To neutralize this hesitation, born of his upbringing in a closed society, the narrator uses still more coaxing words:

Think of the women  
you wished to know and haven't.  
The faces in the posters, the public hoardings.(3-5)

The narrator adds that these women are "all there together"(6). He suggests further that these women are bold and courageous enough to defy the society which does not seem to welcome them and, therefore, they "put the house there/ for the startled eye to fall upon"(7-8). The narrator seems, at the same time, to speak for both – the women in the brothel and the society outside. To the society these women are unwelcome but they care little about it:

The sacred hollow courtyard  
that harbours the promise of a great conspiracy,  
Yet nothing you do  
makes a heresy of that house.(10-13)

When the poem reaches this stage, the million dollar question is put by the narrator to the protagonist: "Are you ashamed to believe you're in this?"(14) It is made sufficiently clear that the

protagonist is languishing hard under a strong prohibitive influence of society reaching out to him through his conscience.

The protagonist is in two minds. He has come to visit the brothel but something within him is pulling him back. In the last five lines of the second stanza and in the whole of the third stanza, a contrast is presented between the life left behind at home and the life in the brothel. The narrator tells the protagonist that the women at home were busy in “false chatter” and were occupied in looking after the children whereas this place is free from those burdens:

Dream children, dark superfluous;  
you miss them in the house’s dark spaces,  
how can’t you?(20-21)

As the poem advances and reaches the fourth and the last stanza, the conflict in the mind of the protagonist reaches its zenith and the visit to the brothel ends in a complete fiasco. The protagonist is now being served by a woman in the brothel. He falls back against her in his effort “to learn something more about women”(28-29). And she does what is “proper” for her to “please” him. The lure of the brothel is summed up in “the sweet, the little things, the imagined” being done by her for him. At this stage, all of a sudden “the statue of the man within,” he had “believed in throughout the years,” appears before him to act as a spoilsport like “a disobeying toy”(32-34). His inner voice, well nursed in the Indian tradition that regards extramarital relations as immoral and evil, pulls him back. He is unable to draw any pleasure out of the adventure he came here for and the woman serving him is cut to the quick at once and wants to be released immediately:

‘Hurry, will you? Let me go’(41)

The poem ends with the narrator telling the protagonist how the game was spoilt: “and her lonely breath thrashed against your kind”(42).

Beyond the simple incident of the visit of, perhaps, a truly Indian gentleman to a brothel, which proves to be a failure because of his pre-occupation with the thoughts of right and wrong, the poem appears to be a representative poem of Mahapatra.

Having viewed the preceding two typical portraits of life in two different houses in Ezekiel and Mahapatra, we can now move to a picture of an impoverished life, enmeshed in rituals, in an Indian house in A.K Ramanujan’s “Obituary.” The house belongs to the poor family of the narrator, whose father has lived and died in poverty. It seems to be a dilapidated house, which has survived a precarious condition for long:

a house that leaned  
slowly through our growing  
years on a bent coconut  
tree in the yard.(8-11)

The poem paints a vivid picture of the poverty stricken life of an Indian Hindu family that faces the problems of a joint family, debt, and the marriage of daughters. At the time of death, father left behind him a dusty table full of papers, debts, daughters and an infant grandson. The following lines verging on mockery at the worst and pathos at the best indicate sufficiently that father lived a hard and ill-tempered life because of poverty:

Being the burning type  
he burned properly  
at the cremation  
as before, easily  
and at both ends (12-16)

The above description of father seems to adequately hint at the real misery faced by the head of a poor family in India.

After the death of a relative, a Hindu family in most cases, as far as possible, takes pains to gather the ashes of the dead and makes sure to throw these, with some religious ceremonies, into the river Ganges. Father’s ashes, too, were picked up by his sons as the custom is and were thrown, as the

priest advised, “facing east/ where three rivers meet/ near the railway station” (24-26). So here one finds a Hindu family paying its last respects to the departed soul.

The narrator humorously regrets that no memorial has been erected for father with a slab bearing his name in full, with the dates of his birth and death, still in parentheses having a record of “everything he didn’t quite / manage to do himself.” Humorously or otherwise, father is made here quite a ridiculous figure when the narrator puts his failures at par with caesarian birth and his death by heart failure in the fruit market (32-35). It begins to seem in the poem that the narrator is making fun of his father for not being able to do well in life. This seems rather unkind on his part.

Father’s figure is made more abject and pitiable in the sixth stanza when the narrator reports about him:

But someone told me  
he got two lines  
in an inside column  
of a Madras newspaper  
sold by the kilo  
exactly four weeks later  
to streethawkers (36-41).

The two obituary lines for father are seen to be an impossibility taking a tangible shape in a baffling manner. The reader is likely to feel deep pity for father at this kind of attitude to him from his son. However, the son redeems himself slightly by impatiently looking for these obituary lines in the pieces of the Madras newspaper used by his grocer to pack his items of grocery sold to him (the narrator).

To conclude, “Obituary” is a well-knit and a simply worded poem. In the entire poem of fifty six lines, the word ‘father’ has been used only once in the first line and in the rest of the poem the pronoun ‘he’ is meticulously used till the end. The poem gives us a very clear picture of a Hindu family in India living with its age-old beliefs and rituals.

In the poems examined by us in the foregoing discussion, we have seen a trend among the Indian English poets to explore certain facets of life in India. We can now move on to their poems concerning nature. In the poems selected for discussion in this paper, Ezekiel looks at the soothing impact of nature on human life while Mahapatra and Ramanujan see the difficulties created by nature for human life. On the whole, all the three poems may be seen to underscore the reaction of these poets to their surroundings.

First, we take up Ezekiel’s “Urban” for our analysis. It is a short poem of eighteen lines, divided into easy-to-follow sentences, clauses and phrases. The protagonist in the poem is referred to as ‘He’ in the second line and in the rest of the poem remains the centre of reference till the end.

He is totally separated from nature, which, though accessible easily, has gone beyond his reach because of his pre-occupation with the life in the town. Trapped in his business, which is always on his mind, he remains bound to the broken roads. The very first line of the poem figuratively highlights his miserable plight: “The Hills are always far away.” The hills metaphorically seem to refer to the soothing impact of nature.

He does not get up early enough to be able to have a walk by the riverside to relax himself in the winds blowing there. His life has become so mechanical that he does not ever notice “the skies/ Which, silently, are born again” (7-8) every morning. When the night approaches, he does not feel its shadows resting “their fingers on his eyes”(9-10). He has lost contact with nature’s blessings. The sun or rain do not matter to him and his landscape is without any depth or height(11-12). The city is the burning passion with him. The last three lines of the poem describe his total alienation from nature thus:

But still his mind its traffic turns  
Away from beach and tree and stone  
To kindred clamour close at hand. (16-18)

Ezekiel has depicted in the poem the destabilizing and disturbing impact of urbanization on human life. According to P.K.J Kurup, the “complexities of contemporary urban existence in India has been his most favourite theme” (11). The message of the poem here seems to be that one can seek solace in nature when the problems of life threaten one’s peace of mind. The suggestion seems to be Wordsworthian in quality.

Next, we come to Mahapatra’s poem “Indian Summer,” which presents a contrast to the picture of nature we have just seen. It shows us a ferocious aspect of nature. Nature doesn’t seem to be kind and peaceful here. Though the poem brings to the fore a severe summer, as we have in India, it has , perhaps, also some philosophical overtones in it. The poet at the same time is, undoubtedly, reacting to what is around him.

It is a short poem of eleven lines. It begins with the poet telling us that in the extremely heated atmosphere of summer in India “priests chant louder than ever .../Crocodiles move into deeper waters/Mornings.../smoke under the sun”(2-6). Here when we are past the middle of the poem, the scene shifts to a room in the poet’s house. His good wife lies in his bed “ through the long afternoon.” She is still dreaming, not exhausted “by the deep roar of funeral pyres”(11). The poem ends here. Presumably, the life outside the poet’s house has come to a standstill and is badly paralysed due to the hot winds blowing like the flames of funeral pyres. The phrase “the deep roar of funeral pyres” seems to refer to the noisy hot winds blowing in India in summer. We are here given an image of a number of funeral pyres burning together with roaring flames. Anybody who has attended a cremation ceremony in India and has also experienced extremely hot winds blowing in summer can understand the appropriateness of the comparison between the two.

From Mahapatra’s “Indian Summer” we move to A.K. Ramanujan’s “A River,” the last in our discussion of the Indian English poems on nature. In the poem of forty nine lines, the first three lines are about the city of Madurai where there are temples and poets. The poets write poetry about cities and temples but write nothing about the problems faced by the people in summer or in rainy season.

The poet complains that in summer every year in Madurai “a river dries to a trickle/ in the sand/ baring the sand ribs,/straw and women’s hair” (5-8). The intensity and severity of summer reminds us of the summer in Mahapatra’s “Indian summer”. If in “Indian Summer” we saw real crocodiles moving into deep waters to seek relief from heat, here under the bridge we see “the wet stones glistening like sleepy/crocodiles” and “the dry ones” look like “shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun” (13-15).

After the summer, there were floods. The poet complains that “The poets sang only of the floods” (16). This is ironic. It is a pity that the poets are indifferent to the sufferings caused by the hard summer and the floods. The new poets behave like the old ones.

To conclude, nature appears in this poem as harsh and very difficult to cope with. The indifference of the poets to the difficulties faced by people in summer or in rainy season has been decried. Ramanujan seems to advance the view that only the bright and pleasing aspect of nature should not be the subject of poetry. The poets should also take notice of the ferocity present in nature.

To sum up the whole argument in this paper, it looks obvious to say that a poet cannot simply be uninterested in what happens around him. The poetry he writes can be studied with reference to certain situations or incidents in his operational circle. We may say he would write about something that might concern him in any significant way. We have studied a few poems by Ezekiel, Mahapatra and Ramanujan to study their reaction or response to certain beliefs, traditions and patterns of behaviour in society. We have noted a trend of the poets looking at the society critically and analytically. A similar analytical trend is noticeable with regard to their attitude to nature. In all the six poems analysed in this paper the poets have been seen to be reacting individually and originally in particular situations in their vicinity.

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## **The Trend of Tussle with the Surroundings: Society and Nature in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra and A.K. Ramanujan**

*Dr. Kalwaran Singh\**

Poetry written anywhere in the world would have its particular immediate context. While poets write, it is obvious they would refer to their environment, social and natural, in which they exist with their fellow beings. Though the choice of themes might differ among them individually, their poetry would remain their natural response to the conditions of their existence. Christopher Caudwell in his book *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* in the chapter "The Birth of Poetry" regards poetry as the natural and collective response of society to its environment: "Thus the developing complex of society, in its struggle with the environment, secretes poetry as it secretes the technique of harvest, as part of its non biological and specifically human adaptation to existence"(28).

Incidentally, what is true about poetry may be true ,in a sense, about all literature, too. Northrop Frye in his essay "Literary Criticism" discussing the form of literature as a whole as the content of criticism as a whole points to the "larger questions," i.e. "why man produces literature, what it does for society, what its connections are with other uses of mother tongue"(81). It is, perhaps, pertinent here to observe that literature is one of the ways humanity adopts consciously or unconsciously to cope with its experiences in nature and in society.

With the above idea of poetry, or literature on the whole, in my mind, I have decided to explore in the present paper an evident trend of the contemporary Indian poetry in English as reflected in a few poems by Nissim Ezekiel , Jayanta Mahapatra and A.K. Ramanujan. In these poems the poets seem to be grappling with certain harsh realities staring them in the face in their neighbourhood.

The first three poems discussed in the paper seem to indicate spontaneously the respective response of these poets to certain occurrences or situations in their social circle. The remaining three poems probably point, to some extent, to the attitude of these poets to nature. Here again, they appear to be responding to what is around them.

We can begin our discussion with Nissim Ezekiel. Surya Nath Pandey equates Ezekiel with Eliot "who founded the Modernist movement in the British literature"(76) and observes that he is a "keen and perceptive observer" who "is quick to mark the deficient point and grapples with it with his self-effacing disposition"(82). In his "Night of the Scorpion" He poetically grapples with certain very strange beliefs held by a large section of Indian people. The peasants and the holy man in the poem

seem to represent these beliefs in a dramatic way. The poem of forty eight lines begins with the narrator remembering the night when his mother was stung by a scorpion. The conditions conducive to the coming of the scorpion into the house are vividly described. It had rained for ten hours steadily and the scorpion was forced to take shelter under a sack of rice in the house. After stinging the mother, he went back into the rain.

Up to here (7<sup>th</sup> line), we find the narration quite matter of fact, with no extra meaning loaded on it. In the eighth line the peasants of the neighbourhood are introduced as sympathizers and helpers. From here onwards the poem acquires an ironical and satirical tone, which continues till the forty fifth line. The last three lines of the poem have irony tempered with kindness. Rajeev Taranath has, perhaps, rightly remarked, "The 'Night of the Scorpion' absorbed irony into the poem structure"(01). Our analysis of the poem in the present paper is an attempt to indicate how irony and satire get the lion's share in the poem.

The peasants living in the neighbourhood came running "like swarms of flies." Since the peasants moved in like flies, it is reported (to keep the image natural but it looks more ironical) that they "buzzed the name of God a hundred times/to paralyse the Evil One"(09-10). We observe that the people coming for help are Indian to the core as there are very subtle hints here and there in the poem to suggest this. The God-Satan rivalry hinted at in the above reference is, however, intriguing. It is, perhaps, designed to lessen the severity of the satire on certain beliefs in India or its purpose for poet might be to keep himself neutral at best, or, perhaps, he simply wants the attention of the Christian readers of the poem.

The peasants used lanterns and candles while searching for the scorpion but they did not find him. In the following lines the poet highlights one of the superstitious beliefs held by them:

With every movement that the scorpion made  
his poison moved in mother's blood, they said.  
May he sit still, they said. (16-18)

It is also a curious belief of the peasants that suffering burns down the sins of one's previous births and also decreases the misfortunes of the one's next birth. They wished the narrator's mother a very happy outcome of her suffering:

May the sins of your previous birth  
be burned away tonight, they said.  
May your suffering decrease  
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.(19-22)

Incidentally, the belief of the Indian people in the cycle of birth and death, the transmigration of the soul, the movement of soul from one body to another after death, is underlined in the above lines. It is a popular belief among the Hindus that due to the sins committed during one life time one has to take another birth after death to receive punishment for these sins. As people continue to commit sins in every lifetime, the cycle of birth and death continues indefinitely.

The peasants in the poem also represent a sizeable number of people in India who superstitiously hold that desire and ambition in life are evil. Even the Bhagavad-Gita is interpreted by some to endorse this view. The poet attacks this belief in a covert manner and even seems to make fun of it. The peasants are here praying for the woman stung by the scorpion:

May the poison purify your flesh  
of desire, and your spirit of ambition,  
they said, and they sat around  
on the floor with my mother in the centre,  
the peace of understanding on each face. (27-31)

It seems the stinging is being seen here as a blessing in disguise. The above prayer is being said when the narrator's mother is writhing in pain, twisting "through and through" and is "groaning on a mat" (34-35). The scene presented here seems to point out that these people have got their values seriously wrong. Anisur Rahman in his book *Form and Value in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel* remarks that "Ezekiel's poetry is basically concerned with the exploration of values"(19). He adds :

“This awareness is achieved but only after reaching a particular point of illumination when the poet is able to discriminate and choose”(19). I believe what Rahman has said in the above words about Ezekiel’s poetry stands illustrated in the foregoing discussion of the peasants.

We now turn to Jayanta Mahapatra who is “one of the very few poets widely published abroad” and who “is indisputably a major poet with a distinctively unpretentious and powerful voice”(Prasad V).

Mahapatra’s hermit-like meditateness and his contemplative bent of mind are revealed in his poem “The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street” in his picturesque rendering of a house, a brothel in Calcutta. The protagonist in the poem is a typical Indian. In some respect, the poem may appear to be like the one we have just discussed. It deals with the thinking and the beliefs peculiar to the Indian people. However, their beliefs in this poem point mainly towards their attitude to sex. In the preceding poem, we had only a slight hint at it in the reference to the desire as evil.

The narrator who might well be the inner self of the protagonist addresses him as ‘you’ and in the very first line in the poem invites him to enter the whorehouse:

Walk right in. It is yours. (1)

This request pre-supposes certain hesitation and reservation already present in the mind of the protagonist, desiring to visit the house. To neutralize this hesitation, born of his upbringing in a closed society, the narrator uses still more coaxing words:

Think of the women  
you wished to know and haven’t.  
The faces in the posters, the public hoardings.(3-5)

The narrator adds that these women are “all there together”(6). He suggests further that these women are bold and courageous enough to defy the society which does not seem to welcome them and, therefore, they “put the house there/ for the startled eye to fall upon”(7-8). The narrator seems, at the same time, to speak for both – the women in the brothel and the society outside. To the society these women are unwelcome but they care little about it:

The sacred hollow courtyard  
that harbours the promise of a great conspiracy,  
Yet nothing you do  
makes a heresy of that house.(10-13)

When the poem reaches this stage, the million dollar question is put by the narrator to the protagonist: “Are you ashamed to believe you’re in this?”(14) It is made sufficiently clear that the protagonist is languishing hard under a strong prohibitive influence of society reaching out to him through his conscience.

The protagonist is in two minds. He has come to visit the brothel but something within him is pulling him back. In the last five lines of the second stanza and in the whole of the third stanza, a contrast is presented between the life left behind at home and the life in the brothel. The narrator tells the protagonist that the women at home were busy in “false chatter” and were occupied in looking after the children whereas this place is free from those burdens:

Dream children, dark superfluous;  
you miss them in the house’s dark spaces,  
how can’t you?(20-21)

As the poem advances and reaches the fourth and the last stanza, the conflict in the mind of the protagonist reaches its zenith and the visit to the brothel ends in a complete fiasco. The protagonist is now being served by a woman in the brothel. He falls back against her in his effort “to learn something more about women”(28-29). And she does what is “proper” for her to “please” him. The lure of the brothel is summed up in “the sweet, the little things, the imagined” being done by her for him. At this stage, all of a sudden “the statue of the man within,” he had “believed in throughout the years,” appears before him to act as a spoilsport like “a disobeying toy”(32-34). His inner voice, well nursed in the Indian tradition that regards extramarital relations as immoral and evil, pulls him back.

He is unable to draw any pleasure out of the adventure he came here for and the woman serving him is cut to the quick at once and wants to be released immediately:

‘Hurry, will you? Let me go’(41)

The poem ends with the narrator telling the protagonist how the game was spoilt: “and her lonely breath thrashed against your kind”(42).

Beyond the simple incident of the visit of , perhaps, a truly Indian gentleman to a brothel, which proves to be a failure because of his pre-occupation with the thoughts of right and wrong, the poem appears to be a representative poem of Mahapatra.

Having viewed the preceding two typical portraits of life in two different houses in Ezekiel and Mahapatra, we can now move to a picture of an impoverished life, enmeshed in rituals, in an Indian house in A.K Ramanujan’s “Obituary.” The house belongs to the poor family of the narrator, whose father has lived and died in poverty. It seems to be a dilapidated house, which has survived a precarious condition for long:

a house that leaned  
slowly through our growing  
years on a bent coconut  
tree in the yard.(8-11)

The poem paints a vivid picture of the poverty stricken life of an Indian Hindu family that faces the problems of a joint family, debt, and the marriage of daughters. At the time of death, father left behind him a dusty table full of papers, debts, daughters and an infant grandson. The following lines verging on mockery at the worst and pathos at the best indicate sufficiently that father lived a hard and ill-tempered life because of poverty:

Being the burning type  
he burned properly  
at the cremation  
as before, easily  
and at both ends (12-16)

The above description of father seems to adequately hint at the real misery faced by the head of a poor family in India.

After the death of a relative, a Hindu family in most cases, as far as possible, takes pains to gather the ashes of the dead and makes sure to throw these, with some religious ceremonies, into the river Ganges. Father’s ashes , too, were picked up by his sons as the custom is and were thrown, as the priest advised, “facing east/ where three rivers meet/ near the railway station” (24-26). So here one finds a Hindu family paying its last respects to the departed soul.

The narrator humorously regrets that no memorial has been erected for father with a slab bearing his name in full, with the dates of his birth and death, still in parentheses having a record of “everything he didn’t quite / manage to do himself.” Humorously or otherwise, father is made here quite a ridiculous figure when the narrator puts his failures at par with caesarian birth and his death by heart failure in the fruit market (32-35).It begins to seem in the poem that the narrator is making fun of his father for not being able to do well in life. This seems rather unkind on his part.

Father’s figure is made more abject and pitiable in the sixth stanza when the narrator reports about him:

But someone told me  
he got two lines  
in an inside column  
of a Madras newspaper  
sold by the kilo  
exactly four weeks later  
to streethawkers (36-41).

The two obituary lines for father are seen to be an impossibility taking a tangible shape in a baffling manner. The reader is likely to feel deep pity for father at this kind of attitude to him from his son. However, the son redeems himself slightly by impatiently looking for these obituary lines in the pieces of the Madras newspaper used by his grocer to pack his items of grocery sold to him (the narrator).

To conclude, "Obituary" is a well-knit and a simply worded poem. In the entire poem of fifty six lines, the word 'father' has been used only once in the first line and in the rest of the poem the pronoun 'he' is meticulously used till the end. The poem gives us a very clear picture of a Hindu family in India living with its age-old beliefs and rituals.

In the poems examined by us in the foregoing discussion, we have seen a trend among the Indian English poets to explore certain facets of life in India. We can now move on to their poems concerning nature. In the poems selected for discussion in this paper, Ezekiel looks at the soothing impact of nature on human life while Mahapatra and Ramanujan see the difficulties created by nature for human life. On the whole, all the three poems may be seen to underscore the reaction of these poets to their surroundings.

First, we take up Ezekiel's "Urban" for our analysis. It is a short poem of eighteen lines, divided into easy-to-follow sentences, clauses and phrases. The protagonist in the poem is referred to as 'He' in the second line and in the rest of the poem remains the centre of reference till the end.

He is totally separated from nature, which, though accessible easily, has gone beyond his reach because of his pre-occupation with the life in the town. Trapped in his business, which is always on his mind, he remains bound to the broken roads. The very first line of the poem figuratively highlights his miserable plight: "The Hills are always far away." The hills metaphorically seem to refer to the soothing impact of nature.

He does not get up early enough to be able to have a walk by the riverside to relax himself in the winds blowing there. His life has become so mechanical that he does not ever notice "the skies/ Which, silently, are born again" (7-8) every morning. When the night approaches, he does not feel its shadows resting "their fingers on his eyes"(9-10). He has lost contact with nature's blessings. The sun or rain do not matter to him and his landscape is without any depth or height(11-12). The city is the burning passion with him. The last three lines of the poem describe his total alienation from nature thus:

But still his mind its traffic turns  
Away from beach and tree and stone  
To kindred clamour close at hand. (16-18)

Ezekiel has depicted in the poem the destabilizing and disturbing impact of urbanization on human life. According to P.K.J Kurup, the "complexities of contemporary urban existence in India has been his most favourite theme" (11). The message of the poem here seems to be that one can seek solace in nature when the problems of life threaten one's peace of mind. The suggestion seems to be Wordsworthian in quality.

Next, we come to Mahapatra's poem "Indian Summer," which presents a contrast to the picture of nature we have just seen. It shows us a ferocious aspect of nature. Nature doesn't seem to be kind and peaceful here. Though the poem brings to the fore a severe summer, as we have in India, it has , perhaps, also some philosophical overtones in it. The poet at the same time is, undoubtedly, reacting to what is around him.

It is a short poem of eleven lines. It begins with the poet telling us that in the extremely heated atmosphere of summer in India "priests chant louder than ever .../Crocodiles move into deeper waters/Mornings.../smoke under the sun"(2-6). Here when we are past the middle of the poem, the scene shifts to a room in the poet's house. His good wife lies in his bed " through the long afternoon." She is still dreaming, not exhausted "by the deep roar of funeral pyres"(11). The poem ends here.

Presumably, the life outside the poet's house has come to a standstill and is badly paralysed due to the hot winds blowing like the flames of funeral pyres. The phrase "the deep roar of funeral pyres" seems to refer to the noisy hot winds blowing in India in summer. We are here given an image of a number of funeral pyres burning together with roaring flames. Anybody who has attended a cremation ceremony in India and has also experienced extremely hot winds blowing in summer can understand the appropriateness of the comparison between the two.

From Mahapatra's "Indian Summer" we move to A.K. Ramanujan's "A River," the last in our discussion of the Indian English poems on nature. In the poem of forty nine lines, the first three lines are about the city of Madurai where there are temples and poets. The poets write poetry about cities and temples but write nothing about the problems faced by the people in summer or in rainy season.

The poet complains that in summer every year in Madurai "a river dries to a trickle/ in the sand/ baring the sand ribs,/straw and women's hair" (5-8). The intensity and severity of summer reminds us of the summer in Mahapatra's "Indian summer". If in "Indian Summer" we saw real crocodiles moving into deep waters to seek relief from heat, here under the bridge we see "the wet stones glistening like sleepy/crocodiles" and "the dry ones" look like "shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun" (13-15).

After the summer, there were floods. The poet complains that "The poets sang only of the floods" (16). This is ironic. It is a pity that the poets are indifferent to the sufferings caused by the hard summer and the floods. The new poets behave like the old ones.

To conclude, nature appears in this poem as harsh and very difficult to cope with. The indifference of the poets to the difficulties faced by people in summer or in rainy season has been decried. Ramanujan seems to advance the view that only the bright and pleasing aspect of nature should not be the subject of poetry. The poets should also take notice of the ferocity present in nature.

To sum up the whole argument in this paper, it looks obvious to say that a poet cannot simply be uninterested in what happens around him. The poetry he writes can be studied with reference to certain situations or incidents in his operational circle. We may say he would write about something that might concern him in any significant way. We have studied a few poems by Ezekiel, Mahapatra and Ramanujan to study their reaction or response to certain beliefs, traditions and patterns of behaviour in society. We have noted a trend of the poets looking at the society critically and analytically. A similar analytical trend is noticeable with regard to their attitude to nature. In all the six poems analysed in this paper the poets have been seen to be reacting individually and originally in particular situations in their vicinity.

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## Whirlpool of Echoes : A Perspective

*Raman Sidhu\**

*Whirlpool of Echoes* is a thought provoking and powerful reflection on the contemporary world from modernist point of view. Modernists believe that a sense of purpose and continuity that had previously been the core of human existence is ruptured and fragmented. The anthology records the voice of a sensitive soul who strongly feels that the technology savvy fast moving modern man of information age suffers from spiritual vacuum. Dr. Kushal opines that not only the man but the nature is also robbed of its purity. The hypocrisy in the social life is rendering the relationships hollow. Man's relationship with his own self, society and nature has degenerated. Consequently, nothing around him is able to provide peace and spiritual anchor. He is living a fragmented and alienated life. The poet is dejected to see, "What Man has made of Man." According to C.S. Walmsley Modernism is an "...attempt to capture this sense of fragmentation and alienation." Fragmentation is the main focus of both the modernist and postmodernist studies but a post modernist celebrates the absence of a fixed value system whereas a modernist laments it. Post modernism is an impulse to de-centre whereas modernism is a desperate endeavour to hold on to centre. Like other modernists Dr. Kushal craves for idealism and unity of past. He not only captures but also mourns their tragic loss. "The cultural movement known as modernism subscribed to this project in the sense that constituted a lament for a lost sense of purpose, a lost coherence, and a system of values." (Peter Barry

Admitting occasional flashes of hope and faith, and managing to overcome the mood of dejection in some of his poems he registers a hope of man's spiritual redemption. But it happens just in 'some of the poems'. The poet keeps oscillating between hope and despair but his vision is unable to cast the despair out of his mind. *Whirlpool of Echoes* expresses Dr Kushal's disgust over the contemporary way of life. His poems are both timely and timeless, individual and universal. No doubt, literature in every age is deeply embedded in its socio-cultural background but it's poet's individual perception and his reaction to that perception that informs the growth and shape of the writing. The poet exposes himself in the process of writing poetry. "These poems exhibit a sustained effort of the poet to unearth the underlying patterns of life in the form of fundamentals against which the journey of self be evaluated. In the process while examining the external world, the poet seems to be more involved in the exploration of his own real self." N.K. Neb.

The first poem of the collection, 'Time to Celebrate,' written in a satiric vein, presents the poet in utter despair. He calls it a time for the celebration when the smiles around him are simmering and loneliness is boiling. Contrary to the title he does not actually celebrate the unnatural state of affairs around him. He mocks the sordid and dehumanizing aspects of man's actions.

These are the times  
To dance around the burning pyres  
And to learn  
Terminology of genetic engineering (pg.13)

He expresses the meaninglessness of the strange times through novel images metaphors and juxtaposition of words like "Burning springs", "Melancholy winters", "Cursed Blessings", "Negative Affirmations" and "Positive Denials".

The images, metaphors and his vision of the world certainly reminds one of T.S. Eliot. Both of them mourn the absence of golden age of unity. This poem might be considered akin to Prufrock in certain aspects. Prufrock is conflict-torn. Even after experiencing the constant trails of consciousness and a lot of incisive introspection he is unable to assert his ideal self. He succumbs to his fears. In "Time to Celebrate" protagonist stoically surrenders to the anarchy prevalent in the world around him. There is a perturbing awareness of the state of affairs around and he succeeds in highlighting it.

The poem vocalizes the predicament of an ordinary man ; the one who is sensible enough to feel the gravity of the situation but can neither bury his ideal self nor deny his social self. We do not witness any passionate rush of ideas here like in Shelley rather it is the poised expression of a realistic man with a thoughtful and ripe mind.

“Dance of Masks” is written under the same pessimistic vein. Kushal ridicules the social network of feigned relationships but at the same time honestly admits that he is also one among these modern day pretenders. Wordsworth in “The World is too Much with Us” preferred a Pagan life to the frenzy ridden life of urbanized London. However Dr. Kushal seems to be too agonized to hope for a better alternate. There is no escape for him and he decides:

Lets join  
The dance of the masks (Pg.15)

Many modernist poets experience the same feeling. Ezra Pound called his major work *The Cantos* a ‘rag bag’ implying that just such kind of art is possible in modern age, but he regrets it.

“I feel Sad” is another beautiful poem scripted deftly. The beauty lies in its specific appeal to address the timely and the timeless issues. The poem opens with the consciousness of the passage of the time. The reference certainly hints at the passing of youth.

So many autumns  
So many stumbling springs  
So many warm winters  
Grammar of Love  
Still a hard nut to crack (Pg.16)

Love is still a mystery for the poet though he is in advanced years of life. What he encountered in the name of love are “false promises”. Poem reveals that the social, cultural and spiritual values are crumbling in the season of unethical activities. Man’s indulgence in materialism has made him devoid of finer sensibilities and that is a great loss. The whirlpool of commerce and capitalism has absorbed the modern man completely.

It also expresses poet’s concern over the hollowness of relationships. Friends and relatives are actually a herd of opportunist and shameless people seeking material benefits in return of their blessings and greetings. This revelation makes the poet sad. Whatever the age is it holds true in all earthly relationships. Generally this revelation dawns on man in his mature years where experiences equip him to see through the appearances. The poem exposes a fact that there are no pre-thought recipes of success. So, the poem turns out to be a critique of the contemporary times as well human nature and predicament.

“Enough of it.....” is a heart rending lament over the deteriorating state of human habitation.

Polluted beyond repair  
Hedged by dreadful nightmares... (Pg.19)

The poets is fed up with the boastings of science and the mad race of people for temporal success. This madness after success has made them narrowly dwarfish creatures. He rejects the material comforts offered by science as with all its boastings and comfort panorama it cannot provide peace. The irony meant is explicit.

Enough of these conveniences and comforts.. (Pg.21)

For the first time in the anthology his dejection gives way to a yearning, a wish and thus a hope.

Soul yearns for stretches sublime  
Craves intensely for a touch benign  
Liberating from the relation nets  
And all other internets. (Pg.21)

He hopes to be rescued from all selfish relationships and longs for a fulfilling union.

The Victorian trends in British Literature inform an era of confusion and flux marked with unique pessimism. Matthew Arnold in "Dover Beach" gives expression to the skepticism and faithlessness of his times.

Ah love, lets us be true  
To one another ! for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
Hath really neither joy nor love nor light  
Nor certitude nor peace nor help for pain.

Despite such atmosphere around he had a meaningful relationship to keep his faith intact whereas in these days protagonist does not have such anchor to fall back upon. Still he rises above Prufrock in this poem. Prufrock could not overcome the conflict between his ideal and social self. He could not be resurrected where as the protagonist in this poem has begin to seek a genuine relationship. He is decisive about his need and hopes for it.

"The Perils Ahead" is a touching poem on human predicament. Man is always caught in the web of unavoidable circumstances and non anticipated perils. The poet is aware of the burdens of flesh and the sexual perversion among contemporary people. He warns them to practice restrain.

Mind your bodies  
You are steering them recklessly  
Hold on (Pg. 38)

"Haven of Rocks" is a satire on the frenzied, ultra modern, urbanized and commercial life style of contemporary man. The poem is a critique of the civilized society and its ever increasing indulgence in capitalism. 'Rock 'is a recurring image in the poetry of Kulbhushan Kushal.

Their [Rocks'] barren faces remind me of the inherent barrenness of the modern urbanized way of life which paradoxically, inspite of hi-tech movement and mechanical movements continue to reflect rock like static presence: sound and fury signifying nothin Kushal 'Luster Lost' again rejects material comforts as according to the poet these are mere tools incapacitate the man and breed dependence. They cannot offer peace still man is not tired of chasing these mirages.

"Time, the Thief" explores poet's poignant concern over the deteriorating state of modern life. The world has become a pale shadow of the virtual substance. Erosion of values have rendered everything in the world worthless. Time has stolen the 'meaning from words', 'knowledge from information', 'value from the money', 'beauty from youth,' 'peace from homes,' 'warmth from sun'. The theme of the poem is prevalent hypocrisy that has engulfed the worth of things. Even the slogans have become a mere rattle of words.

"Time has stolen  
Impact from the slogans  
Search it please  
In the silence  
of crowds". (Pg. 53)  
Silence is more genuinely expressive than the rattle of words.  
"Is tarah jaal jeha bunadi e purdadari  
Arth nu shabad nikal janda e hauli hauli.  
Surjit Pata  
Hypocrisy weaves such a net  
that word swallows the meaning slowly.

"I have a Dream" seems to register a ray of optimism. The poem is an oblique criticism of the existing world. The simple natural order is so much messed up that its restoration seems a dream.

"I have a dream  
The trees shall call the birds  
To sing for children  
And make them think of fairies." (Pg. 54)

Another compelling issue in his poems is concern about the physical environment of nature and its impact on man.

I have a fear  
Spring may not  
Knock at our doors next year... (Pg. 56)

The spring here connotes both the physical and spiritual plane. The ultra modern and unethical activities of man may soon turn the geographical and moral world into a barren space.

From physical nature he proceeds to changing patterns of social and cultural life and shudders at the thought of impending doom.

“Another Fear” intensifies Dr. Kushal’s horrifying anticipation of ‘I have a Fear’. The poem presents depressing pictures of man’s spiritual doom. The poet is afraid that man would lose all his noble qualities including language. Language, a medium of communication marks the man from lowly beasts. It would soon degenerate into the braying of donkeys and barking of dogs.

Poet’s thought process runs into a specific pattern where genuine hope sometimes influences poet’s pen but it does not hamper the growth of his fears. Poet has felt that the communication is a mere rattle of words and then his pain is deepened to see that time has stolen the meaning from words and the deterioration is complete in braying of donkeys in this poem.

“Deception” reads universal saga of deceptions. He is pained to see that man does not relate himself beyond petty ends.

It is said that great poetry is not the expression of extra ordinary emotions rather they are the emotions expressed in extra ordinary way. Spiritual bankruptcy of the man is convincingly portrayed through a parallel between share market and human life. The poem ‘At Stake’ begins, unfolding the pressures on artist. Dr. Kushal refuses to be some one’s mouthpiece rather asserts:

It’s the time  
We re-negotiate the price of our souls. (Pg. 68)

The Modern world seems to be full of Faustuses, ready to sell their talent for petty gains.  
God is a hard negotiator.

One has to look beyond the earthly benefits to be there in God’s company. “Karma Theory” is succinctly and comprehensively conveyed. The poem suggests the man to think of general good which would be beneficial for all.

When shall we learn  
The grammar of profits  
Nature abhors imbalances (Pg. 69)

Worldly losses are balanced against heavenly gains. In a novel way Dr. Kushal derives home the point of the futility of commercial pursuits. “Ripeness is all”; Man has to keep learning till his knowledge is complete.

And provide again a level  
For the players to play  
A game of hide and seek  
Till you discover  
The hard layers of onions  
And the silken sheaths  
Hiding nothing..... (Pg. 69)

‘Mirror’ depicts the estranged condition of modern man. He is estranged from his true self. He is unable to confront his real self so prefers to keep himself hidden under mask.

‘A proposal’ proposes the exchange of roles between the man and birds. He feels that birds should take the reigns of the world.

‘Let them teach environmental sciences  
to the fish and to the lions.

Let them master the art and craft  
of developing eco-friendly architecture. (Pg.84)

“Let men learn the art of balancing  
And offer their bodies  
To the vultures to eat. (Pg. 85)

This poem again very clearly highlights Dr. Kushal’s concern regarding ecological balance and the need of taking environmental sciences seriously .He feels that man has fiddled enough with the planet and now he should take back seat and hand this world over to birds. Main while he could rediscover his communion to nature. Birds should ‘teach’ and ‘master’ whereas men would ‘learn’. Then he can hope for better future.

‘The Skies Beyond’ expresses a wish to ramble through the mysteries of the universe and acquire the ultimate knowledge. The poem ‘If’ endorses the universal truth that our knowledge is the product of a set of experiences we encounter. So knowledge is relative. It may not always be the carrier of wisdom. Wisdom and knowledge are two different things.

‘These are not the Nights .....’ depicts a disgusting rather pathetic picture of the contemporary world robbed off innocent simplicity and peace. Modern man is incapable of praying for peace as he has become habitual of the anarchy in this topsy-turvy world. The poet does not see any spiritual anchor either in history or in heritage.

We are proxy witnesses of world wars.  
The inheritors  
Of the heritage of rage (Pg.93)

The contemporary religious leaders are also shallow however the poet suggests a slight hope in the philosophy of great souls like Buddha and Krishna. It may help the modern man to understand the essence of life. To proceed towards spiritual advancement man would have to leave the petty interests and pretension behind.

Do not reinvent the wheel  
Proceed Ahead  
And how can we know  
The chakras of the chakkar  
The mysteries of Buddha’s wheel  
And the glory of Krishna’s Sudarshan  
Invent the wheel and then proceed (Pg.94)

Though he has shown the slight possibility of man’s redemption still the atmosphere of the poem is too charged with the horrid images of disorder to be convinced with this hope. The ending seems abstract in comparison with the realistic sketch of the contemporary times the poem has drawn. Although Eliot also tried to sound optimistic in the concluding part of *The Wasteland* but Elizabeth Drew found the optimism the forced one saying that it is impossible to feel peace in concluding passage.

Well, according to Bate,“The business of literature is to work upon consciousness.” Eliot’s and Dr. Kushal’s poetry succeeds in giving a prick to our consciousness and make us think of modern man’s pervert and irresponsible ways and the unavoidable catastrophe it may invite. James C. Mckusick said about the restoration of environment:“May be what is needed is not a quick technological fixbut a fundamental change in human consciousness.”

T.S. Eliot relates the mythical story of moral bankruptcy resulting into physical barrenness of land in *The Wasteland*. He feels that both of the problems can be solved by asking a moral question :What wrong has happened around and who is responsible for it ? *Whirlpool of Echoes* make readers ask this question and if one becomes aware enough to ask this question, answer would follow. And there lies the hope for the resurrection of modern man.

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## **Portrayal of Harsh Realities of Modern Life In D.C . Chambial's Poetry**

*Arvinder Beri \**

The extraordinary rich and varied urban life that human beings have experienced throughout that ages have played a crucial role in the evolution of modern world. From the very beginning, city life has excited interest and provoked controversy. The modern city life represents the victory of man's creative genius and is unquestionably the home of most advances made in his civilization. Unfortunately it also has given birth to enormous psychic, physical, emotional and spiritual problems.Literary writers have viewed different aspects of modern city life from different perspectives. Some have seen the life in modern city as representing art, learning and modernization while other have viewed it as the center of corruption, degeneration of human values, detachment from nature, detachment or alienation from humanity and disbelief in the existence of God.

Poets like Wordsworth, Keats, Blake and others started a new campaign against life in city. There have been a whole movement in history and literature deducted to return to nature, to the natural environment of country life, to the simple values, to nature and closeness with nature.With the arrival of modern technology, this commitment to nature took a new meaning and became a harsh criticism of urban life with all its tensions, abuses and problems.The poet who started the wave against city life was Wordsworth. In his poems, we can see the criticism of city life. It is crystal clear when he says:

The world is too much with us, late or soon,  
Getting and spending, we waste our powers,  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;

This is an authentic way of seeing not Just the city but the capital city, embodying and directing the whole country. He sees the city as a place where love does not easily thrive.The movement which was started by Wordsworth, is still going strong with the coming of poets like(Kulbhushan Kushal and) D.C. Chambial. As it is the job of a poet to express the emotional intensity of his time, waste on whatever his time happened to think.

D.C.Chambial's concern about nature is visible in his poetry. He believes that nature has value and meaning for human beings. But we are destroying the Nature because of our lust for material pursuits.

This Promising Age brings out the true motive of modern city human beings. Brooks and parks Mysteriously disappeared In the forced isolation As glass aquaria stepped into A room of hundredth storey steel house (Chambial,2004:7)

Nature warns Man: But the warnings have no effect on human beings. He has degraded himself. The poet clearly shows the Nature's resentment in Frantic Rhythm when he says:

Heaven denounces hypocrisy,  
Apathy, selfishness  
Lewd indulgence in sensuality.

He further says:  
Thunder, lightning Codes of Conduct Insignificant

When men resolve to play beast and revert to prehistoric ogres devouring one another.

When man forgets its boundaries and uses technology and scientific power and skill excessively then Nature shows its resentment as points out by Chambial in his poem: 'A Cry for Peace'

Those who brag to have subjugated  
The Nature with leaping aspirations  
Send satellites into space  
Despite meticulous skill

They tumble down, a house of cards (Chambial, 2004:59) Human relationships are the base of human existence but in modern life, they have become intricate and complicated. It is expressed by the poet in This Promising Age: In this antagonistic society Contradictions Tend to become acute With unsympathetic attitude. Emotions and feelings are the important features of human beings but in modern world all these feelings vaporizes. Passions degenerated Into mechanized smiles While coming and going Lips frigid to flowery kisses\ Inside the tube (Chambial, 2003:7)

As man is totally detached from nature, this detachment gives birth to degeneration into human relationships. Even the most sacred relation of child and mother is tainted due to unethical use of technology. Chambial's poem, 'This Promising Age' echoes the same views:

A business minded mother\Decides to be pregnant\ For those who do not want \To lose their shape.

Here the emphasis is not only on unethical use of technology but also on modern mother's attitude towards becoming pregnant. She is so much conscious of her figure that she takes the help of another woman for rearing her child. For her, becoming mother is only a formality.

Modern human beings forgets the reality of life. He thinks himself powerful and king of the world but Chambial reminds him the ultimate reality that is death in his poem Dust To Man

Dust raised its head  
From under the feet  
Of proud man  
And said 'You're me  
And again shall be me'  
Your haughtiness  
Can't estrange you from me.

Another feature of modern city life is using masks to hide the true self, true feelings and true motives. People live with dual personalities. They meet each other with smiles but have venom, Jealousy in their hearts. In the poem Masks Chambial writes:

'To live successfully  
At the present hour  
One must have two faces  
One of the angel's  
Other of the devil  
Bedecked with  
Synthetic perfumes and creams  
To hide the rotten smell  
He further says  
We must live by two  
Or lag behind  
In the race to knock

Our rivals down  
On the ground'

D.C. Chambial says that when man becomes puppet in the hands of modern technology, forget his roots, values becomes detached from nature, all these take him to the pathetic condition of helplessness.

Satan pulls strings  
Like a puppet player  
Makes them dance to his tunes  
Casualty: peace, love, fraternity,  
Harmony and human faith.

(The poet is pained to see the pathetic condition of human beings). Sometimes the inner voice of man yearns for freedom, liberty from pathetic condition, a wish to go to back to nature to enjoy the bank of a river, to breathe the fresh air. In Manacles the poet gives voice to the yearning of a man:

Do not make me a pet  
Like a bird in a cage  
Or puppy in the lap  
Let me roam  
For, far away

On the bank of a placed river, On the hills clothed with snow.

The poet is pained to see the modern world where values and innocence vanished. The cunningness survives and innocence sobs.

The land is all a flame  
Wolves, rats and cats enjoy  
Cake and ale, hens and lambs  
Sobs in a dark corner.

The helplessness of soul is painted well with words by the poet when he says in his poem The Burning Tree

The poor pigeons  
Store at the horizon  
In the hope of a new seen  
Well it dawn?

An otherwise of modern life is religious hatred. The wars that are being fought by people and nations are due to intolerance in behavior. But there is still hope for tolerance and hope for peace and co-existence.

Let us march, today in search  
Of that piece of land  
Where bloom none of our present  
Religious prawning hatred of man  
Against man;

Poet says that Nature is a divine force that nourishes and governs all forms of life. His treatment of nature and understanding of human relationship indicates that human existence is tied to nature. In his poetry, that active role played by nature is in its various forms is clearly visible. Man has become blind and forgets its his ties with past, his roots. He becomes selfish, heartless, ruthless being but hope is still there for his safe return to nature, to peace of mind, to basic moral values without which human existence is different. In his poem A Cry For Peace, he says:

No men strangers, no land foreign Everywhere shine the same sun and moon Rivers flow and air blows Meddle not with their course We want peace! Give us peace!

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### **From the Editor’s Desk**

The contemporary Indian English poetry marks a noteworthy development and an emphatic presence in the history of Indian English literature . the variety of themes and the poetic devices used by the poets have certainly enriched this literary genre. The poets no longer remain limited to the treatment of traditional themes like spiritualism, moral values and presentation of universals in life that concerned the society as a whole. Nor are their concerns limited to the reality strictly associated with the Indian social interaction. The issues now extend from the local to the global, common to the peculiar, mainstream to the marginalized, nature to technology, involving multiple possibilities instead of the unified and the singular. In spite of the persistence of the earlier strains like the treatment of nature, women, society, individual consciousness, and existential issues, the emergence of feminist thought, postcolonial perspectives, cross cultural interaction in terms of diasporic experiences abroad, and multicultural nature of reality in the form of subcultures in the larger national group along with the treatment of nature in the form of eco-consciousness form a major concern of the contemporary Indian English poetry.

The present issue, based on the National Seminar on Major Trends in Contemporary Indian English Poetry held on 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2011 at District Library, Jalandhar , organized by Pragati Educational Council registers the nature of different trends and tendencies in contemporary Indian English poetry . The papers presented in the seminar and included in this issue also point out how a host of contemporary Indian English poets have evolved new modes of perception and earned an enviable place for themselves and added to the popularity of this form of art, at least, among the students and scholars interested in literary studies.

Another hallmark of the studies included in the special issue is the nature of the shift informing literary studies that they inform. The involvement of the one or the other theoretical perspectives for the study of poetry in these papers points out that literary studies in general have shifted from a simple exploration of themes, images, symbols etc., to a form of study that is closer to cultural studies. In the process, these papers tend to become an exercise competent to explore the nature of contemporary critical studies. These aspects of the exploration of poetry taken up by different scholars in this issue certainly make it a literary document that deserves to be preserved.

*N. K. Neb*

## **A Report on National Seminar on "Major Trends in Contemporary Indian English Poetry"**

A One Day National Seminar on “Major Trends in Contemporary Indian English Poetry organized by Pragati Educational Council (Regd.) was held on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2011 at District Library , Jalandhar. The General Secretary of the Council, Dr. N. K. Neb, welcomed the Chief guest Dr. Mrs. Ajay Sareen, Principal R.R. D.A.V. College for Girls, Batala and talked about the literary activities of the council including the organization of such seminars, workshops, conferences and the publication a literary journal *Pragati's English Journal* (a bi-annual journal dedicated to the study of language and literature). The chief guest, Dr. Mrs. Ajay Sareen highlighted the relevance of poetry in the present times and expressed her concern for the growing apathy of the people towards poetry. Prof. G.C. Mago, an eminent poet and Prof. R. K. Parashar (the guests of honour) also shared their views about the emergence of new trends in contemporary Indian English poetry. They also recited their poems which received applause from the audience. Prof Vaneet Mehta also recited some of his poems.

The seminar was attended by 72 delegates and fifteen scholarly papers were presented followed by interesting and lively discussion on the papers by scholars like Sadaf Shah, Rohit Phutela and Kalwaran Singh. The papers by Monika Sethi, Tripti Chaudhary, Shelly Dutta, Balbir Singh, Ravinder Gill, Barinder Kumar, Poornima, Narinder Kumar Neb, Arvinder Beri, Raman Sidhu, were of great interest to the scholars and the audience. The major trends that these papers traced in contemporary Indian English Poetry included the thrust on the expression of contemporary reality, gender bias, treatment of the life of the marginalized groups like gays and lesbians, postcolonial issues, diasporic consciousness, modernist concern for established values, treatment of nature revealing eco consciousness and concentrated treatment of city life.

Apart from the participants related to the literary circles and students of literature like, Prof. H. K. Bajaj, Anoop Vats, Prof. Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, Prof. Archana Oberoi, Prof. Renu Gupta, Prof. Navjot Deol, Prof. Aman Lata, Prof. Baljinder Kaur, Prof. Som Nath, Prof. Rajan Kapur, Prof. Naresh Kumar Sharma, Prof. Rajni Sodhi, Harjeet, Kirandeep Singh, Aarti Parashar, Nitika Dhawan, Deepa Katyal, the presence of Prof. S. J. Talwar Department of Economics, D.A.V. College, Jalandhar, Dr. Rajinder Singh Beri, Department of Commerce, K.R.M.D.A.V. College, Nakodar, Mrs. and Mr. Sukesh Prinja, Mr. Drupad, Sukhmani and Prabhutee throughout the seminar indicated the interest that it could generate and the relevance poetry carries for life.

Prof. Sharad Manocha conducted the stage in an impressive way. The seminar concluded with a vote of thanks presented by Mrs. Ravinder Neb on behalf of the Pragati Educational Council.

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