Contemporary Indian Poetry in English

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Preface and Acknowledgement

Indian English Poetry has come a long way. By now it is certainly not isolated poetry written in a niche language by a small group of 'privileged' writers. It is also not instance of poetic writings significant only for studying as part of University syllabi. Indian English Poetry has achieved the necessary excellence to deserve the legitimate space both within the canon and without. And in comparison with Indian English fiction, poetry written in English by Indian writers has had to struggle for recognition. Although this present volume of essays on post-independence poets have been generated primarily out of academic interest, the sense of wonder, attendant upon the joy of reading poetry is never lost.

It is rightfully observed that apart from a few select repertoires, there is marked absence of comprehensive critical approaches on Indian English poetry. The gap is being filled up very rapidly though. For this reason and for the fact that books on IEP are still less than sufficient, a new book on the subject is still not considered tautological. This present volume, we hope, would not be treated as just another volume adding to the long list of similar books. Without sounding too ambitious, the volume at least has attempts a lot more than mere paraphrasing of the poems. The essays concentrate upon bringing out the distinctive voice of the individual poets through an in-depth study of the thematic and textual concerns. The basic objective is to illustrate

the means of scholarly reception of the texts and to situate them within the broadening horizon of literary-cultural theory. The content has been decidedly kept at an accessible level, keeping in view the requirements of the Graduate and Postgraduate students and the same line of thinking is reflected on the thrust areas chosen for discussing individual poets. We have tried to include lesser known poets in the collection and would have been happier if more poets, representing every distinct category could have been accommodated. We hope that the book would not be a failure if not entirely successful.

We take this opportunity to offer our sincere thanks to all of our contributors, who responded to our call for papers for this book and never lost their patience when the process of publication got delayed. We owe our thanks also to our colleagues, who have always been enthusiastic about the present publication and proved helpful in many ways.

We heartily thank Mr. Sudarshan Kcherry of Authorspress for his initiative in publishing the book.

1st July, 2015

Jaydip Sarkar
Shirsendu Mondal

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Indian English Poetry: A Very Brief History

Pinaki Roy

It has presently emerged as a fact incontrovertible that *Indian Writing in English* (I.W.E.) constitutes a significant section of the twenty-first century English literature and is considerably responsible for the increasing popularity of the same. To this critically-acclaimed genre of I.W.E., in turn, *Indian Poetry in English* (I.P.E.) – or rather *Indian English Poetry* (I.E.P.) – contributes commendably. Though arguably somewhat less popular than *Indian Novels in English* (I.N.E.)/ *Indian English Novels* (I.E.N.) and *Indian Drama in English* (I.D.E.)/ *Indian English Drama* (I.E.D.), Indian Poetry in English has witnessed mellifluous contributions by some of the country's more renowned litterateurs over the ages, and occurs in two versions: one section comprising poems written directly in English (as for example, the verses of Kamala Das and Rajagopal Parthasarathy), and the other including poems originally written in other Indian languages and later translated into English by either the poets themselves or other translators or academicians. The present essays attempts to very briefly trace the development of Indian Poetry in English from the 19th century until the present postmodern period.

Many of the literary historians dealing with Indian Writing in English – for example, Iyengar (34) and Naik (22) and

Ramamurti (1) – agree that the partially-Portuguese former lecturer of *Hindu College*, Kolkata – Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31) – is the first notable Indian Poet in English, whose contributions, mostly sonnets, were compiled in *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828). Born in Kolkata, Derozio, more Indianised than most of the so-called 'indigenous' intellectuals, contributed significantly to the social movement of *Bengal Renaissance*, which continued approximately until 1941. Derozio was also among the earlier litterateurs to lament the enslavement of India by the English, and in his most famous poem, "To India – My Native Land" (1828), he ruefully writes, 'My country! in thy day of glory past / A beauteous halo circled round thy brow, / And worshipped as a deity thou wast. / Where is that glory, where that reverence now? / Thy eagle pinion is chained down at last, / And grovelling in the lowly dust art thou; / Thy minstrel hath no wreath to weave for thee / Save the sad story of thy misery!' (l. 1-8). *The Fakeer of Jungheera* opens rather romantically: 'How like young spirits on the wing/ The viewless winds are wandering! / Now o'er the flower-bells fair they creep/ Waking sweet odours out of sleep' (l. 1-4). Naik comments, "[…] [Derozio's] shorter poems show a strong influence of British Romantic poets in theme, […] sentiment, imagery, and diction, with some traces of neo-classicism" (22-23). Derozio's followers – among them being Uma Charan Basu, Ramgopal Ghosh, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Shib Chandra Deb, and Peary Chand Mitra – spearheaded the 'Young Bengal Movement'. It must, however, be mentioned that Derozio's prominence in India is more as a social reformer than as a poet, and even the extent of his influence on the 19th-century Indian intellectuals has been questioned by writers such as Samaren Roy (119). Importantly, Paranjape identifies the English Orientalist, William Jones (1746-94), as being among the earlier 'prominent Anglo-Indian writer[s] of verse' whose 'familiarity with the India tradition is reflected in his eight hymns to Hindu deities' (2).

Dev, Tiwari, and Khanna note a distinct change in writings constituting the Indian literature from 1857 onwards: they observe a 'strong nationalistic overtone' which was 'coupled with a love for the mother tongue' (xx). Though the poems of Derozio and those who wrote immediately after him are written in English, the 'strong nationalist overtone' began to unmistakably demonstrate itself. Dev, Tiwari, and Khanna also note the presence of 'self-reflection' and 'self-criticism' in such writings (*ibid.* xxi), which also define the poems of Kashiprashad Ghose (1809-73), whose *The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems* was first published in 1830. In Ghose's verses, one may notice for the first time an urge to Indianise different aspects of European – especially English poetry – popularised by the 16th-17th-century *Cavalier Poets*. He began to follow the style of British verses while writing about Indian festivals, customs, beliefs, and even natural surroundings as in his "The Boatman's Song to Ganga" and "The Moon in September". Iyengar, however, does not appear to be too appreciative of the oeuvre of this Presidency College-graduate and former editor of *The Hindu Intelligence*: "His was derivative and imitative poetry, made up mainly of conventional descriptions and tedious moralising, but it is a tedium brightened by odd flashes of originality, and thus a bright poetic phrase ort line occasionally glistens amidst the heap of utterly prosaic and the inane" (37). Naik comments, "Kashiprashad Ghose seems to intimate by turns the stylised love-lyrics of the cavalier poets, the moralising tone in neo-classical poetry, and the British romanticists, his 'Shair' being obviously Scott's 'minstrel' in an Indian garb" (24). The successors of Ghose – Rajnarayan Dutt (1824-89) and Hur Chandra Dutt (1831-1901), who respectively published *Osmyn: An Arabian Tale* (1841), and *Fugitive Pieces* (1851) – were 'imitative poets' who failed to distinguish themselves as powerful writers of Indian poems in English.

Before the Kolkata-born and Cambridge-educated female Bengali poet Toru Dutt (1856-77) added considerably to the growing reputation of Indian Writing in English with her widely-acclaimed *A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields* (1876), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73), whose visits to England and France in mid-19th-century considerably altered his original Anglophilia, had established himself as an important poet of the genre. As revealed in the authoritative *Madhusudan Rachanabali*, edited by Kshetra Gupta and published for the first time in 1965 by the Kolkata-based *Sahitya Samsad*, Dutt's English poetic oeuvre comprised of approximately 57 long and short poems and sonnets written between 1841 and 1848 of which "The Upsori", "King Porus", and "Visions of the Past" are the more popular, and his *magnum opus* of poetry, *The Captive Ladie* (1849), based on a north Indian love-story involving a princess, remains unfinished. Dutt could have been even more mellifluous had not he incurred societal wrath by converting to Christianity in February 1843, which, as Gupta suggests, was partially influenced by his attraction to Debaki Bandyopadhyay, daughter of the radical philosopher and Indian English dramatist, Reverend Krishna Mohan Bandyopadhyay (1813-85) (Dutt 13).

Though not as multifariously-talented as Madhusudan Dutt, Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), was a relative of Toru Dutt and a barrister who qualified for the *Indian Civil Service* in 1869 and served as a colonial government officer until 1897, when he left his administrative responsibilities to lecture Indian History at University College London. His principal contribution to the growth of Indian English poetry comprised his (respectively) 1899 and 1898 English translations of the two Indian epics, *The Ramayana* (c. 4th century B.C.) and *The Mahabharata* (4th century A.D.), both of which were published by *J.M. Dent and Company*, London. Dutt's English-poetry-oeuvre, other than these, consists of *Lays of Ancient India: Selections from Indian Poetry rendered into*

English Verse (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1894), *Reminiscences of a Workman's Life: Verses* (Kolkata: Elen Press, 1896), and *Indian Poetry: Selected and rendered into English by R.C. Dutt* (London: J.M. Dent, 1905). Iyengar in spite of crediting Dutt as a 'careful' poet, refuses to identify him as much a quality artist as Toru Dutt (66). Romesh Chunder Dutt's uncle, Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1824-85), used to write under the pseudonyms of 'J.A.G. Barton' and 'H. B. Rowney' and converted to Christianity from Hinduism, but, in the assessment of his illustrious nephew, "use[d] the colonisers' values to eulogise freedom from subjugation"[1]. As Sengupta and Basu write, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, though he was employed under the English administration, incurred the wrath of such powerful officers as Bengal's Lieutenant-Governor George Campbell (1824-92), diplomat Ashley Eden (1831-87), and the *Council of India*-member Thomas Erskine Parry (1806-82) through his anti-imperialistic compositions (516). His English poetry-publications include *Miscellaneous Verses* (1848) and *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems* (1878), the latter being a study of the cultural conflicts between Hindu and Christian beliefs. If Peter Barry has identified postcolonial literature into three phases – the imitative 'Adopt' phase, the progressively-original 'Adapt' phase, and the independent 'Adept' phase (196) – Indian Poetry in English can be identified as wavering between the first two phases throughout the 19th century.

Before the 'advent' of Toru Dutt, Nobo Kissen Ghose (1837-1918), who preferred using the *nom-de-plume* 'Ram Sharma', demonstrated, according to Naik, "certain glimpses of authenticity" (37) in his poems collected in *Willow Drops* (1873-74), *The Last Day: A Poem* (1886), and *Shiva Ratri, Bhagvat Gita, and Miscellaneous Poems* (1903). Though he would compose "The Ode in Welcome to Prince Albert", Sengupta and Basu identify him primarily as a postcolonial poet who steadily lambasted the colonial government's policies in such magazines and periodicals

as *The Englishman*, *Mukherjees' Magazine*, and *The Indian Mirror* (242). With Toru Dutt, who died of consumption at an early age of 21 years, Naik writes, "Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authenticity" (37). Iyengar speaks of Dutt only in superlatives, beginning the (4th) chapter on the poet with: "Beauty and tragedy and fatality criss-crossed in the life of Toru Dutt, and it is difficult, when talking about her poetry, to make any nice distinction between poetry and what C.S. Lewis would call 'poetolatry'" (55). Christianised in 1862, Dutt attended lectures at Cambridge between 1871 and 1873, and published superior and (French) translated poetry as collections in *A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields* (1876) and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1885). An 'Introduction' to Dutt's 1885 was written by Edmund Gosse, while Arthur Symons wrote a 'Foreword' for *A Sheaf*. Dutt might have written such critically-acclaimed poems as "Love came to Flora asking for a Flower", "My Vocation", "The Lotus", and "Our Casuarina Tree" (1881), but, as Makarand Paranjape writes, "[T]here is a bit of a cultural mismatch in her work as Toru [Dutt] tried to bring […] Indian themes into [her] English verse[s], […] [and also her] Christian beliefs introduce into […] [her] text[s]" (Satchidanandan 134-35). Moreover, B.K. Pandey, pointing out the usual feminist sensibilities in Toru Dutt's poems, accuses her of 'lacking' in "a powerful feminine awareness and view-point" (132). In "Lakshman", the anxious Sita's voice is passionate but perceptively unconvincing and indistinct: "'Hark! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry! / It is, - it is my husband's voice! / Oh hasten, to his succour fly, / No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice. / He calls on thee, perhaps his foes / Environ him on all sides round, / That wail, - it means death's final throes! / Why standest thou, as magic-bound?" (l. 1-8). Nevertheless, Ramamurti tries to stress on the postcoloniality of Dutt's poetry: "[…] Toru and [her sister] Aru adored France and felt inspired by that country, which almost claimed Toru as a Frenchwoman, and yet

the sisters had never lost their interest in India. They loved the land of their birth more than anything else, and they remained very Indian in consciousness and sensibility" (13). Ramamurti exemplifies her love for the Indian landscape by quoting her ballad "The Legend of Dhruva": "What glorious trees! the sombre saul/On which the eye delights to rest,/ […] / All these, and thousands, thousands more/ With helmet red, or golden crown/ Of green tiara, rose before/ The youth in evening's shadow brown".

Prior to the beginning of the 'nationalist phase' – to refer to Paranjape's distinction of different periods of Indian English poetry (13) – another important contributor to the genre was Manmohan Ghose (1869-1924), the elder brother of the Indian freedom fighters Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) and Barindra Kumar Ghose (1880-1959). As Sengupta and Basu note, Manmohan Ghose, who would later profess English at Presidency College, Kolkata, studied at Oxford, where he published his poems in *Primavera* (1890), thus cementing his reputation as a poet (395). Being reviewed favourably by Oscar Wilde in the *Pall Mall Gazette* was perhaps a compensation for Ghose whose physician father, Krishnadhan Ghose, reared him up in an "extremely anglicised environment" (Paranjape 12). A friend of Stephen Phillips and Lawrence Binyon, Ghose published one poetry-collection in his lifetime: *Love Songs and Elegies* (1898), while his *Songs of Life and Death* (1926) was published posthumously. Lotika Ghose later edited *Select Poems of Manmohan Ghose* (1975) and *Manmohan Ghose: Modern Indo-English Poet* (1990). "Perseus, the Gorgon Slayer", "Nala and Damayanti", and "Orphic Mysteries" are some of the more famous verses from Ghose. In spite of his apparent successes as a versified, Paranjape comments, "Ghose's life was tragic. Returning to India after becoming, in his own words, 'four-fifths an Englishman', he found himself out of place, 'denationalised'. Cut off from the sustaining currents of

mainstream English poetry, Ghose's later work suffered, unable to capture the immediacy or authenticity of his early poems. Ghose came close to becoming an English poet despite being an Indian, but at that too he was doomed to fail" (12-13).

While proceeding to the nationalist phase of Indian English poetry, one must recall what R. Parthasarathy has identified as some of the characteristic features of the genre. He refuses to acknowledge the 'postcoloniality' of Indian English poetry because – according to him – the growth and development of the genre is actually not connected to the arrival and withdrawal of the English colonisers at and from India. In fact, Parthasarathy takes an ironic view of how the genre is 'Indiana in sensibility and content, and English in language' (3). He opines that an Indian English poet, first of all, feels a sort of alienation while expressing her/his Indian feelings in the colonisers' language. Second, and more importantly, the phrases and idioms used by the English-speaking people and the Indians differ markedly, and an Indian versifier using English always remembers her/his Indianness. To Parthasarathy, this awkwardness signifies "a crisis of identity" (4). The poet-critic reasons that probably because of this 'identity-crisis', Madhusudan Dutt turned to writing in Bengali after publishing *The Captive Ladie* (in English), while Fernando A.N. Pessôa (1888-1935), after publishing/attempting to publish (in English) the collections *The Mad Fiddler*, *Antinous*, and *Thirty-five Sonnets*, began writing exclusively in Portuguese (4).

As Dev, Tiwari, and Khanna write, with the beginning of the Indian freedom movement, numerous Indian writers, including those writing poems in English, became directly or indirectly involved with the anti-colonial crusades, and the genre of Indian-English poetry began to change. To quote them, "Literature of this period […] articulates the reformist and resurgent spirit of the people and raises its voice in protest against

oppression, whether political or social. It also condemns inequality and discrimination, in order to create a better society. Writers celebrate, even mythologise India's glorious past in order to give pride to a subjugated people" (xxii). To this congregation of nationalistically-inclined poets belong Aurobindo Ghose and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949). Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who translated a significant number of his own Bengali poems into English and published *The Child* (1931) exclusively in the colonisers' language, wrote a number of anti-colonial poems as well, but in spite of his translated *Geetanjali* (1912) winning the *Nobel Prize for Literature* in 1913, Tagore is usually not included in the group of Indo-Anglian poets. Nevertheless, Iyengar has dedicated two entire chapters of his *Indian Writing in English* (pp. 99-143) in estimating the contribution of Tagore to the field of Indian Writing in English. Naik, in contrast, feels that Tagore's "career as an Indian English poet began by sheer accident" (59), and he mentions *The Geetanjali*, *The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Fruit-gathering* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), *Lover's Gift and Crossing* (1918), and *The Fugitive* (1921) as important specimens of Tagore's Indo-Anglian verse-writings. Later, William Radice translated a significant number of Tagore's poems in *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems* (1985).

Iyengar also dedicates three of his book's chapters to writing about the poetic achievements of Aurobindo Ghose (pp. 144-206). Originally trained as a Civil Servant in England, Ghose involved himself with the armed Indian freedom fighters in the first decade of the 20th century, and was imprisoned following the beginning of the *Alipore Bomb Case* (1905-06). Acquitted, he excused himself from rebellious activities in 1910, and withdrew first to Chandannagar, and thereafter, to an ascetic life of contemplation in Puducherry. Ghose's contribution to the genre of Indian English poetry include the early *Short Poems – 1890 – 1900*, *The Short Poems – 1895 – 1908*, *Urvasie*, *Love and Death*, and

Baji Prabhou, but as Naik opines, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (1950-51) is actually the demonstration of the supreme poetic power of Ghose (51). Divided into 12 *Book*-s and comprising 24,000 lines, Ghose's *Savitri* is a philosophical rendering of the legend of the couple Satyaban and Savitri, and deals with the theme of the "transcendence of man as the consummation of terrestrial evolution, and the emergence of an immortal supramental gnostic race upon earth"[2]. About the book, Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973) (the Turkish-Jewish French-born disciple of Ghose popularly referred to as 'The Mother'), opines, "[E]verything is there [in *Savitri*]: mysticism, occultism, philosophy, the history of evolution, the history of man, of the gods, of creation, [and] of Nature. How the universe was created, why, for what purpose, what destiny – all is there. You can find all the answers to all your questions there"[3]. The mystical interpretations notwithstanding, Naik writes that *Savitri* is not a perfect poem (58), and is actually an attempt to write an Indian English epic with philosophical implications.

Sarojini Naidu (nee Chattopadhyay), an Indian Congress activist and politician, studied at London and Cambridge, and contributed *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death, and the Spring* (1912), *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring* (1917), *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India* (1943), and *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961) to the genre of Indo-Anglian poetry. Though Naidu, whose more famous poems include "Damayante to Nala in the Hour of Exile", "Ecstasy", "In Salutation to the Eternal Peace", "Palanquin Bearers", "The Snake-Charmer", "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus", and "The Coromandal Fishers", disappointed Gosse, he and Arthur Symons recommended publication of her first poetry-collection. Though widely read and favourably reviewed until the end of the First World War, Naidu's *The Broken Wing* failed to cope with the standards of early-20th century literary modernism, and attracted

wide criticism. Naidu wrote under the influence of the English Romanticists, the Persian poets, and the Urdu writers, and Naik mostly praises her for her lyrics which have "a perfect structure and an exquisite finish" (68), though he also identifies her poems as "hopelessly outdated" by the 'standards of modern poetic tastes' (69). Iyengar, in contrast, is apparently dismissive of charges of 'writing bad poetry' which are being increasingly brought against her poetic oeuvre in late-20th century (223). However, he identifies poems written by Naidu's brother Harindranath Chattopadhyay (1898-1990) as either "light verses" or "passionate poetry" (602). Paranjape also identifies Chattopadhyay, who was an Independent M.P. from Vijayawada Constituency and whose poetic oeuvre comprises *The Feast of Youth* (1918), *The Magic Tree* (1922), *Blood of Stones* (1944), *Spring in Winter* (1955), and *Virgin and Vineyards* (1967) as the "most disappointing poet of the age" Though praised by Aurobindo Ghose for his "rich and finely lavish command of language, a firm possession of the metrical instrument, [and] an almost blinding gleam and glitter of the wealth of imagination and fancy" (Iyengar 602), Chattopadhyay's poems are mostly concerned with either the Aurobindonian philosophy or the Marxist conception of societies. His usage of decorative vocabulary, in Iyengar's estimation, has not particularly endeared him to his readers (606). Paranjape has also mentioned the names of 'Ananda Acharya' (that is, Surendranath Baral) (1881-1941): the writer of the collections *Snow Birds and Other Poems* (1974) and *Arctic Swallows and Other Poems* (1974), Puran Singh (1881-1931): who published *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel* (1921), *Unstrung Beads* (1923), and *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry* (1926), Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986): who wrote *The Immortal Friend* (1928) and *The Song of Life* (1931); and Humayun Kabir (1906-69), the compiler of self-written *Poems* (1932), as being among the other nationalist Indo-Anglian poem-writers (17-18). Kaikhosru Dadhaboy Sethna's *Artist Love* (1925), *The Secret*

Splendour (1941), and *The Adventure of the Apocalypse* (1949), Anilbaran Roy's *Songs from the Soul* (1939), Nolini Kanta Gupta's *To the Heights* (1944), Kavalam Madhava Panikkar's *The Waves of Thought* (1944), Nirodbaran Chakraborty's *Sun-Blossoms* (1947), and Dilip Kumar Roy's *Eyes of Light* (1948) and *The Immortals of the Bhagavat* (1958) can be considered as among the critically-acclaimed poetry collections of pre-modern Indian English poetic genre.

Paranjape has identified 'A.D. 1950' as the approximate year when modernism found its way into Indian English poetry – a phase that would continue until 1980 (19). Iyengar includes Armando Menezes's *The Ancestral Face* (1951), Surendranath Dasgupta's *The Vanishing Lines* (1956), and R.V. Pandit's *Voices of Peace* (1967) as important compilations of Indo-Anglian poetry of early modern period. Though readers usually read the works of the Goan poet, Joseph Furtado (1872-1975) – especially the poetry-collections *The Goan Fiddler* (1927) and *Songs of Exile* (1938) as modern Indian English literature – he wrote his popularly-read poems like "The Secret", "Brahmin Girls", "the Neglected Wife", and "Birds and Neighbours" well before Paranjape's stipulated date of 1950. *The Caravan* journal thus introduces Furtado's poems: "Furtado's poetic subjects include landscape ('Land of palm and mango-tree/ Dear as life art thou to me', he writes in one poem) and love, in which matter his speakers reveal a warmingly ecumenical taste (in one poem, the speaker professes a love for a mullah's daughter; in another, he dreams of a lady who sits by his feet 'And reads out stories/ Of Vedic glories'). But as poems like 'The Secret' reveal, the natural world was for Furtado heavy with human mysteries and silences; and his verse can be feminist, too, as when he sees women not just as objects of male desire but desiring subjects, as in 'The Neglected Wife'"[4]. Iyengar classifies the other, more popularly-read Indo-Anglian poets like Shiv K. Kumar (b. 1921), Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004),

Jayanta Mahapatra (b. 1928), Purushottama Lal (1929-2010), Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929-93), Arun Balkrishna Kolatkar (1932-2004), Rajagopal Parthasarathy (b. 1934), Kamala Das (1934-2009), Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla (b. 1937), Dilip Purushottam Chitre (1938-2009), Dominic Francis 'Dom' *Moraes* (1938-2004), Adil Jussawalla (b. 1940), Eunice de Souza (b. 1940), Gieve Patel (b. 1940/46), Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (b. 1947), and Pritish Nandy (b. 1951), as the 'New Poets' (641-90).

Born in Lahore, and educated at *Forman Christian College*, Lahore (M.A.), and the University of Cambridge (Ph.D.), Shiv K. Kumar retired as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hyderabad in 1980. The 1987 *Sahitya Akademi Award*-winner, Kumar's poetic oeuvre comprises such poetry-compilations in English as *Articulate Silences* (1970), *Cobwebs in the Sun* (1974), *Subterfuges* (1976), *Woodpeckers* (1979), *Trapfalls in the Sky* (1986), and *Wool-gathering* (1995). Bijay Kumar Das's *Shiv K. Kumar as a Postcolonial Poet* (2001) might focus only on Kumar's anti-colonial ideology, but Iyengar praises his poems for their "sense of form" and "feeling for precise evocative language", mentioning that Kumar's poems like "My Co-respondent", "Border Guards", and "Indian Women" are either 'sharply-pointed' or with 'humanistic undertones' (721).

The Indian Jewish poet, Ezekiel, was awarded the *Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1983 for his poetry-collection *Latter-day Psalms* (1982), but his poetic oeuvre consists of different other quality compilations as well, among them being *Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty-nine Poems* (1953), *The Discovery of India* (1956), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), and *Hymns in Darkness* (1976). The poet, in his early life, studied philosophy at Birkbeck College, London, and later visited the University of Leeds and University of Puducherry in the 1960s as a professor Among Ezekiel's poems on the Indian universities'

curricula are "Enterprise", "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher", and the autobiographical "Background, Casually": 'I have made my commitments now. / This is one: to stay where I am, / […]/ My backward place is where I am'. Naik observes, "The alienation theme is thus central to Ezekiel's work and colours his entire poetic universe. This explains his early fascination for Rilke, though he learned his poetic craft from Eliot and Auden, whom he frequently echoes in his early verse" (194).

Mahapatra, one of the more famous Indian English poets alive, taught physics at four Odisha colleges, before retiring in 1986. Between 1971 and 2013, he authored eighteen collections of critically-acclaimed Indo-Anglian poems, among which mention must be made of *Close the Sky Ten by Ten* (1971), *Svayamvara and Other Poems* (1971), *A Father's Hours* (1976), *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *Relationship* (1980), *Dispossessed Nests* (1986), *A Whiteness of Bone* (1992), and *Bare Face* (2000). Ramamurti summarises that Mahapatra's poems show the 'stamp of the modernist and post-modernist influences', and that the "recurrent themes of his poetry are loneliness, the complex problems of human relationships, the difficulties of meaningful communication, the life of the mind in relation to the life of the external world, and the complex nature of love and sex" (55). Poems like "Dawn at Puri", "Life Signs", "Indian Summer Poem", "Taste for Tomorrow", "Slum", "Hunger", and "Evening Landscape by the River" bear the characteristic hallmark of Mahapatranian symbolism.

Purushottama Lal taught English at Kolkata and at several U.S. colleges and universities, and compiled eight books of self-written poetry, including *The Parrot's Death and Other Poems* (1960), *Love's the First* (1960), *'Change!' They Said* (1966), *Draupadi and Jayadratha and Other Poems* (1967), and *Calcutta: A Long Poem* (1977). His most important publication is the English translation of *The Mahabharata*. Also a translator of Tagore's and Premchand's

poetry, Lal is praised by Naik for his choice of words and 'melody' (197). His widely-anthologised poems include "The Tribute", "The Rendezvous", "The Crickets", "Always the Trouble was Truth", and "Friend".

Born in the same year as Lal, A.K. Ramanujan, whose "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" (collected in *Striders*, 1966), "Still Life" (*Striders*), "Self-portrait" (*Striders*), "A River", and "Love Poem for a Wife – I" (from *Relations*, 1971) has earned international accolades, earned his *Ph.D.* in Linguistics from Indiana University, Bloomington, and taught at the University of Chicago. *Oxford University Press* brought out his *Selected Poems* in 1976, while his translated verse-collections and other works include *The Interior Landscape* (1967), *Speaking of Siva* (1972), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981), and *Poems of Love and War* (1985). While R. Parthasarathy values Ramanujan's poems for their 'images' (9), scepticism seems to define almost all of Ramanujan's verse-publications, with an awareness of forcible sexual abstinence. Kolatkar's most famous collection of English poems might be *Jejuri* (1976), but the Maharastrian artist published two more collections – *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004) and *Sarpa Sastra* (2004) – the same year in which he succumbed to cancer. A. K. Mehrotra later edited his *Collected Poems in English* (Bala: Bloodaxe Books, 2010). In all his poems Kolatkar deals with the angst of modern existence or the progressive dehumanisation of sensitive individuals. "The Bus", "A Low Temple", and "Chaitanya" are some of the more widely-studied poems by Kolatkar. Originally from Tiruparaitturai, Tamil Nadu, R. Parthasarathy, currently an Association Professor of English at Skidmore College, New York, published *Poetry from Leeds* (1968) and *Rough Passage* (1977), before editing *Ten Twentieth-century Indian Poets* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977). Naik does not seem to take an enthusiastic view of Parthasarathy's anglicised outlook, wondering what *Rough Passage* has actually achieved (203).

The poet and politician Kamala Das converted to Islam in 1999 and adopted the name of 'Kamala Surayya'. A *Confessionalist*, Das has published numerous Indian English poems which are marked by their feministic concern and sexual explicitness. Hailing from Thrissur's Punnayurkulam, Kerala, Das published nine collections of poetry between 1964 and 1999, among them being *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *The Annamalai Poems* (1985), and *Only the Soul knows how to Sing* (1996). Her autobiography *My Story* (1976) won for her a huge controversy and the much-needed publicity, though she had begun as a self-confident feminist in her most famous poem, "An Introduction". Naik finds a "Browningesque dramatic quality" in many of Das's love poems (209). With Pritish Nandy, Kamala Das published *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (1977), which has been praised by almost all the critics of Indian English poetry.

A former *Indian Police Service* officer and *Research and Analysis Wing* Additional Director, Daruwalla might have own a *Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1984, but he is well-known for his conservative views regarding the genre of Indian English poetry. His more famous publications include *Under Orion* (1970), *Apparition in April* (1971), *Winter Poems* (1980), *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982), *Crossing of Rivers* (1985), and *A Summer of Tigers: Poems* (1995). Daruwalla is primarily a poet of action, writing about predatory birds, soldiers, and conquerors. His important poems include "Rumination", "The Mistress", "The King speaks to the Scribe", "The Unrest of Desire", "Routine", and "Crossing of Rivers". According to Iyengar, he "is a genuine poet, especially of the landscape" (715).

Importantly, neither Parthasarathy nor Ramamurti has identified Dilip Chitre as an important Indian English poet. Paranjape includes his "A Gravel-voiced Man", "A View from

Chinchpokli", and "Father returning home" in his anthology though. An activist deeply associated with the little-magazine-movement in Maharastra, Chitre's English poetry-compilations include *Ambulance Ride* (1972), *Travelling in a Cage* (1980), and *As Is, Where Is: Selected Poems* (2008). Iyengar seems to write rather dismissively of Chitre: "*Travelling in a Cage* […] is a long poem in 17 sections that took shape when he felt self-exiled in the U.S.A. The exile's sense of isolation […] and frantic search for moorings fill the spaces of the poem […]" (722). He is rather appreciative of Moraes, whom he describes as "the most successful of the new poets", and identifies his poems as "confessional" (654). A graduate from Oxford, Moraes, who ultimately settled down in his birth-city of Mumbai, edited magazines in London, Hong Kong, and New York, and served at the *United Nations Organisation* in 1976. His first book of poems, *A Beginning* (1958), was awarded the *Hawthornden Prize* of the U.K. His other Indian English poetry publications include *Poems* (1960), *John Nobody* (1965), and *Absences* (1983). The Parsee poet, Adil Jussawalla, was born in Mumbai too, and was educated at Oxford and London. As Ramamurti notes, feelings of rootlessness and alienation mark Jussawalla's poems (142), which are collected in *Land's End* (1962) and *Missing Person* (1974). "Scenes from the Life" and "Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay" are regarded by both Paranjape and Ramamurti to be among Jussawalla's more famous poems. The powerful female poet, Eunice de Souza, is Portuguese Goan in origin, and holds a post-graduate degree from Marquette University, Wisconsin, and a Ph.D. from the University of Mumbai. A former teacher of Mumbai's *St. Xavier's College*, de Souza's three books of Indo-Anglian poetry, which are mostly nostalgic in contents, are *Fix* (1979), *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988), and *Ways of Belonging* (1990). She has also edited *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology* (published by *Oxford University Press* in 2001). The Mumbai-based physician Gieve Patel's poetry-

collections are *Poems* (1966), *How Do You Withstand, Body* (1976), and *Mirrored, Mirroring* (1991), while the Mumbai-based journalist, politician, and media-personality Pritish Nandy's collections include *Of Gods and Olives* (1967), *On Either Side of Arrogance* (1968), *From the Outer Bank of the Brahmaputra* (1969), *Madness is the Second Stroke* (1972), *A Stranger Called I* (1976), *The Rainbow Last Night* (1981), and *Again* (2010). A.K. Mehrotra, the last but not the least of Iyengar's 'New Poets' of substance, has edited *Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992), while his poetry-compilations include *Nine Enclosures* (1976), *Distance in Statute Miles* (1982), *Middle Earth* (1984), and *The Transfiguring Places: Poems* (1998). He teaches English at the University of Allahabad.

It must be mentioned, in conclusion, that the list of the Indian English poets seems to be endless in the 21st century. However, with the increasing number of writers, the quality of verses has come to suffer noticeably. Inflow of money and loosening of publishing norms have led to several less talented and mellifluous 'poets' publishing their collections from publishing houses that are little recognised in the academic world. Moreover, criticism of Indian English poetry has been relegated principally to postcolonial re-readings of the publications. Nevertheless, with its fast-expanding contents and scopes, Indian English poetry seems to have the potency to develop itself further and further, and attract serious research.

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Exiled at Home, Alone in the World

2

Memory, Exile and Loneliness in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali

DHRUBA BANERJI

Agha Shahid Ali is a poet who travels in the vistas of memory and creates for himself a space that is vaunting and evocative but never bereft of the pain and suffering that is consequent upon loss of home and dear ones. Simultaneously, the imaginative travels of the poet are successful in adding a further dimension to this poetic world. In order to examine the depths and dimensions of this unique space, the concept of exile needs elucidation at the very outset. Edward Said provides a memorable explanation of the term. In his "Reflections on Exile" he says:

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is that unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (Said, 2001: 173-186)

Said adds:

> The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons and are often defended beyond reason and necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (Ibid.)

Referring to the fact that "the past is a country, from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity", Salman Rushdie says in *Imaginary Homelands* that, the expatriate writer "is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" and adds that in this context, "[t]he shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities …"(Rushdie, 1992: 9-21).

Agha Shahid Ali tries to express his own plural identity by using, what Daniel Hall in his Foreword to *The Veiled Suite : The Collected Poems* refers to as a "remarkable range and variety of his sources: the literatures of several continents; Bollywood, Hollywod, and the art-house cinema; classical Indian and European music; and American pop" (Hall 15-19). This "multiplicity of subject matter and references" may pose initial difficulties to the discerning reader but Hall points out that "certain great poems and great poetries, are not incomprehensible, but *inexhaustible*; they reward rereading and change us as we grow older with them". (Ibid.) The poems are sometimes puzzling but they spin out a great range of resonances and implications which try to sound the dizzying depths of a consciousness that is adrift. Shahid Ali's voice is, in the words of Amitav Ghosh, "at once lyrical and fiercely disciplined, engaged and yet deeply inward" (Ghosh, 340-361). This voice expresses itself in many ways and these expressions result in the many beautiful poems. In these

poems, the personal is not restricted to the family only. The deep engagement with Kashmir and the pervading sense of loss also expresses itself through them. These complex emotions can never be adequately summed up in a single phrase or sentence. Rather they add new dimensions to the status of an exile or the role of memory in the life of an artist.

"Postcard from Kashmir", hauntingly describes the status that a geographical space is lived in the mind and memory of the poet. He says "Kashmir shrinks into my mail box, / my home a neat four by six inches". The collection of poems is entitled *The Half-inch Himalayas* and the phrase is part of this poem, implying the fact that the beautiful homeland is at present an imaginary land but never picture perfect. He says, "This is home. And this the closest / I'll ever be to home."(29)

Amitav Ghosh documents the effects of the changing situations in Kashmir on Agha Shahid Ali and says:

> The steady deterioration of the political situation in Kashmir – the violence and counter-violence – had a powerful effect on him. In time it became one of the central subjects of his work: indeed, it could be said that it was in writing of Kashmir that he created his finest work. The irony of this is that Shahid was not by inclination a political poet. I heard him say once: 'If you are from a difficult place and that's all you have to write about then you should stop writing ….' (Ghosh, 340-361)

Poems from the collection entitled *The Country without a Post Office* exhibit this tendency. The sense of loss and pain may be the starting point of these poetic utterances but they are never the only aspects that the poems have. In "Farewell" Shahid Ali poses an important question, "They make a desolation and call it peace/ Who is the guardian tonight of the gates of Paradise?" (175-177)

The image of the Paradise is further echoed in "The Last Saffron" where Shahid Ali quotes the famous lines:

> "If there is a paradise on earth
> It is this, it is this, it is this" (181-183)

But this space hides within it poignant stories of pain, sufferings, divisions and loss. The poet says:

> Your history gets in the way of my memory.
> I am everything you lost. You can't forgive me.
> I am everything you lost. Your perfect enemy.
> Your memory gets in the way of my memory:
> I am being rowed through Paradise on a river of Hell (175-177)

Scenes depicting how this paradisal landscape gets transformed into hell are described in "I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight". Haunting scenes of "a shadow chased by searchlights is running / away to find its body" or "rippings from a suspended burning tire / are falling on the back of a prisoner, / the naked boy screaming, 'I know nothing.'" remain etched in the memory. So also are the references to "men removing statues from temples". The question "Who will protect us if you leave?" remains unanswered. The dead Rizwan implores the poet not to tell his father that he has died and requests him to put Kashmir in his dreams. The atrocities do not end and the wish that someday the violence would abet, seems just an empty desire as the gods are "asleep" (178-180).

In order to document this history of pain, of suffering and of silences, Shahid Ali uses the trope of the letter. The fact is that in these poems, the messages in the form of letters are seldom delivered to the person they are intended for. In a poem written in the form of a letter and entitled "Dear Shahid", the speaker says, "Here one can't even manage postage stamps. Today I went to the post office. Across the river. Bags and bags – hundreds of canvas bags – all undelivered mail." (194-195) In fact the very title of this collection is highly suggestive: *The Country*

Without a Post Office. In the poem bearing the same title, the letter image is further developed. The poet says:

> I read them, letters of lovers, the mad ones,
> and mine to him from whom no answers came.
> I light lamps, send my answers, Calls to Prayer
> to deaf worlds across continents. And my lament
> is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
> to this world whose end was near, always near.
> My words go out in the huge packages of rain,
> go there, to addresses, across continents (202-208)

But the poet wishes to die in Kashmir. In "The Last Saffron", he says

> I will die, in autumn, in Kashmir,
> And the shadowed routine of each vein
> will almost be news, the blood censored,
> for the *Saffron Sun* and the *Times of Rain* …

Towards the end of the poem the tone of protest takes a unique character as the poet says:

> Yes, I remember it,
> the day I'll die, I broadcast the crimson,
>
> so long ago of that sky, its spread air,
> its rushing dyes, and a piece of earth
>
> bleeding, apart from the shore, as we went
> on the day I'll die, past the guards, and he
> keeper of the world's last saffron, rowed me
> on an island the size of a grave. (180-183)

The point being made simply here is that the moment one is immersed in the serenity of the place, the external problems cease to matter. In death what is remembered is the paradise on earth. The beauty of the utterance scores a silent victory over the might of the entire cruel world.

Death features in another poem of his: "Lennox Hill". Here the death of Shahid Ali's mother is the occasion. The poet expresses his mother's deep desire:

> Windows open on Kashmir:
> *There*, the fragile wood-shrines – so far away – of Kashmir!
> O Destroyer, let her return there, if just to die.

He continues and at the very end of the poem says

> For compared to my grief for you, what are those of Kashmir,
> and what (I close the ledger) are the griefs of the universe
> when I remember you – beyond all accounting – O my mother?
> (247-249)

"Lennox Hill" combines the two feelings of loss that are to be found in the poems of Shahid Ali. The memories of the family and past that are irrevocably gone turn out for Shahid Ali sources of a feeling of emptiness and his utterances become deeply infused with a sense of sadness. If the poems dealing specifically with Kashmir try to express exile from one perspective, these poems dealing with the family and the past try to give utterance to the distanced consciousness in another way.

In the poem "I Dream it is Afternoon When I Return to Delhi", the painful distance that exists between the happy past and the empty present is brought out through the metaphor of money. In the dream the poet has no money in his hands as he is called into one memorable scene of the past after another. In the end he still remains empty handed as the bus for which he is waiting does not stop. The last few lines of the poem try to establish the fact that this poverty is worse than any kind of monetary poverty:

> Once again my hands are empty.
> I am waiting, alone, at Purana Qila.

Bus after empty bus is not stopping.
Suddenly, beggar women with children
are everywhere, offering
me money, weeping for me. (74-75)

"A Lost Memory of Delhi" also highlights the unbridgeable distance that exists between the past and the present. The emptiness of the present also features prominently in another dream poem, "A Wrong Turn". The poet says:

I dream I'm always
in a massacred town, its name
erased from maps …

Documenting tales of atrocities and sufferings, the faces of these inhabitants have been blurred by time. But there is no easy escape from this ghost town. All links with the world have been severed. The poet says:

I thrust my hand
into the cobwebbed booth
of the town's ghost station
the platform a snake-scaled rock,
rusted tracks waiting for a lost train,
my ticket a dead spider
hard as stone. (60)

Memory can never be wiped off. All attempts to erase it are bound to fail ultimately. In the poem "The Previous Occupant", the poet moves into an apartment and the landlady says that the same would be cleaned before he moves in. But the poet wonders "no detergent will rub his voice from the air" and adds "The stains of his thoughts still cling / in phrases …." (63-64). In "The Season of the Plains" there is a poignant reminder of the fact that Shahid Ali's mother too had to suffer estrangement from her childhood Lucknow. This poem seems to be a reminder that in life's journey there are bound to be separations from the places

that we call our own. But traces would definitely remain. However, it is interesting to note here that his mother had thought of Kashmir and not of Lucknow, from her deathbed.

Amitav Ghosh in "The Greatest Sorrow: Times of Joy Recalled in Wretchedness" talking in the context of the 11th September attacks, refers to how he was startled by the "contrast between Shahid's voice and those of the poets of the last century; by the vividness of emotion; by the almost-palpable terror that comes from having looked into the obscurity of a time that will not permit itself to be mapped with measures of the past" (305-325).

In this context one needs to remember the beautiful lines of Hugo of St. Victor, a twelfth-century monk from Saxony, referred to by Edward Said and see how they can be applied to enrich the understanding of the mind of a poet like Agha Shahid Ali:

> The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his. (Said, 2001:173-186)

These lines add a new dimension to the concepts of exile, estrangement and loneliness. They somehow try to sound the depths of the consciousness that is never at home in any given geographical space or temporal framework. A country of origin or residence can be just a starting point for such a mind and there is always a danger of the home or space of comfort ceaselessly being pushed further and further.

Notes

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3

The Art of Critical Love: Nissim Ezekiel's Modes of Belonging

ABIN CHAKRABARTI

In the *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha reminds us that the imagined community of the nation remains split within itself by "the discourse of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference" (Bhabha 148). These forces are as much confronted by authors attempting to narrate the nation through their novels as by poets caught in the grasp of self and society. Any brief survey of Indian poetry in English would indicate how poets have repeatedly tried to negotiate this drama of identity and belonging, especially on account of the fraught relationship with the language itself, from varied perspectives, based on differing contexts. Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is obviously a part of this tradition and he indeed played a pioneering role in evolving a modernist idiom which could accommodate these vicissitudes, while retaining an ironic voice which made his lines pregnant with multiple resonances.

Born into the Bene Israel community of Jews in Bombay, Ezekiel recurrently negotiates in his poetry his own status as an Indian through a variety of poetic manoeuvres that may assuredly locate him within the national imaginary, despite the centripetal forces exercised by religious differences which fissure the bonds

of 'horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 8). This is especially evident in a poem like "Background Casually" where the confessional, autobiographical mode highlights the alienation experienced by the speaker in his childhood where the lines of religious and linguistic difference constituted him as an 'other' within his own land:

> I went to Roman Catholic School
> A mugging Jew among the wolves.
> They told me I had killed the Christ,
> That year I won the scripture prize.
> A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.
>
> I grew in terror of the strong
> But undernourished Hindu lads,
> Their prepositions always wrong,
> Repelled me by passivity.
> One day I used a knife. (179)

These musings illustrate the "unhomeliness" (My use of the word is derived from Homi Bhabha's use of the term "unhomely" in the "The World and The Home") experienced by the young Jew whose very Indian-ness is rendered questionable by a religious identity that makes him consider himself as an alien, conditioned as he is by the otherizing gaze of the Hindu, Muslim or Catholic boys who either tease or taunt him or subject him to a shattering passivity. This is also reciprocated by his father's hostile attitude towards all Hindus:

> All Hindus are,
> Like that, my father used to say,
>
> When someone talked too loudly, or
> Knocked at the door like the devil.
> They hawked and spat. They sprawled around. (180)

What makes things worse is the speaker's inability to seek refuge, either within the fold of his own religious community, or within

his personal genealogy. Not only does he remain distant from any religious assurance – "The more I searched, the less I found" (179) – but his sense of alienation is further exacerbated by the fact that one of his ancestors was "a Major bearing British arms" (181), which only imposes on him a stifling sense of hapless imprisonment: "Fierce men had bound my feet and hands" (Ibid). It is this failure to securely belong within any specific rubric of identity which subjects the speaker into a stagnating pool of uncertainty: "His borrowed top refused to spin" (179).

Hence the speaker's realization: "How to feel at home was the point" (180). It is this search for belonging that again and again takes Ezekiel back to the "kindred clamour" of Bombay which despite being a "barbaric city", emerges as his home. All such attempts at belongingness are mediated by a consistent negotiation with the urban landscape of Bombay with which Ezekiel continuously engages on the basis of diction and a rhetoric that anxiously looks back to Eliot's cityscapes, especially in his early poetry. Eliot, in fact, casts a looming shadow over the oeuvre of Ezekiel as his own representation of Bombay are marked by such expressions as "purgatorial lanes", "men of straw" or visions full of "thick fog". Perhaps this looming presence makes itself most explicitly visible in "Enterprise" where the disillusioned narrator describes his own group of pilgrim-travellers as "A straggling crowd of little hope,/ Ignoring what the thunder meant. (118)"

A professor of English literature himself, Ezekiel here obviously refers to the section "What the Thunder Said" from Eliot's *The Waste Land* where we have the allusion to the fable of the thunder from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Eliot's allusion comes as part of the narrator's quest for some paradigm of faith and spiritual belief through which one may find a way beyond the waste land of the modern urban civilization, embodied by the unreal cities of Eliot's poem, marked by "cracks", "bursts" and

"falling towers" (Eliot, 73). In fact, Eliot's early poems recurrently locate the city as an infernal space marked by repeated use of allusive depictions that keep harking back to Dante's Inferno, as evident from the subsequent lines:

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many
> I had not thought death had undone so many. (Eliot 62)

Ezekiel was perhaps thinking of the same crowd when he states:

> The fog is thick and men are lost
> Who wanted only quiet lives,
> And failed to count the growing cost
> Of cushy jobs and unloved wives (121).

What makes the possibility of such an association all the more significant is Ezekiel's own reference to "purgatorial lanes":

> Barbaric city sick with slums,
> Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
> Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
> Processions led by frantic drums,
> A million purgatorial lanes… (119)

This seems to suggest that consciously or unconsciously Ezekiel's engagement with city in his poetry was underpinned by his personal knowledge of Eliot's cityscapes and the infernal dimensions which he attributed to it. Perhaps the most unredeeming of such judgments were pronounced through "The Hollow Men" where the undead crowds of *The Waste Land* take centre-stage and declare:

> We are the hollow men.
> We are the stuffed men.
> Leaning together,
> Headpiece filled with straw. (Eliot 83)

It is probably in acknowledgment of such statements that Ezekiel himself elsewhere wonders, through one of his urban speakers, "Is he among the men of straw/ Who think they go which way they please? (119)" Interestingly, Eliot is categorical about the hollow men's inability to move independently as he represented them as straw-built scarecrows that only sway with the wind:

> Let me also wear
> Such deliberate disguises,
> Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves,
> In a field
> Behaving as the wind behaves. (84)

However, we must be as conscious of these similarities as of several dissimilarities which also mark the poetic relationship between Eliot and Ezekiel. These dissimilarities are basically a product of two different approaches altogether. Eliot's primary problem with modern metropolitan life was his perception of its pervasive faithlessness. This is why it remained to him so thoroughly "unreal" as it manifested incapacity to prize those intersections of the temporal and the timeless which religious faith could offer. Therefore, even in his post-conversion poems London remains the "timekept City" (Eliot 147), the antithesis of the "Celestial City" where one is always aware that:

> The desert is not only around the corner,
> The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you (Eliot 149).

Ezekiel, despite his occasional theological meditations and spiritual interrogations, is never as staunchly and overtly religious as Eliot was. Therefore, as opposed to the entrenched disavowal of city and urban life that Eliot foregrounds, Ezekiel adopts for himself an ironic, skeptical mode of belonging that, to an extent, replays the strategies of Prufrock who keeps repeating the same

routine even though he is aware of their futility as he is afraid to ask the overwhelming questions that may bring the cycles to a sudden halt. In the process, to use the schemata of Harold Bloom, Ezekiel's relationship with Eliot, in this regard, goes through a process of what we may call interrupted kenosis. Bloom uses the term "kenosis" to suggest a "movement towards discontinuity with the precursor" (Bloom 14). However, as the continuation of the Prufrock mode suggests, Ezekiel's discontinuity is only partial.

What exactly do I mean by this Prufrock mode and how does this strategy reappear in Ezekiel? The fundamental predicament of Prufrock is that despite being aware of all the superficiality and futility associated with the kind of life he is accustomed, he still cannot bring himself to dissociate himself from it on account of his timidity and passivity and therefore keeps reprising his roles, either as a Polonius or as the Fool. Therefore, even though he scoffingly recalls the women who "come and go/Talking of Michaelangelo", without either any perception of Michaelangelo's art or the religious basis of his paintings; he still keeps dressing up with utmost formal precision, precisely to impress them, with consistent anxiety, knowing all the while that he is only going to experience the monotonous recurrence of the same unbroken routine. Thus Prufrock's critical judgment on his own society strangely combines with a sheer passivity that moors him to the same. His own antics therefore appear to him as ridiculous as the antics of a clown or a court-jester, though impregnated at times, with the gnomic insights of the Fool in *King Lear*:

> No I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
> Am an attendant lord, one that'll do
> To swell a progress, state a scene or two,
> Advise the prince, no doubt a easy tool,
> Deferential, glad to be of use,

> Politic cautious and meticulous;
> Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
> At times, indeed almost ridiculous –
> Almost at times the Fool. (14)

Interestingly, and not altogether unexpectedly, the same diction reappears in Ezekiel's poems as we are confronted by the following lines, through the voice of an urban citizen, out for a morning walk:

> His past is like a muddy pool
> From which he cannot hope for words.
> The city wakes, where fame is cheap,
> And he belongs, an active fool. (120)

What, however, distinguishes, Ezekiel's speakers from Eliot's Prufrock is that Eliot's Prufrock remains rooted to the urban life in which he finds himself simply because he lacks the will to do otherwise, while those of Ezekiel will themselves into belonging despite there being several impediments which provoke the speaker into scorn and outrage. Much of this dilemma is explored elsewhere by Ezekiel, specifically in his review of Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness: An Experience of India*. At one part of this sharp and incisive article he states:

> In the India which I have presumed to call mine, I acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all the darkness Mr. Naipaul discovered. I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian. India is simply my environment. A man can do something for his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India. (Ezekiel: 1976, 203)

What forms the basis of such commitment to India, despite the knowledge of so much darkness which Ezekiel so candidly

acknowledges? The answer is provided by the poet himself in the same essay:

> I believe in anger, compassion and contempt. They are not without value. I believe in acceptance that incorporates all three, makes use of them. I am incurably critical and sceptical. That is what I am in relation to India also. And to myself. I find it does not prevent the growth of love. In this sense only, I love India. I expect nothing in return because critical, sceptical love does not beget love. It performs another, more objective function. (ibid. 203-04)

Therefore, despite all the mud and grime, the potholed roads, the daily dose of hypocrisy and so much more, Ezekiel's speakers repeatedly assert their identification with the city of Bombay and thus highlight that ground of bonding from which Ezekiel's art of critical love springs. This is particularly evident in the poem "Urban" which begins by enlisting all the problems and maladies generally associated with urban life such as the broken roads, the dry river, the still air which almost seems 'dead', the skies remain invisible and the depthless landscape which is marked by a senseless change of seasonal cycles. Yet, despite being aware of all these problems, the speaker remains willingly anchored to the own urban milieu:

> The city like a passion burns.
> He dreams of morning walks, alone,
> And floating on a wave of sand.
> But still his mind its traffic turns
> Away from beach and tree and stone
> To kindred clamour close at hand. (117)

It is this sense of kinship with urban experience that makes Ezekiel a poet of "townlore". He therefore objectively instructs the self to embrace that identification between the city and the self which is the only probable path for the evolution of one's identity:

> The web of tramlines and the routes
> Of rushing buses melt into
> One unbarricaded road
> That leads to you. (81)

What is it about the city, especially Bombay that makes it such an intimate refuge of the self? Built by the British into the financial capital of the former colony, the port-city has always been a cosmopolitan space where migrants of different sects, colors and classes have jostled and hustled to fulfil their myriad dreams of money, fame and success. This is precisely what enables Ezekiel to situate himself so squarely within Bombay whose cosmopolitan modernity becomes identified with those "frontiers of future" (Ezekiel: 1976, 204) in terms of which he seeks to shape his own identity. He therefore notes that:

> Bright and tempting breezes
> Flow across the island
> Separating past from future (182)

so that citizens like him may find within it, with committed, determined deliberation ways of belonging that may not be thwarted by that ugly gap between the rich and the poor which also haunts metropolitan spaces like Bombay. The speaker therefore states:

> Unsuitable for song as well sense
> the island flowers into slums,
> and skyscrapers, reflecting
> precisely the growth of my mind.
> I am here to find my way in it. (182)

Would such a commitment mean an exclusion of all those aspects of darkness associated with life in Bombay and by extension the whole of India? Instead, Ezekiel's commitment is based on a frank acknowledgment of all the problems which are there in India, but

from the perspective of an insider, who is as much a part of these problems as anyone else. Hence he writes in "In India":

> Always in the sun's eye,
> Here among the beggars,
> Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
> Hutment dwellers, slums,
> Dead souls of men and gods,
> Burnt-out mothers, frightened
> Virgins, wasted child
> And tortured animal,
> All in noisy silence
> Suffering the place and time,
> I ride my elephant of thought…(130)

But such rides do not actually lead to a movement away from all the chaos and squalor of India. Rather, as Ezekiel points out, as opposed to Naipaul's hysteric declarations, "the escape for most is not from the community, but into it". He categorically states:

> I cannot leave the island,
> I was born here and belong.
>
> Even now a host of miracles
> Hurries me to daily business,
> Minding the ways of the island
> As a good native should,
> Taking calm and clamour in my stride. (182)

The poet who used to contemplate once how exactly to feel at home, can now confidently assert himself as a "native" who does definitely "belong". Unlike Eliot, who could only find the still centre in the refuge of the Anglican Church, Ezekiel finds his desired mode of belongingness on the basis of his critical love of the city that makes him feel at home within an urban milieu which he, however, continues to criticize from the inside. He neither makes any pretensions about the backwardness of his own location, nor disengages from it. Despite his Jewishness, despite

his professed status as an outsider who cannot identify himself with much of Indian heritage, it is simply his skeptical immersion in the present that moulds his mode of belongingness in which he feels unambiguously secure. What makes this possible is a deeply emotional attachment to the city of his birth and growth, however ugly, potholed and hypocritical it may be. As he candidly confesses:

> Perhaps it is not the mangoes
> That my eyes and tongue long for,
> But Bombay as the fruit
> On which I've lived
> Winning and losing
> My little life. (293)

It is this deep emotional bond with his city that forms the basis of his personal identity which manages to find its moorings despite all the initial vicissitudes. Just as Homi Bhabha speaks of an "art of the present" which moved beyond "narrative of origin and initial subjectivities" (Bhabha 1), Ezekiel too shores his daily experiences in the city against the flux of squalor and confusion to fashion his identity as a citizen and as an Indian. The claustrophobic uncertainly of his youthful days gives way to a secure and serene acceptance that also retains the critical voice:

> I have made my commitments now.
> This is one: to stay where I am,
> As others choose to give themselves
> In some remote and backward place.
> My backward place is where I am (181).

The poet of Jewish origin, who wrote English poems in India, thus articulates through poems that objective and critical patriotism which rehabilitates him within the national imaginary and thereby renders possible a paradigm of belonging that challenges the rhetoric of nationalist nostalgia to highlight

alternative possibilities suitable for postcolonial futures. At a time when regressive fanaticism and rootless alienation are equally potent, Ezekiel's poems offer some much-needed alternatives, relevant to both the individual and the nation.

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4

Moving Spaces in the Culture Carnival: Historiography of the Hybrid in the Private Poetics of A. K. Ramanujan

Rajadipta Roy

As a poet A. K. Ramanujan is well received among the intellectuals. But on the flip side of this reception, a somewhat callous indifference to his huge poetic calibre may also be traced among the common and popular readership of the Indian English poetry as such. The reason of such a mutually opposite reader's response may be located in Ramanujan's utterly culture specific poetic imagination, where the significance of the idiom 'culture' is best realized in terms of an inevitable hybridity, an acute awareness of which pervades across his diasporic experiences and also beyond that at once. A multiculturalism that constitutes the very poetic space of Ramanujan, often challenges his readers out of depths as it appears alien and esoteric to the latter. The spaces that overlap in his poems are often infirm of their regular and polarized private and public identities. They frequently converge upon the borderlines of a certain universality that speak of a true visionary self in Ramanujan achieved through a psychic sublimation of that same culturally hybrid alertness.

Ramanujan's own identity as a dislocated individual inhabiting the overlapping spaces between the private and the public worlds of his essential postcolonial situation spawns an

implosive possibility of cultural hybridism, instead of an explosive one. The 'between-ness' that is inevitably underpinned in the plurally imaginative poetic space of Ramanujan is almost an ontological condition with not only his creation but also with many other Indian poets of his time in exile. Bruce King diagnoses this predisposition in unequivocal terms and says,

> Indian expatriate poets do not write from the position of a distinct foreign community, such as the exiled black or West Indian novelists, but their writing reflects the perspective of someone between two cultures. They may look back on India with nostalgia, satirically celebrating their liberation or asserting their biculturalism, but they also look sceptically and wryly on their new homeland as outsiders, with a feeling of something having been lost in the process of growth. (209-210)

Memory and moment fuse into a hybrid whole in Ramanujan's poems and the poems of *Relations (1971)* engender an inevitable negotiation between the private and the public spaces, though with a touch of existential anxiety. The unmistakable nostalgia resultant of an acutely paranoid cultural cross- over is best reflected in the lines of "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day" from the said collection:

> 1935. Professor of Sanskrit
> on cultural exchange;
> passing through; lost
> in Berlin rain; reduced
> to a literal, turbaned child,
> spelling German signs on door, bus, and shop,
> trying to guess go from stop;
> desperate
> for a way of telling apart
> a familiar street from a strange,
> or east
> from west at night,
> the brown dog that barks
> from the brown dog that doesn't (Ramanujan 75).

The cross-cultural wakefulness to the historical situation of an individual, rooted in one frame of existence and yet inhabiting many and myriad cultural existences, requires a polymorphic and equally polysemous sensitivity on the part of a multicultural reader. Ramanujan usually and most flexibly meshes up two mutually opposite takes on the idea of history in the poems negotiating spaces between the private and the public zones of his Indian poetic self, writing in exile. History, as a collated version of cultures lived through the ages, in places bound in specific political identities and, on the other hand, history as a huge and large chronotope defying boundaries and differences in delivering stories of human beings in general; are both ideological pre-requisites in approaching the cultural textuality of Ramanujan's poetic oeuvre. Dharwadker sees into the pattern emerging in the maestro's poems, born out of a definite feeling of hybridity, and documents the poet's preoccupations with the concept of history as such. He says, "[T]he extension of biological time to geological time symptomatically links Ramanujan's interests in time, culture, nature, and the body with his general interests in human history and society" (Ramanujan, xxviii). But the most intriguing part of his infallibly humanistic observation consists in diagnosing the general plan of such an understanding in the poet as the latter does away with all the animosities existing between the utterly private and the public, i.e. intellectual notions of the cultural overtones stuck on to the idea of history. Dharwadker explains that Ramanujan's poems,

> [F]ocus on the more abstract, impersonal, and even trans-human aspects of temporality and historical process, but they remain inextricable from a humanistic conception of the past and the present. From this viewpoint, history can be imagined and narrated only by a human subject, and only in relation to itself and to other human subjects, precisely those who constitute the 'raw material and victims' of historical events.... Such an engagement with history arises from an interest in the

> concrete particulars of character, action, and situation in the past and the present, and specifically in their warm- blooded human origins and meanings. (Ramanujan xxviii-xxix)

The monolith of 'history' in the sense of a collective experience conceived in general terms gives readily way to a more individualistic yet polysemous "fictional account of family life to dramatize the general interdependence of observing subject and observed event" in the poems Ramanujan (xxix). He recounts his family anecdotes that erupt out of his strictly personal and family memory, i.e. his private space of experience, as something which eventually constitutes the building blocks of a larger public space, i.e. the cultural knowledge of the Indian history in the hybrid matrix of the uniquely diasporic poetic self. In a publicly well-received poem of Ramanujan, "Small-scale Reflections on a Great House", the values of an outsized Hindu family, stuffed with tradition, is treated from an especially personalized viewpoint that recalls some of the intense feelings of the poet in connection with the most private memories of his father. In doing so, his historical knowledge steers the reader easily into a domain of poetic culture that, besides accounting for the private experiences of the poet within the circumferences of a single Hindu family in South India, redolently replicates the prototypes of rituals, customs and beliefs of almost every Indian family in the Hindu quarters by the first two or three decades of the twentieth century. Ramanujan offers a historic-cultural tour to his readers in English language, and more specifically to those residing in the West, with an unparalleled poetic flourish:

> Nothing stays out: daughters
> get married to short-lived idiots;
> sons who ran away come back
>
> in grand children who recite Sanskrit
> to approving old men, or bring
> betelnuts for visiting uncles

> who keep them gaping with
> anecdotes of unseen fathers,
> or to bring Ganges water
>
> in a copper pot
> for the last of the dying
> ancestors' rattle in the throat. (98)

The inevitable awareness of a domestic sphere that churns out Ramanujan's poetry unequivocally relates and finally locates itself in the society around him. The famous context- sensitivity that he professes for so vehemently in his theoretical exhortations, calls forth the necessity of understanding such an enmeshing network of the home and the society, the private and the public in his poems as well. The interdependence might seem a little ambiguous sometimes but the two are unquestionably intertwined in Ramanujan. Emphasizing the apparent ambiguity existing between a historical/ cultural context of a private self and the transgressing cognitive ideal of the same, Ramanujan candidly exclaims:

> All societies have context- sensitive behaviour and rules – but the dominant ideal may not be the 'context- sensitive' but the 'context- free' Egalitarian democratic ideals... In 'traditional' cultures like India, where context- sensitivity rules and binds, the dream is to be free of context. So *rasa* in aesthetics, *moksa* in the aims of life', *sannyasa* in the life- stages, *sphota* in semantics, and *bhakti* in religion defines themselves against a background of inexorable contextuality. (Dharwadker 47-48)

The interface of these so called spaces recurs in all of Ramanujan's poems that take their cue from the very first of his public volumes, *The Striders* (1966). The central dynamics of the two relatively different yet interdependent categories constitute the hybrid for Ramanujan. Elaborating on the mechanics of the *The Striders*, a design that remain replicating steadily in the other

volumes of Ramanujan like *Relations* (1971), *Second Sight* (1986) and even *The Black Hen* (1995), Dharwadker defines this 'metonymic metaphor' of space – trapping as an ontological preoccupation of Ramanujan's poetic effervescence. He says that Ramanujan's poetic idiom "identifies this problem precisely when it suggests that the self is more an absence than a presence in private as well as public space" (Ramanujan xxxiii). In "Self-portrait", the context of an individual's private relations is crucial to understanding the identity of the self:

> I resemble everyone
> but myself, and sometimes see
> in shop windows,
> despite the well-known laws of optics,
> the portrait of a stranger,
> date unknown,
> often signed in a corner
> by my father. (Ramanujan 23)

Almost identical exhortations characterize the essence of a poem called ""Zero" written much later and published in 1995 in the volume entitled *The Black Hen*. The initial self identity of the subject, which is context- free and private thereof, cannot achieve historical significance unless it is realized in terms either of its preceding or succeeding context, hence underpinning the immense cultural sensitivity of a given historical perspective i.e. the contextulization in terms of the public. In "Zero", we come across Ramanujan's overtly conscious awareness of the hybrid, as the self attains its cognitive existence in relation to the 'others':

> The Mayans had a glyph for zero
> he said
> The hindus thought zero was holy
> I said
> The Jewish god was one, the Buddhist was zero
> He said

> Take away the zero from zero it's still zero
> I said
> zero has no value until it follows a real number
> he said
> Like you, me and this talk
> I said (Ramanujan 263).

The "I- ness" of the private seems significant only when it takes under its folds the "others" to that "I" as well. Consequently, a possibility of the compound layers of individual consciousness is espoused as the "one" is tirelessly understood in terms of the "many" as is evident in the context-sensitive poetic discourse of "In Toyland":

> In bins of rubber
> chameleon, the live one
> mimics the mimics.
>
> Yellow flecks on green
> on a green and yellow bush,
> but for a moving
>
> eye:
>
> 'If you think you see
> nothing on a tree, then it's
> a chameleon you see'. (262)

This "infinite regress of identities", as is being identified by Dharwadker (xxxv), is crucial in reading Ramanujan as his poetic splendour is contained in the intricate double movement towards a unique idiom of the hybrid. The idea of such a hybridism is being at once conceived and lived by Ramanujan throughout his whole life as an Indian linguist-folklorist-poet and theoretician of the Tamil Brahmin stock, living and writing in Diaspora in the United States. The interconnection of so many intrinsically spiralled identities spawns the hybrid sensitivity in the poet in action. A state of cognitive hyper-reality is affected immediately

that takes into account the entire traditional, scientific, Hindu and Christian ideas of human existence while imagining a single ritualized performance for the body of a deceased diasporic entity. The multi-focal hybrid consciousness that is fore grounded in the poetic space of Ramanujan consumes the differences in cultures and speaks of a different correlation of the vegetated body and the crude nature which is inexorably going to contain it immediately after death. In "Death and the Good Citizen" from the volume *Second Sight* (1986), Ramanujan writes:

> Or abroad,
> they'll lay me out in a funeral
> parlour, embalm me in pesticide,
> bury me in a steel trap, lock
> me out of nature
> till I'm oxidized by left-
> over air, withered by my own
> vapours into grin and bone.
> My tissue will never graft,
> will never know newsprint,
> never grow in a culture... (Ramanujan 136).

The fusion of the private and the public, the domestic and the socio-intellectual is so involving in the poetic space of Ramanujan that his poetic oeuvre often takes the shape of a culture carnival. The hybrid in him, therefore, is not an inescapable lament of a complaining self or a self-effacing glorification of the western episteme of cultural Knowledge. Ramanujan inhabits the hybrid in a way a man inhabits his most private and natural parts of his unconscious within his mind. The co-existence of culturally different parameters is an outcome of his innate Indian self which organically recognizes the possibility of a creative pluralism essentially taking its root in the multicultural national carnival, called the "Indian-ness". Bruce king points to this flexibility of Ramanujan's culturally hybrid capacity when he indicates that the "unpredictable fusion of varied roots in Ramanujan's poetry is

true of the attitudes it expresses" (King 211). Sabitha T. P. refers to the making of this unique hybridism in Ramanujan in her article "*Home in Exile: 'Hybridity' in A. K. Ramanujan and Nissim Ezekiel*" and reflects upon the poet's capacity in perceiving the world from both the Indian and the western standpoints as something conditioned with his very being as a responsive individual to the phenomena of life around him:

> This 'hybrid' identity could very well be that of Ramanujan's own. His poems suggest just such a coexistence of Indian and western systems of perceiving and conceiving the world or, as Ramanujan would say, that of his 'outer' and 'inner' forms. The 'hybridity' in Ramanujan's poems is not a post exile phenomenon. The intermingling of 'western and 'Indian ways of perceiving can be traced back to some of his earliest poems which were written in India. (Sabitha 195)

The hybridism encoded in the pan- Indian consciousness of Ramanujan is also evident in his theorization of the oral narrative tradition in India as he says in the Introduction to his *Folktales from India: A Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-two languages*:

> When we look at texts... we need to modify terms such as 'Great Tradition' and 'Little Tradition' and to see all these cultural performances as a transitive series, a 'scale of forms' responding to one another, engaged in continuous and dynamic and dialogic relations. Past and present, what's 'pan- Indian' and what's local, the written and the oral, the verbal and the nonverbal – all these are engaged in reworking and redefining relevant others.... Texts, then, are also contexts and pretexts for other texts. (Ramanujan, 2009: xviii-xix)

It entails logically then that the idea of 'enmeshing' different cultural tropes and forms which is embedded in the creative psyche of Ramanujan so deeply cuts veritably across his historical hybridism conveyed through his poems. His poetics is thoroughly dependent on this single factor, sometimes resolving his anguish

of being at a single time in two or more cultures and sometimes disturbing him with irreconcilable ideations of opposing principles in his poems, which is understood ingeniously differently from the idea of the 'hybrid' conceived by another Indian expatriate theoretician Homi K. Bhabha. The latter vehemently expostulates the notion of the 'in- betweenness' in hybridism as an unconditional luminal space and sys in favour of his logic that "[this] liminality of migrant experience is no less a transitional phenomenon than a translational one; there is no resolution to it because the two conditions are ambivalently enjoined in the survival of migrant life" (Bhabha 321). The western episteme is enamoured with this postulation of the hybrid by Bhabha as a liminal third apace while the conception of the same in Ramanujan has to be understood in terms of his being an unconditionally Indian poet in English and subsequently upholding a more reflexive and universal hermeneutic position in reading the scopes of the hybrid especially in his poems. The 'global' theoretical backdrop of Bhabha finds itself at war with the 'universal' culture carnival in Ramanujan's poetic space. T. P. Sabitha picks up the difference in approaches and surmises:

> The question of hybridity is linked not just with postcoloniality, but also with questions of secularism and democracy. Home as a hybrid space is a political understanding of the plural nature of a country like India. To avoid a majoritarian politics, it is important to use the concept of ""hybridity". However it cannot be a hybridity that resides nowhere, or at the margins of discourses and nations, but a hybridity that resides at home. This is the way in which we can perceive a "hybrid" self in the writings of Ramanujan... (Sabitha 202)

A dualistic perception in both the subjective and the objective routes of thinking life as a hybrid phenomenon, and in advocating for that enmeshing dualism in simply straight and unaffected terms is a vital intellectual pillar of Ramanujan's poetics. The

interstitial passages that he often leaves in the imaginative body of his poems is undoubtedly a celebration of the hybrid which interweaves the ever moving and unstable spaces of the private and the public zones of his socio- cultural poetic exposures. Hence, we fall upon Ramanujan's poetics of the cultural hybrid, which is not a mere liminal passage of rapidly vanishing cultural signs churning out melancholic yearns in its wake, but a festival of memory and contemporaneity, of the "I" and the "other" which are interdependent and therefore more layered and adequate for a hyper-real poetics cutting across cultures like that of his.

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5

Dilip Chitre: The Exploration of the Self and Reality

SIDDARTH SYANGDEN

> "*I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am.*" —Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

When Albert Einstein first published his paper on the theory of special relativity in 1905, it changed the way the world viewed physics and science as a whole. It not only changed the overall outlook of modern physics but it had a huge influence on the cultural and social front. Relative to the self, reality now had a different meaning and existence. The concept of the self has always intrigued mankind from the time of the ancient Greeks to this present day. Einstein's paper on relativity brought an entirely new dimension to the idea of the self and reality. Much like Einstein's theory of relativity, Chitre's poems expose the world in its relativity to the self. Dilip Chitre's poems try to explore the reality surrounding the self. In his personal blog he writes about his early poems:

> "Most of my poems connected sexual love with death—complete annihilation of self-awareness…I now realize how deeply autobiographical all my work is and how intimate despite its reflection of the outside world."

Poets are no strangers to sexual imageries, themes and the idea of the self but what makes Chitre different is his autobiographical insight into the functioning of the self and reality.

The idea of the self is central to many philosophical and artistic discourses and is an element of archetypal quest for religions. The self primarily constitutes the idea of the individual and his quest for meaning in social existence. In *Being and Nothingness,* Jean Paul Sartre argues that "free will" will exist only if the individual completely acknowledges one's existence in reality. For Sartre "Existence is prior to essence" he focused on the human experience of the existence of the self in a godless world and the responsibilities that lie with this existence. In psychological terms the self signifies the study of one's identity or experience. The idea of self revolves around the distinction between the self *I* and the self *Me.* Chitre's poems offer the readers an insight into the self, reality and the reality surrounding the self.

Apart from being a poet Chitre was also a prominent film maker and an artist. It was natural for him to use in his poetry many concepts of film and painting. His poems also deal with alienation and separation from man. In his poem "Farther Returning Home" he deals with the anguish of being alone and the desire for having someone at home by his side. In the title itself the poet uses the metaphor of home which signifies a comfortable space shared by the poet with another human being, his father. This poem not only tells us about the estrangement between a father and a son but also about the poet's alienation form an artificial world:

> Home again, I see him drinking weak tea,
> Eating a stale chapatti, reading a book,
> He goes into the toilet to contemplate
> Man's estrangement from a man made world
>
> ("Farther Returning Home")

These lines give us an insight into the mind of the poet and what he thinks of the reality relative to the self. He talks of alienation and the divide created by the self's concept of reality and the social concept of reality. Karl Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* has used the concept of 'estrangement' or 'alienation' to describe a labourer's realization of the loss of reality in an economy. He says, "the industrial capitalist economy alienated individuals from the work that they do, unable to control their own labour, they must give (sell) to another, they lack control and knowledge of themselves and never achieve their full human potential". Marx's idea of alienation opened doors for modern psychology and artistic expressions. In "Farther Returning Home" we get to see the estrangement the poet feels towards a fellow human being and the society which the poet calls *"*a man made world*"*. The poem opens with the poet's father travelling *"*on the late evening train*"* surrounded by fellow travellers who are silent. This silence signifies the hollow emotions and the lack of interactive touch that modern generation suffers from. The poem echoes the modern day alienation of a human being from another human being. The poet writes:

> My father travels on the late evening train
> Standing among silent commuters in the yellow light
> Suburbs slide past his unseeing eyes
> His shirt and pants are soggy and his black raincoat
> Stained with mud… ("Farther Returning Home")

These lines are very symbolic of a person losing his sense of reality. His is on a crowded train yet he is alienated not only from the people around him but from the world outside as well as *"*suburbs slide past his unseeing eyes*"*. Alienation as we know is the isolation of a human being from nature or in this case the isolation of a father from his son:

His sullen children have often refused to share
Jokes and secrets with him. He will now go to sleep
Listening to the static on the radio, dreaming
Of his ancestors and grandchildren, thinking…
("Farther Returning Home")

The poem ends with the poet's father going to sleep thinking and dreaming of what might have happened if he removed himself from reality and completely lost a grasp on it. The poem gives us an insight into the life of a man who is alienated from nature, reality and human beings and above all it tells us about the nature of existence. Existence has been explored in majority of the world religions and philosophies, the very essence of existence is to be aware of the surroundings and to make use of it either in a positive light or in a negative light. This poem illustrates the existence of a man who is not aware of what he has. Instead, he dreams of what he does not have. Chitre beautifully uses the images such as "the late evening train", "black rain coat", "grey platform", "stale chapatti" to paint the picture of silence, loneliness and isolation.

"The House of my Childhood" is another autobiographical poem where Chitre writes about his childhood home which he revisits after a long period of time. The child that spent time in that house is not the same person as the man standing there after a long time. Time as we know it always flows and with time our thoughts, images and memories flows and some of it are lost along the way. When the poet comes back to his childhood house he has repressions and the visual memory of the house when he was a child comes flooding back.

After the death of all birds
Bird-cries still fill the mind
After the city's erasure
A blur still peoples the air ("The House of my Childhood")

This poem tries to blur the distinction between fantasy and reality. The poet (self) appears to in his childhood home (reality), which is constantly and ever changing. The house used to look in a certain way but now it appears that reality has changed and being relative to it, the self has changed too. Relative to the self the truth is forever changing, when the poet was a child and growing up; the house represented a certain reality to him, and now that he has come back after a long time the house now represents a different reality to him.

> My grandmother's voice shivers on a bare branch
> I toddle around the empty house
> Spring and summer are both gone
> Leaving an elderly infant
> To explore the rooms of age ("The House of my Childhood")

The poet uses images like *"*spring and summer*", "*elderly infant*"* and *"*age*",* which symbolizes time. Time is a dimension which measures events and the passing of it; though the nature of time is scientific it has a significant bearing on literature, painting, photography or cinema. In this poem we can find the passing of time in two different directions, one is the mental or psychological flow of time inside the mind of the poet and the other is the physical passing of time and the effects of time on the childhood house. The poet refuses to accept the physical passing of time and the ruins it brought to his childhood home. In his mind, time is static and it becomes very difficult for the poet to come to terms with the fact that his childhood home is no longer the same.

> The house of my childhood stood empty
> On a grey hill
> All its furniture gone

The poet's reality and his existence is subject to time, Martin Heidegger in his *Being and Time* writes, "Being is not something

like a being…being is what determines beings as beings", in the poem the poet enters into a space (his childhood home) and is overcome by nostalgia, this space appears to be different at different times. He calls himself *"*an elderly infant*"* signifying the effect of time on his body and appearance, but psychologically time has stood still, here the self and the reality appears to be in a contradictory flux.

Chitre's fascination with the past and nostalgia is evident in his poem "At Midnight in the Bakery at the Corner*"*, this poem much like *"*The House of My Childhood*"* employs the poet's memory related to the past just like the house, the bakery acts as a trigger for his repression of memories:

> At midnight in the bakery at the corner
> While bread and butter-biscuits are being baked
> I remember the Rahman of my childhood
> And Asmat's sparkling eyes
> Playing carom with me

Once again the distinction between reality and memory is very apparent in this poem, the poet goes back in time to remember his childhood friends Rahman and Asmat. He remembers *"*Rahman of my childhood*"* and Asmat *"*Playing carom with me*"*. This poem, apart from being a reflection of nostalgia, also contains sexual imagery:

> At midnight bakery at the corner
> While bread and butter-biscuits are being baked
> The wife of the Pathan next door enters my room
> Closes the door and turns her back to me
> I tell her, sister, go find someone else

The poet once again engages between reality and his perception of it. The poet becomes haunted by the tyranny of time, his memories, his fantasies and his sexual desires all becomes a part

of the perceived reality of the self memory now serves as the link between the inevitable passing of time and the past.

The poet's alienation is also a very important theme in this poem, the poet due to the lapse of time and its effects, finds himself alone and longing for human touch. The physical loneliness of the poet is compensated by his memories of the past and his imagination of it:

> I am boozing alone in my room
> In front of me fried liver pieces gone cold in a plate
> All my friends migrated to the gulf

The above lines suggest that the poet is in desperate need of company, he is alone in his room drinking and thoughts of his friends and Pathan's wife pass by. Memory and imagination play a very important role in this poem. Shadows are the areas where light ceases to enter due to the obstruction of light or a light source. Without light there can be no shadow and without memories there can be no imagination. Memory acts as a painter's paint brush painting disjointed, concrete, broken or fractured images into the canvas of imagination. Memory of what once was, of what once could have been and of what was once was dreamt. A collection of memory inside the mind of the poet serves as a source from where he creates a collage of images and imagination.

> "Surrealism is destructive, but it destroys only what it considers to be shackles limiting our vision" —Salvador Dali

The existence of a poet and his role in society has always been a topic of debate amongst scholars and critics, but nobody can deny that poets offer us a glimpse into a perceived reality of being. Over the years poets have been influenced by many artistic moments and theories for instance poets like Guillaume Apollinaire and Jean Cocteau were heavily influenced by Picasso's

idea of breaking up of images called Cubism, Dylan Thomas was heavily influenced by surrealism and in Indian English poetry we find Kolatkar being heavily influenced by surrealism, the exploration of the unconscious in a dream like sequence. Dilip Chitre being a painter himself had a vast idea of the concepts and theories of painting. In his poem "In the Light of Birds", he flirts and experiments with the idea of surrealism. One of the most important developments of the twentieth century was the fascination and obsession regarding how the human mind worked; it opened doors for new discourses and new branches of study. This intensive study of the human mind served as a stimulus to new literary and artistic movements. The revolutionary theories of Freud which explored the realms of the human mind influenced an artistic movement called surrealism, which explored the state of being into the depth of the unconscious mind and it was expressed in a dreamy flow. The poem "In the Light of Birds", the poet tries to explore the self by reaching into the depth of his unconscious mind:

> In the light of birds the lunatic wakes from uncountable sleep
> His burning electric wires begin to glow
> Birds sing in every forest of flesh and blood
> The lunatic's fingers turn into strings in the outer silence
> ("In the Light of Birds")

In this poem the distance between the inner and the outer is very much evident, the inner representing the self and the outer representing the reality. The poem is a description of a psychologically disarrayed man who lingers in the unconscious state of mind and the reality in which he lives, the man can be described as what Yeats calls "passionate fragmentary man", the man can be thought to be in a state of exile- from the self, his "human potential" and the reality of being. The man is in a state of what can be explained as a *Medusa Effect*. Medusa in Greek

mythology was the priestess of Athena, the goddess of war and was bound by the eternal vow of chastity. She was once a fair beautiful maiden with long flowing locks of hair until she was raped by Poseidon, the god of the sea. As a punishment for breaking her vow of chastity her beautiful hair was replaced by poisonous snakes and a mere gaze into her eyes could turn people into stone. This myth of Medusa had a symbolic significance in the modern society, as she represented alienation and exile. The inner self of Medusa might have been pure but her outer self represented a demon and a hideous creature, Medusa represented the paradox between the inner and the outer, between the ego and the alter ego. The *"*Lunatic*"* in this poem too represents the poet's inner and the outer self. The *"*uncountable sleep*"* echoes Freud's concept of "Dream thoughts". The lunatic is in a state of chaos and disorder much like Medusa, he is in a state of self exile and alienation. The Lunatic in the poem represents the isolation, hollowness and the nothingness that exists in the world. The poet uses the medium of surrealism to explore his deepest desires, unfulfilled happiness and the unattained sense of belonging. The poem is rich in the imageries of sleep and dreams. The *"Half asleep"* state of being represents the sub conscious state of mind, where dreams and reality merge, and the poet in a state of a sub conscious existence where he cannot distinguish between memories, reality and dreams. *"Total sleep is a frightening fire"* represents the poet now cannot be a whole, his existence has been compromised and is stuck in the state of singularity where everything exists in nothing.

> The lunatic sees through his sun-paraphrasing eyes
> That creates circles centered outside him
> And unaccountable sleep awakens lightnings
> To sing a vast lullaby in flesh and blood
>
> The lunatic watches a bird…half closed like eyes flying…
> ("In the Light of Birds")

Again in the above lines the poet uses a dream like sequence to depict the state of the lunatic, he is neither asleep nor awake he is in between the inner and the outer between the self and reality.

Dilip Chitre's imagination and his poetic qualities take him from his past, into the realm of the unconscious and the reality. He uses familiarity with surrealism in his other poem "In Your Poisoned Wounds":

> In your poisoned wounds
> Fall the shadows of burning planets
> The splitting breakers of foaming oceans
> Your invisible paths going through raging storms
> You spread like lightning flashes through my heart
> And I grew in this darkness ("In Your Poisoned Wounds")

In these lines the poet is employing the use of surrealism to come to terms with his Self and his Reality. The self represented with the use of *"I"* and the reality is represented with the use of *"burning planets",* "invisible paths" and *"darkness"*.

Chitre occupies a special position in Indian poetry and like most of the Indian poets he was bilingual and a translator. His poems deal with the realization of a being's loss of reality and its effect on the self. Chitre consciously rejects the temptation of being propagandist or controversial and he remained confirmed to common language which makes it easier for the readers to relate to his poems. Chitre was also a painter and a film maker, who travelled widely across the world and has written considerable number of poems on the experiences of his travels like, *Kiev, Ukraine: 1980*, *Leningrad, Sans Mandelstam, April, 1980, Horniman Circle Garden Circa 1964*. His poems give us a multidimensional view about the nature of being and the nature of reality.

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6

Broken Narratives of Diasporic Sensibility: A Study of Sujata Bhatt's Poems

JAYDIP SARKAR

Most of the present generation of the non-resident Indian poets, writing in English do not consider themselves as 'exiled' because emotionally they move seamlessly between countries. As Agha Shahid Ali says:

> Technically I am not an exile. No one kicked me out of anywhere. I am an expatriate, a voluntary condition. […] America is very much mine and so is the Subcontinent and I feel equally comfortable, though in different ways, in both places (Swain 191).

Sujata Bhatt, however, places herself as more an Indian poet writing in English who happens to live anywhere but India. Her poetry is truly the poems of "the anguish of immigrants when they start to lose their first language" (as quoted in De Souza 69), the pains of their displacement, their fond memories of home and a love for their mother-tongue. And all of these are mingled with Bhatt's sensitive awareness of being a South-Asian woman in a postmodern living condition. She really came in touch with many cultures of the world as she lived in India, the U.S. and Germany, and her poems exude those feelings and attitudes which

broadly shape the imaginative canvas of diasporic writings across the world. Her encompassing both the mythic local and the postmodern global is also paramount in her use of Gujarati interspersed with English "for onomatopoetic effect and because for her certain subjects cannot be described in English" (Ibid). In other words, whatever physical or existential space Bhatt occupies, it is home that always remains central to her poetic consciousness, and it is from this centre that she recognizes and celebrates her own identity, as she writes in "The one who goes away":

> I am the one
> who always goes
> away with my home
> which can only stay inside
> in my blood - my home which does not fit
> with any geography…
>
> But I never left home
> I carried it away
> with me - her in my darkness
> in myself. ("The one who goes away")

Bhatt's experience of being in the wrong house is again and again repeated in her poems, and she thus raises more questions and issues with regard to home and displacement as in the following:

> I know I've made the mistake
> of loving America too much.
> … … ….
> What does it mean to feel at home?
> Sometimes when you walk into a house
> and wander through the rooms until you feel the doors
> and windows snug around you,
> when you walk across the wooden floors and feel
> blood clots in your throat then you know
> it's the wrong house.
>
> What if it's the wrong country? ("Brunizem", 106— 9)

In fact, despite willingness and attempt to cultivate the dynamic of integration with the places of migration, the diasporic poets and creative writers always create a space for themselves to which they often return in order to register their hiatus with the land or culture they come from. In his essay "Orientalist Construction of Home/Nation: Poetry of A.K.Ramanujan, Sujata Bhatt and R.Parthasarathy", Nirajan Mohanty thus reviews this poetic project of Bhatt relating to displacement and home:

> Falling back on memories of individuals, legends, anecdotes, rites of the family, and of course, on the country's grim colonial past, Bhatt's poetry construct images of home and nation. She can relate the Hindu/Sikh riots to early memories of playing with a Sikh boy. While painting poverty, she is reminded of Ahmedabad reeling under poverty and hunger. Peacock, buffalo, lizard, shrimp, crocodile, and monkey figure so much in her poetry that they create the sense of a place that never leaves her psychic domain. Through the personalities of Swami Anand, Nanabhai Bhatt, Nachiketa, Grandmother, Devibhen Pathak - the poet tries to relate herself with a past that makes the present meaningful. I believe, a diasporic writer's sense of identity can be perceived from his/her mode of revoking the past. Many of Bhatt's poems depict her awareness and understanding of the place she lives in. A comparison between the poems on the concept of home/nation and those on the cities of the west, or say, between the mythic location and the real, indicates that while representing the former a kind of passionate involvement, a kind of absorption is felt; whereas in the latter the representation evidences a reportorial flatness, a coldness of the language. (Mohanty, 8)

Bhatt's first collection *Brunizem* (1988) has almost half of the poems, set in India, where she recalls her family, childhood memories and sights, sounds and smells of village life. Here she recalls "how long and road-dust and wet canna lilies / the smell of monkey breath and freshly washed clothes". She returns to her city Ahmedabad after ten years. She experiences mixed

feelings of nostalgia and confusion: "Here, the gods roam freely / disguised as snakes or monkeys." She compares the dreams of a young widow with buffaloes "lazily swishing their tails, dozing." And all these are not merely physical entities but the part of her psyche. She thus expresses her preoccupation with her childhood past very strongly in "My mother's Way of Wearing a Sari":

> The part I like best, the part I ask her
> to show me again and again is the way
> she makes the pleats - snapping them into
> existence - as the neem tree in our garden
> starts snapping at the
> elegant bluish eloquent eucalyptus leaves....
> ("My mother's Way of Wearing a Sari")

Here one must feel that the poet is busy in mythologising the real - that existed once but now occupies a mythic space. Mohanty notes the context thus:

> When the diasporic creative writers draw images from home/ nation, they amalgamate memory and desire to galvanise their sense of identity; when they draw images from locations of migrancy, they mix the real with the sense of alienation, and they represent the real as real. (Mohanty, 9)

"A Different way to Dance" and "What Happened to the Elephant"— these two poems refer to the myth of Ganesh. Ganesh, the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, is considered a symbol of wisdom and prudence. Ganesh did not always have an elephant's head but acquired one after Shiva, through a misunderstanding, chopped off his original head. In the poem "A Different Way to Dance", Bhatt describes a drive South of Boston on a June night when her mother saw an elephant in a truck. They follow the truck as if they were following Lord Ganesh himself. Then the poet imagines Parvati, Ganesh's mother dreaming of her son's greenish brown eyes, small nose, straight eyebrows, thick knots of curly hair before Shiva 'interfered':

Sometime the elephant head of Ganesh
dreams of the life among elephants it knew
before Shiva interfered.
How comfortable it was to walk
on four legs. To be able to speak with mountains
to guess the mood of the wind..
and there was the jungle,
cool mud, dripping leaves,
the smell of wood-sandal wood and teal.
The smell of trees allowed to grow old
the smell of fresh water touched by deer
the smell of his newly found mate
the smell of their mounting passion.
("A Different Way to Dance")

Bhatt peeps in to the elephant head of Ganesh who still cherish the memories of the jungle life among the elephant herd. The poem evokes highly sensuous images that appeal to readers' senses of touch, hearing, smell and soon. She returns to the same myth in 'what happened to the Elephant' where she questions:

What happened to the elephant
the one whose head Shiva stole
to bring his son Ganesh
back to life? ("What Happened to the Elephant")

She prolongs the story by stretching the child's imagination that continues to probe deeper. Ganesh become Ganesh with head of elephant Shiva chopped off but then what happened to the elephant whose head was chopped off. If the elephant was received with, say, a horse's head, chopped off. If the elephant was received with, say, a horse's head,

Who is the true elephant?
And what shall we do
about the horse's body? (ibid)

The child wants solution where none should dies. The poet says that one imagines a rotting carcass of a beheaded elephant as she looks at the framed post-card of Lord Ganesh. The elephant invited for Ganesh but the other elephants danced in sadness round the beheaded elephant.

> How they turned and turned
> in a circle, with their trunks
> facing outwards and the inwards
> towards the headless one.
> That is dance
> a group dance
> no one talks about. (ibid)

Bhatt's mode of questioning thus raises deeply curious, intellectual and sensitive issues which sets her apart from other Diaspora poets in whom one finds a sense of dislocation and displacement from their homeland only, while in Bhatt's poetry one encounters intellectual inquiry that are often metaphysical in nature.

In "Walking Across the Brooklyn Bridge", she however remembers the matter-of-fact picture of the people from Vietnam who are willing to give their blood, hair, livers and kidneys to have their statue of liberty. It presents an immigrant's view of the subtle form of violence in America:

> In another section
> of the Newspaper I read
> about the ever growing problems of refuges
> who will take them in?
> Especially, the ones from Vietnam,
> a favourite subject for photographers,
> flimsy boats, someone's thin arm in the way -
> who can forget those eyes?
> And who can judge those eyes
> that vision?
>
> ("Walking Across the Brooklyn Bridge",)

In "Ajwali Ba", Bhatt falls back on the tale told by her father at a dinner. This tale relates her to her grandmother Ajwali Ba, the orthodox Brahmin who asked the grandfather "to bathe/near the orchard / before coming in" (*Monkey Shadows* 24) as he must have been touched by people of lower castes. The grandfather decided to sleep in the garden as he could not break the rule of the house. But the tale has an interesting twist, when:

> A few minutes later,
> let's say about ten minutes later,
> she rushes out of the house,
> runs across the courtyard,
> leaps down the steps
> leading to the mango orchard
> and joins him. (*Monkey Shadows* 25)

Bhatt appreciates this part of the tale most and hence it occupies a considerable space within her. The grandfather slept as he was tired, but the grandmother did not sleep:

> I see her staring at the sky
> enjoying a private game
> of untangling the stars
> and counting them
> into their correct constellations. (26)

In *Post-colonial Transformation*, Bill Aascroft advocates in favour of post-colonial theories not only because they address issues posited in relations between the 'First' and 'Third' worlds, but because they coin new terms like 'horizontality', 'transformation' and 'fluidity' of identity of diasporic/global writers. "Wanting Agni" is a poem that successfully reflects the identity of Bhatt as a poet, besides permitting us to see how meaningfully the nation gets constructed in her poems. If Ramanujan's wish is to be cremated with 'Sanskrit and sandalwood,' Bhatt's longing is to be cremated with fragrant wood. If "through images of the rites, she is able

to construct the house-image, through myths, she constructs the nation, its cultural moorings" (Mohanty 10):

> But if I'm taken away on bamboo and roses and neem
> and placed on more wood
> then Agni, the good god of fire will come rushing
> towards me,
> laughing
> as if tickled by all the saffron.
> the same Agni who would not touch the fire- strong and pure
>
> Sita, returns again and again-
> The same Agni worshipped by prostitutes in Bombay
> as they cleanse themselves, leaping
> over flames between customers -
> That Agni regurns again and again
> even for me. (*Brunizem* 80)

Bamboo, rose, neem and Agni and even Sita, are elements of a cultural construct which not only correspond to an identity but also register the integration that takes place between the identity and specificities of a culture or nation.

The problem of language, the search for the mother tongue can be attributed to the displacement of every diasporic creative writer, and Bhatt's method of handling this problem is meaningful. As noted by Mohanty:

> By placing the Gujarati words amid the flux of English words in the poem, Bhatt tries to give us a graphic picture of displacement. Secondly, she offers a resistance to the flow of language in English. Thirdly, she reveals her sense of rootedness or belongingness to her mother tongue. (Mohanty, 12)

The poem "Search for my Tongue", though 'clumsy' and 'contrived' (De Souza 71) in thought process, Bhatt argues in favour of her mother tongue through a series of images which are suggestive of the intimate linkage that the language can have

with the culture of the place. In other words, Bhatt amply suggests that one's mother tongue gets shaped by the water and air of the particular place and that language can operate meaningfully in a specific cultural context. As she says, her mother tongue is nurtured not by rock but by life-giving water as, "My tongue can only be/ where there is water" (*Brunizem* 64). Mohanty observes, the first section of the poem concludes with another image - an image which cannot be thought of or perceived in another language, and more particularly in English:

> There was little girl
> who carried a black clay pitcher on her head,
> who sold water at the train station.
> She fulled her brass cup with water,
> stretched out her arm to me,
> reached up to the window, up
> to me leaning out the window from the train,
> but I can't think of her in English. (*Brunizem* 65)

In fact, what Bhatt tries to do through this image is striking because the image is entirely native in its Indian essence and colour, but conveyed in a language that is not India's own. This language was rather initiated for dominating India. Bhatt here successfully depicts the ambivalent nature of the diasporic and postcolonial writer, keeping her own position at the centre of this experience or image.

In the second section of the poem, however, Bhatt's argument is more convincing because she tries to argue that displacement does not displace the mother tongue:

> Every time I think I've forgotten,
> I think I've lost the mother tongue,
> it blossoms out of my mouth. (66)

One cannot really spit out the mother tongue when one lives in a different country, using a different tongue. The second section

of the poem gets concluded with another striking image, the image of the mother singing in the kitchen, which nicely constructs the image of the home and the nation:

> (Ravindrasangeet gaati gaati)
> The monsoon sky giving rain
> all night, all day, lightning, the electricity
> goes out,
> we light the cotton wicks in butter :
> candles in brass.
> And my mother in the kitchen,
> My mother singing :
> I can't hear my mother in English. (68)

The poem ends with: "listen to the tablas, listen, (dha dhin, dhin dha ... dhinaka dhinaka dhin dhin)" (p.69). In the single poem Bhatt constructs the images of home, nation and celebrates the link of a language with the culture of a place. She began the poem with her search for the mother tongue but ends it with tabla recitals.

However, when Bhatt is not speaking of the problems of diaspora, she is altogether a different poet. In a poem like "Honeymoon" she comes out candidly, scathingly on the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law which is an eternal problem, certainly an acute one in India. When challenged by the will and "strength of patience" of a "beautiful" daughter-in-law, whom she got by "worship," the mother-in-law takes her sweet revenge on her daughter-in-law which is never to be forgotten:

> What great bitterness was it that made you decide your
> twelve-year-old daughter, my father's sister,
> had to accompany my parents on their honeymoon?
> ("Honeymoon")

Hurt, bewildered at this, now the bitter grand-daughter asks: "But I always wanted to know, grandmother, / what had you been denied?" The word 'what' in this context could mean so many things, so much, as the poet would have us like it, better not said. And to express this relationship, of power, of libidinal deprivation, Bhatt profusely uses the metaphor of the snake in this collection as she used the figure of monkey in her earlier collection *Monkey Shadows*.

Bhatt's personal history is thus a broken narrative, fragmented by post-colonial consciousness of which the poem "History is a Broken Narrative" is a record:

> History is a broken narrative
> pick a story and see where
> It will lead you.
> You take your language where you get it
> Or do you
> Get your language where you take it?
> I got mine in New Orleans.
> In New Orleans, when I was five
> A whole new alphabet to go with the new world.
> Afternoons my mother led me through our old
> alphabet -
> I felt as if the different scripts
> Belonged together I felt them raw,
> clotting together in my mind,
> Raw, itchy - the way skin begins to heal.
> Still I took my language from New Orleans,
> When I was five
> And then someone changed it :
> In an English convent school in Poona,
> Years later, the very old Miss Ghaswala
> Managed to change my New Orleans style.
> History is a broken narrative
> Where you make your language
> when you change it. ("History is a Broken Narrative")

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Of Gods and Other Demons

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Vulnerable Gods and Post-Godly Faiths: A Reading of Arun Kolatkar's Selected Poems

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The western part of Maharashtra is abode of gods. Religious places like Kolhapur, Jejuri, Pandharpur, etc are scattered all over the western and south-western part of Maharashtra. Religious trips to these religious places, organizing fairs, pledging *navas*, donating gifts, and seeking blessings for prosperity are some common practices followed by devotees of these deities. The people who share and follow conventional beliefs about Hindu religion, follow the rituals and customs related to the deities. Most of the times, they follow these customs almost unquestioned. Along with the spiritual faith the importance attached to the rituals and customs is so rigid that it rules out any doubt about the necessity or the basis of some of these customs. They become so important that they are understood to be sacrosanct and go unquestioned, often resulting in mechanical following of those customs. Although there is a parallel existence of Sant Sampraday and its literature, which tried since thirteenth century to rationalize the relationship between man and religion and between man and gods, there is enough space left to the middlemen to interpret religion. Due to this, a mostly superstitious understanding of religion and gods was preached, prevailed, strengthened and continued. Middle

classes gained access to the gods through religious instructions at home and community gathering. However, instead of having larger focus on the religious principles, the instruction centers itself on following and satisfying the individual gods. Individual gods and deities were enforced on the basis of their ability to do miracles in human life especially in the life of the devotees. This belief was also moralized and philosophized to give it wider acceptance, continuity and strength. Although the saints like Dnyaneshwar, Eknath, Namdeo, Muktabai, Chokhamela, etc. made efforts since thirteenth century to rationalize the existing religious beliefs, they couldn't erase the innate human temptation towards miraculous powers of deities. But it was not the only cause that bound man to miraculous powers of gods. Till the advent of British raj and its introduction of western education to masses, the ordinary population was largely illiterate. Economic vulnerability, occurrence of frequent waves of epidemics, and absence of modern health facilities also contributed to the strengthening of the view (read as superstition), propagated by the priestly classes that only miraculous power of the gods can save them from all sorts of dangers- diseases, poverty, and destitution. The remedy lies in unconditional surrendering to the authority of the gods. Evitable or inevitable, the gods assumed immanent place in the life of people. After independence and movement towards modernization of the Indian society, many prevalent concepts of our social life underwent radical change. Religious life was one of them. It also began to face the stress of modernization. The pressures of everyday life began to turn the modern man towards god to seek solace and fulfillment. This was not to happen as was supposed. The resultant depression led to skepticism. This situation led to two quite opposite trends in the society. On the one hand, there was strong skepticism about the religion and gods, and on the other there was strong superstitious strain gaining firm ground in today's uncertain and insecure world.

Man began to look towards religion as the only remedy and the gods as sole saviours. Simultaneously, the rational element in understanding the relation between humans and gods was also in the air. After primary wave of skepticism towards gods they also began to understand this relationship with a mature eye. In such a situation Arun Kolatkar' poems about gods reveal the latter mood. The selected poems reflect simultaneously wider superstitions among the people, strong skepticism among the people like him, and the rational understanding of the existence of the gods in human life. This paper focuses on Arun Kolatkar's views in this third phase where he transcends the skeptic's eye towards gods, sees their temporal existence with humanitarian eye, and realizes the similarity between man and gods.

I will analyze some of his poems to establish how he makes gods equally vulnerable, ordinary and commonplace. It will also show his ambiguous presence in Jejuri either as a devotee or a casual companion of another devotee. I will also examine the nature of human faiths in post-godly temporality.

"A Low Temple**"** begins with discovery of gods with a match box, and continues to explore each god with each match stick. Instead of the glow of the gods he notices the metal or wood which the god figure is made up of. Gods' coming to the light is also unusual:

> Amused bronze. Smiling stone. Unsurprised
> For a moment the length of a matchstick
> gesture after gesture revives and dies
> Stance after lost stance is found
> and lost again.

He could see a goddess only in the light of the skeptic match stick. It is skeptic because he sees her eighteen hands in the light. But for the priest she has eights hands (*ashta-bhuaja*). He comes out of the shrine and lights a cigarette. His experience in the

temple is ambiguous. It is not clear whether his exit from the temple relaxes him or he wants to relax just after the tiresome experience. The juxtaposition of religious with the material is underlined here vigorously. He sees the children playing on the tortoise carved in front of the temple. In the temples in Maharashtra a tortoise is carved in front of the main door and people pay their respect to the tortoise before entering the temple. But here, children in play seem to be indifferent of it. For them it becomes a toy. The whole experience renders gods as ordinary and commonplace entities, who are waiting in 'low' and 'dark' temples, to be discovered. They are also lonely and suffering from human neglect. They also require human help to see themselves. The awful devotion or mesmerizing experience is not felt by the poet.

In "Makarand" a very casual situation is portrayed wherein the poet's friend is supposed to do the Puja, so the poet asks him to go ahead for that. Nevertheless, he asks him to leave the matchbox behind so that he can smoke outside the temple. The presence of gods does not make any difference in his routine life. The immediate presence of gods or the very nearness of deities, which is supposed to create spiritual feelings in human beings, is somewhat absent here. For him going inside the temple is not very essential, neither the place is sacrosanct where he can't smoke.

In "Heart of Ruin" the poet sees god's dwelling amidst the ruin. He thinks, perhaps the god himself likes this dilapidated structure as it somehow protects him from the dogs looking out for the *'prasad,'* which is meant for him. He says, 'Maybe he likes a temple better this way.' A bitch finds the temple suitable for herself and her puppies. The temple here serves the purpose of shelter and protection for both the god and the animals. The bitch looks at the visitors angrily as they try to enter the temple. All

her puppies gather there and tumble over her. They stare at the visitors as the unwanted entrants at their protected places. They don't want any encroachment in their area. The ruined place prevents the visitors from entering that way. The poet concludes that the god may also like the ruin. Even the little puppy wields more power than the image of God; it terrorizes the little bee which has to fly to the old ruined collection box buried under the broken pillar. At the end he says that this place is no more considered suitable for worship because of its broken and ruined ambience. The usual sight of an orderly place with essence bearing sticks, flowers, and *prasad* is associated with the place for worship and not a dilapidated, dusty, and dirty place infested with dogs, puppies, and broken pillars. But here existentially it houses the image of the god and becomes the house of the god. Now through this unavoidable existential situation Arun Kolatkar poses a few unanswerable questions— whether the place is suitable for the worship of god or not as he says, 'no more a place of worship this place'? If people are interested in god should they be caring for the material physical conditions around Him? Why does the god keep Himself in the dilapidated condition? Does it mean that the bitch and her puppies are more close to the god than the devotee who evade entering the dirty premise of the temple?

"Scratch" portrays truly democratic, plural, and simpler understanding of god's existence. He sees there is a very thin line between a god and a stone in Jejuri. Every other stone here to him is either 'a god or his cousin'. The omnipresence of gods is thus existentially challenged. However, the tone never appears satirical. He seems very serious as he is also upset over the cheap trivialization of the whole idea. The terrain in Jejuri is barren and infertile otherwise. However it is fertile only for the 'crop of the gods'. He concludes that 'god is harvested here' for sale, advertisement, and earning mileage from. It clearly proves that the god is a crop, a commodity, which needs to be harvested by

man. It has the potential to be exploited twenty four hours a day and throughout the year. Transactions take place between the priests and the visitors regarding the access to gods and goddesses. The third stanza is actually an apt comment on how the legends are carved out around the gods, their power, and their miracles; and how these legends then become sacrosanct in revering the images of the gods without questioning the authorship and authenticity of those legends. 'A giant hunk' of rock is said to have been Khandoba's wife. A mark of a cut is said to be the scar on her body due to his sword. What is 'true' about this particular rock is 'generally' true about all such rocks and other elements. They all have assumed legendary status in the popular stories. Poet's skeptical eye makes a satirical comment on those legends, sources of those legends and the believers of those legends. But he doesn't directly engage himself actively in rejecting or rewriting those legends. Somehow he is convinced that however he tries to review or rewrite them they will crop up with much speed and the believers will soon surpass him.

"The Manohar" is another short poem taking a dig at the expectancy of a devotee who, while visiting the place like Jejuri expects every shed as temple. The temples are mixed with the ordinary places. The poet here removes the difference between a temple and a cowshed thereby making the temple and the inmates (Gods) very common and de-deified. Manohar peeps in through a door expecting that it was another temple in that place. He is not sure about the deity consecrated in the shed. Unsure he peeps in but to his surprise he finds it nothing but a cow shade. It suggests two things- similarity between the cowshed and the temple (cowshed elevated to the status of temple or temple reduced to the status of cowshed) as well as by visiting temples in succession the devotee began to expect temples all over the place and actually loosing the sense of differentiation between the place of reverence and a cowshed.

"Yeshwant Rao"

The poem begins with an enquiring question whether you are searching for god as though to ascertain that every person who is visiting Jejuri must be in search of God or he/she hasn't found the one in spite of struggling for a long time. The poet's answer that he knows a 'good one,' is purely utilitarian information. He is surely and definitely to be seen in Jejuri, whether the God you meet or not. He sits outside the temple, even outside of the wall among the tradesmen and lepers. So he sits among the common people. According to the poet he is different from the generally accepted image of gods. What he knows about the God is that they have pretty faces and they are nicely dressed. For the gods and the desire for getting the blessings of the gods people sacrifice the gold and precious things, which people actually strive for. Gods make their devotees to undertake miles of arduous journey. They are supposed to be the one who make women pregnant and end your enemy. Gods are supposed to advise you regarding the management and prosperity of property. If this be true then the gods are service providers, who in exchange of gold and your prayers and arduous labour do the services for you. In this sense they can be sued in case they fail to perform the desirable task. Gods are no more benevolent, kind, the mighty forgiver— instead the poet portrays them as normal human beings capable of getting angry, jealous, inimical, revengeful and flattered.

In all the poems just mentioned above the conventional significant place of gods in the hearts of devotees is almost absent. The special awful reverence for the gods is replaced by a very commonplace ordinary feeling about the gods. A conventional devotee's journey begins with the desire to pay gratitude to gods, who are supposed to be found in temples. The devotees are supposed to travel all the arduous journey on his/her own to

satisfy and convince his master in order to show his/her sincere devotion; he/she has to show readiness to sacrifice hard-won wealth and precious time; he/she has to be always meek, submissive, and humble and at the receiving end. God at the other end is supposed to receive his/her offerings, prayers, requests and sit for judging to grant him/her accordingly. This relationship is completely reversed in Kolatkar's Jejuri. Neither the devotee is conventionally meek, submissive, faithful, nor is the god awful, omnipotent, and giver. The gods are not questioned in the conventional model of faith. Though Kolatkar does not question directly the capacity of gods he definitely brings them truly existential level where they are made to jostle with humans, animals, and dilapidated pillars. This obviously goes beyond the mere modernist skepticism about the religion and gods as he rejects the simple difference between gods and humans. In fact he brings both of them on one plane and subjects both of them together to the onslaught of time. Sheer multitude of gods competes with the multitudes of devotees and yet no one conquers the other side.

> 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. ("Scratch")

It is clearly not the case of man versus god, but man as well his/her god which is subject to something far beyond both of them.

In almost all the poems referred to here, the poet's attitude towards gods is not at all merely questioning or denying their existence. In the discourse of faith or divinity, god's existence is not necessarily physical; it is spiritual, divine and mostly a felt one.

Their existence is not subject to everyday, temporal, and ordinary hassles. In the discourse of skepticism towards gods they are denied their spiritual, divine, and metaphysical existence; their existence and attributes are vehemently questioned and contested. The centrality of the universe towards gods, man's awe-inspired reverence to the gods, their ability to control the universe and man, and faithful acceptance of their arbitrary power over universe are all subject to criticism in the discourse of skepticism. However, this skepticism entails that there were prerequisites of power, faith, transcendentalism, divinity, and prophecy regarding the gods which were strongly propagated, believed and manipulated or perpetuated through variety of means. Strangely, all such prerequisites are not mentioned, even remotely, by the poet in almost all these poems. As if to show that those prerequisites never existed. It never appears that he is contesting any powerful positions wielded in gods by faith or belief, or continuous preaching. From the very beginning of these poems the gods are shown as ordinary, weak, vulnerable, common, and lusterless as human beings are. Human pursuit does not start or end with the gods. Gods are never shown as their destination. Though the poet goes to Jejuri on insistence on someone very near to him, probably his wife, friend or relative; we never find him either critical of the other person's devotion or faith nor do we see him engaged in the pursuit of gods. Rather he is indifferent towards the whole 'process' of finding gods. His discovery of gods' multiplicity or their being in the dilapidated state does not invoke anger, as a faithful person, or any happiness, being a skeptic. This clearly shows his disinterestedness and indifference towards his visit. He even seems not concerned about engaging with the idea of debating their existence.

Post-godly Faiths

He sees gods' existence similar to human beings— ordinary, weak, vulnerable, deprived of any superhuman powers. They, along with

human beings, are co-sufferers in this journey of life. They too have their enemies, fears, worries, and injuries. In fact the man is shown as the discoverer of gods when he says:

> You lend a match box to the priest.
> One by one the gods come to light. **(**A Low Temple**)**

Man and the god are subject to the vagaries of time, fate, and wear and tear of nature. They both are equals, and need sympathies of each other in their existence on the temporal earth. Somehow his portrayals of gods evoke sympathy and fellow-feeling towards gods; but surely not faith, reverence, and awe. His faith clearly transcends the gods and reaches out to something that encompasses humans including their physical existence and metaphysical beliefs. The conventional discourse of faith reduces man to the baser levels and considers him as contemptible, incomplete, and sinful; and considers him requiring gods' grace for salvation and material realization of his goals. On the other hand postmodernist skeptic discourse rejects all the conventional premises on which gods' authority is rested. Both these tendencies are extremes- one makes the human universe god-centric denying the human even a fair chance; while the other centers the universe on man (systematically forgetting that the origin and existence of gods lie in human mind), objecting the gods' omnipotent stature. Koltkar seems to moderate these two stands by rejecting each any authority over the other. In their pursuit of each other they find each other and understand the necessity of both. Man is made to see that true object of his/her faith is not the god but attaining larger feeling of sympathy towards everything in the universe. The confinement which he used to feel, probably due to his extension of faith up to gods only, is now removed. He begins to see towards the universe and its objects without making any distinctions among them on the basis of whether they possess any divine power or not. Newly acquired post-godly faiths are more humanitarian and universal.

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The Early Poetry of Keki N Daruwalla

SHIRSENDU MONDAL

A boat sails over my body:
on a river of solitude, a sailboat
with a cargo of sorrow.
I walk the octopus city, lost in the dark
Like an undersea shadow.
I hope there are people here who are not brooding
On sin-water, death water
And leper eating fish-water. (Vignette III)

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla's early poetry is recurrently concerned with a pervading morbidity about general human condition in an anxious time. The atmosphere of his verse is suffused with darkness, blood, curfew, gun-shot and the myriad phantasmagoric visions of gloom. When the setting is not explicitly violent and the gunshot is not heard; the gnawing worms of his disturbing lines still spill blood. Again and again remorselessly, with a heavy burden as it were, his verse sees through the unnerving reality hidden under the lofty construction of a myth. It is coupled with a distinctive hopelessness of perceiving individual about the anchorage of existence that had the promise of a soft, tender, little thing called love. The resultant universe that Daruwalla's poetry inhabits is one of a permanent void and uncertainty. This universe is taut and tense with anxiety as both the omniscient deities and the personal Gods have left

the scene for the prowling animals to romp about. In a wry, laconic narrative that clamps anger under the teeth to produce a controlled explosive dissection, Daruwalla appears to be a modern interpreter of maladies. A K Mehrotra discerns that Daruwalla's "writing, whether of hawks or men, from the frontlines of ancient history or from those more recent, returns to the same bleak truism again and again: an axe head lashed to a handle is no match for a copper axe with a shaft hole". (Mehrotra, 79)

The 60s and the 70s of the last century had been a period of protest and revolution globally. The old ideas, regimes and the politics of dispossession were questioned and resisted by the liberal radicals in a move to emancipate people. Given the intellectual currents of the time, engagement with the oppressive happening reality is expected to align the poet with a definitive politics. Almost in an unconscious reflexivity of the mind, the reader is prone to make out of Daruwalla's verse the sure footprints of a socially responsible verse. But interestingly, Daruwalla stops short of avowing the cause of any group of people or conforming to any intellectual-political creed of radical alteration of affairs. In an interview with Geeti Sen he clearly saw the problem of reacting to social ills as the function of poetry. Poetry should not be reduced to journalistic pieces and he implies that conveying social message is not the raison d' e2tre of poetry. But he has an important thing to add:

> For me, content has always been very important. In some poems, of course, you rely mostly on craft.... and then, somehow or the other, the passion has to come through—and I do hope, at least in some of these poems, the passion has come through; because if it didn't, then the poems would have been total failures. (Daruwalla & Sen)

On the contrary he may even appear to be a little conservative in tracing the dismal in terms of a general decadence, a crisis; rather than upholding a subject position castigating its opposite.

While a controlled sarcasm on the dominant and the powerful hardly eclipses his compassion and empathy for man, he chooses not to articulate any grand program for the marginal. Similarly, the shallow and tautological emphasis on the quality of journalistic reportage of his verse does not help understanding the power of Daruwalla. This reduces him to the level of those lesser poets whose images of the violent now end up in mere shock-tactics. Vilas Sarang would like to probe deeper than this:

> He brings alive the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night, *lath*i blows on cowering bodies, "the starch on your khaki back", soda bottles and acid bulbs waiting on the rooftops, press communique's. The contemporary Indian socio-political world—not merely of the city, but also of small town, village and the countryside—is portrayed with heavy strokes, laden with savage irony. (Sarang, 21)

Keki N Daruwalla's method instead is a relentless undermining of the manifest reality and subjecting it to a ruthless examination for aberration (Singh, 10). This method of debunking the myth is not meant to promote an alternative. It inevitably leads to the discovery of the still, sad center of human heart in the throes of deadly vulnerability. In an unsentimental dissection of the malaise, the poet keeps on destabilizing the validity of any construct of reality. The resultant void has been equated with the barren landscape of a 'modern' psyche that gets disjointed with the pervading decadence of the time. R. A. Singh, observing generally about Daruwalla's early poetry, finds "loneliness and pangs of separation" as the source of the crisis of identity for modern man. He finds darkness shaping the dominant voice of his verse:

> The rapport between man and man is missing because of the sense of alienation gripping us today….a sensitive writer finds himself utterly lonely. Darkness prevails everywhere and a modern man's life is marked by dark and deep fears. (Singh)

But the voice that speaks in the poems and the poetic voice that shapes it do not appear to be beaten down by the disappointing spectacle around. With a certain philosophic poise keeping an omniscient narrator's distance, they record the crumbling down of ideas and institutions. The voices guide the readers to the seamy underside of the scene, taking them to the truth as it were.

"Curfew in a Riot Torn City", one of the early poems from *Under Orion* undertakes a journey into the abyss of hatred exposed by a riot. The police and the rioter, the hunter and the hunted-each of them switching roles, are embroiled in a dismal conflict that ultimately boils down to a spread of rabid fear instead of seeing it curbed. In the guise of an anonymous speaker or a persona, the poet is giving voice to a general fear lurking within all of us (Swain, 171). While law and order has to be enforced on a world of fury and the "barracuda eyes" of the police van's headlight must be "searching for prey", the police find the job repulsive. It is the abominable recession of things human that makes them weary and scared to operate in the fateful town. Images of claustrophobia, revulsion, physical pain under adverse situation are all made to play upon the body and mind of the peace-keeping police personnel. And even while they open fire, more as defense than affront, they praise the lord that the bullet has not claimed a corpse. But they have to save themselves from the brickbats, soda bottles and acid bulbs often rained down from the rooftops of houses packed together in the "tumor growth" of the town. At the end of it all, the curfew trails a spreading riot and the "iron law" hopelessly gropes about means for contemning the menace. The town and its people as a palsied presence seething in fear, is now beyond any redemption as law contributes to the madness:

> You clamp the curfew on the outskirts now,
> On the outer fringe,
> The outward striae of this whorl of madness. ("Curfew…")

The iron law comes down again with unchallenged brutality in "Curfew 2". Against an unnamed adversary, the curfew this time suspends every human faculty, attempting to regulate the movements of the human brain as it were, with its imperious authority. But the brisk, lethal movement of the state-machinery can hardly screen its nervousness in overdoing the curfew as the counter-force has to be intimidated with the flourish of the show. The opposition withdraws to a strategic subterranean presence only to resurface at any opportune moment, because the crack-down clamped by the state machinery, cannot sustain such extreme embargo for long. In "Curfew2", the curfew is a metaphor for complete rupture and total siege brought about by extreme intolerance to any form of behavior that does not conform to the ways of the powerful. In this war of the mighty, the common man writhes in violent agony under the fearful clutches of an oppressive nightmare:

> One passion walls in another. We can't find out
> Who encircles whom, whether the killer urge
> Is within the prison or without.

And the way forward is equally bleak:

> A spiral of ghost-dust that disappears
> Into the suburbs of the sky. But the word
> Flies from a locked past to a lockjaw future,
> Like a trapped bird. ("Curfew 2")

At other times, Daruwalla's preoccupation with hunger, deprivation and dispossession expands the desolating spectacle of a predatory time. The consciousness of a modern poet is perennially clouded by the realization of the wretchedness of his

fellow men degraded by poverty, pestilence and a general sub-human living condition. The irony is ruthlessly incisive in suggesting how civilization crumbles down as the nation is held prisoner from within. The process of betrayal and undermining of people, in a sardonic tryst with destiny, is rampant in a modern India that thrives on profiteering, black-marketing and opportunist politics. People starve and the politics weave threads of hope with vacuous words. To the gaping hunger of an impoverished populace, the ideology and 'plan' of the political parties is as alien as worst possible incongruity. Starved people, irretrievably hurrying to death looms over the sky of his verse and the humanity goes down to an abyss of degeneration. He observes the processes of undermining with a disguised calmness and prods the onlooker to be vexed continually from the guilt of inaction. In "Collage 1" from *Under Orion,* Daruwalla's self-mockery presents an estimation of urban ills. He quizzically interjects that his horoscope is a failure as it does not feature the inflation, taxes, floor-crossing and black-marketing that so much govern life. He is sarcastic to add:

> If we had plague
> Camus style
> And doctors searched for the virus and vaccine
> There would be black-market in rats ("Collage 1")

The fear is not the least unfounded for the bizarre politics of hunger is played out against an emaciated landscape of people. In "Food and Words, Words and Food", the veteran leader's speech, ridiculed in a manner of Beckettian travesty; dishes out to the starving people empty political promise. The hypocrite urges people reject foreign food-grant on superfluous ideological ground while he remains silent on the ineffectuality of that ideology to feed. Betrayal of politics actually helps sustain the profiteers from whose octopus strangle there is no escape:

> If only the earth were edible
> we would have eaten it
> eaten the planet we live on
> but that would be only
> stalling for time.
> Within ten years
> they would be shipping earth to us. ("Food and Words")

Well, starvation appeared to be the destiny this time for the land was hit by an interminable period of draught. It left the animal and the vegetation completely parched. In "Calendar Starting with June" from "Hunger 74", the shrinking human figures mirror the charred and contracted landscape of nature outside. In Daruwalla's poetry hunger becomes an always-already phenomenon, a permanent condition of fateful humanity. Madhusudan Prasad comments:

> The effectiveness of these poems dealing with hunger consists in the elimination of specificity of context and reference, for these are set in that intangible zone where action, thought, feeling, and purpose are manifest not only in one particular place and time but everywhere and always. (Prasad, 154)

The metaphorical ribs of the earth overlap with the ribs of the human body and both are caving in for want of nourishment. The ribs are not encased by the least wrapping of flesh or skin. If there were skin:

> You could have used the rib-bowl
> To draw water from a well—
> Had there been water in the well

The evocation of a tortured apocalyptic close of civilization is encapsulated in the slow extermination of nature. The atmosphere is torn asunder by the shrieking of "coppersmith" bird reeling over the gulmohor tree that "coughs blood". Everything, except a stupid blind koel, knows that "death is round the corner".

But had it been entirely due to a caprice of weather in which human players had no role, the misery would be justified. While nature was hostile, their fellow beings made things worse. It is often the reality that the wildest form of vulnerability of one is exploited by the other as the most legitimate opportunity to take advantage of. Daruwalla observes the malign human intervention in the form of hoarding food grains, profiteering, government indifference and political hoodwinking. The "inner desert" trying to accommodate the "outer desert" has to negotiate with many monsters, not just the implacable and inscrutable working of nature. The two vignettes of "Notes" meant to be the crux of this forced destitution, may remind the reader of Eliot's or Baudelaire's cityscapes of squalor and dirt. In the first portrait a young woman with two children jumps into a well fearing the pain of prolonged starvation. Or was it more intolerable for her to see her children cry for food and droop and finally wither? The husband of this helpless mother had run away with the last meal. In the second portrait the protagonist sold everything that could fetch food. Now the problem is with the two starving daughters:

> There is no red-light area in the town
> where starving daughters can be sold.
> The river bank comes to the rescue,
> Its sand soft as volcanic ash. ("Notes")

But here the poet is not paying a mere lip service to their plight with a superficial pose of empathy. He is ruefully sick to watch how the state and its politics along with its privileged members cast a blind eye to the ills they created. It is like watching the monstrous coercion of the so-called democracy that treads on heaps of dead bodies to keep itself in place. In "Rhapsody on a Hungry Night" the poet wonders during a journey through parts of famine-stricken India if he were in some place of Sahara. The

arid hunger-torn landscape is then conflated with the aridity of words exchanged by the opposing political ideologues that do not waste words about the immediacy of having food. If one side gives a clarion-call for a lofty programme of revolution, the other side demolishes the "Plan" and sees "foreign hand in all this". And the democratic government decides to send armed force to quell food-riots, wishfully forgetting that the agitators wanted a little rice, not the bullets:

> Cables are flashed from the outposts
> 'Food riots! Send Rice Specials at once'
> From the capital the word bounces back
> 'Despatching armed police instead.' ("Jottings")

At the bottom of it, the receiver is the same wretched, pitiful and cruelly vulnerable common man upon whose corpses are built castles of air. But it is difficult to be philosophic when survival itself is made

immeasurably painful. The poetic voice attempts to identify itself with them and finds that they struggle with many antagonists:

> This is it
> The last summer of our despair,
> The inner desert shuffling across
> With skeleton arms
> To meet the outer desert. (3 "Hunger 74")

The sacred water of the river Ganga, the consecrated water of blissful streams caressing the holy temples of a pristine city reflects the fiery red of unreclaimed death all around. Even religion or at least an unflinching faith in a probable redemption would have been an oasis in the desert of hopelessness. But the speaker wonders if this holy place of gloom is further debased than Purgatory, "beyond the reach of pity?" "Nightscape" from the

Crossing of Rivers (1976) is proof to this strangely tumultuous mood that uses violent images to challenge the piety of religion. Votive lights are stunted in the thick fog as animals are clamped with muzzles so that they are made incapable to wreak havoc. The lights then smudge and blur on the frosted window to resemble bloodstains. Temples immersed in carbon soot and smog; battle to overcome their sterility to sanctify. The city appears to be closeted in a bizarre mimicry of solemnity that had been its glory in the past. At present it is "… a city in meditation/ brooding over a ghostscape". The poem "Dawn" is all about the images and silhouettes seen at the break of the day on the Ganges. The images are described as contused, distorted and are suffering under the load of some moribund rituals as:

> A frayed anchorite walks
> Like a fossil saint
> Who has crawled out
> From the sediments of time. ("Dawn")

"Vignette I" continues in the same vein pouring over more images of squalor and slow debilitating death. The sun shines as "some fiery despair", lepers huddle like "stunted shrubs", and a dwarf "cavorts ape-like" in this "desert of human lives". The mighty yet munificent river however continues to flow in sad contrast to the misery of devout believers. Inevitably, the city of Varanasi- a hallowed site of ablution and rejuvenation, professing mystic power of healing; turns into a huge crematorium of suspect sacramental potency. In an atmosphere of "spider-thread ritual here" ("VignetteII"), the routinised mechanism of dazed belief cannot redeem the city turning into "a bas-relief of death" ("Death Vignette").

The landscape of death and despair rapidly propagates. The mind of the poet sees it engulfing other cities where war, genocide and torture block the genial current of human soul. The

disillusioned mind wishes to take a flight to a place of quiet from "the wet lick of the city's fiery tongue". He is denied that transcendence as he knows by now that every city is groaning in delirium under severe pain:

> At dawn everywhere the radios crackle with death,
> the newspaper drip with bile and acid.
> Somewhere a flag of blood
> Rise on a coup-stricken capital.
> The white flags fly at half-mast.
> The pulse of life itself throbs at a half-beat. ("VignetteIII")

The imagination comes to a full circle. A sense of crumbling down of the world and its vestiges permeates Daruwalla's poetic landscape like a stream of consciousness. It is this despondency and the attendant penchant for a lost radiance and euphoria that the poet comes to review time and again. At the water-front, hoping against hope, he allows himself to be momentarily transformed as that "Someone who hears the white-flowered surf/ someone who hears the wind in the palm fronds/and under the ocean murmur/ reaches for the shells of his childhood. ("VignetteIII")

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9

"More faith in Honest Doubt"— Sensuality, Religiosity and More: A Critical Analysis of Nissim Ezekiel's *Latter-Day Psalms*

JOY MUKHERJEE

Bruce King in *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, relates the process of decolonization of perception in the once colonized countries to the evolution of Indian English poetry. It evolved from European domination to acquire an independent, nationalist character of its own (King, 110). It will be unanimously accepted that pre-independence Indian English poetry was chiefly an imitation of European literary tradition and post-independence authors were striving to build up a national character of Indian English literature. It is true to say that Henry Derozio's *Poems* inaugurated the journey of a new genre of Indian English literature, but simultaneously it is also to be accepted that the same form was enriched by mainly imitative works of European literature in the few following decades. When in 1962 Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky visited India, they found Indian English verse still to be old-fashioned and largely imitative of British verse and Indian poets failing to have their own voice (Dulai, 181). But despite increasing efforts of adapting this genre to a national atmosphere by incorporating local themes and diction, excessive concern with aesthetic matters greatly delayed

the emergence of a purely Indian English poetry. The growth of Indian English verse from its infancy in the pre-independence and post-independence eras in the hands of such figures as Kashi Prasad Ghose, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Aru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chottapadhya and Sarojini Naidu into its maturity in the post 1980s in the able hands of Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan and Nissim Ezekiel among others, is the story of amazing struggle and success.

The true flavour of Indian English verse began to be felt in the 1950s and 1960s when the poets started shifting the centre of attention from foreign convention, idiom and aesthetics, to themselves—by selecting their material from their own experience. The vision shifted from "a generalized, stereotyped India" (King, 112) to a personal, individualized India. One of the major personalities making this transition possible was Nissim Ezekiel, while among others were Dom Moraes, Srinivas Rayaprol and P. Lal. The shift from an idealized, romanticized and sentimentalized Indian background, presented chiefly in a borrowed English diction, to the India of an everyday commonplace reality in a seemingly colloquial language or what is commonly called 'swadeshi angrezi', also was made possible by Ezekiel, and, among others, by Ramanujan, Gieve Patel and Kamala Das. Unlike his predecessors, Ezekiel refrained from going to an alien culture and convention for the sake of composing his poetry, but stuck himself to native tradition. Thus he confidently claimed, "a man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India" (Pandey, 28). So his poetry can be defined in his own language as "The music Indian and the language English" (*CP*, 232), just what Raja Rao describes in the preface of his novel *Kanthapura* (Rao, vii-viii). Ezekiel's famous "Very Indian Poems in Indian English" uses English that is shaped in the mould of Indian culture. Far from being a simple

satire on the use of Indian-English, this language is, as John Thieme writes in the Introduction to the *Collected Poems*, "a serious attempt to probe the nuances of a language being shaped in the interstices of culture." (*CP*, xxx)

The recognition of English as one of the Indian languages by the Sahitya Akademi in 1960 was a boost for the Indian English writing, and Indian English poetry also saw a jostle of literary activities in the same decade. Jayanta Mahapatra's *Relationship* was the first book of Indian English poetry to win the Sahitya Akademi award in 1981, while Ezekiel's *Latter-Day Psalms* was the second. Herein lies the importance of Ezekiel's volume. The poetic career of this Padma Shri awardee has been described as a journey—an 'unfinished man' in search of an 'exact name'. Satyanarain Singh calls Ezekiel "a pilgrim with a sense of commitment" whose poetry is "a metaphoric journey to the heart of existence" (Raghu, 78). The journey that began with *A Time to Change* (1952) culminates in *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982)—the volume memorable for being the final product of an evolving genius, and also as the religious exercise of an atheist. The volume, however, is not only about religion or spirituality, which Nissim Ezekiel is altogether incapable, as he himself confesses: "If I write a religious poem, the next poem is likely to be very secular, skeptical I attach a great deal of importance to the worldliness of the world, its independence" (Beston, 89 and also quoted in Pandey, 17). This "worldliness of the world" is expressed through his ripe inference of experience.

As a man of literature who pioneered the advent of modernism in Indian English poetry, Nissim Ezekiel has a number of themes to write about: urban life, sexuality, alienation, religion etc. (Dominic, K.V.). A rejecter of "tradition", as he always has been, Ezekiel's approach to religion is quite unconventional. Despite his Jewish background, he may not

appear to be a *religious* person in the conventional sense. His beliefs in God have undergone a number of changes, as points out A. Raghu (Raghu, 77-81). From an orthodox theist in the Jewish lines, he ceased to have faith in his forefathers' God when he came in touch with a number of nineteenth century anti-religious literature at the age of about eighteen. He wrote, "I believed that there was no God, no future life, that morality was man-made" (Durant, 404 and quoted in Raghu, 77). He went on to join the Rationalist Association of India and took up his pen to disseminate atheism. His rapid change from belief to non-belief may be compared to the similar transformation that took place in Nietzsche in just about the same age, as observes Will Durant (Durant, 404 and quoted in Raghu, 77). The re-transformation was partially a result of the philosophy course at London and partially of an exercise with taking drug in New York that gave him highly surrealistic visions. He permanently returned to theism, though often making scathing comments on the nature of God and religion. In spite of all the oscillations in his belief, there has always been a definite trend towards religion in him. Ramakrishna says, "As for Eliot and most moderns like him, for Ezekiel too the religious element in literature reveals the writer's moral concerns" (Ramakrishna, 21 and quoted in Dominic). He is a religious humanist, as he confesses in an interview with Inder Nath Kher:

> "I am not religious or even a moral persona in any conventional sense. Yet, I've always felt myself to be religious and moral in some sense. The gap between these two statements is the essential sphere of my poetry." (Hasan)

The poems in *Latter-Day Psalms* demonstrate a wide variety of themes and tones, though the focus remains on the theme of religion, as Ezekiel does in the previous volume *Hymns in Darkness*. In his well known essay "Poetrey as Knowledge" he differentiates

between theoreticians and the poets saying that the poet must "insist on the integrity, the uniqueness, the primacy of his experience in poetry, which is the experience, so to speak of being on fire and not the experience of studying the flame that has cooled down" (*CP*, xxii). The poems in the *Psalms*, grouped under twelve titles are products of his own experience acquired in different segments of life.

The element of spirituality has been visible in Ezekiel from the very beginning. In his first volume *A Time to Change* (1952) we find such a desire as, "To move into another state, ineluctably, like death. Perfection in the flow of consciousness, like love" (*CP*, 34). Even in the midst of the busy city life with 'shops, cinemas and business houses', 'people', 'evening papers' and 'tube stations', he expresses his realization that high spiritual consciousness is a matter that defies question:

> "How? I asked.
> And realised suddenly that it is necessary not to ask certain questions." (*CP*, 35)

But the problem-ridden common man, fumbling in vain for a path of firm faith, often resorts to the solace of a 'guru' or guide-cum-counsellor on religious and moral matters. Such a situation comes in the first poem of *Latter-Day Psalms* "Counsel" that Ezekiel described as a found poem (*CP*, xxxii). In this poem the poet records the one-way answer of a two-way conversation, with the guru giving a series of answers to supposed questions of an understood dramatic persona. The task on the part of a modern reader is not a difficult one as he himself is supposed questioner. The guru, Shri Hariji's reply builds up the series of counsels on the morality and religiosity of common man:

> "Whether you believe or not
> Think as if you do.
> Stop the blind effort,

Ask yourself what you need.
Success at the moment
Is not in your interest.

Turn to silence, nothingness.
Where you are
Is where you have to be." (CP, 229)

Ezekiel's realisation about the nature of God reminds us, as A. Raghu observes, of Medeleine's final 'understanding' of Rama's recitation of verses from Bhavabuti's *Uttara Rama Charita* in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's description of the nature of God from the Upanishad: "When asked to define the nature of God, the seer of the Upanishad sat silent, and when pressed to answer exclaimed that the Absolute is silence : *santo yam atma.* The mystery of the divine reality eludes the machinery of speech and symbol." (Radhakrishnan, 19, quoted in Raghu) The poet goes on to advise: "Grasp your folly / and you grasp your self', "Do without, be absent, / Keep the eyes closed. / Keep the mind steady", and paradoxically tends to highlight the nature of spiritual illumination: "No vision, except in darkness."

The picture of poverty in India turning itself into a commodity and focus of attraction to the foreigner's eye and the foreigner's wonder at the apparent innocence of a child-beggar's smile comes up as the theme of "Poverty Poem". The picture of almost Wordsworthian innocence of childhood, built up through the lady's description of the child-beggar, is satirically broken by the narrator's realisation of a harsh truth:

"She didn't know beggars in India
smile only at white foreigners." (*CP*, 231)

The poet seems to be well aware of the ailment of modern man wanting 'Sex', 'Meat and drink' as well as salvation, and the

opportunist healers' making business out of their self-contradictory desire. Thus "Healers", after its Eliotic beginning—"The unplanned city has a death-wish"—goes on to advise prophetically

> "Know your *mantra*, medidate,
> release your *kundalini*,
> get your *shakti* awakening
> and float with the spirit
> to your destination." (*CP*, 232)

Critics like Bruce King (King, 92ff), M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan (Naik and Narayan, 142) and Rajeev Patke (Patke, 248) have observed that the dominant tone of Ezekiel's poetry is ironic scepticism (*CP*, xxi). *Latter-Day Psalms*, as Bijay Kumar Das says (Das, 7), is rich in "Paradox, irony and anti-thesis", and the use of anti-thesis is finely demonstrated in "Hangover". The whole poem is built up on the anti-thesis between the vision of two opposing Indias—the rich, anglophile, aristocratic, midnight-reveling India of Taj hotel and the outside real-life India with its sordid pictures of political turmoil and poverty. The antithetical contrasts growing up in the first part of the poem between the red-coated waiters of Harbour Hall and the red-light district dancer of Apollo Room, the foreigner and the foreign-returned, the see-through dress and the show-nothing saree, the five-children local family and the one-child American family lead to show the irony of this existence drinking imported whiskey mixed with Indian soda. The outside reality come up in the second part as the poetic persona faces taxi strike on the road and has to walk to Churchgate station passing the pavement sleepers on the way, and has to catch the last train to Borivli with two blind beggars as co-passengers. So the hazy vision of the next day is not only a product of the previous day drinking and smoking of an unaccustomed person, but also from the contrast embedded in

the two sorts of existence in the same country: "Half the day hazy with previous night."

Nissim Ezekiel is accepted to be the pioneer of modernism in Indian English poetry and A.N. Dwivedi calls him "the perfect barometer of modern India's literary atmosphere" (Dwivedi, 432). Ezekiel's use of symbolism and imagery is one of the chief factors behind this claim of modernism for his poetry. "Warning: Two Sonnets" displays his brilliance in handling of imagery. Here we encounter such striking images as "The cross he carries to no crucifixion / is merely middle age" and "Counterfeiters / caught by critic-cops at dead of night." In the first phrase middle age is compared to the 'cross' while in the second, the pseudo poets are called 'counterfeiters' who are caught red-handed by cop like critics for deceiving the readers with their trash creations (Dwivedi, 433). The poems are written on the predicament of a poet who cannot find proper images and is haunted by them on the subconscious level. Plain language will lower his position. His friendly neighbours are easily impressed by his efforts, but never wholly taken in by his words. The ultimate truth as understood by the people is "the sage is probably a clown." Again, warning is issued to the aspirant poets against influencing customers, i.e. their readers with cheap poetic creations because "customers/ are shrewd" but to sense their discontent. Such a practice is a kind of cheating, not with money but with words. The wisdom of Ezekiel's final advice to the would-be poets is the product of his ripe inference:

> "Come, confess, and do not talk of God.
> Your vanity is not as wretched as your style." (*CP*, 234)

Nissim Ezekiel refers to his Jewish consciousness and the certainty of his Jewish identity repeatedly in his writings, but he does not talk explicitly about his Jewish life, opines Paul Morris (Morris). But in his unique poem "Jewish Wedding in Bombay",

he uses the experience of his marriage happening in 'Mosaic Law' as the material so candidly that the readers are shocked to recognize their own feelings reflected in the poem. With a peculiar indifference the minutes of the wedding are narrated in the hope that it would offer release from the orthodox rituals. The poet seeks a balance between the existential involvement and the intellectual quest of a man engaged in a progressive journey and hankering to reach out to future destinations, thinks Mithilesh K. Pandey (Pandey, 11). The conflict between romance and reality in life is highlighted through the antithetical co-existence of the ceremonious wedding and its sordid consummation on a floor-mattress in the kitchen of the bride's house, a consummation for which they repent at a later time:

> "During our first serious marriage quarrel she said Why did you take my virginity from me? I would gladly have returned it, but not one of the books I had read instructed me how."
> (*CP*, 235)

The half serious and half satirical tone is noteworthy.

The same Jewish identity of the poet comes back in a more serious tone in "Minority Poem". Ezekiel has always been haunted by his sense of alienation at being a Jew in a Hindu and Muslim dominated country. In "Background Casually" he expresses his fear of the Hindu and Muslim boys who accused him of "killing the Christ" (*CP*, 179). The same sense of alienation and separateness becomes the subject matter of "Minority Poem". Here he tries to clarify his position before his 'invisible guests', though they leave him with 'inscrutable faces' and do not leave their 'amiable ways' (*CP*, 236). He has love for the alien gods and understands that it is only the language that makes him a natural outsider, but he knows that in spite of the same difference in language the countrymen do not fail to understand Mother Teresa. The ultimate truth that for the union of different cultures

and religions it is not necessary to know each other's mythology or marriage customs, but the desire for self-sacrifice should be there. But his 'guests' remain "uneasy /orphan of their racial / memories" (*CP*, 237) and go on observing while the city burns in the fire of hatred.

The three "Very Indian Poems in Indian English"—"The Patriot", "The Professor" and "Irani Restaurant Instructions"—are not only memorable for the use of an Indian English, spoken especially by the Gujratis and Sindhris, but also for Ezekiel's characteristic use of the devices of humour, irony and satire. These poems are highly evocative and enjoyable, as observes Bijay Kumar Das (Das, 7). "The Patriot" is a satire on an Indian politician who claims to be a patriot and bangs his own drum in the hope to get audience and recognition, though he knows well that he is actually talking to himself. He imitates a foreign tongue (though wrongly) before an auditor who is superior to him in the knowledge of English. The use of wrong English by the poetic persona is mocked at though he tries to impress his auditor by showing his acquaintance with *The Times of India* to 'improve (his) English Language' and Shakespeare. He is preaching a gospel which he himself hardly understands or believes in. He is shown greatly worried at the violence taking place inside as well as outside the country and so advising everyone to follow the path of Mahatma Gandhi. In a mock-seriousness in the manner of Brutus he gives us advice but the co-existence of high-flown ideas and sordid everyday thoughts makes the speech highly ludicrous:

> "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I am saying
> (To myself)
> Lend me the ears.
> Everything is coming—
> Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception." (*CP,* 238)

He is making men dream of the Ram Rajya (the kingdom of Lord Rama) though his bored audience soon departs. But with earnest hope he invites them once again:

> "You are going?
> But you will visit again
> Any time, any day,
> I am not believing in ceremony.
> Always I am enjoying your company."

The speaker is seen eager to have the company of his auditor, though the latter departs abruptly as he must have better things to do than listening to the monologue in Indian English (Raghu, 74).

The next poem, "The Professor" uses a dramatic persona of one Professor Sheth, who says proudly of his settled children as well as of his eleven grandchildren, though he well knows that "These are days of family planning" and also that

> "We have to change with times.
> Whole world is changing. In India also
> We are keeping up. Our progress is progressing.
> Old values are going, new values are coming.
> Everything is happening with leaps and bounds." (CP, 239)

This persona is shown to be stuck between the 'old values' and the 'new values'. This old man "living just on opposite house's backside" with "usual aches and pains", is not only a funny figure, but also a hypocrite and ill-mannered man who does not invite his former students to get in, though they are obviously standing very close by his house. Ayyappa Paniker says that Ezekiel started the poems with the intention of mocking at the users of Indian English, but at the end cannot withhold his sympathy for the poetic personae (Raghu, 73).

William Walsh finds light and bantering exercise of near mathematical skill in exact reproduction of tone, idiom and voice in the "Very Indian Poems in Indian English" which are "gleefully comic" but "Unpatronising" (Pandey, 11). Another poem in this group "Irani Restaurant Instructions" displays the same skill in the reproduction of typical Indian English language with its too much use of present continuous tense—"Hair is spoiling floor" and "Our waiter is reporting."

Walter Tonetto and Enrique Martinez comments, "within the economy of Ezekiel's language there spins a commitment to humanity that keeps the reading alive, nurturing it from deep sources" (Raghu, 81). This concern for humanity is expressed in a pseudo-detached mood in "Undertrial Prisoners", the first of the "Songs for Nandu Bhende". The undertrial poor prisoners suffering in the Indian jails with uncertain crimes are sympathized with while the ambiguous nature of law is mocked at:

> "Thousands like him
> who did something wrong
> five years ago or may be ten
> they don't know when
> they were offered bail
> but didn't have the money
> so they live in jail." (*CP* 241)

In the detached tone of the lines there is a deep sense of irony and satire.

The next poem "Song to be Shouted Out" portrays the usual quarrel between a husband and his wife, with the wife attacking him with a series of questions whenever he returns home at the evening:

> "I come home in the evening
> and my wife shouts at me:
> Did you post that letter?

Did you make that telephone call?
Did you pay that bill?
What do you do all day?" (*CP*, 241)

Here we get the picture of a wretched husband and a dominating wife and the final outburst of the meek husband:

"It's good for my soul
to be shouted at.
Shout at me, woman!
What else are wives for?" (*CP*, 242)

The dialogue between the married couple is treated in a half-serious, ironical way with the termagant being subjected to the poet's satire.

The different meanings of the word 'touch' are used to frame the poem "Touching": "This is a song/ about touching and touching", the poet declares at the very outset. But the social nature of man is highlighted in the course of the light tone: "How can we live / without touching and being touched?" But the real significance of the subject-matter under discussion is given in the following lines:

"Touching is an art
it's the movement
to and from the heart." (*CP* 242)

In a simple, conversational tone Nissim Ezekiel has held up the ailment in the modern 'rootless' man in the fourth of the "Songs for Nandu Bhende". The cry, "All of us are sick, Sir" is climaxed by the speaker's desperate call for a 'Psy—chi—a—trist!' (*CP*, 243). The modern man is actually suffering from the disease of rootlessness and the situation made man try various spiritual paths:

"Time is ripe for Sai Baba.
Time is ripe for Muktananda.
Let father go to Rajneesh Ashram.
Let mother go to Gita classes.
What we need is meditation.
Need to find our roots." (*CP*, 243)

The source of the problem, however, lies in man's solitary existence, the proliferation of nuclear families.

As Makarand R. Paranjape thinks, "Very Indian Poems in Indian English," "Songs for Nandu Bhende" and "Postcard Poems" are, in fact, about the politics not of aloofness, but of belonging. They combine humour, pathos, satire, and laughter to demonstrate a poetics of compassion and empathy (Paranjape). Ezekiel's small observations on life are reflected in the small space of the "Postcard Poems". He may be in a dilemma between the choices of sanity and insanity, can feel the need of sustenance "by voices, by hands, / by the human need / to hear new messages" (*CP*, 244) and can be afflicted by his own furies which "Neither as enemies /nor as friends" (*CP*, 245) leaves him alone.

"Nudes 1978" is one of the most celebrated of Ezekiel's poems. It shows the poet's open likeness for sensual themes, in contrast to the traditional approach found in the earlier Indian English poets. As a modern poet he is very alive to the call of the flesh. Iyenger says, "The poet is painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, its disturbing filiations with the mind" (Pandey, 15). Ezekiel stands with W.B. Yeats in the "profane perfection of mankind" in which sense and spirit are fully and harmoniously exploited, believes Bijay Kr. Das (Das, 7). The poem combines satire, sensuousness and eroticism while celebrating the pleasure of nudity, of "naked seen, seeing nakedness", and the pleasure is doubled by the nakedness of his partner. But still, his desire has an aesthetic basis:

"The body has a name,
or the name has a body.
It is not the subject of my love
but a form, an art
in which I am absorbed." (*CP* 245)

But the woman presented here is highly sensual who can say without inhibition "I love undressing" or give her lover lessons on the art of kissing and at the same time can declare without any touch of emotion or sentimentality "you're hardly/my cup of tea." Anisur Rahman considers her to be a symbol of "mean passion, earthly corruption and defilement." (Pandey, 15) The copulation, therefore, is just a game of bodies for the lovers as they remain absorbed in "this hunger-making paradise." (*CP* 247) Ezekiel has found out the melody of sensuality, a unique feeling that stands by itself:

"You touch it, smell it, give yourself
to every movement, every stressed
and unstressed syllable that sounds,
resounds in this nude-body-mood." (*CP* 247)

The mosaic of pictures complied under the title "Nudes" holds up the position that lust has taken up in the modern society, something like Eliot did in "The Wasteland". But Ezekiel shows the process in which "love of art" ripens into "art of love". He sees how "this most unreal flesh/obstinately fills the soul" (*CP* 249). The man-woman intercourse is also a sacramental ritual which transmutes the physical into the spiritual, the gross earthly into a supramundane experience:

"for a moment only,
it seemed an illusion—
not the sexual bit
absorbed in itself,
but everything,
life on earth, the cosmos,

even the spirit of God
in the void, and the void."

Among other qualities, *Latter-Day Psalms* demonstrate Nissim Ezekiel's excellent artistic power. His passages are highly evocative, using to the full the devices of imagery and symbolism. As A.N Dwivedi finds, in "Nudes" we find such images as the following that transfers the human psyche to the objects in nature almost in a Wordsworthian spirit (Dwivedi, 433), yet convey the high sensuousness:

"Hills, valleys, swelling river-banks,
all those landscape images;
praise of breasts and buttocks
seen as fruit, thighs as tree-trunks…" (*CP* 249)

God and spirituality have always occupied places of prominence in Ezekiel's poetry and it is his preoccupation with the theme of religion that has added some extra feathers to his writings. His complex attitude towards God reflects a modern man's vacillation of belief in everyday life. As A. Raghu recounts, God is ever present in Ezekiel; sometimes his God is the Judeo-Christian "Lord" and more often, simply "God", but He is never the Omnipotent (Raghu, 76). Even as an atheist he does not deny the existence of God, but highlights his non-benevolent nature:

"He
made Hitler and Stalin.
He
made the Inquisition.
He
Made the Holocaust." (*CP* 287-8)

While Nissim Ezekiel has drawn on the Vedic hymns in his *Hymns in Darkness*, he continues to draw on the *Book of Psalms* in "Latter-Day Psalms". John Thieme notes that (*CP*, xxxvii) here "Urban

experience, understated accounts of love affairs and wry social observation are replaced by a dialogue with spiritual genres, but Ezekiel's response to the Sanskrit and Judaic originals on which he draws is as skeptical as anything in his earlier poetry." The idea of the "Latter-Day Psalms" came to Ezekiel when he went to attend Rotterdam Poetry Festival in 1978. Having no other material to read in the hotel room, he took up a Gideon Bible, as describes his biographer R. Raj (*Nissim Ezekiel: The Authorised Biography*, p.246; cited in Naik and Narayan, *Indian English Literature, 1980-2000*, p. 142 and in John Thieme, "Introduction", *Nissim Ezekiel: Complete Poems*, p. xxxvii) and found a source for a new type of poetry in the Psalms. But the *Old Testament* psalms have been refashioned to meet the contemporary concerns. The poems essentially personify a modern man's response to orthodox religion and morality.

From the 150 psalms in the Bible, Ezekiel has chosen only nine psalms—corresponding to numbers 1, 3, 8, 23, 60, 78, 95, 102 and 127—while providing his final observation in the tenth psalm. In an interview Ezekiel has revealed the atmosphere of this creation:

> "I think I realised suddenly that I had never accepted the Psalms, and this crystallised into an answer to the first one. Within ten minutes I'd written the first Latter-Day Psalm and formed the idea of writing ten. I completed nine Latter-Day Psalms in Rotterdam (June 78). The tenth is a commentary on the other nine" (Dwivedi, 433).

In these poems Ezekiel makes a rapprochement with the Judaic psalms, but after he has made personal appropriation of the psalmist's words. His attitude here reflects a modern man's scepticism regarding the promise of security in orthodox religion. In the first verse the assertion of Psalm 1 is transformed into negative. "Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel

of the wicked / nor stand in the way of sinners" (Psalm 1) becomes "Blessed is the man that walketh / not in the counsel of the con-/ventional, and is at home with/ sin as with a wife." The sense of meditation on Yahweh's law is replaced by delight in action. The contemporary situation of the poet is very different from the situation of the psalmist who could live in full grace of God. The poet lives in full awareness of sin and its perpetual existence: "the way of the ungodly shall ne-/ver perish on the earth." But he does not seek to escape from the world by means of spiritual transcendence. He rather shows a deep sense of commitment through his action.

Contrary to the spirit of Psalm 3 of the Bible where salvation is sought for only the people of Yahweh, Nissim Ezekiel in the second verse of the "Latter-Day Psalms" asserts that God's blessing is for the whole mankind:

> "Salvation belongeth unto the
> Lord. It is not through
> One or other Church.
> Thy blessing is upon
> all the people of the earth."

While acknowledging the position of glory and honour as well as the dominion over the animal world on land, in the air and in the water that man has been bestowed with, the poet in the next verse puts in question man's utilization of his supremacy. Verse IV which is a recreation of Psalm 23, converts the psalmist's firm faith in God—"Yahweh is my Shepherd" and "I shall lack nothing"—into interrogations: "Is the Lord my Shepherd?" and "Shall I not want?" (*CP* 255) The idyllic life is rejected for a life full of work. But most importantly, the poet omits all reference to God as he says: "I walk the path of self-/righteousness" instead of "He (God) leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" as found in Psalm 23. The "cup that runneth over"

is declined and it is stated that mere assurance of God's grace does not ensure freedom from all fear: "I *do* fear evil", says the poet. This is a modern man's sceptic attitude to orthodox religion. As Mithilesh K. Pandey says, here "Ezekiel is continually trying to restructure his relationship with the spiritual and the phenomenal world" (Pandey, 15).

A beautiful reformation of an ancient theme is made in the fifth verse which is a retelling of Psalm 60 from a modern point of view. The problem of Israel in dealing with the external enemies is related to the modern problem of co-existence between neighbouring countries: "where shall/ we live in peace with our/ enemies?" (*CP* 256). The psalmist's supreme faith in God's grace is subjected to severe doubt:

> "Did none pray who was ca-
> ught in the Holocaust?
> It is nowhere said by King
> David that God is on the
> side of big battalions." (*CP* 256)

Ezekiel's remaking of the spirit of Psalm 78 is more astounding in *Latter-Day Psalms*. A call is issued for the listeners to give ear to the new parables, because the old ones are no longer feasible, Ezekiel seems to say in the next verse. God's marvels in ancient Israel can hardly satisfy a modern disciple, so the poet craves to listen to the marvellous things in Nazi Germany. Parallelism is drawn between the situation in ancient Israel when the 'chosen seeds' of God were going astray from the path of holiness and the modern scenario with man willfully choosing the path of sin "Even with manna in our mouths." (*CP* 257) For this disobedience to God's testimony, man is punished by His wrath:

> "for this, the fire con-
> summed our young men. For
> this our maidens were not
> given in marriage." (*CP* 257)

Yet the poet still says categorically that the testimony "*cannot* / be kept" (emphasis mine). It is, however, neither God, nor man who is to be blamed for such a situation.

The essence of Psalm 95 is openly mocked at in a spirit of utter disbelief in Verse VII. A reference to the title of the collection is made in the poet's call for making "a different noise with / Latter-Day Psalms." (*CP* 258) The psalmist's utter theistic words "We are the people of his pasture / and the sheep in his care" are turned into sheer mockery with "Baa Baa Black / Sheep." The unitary faith in God of Judaism is given a utilitarian basis: "It saves time to worship / One than many." The effort of man to tempt and test God's power is no doubt "sheer folly", but the works of the forefathers have also been exaggerated by the psalmist of the Old Testament, believes the poet. In the next verse, the poet expresses his faith in that God "who regards / the prayer of the destitute, / who hears the groaning of the / prisoner and of those who are / appointed to death." (*CP* 259) Instead of the various facades of the universe, the poet insists upon the change in him: "I wax old as a garment; / as a vesture I am changed." But most importantly, he is humanitarian in his outlook: "In this I accept the condition of humanity." The reformation of the psalmist's words—"The children of your servants will continue"—into "My children shall continue, / and their children shall continue…" is again the negation of traditional trend of attributing all the glory to God.

Psalm 127, which is parodied in verse IX of Ezekiel's "Latter-Day Psalms", ascribes all the credit of human toil to Yahweh, the Lord. While accepting half-heartedly the fact that God is responsible for any constructive activity, the poet nonetheless emphasizes upon the utility of human efforts: "it is better to build / than to abstain from building" (*CP* 260) for no labour goes in vain. Then the poet differs from the psalmist's

assertion that for the happiness of a mighty man, a quiver full of children is essential, while the "enemies in the gate" are altogether forgotten. The *Concluding Latter-Day Psalm* passes the final comment on the previous psalms. "All those fuss about faith" and "all those decisions to praise / God" may appear "boring and pathetic" (*CP* 260), but still the poet accept their elemental nature. Then with a fine piece of poetic craftsmanship the poet converts the images in the Psalter into beautiful birds and colourful fish which swim in the poet's Jewish consciousness. Ezekiel's final acceptance of the faith in God and the Psalms brushing aside all the doubts in the mind is noteworthy:

> "Now I am through with
> the Psalms; they are
> part of my flesh." (*CP* 261)

The lines may remind one of George Herbert's "The Collar" where the poet finally asserts faith in God after his initial spirit of revolt against the religious constraints. Thus Mithilesh K. Pandey rightly says, "whatever else Ezekiel might have done in his "psalms", he has retained the communion with God…Without challenging God's glowing power and providence Ezekiel has his say sly, sure, sensible—in accordance with the spirit within him, moved by his experience of life as it is in his day" (Pandey, 15).

It is rightly said that *Latter-Day Psalms* brings the bubbling themes in Nissim Ezekiel to a logical conclusion. His wide range of subjects combines with his multifarious genius to produce this opalescent collection of poems. About his creed Bruce King says, "Ezekiel viewed poetry as a way of life; a poem was part of an evolving body of work, an expression of a life as a poet." (King, 15) In his poetry Ezekiel undertakes to make a "quest for physical, social and spiritual integration of the self" (King, 14), and he reaches his culmination in *Psalms*. When asked about his

philosophy of life as expressed in his writings, Ezekiel once remarked, "I don't make claims about a whole philosophy of life expressed in the plays. There are perceptions, views, ideas, reasonably integrated." (Paniker, 85, and also quoted in Raghu, 80) Accordingly, his integrated perceptions, views and ideas have formed this mostly discussed volume from his pen.

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Poet as Caftsman

10

"Variants of Variations": The Poems of Vikram Seth

MELANIE HYDERI

Vikram Seth does not succumb to the temptation to repeat himself. Throughout his career, he has been driven by a restless pursuit of diversity: skipping from economist to poet, to travel writer, to novelist-in-verse, to librettist, to translator and to children's writer, he even tried his hand at biography in *Two Lives* (published in 2005). In a postmodern context where generic distinctions are increasingly blurred, all Seth's works exhibit an ostensibly unfashionable sense of form, marking a striking divergence from current expectations of the postcolonial. Indeed Seth seems to view everything he writes as deliberate experiment, embodying all the characteristics of which a given form is capable, and the virtues most appropriate to it. Asked if he had a predilection for a specific genre amongst the exceptional variety of his repertoire of writing, he replied: "Poetry. Always poetry. I have written lyric poetry throughout my career. The books appear sporadically, but that is only because composing poems to form a book takes a number of years" ("Vikram Seth: Bangladesh and England"). Even Seth's prose works betray his irresistible attraction for poetry: in *A Suitable Boy*, the character of Amit – the Bengali poet and novelist who stands for the author's intradiegetic double – legitimizes the inclusion of numerous

rhyming couplets, which bear the unmistakable mark of Seth's style.

Seth's poems are characterized by structured forms (sonnets, epigrams, etc.) and conventional metre and rhyme. They are distinguished by a lightness of wit and a conversational, at times flippant, tone. Seth has often expressed his irritation with modern poetry, which he deems too arcane and remote from the common reader's everyday experience: "I often don't understand what's being said, and when I understand it, I sometimes wonder why it's being said at all. […] There is so much poetry that one reads which really doesn't move or enlighten one at all. I'm not surprised that people are turning away from poetry" (Leslie). By virtue of his reverence for tradition, Seth has often been perceived as an "anachronism" (Patel) in the contemporary poetic arena.

Though Seth posits himself primarily as a poet, his collections of poems tend to receive little critical attention compared to his prose or to the novel in verse *The Golden Gate* (1986), which Seth has described as a stepping stone into fiction. Oddly enough, in contrast to his public declarations, Seth's account of the genesis of his work in the first part of *Two Lives* also gives pride of place to his prose. One is under the impression that the travelogue *From Heaven Lake* (1983) is Seth's first book: *Mappings* (1980), his first collection of poems, is disqualified without being named,[1] while the subsequent collections of poems – *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990) and *Beastly Tales From Here and There* (1991) – are not even mentioned. This paper will argue that Seth's poems are in fact essential to any understanding of his overall literary strategies, as is confirmed by *The Rivered Earth* (2011), his last work, which highlights the mimetic process that underlies Seth's opus.

The generic heterogeneity of Seth's work masks a hidden unity, which lies in a deliberate and frantic use of parody and pastiche, two sophisticated intertextual practices that rely on a structural superposition of texts and demand a flawless command of literary codes on both the author's and the reader's part. As Seth has stated, his first novel (in verse) grew out of his enthusiasm upon reading Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, as translated into English by Charles Johnson.[2] In *The Golden Gate*, Seth revitalizes *Eugene Oneguine* by transplanting Pushkin's extended poem into the San Francisco Bay area. *The Golden Gate* follows the fourteen-line stanza pattern of *Eugene Onegin*, which is written in verses of iambic tetrameter with the unusual rhyme scheme a,b,a,b, c,c,d,d, e,f,f,e, g,g. Seth's novel is comprised of 594 sonnets, all written in iambic tetrameter (including the acknowledgements, the dedication, the table of contents and the author's biographical note) – an astounding technical feat that reveals the author's penchant for formal rigor.

Seth reproduces not only the style, but also the content of the Russian poem. In *Palimpsests*, Gérard Genette stresses that the term "style" covers heterogeneous realities, for it operates both on a formal and a thematic level:

> I'm not entirely sure, as I have already said that the pastiche form (in general) is a purely "stylistic" affair in the usual sense of the term. There is no law against imitating also the "content," the actual theme, of the model […]. But it is the common idea that is faulty; style is form in general and therefore, as was said earlier, the form of the expression *and* the content. (Genette 105)

The plot of *Eugene Onegin* is remarkably thin. It is constructed around a non-event, a failed romantic encounter: the eponymous character, an idle, disenchanted dandy, condescendingly rejects Tatyana and is in turn rejected by her years later. Spleen is the

central motif of Pushkin's masterpiece: "The illness with which he's been smitten/should have been analysed when caught, / something like spleen, that scourge of Britain, /or Russia's *chondria*, in short; /it mastered him in slow gradation; /thank God, he had no inclination/to blow his brains out, but instead/to life grew colder than the dead" (Pushkin 25). In *The Golden Gate*, Vikram Seth appropriates the spleen motif and turns it into the pernicious symptom of a sick, materialistic society. The very beginning of the novel makes it clear that John Brown – a Californian yuppie whose first name signals the capital influence Byron's *Don Juan* exerted on Pushkin – suffers from the same affliction as Pushkin's hero. Thus, in the first chapter of the novel, the protagonist confides his weariness to his friend Janet. In John's lament, the [s] alliteration suggests the source of John's sorrow. The absence of enjambment lends these lines the ineluctable tone of a fatal diagnosis:

> "I'm employed, healthy, ambitious,
> Sound, solvent, self-made, self-possessed.
> But all my symptoms are pernicious.
> The Dow-Jones of my heart's depressed.
> The sunflower of my youth is wilting.
> The tower of my dreams is tilting.
> The zoom lens of my zest is blurred.
> The drama of my life's absurd.
> What is the root of my neurosis?
> I jog, eat brewer's yeast each day,
> And yet I feel life slip away.
> I wait your sapient diagnosis.
> I die! I faint! I fail! I sink!"
> "You need a lover, John, I think." (Seth, *The Golden Gate* 14)

A web of intertextual echoes underlies John's lament: the metaphor "the sunflower of my youth" condenses two crucial motifs from Blake's poem "Ah! Sunflower," while the series of distraught exclamations "I die! I faint! I sink!" combines

references to Shelley's poems "The Indian Girl's Song" ("I die! I faint! I fail!"), "Epipsychidion" ("I sink!") and "Ode to the West Wind" ("I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!"). Seth's distancing use of poetic conventions deflates the lyrical impulse of John's confession. The prosaic metaphor of the market index – "the Dow-Jones of my heart's depressed" (Seth, *The Golden Gate* 14) – stresses the protagonist's inveterate materialism. Like Eugene, who fails to appreciate Tatyana's guileless love, John acknowledges his feelings for Janet too late, despite the latter's warning at the beginning of the novel: "Don't put things off till it's too late. You are the DJ of your fate" (Seth, *The Golden Gate* 15). In a manner similar to *Eugene Onegin*, *The Golden Gate* is built around the conflicting demands of lyricism and mockery, prose and poetry.

In the fifth chapter of *The Golden Gate*, Vikram Seth interrupts the narrative to pay a vibrant tribute to Pushkin:

> Reader, enough of this apology;
> But spare me if I think it best,
> Before I tether my monology,
> To take a stanza to suggest
> You spend some unfilled day of leisure
> By that original spring of pleasure:
> Sweet-watered, fluent, clear, light, blithe
> (This homage merely pays a tithe
> Of what in joy and inspiration
> It gave me once and does not cease
> To give me) – Pushkin's masterpiece
> In Johnston's luminous translation:
> Eugene Onegin – like champagne
> Its effervescence stirs my brain. (Seth, *The Golden Gate* 102)

The lexical field of water and the numerous enjambments lend this laudatory stanza certain fluidity, stressing the mythical limpidity of Pushkin's swift-moving poetry. This metafictional stanza establishes a reading contract. The term "original" is

crucial: the text openly posits itself as a pastiche or a "translation" of Pushkin's masterpiece. Through a clever *mise en abyme*, Seth's panegyric takes the form of a typically Pushkinian digression initiated by the trochee "Reader" (it should be noted that the comparison with champagne – "[…] like champagne/Its effervescence stirs my brain" (Seth, *The Golden Gate* 102) – owes nothing to chance: this "enchanting" drink triggers one of the numerous digressions that punctuate Pushkin's novel). Precisely in the fifth chapter of *Eugene Onegin*, the narrator indulges in a facetious digression on the necessity to avoid digressions. Like Pushkin, Seth playfully draws attention to the work as artifice.

While according to Proust, pastiche occupies a central function in the training of a writer, Vikram Seth harks back to this mimetic practice: pastiche is the cornerstone of his centrifugal work, as is evidenced by *The Rivered Earth*, Seth's last work. "Shared Ground" – the second libretto of *The Rivered Earth* – throws into sharp relief the rewriting impulse which lies at the core of Seth's protean opus, presenting literary influence as a potentially dysphoric experience. *The Rivered Earth* partakes of a musical project that sprang from a fruitful collaboration between Vikram Seth, the composer Alec Roth and the violinist Philippe Honoré. It is divided into four neatly compartmentalized libretti which touch upon three civilizations, Chinese, European and Indian, highlighting Seth's impressive ability to move seamlessly from one geographical and cultural location to another (likewise, *The Humble Administrator's Garden* is divided into three sections; each of them is named after a tree symbolizing China, India and California, respectively: "Wutong," "Neem" and "Live-Oak"). Like *Mappings*, which contains poems translated from Hindi, Urdu, German and Chinese, *The Rivered Earth* comprises numerous translations: the first libretto gathers the translations of Du Fu that Seth first published in *Three Chinese Poets* (1992), while the third libretto consists of both original poems and texts translated

from Chinese, Sanskrit, Pali, Urdu and Bengali. Though the second and the fourth libretti are solely made up of "original" creations, "Shared Ground" is almost exclusively made up of pastiches. It is based on a series of poems by the Welsh-born English poet, orator and Anglican priest George Herbert, as Seth acknowledges in the introduction to the second libretto: "Though I hope that the mood and spirit of these poems are my own, they are formally based on 'Paradise', 'Easter-Wings', 'Hope', 'Love (III)', 'Virtue' and 'Prayer (I)' – some of the loveliest of Herbert's poems" (Seth, *The Rivered Earth* 53).

"Shared Ground" sheds light on the latent fear of plagiarism inherent in mimetic writing. In the introduction to "Shared Ground," Seth explains how he ended up acquiring the former house of George Herbert: "Despite many doubts and difficulties, I did, finally and somehow, manage to buy the house. At first, I used to imagine Herbert writing in his room […]. After a while, I simply got used to the presence of my tactful host, who never tried to bully me into his philosophy or his style. His presence and his poetry were kindly influences" (Seth, *The Rivered Earth* 53).[3] Though Seth attempts to play down the "anxiety of influence" Herbert's ghost instills in him, this passage conveys the powerful image of a haunted poet. In "Host," the author dramatizes the doubts that plagued him when he first considered purchasing Herbert's house. The poem takes the form of a dialogue with the natural elements surrounding Herbert's presbytery:

> "A guest?" I asked. "Yes, as you are on earth."
> "The means?" "… will come, don't fear."
> "What of the risk?" "Our lives are that from birth."
> "His ghost?" "His soul is here."
> "He'll change my style." "Well, but you could do worse
> Than rent his rooms of verse."
> Joy came, and grief; love came, and loss; three years –
> Tiles down; moles up; drought; flood.

> Though far in time and faith, I share his tears,
> His hearth, his ground, his mud,
> Yet my host stands just out of mind and sight,
> That I may sit and write. (Seth, *The Rivered Earth* 57)

The verb "share" – "I share his tears" (Seth, *The Rivered Earth* 57) – recalls the beautiful title of the libretto, which operates on two levels, since Seth inhabits Herbert's former house and imitates his poems. "Host" is the only poem of "Shared Ground" that does not fall into the category of pastiche. All the other poems of the libretto comply with Oulipian formal features borrowed from Herbert's poems. For instance, "Lost," a poem made up of five tercets, complies with the same formal constraint as Herbert's "Paradise; "the rhyme-word of the first line in each tercet loses a letter in each succeeding line, as follows:

> Lost in a world of dust and spray
> We turn, we learn, we twist, we pray
> For word or tune or touch or ray.
>
> Some tune of hope, some word of grace,
> Some ray of joy to guide our race,
> Some touch of love to deuce our ace.
>
> (Seth, *The Rivered Earth* 55)

Seth's fondness for rhymes, which is particularly conspicuous in these lines, reveals his constant attempt to translate the sounds of music into the written word (one should not forget that the poems of *The Rivered Earth* are meant to be sung). The result, however, is not altogether satisfactory: all too often, Seth's poems appear as purely technical exercises, as if all that mattered was the form of the poem. There is a flatness of tone that does not offer the usual forms of linguistic richness that one expects of poetic language.

This is further corroborated by a poem from "Live-Oak,"

the Californian section of *The Humble Administrator's Garden*. "Ceasing upon the Midnight" is a parodic rewriting of "Ode to a Nightingale," the famous poem by Keats. Seth acknowledges his debt to Keats in the title: "Ceasing upon the Midnight" is a variation on an infinitive phrase from "Ode to a Nightingale". In Keats' poem, which is written in the first person, the speaker considers committing suicide: "Now more than ever seems it rich to die/ To cease upon the midnight with no pain…." In Seth's poem, distorted echoes of these two lines can be found in the speaker's musings, which are rendered in free indirect speech: "[…] Ah, tonight, /How rich it seems to be/Alive unhappily" (*HAC*, 59). Though Seth's protagonist is also visited by sombre thoughts of death (perhaps in a fit of Californian spleen), he ends up turning them into ridicule:

> […] To cease upon
>
> The midnight under the live-oak
> Seems too derisory a joke.
> The bottle lies on the ground.
> He sleeps. His sleep is sound
> (Seth, *The Humble Administrator's Garden* 61).

These are the last lines of "Ceasing Upon the Midnight". While Keats' speaker aspires to drink wine to relieve his weariness (see the lyrical exclamation O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been /Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth…"), Seth's protagonist becomes literally inebriated. This prosaic ending is enhanced by the polyptoton "sleeps"/"sleep" and the rhyme "ground"/"sound". It is no coincidence that the text closes with the term "sound." On a first level, the adjective clearly refers to the protagonist's deep slumber, but it also has a deeper import, for it comments upon the striking absence of the nightingale (whose singing ravishes Keats' protagonist) in Seth's poem. While the nightingale is an important motif in Seth's novel *An Equal Music* (1999) – Julia is enamored of this bird, which comes to

symbolize everything she has lost owing to her encroaching deafness – the only sounds one hears in "Ceasing upon the Midnight" are those of the telephone and the refrigerator. No poetical force is to be found in these "romantic residues".

In "Night in Jiangning" (*All You Who Sleep Tonight*), Seth sketches an exotic atmosphere of serenity in just a few brush strokes:

> A glass of tea; the moon;
> The frogs croak in the weeds.
> A bat wriggles down across
> Gold disk to silver reeds.
> The distant light of lamps.
> The whirr of winnowing grain.
> The peace of loneliness.
> The scent of imminent rain.
> (Seth, *All You Who Sleep Tonight* 31)

Through a series of nominal sentences and the use of the present tense, the author attempts to capture this moment of exotic equanimity at the risk of over-simplifying. It is hard to take Seth's replication of this orientalist cliché at face value – but how should we construe it?

Though it is sometimes difficult to trace the hypotexts in which Seth's poems are anchored, it is hard to resist the impression that they draw on a series of preexisting texts, "an already written real, a prospective code, along which we discern, as far as the eye can see, only a succession of copies" (Barthes 167). The image of the photocopier in "And Some Have Madness Thrown Upon Them" (*The Humble Administrator's Garden*) supports such an intuition: "Salesmen have come in throughout the day./Bearing photocopying machines into my house./They have copied graphs onto computer paper,/Bach onto tracing paper,/Academic documents onto sheets of plastic" (Seth, *The*

Humble Administrator's Garden 53). Through the polyptoton "photocopying"/"copied," the notion of textual reproduction is foregrounded. The elision of the verb "have copied" in the last two lines creates an impression of speed that enhances the automatic, mechanical aspect of the textual reproduction. It is by no means coincidental that the very title of the poem is a variation on a famous Shakespearian phrase from *Twelfth Night* ("and some have greatness thrust upon them"): this intertextual reference prompts the reader to read this poem as a metacritical comment on literary reprise. Seth's poems are marked by a process of duplication that lends them a detached tone, as if they were copies of copies of an ever elusive original, not unlike the endless series of variations the narrator of *An Equal Music* refers to: "[…] the variations take on a strange, mysterious distance, as being, in a sense, variations one degree removed, orchestral variants of variations…" (Seth, *An Equal Music* 68). *The Golden Gate* consists of relayed "translations": a pastiche of Pushkin, whom Seth read in translation, while Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* was itself a pastiche of Byron whom Pushkin also read in translation; meanwhile Seth's poetry itself almost reads as if it were a translation.

Critiques of Seth's poems stress the unsettling detachment of the speaker. Devesh Patel uses the oxymoron "detached involvement" to describe the collection of poems *The Humble Administrator's Garden*: "[Seth's work] resembles the best productions of the English tradition technically, but curiously augments them with the experiences of a self-styled exile. This gives his poems a strange tone, as if they were a dialogue of the self, with the self missing" (Patel). For Devesh Patel, such evanescence/the fleetingness of the ego is characteristic of Seth's opus as a whole: "If anything ties his work together, it is the rootless, detached quality of the teller. In his observations, there is a charged distance which draws the reader in just enough to feel unconnected" (Patel). The figure of the oxymoron conveys

the striking porosity of the ego in Seth's poetry. One might say that Seth excels in "the introspection of the other" – a beautiful formula created by Charles du Bos to capture Robert Browning's art. Like Browning and Keats – two poets Charles du Bos compares by virtue of their faculty of supreme empathy – Seth constantly strives to become other. This raises the larger question of how far Seth's perspective in fact draws more substantively from poetic traditions than fiction.

References

1. "I wrote poetry imbued with the traumas of life and love and vast philosophical questions about existence and purpose. It was bad poetry, not insincere exactly, but desperately inflated" (Seth, *Two Lives* 22).
2. "I began reading a translation of Pushkin's novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin*. I was caught up in the story – at the same time light and profound, witty and sorrowful – as well as in the astonishing stanzaic form so magically maintained by the translator, Charles Johnston. That evening I finished the book and began reading it again. I was in the grip of an inspiration that would change my life." (Seth, *Two Lives* 34)
3. Comparer avec An Equal Music.

11

Of Apollonian and Dionysian Craft: Ramanujan's 'Method' and Surendran's 'Madness' in Poetic Expression

TUHIN SANYAL & BIPRADIP SAHA

Motif- I: Madness

> Did Hamlet mentor Surendran as he said —"I am but mad north-northwest:
> When the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw."?

If A.K. Ramanujan has mastered value restraint and modesty of the Apollonian art in his poesy to heighten a dream state with the wish to create expressional order, with principles of a colonized's individuation, with the plastic beauty in his poetic arts, with the celebrations of appearance and illusions and exhaustion of possibilities, with self-control and perfection, creating the rational, logical and reasonable, C.P. Surendran (b. 1956 in Kerala–) is his total opposite.

C.P. Surendran's expression is often ostentatious and excessively Dionysian, shimmering in the chaos of mesmerizing intoxication, celebrating the queer nature within and without man in an oblique urban ennui which is instinctual and intuitive, pertaining to the sensation of pleasure or pain, with individuality dissolved in lunatic grace, and grace dissolved in place, hence destroying, disturbing the wholeness of existence with orgiastic

passion, dissolving all boundaries, celebrating subtleties and excesses, and glorifying the creative art that speaks of destruction and the beauteous irrational and non-logical. This is intensely manifest as he reminisces in the Introduction to *Posthumous Poems*, where he thinks aloud:

> I cannot remember the shock of my emotional displacement, preceded by my intellectual dereliction, in all its details now. For a long dark while I was in a dark place. I had nothing. I recall those days were full of wrong trains in the middle of the night with sodium vapour lamps, waking up in huge railway yards very quiet and weighted down with iron; I also remember lying on the floor of my rented flat in Bombay, looking at the map the termites were drawing all over the ceiling. It looked like a country I would sooner or later visit.

C.P. Surendran, this very 'living' man, who published posthumous poems in English, earns his *chapati* as a journalist and columnist in one of India's leading news-dailies. Apart from poetry, *An Iron Harvest* and *Lost and Found* is the couple of novels he has to his credit. With four volumes of poetry to offer viz. *Posthumous Poems*, *Gemini II*, *Canaries on the Moon* and *Portraits of the Space We Occupy*, he indulges in a poetic expression and style which is simply akin to inspired madness, much in the Dionysian vein. He gives himself up "To Bombay, her electric embrace", with "Sleepless eyes / Set in ice" and is masochistically "healed by what hurts most" (epigraph in *Posthumous Poems*). To him, "death doesn't matter / It's metaphor" ("Toast"; *Posthumous Poems*) and "*all tragedies are trite; there's no grief death cannot resolve/redress*" ("Solution", *Posthumous Poems*).

Surendran, the Dionysian artist, is all-inclusive and encompasses all that he comes across in his daily chores; rather than alienating the viewer with a sublimating experience (the sublime needs critical distance; c.f. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*), this Dionysian poet demands a critical eye of the perceiver to

behold his closeness of experiences and the intense philosophies encompassing them. For example, he sees life's realizations in "doors":

> A house with a hundred doors.
> And as many years old.
> You step out of a room
> And a door, like a fallen day,
> Blocks your view…
> … … … … … …
> When you have finished
> Moving
> From room to room,
> Living all your days
> In a hundred different ways
> You emerge…
> … … … … … …
> … … … … … …
> To face the place
> You can't open or shut."
> ("Doors", *Posthumous Poems*)

The doors act as both, a symbol and signification. They are symbolical of an opening as well as a closure, and they signify the threshold, the will to transgress or trespass, *"*In a hundred different ways*"*. There is also a sense of claustrophobia and the resultant will to break free. Then there is a new philosophical emergence. Ironically, finality comes in the mould of helplessness of a man in the face of fate— *"*the place … (men) can't open or shut.*"*

The critical distance (originating in the Apollonian ideals), which separates man from his closest emotions, and separates him from his essential connection with the self, is never found in Surendran. The Dionysian embracing of the chaotic, the magnification of Man (the self), madly realizing that he is one and the same with all the (un)related and (dis)ordered human

experience, and the godlike unity of lunatic expression are of utmost importance in viewing the poems of Surendran, as they are ironically related to the Apollonian in the emphasis of the harmony that can be found within one's chaotic experience. His poems are a constant argument bordering on the interaction between the mind and the physical environment. They are expressions of fragmented and dialectic consciousness which echo a queer non-existential stability in an existential instability. This is clearly manifest when he writes:

> In my sleep the trees whirled
> And leaf by leaf light emptied.
> When I awoke everything I liked
> Looked alike.
> ("Night Vision", *Posthumous Poems*)

Truth being 'primordial pain', our existential being is quite well defined and determined by such dialectics presented by Surendran in his poetry. And truth comes to him as a dialectical paradox:

> Hunting for God in the dark
> Under the earth, pumping iron,
> I grow to roots, rumour, war— says he.
> ("Gymnastics of Why", *Posthumous Poems*)

He does not seek, rather *hunts* for God, as is practised in this postmodern milieu. The Pre-Naxalite economic scenario in India, that denied open-markets and favoured the Capitalists, too were causes enough for the sacrifices of many godly lives. Gods were hunted for and hunted down, often, by the state apparatus, *'*in the dark*"*. He cynically justifies this lopsided situation in the introduction to *Posthumous Poems* by posing a rather interesting question just before he speaks of his 'Naxalite' friends— *'*If Christ were to swim on the cross again, how many of us would watch Him without a remote in hand*?"*. Again, his claustrophobia is manifest in the idea of growth, emotional or revolutionary; the

growth is linear and bottomward, perhaps grave-infesting, like the 'Naxalites'. He grows to roots, which, simultaneously, is positive and negative. Not being able to be the 'shoot' suggests denial of light and aerial bliss, and being able to be the root suggests being able to be a part of the deep and intense culture of communes (bearing Indian ethos similar to his), even though it involves journeys through dark; darkness itself being synonymous with postcolonial symbolisms.

In some poems, his shingly-sharp understatements have flashes of lyricism much like that of an inspired lunatic, and his laconic brevity encapsulates sudden images that have intense luminosity. He is at times like T.S. Eliot, who had the courage to juxtapose a sprouting corpse against a hyacinth girl (as in *The Wasteland*), to deliberately disturb the taken-for-granted-mechanics of poetry. Surendran, in his postmodern love poem, juxtaposes "roses" against "a dead man's eyes":

> …These roses which you sent are fine
> Except that they grow
> All the time. It's as if they feed
> On the night of late strewn with a dead man's eyes
> Which turn brighter by the minute
> Like an approaching light.
> ("Question: Do You Have Nightmares", *Posthumous Poems*)

Here, the image of a vegetative motion of cynically ever-growing roses being pitted against the image of a cosmic motion of approaching light, intensifying the lustre of a dead man's eyes, is a deliberate ploy to magnify the subtle understatement borne out by the melancholic emotions of love, in a tussle between life and death. Again, the ever-growing roses, symbolical of an encroaching and denial of space, non-accommodativeness and a stifling situation in love, are well meted out and challenged by the symbol 'light', which flouts many calculations of space and

time and does not require space to infest or grow. It is, ironically, ever approaching, ever living, in a dead man's eyes, yet not material. It is only peony, or anti-matter to a great extent, hence pure even in its sordidness.

Surendran's poems delve in a plethora of moods and tones ranging from casual violence to subtle yearnings, from quite elegies to savage irony. This can be seen even in his amour—

> She said hearts were what made her go
> Finally, I dug up the old, dark thing.
> And she said, oh, but this is a grenade.
> I told you, I said, and bit the pin.
> ("Enemy", *Portraits of the Space We Occupy*)

He deftly declares through these lines how "Poetry is war on space" and "Only the violently true win" in this art (Introduction in *Posthumous Poems*). He as if believes in a poetic transcendence that comes with shock and sudden contact between the mundane, the ethereal and the spoofy. The lines above clearly reveal that sometimes his love poems can be passionately dangerous when it comes to the expression of the love-emotion. He expresses his raw emotions much as a weird mixture of gravity and levity—he is sometimes a Coppola and a Chaplin rolled into one.

The amalgam of toxicity and tenderness in his verses often lead to pain, since pain is his escape route. They verge on 'what is *not*', and the resultant effect 'what *is*' comes as a final resolution, to make things work at cross-purposes in many of his poems. In the following poem, for example, Surendran upholds this queer amalgam of a sense of presence and absence much in the fashion of Eliot's "Marina", hinting at the feline and feminine, perhaps ruminating about his situation after the broken marriage

> First light on the kitchen table
> Breakfast for one. Beer and wine.

Feline eyes kiss fallen tart.

Lunch is a conceit of three. My cat,
Your snapshot and me. Secret rum
In mint tea. Invalidation of the sun.
… … … … … …
A sliver of music around the ankles
In a dream's corridor.
Endless retreat of inaccessible feet.
("Renunciation", *Gemini II*)

Here he showcases the death-in-life situation created by the juxtaposition of a dream-like state and reality. He deliberately bombards a numbness which falls subtle on the man, made indolent and oblivious by reality. He traps the ethereal in the spatial in the expression "First light on the kitchen table"; there the microcosmic "table" contains the macrocosmic "first light"— which has travelled a million light years perhaps to reach the earth— a queer flouting of norms which make the situation somewhat surreal even in its mundaneness. Then there is a savage irony in beginning the verse with the "first light"— reminiscent of the much Biblical 'initial illumination' ("Let there be Light*!*") —and then rounding it up with 'fallen tart'— reminiscent of the fallen angels who pined in 'bottomless perdition' (Milton's *Paradise Lost* Bk-I), much like the poet himself. "Lunch...(as) a conceit of three…My cat, / Your snapshot and me" is truly conceit enough that might ask the metaphysical poets to think of reviewing the natures of their conceits anew. Surendran tethers three different ideas altogether to construct this trident of a conceit; the first being the supposedly rational human, though in "Renunciation"— a death-in-life/dream-like state, oblivious and giving up; the second being an inanimate generator of memories— a photograph, may be of a feminine form, perhaps his first wife; and the third being a non-human, non-rational entity— a cat. And *'*lunch*"* is dire necessity for all of the three. The moment of lunch

keeps the photograph topical by retaining the importance of the one in it, the one badly missed. For the cat, it is the moment of survival— food! —once served by the mistress of the house. And for the poet, it is the moment to renew himself, through memories, *"*In a dream's corridor*"* where he can perceive "Endless retreat of inaccessible feet*"* in his death-in-life situation of renunciation.

Again, Surendran's verses are sometimes sly and have a curt impassivity which may lead the reader in a certain direction that has pitfalls, and one helplessly ends up at an unexpected destination. The slyness is perceived in his depictions of the real. His self-inflicted impassivity recurs in his very passive response to corporal pain unleashed on him for petty youthful mischief; his expression comes, peculiarly, through 'a shortage of words' and he writes—

> … But now that I am 40, I no longer care
> … I think now
> Each blow to the body is a word
> Deleted from the dictionary. That's why
> We don't have more words than we deserve.
> ("A Shortage of Words", *Posthumous Poems*)

The same strain of impassivity abounds in another poem where he describes how he faced the plain-faced legal and court ambience where a divorce between him and his wife was finally pronounced, without the involvement of any sort of emotion, amidst sundry things like nature's call. The build-up of this poem too, like the previous one, is simple, prosaic, lacking the promise of something highly climactic, and the poem ends in a heart-wrenching, zombie-like note of acceptance, where, the one at the receiving end has the masochistic power to endure, though not the power to change:

At the Family Court
The lift wouldn't work.
So they walked up
… … … … … …
On the fourth landing
Two toilets, one marked,
For Judges Only, and one,
For Others. They used
The first…/ …no one charged
Them with contempt of court.
… … … … … …
An attendant
… … … … … …
… led them into a hall
Where the judge
They met in the toilet said
They were no longer
Man and wife.
("The Family Court", *Posthumous Poems*)

In *Portraits of the Space we Occupy*, C.P. Surendran often presents the speedy urbanity of '*Bombay*' city (presently Mumbai) in such instantaneous, unpunctuated, blink-and-miss photographic speed that the people (his readers) often miss the pictures as they steadily scamper from one image to the other. His poetic "Signal" is stoic and fatal; it flouts norms and contributes to the final catastrophe, drowning the on-lookers in the very next bend:

Caught in the ink-glass of night
Between sleep and alarmed wake
A blind man flailing his hands of light
And an engine plunging down into a lake.
("Signal", *Portraits of the Space We Occupy*)

Again, hyper-real and sometimes surreal images, combined with the overtly mundane pathos that might be well overlooked, is often portrayed by him in this collection. This trait is manifest in the following lines:

Seedlings are like children
Quite a few of whom
Go hungry in India and Africa

And show variation
In flower colour, leaf shape
And plant size
… … … … … …
If only they were
Fed.
("The Sowing Circle", *Portraits of the Space We Occupy*)

The portrayal of the psychosis of power, battered memories of a life that has been, and a fervent pining and brooding in the shadow of death are oft revealed by him in "Portraits of the Space we Occupy". Such is his Dionysian forte. His landscapes and mindscapes vary; they are glimpses, varnished, tarnished and burnished over and over again. The words in these verses are contained, but barely, since they are oft dented and painted anew. And this gives his expression a stark and unrelenting tension, as the words, and the worlds they fashion or seek to shape, lend a rare tension to his Dionysian craft. Even to him, as it is…

… … … … … …
With the vulture (,)
… … … … … …
…the beak buried in brains (,)
… … … … … …
The world is meat."
("Alchemy, *Portraits of the Space We Occupy*)

His verses in *Portraits of the Space we Occupy* are of a rare tensile quality.

…traffic screeches, …
And our kisses fall…on sheets of burning brass,
We sink deep… there we rest.
("Highway", "Bombay"*; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*)

In this volume, the poems occur in three sections, viz. "Bombay", "Ruhnama" and "Catafalque", mainly focusing on the metaphors of a bread-winner like Raju in a low city-life, on its cruel pathos, rather than on the insignificant polemics of wholeness or universality which we tend to forget with every distracting phone-call or traffic-whistle. In this context, the following lines deserve special mention:

> Two fingers of the right hand hardened
> With filth, stuffed into his mouth, and two of the left
> Digging into his bottom, sun-baked and tear-dried
> Raju is working round the clock so both ends are met.
> ("Professional", "Bombay"*; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*)

"Ruhnama", which means 'Book of the Spirit' in Persian, drifts away from the world of grime and problems of survival. The philosophy in it is that "The day is a mirror / And I see myself everywhere" ("Benediction", "Ruhnama"*; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*). This section is an endeavour to devise the ways in which the application of individual powers and authority can become an end in itself. And such individual power and authority is one of sheer endurance. Here, the poet is a role-player, a "Curator-king / Of a museum of ruins…/ (and) …abjured dreams" ("Penance", "Ruhnama"*; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*). But such role-playing bliss is again dismantled by the final philosophic question in "Ruhnama":

> Was I born like this, a mask, or did it fall from the skies
> And visor around my face, perfectly in place?
> ("Curriculum Vitae" "Ruhnama"*; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*).

"Ruhnama" gives way to an autumnal sequence of thirty autobiographical poems related to the poet's father, Pavanan, a Malayalam writer who was smitten by Alzheimer's in the last years of his life. This one, "Catafalque", final in sequence, hints at a

raised bier or moveable box, used to support the casket, coffin, or body of the deceased during a funeral or memorial service, and is mainly in sync with the absolution of the dead. It begins with Nachiketa's (c.f. The *Katha-Upanishad*) stoic, death-related address to his father— *"What will… Yama* (God of Death) *…do unto me?"* In the very first poem in this section he views his *"father on the cot in white, straight as a corpse in a coffin"* when *"hours crawl about him in ambush"* ('Post Natal', *Catafalque; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*); *"His fingers, like tendrils / Coil the air about without a care…/ …His speech dies at birth"* in the second poem ('Eclipse', *Catafalque; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*); and in the third poem, pathos of the death-bed heighten all the more as the poet, to relieve his father of the pain, say:

> If you were a good son
> You'd hold to his head
> A steady gun.
> ("Favour", "Catafalque*"; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*).

"Catafalque", through the later poems, trails into remembrance of things past and the predicament of man. The title poem itself borders on *"*the frieze, framed pictures*"* and on realizations that *"*We are just portraits of the space we occupy*"*. The poet, at one point, even implores for a replica of the past to:

> Burn at hearth like fire
> Redden the embers with …dying breath…
> Last the beauty of this sodden season— in vain!
> ("Who Shifts the Stars So June Is Here Again", "Catafalque*"; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*).

Finally, after braving myriad Dionysian storms of the mind, he translates himself to endurance and acceptance in the final poem as he reverently says:

I must bow down to the ground I tread,
Recall with grace what's lost as you pass
Into earth and air, holy as the Host in bread.
("Translation", "Catafalque"*; Portraits of the Space We Occupy*).

He, much like the 'Buddha', finally gains illumination and stoic enlightenment at the end of "Catafalque".

To conclude, it needs be added that Surendran's crisp poems convey much through a sense of incongruity than typified, rational, poetic patterns, and his overtly poignant verses brace with his much likeable 'madness' that he upholds in his expression. The apparently minimalist surfaces of his verses often have the essence of a postmodern Indian English poet's deep philosophic concern. The 'moment of poetry' is his moment of grace, the moment of intellectual and soulful bickering. He chooses not 'a mouthful of air' like Yeats, but chooses the 'light' of humane understanding as his raw material, with which he weaves all other entities elemental, to churn out poetry. The moment of grace revisits him in every intellectual venture he undertakes—

From future and past
Return
By land, sea and air
By sleight of hand
And turn of phrase
To this wholly present
Moment of grace. ("Luminous", *Portraits of the Space We Occupy*)

Motif- II: Method

A man is a method, a progressive arrangement;
a selecting principle, gathering his like to him; wherever he goes."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

A. K. Ramanujan, unlike Surendran, was not only a transnational figure, but also a transdisciplinary scholar, redoubling up as poet, translator, linguist and folklorist. Although he wrote primarily in English, he was fluent in Kannada, the common public language of Mysore, and also in Tamil, the language of his family. In the quiet yet affable wit known best to his extended family of students, colleagues and friends; Ramanujan would observe that he was the 'hyphen' in the phrase 'Indo-American'. He was known in these inner circles as a man with the passionate brilliance of language, and a rather rich and evocative metaphor for the human experience which he expressed through his verses. His poetic output in the English language is rather scant in comparison with the output of the other Indo-Anglican poets. He has published only three volumes of poetry viz. *The Striders (1966), Relations (1971)* and *Second Sight (1976)* with intermittent gaps of half-decades. His works like *The Interior Landscape (1967)* and *Speaking of Siva (1972)* also reveal his knack for translations into English from Kannada and Tamil poems.

Ramanujan's poetic cosmos is an account of a three part expedition. In the first instance, the world to which the poet migrates is represented as attenuation. The self feels isolated, without a sense of connectedness to a community. The second stage of this journey turns to a world compounded of memory, fiction and desire, in order to recollect or invent a realm of possibility in which the self and all its modes of thought, feeling and action are connected to a communal way of life. The last stage of the figurative voyage entails using language to bring the remembered and imagined past to bear on the present through the activity of translation. Thus, translation helped the poet cope with diaspora, while diaspora enabled the collective past to survive and come forward through him.

Regarding Ramanujan's style of writing, the term Apollonian can be aptly applied. Friedrich Nietzsche used the term in his

book *The Birth of Tragedy* to describe one of the two opposing creative impulses in Greek tragedy viz. reason, culture, harmony, and restraint. These Apollonian attributes— as opposed to the Dionysian characteristics of excess, irrationality, lack of method, and unbridled passion— are splendidly decorated in the poems of Ramanujan. The terseness of his diction, consummate skill with which he introduces rhyme and assonance into his verse, the sharply etched, crystalline images, and the disciplined handling of language as well as his theme and structure, make Ramanujan one of the most significant and 'methodical' poets in India today.

Ramanujan's poetry is largely autobiographical and evocative. They are full of irony, humour, paradox and sudden reversals. However, the archetypal theme of Ramanujan's poetry is family and its relationships viewed from different angles. In these relationships, we find nostalgia, pathos, irony, humour and sympathy. His poems reveal an assured identity of the poet with the family, which he very much needed after he settled down in Chicago. The linking of familial experience with history and tradition is a feature which runs through the poetry of Ramanujan. *"*Of Mothers, Among Other Things*"* is one of the most touching poems bringing out the poet's enduring relationship with his mother. The pitiable condition of an aged mother is impressively presented with the deft touch of an imagistic painter:

> Her hands are a wet eagle's
> two black pink-crinkled feat,
> one talon crippled in a garden--
> trap set for a mouse. Her sarees
> do not cling; they hang, loose
> feather of a one time wing.
> ("Of Mothers, Among Other Things")

She is withered, like a *"*twisted blackbone tree*"*; but the poet's nostalgic memory recalls the rosy picture of his mother in her youth, active and caring for her children:

From her earnings three diamonds
splash a handful of needles
and I see my mother run back
from rain to the crying cradles.
("Of Mothers, Among Other Things")

The rain broke the tree-tasselled light into rays. The rain may suggest the changing fortunes of life. The effect of age enfeebled his mother who looked like a lean wet eagle. Her fingers became disabled and too weak to pick up a grain of rice from the kitchen floor. This pitiable condition affected the poet so much that he felt his tongue dried up like a parchment tasting of bark in his mouth.

In the poem *"Obituary"* the poet presents, in an ironical vein, the tragic effect on the family due to sudden death of his father, causing repercussions on and affecting the whole family set-up. The tone is flippant, mock-ironic, but it is merely a cover to hide his essential seriousness and the poignancy of his grief. The father bequeathed to his son:

dust on a table full of papers
left debts and daughters,
a bedwetting grand son
named by the toss
of a coin after him a house that leaned
slowly through (our) growing
years on a bent coconut
tree in the yard. (*"Obituary"*)

The ritualistic ceremonies and mixing of the dead person's ashes in holy river etc. seemed meaningless to the poet who experienced a void that nothing can fill in. His father's hopes and aspirations too died. No memorial was set up to record his achievements which are almost insignificant. Yet the poet anxiously tried to find out the two lines written about his father in the obituary column

in scraps of news paper. This shows his unbroken blood - relationship or the last thread of attachment in spite of his ironic digs at the negative achievements of his father. The changed mother, a relic of his father's death, is indeed a sad remembrance of this tragic event that upset the whole family. Generally, poems written on death, end with a philosophical resignation. But Ramanujan just presented the situation as it is, affecting the relationships in a realistic manner. There is a poignant undertone suggesting his father's miserable position as he left nothing to his son except debts, responsibilities and expenses for performing annual ceremonies.

"Love Poem for a Wife - I" enacts the short anecdotes of domestic nature arranged in a crisscross order. The lack of emotional integration between the poet and his wife was traced back to lack of sharing each other's child-hood experiences. Both of them were eager to know each other's past. The poet gives details of two different family backgrounds juxtaposing one against the other. His wife is curious to know his past through family rumours and brother's anecdotes and through albums showing pictures:

> Picture of father in a turban
> Mother standing on her bare
> Splayed fee, silver rings
> On her second toes; ("Love Poem for a Wife - I")

The poet feels a streak of jealousy for not sharing his wife's part. The poet's father-in-law never cared to remember the past and never bothered to think about his young daughter's wanderings. The hiatus between the attitudes of the poet and his wife is shown even in the present when she started a heated argument with her brother James about the location of bathroom in her grandfather's house, even betting on her husband's income ignoring her husband's presence:

> Sister-in-law
> and I were blank cut-outs
> fitted to our respective
> slots in a room. ("Love Poem for a Wife - I")

Ironically the poet suggests that to solve this problem of alienation, one may follow the Egyptian custom of brother marrying his own sister or the Hindu custom of arranged child marriages. In other words, for a happy married life, mutual understanding and sharing of each other's experiences are indirectly suggested. Thus Ramanujan, in his quest for culture, tradition and Indian sensibility explored the theme of family relationships in multifarious ways, which gave him a base for creative use of English as well as for study of human psyche in various contexts.

The identity crisis in the poetry of A. K. Ramanujan escapes easy categorization. The writer who is born and brought up in the Hindu way of life and who has educated himself as a world citizen; the conflict between the inner and the outer forms the core of his poetry. Ramanujan himself has said:

> English and my disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give me my 'outer' forms—linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience, and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and my field trips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and Folklore give me my substance, my 'inner' forms, my images, symbols.

His poetry thus draws sustenance from his intense awareness of his racial burden, his Hindu heritage, which reflects his motto:

> I must seek and will find
> My particular hell in my Hindu mind
> ("Conventions of Despair")

Ramanujan, however, does not accept his Hindu heritage blindly. He is equally alive to the strength and deficiencies of his racial ethos. He admires its vision of unity of life as in Christmas and he notes its great absorbing power by picturing the life of a typical joint family in "*Small-scale Reflections on a Great House.*" At the same time, he does not ignore the inability of the orthodox Hindu religion to satisfy the modern mind which perceives the presence of primitive or elemental evil in human life. For example, in one poem he brings to light the failure of a Hindu to remain calm in all situations though he reads the Gita. In another, he castigates the Hindu for his cowardice in not hunting a fly or a spider though he gives his cowardice the name of 'gentleness'. In yet another poem, the poet expresses the view that the Hindu's enduring equanimity of mind can relapse into absolute pitilessness. He also criticizes the Hindu's uncritical acceptance of tradition and neglect of the individual.

> The new poets still quoted
> The old poets, but no one spoke
> In verse
> Of the pregnant woman
> Drowned. ("A River")

According to M. K. Naik, Ramanujan has fully exploited the opportunities which his Hindu heritage and his memory of early life offered to him but his articulation of the Hindu ethos has produced, with a few noble exceptions, poetry of the periphery and not the centre of the Hindu experience. Ramanujan, confronted by the cleavage between tradition and modernity, yields to the attractions of western modes of life, even though his Hindu heritage and Brahmin ancestry at first rebel against those modes. The 'ancient hands' at the poet's 'throat' include the ancestors of his persona too. While the Tamil epigraph to "*Relations*" states that

living
Among relations
Binds the feet, ("Relations")

Ramanujan's persona finds his entire anatomy "bred in an ancestor's bone". The poem "Conventions of Despair" also shows a change in Ramanujan's perceptions because here he says that he would find his particular hell only in his Hindu mind. He asserts that he has to work out his salvation in terms of his own tradition. It is in the Indian ethos that the poet realises himself. The reality of Ramanujan's predicament is the reality of a universal predicament, namely the quest for an individual identity.

Ramanujan, as a poet, has unique ways of expressing various issues of India which leave a permanent impression upon the mind of the readers. Each and every word of his poems seems to be potential enough to give rise to the predicaments that a deconstructionist looks forward. Though Ramanujan himself did not like the idea of putting him under discussion in the light of Indian sensibilities, who himself identified as an Indo-English poet, it remains yet, incomplete if he is studied and analyzed without it. The primary essence of his poetry is rooted deeply and inseparably in the tradition of Indian sensibilities. A. K. Ramanujan, the poet and the Anthropologist inherits this tradition from his family right from his childhood days. Many of his poetic creations, what are included in his famous collection of poems like *The Striders*, *Relations, Selected Poems, The Second Sight, The Black Hen and other Poems,* apart from his translated poems, bear the mark of Indian sensibility presented through memoirs, past experiences, return poems, use of myths, Legends and tales. His encyclopaedic knowledge of India and its culture and western culture is superbly exploited in his poems in order to express extraordinary feelings of Indian Diaspora making a decent blending of both cultures. The poem, "The Striders" gives rise to diverse and heterogeneous ideas and radical thinking:

And search
For certain thin __
Stemmed, bubble- eyed water bugs.
See them perch
On dry capillary legs
Weightless
On the ripple skin
Of a stream.

It is one of the finest poems by the poet which opens a scope for a deconstructive analysis in relation to the poets of Indian sensibilities. In the poem "Anxiety" the poet refers to the complex Indian problems like growth of population, poverty, illiteracy, lack of sense of hygiene and the problem of unemployment:

Not branchless as the fear tree,
It has naked roots and secret twigs
Not geometric as the parabolas
Of hope, it has loose ends
With a knot at the top
That's me.
Not wakeful in its white snake – ("Anxiety")

'Fear' is the source of all tension in the poem. Fear may be because of communal conflict, Maoism and terrorism, apparently the problems are having 'loose ends'. The problems are not related to each other. Those may be because of the wrong policies of the government and wrong administrations, but the buck cannot be passed to the government alone. The problems are because of the lack of individual consciousness also. That is why the poet says that the anxieties are, "with a knot at the top/ that's me". It is interesting to observe further that both the attitudes to self and the world get attuned to imbibing simultaneity.

Ramanujan's poetry contains imagery which is distinctive, and distinguished from the imagery of other Indo-Anglian poets. His genius looks for the particular, the precise, and the concrete

as against the general, the vague and the abstract. This is clearly evident from the titles which he gives to his poems: *"Striders", "Snakes", "Breaded Fish", "A River", "A Poem on Particulars"* and *"An Image for Politics"*. He has an insight into the characteristic quality informing every object. His images also display the qualities of richness and completeness. He has used all forms and types of images lending his poetry the power to evoke the multi-dimensional experience of life. His images often aroused both visual and auditory sensations at the same time. Here I quote from "Snakes" to support this observation:

> They lick the room with their bodies, curves
> Uncurling, writing a sibilant alphabet of panic
> On my floor. ("Snakes")

The images are vivid as well as realistic and along with it we also have here auditory image of the "twirls of their hisses". We also can cite examples of cameo-like pictures in poems like "Poona Train Window" and "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day" and also tableau-like effects in poems like "Still Life" and "A River".

The roots of Ramanujan's poetry are in memory; either psychological or subjective. It creates an interesting pattern of emotion in his poetry. He carries his past with him as an inner world of memories and laws which erupt into the present, transformed into anxieties, fears and new insights. "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" depicts child psychology as well as adult psychology with the sexual instinct being an active force in both a child and grown up person, though in childhood it is quiescent and is never explicitly expressed:

> Now she looks for a swing
> In cities with fifteen suburbs
> And tries to be innocent
> About it. ("Looking for a Cousin on a Swing")

Not only the desire for the other sex is changed in content with adulthood, but the interpretation of what happened in the past has changed in the light of new experience and knowledge. "Still Life" explores the relationship of memory to reality and art. The title refers to the genre of painting in which the model unlike a live model does not move. Being a Ramanujan's poem it concerns with the changing relationship of past to present:

> When she left me
> After lunch, I read
> For a while
> But suddenly wanted to look again
> And I saw the half eaten
> Sandwich
> Bread,
> Lettuce and salami,
> All carrying the shape of her bite. ("Still Life")

The piece of sandwich retains the memory of the bite of the woman in a concrete way. "Love poem for a Wife-I" is an acute analysis of the mind of the speaker in the poem, and of the minds of his wife, her father and various other relatives, hers and his own. "Obituary" reveals to us the mind of the persona's father, and the persona's reactions to him. The persona is Ramanujan himself.

He writes not only against Indian quandary and situations, but foreign too. He writes about 'lepers of Madurai', 'after the riots, downtown Nairobi', 'city like Calcutta',' Madras lawyer', 'Chinese wall', 'Delhi zoo', 'giraffe in London ', Wrestler of Mysore', 'travelling on a highway to Mexico', 'Jewish mama', and 'Chicago Zen '. In his poem "Image for Politics" Ramanujan attempts an "Objective correlative" to the politics of utter cannibalism which manages to survive on executing all opposition:

> ...where once a mackerel gasped for worms, cannibal
> devouring smaller cannibal

till only two equal
giants are left to struggle,
entwined....("Image for Politics")

The physically powerful consume the weak and the desire for blood leads up to where the conqueror - sufferer bleeds and thus continues the garish game of power politics. Sometimes his protest gets reflected in an ironical way. A. K. Ramanujan in "A River" discusses ironically on the attitude of the old and the new poets in Madurai since their lyrical awareness is awakened only by the rising flood in the river and their souls never stir by human grief and sufferings:

The poets sang only of the floods.
He was there for a day
When they had the floods.
He aims at poets writing:
The new poets still quoted
The old poets, but no one spoke in verse
Of the pregnant woman
Drowned, with perhaps twins in her, ("A River")

The poem is an attack at the poets who will compose only of the episode that tickles them most. They are oblivious of what it means to others - to whom poetry is no more than a form of self-indulgence. The river in summer days is just an ooze - too arid and uninspiring- but a river in floods is a thrilling vista:

The river has water enough
To be poetic
About only once a year. ("A River")

While protesting against his Brahmin heritage, he is conscious of laws being broken rather than simply losing his past. In. "A Poem on Particulars" he defines that one cannot recapture the past, fix the present or guarantee the prospect:

You can sometimes count
Every orange
On a tree
But never
All the trees
In a single
Orange. ("A Poem on Particulars")

"Conventions of Despair" is again a protest poem. Opening lines of the poem instruct us to be itinerant and modern to fit in the current or contemporary world and to stay away from the bitter sense of anguish and dissatisfaction:

Yes, I know all that. I should be modern.
Marry again. See strippers at the Tease.
Touch Africa. Go to the movies. ("Conventions of Despair")

The poem "Small - Scale Reflections on a Great House" tells us about the house, which absorbs not only good things but also bad things. The pretentious humiliation of the girls of the house is superbly brought out in the first few lines:

Lame wondering cows from nowhere
Have been known to be tethered,
Given a name, encouraged
To get pregnant in the broad daylight
Of the street under the elders
'Supervision, the girls hiding
Behind windows with holes in them.
("Small - Scale Reflections on a Great House")

The Apollonian Ramanujan was a conscientious craftsman who revises and re-revises what he writes till perfection is achieved. He uses simplest words possible, especially monosyllabic, thus achieving a concentration of novel sounds which make his diction musical and sweet sounding. Rhyme and assonance are the other devices used by him to create musical effects. Correct placement

of words and no use of superfluity add to Ramanujan's credo. His diction has almost classical simplicity, austerity and perfection. There is something cynical about Ramanujan's use of the language. It has a cold, glass-like quality. He attempts to turn language into an artefact. He uses tones and rhythms of familiar, everyday speech and employs cliché and slang in incongruous contexts to achieve unexpected effects. And these devices by the poet are skilfully related to the meanings which he wanted to convey. Examples are to be found in "Snakes", "Looking for a Cousin on a House", "Still Another for Mother", and "Small Scale Reflections on a Great House". The trick of repetition is used by Ramanujan with telling effect in a number of poems like "Snakes", "A River" and "The Last of the Princes".

Furthermore, while Ramanujan mostly writes in free verse, he often makes use of rhyme—especially internal rhyme and assonance for building up his effects. He also uses the short line, sometimes even as short as one or two syllables. Almost every line in his poetry is spoken in one or two efforts of the breath. His lines are accent based and colloquial. In "Prayer to Lord Marugan", the serenity and silence of the concluding prayer contrast sharply with the excited, almost feverish, pitch of voice and the movement of images with which the God is sought to be invoked in the opening prayer.

Alongside the Apollonian traits, we can also find traces of Dionysian features in Ramanujan's atavistic poetic arguments. In Ramanujan's quirky universe, excellence in human affairs is more a product of one's compulsions or handicaps rather than one's innate genius. In his poem "Figures of disfigurement" he reveals how some underlying handicaps, physical or mental; bring grace to the so-called graceful. This is how he accounts for the graceful movements of a traffic constable:

Sick, disabled, twisting
through the bright days
the constable
of the market traffic
moves only his left hand
in sheer agony
Men in cars, women on bikes
Admire the grace of his movements.
("Figures of disfigurement")

Grace is an outcome of some internal sickness. Creativity is attributed to physical disorder. Sickness is the mother of invention. Disease is strength. Those who suffer from epilepsy undergo moments of ecstasy. In the nihilistic vision of the poet, future belongs either to the diseased or to the deceased. Metaphysics is one casualty of post-modern playfulness. The high ideal of "being" is shunned in favour of more pragmatic "becoming", even this becoming is highly topsy-turvy. Ramanujan questions the humanly plausible enterprise of "becoming". Becoming is not an upward movement of self-realisation, it is more a movement of self-caricature. The contemporary forces of commercialisation have reduced man to a commodity was his belief.

Institutionalised religion with all its promises of formulaic salvation is nothing but a grand scandal which parody as the poet's chosen strategy of subversion threatens to expose. Ramanujan's poetic landscape is crowded with family members, including dead and "unborn". All members are caricaturised except his mother. The poet's otherwise rather unceremonious attitude is somehow checkmated by the presence of his mother. In "Returning", the poet away from his motherland, in some moments of nostalgia looks for his mother who had died years ago. The ending of the poem is really poignant:

> Where are you? I'm home! I'm hungry!
> But there was no answer, not even an echo
> In the deserted street blazing with sunshine
> Suddenly he remembered he was now sixty-one
> And he hadn't had a mother for forty years. ("Returning")

Such moments of poignancy are rare in Ramanujan's weird universe. Even, in many poems Ramanujan depicts himself as being on the brink of madness and psychosis:

> Dreams are full of enemies, bruises...
> A stillness haunts his walking, there's a fury in his sitting quietly.
> ("Looking and Finding")

Last, but not least, Ramanujan appears to have the surest touch, for he never lapses into romantic cliché. Hs unfailing sense of rhythm gives a fitting answer to those who hold that complete inwardness with language is possible only to a poet writing in his mother tongue. Though he writes in open forms, his verse is extremely tightly constructed. His technical accomplishment is indisputable and his thematic strategy unparallel. As Taqi Ali Mirza observes, Ramanujan has revealed himself not only as a great craftsman but as a poet of substance. His Apollonian craft can be credited for turning the ephemeral into the permanent, articulating the predicament of a whole people in verse which is charged with emotion and has the detachment of great art. His "Particular hell" is our common heritage. His poetry, despite its rootedness in Indian cultural traditions, can be read on its own as English poetry with modern themes and forms. Thus, he achieves a rare blending of the ancient and the modern, the Indian and the American idioms. As in T.S. Eliot, in Ramanujan too there is continuity between his poetry, translation and scholarship.

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12

"The Morning Light Creaks Down Again": Reconsidering the Two Morning-Poems of R. Parthasarathy

KAUSTAV CHAKRABARTY

> The problem with marriage is that it ends every night after making love, and it must be rebuilt every morning before breakfast.—Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*

Rajagopal Parthasarathy's personal poems have always been strained with an iota of uneasiness: "and it shows most constrictingly in his love-poems, if they can be called so. They are...", as Gauri Deshpande rightly observed, "regretful, wry, even cynical...."He cannot forget the "skull beneath the skin"....Very few poems escape from this unusual weight of "I'm past it all". (Introduction to *An Anthology of Indo-English Poetry*). Deshpande seemed to be annoyed of Parthasarathy's love poems with the recurrent "undercurrent of certain, unnecessary farewell" and she ended her note by wishing that the poet "will some day turn to the mistress he once tired of". The critic's reaction is commonly shared by the readers of Parthasarathy's love-poems published in *Poetry from Leeds*, *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* and *Rough Passage*. However, surprisingly enough, in two love poems that were published in *Kavya Bharati* (edited by R P Nair, Special Issue, "Poetry of the Indian Diaspora – I", published from The Study Centre for Indian Literature In English And Translation,

American College, Madurai**,** Number 16, 2004), the poet appears to be deeply merged with the renewed love—love that is celebrated without the consciousness of being "so perishable, trite", but rather with a sense of an everlasting attachment.

The love-poems of Parthasarathy from *Kavya Bharati* are titled as ''Aubade" and ''Pillow Talk". Both 'alba' and 'aubade' are genres of morning-poetry. The *alba*'s theme of separation, its preference for dialogue, differentiate the *alba* from the *aubade*, a distinction lost to all but the most specialised literary critics. The word aubade does not appear before the fifteenth century and technically designates a waking song addressed to the sleeping beloved from a window or door. The aubade, in modern usage, is a poem of the morning, of sun-up—though it's also a poem of yearnings, traditionally presenting a farewell, from one lover to another, as one departs before the light catches them together. Since aubades both open and close, these poems seem capable of great depth or complexity of emotion—and they offer many opportunities for innovation. The poem entitled ''Aubade" portrays the arousing lovers' rising recollection of the night-long amatory, while the ''Pillow Talk" broods on the temporal halt of their union at the day-break. Hence, both the poems, the first one as the celebrating alba and the second one as the lamenting aubade, exhibit the gamut of emotions that the modern poets like Parthasarathy infuse into this traditional genre.

"Aubade" is also an olfactory-poem where the aromatic imagery portrays the beloved through the lover's adoration cum addiction of her fragrance:

> Under the warm coverlet my woman sleeps on;
> I am drenched in the intractable scent of her hair.
> The notion has often crossed my mind:
> I should crumple it up like a handkerchief
> that I could press to my face from time to time.
>
> ("Aubade", R. Parthasarathy)

Traditionally, in Asian poetry, woman's hair had a strong sexual association, and Parthasarathy's love poem seems to be an ideal inheritor of the tradition. Even in the poems composed by Japanese women poets, the consciousness of the sexual appeal of the women's hair is quite obvious. A poem by Izumi Shikibu from the late eighth century stated: "Not even aware of my tangled black hair/ I lie face down/ Longing for him who put his fingers through it" (Toyomi, 245). Yosano, a renowned poetess, was well aware of the specific metaphorical function given to women's hair in traditional Japanese poetry, thus the title of her first collection, *Tangled Hair*. The following poem, for example, draws directly upon the familiar image of black hair: "My black hair/ A thousand strands of my hair/ My hair all-a-tangle/ And my heart all-a-tangle/ My heart all-a-tangle" (Toyomi, 173). Parthasarathy's poems have hardly witnessed such vocal enthralling of unquenched physical intimacy. Contradictorily, the oft cited 'aubade' poem entitled ''East Window'' reveals Partharasathy's antipathy for the corporeal:

> Few are the body's needs:
> it is the mind's that are insatiable.
> May our hands and eyes open this spring afternoon
> as the blue phlox open on a calm Salem Drive
> to the truth of each ordinary day:
> the miracle is all in the unevent.
>
> What home have I, an exile,
> other than the threshold of your hand?
> Love is the only word there is:
> a fool wears out his tongue learning to say it,
> as I have, every day of his life.
>
> ("East Window", R. Parthasarathy)

But most strikingly, the poet moves a step ahead, from imaginative to instinctive discourse, through vivid celebration of the tangible intimacy:

Meanwhile wakeful hands peel the skin off the night;
I drink from her tongue in the dark.
Our breath tips the room over to one side:
the tight hardwood floor groans
under the slew of discarded clothes.
("Aubade", R. Parthasarathy)

Such gratifying union finds its only parallel in Terese Svoboda's "Aubade":

Sinews here and there,
his legs twined at desk
and all of him bare,

mousing around, click,
so the child won't wake.
Sinews, his sex thick ("Aubade", Terese Svoboda)

The concluding couplet of Parthasarathy's "Aubade" tries to defy the alarming dawn unlike the traditional aubades; rather more like an 'alba' the poem endeavours at resisting love's satiety and the consequent parting off for the day-works:

We shut the whole untidy threadbare world out—
dogs, telephones, even the small indifferent rain.
("Aubade", R. Parthasarathy)

Such confrontation again adds to Parthasarathy's "Aubade" a de-stereotyped positive vein, unlike the prevalent anxiety-syndrome that could be traced in the conventional aubades, Sir William Davenant's "Aubade" is a specimen of the convention:

The lark now leaves his wat'ry nest,
And climbing shakes his dewy wings.
He takes this window for the East,
And to implore your light he sings—
Awake, awake! the morn will never rise
Till she can dress her beauty at your eyes.

The merchant bows unto the seaman's star,
The ploughman from the sun his season takes,
But still the lover wonders what they are
Who look for day before his mistress wakes.
Awake, awake! break thro' your veils of lawn!
Then draw your curtains, and begin the dawn!
("Aubade", Sir William Davenant)

The deviation attempted at "Aubade" soon proves futile, for the very opening lines of the subsequent poem entitled "Pillow Talk" announce: "You wake up and slip quietly out of the room,/ shutting the door behind you...". The lover is left alone with the intoxicating smell of the lady-love:

....Eyes closed,
I clasp the pillows one after another,
often press them to my nose in hopes of smelling out
the faintest trace of your body's secret perfume.
("Pillow Talk", R. Parthasarathy)

Here again, the poet's obsession with smell becomes evident. Modern psycho-physiological researches have shown that physical attraction itself may literally be based on smell. Often people discount the importance of scent-centric communication only because it operates on such a subtle level. "This is not something that jumps out at you, like smelling a good steak cooking on the grill," says Anya Rikowski, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of New Mexico. "But the scent capability is there, and it's not surprising to find smell capacity in the context of sexual behavior." The poem, though accepts the temporal departure of the lovers at the sun-rise, does not, however, sound cynic like that of Larkin's "Aubade", where departure gets almost identical with the contemplation of death:

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse
– The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused – nor wretchedly because

An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
But at the total emptiness for ever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.
("Aubade", Philip Larkin)

The "Pilow Talk" rather becomes a more authentic 'aubade' in its lamenting over the end of the nocturnal voluptuary and the beginning of the day-routine:

What nights we have ridden out on these pillows!
What strange cargo of dreams and memories
has washed up on these shores!
Never before have I held you more closely
as I hold you now in your absence.

But you, you hug the morning paper to your chest
in the kitchen, washing it down with a cup of tea.
("Pillow Talk", R. Parthasarathy)

The kitchen-scene reminds the reader of the poem "Aubade" by Edith Sitwell where the lady is summoned to join the kitchen as the initial task of the day:

Jane, Jane,
Tall as a crane,
The morning light creaks down again;
Comb your cockscomb-ragged hair,
Jane, Jane, come down the stair.
Each dull blunt wooden stalactite
Of rain creaks, hardened by the light,
Sounding like an overtone
From some lonely world unknown.
But the creaking empty light
Will never harden into sight,
Will never penetrate your brain

With overtones like the blunt rain.
The light would show (if it could harden)
Eternities of kitchen garden,
Cockscomb flowers that none will pluck,
And wooden flowers that 'gin to cluck.
In the kitchen you must light
Flames as staring, red and white,
As carrots or as turnips shining
Where the cold dawn light lies whining.
("Aubade", Edith Sitwell)

Aubade is etymologically love poem and Parthasarathy's "Aubade" and "Pillow Talk" demonstrate the poet's return to his beloved with a renewed love and vigorous want. In one major way Parthasarathy's newly composed morning-poetry is critical when it comes to sexuality as an expression of individuality and as a form of emotional connection between people, with the speaker still longing for those interpersonal connections. The only uneasiness that arises is the question of explicit objectification through the eroticizing of the female body. However, as observes Julian Wolfreys, when it comes to the subject of the body feminist history has showed ambivalence. While some believe the body to be the source of women's oppression, others view it as "the locus of a specifically female power". Is an eroticized female body a symbol of empowerment or a reinforcement of its submissiveness in a patriarchal society? Until the feminist thinkers come forward with a unanimous consensus, the readers can enjoy these two morning-poems as the path-breaking love-poems of Parthasarathy's entire poetic career.

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13

"Masterful Images" of Orissa vis-à-vis India: A Critique of Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry

Nitai Saha

> "Many of our poets elevate the artist to the ethereal, where we deny the connections between the self and other, separating language from social relations. We revere this isolated human being and treat his imagination as something he has inherited, a gift from god, as though there were no logical relationship between the self and the world. We are then aware that we write without any sense of community or audience. That is probably why the poetry of many Indian poets fails, when these poets prefer to live abroad, exiled by his own choosing."
>
> —Jayanta Mahapatra

> "Frankly, I should like to write such a poetry, a poetry which comes out of ashes of our own culture."
>
> —Jayanta Mahapatra

Jayanta Mahapatra, like many other Indian poets writing in English, is bilingual. He used to write poetry in Oriya, his mother tongue, before he started writing poetry in English. It is beyond doubt that his Oriya poetry also rank very high. The works of several noted Oriya poets have been translated into English by him. In fact, one of the most widely known Indian English poets

of our time is Jayanta Mahapatra. His poetry is widely read and discussed both at home and abroad. C.L.L. Jayaprada in *Indian Literature Today* mentions: "His (Mahapatra's) is the case of a writer who is first recognized abroad before getting deserved attention at home. Even now one could say that critical output on Mahapatra is not appropriate to his own work."(86)

Truly speaking, the path of an Indian poet writing in English does not run so smooth as that of a native poet. The genuineness of his sensibility and his language are equally doubtful. This is the reason why an Indian poet writing in English often resorts to devices both in his matter and manner, which may be called 'gimmics' as so many Indian poets attempt to sell Indian English poetry abroad. One often finds distortion of syntax and use of unusual words, phrases and imagery to startle the readers and create an impression of Indianness. He is always aware of his writing in a foreign language and so his expression is often laboured and forced. R. Parthasarathy rightly observes:

> "The true poets among Indo-Anglians seem to be those who write in English as well as in their own language. They are poets in their own right who have something significant to say, and know how to say it, both in English and their native tongue. They are not out to 'sell' their poetry through a skilled manipulation of words and the employment of sophisticated techniques. Mahapatra belongs to this small group of genuine poets. Since he is a bi-lingual writer, the secret of his success lies in his not disowning his India inheritance, and not falling a prey to what has been called a feeling of alienation. He has, by and large, steered clear of the pitfalls listed above and the result is an unmistakable authenticity of tone and treatment."(vii)

Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry is the production of various tensions – the rationalist, the eminent teacher of physics finding his roots in the tradition of the country. He has been always there to

decipher the meaning of Hindu myths, rites and rituals, an analytical mind reconciling with ancestral beliefs. As a creator of an intensely meditative, introspective, dialectical hyper-serious poetry, Mahapatra can certainly be called the second generation of modern Indian poets writing in English. It is beyond doubt that Jayanta Mahapatra is deeply rooted in the Orissan soil. Places like Puri, Konark, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar form as it were, a quadrangle in the landscape of his poetry. Legends, history and myths associated with these places immensely interest Jayanta Mahapatra and form the very hub of his poetry. He has written several poems focusing on Puri – the great sacred place of Lord Jagannath- the presiding deity of Orissa. For Hindus, Puri is one of the four well-known places of pilgrimage.

The main focus of his poetic creativity seems to be centered on the 'Naked Earth', and the mythological, symbolic or aesthetic structures firmly rooted in that 'naked earth', of which Orissa and India form a significant part. He writes in 'Living':

> "The naked earth is my radius. Each tropic hour has moved west, ordaining me into the quiet witness to warm brown ground, swinging me to sleep." (*Waiting* 50)

Jayanta Mahapatra's constant preoccupation with the naked earth--the favourite places such as Jagannath Puri, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar in Orissa as mentioned before and parts of Indian soil—dominates one prominent layer of his created work. His is a poetic exploration of the earth to which he belongs as much as it equally becomes a search for his self. Mahaptra tries to relate man to his bit of the earth and explore the subtle relationship between the poet and the earth. This close relationship is explicitly shown in his poem, "Somewhere, My man":

> A man does not mean anything
> But the place.

> Sitting on the riverbank throwing pebbles
> Into the muddy current,
> A man becomes the place.
> Even that simple enough thing. (*A Rain of Rites* 42)

There is, thus, an almost total identification of man with his environment, the earth that has raised him, and this approach has placed Mahapatra with Whitman in range and spirit. Walt Whitman, in his well-known lyric, "There Was a Child Went Forth" (1871) articulates his intensely-felt experience of childhood, of vivid identification with objects in nature and how the child becomes part of the nature he observes. While Walt Whitman vividly expresses the growing child's steady identification with his experience and universalizes his testimony, he also seems to me to echo the romantic poet's basic quest for identity and a feeling for unity with natural phenomena. This feeling is not something new, since other romantic poets also have expressed similar notions. Jayanta Mahapatra follows into the footsteps of these poets in expressing his deep attachment to the earth- and his identification with the experience of that earth. It is obvious that Walt Whitman and Jayanta Mahapatra occupy quite different cabins on their journey in quest of the spirit – indeed they are very dissimilar in many ways – and yet they share the romantic poet's search for this total identification.

The cyclical change in the Indian year, in Orissa's wet and fertile landscape, and the naked earth covered by the waters of the Mahanadi and its tributaries add beauty to the whole landscape. The myths and rituals associated with the numerous temples around he region, for instance, the myth of the great Jagannath and his rath-ride (annual car festival), the myths of the Sun associated with the Sun Temple at Konarak and the famous erotic postures of men and women engaged in close physical embrace – and the other myths of Shiva, the great god in whose

honour so many temples have been built by his followers —have pervasively affected the creative sensibility of Jayanta Mahapatra.

Jagannath Puri has assumed the position of a central character in several of Jayanta Mahapatra's poems – it is, as it were, the central consciousness of the poet's creativity, which flows into making of these poems. How do the worshippers look like when they are totally immersed in a contemplative mood of praying? This is shown in "Ikon", a poem which depicts the process of worship of the *Linga* in a Shiva temple. The image– lingam – is made of black polished stone, and is primarily worshipped as a phallic symbol of fertility:

> What else can the face of crowds show?
> Among them a father stands,
> looking around, like a hill.
> Then, mumbling to himself,
> he touches the *linga* with his forehead,
> divine earths closing his eyes, a sightless god;
> his charred silence
> left from an enormous fire
> no one can remember. (37)

In this poem, as well as in other poem, "Sun Worshippers Bathing", Jayanta Mahapatra projects the mood of prayer of the people who visit the temple or those who bathe in the river and then pray facing the rising sun by making 'offerings' and chanting *mantras* :

> On the river
> a whole reasons tends to close.
> Its sacraments
> linger long in his eyes.
> His jaw moves
> to *mantras:*
> the up and down bobbing of a leaf.
> You overhear the words of ridiculous centuries;

each syllable heavy, blind,
rolling ponderously across the water
like blocks of fog. *(Waiting,* 36)

Mahapatra tries to articulate the inarticulate devotees' sense of prayer and devotional intensity as they enter the temple at Puri. In "The Temple Road, Puri" he describes the 'stream of common men' on the road to the temple and their posture of prayer:

Later,
as the shrine's skeins of light
slowly close their eyes,
something reaching into them
from that place they learn to bear:
the lame lamp post
to the huge temple door,
the sacred beads in their hands
gaping
at the human ground. *(Waiting,* 29)

In the poem "Dawn at Puri", the poet underlines the importance of Puri and what it means to the Hindus in our country. This is the place where windows long for breathing their last less they should attain salvation. Here Jayanta Mahapatra focuses on the faith of the Hindu woman in this particular place of pilgrimage. Since the temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri points to unending rhythm, dying in this place will take one to silence the ultimate desire of a human being which will enable him to attain nirvana.

In another poem – "The Temple Road, Puri", the poet describes the stream of common men on the road to the temple and the form of their prayer.

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the lame lamp post
to the huge temple door,
the sacred beads in their hands gaping
at the human ground ("The Temple Road, Puri" 29)

This poem focuses on people's devotion to the deity. Me Sense of Universal brotherhood overwhelms them and the heart gets purified. Mahapatra's poetic exploration of the places to which he belongs turns out to be a search for the self. Mahapatra often refers to the places of his birth land. In fact, the landscape of his state urges upon the poet to relate it to his poetic craft. For instance in "Somewhere, My Man" the poet says:

A man does not mean anything
But the place
Sitting on the river bank throwing pebbles
into the muddy current,
a man becomes the place.

In fact, some places like Puri, Konark, Bhubaneswar and Cuttack are of utmost importance for Jayanta Mahapatra as they embody the tradition of ancient Orissa and her heroic past. Mahapatra's well known poems like "Indian Summer Poem", "Evening in an Orissa Village", "The Orissa Poems", "The Indian Poems", "The Indian Way" reveal his Indian sensibility. While receiving the National Akademi of letters Award, Jayanta Mahapatra said:

"To Orissa, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which lies my beginning and my end, where the wind knees over the grief of the River Gaya and where the waves of Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Konark. I acknowledge my debt and my relationship."(35)

Thus local colour is an important ingredient of Mahapatra's poetry. We learn a lot about his native land and its various traditions by reading his poetry. Dr. B. K. Das observes: "The poet's life is integrated with the heroic tradition of the land of

his birth and as he becomes conscious of it, his heart throbs and a kind of unknown fear engulfs him. The landscape of Orissa moves him when he observes the annual migrating birds from far north Siberia to the warm waters of Chilika, a beautiful lake in Orissa. The agony of the poet springs from the fact that while the birds and animals react naturally to the seasons of the year, he is cut off as it were from the heroic traditions of his ancestors. He says that, 'I can never come alive if I refuse to consecrate at the altar of my origins' and thus 'a prayer to draw my body out of a thousand years.' There is a sense nostalgia which pervades the atmosphere of the poem. Cuttak, a city of historical importance, which had the great Barabati Fort, is now a symbol of "vanquished dynasties". A sense of belonging overwhelms the poet in a voice charged with emotion."(45)

The poet expresses his personal feelings in the following lines of 'Relationship':

> Now I stand among these ruins
> waiting for the cry of a night
> bird from the river's far side
> to drift through my weariness
> listening to the voices of my friends
> who have become the friends of others
> writing poems, object and anxious
> in rooms which reck of old folk,
> of their sloth and arthritis and neglect.
> Like state cupboards which are going black
> With the smells of the rancid fact of the past.
>
> ("Relationship" 9)

Relationship (1980) is perhaps an appropriate climax to the entire poetic endeavour of Jayanta Mahapatra – from *Close the Sky Ten*, *Swayamvara and Other Poems*, *A Father's Hours*, etc. to this towering poetic achievement combining the voices of Konark, Puri and Bhubaneswar, and of the worlds beyond in a single melody. It is perhaps, as M.K.Naik says, a voice of "Only Connect" –

combining personal memory with the myths of Orissa. "The Orissa scene steeped in history, legend and myth", he writes, "is an even stronger of 'relationship' which is central to his quest is intensely personal, and therefore the poem is not a tract in verse on the pastness of the past or the pastness of the present. The poet's initiation into the awareness of the past begins in his awareness of 'myth':

> Once again one must sit back and bury the face
> in this earth of the forbidding myth,
> the phallus of the enormous stone. ("Relationship" 9)

It seems that there is a need for pilgrimage to the 'Living Oriya Past' in order to recognize the present and lead a meaningful life by imbibing spirit of the glorious past and tradition of the land. Jayanta Mahapatra underlines this aspect in his own words:

> "'Relationship' is a product of dreams, has made me speak of the demands of a pilgrimage – a pilgrimage threatened by the living Oriya past, by nagging hunger and a persistent sexuality."(30)

Jayanta Mahapatra's sensibility is essentially Indian, but he does not create the impression of Indianness by bringing in such traditional items as tigers, snake, snake harmers, jugglers, crocodiles etc. His Indianness is seen at its best in his poems about Orissa, where the local and the regional is raised to the level of the universal. Mahapatra's poetry does reflect a distinct regional colour:

> This is the place
> where I was born. I
> know it
> well. It is home
> (Ezekiel, After Reading a Prediction)

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The Woman Speaks

14

Feminist Quest for Emancipation: A Reading of the Poems of Mamta Kalia

SUPRIYA DEBNATH

Mamta Kalia (b1940) has established a powerful niche among the community of post-independence women poets who evolved a new poetics for themselves and made a new start both in theme and technique around the 1960s. A bilingual poet, Kalia writes both in English and Hindi. She has authored two volumes of English poems so far, namely *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems* (Calcutta: WW, 1970) and *Poems' 78* (Calcutta: WW, 1978). Her poetry encompasses a wide variety of themes, namely, love, marriage, social and family relationships and the degeneration of human values in modern society. With an acute feminine sensibility or more precisely, feminine assertiveness, she has chosen poetry to express the sordid reality of the lives of women in India. She depicts, through her poetry, a sensitive and intellectual woman's predicament in relation to her parents, family, domestic and professional life and the large outer social life. She also articulates the psychic frustrations and compulsions of love and marriage:

> Her poems deal with frustrations of a woman's life in and outside the house, boredom of married life and chaos of values in society. (Bajaj, 1996:19)

As an Indian woman poet, she is conscious of her identity in the traditional Indian society and raises her voice against the oppression of women with a great sense of vigour and involvement. Her distinctive self-revelatory tone, suffused with sharp intellectual sensibility lends uniqueness to her writings. Forced living in an appalling environment, including her relationship with her father that was all the time a dominating one, her loneliness in a women's hostel just after marriage, her living with a husband who could not differentiate between love and sex, her survival with all those twelve members of the family who are related to her husband, and so on, has made her voice her anger and dissatisfaction with life. By using irony, she concentrates on the ordinariness of women's life and adopts a confessional tone in her attempt to overcome the aggression faced by them in the male-oriented society. In fact, her poetry shows a rebellious will to fight for the cause of women and demands a world free from discriminatory values, hypocrisy and prejudiced rules:

> Mamta Kalia is no strident, feminist activist .... Yet her poetry shares a vital concern with the basic proposition of women's demands for an equitable life. She has not only the passion for individuality but also supports the feminist agenda for liberation from patriarchal oppression, and other limitations. (Vashishth)

Mamta Kalia's poetic sensibility is almost exclusively subjective in its response to experience as a beloved and as a serving woman. A large number of poems from the first volume concentrate on the romantic passion of early love while majority of poems from the second volume project the tension of adjusting with the routine of many years of successful love-relationship. She depicts oppression of women with greater self-consciousness, a deeper sense of involvement and often with a note of protest. Despite her literary interest and education she has faced discrimination

and obstacles in her life. She is highly ambitious and gifted but due to low self-esteem, self-confidence she gets psychological problems and manic depressions. She struggles with the ardent feminist within her. She goes to embrace the ideology of femininenes that has been indoctrinated into the women of her generation. She conveys the turmoil of feeling in cool, idiomatic and sensitive prose through her writing. Speaking of her poetic realm, Kalia says:

> *Tribute To Papa* is an ironical collection. I tried to parody most of the relationships. I was breaking down things.....so the poems were against established values, established relationships which are taken for granted. Some of these relationships are served to you on a platter. The first book is a refusal of all that. In the second book, Poems'78, I've sobered down, and moved from individual to social concerns. I felt contradictions in society were more important and more critical than personal contradictions and failures. Society is still full of contradictions. Women are burnt and raped. Dowry demands still exist. Instead of talking about post - modernism we should talk about post - barbarism. Much needs to be done with the pen. (Kalia,1999:60).

The title poem of her debut verse-collection *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems* begins with a set of interrogative sentences having implications of dissent with a father's idealism and his adherence to customs, traditions and sacraments. The daughter questions the authority and concerns of the father. She is, in the words of Virginia Woolf, "killing the Angel in the house" (Woolf, 1929). 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? (pg 9 TTPOP)

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. Kalia rejects her father's life of 'limited dreams':

"I wish you had guts, papa
to smuggle eighty thousand watches at a
stroke." (pg 9 TTPOP)

She does not mind defying the ideals of her father in order to be happy. In the modern world, prayers are considered as concealment for inactiveness and lack of aptitude of a person. She interrogates and rejects her father's idealism and sanctimony as his inability and weakness:

When you can't think of doing anything
You start praying,
Spending useless hours at the temple. (pg 9 TTPOP)

She terms prayers as useless to which a person resorts when he /she is not able to do anything. She intends to choose her own course and follow her ideals. 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.

That's what a ¯Lower Division Clerk,
Accounts Section can be
You want me to be like you, Papa,
Or like Rani Lakshmibai,
You're not sure what greatness is,
But you want me to be great.
I give two donkey-claps for your greatness
And three for Rani Lakshmibai. (pg 9 TTPOP)

Thus, in this poem she rejects her father's notions of greatness and the Indian model of a woman as Laxmibai who fought and died in one sense not for the sake of women but for her son—something that patriarchy would not mind. The comparison of Rani Lakshmibai is very satirical. In actuality a woman is denied the scope of improving her own status. She has to prove her ability and make her presence felt everywhere, she is slave and the Second Sex. As Beauvior says, "Women has always been man's dependent, if not his slave, the two sexes have never, shared the world in equality". First she has to liberate herself free from the bonds and restraint imposed upon her by this society and then she can fight for some other cause. Rani of Jhansi fought for the cause of independence and died for that but she could not maintain her own identity. Her real name was Manu but after marriage her husband changed her name and called her Rani Lakshmibai. She lost her name and identity for her husband. A woman becomes great if she scarifies herself for her husband and children in this man's world. The problem arises when she starts thinking about herself. So Mamta Kalia does not want to be Rani Lakshmibai. She gives two donkey claps for her father's greatness and three for Rani Lakshmibai. Thus 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. She represents a modern woman who has the bravado to raise voice against the set patterns of patriarchy. She subverts the codes of our gender biased society, and hence her

crusade against patriarchy and its 'absolute' character manifests itself deconstructing the forms of knowledge which, according to Derrida, is 'structured around a centre'.

Thus the poem marks the resultant communication gap between the old and the young. She again says that her father is suspecting her of having a love-affair but he cannot say this to her directly because he feels ashamed of this love affair and pregnancy:

> "Everything about you clashes with nearly
> everything about me.
> You suspect I am having a love affair 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? (pg 9 TTPOP)

Her revolt goes to the extent of disowning her father:

> These days I am
> seriously thinking of disowning you, papa
> You and your sacredness. (pg 9 TTPOP)

However, the poem closes on a note of concern for the father. In the Indian middle class society, daughters have a great 'responsibility' for honouring the family values and any wrong step by them can dishonour the whole family. In a patriarchal culture daughters are emotionally compelled to sacrifice their feelings and emotions for the sake of the family. So Kalia ends the poem with an ironic cautious note as:

> But I'll be careful, papa
> Or I know you'll at once think of suicide.(pg 9 TTPOP)

Patriarchy considers woman as a marginalized creature and her destiny is always defined with reference to man. The same society imparts fullest autonomy to a man, instilling pride in him for his

manhood and independence. Passivity is treated as an essential characteristic of femininity, but a boy\man is encouraged to undertake, invent, dare and achieve self-realization. In such a society a woman feels marginalized, cornered, even overwhelmed by the harsh and unpleasant realities of the society. Kalia vehemently expresses her unwillingness to accept all the standards and norms of behaviour and conduct fixed by men. She has a free will and intellect. She is very candid in her poetic expression and confesses whatever she desires in a straightforward manner. As she reveals in 'Compulsions':

> I want to slap the boy who makes love in a café
> . . . . . .
> I want to pay Sunday visits
> Totally undressed
> I want to throw away
> All my cosmetics
> I want to reveal
> My real age. (pg 12 TTPOP)

Her poetry is truly confessional as she never hesitates to confess her feeling and experience, guilt and hate, love and lust. It is self-revelatory, poetry of private details. She doesn't hesitate to articulate her impatience with the social etiquettes, and makes a frank declaration of her desires for normal life:

> I want to shout in the middle of the road, I have a name;
> I'm Sheela, I've studied four classes in Prathamik Shala,
> Once I went to a picnic and drank Coca-Cola,
> I can roll excellent *chapattis,* (pg 18 TTPOP)

Mamta Kalia thus seeks to subvert the phallocentric language and asserts the discourse of desire from the woman's point of view, the subordinate role of woman in the patriarchal society is reversed, and the woman is given voice to articulate her desires, her will to have her sensual orgasm at her own behest. While

articulating woman's desire, Kalia demolishes the position of the subordination of woman and places her in the active role, giving her the word to voice her inner urges.

Like Kamala Das and Gauri Deshpande, Kalia also jostles with the ground realities of life. Her another poem 'Sheer Good Luck' holds mirror to the insecure position of women in male-dominated society. To quote her from the poem:

> I could have been kidnapped
> at the age of seven
> and ravaged by
> dirty-minded middle aged man (pg 11 TTPOP)

'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 kidnapping, abduction and rape as forms of grisly violence that women might fall prey to in an unsafe 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. The expression, "a man with a bad smell" not only implies the imposition of masculinity but also carries undertones of sexuality.

The last image 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. (pg 11 TTPOP)

This picture apart from depicting illiteracy and ignorance on the part of women also takes to task the men-folk who exploit 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 as the poet tells ironically and wittily how jaded and lackluster her wedded life has turned out to be:

> But nothing ever happened to me
> except two children
> and two miscarriages. (pg 11 TTPOP)

Kalia gives an ironic treatment to the institution of marriage which turns a young bride old before her age so that she sleeps with a 'headache' and wakes up with a 'backache'. The condition becomes more pathetic when the husband does not acknowledge her talents and sacrifices:

> Love made a housewife out of me
> I came with a degree in textile designing
> I skill in debates, dramatics and games
> You don't realise
> You don't sympathise. (pg 20 P-78)

She prefers to confront truth in its nakedness rather than seeking a romantic hideout. She hardly ever hesitates in speaking out her feeling of ennui in her relationships. She dares to question the chauvinistic attitude of her man. For instance, in her poem "Must Write Nicely Now", she voices her anger and anguish at the arrogant and self-centred outlook of her husband:

> Rejection, Dejection, Erection,
> You can't adjust with your own children.
> You feel the world is full of whores
> Knocking hard at your bedroom doors.

You sleep with a headache
And wake up with a backache.
Except yourself
You feel everything is fake. (pg 18 P-78)

Another poem "I am a Great Fool" presents the poetess's sense of ennui in her matrimonial relationship, where she finds marriage hazardous for keeping love alive. She cries in disillusionment:

I am a great fool
To think that marriage is bliss,
Was it last month or last year
That we exchanged a kiss. (pg 8 P-78)

The same thought is carried out in "Matrimonial Bliss". Kalia brings out the compulsions under which a woman is forced to spend her life, the superficiality of living with a husband with whom she has a relationship devoid of love and understanding, feeling separated while together. There is nobody to share her feelings, she feels lonely but pretends to be happy in order to please her husband:

I keep hanging on to you like an appendix.
But you don't mind,
You obligingly smile,
Asking me to keep note of milk and bread.
I feel all disjointed inside.
But the moment I hear your footstep;
I put all of me together
And give you my best smile
That's eternally saying cheese. (pg 30 TTPOP)

Marriage for a girl means only an exchange of masters – first the parents were there, now there will be a husband to control her. As Simone de Beauvoir observes:

"There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband – or in some cases a 'protector' – is for her the most important of

> undertakings ……. She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother's hold, she will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile into the hands of a new master" (Beauvoir 352).

Marriage in Indian societies does not involve developing a love-relation with one's husband but marrying as if with the whole family and everyone related to the husband. In a joint family, a daughter-in-law is supposed to sacrifice her own wishes and dreams for the sake of her family. She has to shrink her own self in order to make her family happy. She is expected to obey everybody at her in-laws. Kalia depicts her agony and misery in a large joint family of her in-laws in "After Eight Years of Marriage". When she visited her parents 'for the first time' after 'eight years of marriage' they asked her whether she was happy, she found it as 'an absurd question', but like an accommodating Indian wife 'swallowed everything / And smiled a smile of great content.' However, her repressed self mulls over it:

> And I should have laughed at it.
> Instead, I cried,
> And in between sobs, nodded yes.
> I wanted to tell them
> That I was happy on
> Tuesday.
> I was unhappy on Wednesday.
> I was happy one day at 8 o' clock
> I was most unhappy by 8.15....
> I wanted to tell them how I wept in bed all night once
> And struggled hard from hurting myself.
> That it wasn't easy to be happy
> In a family of twelve. (pg 26 P-78)

"The poetess expresses her anguish over the fate and existence of all female creatures. Even in the group or family, they feel alienated and have to remain content within themselves. What Germaine Greer remarks in this context is true that "many a

housewife staring at the back of her husband's newspaper or listening to his breathing in bed is lonelier than any spinster in a rented room" (Greer 244).

There are several other poems, which convey, too, woman's compromises and adjustments with her surroundings. Especially a workingwoman, who has also to perform her duties as a homemaker, finds it hard to cope with the tedium of daily routine. She feels sandwiched between her place of work and household. On the one hand she has to bear the drudgery of her workplace, and on the other she has to manage 'sinkful of plates', 'unwashed brushes', 'hosting meals', "unmade beds', and of the ilk at home. In the poem "How Like A Fool", she tells about her exhaustion and humiliation in the office:

> Here like a fool I've been working all along
> When work is work's own defeat?
> My promotion waits on your naughty knees.
> Readiness is all I now need. (pg 15 P-78)

Kalia also exposes the sexual exploitation women experience under a male boss in poems like "Tit For Tat". According to Simon De Beauvoir:

> A woman is not allowed to do something positive in her work and in consequence win recognition as a complete person. However respected she may be she is subordinate, secondary and parasitic. (De Beauvoir,1984: 475)

But this subordination enrages Kalia's sensitive self and she expresses her anger thus:

> I'll hit you! / I'll tear you up
> .....
> No, I won't kill you all at once
> You don't kill me that way either. (pg 16 TTPOP)

Kalia's woman wants to avenge her male boss for his misdeeds. She breaks the age-old silence imposed by patriarchy:

> Let you taste the whole of death gradually,
> As I tasted it for twenty three years.
> You made me kneel / For insignificant things;
> .....
> You made a cipher out of me (pg 16 TTPOP)

"Active life" brings forth the dreary routine of a lady lecturer whose daily schedule includes 'preparing for lectures' and 'jotting down dictionary meanings', and on Sundays, she engages herself watching movie or writing diary or reading some book borrowed from the library. And by the end of day, 'She gargled at night / and slept serenely / after a bit of mental masturbation.' The workingwoman finds no joy even in sex, as the poet remarks in the poem 'They Made Love':

> They made love
> And ate sandwiches
> And looked at each other's face —
> Two empty cans. (pg 16 P-78)

In 'Sunday Song" the poet speaks of her languor and boredom on Sundays: 'The calendar has just dropped / a Sunday In my room.? I'm puzzled how to hold on to this long vacant day'. She misses her mate whose long absence has made her Sundays vacant and unexciting and with whom she used to have a holiday schedule full of great activity:

> I wonder at the emptiness
> of this Sunday and of all Sundays.
> It was not like this
> when you were here.
> We'd rise late,
> sip each other's tea,
> bathe together,

quarrel, all in a few hours.
We'd go places, visit friends, eat *bhel pun,*
We'd come back, make love again, call it a day...
(pg 23, NIWP 97)

But, at the same time, in love and marital ties, Kalia finds moving irony and paradox. At times, she grills her spouse, as in "Dubious Lovers": '...you insist on your presence, / and I am conscious of it / as I am of a burning in my rectum / or hair on my chin' (pg 19 TTPOP). She also mentions of quarrels in married life. There are moments when they 'look at each other sheepishly / badly needing something to talk about'. Often ego-clash makes it difficult for both to arrive at a consensus:

Every time I open my mouth,
You feel let down,
And every time you discuss your pay scale,
I try hard not to frown.
If this goes on where will we end?
Or have we ended before we have begun? (pg 19 TTPOP)

There are quite a lot of other poems like "Love Made A Housewife Out of Me", "No, I'm No Pelican to My Sons', "It Was Faith", "Anonymous', 'Sunday Song", etc. which show Kalia's disquietude over woman's problems and predicaments in a male-dominated society. Most of Kalia's poetry speaks of her 'disjointed inside', anger and dissatisfaction with life. The loss of one's identity is often another form of estrangement that a woman feels under a repressive patriarchal system. Hence she raises her voice of protest against the man made and man- governed society wherein she fears of losing her individuality and identity. In her poem 'Anonymous', she voices her identity-crisis thus:

I no longer feel I'm Mamta Kalia.
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.
> I see worthless movies at reduced rates
> and feel happy at reduced rates…. I put on weight every month
> / like Kamla or Vimla / or Kanta or Shanta, / and feel happy.
> I am no longer Mamta Kalia'. (Kalia, 1997:26)

Before marriage everyone knows her by her name but after marriage she has become 'anonymous' as she has lost her identity after marriage. Thus the poet reveals acute awareness of the tragic fate which comes with the very fact of being born a woman. Kalia spares no pains to voice forth the emotional experiences, the cries in the lives of women; the physical and psychological torture experienced by them:

> 'Life of a woman is very difficult you are bound to adjust everywhere. I really hate the word 'adjust'. But after marriage I had to adjust a lot. When you marry a person you are directly connected to his family also. The motto of relationship is adjustment. Marriage is an adjustment. It is one sided elastic band where a women's patience is stretched.' (Kalia).

A woman as a wife is expected to be obedient and faithful to her husband and prove a good mother as far as nourishing of her children is concerned. There is no such established tradition for men. Kalia feels suffocation in such a society and repents that she is a woman. She is fed up of being a woman, "Oh, I'm fed up of being a woman,/ This all time bewareness of my body" (Poems 79), and looks for her emancipation through writing. She expresses her feelings in "In My Hour Of Discontent":

> In my hour of discontent
> I neither shout nor rant
> I simply fill ink in my pen
> And spill it with intent. (Pg 17 P-78)

She takes up her pen as the only weapon to fight against

discrimination:

> Creative expression is a lone man's battle against the enormous uncertainty of this universe. .....I may not be able to transform the world but I can certainly make them see through my minus-three eye sight..... the hope of being heard and read always exists. (Kalia,1999:63-64)

Mamta Kalia epitomizes an awakened and rebellious twenty-first century woman who possesses the guts to question, judge and finally reject the patriarchal norms imposed on women down the ages. She represents a modern woman who dares to raise voice against the set patterns of patriarchy. Her poetry is an important social document in which one finds struggle, search for identity and dignity, enlightenment and a yearning for a world in which the women are not just in the periphery, rather they are as central as the men. That is why, 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.

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15

"Brave New World"— Kamala Das's Poetic World Revisited

NITAI SAHA

> "I don't think we have many gifted writers like her. She is the most courageous writer I have come across—a woman capable of great love and compassion. I feel proud to be a contemporary of Kamala Das." —U.R. Ananthamurthy

> "Kamala Das has less variety, but more intensity, though her celebration of the body attains ritualistic overtones."
>
> —K. Ayyappa Paniker

In their Introduction to *Psyche*: *The Feminine Poetic Consciousness* (New York, 1973), Barbara Seyniz and Carol Rainey point out that "a conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male oriented universe" is one of the themes that preoccupies the women poets. Kamala Das, though deals with the conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male oriented universe, "her poetry is in the final analysis an acknowledgement and celebration of the beauty and courage of being a woman "(qtd. in Kohli 190).

Kamala Das' feminine self articulates her awareness of her surrounding, its sordidness, boredom, ugliness, horror and the hurts it has received in an insensitive, largely man-made world in which "love is crucified in sex and sex defiles itself again and

again" (Iyengar 677). She exposes those dark areas which are normally concealed and subjects herself to an elaborate private exposition. Such revelation denotes that "She is sinner, she is saint; she is the beloved, she is the betrayed; she is always and uniquely herself" (Iyengar 678). The obvious concern in her poetry is with a poetic effort to "transcend the physical self to experience the poetic self and its expressions." (Jassawalla 54) There is something beyond self exhibitionism in Kamala Das' poetry. She treats her poetry as "an attractive, protective or defiant cover to hide the nakedness of the self, but more often than not an engine of catharsis, a way of agonized self knowledge" (Iyengar 662). It is as honest, it is as human as she is.

Kamala Das' poetry is hardly optimistic and objective. There is a vision being essentially tragic and pessimistic, and her subjective self often feels irritated while confronting the grim reality around. Her poetry comes as the inevitable result of her childhood innocence shattered by the terrifying experiences of the adult world in which she realizes her miserable lot and helpless condition and that she is "a misfit everywhere." Her predicament mocks her feminine integrity and her poetic self attempts to wage a cold war against this predicament. Thus her poetry bursts "out the mire of her utter hopelessness like a red Lotus in order to express her endless female hungers" (Das 9); the muted whispers at the core of womanhood. It is the instinctive protest of her freedom-loving feminine self against her traumatic frustrations in love and marriage and the inhibitions against the freedom to search for her true self. Which is why "it is only when she comes up against moments of frustration for her personal self that Kamala Das seems to produce poetry." (Jassawalla 59)

It is a fact that in her search for self Kamala Das' poetic self fails in gaining a total vision of life. The reason for this lack of intensification of the total vision of life is her failure in keeping

barriers between the poetic self and its direct expression. Her main interest lies in the expression of "a raw, unsophisticated concentration of impulses and reactions to situations". She believes that she has

> "Come, yes, with hunger, faith and
> A secret language
> All ready to be used."

"It is not her intention to search for pretty words which dilute the truth" but (to) write in haste, "of everything perceived and known and loved." (Kohli 3) What she seeks most is the intensity of utterance to mull over love, sex and body's wisdom. "Her persona too sees herself in different situations against a concrete background, reacting to "incidents in the development of the soul." (Naik 209) Her poetic self encounters several faces of her feminine self in this process— "woman as a sweetheart, flirt, wife, woman of the world, mother, middle-aged mature of the psychological processes behind both femininity and masculinity." (Ibid) It is this mission which Kamala Das has assigned to her poetic self, to tear passionately at conventional attitude, to reveal the quintessential woman within. This urgency of feeling and expression, perhaps, is responsible for the lack of experiential enlargement of her vision. But with all the limitations of her poetic self the poetry of Kamala Das takes on herself the burden of the feminine self's mission to grasp the world and be grasped by it in its totality.

A manifesto of the poetic self's unresolved tension between the desire and the spasm, the "Dance of the Eunuchs" acquaints us with the pathos, the helplessness and the meanness of a situation. The superb lines that it consists of embody Kamala Das's exquisite identification with the barren spectacle of the spasm-shaken Eunuchs. It is the psychological equivalent for her mental state. Through the visionary reconstruction of the "Dance

of the Eunuchs" her poetic self effects a self imposed therapy. Her poetic self descending with humility and sympathy at the level of Eunuchs, scrutinizes their character. In their ill-fated journey through life they are nothing more than death in life. In fact, she was searching for passionate involvement in the hot river of sex and that what she meant by "they sang of lovers dying" was all barren passion. All quest for love and meaningful existence ends in disaster, growing within her the sense of unfulfilment and alienation. Like the Eunuchs, she can only pretend ecstasy. All efforts of her feminine self for fulfillment end in spectacle of a grotesquery. Like the Eunuchs, the passion of her feminine self remains the eternal hunger with an eternal irony. What her poetic self encounters throughout the entire volume of "Summer in Calcutta" is this awareness of hollowness of this hell rendering "that heart an empty cistern waiting for long hours" which is filled only with "coiling snakes of silence." The heat, sweat and weariness which is the predominant characteristic of "Summer in Calcutta," is represented by the rottenness and barrenness of the dance of the Eunuchs:

> "The sky crackled then,
> Thunder came and lighting
> And rain, a meager rain that
> Melt of dust in
> Attics and the urine of lizards
> And mice".

"Freaks" is also marked by a dissonant sense of disappomtment and deprivation. Like the "attic" symbolizing the barren life of the Eunuchs of which they have no redemption, the feminine self of Kamala Das feels her body acting as a 'cage' through which external impressions impinge in a threatening way upon the trapped mind. Here the woman persona is caught in "a helpless situation when the mind of the poet and her man though "willed to race towards love" merely wander 'tripling/Idly over puddles

of/Desire'—". (Kohli 5) The woman persona is filled with utter disgust at the failing of her lover whose mouth is:

> "a dark
> Cavern where stalactites of
> Uneven teeth gleam……."

Isolated in despair, she attempts to make contact with her lover artificially. But the man who is indifferent to her feminine self fails to the craving of her heart for tenderness and love beyond desire. The feminine self remains

> "an empty cistern, waiting
> Through long hours, fills itself
> With coiling snakes of silence……."

It is in such a "shamefully helpless situation" that she declares; "I am a freak". Such a situation mocks her feminine integrity. If the eunuchs "writhe" in order to pretend ecstasy, the woman persona in the poem flaunts a "grant flamboyant lust". Both the actions, devoid of emotional fulfillment, are nothing but mimicry to "save the face".

As the dark figure of her feminine self, "In Love" exposes her "unending lust". Her sexual experience is so complete that she feels:

> "……..where
> Is room, excuse or ever
> Need for love, for, isn't each
> Embrace a complete thing, a
> Finished jigsaw," –

Since "the burning mouth of the sun" suggests the glow of passion and lust, the physical is self-contained and complete. But what puzzles her feminine and poetic self is the incomplete love:

"This skin-communicated
Thing that I dare not yet in
His presence call our love."

Her feminine self always sought the sexual reservoir in order to forge "the union of true minds" as well as a sense of personal integration. But, the "skin communicated thing" which is only "a sad lie" cannot bring in such a union. It is what that frustrates her feminine self. In "Winter" her feminine self indulges in this celebration of physical love through sexual act in a desperate attempt of her soul for groping for roots in his body and physical love. Her feminine self reminds itself that love (physical love) is older than her poetic self "by myriad saddened centuries." It has made the bones of mankind "grow in years of adolescence to this favoured height". It is the desire of the male and the female for each other that made him male (and her female) and beautiful. This is the bond between the male and female by virtue of which they communicate the essential wisdom to each other.

Kamala Das's poetry voices the protest of the feminine self against a husband who wants to "tame the swallow". It is also the protest against the constrains of the married life, the fever of domesticity, male domination and the male egotism that dwarfs the true female self. The attempts that her feminine self makes of escape in this way, seeking physical love outside marriage, are mere 'suicides'. On the other hand, her feminine self urges for an immediate need for domestic security and the desire for independence. Such pursuits of the inordinate desire for lust sans love are her desperate attempts, as she tells in a later poem ("Glass"), to

"enter other's
Lives, and
Make of every trap of lust
A temporary home."

Again, her feminine self can hardly escape from the sense of frustration and the resultant awareness of being a prisoner of her own loneliness:

"……..I –
Shut my eyes, but inside eyelids there was
No more light, no more love, or peace,
Only
The white, white sun burning,
Burning, burning…"
("The Testing of the Sirens")

Hence, on the one hand, she craves to break away and find her place as a woman and a rebel against traditions in a rigid society. But on the other, her feminine self is rooted in her traditions. This inner conflict of her tradition-bound self is presented in "An Apology to Gautama" in which she attempts to find in the arms of her lover, "an oasis". But her inescapable tradition-bound self finds that he is inferior to her man:

"……while your arms hold
My woman form, his hurting arms
Hold my very soul."

"The fact that her soul is enmeshed in body, is more important and more inescapable than her body is enmeshed in her only. As she is unable to betray her 'body's wisdom', she can only offer a physical, in the sense of mechanical, surrender to Gautama: Spiritually she remains bound to her man".(Kohli 8, *Virgin Whiteness*) Here, the poetic self of Kamala Das, while struggling for authentic love and sense of security, becomes aware of the limitations of a family life. It is this awareness, perhaps, that pulls her feminine self to try to satisfy a peculiar personal need to distract herself from the mood of sadness and loneliness as implied in "The Wild Bougainvillaea". She –

"groaned
And moaned, and constantly yearned
For a man from
Another town……"

In the title piece of her first collection "Summer in Calcutta" we find her haunting inordinate desire of passion. Here, through action and gesture, a sense of lassitude is blended with that of creative activity. The poem projects the desperate attempt of her poetic self to get involved and to become a part of the summer heat of Indian as also the summer heat within. The April sun brings to her a sense of sensuous repletion of warm intoxication which inspires as well as relaxes:

"Wee bubbles ring
My glass, like a bride's
Nervous smile and meet
My lips dear, forgive
This moment's lull in
Wanting you, the blur
In memory.

This is a kind of romantic claptrap which she seeks for her poetic self in her desperate longing for a mood of temporary triumph over "the defeat of love" derived from the traumatic frustration in love and marriage which compels the victim to "run, from one/ Gossamer love to another."

As Devindra Kohli puts in "It is an Indian poet's creative reaction to the torture of summer, it is a mood which is a complex and queer blending of luxury and lethargy." (*Virgin Whiteness* 11) D. Kohli finds elsewhere that with Kamala Das virgin whiteness provides a necessary clue suggesting the complex but intense concentration of psychological gesture under the presiding agency of heart, especially that of sun, and the absorptive sensibility of the poet. It is also characteristic of Kamala Das that "meaningful

things happen to her in the moments of virgin whiteness of the sun". In such moments her poetic self experiences the blending and reinforcement of sight and insight. It is one of these moments, influenced by the sun, that she achieves the triumph (though temporary) over her sense of doom and attains a strange tranquility:

> "…what noble
> Venom now flows through
> My veins and fills my
> Mind with unhurried
> Laughter?"
> ……..
> ……
> ……..how
> Brief the term of my
> Devotion, how brief
> Your reign when I with
> Glass in hard, drink, drink
> And drink again this
> Juice of April sun."

These are gestures of relief performing curative function to the self, exposing her self to life so as to receive its myriad impressions; the self achieves a solace by transcending the despair. In this respect "The Forest Fire" deserves particular mention. There is a long way from the poems depicting revulsion and confession to "The Forest Fire" which assumes a vaster identity for the self and a certain level of total vision. The poem reveals to a great extent the constant striving of her poetic self to arrive at a harmony of the human particulars by achieving balance in the face of the pains of living and suffering of creation. Through a heightened awareness of the self, the poet encounters life with its many-sidedness in a bid to toughen her poetic self:

> "Of late I have begun to feel a hunger
> To take in with greed, like a forest-fire that

Consumes, and, with each killing gains a wilder
Brighter charm, all that comes my way."

Such a determined attempt to get the self seasoned, denotes the evolution of the poetic self towards achieving a positive dimension and a realistic vision of truth. A true and growing artistic self has, sometime or other, to undergo the process of transcending the personal since it communes with the world beyond its ego and grapples with the complexities of existence. Like forest fire the poetic self "has engulfed the world beyond and projects an inclusive human consciousness" (Rahman 78):

"But in me
The sights and smells and sounds shall thrive and go on
And on and on. In me shall sleep the baby
That sat in prams, and sleep and wake and smile its
Toothless smile. In me shall walk the lovers, hand
In hand, and in me, where else, the old shall sit
And feel the touch of sun. In me, the Street lamps
Shall glimmer, the cabaret girl Cavort, the
Wedding drums resound, the eunuchs swirl coloured
Skirts and sing sad song of love, the wounded moan,
And in me the dying mother with hopeful
Eyes shall gaze around, seeking her child, now grown
And gone away to other towns, other arms."

As Devindra Kohli would say, this in her is a sincere attempt to "put my private voice away and to portray a larger panorama of experience transcending her personal moods and feeling". (*Virgin Whiteness* 14) The courage to own all that comes her way "arises probably from the circumstances of her desperate love-life and emotional wreckage." (Rahman 78) Here one finds that the poet's pre-occupation with self is diminishing bit by bit. Poetry here is nearer to what T.S. Eliot has said "not a turning lose of emotion, it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."(21) There is a shift in tone in this poem

corresponding to the evolution her poetic self has undergone. The poet is, as it were, the point at which the growth of mind shows itself. Viewed in this light, the image of forest fire manifests her poetic self's liberal commitment to life which enables her to achieve a sense of belonging to objects beyond self.

Bruce King said: "In Das's poetry the distance between the poet and poetry is collapsed". (21) This is how the "confessional" element in the poetry operates at the technical level. There is a certain disjointedness in her poem "An Introduction". The first sentence, "I don't know politics… Nehru" has nothing to do with the second. The poem may as well have begun with "I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar…" But the first sentence has an oblique connection with the subject of the poem. The poet disclaims any special knowledge of politics so as to provide an artistic and autobiographical rationale for the language of her creative expression, English. In other words, this poem is a defense, if not an apology, for writing in English. Now, writing in English, as we all know, is more than just a cultural or artistic choice. It has its politics as well. Or, at any rate, the issue of writing in English has been politicized for more than a hundred years. To speak out against this, the first thing that Das does is to claim as apolitical position for herself. She could not care less about politics and politicians, she implies. This indifference then gets translated into a demand for artistic and personal freedom of expression:

> Why not leave
> Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
> Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
> Any language I like ?

There is a certain frustration, anger even, at attempts by others to control or restrict her.

The poem goes on to become an elaborate justification of the kind of poetry she writes and the kind of language she writes in it:

> The language I speak
> Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses,
> All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
> Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
> It is human as I am human, don't
> You see?

Indian English, both linguistically and culturally hybrid and half-caste, is defended passionately. In a society obsessed with hierarchy and purity, even something of privileged status such as English becomes subaltern when one begins to write poetry in it. Such an act is seen almost as a betrayal, an evidence of bad faith.

But the poem is a plea for more than artistic freedom or foe expression in Indian English. There is a passion in the appeal which comes for a defiance of those who wish to silence the poet. She is a human being, the poet screams, and she has a right to her voice. The silencing of the voices of women and of the oppressed is a common fact of the history of all civilizations. It is the elites, the culture defining groups, which always speak on behalf of their less privileged fellows. Das wants to break this stranglehold.

After she creates this space to speak, she begins to tell her story, as it were. What is this story? It is of a lonesome child, growing up on her own. In the background are "Incoherent mutterings of the blazing/ Funeral pyre" signifying the loss of loved ones. There is a quick growth into puberty, and suddenly, a terrible accident: marriage. When the poet asks for love, all she gets is versions of marital rape. And marriage gives the legal sanction to a man to impose his will on what in this case is a

child's body. The aftermath is clearly spelled out, "He did not beat me/But my sad woman-body felt so beaten." This experience seems to be a crucial one for the poet. It creates a world in her psyche which never heals. It leads, as we see in the following stanzas, to immense self-loathing feeling of legal prostitution and attempts to escape from her self.

The poet tries to deny her femininity by dressing like a man, cutting her hair short, and so on. Actually, the revulsion seems to stem from what men do to women. Again, the imposition of social norms: "Dress in sarees, be girl/ Be wife, they said." The whole package is flung at her; embroider, keep house, quarrel with servants, but above all, "fit in." Clearly, however, the poet is a misfit, if there is one. She rebels, not consciously or deliberately, but compulsively, traumatically. The next stanza shows a greater incoherence, suggestive of a breakdown in personality-compulsive behaviour, schizophrenia, nymphomania, and then the inevitable reaching out to another man, the rejection that follows and a devastating indictment of the male sex: "he is every man/Who wants a woman" and "it is I who drinks lonely/ Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hostels in strange towns." The poet seeks not much more than to survive, to earn the right to simply be called "I".

Nevertheless, with a confessional poet, the transcending of all the barriers of individuality, cannot achieve a fully enlarged pantheistic vision of the world. It may act, at times, a device helping her achieve a necessary distraction from her mood of sadness and loneliness. The other inevitable alternative is self revelation amounting to a struggle for relating one's private experience with the outer world as it is. This is what one finds in "An Introduction" where her poetic self struggles to keep her identity against "the categorizers" who ask her to "fit in". This poem "is concerned with the question of human identity, but it effectively uses the confessional and the rhetoric modes in order

to focus pertinent questions relating to a woman's or an Indian poet's identity in English". (Kohli 188) Rather than being a poetic manifesto, "An Introduction" is related to the urges and aspirations of the poet and registers the graph of the growth of her feminine and poetic consciousness. It is the "claim for autonomy", as K.R.S. Iyengar puts it, flowing from "the felt sovereignty of her own individual existence."(678) Through a ruthless self analysis Kamala Das bursts out, the "I" emphasized lyricism breaking the barrier between "the man who suffers and the mind which creates." This poem has to be interpreted with respect to the psychological matrix of her experience which made her drink deep at the sea of pessimism and dispiritedness.

Keeping self as the central myth of her creativity, the poem voices with a fiercely feminine sensibility and without inhibitions her inner disquiet tension and disorder within. Rejecting bitterly to be type-cast into a particular role or be reduced to a single fixed image, she craves for the freedom which only the creative artist can claim. With existential undertones, she articulates in this poem her conviction that an artist is condemned to explore her own identity. During this exploration one has to struggle for and capture one's reputation and even one's relationship with others and the society. This is the agony of freedom that an artist has to experience at some point of his creative activity. This is characteristic of modern sensibility and the reason why the modern poets have been forced to adopt more private voices as they move more deeply into isolation and question the nature of their own literary activity. Finding himself in such an inevitable predicament, the artist has to be face to face with the problem "what am I" and in quest of a solution, he must, without being bound by reason, reputation, morality or other limiting codes, make the self free.

In "The Descendants" a number of poems bring to the fore her realization of the uselessness of her love-pranks. "Looking

Glass" is a perfect example. Here she gives "a clinical analysis of the different stages of falling in love, the Machiavellian strategies empire…… the poem does not merely celebrate the passions of love; it simultaneously views the climax and anti-climax through a bifocal vision." (Sharma 23-24) Presenting the true realistic image of the lustful relationship between man and woman, the poet says that it is easy for a woman to get a man for physical gratification:

> Getting a man to love you is easy
> Only be honest about your wants as
> Woman.

In a male dominated world, a woman has to satisfy the male ego by admiring his masculinity and accepting her own feminine weakness:

> Notice the perfection
> Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
> Shower, the sky walk across the bathroom floor.
> Dropping towels and the jerky way he urinates.
> But when it comes to emotional fulfillment, the story changes
> Oh, yes getting
> A man is easy but living
> Without him afterward may have to be faced.

The lyric, thus, is a psychic showcase of the woman poet who is denied the emotional involvement which she hungers after. The same sense of nothingness of man-woman relationship pervades the poem "Convicts." Here lying "in bed, glassy eyed and fatigued" the couple ask – "What is/The use, what is the bloody use?" wondering, whether, "This hacking at each other's parts like convicts hacking" is love.

And again in "Substitute," when "I was thinking, lying beside him/That I loved and much loved," the reaction of her lover shocks her feminine self:

It is physical thing, he said suddenly
End it, I cried end it, and let us be free.

Such traumatic experiences during her quest for emotional involvement with the partner, led herself to adopt a freedom which in its effect, is rather suicidal than relieving. This freedom, she knows was her "last strange toy like the hangman's robe, even while new/It could give no pride." She defines her newly gained freedom:

After that love became a swivel-door
When one went out, another came in
Then I lost count
For always in my arms
Was a substitute for a substitute.

Such a physical and emotional experience of being a woman compels her to ask stunning questions as in "Conflagration"

Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried
Beneath a man? It's time again to come alive,
The world extends a lot beyond his six-foot frame.

And in "The Maggots":

What is to the corpse if the
Maggots nip?

Added to this sense of futility and luridness, there is her obsession with "the smell of dying things" which in "The Wild Bougainvillea" had served her as a badly needed distraction from her mood of sadness and loneliness.

It is here that the self, disgusted with the physical experience of love ("How well I can see him/After a murder, conscientiously/ Tidy up the sense……..") turns to the sea. The self expects that than the death offered by her man – the feeling of "lying on a funeral pyre/with a burning head."

"The Invitation" builds up the idea of the tension her feminine self is subjected to, between the two modes of death, the one cool and the other warm, with burning head or between throbbing suns

> Warm hollows where human sounds
> Never echoed, seas that whip the craggy
> Shores and mountains where darkness
> Grows like ferns,
> To hide, to hide and save what remains of
> Pride. ("Ferns")

The self-devouring and the self-mocking nature of experience of sexual love makes her death-conscious because the self is rendered lonely, empty, lifeless and sterile by only carnal sex without love. There is no solution to this personal dilemma which arouses suicidal thoughts in her. It is at this stage that the sea comes up with the "invitation" to eternal solace, comfort and redemption as against the force of oppression and exploitation of the domineering male tyranny.

> While she feels,
> "I have a man's fist in my head today
> Clenching unclenching" –

The "garrulous sea" comes up with the invitation:

> "come in, what do you lose by dying?"
> Which she eventually accepts because her death-obsessed self
> asks:
> "How long can one resist?" ("Invitation")

This, in no way, is romanticisation of death. Her autobiography gives ample evidence to her idea of death by self-drowning:

"Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of my loneliness which is not unique in any way, but is

natural to all. I have wanted to find rest in the sea and an escape from involvements".(Das 227) No wonder a self, so preoccupied with death, feels enveloped by the fear of "the dying day" and sense of waste:

> …….like blood
> Running out
> And death beginning, this day of ours is
> Helplessly ending. ("Palam")

To come to such a realization is surprising with her poetic self. One recollects her first volume, "The Summer in Calcutta" where it was the very involvement with the vaster world of varied colours that her all-absorbing sensibility had been yearning for:

> But in me
> The sights and smells and sounds shall thrive and go on
> And on and on. ("Forest Fire")

Is it because most of her life she had been plying with trivialities of a self-centred mind such as:

> I asked my husband
> Am I hetero
> Am I lesbian
> Or am I a plain frigid? ("Composition")

Her progress from "The Summer in Calcutta" to the latest of her writing, the journey of the self of Kamala Das precedes from the blazing light and heat towards a lurid darkness and a sense of disintegrating into nothingness. Devindra Kohli points out (in 'Virgin Whiteness') the frequency with which she has used in her later volumes – especially in "The Descendants" the images of death such as "dead", "tomb", "longer sleep", "funeral pyre", "crucifixion", "buried", "Embers", "corps" etc. "The lights which move on the shore in "The Suicide" do not in any way neutralize

the darkness of the motivating urge." In spite of her occasional attempts to peep out of her characteristic sensibility, in a bid to set herself towards the vaster panorama of life and her occasional mystical flights, the predominant features of her poetic stance are: first, her poetic self's pre-occupation with despair and unfulfilment; secondly, its concern with the existential issues such as human freedom, feeling of anxiety and absurdity of human existence; thirdly, her feminine self's intense urge for raising the man-woman relationship, if not to a spiritual level, to a near ideal level; and finally the self's death consciousness.

The confessional self in her is presented through her shifting moods where apparently contradictory images of the most sublime and the most mundane mingle with one another; the images of deep involvement in the physical act of love mingle with those of physical rotting and disgust. When Kamala Das speaks of death as "the closing of lotus at dusk and probably temporary" she fails to convince. Similarly when she says:

> when I
> Sleep, the outside
> World crumbles, all contacts
> Broken, so, in that longer sleep
> Only
> The world
> Shall die, and I Remain, just being
> Also being a remaining……. ("Contacts")

She again fails to convince because such words sound more like constrained logic uncharacteristic of her, rather than her poetic self's spontaneous arrival at a poetic vision. Such lines do not carry the vigour of those poems that voice the self's refusal to give up the world with all its luridness and complexity.

Her poetry is most convincing when one approaches it to discern the self of a poet, which sees the world through the eyes

of a hunted woman. She cannot neglect the world which she can see and hear. On the whole, the body of Kamala Das's poetry presents the portrait of her feminine self as a tortured young woman. On one level, most of her poetry concerns itself with the poet's intensely felt need for declaring her intimate autobiography to the world so that she could give shape to her point of view of the world by beginning with the self. On another level, a few of her poems like "Forest Fire" begin with the world instead of the self. In the latter case, her poetic self also concerns itself with the issue of poetic process. The images of the external reality live on objectified in the world of the poetic imagination.

Such differing approaches to reality cause in her poetry a tension between the two different forces in her poetic personality - social criticism and spiritual questing. That is why S.C. Harrex says that Kamala Das's poetry contains "Indian tensions…… between the Marxist and Vedantic attitudes, between Kerala communism and Varanasi spiritualism". (qtd. in Kohli 187)

Kamala Das's poems work at least at two levels. On the one hand, they depict a personal, a very individual tragedy. This tragedy may have variations, but it is made up of the following ingredients: a bad marriage; a series of sexual flings; a collapse of personality; a sense of worthlessness at the end. But in addition to this personal tragedy, the poems also comment on larger topics, on the institution of marriage; on marital rape, marital neglect, and marital jealousy; on extra-marital sexual forays and their unseemly consequences; on experience and knowledge hard-won, but fragile. If we keep in mind the feminist slogan, "The personal is the political", then Das's poems are not about the private life on an unbalanced woman, but about all those forces of tradition, culture, and society which make her so. These poems are an attack on a whole way of life characterized by patriarchical norms which oppress and restrict women, reducing them to neurotic and

pathetic creatures. The poems are also, ultimately, about struggle and survival.

Das consciously attempts to distance herself from politics. By doing so, what she is really signaling is the inauguration of a different kind of politics, not a retreat into apolitical passivity. Das's politics is not about the pursuit of power at the level of the state, but it is about personal empowerment and autonomy, it is about the politics of the integrity of the female self in male-dominated and sexual predatory world. It is, ultimately, the politics of the survival not of the fittest, but even of these who are unable to fit in, those who are unfits and misfits in our society.

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16

Women in Gender Asymmetry: Eunice de Souza's Poems

Rajib Bhaumik

Rage and bitterness against the Goan-Catholic community surface as one of the distinct features of Eunice de Souza's portrayal of woman subjectivity. The anti-centric and anti-traditional annoyance and fury which is prevalent in many of her poems bear the imprint of her frustration at the binary way of thinking about women in India. She is definitely an Indian voice of feminism which is not too personal and localized but rather decentered and disseminated particularly in Indian context. Eunice's subject is not a particular 'woman' suffering instability and slippages; hers is 'female' as a cultural performer in a peculiar social context. '[F]emale no longer appears to be stable notion; its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as woman.'(Butler, xxxi). She contests the inertness of the female 'other' pushed beyond and away in a problematic matrix of patriarchy, notion and tradition. Eunice de Souza also acknowledges that women have to 'take it as it comes'

The crisis the females face is that of the patriarchal structure which controls the domestic and social politics in hegemonic impersonation of reality. She strikes at triple dislocation of women in the particular Indian context- woman being someone's daughter, wife or mother, with every re-location renamed at other's will. She is much too artificial, a creature created with

'multiple and diffused points of origin', a nameless device, a 'plastic flower':

> I wish I could be a
> Wise Woman
> Smiling, endlessly, vacuously
> Like a plastic flower,
> Saying Child, learn from me. (Bequest)

The dull plasticity of existence is owing to the trauma of suffering the dictates of patriarchal authority. The woman is desired to conform to the stipulated norms and inviolable codes of conduct. This absolute negation of self de-sexes the woman:

> Some recommend stern standards
> others say float along.
> He says, take it as it comes,
> meaning, of course, as he hands it out. ('Bequest')

This lifelessness and inertia of existence, discontinuity and dissonance mark the very nature of the poetry of Eunice de Souza. She is one among the new generation of Indian poets who are trying to discover their voices by effectively de-constructing the foundational and hierarchical sexual codes. The codes are related to implicit norms that govern the cultural intelligibility of women in all its aspects. The poetry of Eunice labour hard to break the shackles of tradition that dictate a culturally constructed body in a hegemonic scheme of society. Her poems express the 'instress' of desire of a woman to break free from the repressive foundations that have restricted her in a hierarchical frame.

Between the longing for a transformation of socio-cultural construction and the deep dissatisfaction with the given world order, she undergoes the pangs of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts. The women in Eunice's conceptual imaginings are bewildered to understand what the 'stern standards'

are and ultimately they tend to re-emerge as non-conforming rather than accept the reduction. In Butler's critical argumentation such condition may be explained as means to 'radicalize the notion of feminine critique'.

Eunice de Souza is related to the group of young poets like Manohar Shetty and Melanie Silgardo who associate themselves with Bombay and Ezekiel. These poets share a common Goan Catholic background and her verse expresses her anger, fear, guilt, hope and desire. Though expressed in ironic understatement rather than in overt comment, the poems register a high level of consciousness of the situation and problems faced by women. Bruce king states:

> While it has no affiliation in politics, community, humanistic ideals, religion, it is feminist in its kind of awareness of female vision and affinities to the mode of other women poets rather than in proclaimed commitment. (King, 158)

The prime concern of Eunice's feminist consciousness has been her experience as a woman in a world which allows a woman to grow seamless, battered and bruised. She has seen that in India woman is not a coherent and stable 'subject'. On a heterosexual matrix her existence is contested. This contestation is between identity positions to anti-identity position(Butler, 7). The self thus developed is divided and displaced, failing to negotiate the social norms. She is thus completely *decontextualized* (ibid, 13) and separated off from the axes of power. It leads to re-configuring the subjectivities and charting newer modes of self-actualization. De Souza problematises the location of women subjectivity seeking a new interpretation of cultural politics.

Eunice in her poetry explains in her own terms the condition individually suffered by women despite intersections of male and female symbolic order. The intersecting gender sites

are loaded with hegemonic male factors over female subjectivity in purely 'monolithic' and 'monologic' (Butler, 18) sexual politics. De Souza's 'Sweet Sixteen' is an expression of the gender asymmetry that exists in the society. It is a clear acknowledgement of sexual differentiation of a girl-child growing up:

> Well you can't say
> they didn't try.
> Mamas mention menses.
> A nun screamed: you vulgar girl
> don't say brassieres
> Say bracelets.
>
> ……
> The preacher thundered
> Never go with a man alone
> Never alone
> and even if you're engaged
> only passionless kisses.('Sweet Sixteen')

Eunice's poetry reflects the quest for identity, position and location of women in society, their spatial identity and self assertion. It is in a way a cry for universal female identity and rage against masculinist (the thundering 'preacher') oppression set in motion by postcolonial encounter. In the language of Butler the women subjectivity:

> encompasses the axis of sexual difference offering a mapping of intersecting differentials which cannot be summarily hierarchized either within the terms of phallogocentrism or any other candidate for the position of "primary condition of oppression". Rather than an exclusive tactic among many, deployed centrally but not exclusively in the service of expanding and rationalizing the masculinist domain (Butler, 19).

De Souza here clearly suggests a masculine signifying agenda to construct female ethics and cultural codes which are centric to 'menses', 'brassiers', and 'getting preggers'. As a girl grows up and

undergoes normal bio-physical development, she is made aware about her own sexual weakness and vulnerability. In the process of her development and maturing into womanhood, she is reminded of her exclusivity by the 'thundering preacher' and the 'screaming nuns' and she is marked as a 'vulgar girl'. Her vulgarity is socially constructed. She is a victim of some primary condition of oppression where her very femininity is synonymous with vulgarity. Her 'brassiers' are signifier of the same weakness constituting the woman sexuality alone instead of an unmarked category of human species. She is at an interesting point of class, culture and politics in the process of dialectical appropriation of her 'otherness'.

At school the girls are taught that the common article of dressing, exclusive to their sex like 'a brassier' is a disgraceful one. They should call it 'bracelets' which is utterly pointless. These articles are indispensible for their daily routine life but they must screen them, for it is embarrassing to be viewed by others. The nun on seeing bare armed girls goes around nonsensically pinning papers so that the sight of such arms does not inflame desire. The girls at their early teens are trained to fear the opposite sex. They are made conscious of their own femininity and desires while at the same time they are desired as being completely unaware that their bodies possess the power of reproduction. Thus they may get 'preggers' while dancing with boys in parties. In 'Autobiographical' she writes:

> I thought the whole world
> was trying to rip me up
> cut me down go through me
> with a razor blade.
> Then I discovered
> A cliché : that's what I wanted
> to do to the world. ('Autobiographical')

Eunice de Souza seems to say that she has been a victim of the same indifference and that she did every effort to please her parents by acting in a stupid manner, holding back her feminine feelings and urges. Consequently she had to suffer the pangs of gender discrimination in an asymmetrical social structure:

> My parents wanted a boy
> I have done my best to qualify
> I hid the blood stains
> On my clothes
> And let my breasts sag
> Words the weapon
> To crucify. (De Souza Prabhu)

In a patriarchal society, the birth of a female child is traditionally less welcome than that of the male. Being born a boy is itself a privilege. Girls arrive in the world as undesirable creatures and the life-long battle against their formidable foe, i.e., their sex begins, as Eunice de Souza expresses in her "de Souza Prabhu" where she puts herself in the category of lame ducks. As Simone de Beauvoir observes the condition of woman in contemporary society:

> There is unanimous agreement that getting a husband—or in some cases a protector'—is for her the most important of undertakings. . . . She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother's hold, she will open up her future, not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master (Beauvoir, 352).

Thus to be a woman is to be the Object, the 'Other'. The civilization has a strategy to denaturalize and re-signify feminity and her Otherness is a 'subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame' (Butler, xxxiv). And this frustration results in her tending towards a schizophrenic existence. The feeling of disability is so deeply ingrained in a woman's mind that

she feels like questioning whether her feminity is 'natural', 'anatomical', 'chromosomal' or 'hormonal' (Butler,9). She has to hide 'the blood stains' on her clothes. As an object of desire her feminity has to be guarded and garbed. She is a passive recipient of human honour and a victim of foundational illusion. Her 'breasts' must 'sag' before she is 'crucified' ("De Souza Prabhu"), differentiating herself from the universalizing norms and emblematized as a feminine 'Other.'

De Beauvoir asserts: She (woman) is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other (Beauvoir, xvi). Though such patriarchal pressures have constituted traumas for the women poets, an increasing awareness of the injustice done to them has slowly made them raise their voice against inequality and oppression. They have not remained silent in such a situation. Eunice's poems exemplify this increasing awareness of the foundational illusion against the asymmetry of gender discrimination.

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