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# POINTS OF VIEW

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# SHAKESPEARE'S LETTERS

**S. Viswanathan**

Of anything like Shakespeare's correspondences the only extant example is a letter to and not by him, a letter written by Richard Quincy, a friend of Shakespeare's and a notable burgher of Stratford-upon-Avon. And this too is a doubtful example as the document was found among the papers of Quiney, making one wonder whether the letter was sent, much less delivered, at all.[1] So I must confess straightaway that I have not discovered any new correspondence of Shakespeare's, let alone his laundry bills, and the title is something of an attention-catcher for an essay which seeks to look at the part played by letters as a stage prop and dramatic device in the plays.

Letters being sent, delivered and read, and acted on, would seem to be almost ubiquitous; they figure in many plays of his throughout Shakespeare's career. Primarily the letter is a narrative device used in fiction and drama frequently enough. As in the case of other resources of drama, Shakespeare would seem to make the most and the best of it in his plays. The dramatic significance of Shakespeare's letters makes itself felt in various ways both locally in the situation in which they occur and structurally in the total movement of the play concerned. Shakespeare makes great dramatic capital out of them.

Shakespeare's age was a period of epistolary efflorescence, natural enough in an age of a spurt of enthusiastic activity in various spheres of life in family, society, country and international communication. Books like *The English Secretary* (1595) among other things set up to teach letter-writing. A book of rhetoric like Thomas Wilson's *The Art of Rhetoric* (1587) advised on the proper diction of letters by showing an example resembling Don Armado's letters in *Love's Labour's Lost* by way of an *exemplum ad horrendum*. Moreover, political activity had a good deal to do with letters. Apart from straightforward communication through them, conspiratorial activity among rebels, resistors and spies had to rely on confidential letters sent though messengers. No wonder that spying and counterspying agents often sought to read or

intercept such secret letters so that the plans of the enemies would be foiled and they exposed and brought to book in cases. Love letters besides the love prattle they carried also took the form of improvisatory sonneteering thus providing a striking instance of life imitating art, in this case that of Petrarchan love verse. Shakespeare brings to bear a deep awareness of several contemporary uses of the letter as a means of communication on its use in his plays.

In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* an early play, there is the prolonged drama (1.2. 34-129) that is made of Proteus's love epistle, no better than Silvia's love pleas to Phebe in *As You Like It* (3.5). The little drama starts with a seemingly interminable pingpong which Julia and her maid Lucetta play with Proteus's letter before Lucetta delivers it and Julia receives it, and it ends in Julia tearing up the letter before reading. Lucetta knows well enough that Julia would very much want to receive and read the letter and only puts up a pretence of anger against her for bringing the letter; Julia herself knows that she wants to see the letter even as she so violently protests that she would have none of it.

> *Julia:* .... maids in modesty say 'No' to that
> While they would have the profferer construe 'Ay' (1.2. 55-56)

Lucetta knows she will be called back when she is ordered out, and when she returns at Julia's call, she deliberately drops the letter and picks it up 'gingerly' calling attention to it in the process. The favourite Shakespearian play with the word 'nothing' is made here, an early instance in him, in ll. 70-75; Shakespeare puts 'gingerly in doubt' the applicability of the bawdy sense of the word 'nothing' here. At the same time, the homonymic pun in Elizabethan pronunciation does suggest the sense of 'noting', of a note in the word 'nothing'. Shakespeare makes use of this pun (nothing/ noting) extensively in *Much Ado About Nothing.* The game goes on and Julia and Lucetta carry on their 'jar' over the delivery of the letter; now striking the notes of musical metaphors, Julia pretends to charge Lucetta with carrying a letter to herself from some lover of hers. The 'jar' leads to Julia's tearing up of the letter as she storms about it and orders Lucetta out. Julia picks up the pieces, after Lucetta leaves, and hugs these to her bosom, and kisses them.

*Julia* : I will kiss each several paper for amends.

...........................................................

...........................................................

And here is writ 'love wounded Proteus'
Poor wounded name.[2] My bosom as a bed,
Shall lodge thee till thy wound is thoroughly heal'd:
And thus I search it with a sovereign kiss
But twice or thrice was 'Proteus' written down. (1.2. 108-117)

All this caressing by Julia of the pieces of the torn letter suggests that the letter serves as a surrogate of the lover Proteus. The relentless emphasis on the name of the lover, Proteus, reinforces the idea. For, in his early plays where Shakespeare invokes the idea of Platonic love, the idea of a mystical unity between name and essence is often hinted at. At the same time, the name Proteus is tell-tale and eloquently proclaims the changeability of the man as a lover or friend. True to his name, he deserts his lady-love, transfers his affections to Silvia and betrays his friend Valentine who at the end of the play makes the shocking gesture of being ready to give up his lady-love Silvia to him, saying

All that was mine in Silvis I give thee. (5.4. 83)

This last suggests that Shakespeare deliberately points to the *reductio ad absurdum* of the frienship convention. On a tip off from Proteus who commits the betrayal of informing the Duke, Silvia's father, of his friend Valentine's plan for Silvia to come down with the help of a rope ladder sent by him and elope with him, the Duke catches Valentine (3.1. 139-169). He pretends to consult Valentine on a non-existent plan of his to elope with a widow, and Valentine advises the self-same ploy as he plans. The Duke by degrees comes to feel Valentine's cloak and discovers Valentine's letter to be sent to Silvia, rope ladder and all. He reads out the letter cast in the form of a sonneteering love address and happens on the name Silvia towards the close and on the prose instruction to Silvia to use the enclosed rope ladder (3.1. 136-160). The Duke wrathfully on the spot banishes Valentine from his kingdom. As often, the plot turns on the letter, and again it is frequently an undelivered or misdelivered or intercepted letter that is involved.

Shakespeare makes play with the letter in various interesting

ways in *Love's Labour's Lost* which also makes particular play with words and language and with the surprises sprung by love and by the realities of the world on enclosed lives. Don Armado's extravagant, high-flown wording of his letters as well as speech provides great fun to both the onstage characters, and the spectators.

Armado's letters prove to be his comic nemesis in the event. The name suggests an obvious likeness to the Spanish Armada. As its magnificence in the then recent actual history, Armado's absurd magniloquence comes to nothing. The king reads out with relish Armado's letter of indictment against Costard and Jaquenetta for their being seen together in the park (1.1 188-260). The overblown rhetoric as in the opening apostrophe of the letter,

> 'Great deputy, the Welkin's viceregrnt and sole dominator of Navarre, my soul's earth's god and body's fostering patron' (1.1. 213-216)

and the use of explicatory synonyms of Latin and English origin, as was the stylistic habit of Thomas Elyot in his well-known *The Governor* (1540), as in the lines of the letter

> with a child of our grandmother
> Eve, a female; or, for thy more
> sweet understanding, a woman (1.1 249-251)

and Latinate inversion, Miltonic, as in

> Him I ... have seen (1.1 252)

are Latinizing, stylistic vices of the time which Shakespeare exposes to ridicule by parody. Soon enough, Armado himself comes to write a letter to Jaquenetta forcing his 'love' on her, a letter which is mistakenly delivered by none else than Costard to the Princess of France and her courtier Boyet as Costard mistakes the letter to be that sent by Berowne to the Princess's lady Rosalind (4.1. 41-108). In this comic switch, that letter, a sonneteering one, is delivered to Jacquenetta and brought by her and Costard to the schoolmaster Holofernes for intepretation (4.2. 78-143). The letter is returned to Berowne as he is in the company of the King and his other companions, just a few moments after they have all surprised one another and themselves by appearing each reading his love-sonnet to his lady of the French Court (4.3). Berowne tears up the letter, but is more or less forced to pick up the bits and piece them together (4.3. 188 onwards). In the final comic reversal, Armado hectoring as

Hector in the Pageant of the Nine Worthies in the presence of the full court of the King of Navarre and of the Princess of France (5.2. 662), gets exposed and all but beaten up by Costard as Pompey for getting his Jaquenetta with child.

In *Romeo and Juliet* there is the case of the undelivered letter, the one sent by Friar Lawrence through Friar John and carrying the vital message that Juliet is alive though lying like dead in the monument of the Capulets. The letter could not be delivered because both Friar John and the Brother to whom he entrusts the task of carrying it to Romeo are locked up in a house by the citizens who think that they carry the plague infection (5.2) It is the non-delivery of Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo that is the immediate trigger for the tragic deaths of the 'star-cross'd lovers'.

In *The Merchant of Venice,* Shakespeare exploits to dramatic purpose the arrival through Salerino of the dire letter from Antonio speaking of the forfeiture of his bond to Shylock and of Shylock's insistence on his pound of Antonio's flesh, of the reading of it by Bassanio and of his reaction to it in terms of facial expression and gestures, and Portia's noting of these, and finally of the reading out of the letter by Bassanio to Portia (3.2. 234-325). Besides the drama of the particular situation at this point in the play as it occurs almost close on the heels of the wedding of the pair, the letter marks a turning point in the play. In quite another perspective, if Shylock insists relentlessly on the letter of his bond and on his pound of flesh, Portia in disguise as lawyer catches him by the letter of the bond and commands that it should be a pound of flesh, nothing more, nothing less, sans blood. In this sense, it is the letter that prevents the killing of Antonio by Shylock and saves the merchant if it 'kills' Shylock in the process.

In *As You Like It,* among the 'strange things' in the play in the spectacle of that innocent of a shepherd lover, Silvius, being put to the lot of carrying a letter of 'love at first sight' from his flame Phebe, a pastoral trans-mogrification of the scornful mistress of Petrarchanism, on the pretext of its being a 'taunting letter', Rosalind in male guise receives the letter through Silvius and reads it (4.3. 43-66). It is in the form of love-verses addressed by the lady, for a

change, to her love idol.

In *Twelfth Night* (2.5) a conundrum of a letter forged by Maria as if from Olivia and dropped by her in his way acts as a bait to catch Malvolio. He all too readily falls to it, finding confirmation in it, as he thinks, for his wild day-dream that Olivia his mistress is in love with him, her steward. He carries out to the letter the mischievous instructions in the letter, and starts sporting cross-garters and yellow-stockings, a passe and somewhat country fashion of the times. Dubbed mad, he is locked up in a dark house and is visited by the Fool in the guise of Sir Toby the curate coming to exorcise the evil spirit out of him. The Fool on Malvolio's desperate plea, supplies him with a lighted candle and writing materials so that he could write a letter to Olvia vindicating himself and his sanity (4.2). The Fool carries it and gentleman-like, would not let Fabian read, much less intercept, Malvolio's letters (5.1). The Fool makes a little drama of reading out the letter when bidden to do (5.1. 280-302). The irony is that just as a letter gets Malvolio into a predicament, so also a letter relieves him of it, and he is released. When Malvolio confronts Olivia with the cryptic love letter, Olivia in no time sees that it is a prank of her maid Maria's and consoles Malvolio. But he is still fuming with rage as he exits threatening

I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you.

The letter of challenge from the unknightly knight Sir Andrew to Viola-Cesario as he takes the person to be is not delivered by Sir Toby (3.4. 136-186), another instance of an undelivered letter.

Falstaff's identical love-letters simultaneously sent to the two not so young burgesses Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (4.2) initiate his love misadventures which lead him into all sorts of discomfiture. Even after being bitten twice, the third time round he is hardly shy and he still undertakes to carry out an assignation with the two, disguised as Herne, with a buck's head and horns, only to be pinched with candle fire and exposed (5.5). All this, another instance of what wrong love-letters could lead to.

In *All's Well That Ends Well,* the letters which Bertram sends home to his mother and his newly married wife Helena, as he leaves France for Florence to do military service, are the letters of Bertram's

rejection of Helena. To Helena, he lays down the apparently impossible condition that she should be able to exchange her ring with his and also be quick with child by him before she could claim him as her husband. In the event Helena ventures out to Florence, after giving it out that she is dead, and does accomplish the feat thanks to the bed-trick which dupes Bertram into taking Helena for his new found love Diana. Again, it is through a letter to the King of France (5.3. 139 onwards) that Diana, who follows it up with her, and later Helena's, personal audience with the King, is able to expose the truth about the doings of Bertram so that finally all ends well.

In general, letters do not play as crucial a role in a history or Roman play as in a comedy or tragedy. For in the histories and Roman plays, for the most part, messages are carried by personal messengers who often keep coming and going, this very prominently in *Antony and Cleopatra.* Yet a few striking instances of letters acting as a means of mostly local drama are there in *King Henry IV,* Pts. 1 and 2, *King Henry V,* and *Julius Caesar.* In *Henry IV,* Pt. 1 (2.3) Hotspur enters reading a letter from an unnamed lord who at the last moment opts out of joining the rebellion against the king of which Hotspur is a leader. The letter, naturally, provokes the impetuous Hotspur, and only seems to confirm him in his determination to achieve honour by fighting against the king. Hotspur is fated to receive such disappointing letters from his father (4.1) and others (5.5. 80). These last go unread as Hotspur immediately joins battle and meets with his end at the hand of Prince Henry. The Archbishop of York sends letters to the fellow leaders of the conspiracy excusing himself from participation in the Battle of Shrewsbury (4.4). Characteristically for him, Falstaff does not care to read the letter, *Henry IV* Pt. 2 (2.1. 131), sent to him from the court of the king about the war against rebels. Instead Falstaff nonchalantly absorbs himself in drinking and merrymaking with the Hostess on the excuse of making peace with her over a quarrel about his dues to her. All this in the presence of the Chief Justice who well takes the measure of Falstaff.

In *Henry V,* King Henry V's men intercept the letters of Cambridge, Scroop and Grey, the three noble lords of the realm,

about their plan of a conspiracy they have hatched to get Henry V killed at Southampton before embarking on his invasion of France. The king plays a cat-and-mouse game with them pretending to consult them on his pardoning of a drunken man abusing his royal person. The three insist that the man should not be shown any mercy. After this, in the name of handing them their commissions for the war, Henry V hands them their very letters of conspiracy. Henry refuses to show them any mercy and orders their execution. Such interception of letters, common enough in the political espionage of the period and other perilous times as well, is a motif that Shakespeare employs in *Hamlet* and *King Lear.*

In *Julius Caesar,* Cassius practises the ploy of getting letters dropped in through Brutus's window as though they were from the Roman citizens, persuading Brutus to lead the conspiracy against Julius Caesar (2.1). Again, in the quarrel scene (4.3. 65 onwards) much is made of Brutus's letters to Cassius asking for funding, and Cassius not obliging him. Later in the scene, Messala asks Brutus if he had not received letters from Rome about his wife Portia (while Brutus already has known of her death). Several other letters are referred to in this scene which however does not call for property letters.

In *Hamlet,* the two letters which appear as stage-props not only offer dramatic turns in themselves but signal a turning point in the play, a turning-point seen particularly in the sea-change undergone by Hamlet by the time he makes his surprise return to Denmark from his voyage to England. Horatio receives the letter from Hamlet (4.6), informing him of his landing back in Denmark, thanks to his sudden encounter with the pirates and to being caught by them only to be brought back to Denmark by the 'thieves of mercy', Hamlet tells Horatio of his letter to King Claudius intimating the circumstances of his return, the letter carried by the same sailors who bring Hamlet's missive to Horatio. Hamlet promises Horatio more interesting and important news to be given to him in person. That news also hinges on letters. Hamlet narrates to Horatio (5.2) how, prompted as though by providence, one night aboard the ship to England, he stole into the cabin of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and picked up a sealed letter from their pockets as they lay fast

asleep. Hamlet opened the seal and read the letter, from King Claudius to England's king bidding the immediate execution of Hamlet. As though by providential direction again, Hamlet wrote a letter bidding the fate of immediate execution for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.[3] He

> ... wrote it fair.
> I did once hold it, as our statists
> A baseness to write fair, and labour'd much
> How to forget that learning, but, sir now
> It did me yeoman's service.

The discourse of Hamlet on his penmanship, an incidental exhortation on the value of the cultivation of writing a good hand, would seem to be introduced by Shakespeare deliberately, though for aught we know if we go by the evidence of Hand D in the ms. of the play of *Sir Thomas More,* Shakespeare himself does not seem to have studiously cultivated that habit.

Hamlet produces the original commission of Claudius as proof. When Horatio raises the practical question how Hamlet could seal his new commission, Hamlet replies:

> Why even in that was heaven ordiant
> I had my father's signet in my purse,
> Which was the model of that Danish seal.

Importantly, Claudius's letter in the place of which Hamlet so masterfully substitutes another sealing the fate of the meddling twosome, leads to Hamlet's resolve to act quickly against Claudius because the interim, though Hamlet's, will be short enough, as Claudius would get the intimation of the death of the pair from England soon. It, in short, makes Hamlet a fully resolved person with a new-found calm of mind and with a strong faith in providence, in the special as well as the general providence of God.

*King Lear,* among so many other things, is also notable for the several kinds of letters that pass through in the play; these property letters turn out crucial dramatic effects. It starts with the forged letter which Edmund enters holding in his hand at the start of 1.2, and speaking his 'Thou, Nature, art my goddess' soliloquy on behalf of bastards like him. He calculatedly half-shows it to Gloucester to rouse his curiosity, and, as though unwillingly, lets him read it.

Edmund thus manages to convince the 'credulous' Gloucester of Edgar's totally non-existent conspiracy to kill his father and of his supposed seeking of Edmund's connivance in it. It is through the trick of the forged letter that Edmund contrives to bring about the total alienation of the father from the good son Edgar. Kent's spontaneous hostility towards Goneril's man Oswald, shows up when the two encounter each other in the grounds of Gloucester's palace. Kent's fury against Oswald is for his carrying of letters to Regan against King Lear.

> *Kent:* You come with letters against the king and take Vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father.

Kent left standing in the stocks in Gloucester's palace takes out and reads the letter from Cordelia which shows that she is by now aware of the ill-treatment meted out to Lear by Goneril and Regan, and also that Cordelia is going to take action on Lear's behalf (2.2. 157-165).

> *Kent:* Approach, thou beacon to this under-globe,
> That by thy comfortable beams I may
> Peruse this letter. Nothing almost sees miracles
> But misery. I know 'tis from Cordelia,
> Who hath most fortunately been inform'd
> Of my obscured course and shall find time
> From this enormous state, seeking to give
> Losses their remedies.

The information in the property letter marks the counter-movement initiated by Cordelia against the abnormal ('enormous') subjection of the king father by his elder daughters. The phrase 'this enormous state' is supported in the immediate context by Kent the good Earl standing in the stocks, a predicament reserved as punishment for base criminal offenders in Elizabethan England. The letter promises relief but before it comes both Lear and Gloucester and the other good characters undergo severe hardships and humiliation. The pattern recurs in the play, and very prominently towards the close, relief and a change of situation for the better being promised only for these to be nullified in the relentless tragic course of events in the play.[4]

Presumably, Cordelia's reaction to Kent's letter, of which the unnamed Gentleman gives an emblematic and idealized and at the same time convincing and touching account in 4.3, relates to the

letter given by Kent to the Gentleman to be carried to Cordelia, after Kent's meeting with him in 3.1. The account brings to the fore the sensitiveness and concern combined with restraint and dignity, almost Christ-like or saintly, on the part of Cordelia.

In 4.5, the scene of a *tete a tete* between Regan and Oswald, Goneril's man we get to know about Goneril's letter to Edmund both a love epistle and one of a conspiracy planned by them to eliminate Albany, her husband. We get to see Regan entrusting a rival love epistle to be taken by Oswald to Edmund. But in the important, eventful 4.6, Edgar after encountering and fighting against Oswald which he does assuming the disguise and accents of a Welsh peasant caretaker of the old blind Gloucester, kills Oswald. Edgar makes a point of searching and taking out from the dead Oswald's pocket the letter to Edmund which Oswald wanted delivered as his last wish before dying, not so much to carry out Oswald's wish as to find out about the goings on in the enemy camp. As Shakespeare's gentlemen characters never fail to do when they open other people's letters, Edgar apologizes to the wax for his breach of manners, as he removes it, reads the letter, and discovers the villainous intent of Goneril to get rid of Albany. Edgar later uses the letter as trump-card. He hands it over to Albany, so that it finally leads to the challenge to fight against Edmund in single combat in which Edmund is killed by Edgar. But Regan's letter to Edmund is not seen by Edgar in the dead Oswald's pockets. Though Oswald mentions 'letters' (1.244), the word could very well mean a single letter, as it does in *Hamlet* (4.2. 2); perhaps Oswald did not carry Regan's letter at all, out of his loyalty to Goneril.

There is also in *King Lear* earlier in the same scene (4.6. 135) the letter of challenge to whomever it may be written by King Lear in his fit of madness and thrust by him before blind Gloucester's eye.

> *Lear:* Read thou this challenge, mark the penning of it.
> *Gloucester:* Were all the letters suns, I cou'd not see (4.5. 135-136)

The tragic pathos of the situation is underscored in Edgar's aside

> I would not take this from report; it is,
> And my heart breaks at it. (4.6. 137-138)

Here the letter of challenge serves as an intensifier of the situation already charged with tragic pathos in all that has immediately gone before it, though structurally this letter may not have importance as in the other instances of letters in the play.

In *Macbeth* (1.5) Lady Macbeth enters reading a letter from Macbeth which tells of the witches' prophecies to him and of the first two, those of his becoming the Thane of Cawdor and the Thane of Glamis, coming true, and the third prophecy 'Hail King thou shalt be'. The letter makes Lady Macbeth resolve to infuse into her husband the readiness to 'catch the nearest way' by cutting off his compunctions and taking to false and violent ways to become king.

Among the last plays, in *Pericles,* 2.5. 41; 3.2. 72 and in *Cymbeline* 1.6. 14-27; 3.2. 1-46 and 3.4. 20-24; 3.5. 98-105, letters serve as means to further development of action and movement in the plays. Likewise, in *King Henry VIII* (3.2), one of the last plays of Shakespeare, Cardinal Wolsey's mistaken despatch to the king along with state papers of the clergy head's secret letter to the Pope, proves his undoing. The letter was to dissuade the Pope from according sanction to the King's divorce of Queen Katherine.

The examples examined will show that letters, occurring for the most part as property letters, function in the plays as instruments of action, and sometimes as in *Twelfth Night, Hamlet* and *King Lear,* they almost bid fair to turn into something like, though not quite, agents of action. They do serve as nodal points and radiate dramatic force and meaning. No wonder that there are several cases of dropped letters (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Twelfth Night, Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* (as Edmund falsely claims in 1.2 )for example); torn ones ( *The Two Gentlemen, Love's Labour's Lost*); misdelivered letters or forged letters; interchanged ones, substituted ones and intercepted letters. For, in such deviations from the norm lie the effects of drama. But the deviations have a meaningfulness and hence an essential verisimilitude in Shakespeare. To put it another way, by a letter in Shakespeare there hangs a tale, a tale which we can believe, given the aesthetic premises and the sociopolitical milieu of the drama.

## NOTES

[1]For Richard Quiney's letter, written in 1598 requesting a loan of money, see Appendix B 'Records, Documents and Allusions' in *The Riverside Shakespeare* Gen. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), pp.1831-1832. Richard Quiney, a friend of Shakespeare's, also was the father of Thomas Quiney who married Shakespeare's daughter Judith in 1616, weeks before Shakespeare's death. Richard Quiney was a leader of the strong resistance movement against enclosures of common land by barons and big landlords. He was elected mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon, and later died of a blow he received while mediating in a quarrel over fencing off of land for enclosure.

Recent critics sometimes suggest that Shakespeare could have been on the opposite side in the quarrel over enclosures on the basis of the evidence that he was one of those who went to court in 1611 and again in 1614, ostensibly in favour of enclosing their land in order to protect his landed properties. But Shakespeare was only indirectly, at best peripherally associated with those cases. We cannot say that he favoured enclosures out of self-interest. The plays touch upon the problems caused by enclosures as topical and hence of interest to himself and his audience.

Citations in this essay are from *Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 1951).

[2]Julia's phrase 'poor wounded name' can be compared with the serious use of the expression by Shakespeare in the dying speech of Hamlet, 'what a wounded name/ ... shall live behind me' (5.2. 336-337). In Julia's use of the phrase, we could see the ironical associations of the Petrarchan love conceit of the lover's heart wounded by Cupid's arrow or by the cruel looks or rejection by the love mistress taking the literal form of the torn written name.

[3]The motif of substitution seems to range far and wide in Shakespeare. Like the substitution of a letter in *Hamlet* which actually means the substitution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for Hamlet as victims of the axe, various kinds of substitutions occur in the plays — of severed heads (*Measure for Measure*), of maidenheads by way of the 'bed-trick' formula (*Measure for Measure* and *All's Well*), substitution by way of proxy-wooing (*Much Ado, Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*), the king's dummies or Brutus's on the battlefield (*King Henry IV* Pt.1 and *Julius Caesar*) and Cloten's dead body dressed in Posthumus' garments taken for the moment to be that of Posthumus by Imogen (*Cymbeline*).

[4]It is to risk the naturalistic fallacy to raise the question how Cordelia in France could have proleptically come to know of developments in the treatment of Lear by Goneril and Regan as or even before these take place (Lear is yet to confront Regan as Kent reads Cordelia's letter). Shakespeare orders his play in terms of the flow of dramatic time, which factor leads to the positing of 'double time' with reference to *Othello*.

# THE PROBLEM OF DELAY IN SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET* : A POINT OF VIEW

**B.D. Sharma**

The problem as to why Hamlet delays the execution of revenge has been taken up for discussion by a host of critics including S.T. Coleridge, A.C. Bradley and T.S. Eliot. The problem of delay is the most important problem in the play and P.K. Guha is right when he maintains: "... this delay of Hamlet is not a minor factor in the drama, but its basic theme and the chief centre of its dramatic interest (Guha 13). S.T. Coleridge is of the opinion that Hamlet is not a kind of man who can take revenge and he is not fit for the task which has been assigned to him by the Ghost as he is not a man of action. A.C. Bradley rejects the view that Hamlet is not a man of action and argues that if Hamlet had not been a man of action he would not have been able to kill Polonius in his mother's bed-room as swiftly as he does. Bradley holds the view that Hamlet is suffering from the disease of melancholia and that it is this flaw in his constitution that renders him incapable of taking revenge. But one is curious to know that if the disease of melancholia prevents Hamlet from killing Claudius, why it does not prevent him from killing Polonius. If this disease makes him inactive in one case it must make him inactive in all cases. But the fact remains that Hamlet does not hesitate in killing Polonius at all, but when it is the question of killing Claudius, he becomes inactive. That leads one to believe that the real cause of delay must be found in the relations of Claudius and Hamlet.

P.K. Guha believes that delay is caused by the fact Hamlet expands the task of wreaking vengeance for his father's murder to "the curing of a degenerate world." Guha asserts: "His mother's fall and the Ghost's story of the murder of his father by his uncle convinced him that the world was corrupt to its marrow, and that there was no honesty or honour in human character; and the Ghost's injunction of revenge is interpreted by Hamlet to mean an attempt to cure the world of this besetting corruption.... What happens is that his spirit of personal vengeance is dulled by this train of thought of the general depravity of human character, and he is held back from

forming and pursuing a steady plan of revenge. This is what constitutes all 'the dlay' with which Hamlet can be charged..." (Guha 25-26). No doubt Hamlet is disturbed to find villainy and knavery in the world and comes to the conclusion:

> The time is out of joint: cursed spite
> That ever I was born to set it right. (*Hamlet* I,v, 209-10)

But he does not forget that he has been assigned the task of taking revenge. When he scolds himself in his soliloquies repeatedly he is making it crystal clear that he is aware of the task that has been assigned to him. For instance, once he says:

> ....Yet I
> A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
> Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
> And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
> Upon whose property and most dear life
> A damn'd defeat was made. (II,ii, 543-48)

Again, he condemns himself in the same vein IV,iv, 56-59. Such statements of Hamlet make it evident that he is not confusing the task of wreaking vengeance with setting right the time which, as he says, is "out of joint". T.S. Eliot rightly asserts: "... the delay in revenge is unexplained on grounds of necessity or expediency (Eliot 97)

But the real cause of delay in the execution of revenge is the fact that there exists a father-son relationship between Claudius and Hamlet and that Hamlet , being a son, instinctively likes his father Claudius not to be killed, and so delays the execution of revenge until it becomes inevitable for him to kill Claudius. The assertion is being made on the basis of some very strong suggestions given in the play itself. The most prominent of them is there in the remark that Laertes makes when he asserts:

> The drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,
> Cries cuckold to my father, brands the harlot
> Even here, between the chaste unsmirched brows
> Of my mother. (IV,v, 99-102)

Laertes' saying here that a son's blood will not be calm if his father has been murdered and that if a son's blood is calm at the murder of his father he must be the son of somebody other than his mother's husband, at least signifies that Shakespeare was very much aware of the view that there is an instinctive bond of affection between a

son and his real father and that one's real son will not remain calm at his father's murder. Here it is very pertinent to ask the question as to why Shakespeare makes Laertes utter this remark which is pregnant with a suggestion which can solve the chief problem not only in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but in the story of Hamlet as it was available to Shakespeare. Obviously, there are two possibilities in this regard: either Shakespeare is making Laertes make this remark casually without having any significance, or he is making Laertes say this remark purposefully. Of these two the second possibility has a better chance to be right because Shakespeare rarely, if ever, makes his characters make remarks casually. Naturally, Laertes' remark must provide a solution to the problem, namely, why Hamlet is not able to take revenge even though, as he categorically says, he has "'cause and will and strength and means/ [t]o do't'" (IV,iv, 45-46), meaning thereby that there is no hindrance either in the conscious mind of Hamlet or in the external world.

Before Hamlet knows the name of the murderer of his father, he is impatient to take revenge as he says to the Ghost: "'Haste me to know't, that I, with wings swift/ As meditation or the thoughts of love,/ May sweep to my revenge'" (I,v, 16-18). But when he is told: "' The serpent that did sting thy father's life/ Now wears his crown'" (I,v, 27-28), and, thus, when he comes to know that his father has been killed by Claudius, he simply exclaims: "'My uncle!'" (I,v, 30), and then sets down in his tables that "... one may smile, and smile, and be a villain ..." (I,v, 32). Now he is not at all swift to "sweep" to his revenge. Nay, he does nothing against Claudius and when he asks himself why he has not done anything he tries to search out a reason behind his inaction when he says:

> ... perhaps
> Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
> As he is very potent with spirits,
> Abuses me to damn me: I 'll have grounds
> More relative than this.... (II,ii, 579-83)

Likewise, when in Claudius' bed-room he argues,

> A villain kills my father; and for that,
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.

O, this is hire and salary, not revenge. (III,iii, 76-79)

he is trying to find an excuse to put his sword back in the scabbard. Hamlet's repeatedly becoming inactive in the presence of Claudius signifies that there is something that blunts the edge of Hamlet's ire against Claudius and dampens his zeal to take revenge. One naturally likes to ask whether this something lies in Hamlet's blood.

That Hamlet's blood on the issue of killing Claudius is calm is evident not only from the fact that he delays the execution of revenge but also from the statements he makes in his soliloquies. For instance, once he says,

Why what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a shrew, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion! (II,ii, 561-66)

and accuses himself of behaving like a kitchen-maid and remaining satisfied with speaking and doing nothing. At another time he charges himself with having not done anything against Claudius and says:

.... Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on the event,
A thought which, quarter'd hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward, I do not know
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do' .... (IV,iv, 39-44)

Since he unambiguously says that he has "cause, and will and strength and means/ To do 't [See *supra*] and still has not done it, it is evident that he has not done it not on account of any external obstruction but on account of the calmness of his blood. And there must be some reason behind that calmness. In the passage quoted above Hamlet mentions two possible reasons behind his calmness, namely, "beastly oblivion" and his thinking too precisely on the event. But his repeatedly scolding himself for his not having taken revenge evidences the fact that his inaction is not the result of what he calls "beastly oblivion" and that his resolution to take revenge is quite fresh in his memory. So far as his "thinking too precisely on the event is concerned, the fact remains that he does not think on the

event, but tries to find excuses for not having done and for not doing anything against Claudius even in future. For instance, when he is scolding himself for his inaction in his soliloquy,

> .... Yet I
> A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
> Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
> And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
> Upon whose property and most dear life
> A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward? (II,ii, 543-48)

hissearchig his mind provides him no reason which he can hold responsible for his inaction and then he comes to the conclusion that he is "pigeon-liver'd" (II,ii, 555), he is blaming none else but himself for his inaction and upto this point there is nothing to suggest that he is doubting the authenticity of the Ghost. When we come to his words: "'The spirit that I have seen/ May be the devil: and the devil hath power/ To assume a pleasing shape....'" (II,ii, 577-78), we feel that Hamlet's desperate search for a cause has borne fruits and has given him an excuse for delaying the execution of revenge for some more time. When Hamlet comes back to Denmark leaving Guildenstern and Rosencrantz to go to England to be killed by the King of England there, he is also in the know of Claudius' abortive attempt to get him murdered and he has one more reason to take action against this murderer of King Hamlet, but we find Hamlet at this stage only consulting Horatio whether or not now he has a right to kill Claudius with a clear conscience:

> ... isn't not perfect conscience
> To quit him with this arm? and is't not be damn'd
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil? (V,ii, 67-70)

He is already late. But he is in no hurry and is consulting Horatio in a leisurely mood.

There is one more fact that puts a question-mark on Hamlet's paternity. This is his mother's behaviour during her first husband's life-time. When the Ghost tells Hamlet,

> Ay, that incestuous beast,
> With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts, —
> ... won to his shameful lust
> The will of my most seeming virtuous queen.... (I,v, 51-54)

he thereby informs Hamlet of Gertrude's having illicit relations with Claudius. This remark of the Ghost makes it clear that even during King Hamlet's life-time Gertrude had adulterous relations with Claudius. If Gertrude was Claudius' beloved during King Hamlet's life-time, there exists a possibility that the son she gave birth to was the offspring of Claudius rather than that of King Hamlet. However, this does not mean that the possibility that Hamlet is King Hamlet's son is being ruled out. I simply mean to say that there exist both the possibilities. But the very existence of these two possibilities is enough to put a question-mark on Hamlet's legitimate paternity. There is a very strong possibility that it is in view of this fact that Hamlet describes his flesh as "sullied" (=tarnished) when in his first soliloquy he says: "'O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt,/ Thaw and dissolve itself into a dew!'" (I,ii, 134-35).

We have to remember that the mother's guilt is the most important fact in this drama. This fact has been accepted by such critics as J.M. Robertson and T.S. Eliot. The fact becomes clear when we read the following remark of T.S. Eliot:

> The upshot of Mr. Robertson's examination is, we believe, irrefragable: that Shakespeare's Hamlet, so far as it is Shakespeare's, is a play dealing with the effect of a mother's guilt upon the son .... Mr. Robertson is undoubtedly correct in concluding that the essential emotion of the play is the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother....(Eliot 98-99)

Asserting, on the one hand, that Gertrude was guilty and that Claudius was an incestuous beast and yet, on the other, believing that Gertrude gave birth to only her husband's son is not a plausible stand. Once we have accepted that Gertrude is guilty, we have to reach the logical conclusion: if Claudius had incestuous relations with Gertrude, the child Gertrude gave birth to must be Claudius' son.

Hamlet deserves to be regarded as Claudius' son on one more ground: there exist a number of resemblances between Claudius and him. The first of them is that both Claudius and he practise dissimulation and simulation as both of them conceal what they are and try to appear what they are not. So far as Claudius is concerned, he tries to hide his villainy with his smiles as is evident from Hamlet's addressing Claudius, no doubt behind his back as:

"'O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!'" (*Hamlet* I,v, 115), and also from Claudius' own statement:

> The harlot's cheek, beautified with plastering art,
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most painted word.... (III,i, 51-53)

That Hamlet practises dissimulation is evident from his resolving to pretend to be insane and telling Horatio: "'... I perchance hereafter shall think meet/ To put an antic disposition on...'" (I,v, 190-91), and his hiding anger and disgust behind such humorous replies as: "'[ Polonius is at supper] Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him'" (IV,iii, 20-21).

Cruelty is another trait of personality that Hamlet shares with Claudius. Obviously, Claudius is a cruel man as he not only kills his brother King Hamlet in order to get Gertrude and the kingdom of Denmark, but also gets Prince Hamlet stabbed by Laertes when he feels Hamlet can kill him. Hamlet too is cruel when he replaces Claudius' letter to the King of England by a forged letter and arranges that Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are killed in England. No doubt, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz have allowed themselves to have become tools of Claudius, they are not Hamlet's enemies and they do not know they are being sent to England to get Hamlet killed. Fools they may be, knaves they are not. So Hamlet's getting them killed is undoubtedly a cruel act.

Some light is likely to be thrown on this issue also if we turn our attention to the fact that Shakespeare, as T.S. Eliot points out in his essay entitled "Hamlet and His Problems", took the story of Hamlet from Kyd and made some changes in it. T.S. Eliot gives a very wise suggestion in this regard: " The *Hamlet* of Shakespeare will appear to us very differently if, instead of treating the whole action of the play as due to Shakespeare's design, we perceive his *Hamlet* to be superpimosed upon much cruder material which persists even in the final form" (Eliot 96-97). In Kyd's play too the problem of delay is very much there, as is evidenced by the critical writings available about that play as the play has been lost. For example, T.S. Eliot writes in his essay on *Hamlet:* "... it is clear that in the earlier play ... the action or delay is caused, as in the *Spanish Tragedy,* solely

by the difficulty of assassinating a monarch surrounded by guards ..." (Eliot 97). In other words, according to Kyd Hamlet is not able to kill Claudius for some time because the latter is protected by guards. But this is not so in Shakespeare's play. In Shakespeare's play Hamlet is able even to enter the King's bed-room. It means Shakespeare does not accept the view that Hamlet delayed his taking revenge because Claudius was protected by guards. Since in Shakespeare's play Hamlet has both "will" and "means" to take revenge [See *supra*] but does not do that until he finds Claudius to have got him stabbed with a poisoned sword by Laertes, it is obvious that Hamlet's having remained inactive has been caused by something entirely internal. This leaves one with no choice but to infer that the obstruction is there in Hamlet's blood. It also means that Shakespeare rejects Kyd's view in toto. And if Shakespeare rejects an established view he must have done it in order to make an alternative assertion. All this brings one to the conclusion that according to Shakespeare Hamlet delays the execution of revenge only because he is the offspring of Claudius and there exists an instinctive warmth in his heart for his father, but since he does not know this fact he is unable to understand why he is not able to take revenge for a long time even though he consciously wants himself to act swiftly.

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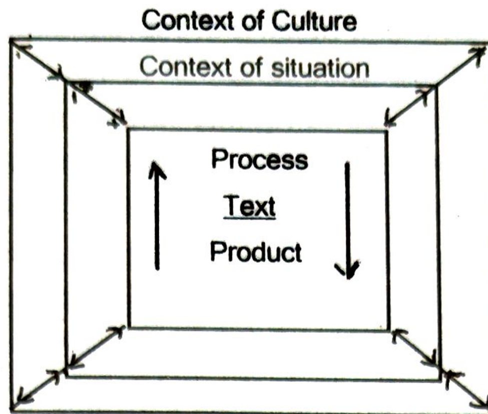
# THE DYNAMICS OF TEXT AND CONTEXT WITH REFERENCE TO ROBERT BROWNING'S 'MY LAST DUCHESS'

N.J. Oberoi

Following the views of Halliday and Hasan (1989), the paper upholds the assumption that a text is predicted, communicated and understood by its relationship to its contexts in a dialectical manner. The text and the context mutually create each other. The friction between them engenders a meaningful communication and makes the text a semantic unit. The paper further assumes that a text may be a written or spoken entity embodying an inherent systematic construction. Two of the basic aspects of a meaningful textual construction are grammaticality and acceptability. Grammaticality is linguistically determined whereas acceptability is a culturally determined phenomenon. A text is a process as each text entails a continuous process of selection from the maze of meaning potentials. Each semantic choice leads to another related choice, thus creating a meaningful and coherent textual web. A text, therefore, is a product and process both, with mutual dialectical relationship. The text as a product and process is embedded in a context, as without the embedding, it would be derelict and therefore fail to communicate meaning. Hence, the text becomes communicative when it is embedded in a context of culture. It is a product of its situational and cultural environments and within its environmental contexts, it is an instnce of an 'exchange of social meaning'. It is encased in two environments and interestingly, at each stratum, the relationship is a dialectical one. Context of culture is the wider context, enveloping the context of situation with its three discoursal features of Field, Tenor and Mode, and the context of situation in turn, further envelopes the text. Based on Halliday and Hasan's (1989) social-semiotic perspective, I give below a diagrammatic presentation of the dialectical relationship between a text and its context:




While discussing Robert Browning's well-known literary instance 'My Last Duchess' I will attempt to discuss its inherent inter-relatedness as per the following dimensions, which make it a semantic unit:

I. The context of culture. The cultural dimension of a text assesses the actions of people on certain occasions and also assesses the socio-cultural meanings attached to them.

II. The context of situation. The context of cutlure determines the way the text is interpreted in its context of situation.

III.The text, embedded in its contexts of culture and situation, unfolds itself as a semantic unit marked by unity of structure and texture.

I

I consider Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess' a text rooted in patriarchal culture where one experiences an erasure of the female space, denial of autonomy of (her)self and the liquidation of one who doesnot fit into the mould of patriarchy:

.... Oh Sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. (*Fifteen Poets* : 444)

The Duke, the arch-patriarch, deliberates and dominates the life of the Duchess. The text of 'My Last Duchess' is opulent in the patriarchal culture. Women, in a patriarchal socio-cultural framework, have often been related to portraits as the Duchess in 'My Last Duchess': Lucrezia in 'Andrea Del Sarto', the young bride in Poe's 'The Portrait', dolls furniture, dummies etc. as Nora in Ibsen's 'A Dolls House'. One would question here as what is the cohesive

feature which binds these objects of representation together and relates them all to the representation of woman? The attribute shared by all the objects is beauty, and beauty which can be possessed. Ironically woman's beauty attracts the patriarchy but it also threatens it. Hence, it is not the woman of flesh and blood but its simulacrum seems to be more reassuring and satisfying. Only an artefact, perhaps, can ensure the 'unalterable permanence of aesthetic value': "Woman in her actual existence is nothing but a contingent and hence an inadequate symbol of beauty." (Izzo: 2001:35). The necessary support of the attribution of beauty is the absence of the real woman and the presence of the woman moulded according to the patriarchal norms, reduced to an icon - of beauty. The shift from the representation of woman to the woman as representation establishes a comfortable relationship between the Duke and the Duchess. The Duchess is the target and the repository of the Duke's gaze and is passive, non-resistent as well as a paragon of virtue. Browning has candidly depicted a culture in which to be a connoisseur of art is synonymous to nobility. Fra Pandolf specially painted the picture of the Duchess and Claus of Innsbruck gifted the statue of Neptune to the Duke. In this context the Duchess is characterized by her "to be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey: 1989). The 'gynaecomorphous' painting and the Duchess both reveal their kinship with the commodification typical of a consumerist culture where the possessive instinct works equally strongly on art forms as woman, and woman as art forms. The visual dynamics associated with woman as an artefact has strong gender connotations and is seen as an integral aspect of culture over the centuries from Victorian prudery of Browning's times to the contemporary feminist concerns. Laura Mulvey (1989), Jacqueline Rose (1986), and Griselda Pollock (1988) have discussed the culturally determined gender connotations in a situation where woman is the passive repository of the male gaze.

> That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
> Looking as if she were alive. I call
> That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
> Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will't please you sit and look at her? (*Fifteen Poets* : 443)

The poem presents not only the subservience of the female body and behaviour but also the strangulation of democratic temperament. It is a society where a connoisseur of art takes pride in possessing the life-like painting of his wife but is ashamed of her when she was alive. The male-ego is celebrated throughout the Duke's discourse. With every statement a new dimension of patriarchal oppression is revealed. Mute/muted women, bride killing, system of dowry, and commodification of woman provide a consistent cultural background to this literary instance.

II

The context of culture determines the way the text is interpreted in its context of situation and dialectically the context of culture is interpreted through the context of situation, a term coind by Malinowski (1923) by which he meant the environment of the text. According to Halliday (1989:12) there are three features of the context of situation — Field, Tenor and Mode. Together they form a conceptual framework which Hasan (1989:55) labels as the 'contextual configuration' of a text. These are not random features but are governed by the cultural context, comprising a coherent package.

The field of discourse is concerned with the nature of social activity, which in the literary instance 'My Last Duchess' is three dimensionl comprising the past, present and future time reference. The Duke is revealing the past while describing the (mis) conduct of the Duchess, he, then, turns to the present describing the portrait of the Duchess and other artefacts in his possession, and the third dimension points towards the future matrimonial alliance through the present negotiations with the envoy of a count. The goal of the activity works along a social matrix, assigning an experiential dimension to the text, thereby unfolding the semantic component of the text. The semantic features can be explained by the following features of the text:

1. The Duke, through the monologue, states the behaviour of the Duchess, his possession of her life-like painting effecting prosopopoeia. "There she stands as if alive."
2. Throughout the text, there are two sets of participants, with the Duke as the common interlocutor. Hence, the relationship is per-

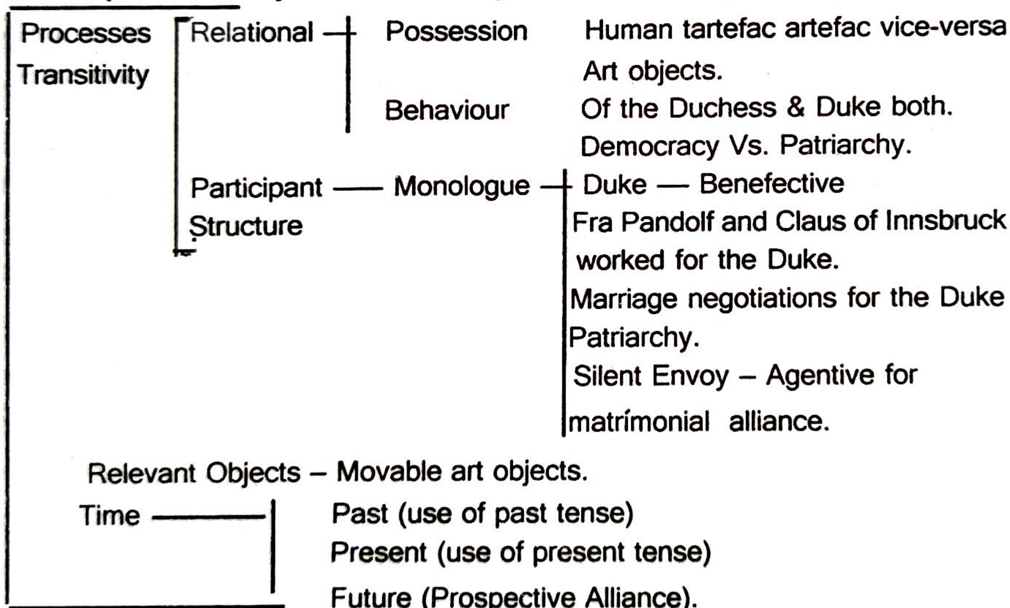
son to person(ified).

The Duke ______ The Duchess (Personified)

The Duke _______ The envoy (Person)

3. Specific mention of the artefacts and artists is made, namely Fra Pandolf and Claus of Innsbruck. Significantly, the Duchess is referred to in the larger part of the text, by the pronominal 'she', thus strengthening the ideational feature of the text — the female subservience.
4. Time references run consistently in the text.
5. The arrival of the envoy puts forward the socio-cultural practice of remarriage and begetting of dowry in the patriarchal culture. These are the processes of existence and possession.

All the above features constitute the experiential component of the text, which reveals our view of the world. I shall attempt to present the Experiential Systems working in the text diagrammatically:




The Tenor of Discourse in the text sets forth the interpersonal relationships with all its socio-cultural subtleties.

1. The interpersonal relationships are expressed by the selection of 'person' in grammar:

| **Ist Person** | **2nd Person** | **3rd Person** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Generally used for | Used for Envoy | Person referred to the The | |
| the Duke | The addressee | Duchess; and others the | |
| The addressor | – You | She | |
| –My | – Sir | that piece | Duchess |

| | |
|---|---|
| –Myself<br>–I<br>–Me<br>–We | her<br>– they - marriage party &<br>– viewers of the Duchess'<br>– painting<br>– Names of the artists-<br>– Fra Pandolf, Clauss of<br>Innsbruck |

The reference to the Duchess by a pronominal is linked with the field of discourse and in turn with the context of culture implying the designation of her identity according to male deliberations, as in her own right she is faceless as well as nameless.

2. As per the mood of the text, the Duke, as the representative of patriarchal values, determines the entire course of action in the poem: "I choose never to stoop", "I gave commands" "We'll meet/ The company below", "... Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me", "... no just pretence of mine for dowry will be disallowed" (*Fifteen Poets:* 444).

3. Agreement to the agentive role of the Duke remains uncontradicted in the text, as all his activities are within the purview of the institution of marriage and hence unchallenged in a patriarchal society. By virtue of his agent role, the Duke is able to exercise a high degree of control over the other participants in the text, namely the Duchess and the silent envoy. The interpersonal relationships between the Duke and the Duchess and between the Duke and the envoy are hierarchic, allowing no space for peerhood. The hierarchic dyad that is constructed through the agent roles remains undisturbed throughout the text. Both the agent roles and the dyadic relations are determined by socio-cultural concerns and express a social structure. If interpersonal relationships are assessed on the axis of social distance, the distance between the Duke on one hand and the Duchess and the Envoy on the other, is maximal. Social distance determines the style of communication. The form of the poem — the dramatic monologue allows no space for verbal communication to either the Duchess or the envoy, giving an authoritative position to the Duke. The syntactical consruction of the text is dominated by the straightforward declarative sentences with absolutely no hedging on the part of the Duke.

The third variable of the context of situation is the Mode of Discourse which considers the aspects of process sharing, channel, and medium. Process sharing examines whether the addressee shares the process of the text - creation as it develops or does the addressee come at the end of the text when it is a finished product. In 'My Last Duchess' the addressor and the addressee relationship between the Duke and the envoy respectively develops a consistent and an unobstrusive process sharing as the silent envoy propels the speech of the Duke. The degree to which the process sharing occurs is closely related to the channel, the modality through which the addressor comes in contact with the addressee. The channel can be either 'Phonic' or 'Graphic' (Hasan: 1989). In the case of 'My Last Duchess', the channel is phonic as it is a dramatic monologue. The envoy, the receiver does not interrupt and is verbally passive. His participation appears to be manifested by his body language, eye contact, facial expression, etc. — the extra verbal modalities. The phonic channel is most conducive to process sharing as the situation is closely shared by the speaker and the listener at the same time. Medium and channel are two distinct entities even if they are closely related to each other. They may or may not be congruent. The phonic channel is congruent with the spoken medium just as the graphic channel is congruently related to the written medium. In 'My Last Duchess' the congruence is distrubed as the channel is graphic but the medium is spoken. These choices are subservient to the choices in Field and Tenor, and hence there occurs an intra-situational relationship. The field, as seen above, is an exposition of a patriarchal culture where the Duke exercises his control over the mute and muted Duchess. His ego is unhesitatingly expressed to a silent envoy, and hence the phonic channel is most appropriate in the interpersonal tenor relationship.

## III

Text and context are inextricably linked with each other. The text as a construct comprises a complex of ideational, interpersonal and textual features. It has unity at structural and textural levels.The structure of a text is traditionally seen as having a beginning, a

middle and an end. These three points of structural unity are labelled by Hasan (1989: 53) as

1. the precipitative event,
2. the consequential event
3. and the revelation event, which leads to a re-interpretation of the precipitative event.

The textual context determines the occurrence of these points and their order in the text. 'My Last Duchess' appears to begin with the second element of the structure — the consequential one, where the consequence is presented in the form of the objectification of the Duchess. The Precipitative Event takes the medial position when the Duke gave commands folowing which " all smiles stopped together" and he then justifies his orders given for the Duchess' liquidation:

.... She had
A heart – ... too soon made glad
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on .... (*Fifteen Poets* : 444)

The Revelation Element follows the consequential one when some facts, hitherto concealed, are exposed. The revelation calls for the re-interpretation of the Precipitative Event. One wonders whether the marriage negotiations stated towards the end of the text make a revelation or are just a recurrence of the second element of the structure — the Consequential Element. Remarriage in a patriarchal society appears to be a natural consequence of the Precepitative state of the text. Hence, the Revelation Element appears to be missing. The comprehensive context of culture thwarts the element of the Revelation as with an oppressive patriarchal mind-set, the Duke is unfit to bring in the element of a revelation, which, according to Hasan, has to be a noble one. Here, one again experiences an inter-relatedness between the structure of the text and its enveloping context of culture.

Texture, like structure, is also related to the context of situation. It is formed by meaning continuities. Throughout the text of 'My Last Duchess' the pronominals 'she' and 'her' are co-referential with the Duchess. Hence cohesion marks the text with unity and makes it a semantic unit.

| A | B | = Cohesion attained through |
|---|---|---|
| Duchess | She/her | co-referentiality |

The members of the 'B' unit form an implicit encoding device, the 'B' list is understood with reference to the 'A'. This is an endophoric tie because the interpretative source of the implicit terms lies in the co-text. A sustained endophoric interpretation is a source of cohesion. The word 'Duchess' is placed in the beginning of the text and therefore precedes its linguistic referents resulting in anaphoric co-referential cohesive tie.

As the poem is in the monologue form, the Duke refers to himself with the first person singular pronoun 'I' and the possessive 'My' which do not have an implicit linguistic co-referents in the text. When we read the line 'That's my last Duchess.... " we get a clue to the identity of the speaker with reference to the Duchess, more so with the context of situation present in the poem. Hence, I would like to state that the 'Duke' and 'I' and 'My' are situational co-referents, a feature by which the text gets its coherence. By these sustained implicit endophoric co-referents, the text gains its unity of texture including cohesion and coherence.

'My Last Duchess' thus is presented as a construct with inter-contextual, intra-contextual and textural unity governed by dialectical relationships at each level.

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# THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN THE POETRY OF TED HUGHES

**Aruna Sharma**
**Rinki Verma**

"Poems are new species of creature and a new specimen of life outside your own." This statement of Hughes is baffling. How can a poem be like an animal? Well, "...it is better to call it an assemblage of living parts moved by a single spirit. The living parts are the words, the language and the rhythm. The spirit is the life which inaibits them when they all work together. Of course, it is difficult to say which part comes first. At the same time one has to make sure that each part is alive, i.e., to whom we can hear, see, taste, touch and smell through senses. They seem to use their muscles like balance."[1] Ted Hughes was a great poet in whose hands language was a very powerful instrument of communication. He reminded us that we really still speak the language of Shakespeare capable of registering the reality of things and of inner states of life. Hughes' language demonstrates the fact that it is adequate enough to express variety of thoughts. About his poetic style Keith Doglas writes: "The style is not a symptom either of obsession or of intellectual surrender. It combines to a remarkable degree of receptiveness and control."[2]

A perusal of the opening lines of Ted Hughes' poem "The Horses" sets forth the poet's skilful use of language:

> I climbed through woods in the hour before dawn-dark,
> Even air, a frost making stillness,
> Not a leaf, not a bird,
> A word cast in frost,
> I came out above the wood,
> Where my breadth left tortuous statues
> In the iron light,
> But the valleys were draining the darkness.[3]

In the above lines the rhythm, diction and sound effects used to evoke the freezing stillness are superb but not unusual. The perception is anchored by a bold conceit. It is well connected with the bleakness of the world before dawn. Apart from this, the poet is not content with the neatness of the conceit that he brings in

potential details. But through excessive and domestic concreteness he has exploded the conceit and thus has established its triumph. The clear perceptual idea pervades the early part of the poem and beneath it there is a striking paradox which reflects the tension at the heart of the poet.

The familiar idea that good poetry makes a communication which precedes and outdistances conscious understanding is connected in Hughes case with the relation to the physical world. There are two aspects of this relation — the ability of the language to represent objects and its roots in the physical nature of the speaker and the hearer. This can be used to provide a synthesis of the two aspects of language's relation to the physical world.

Hughes speaks of capturing the reality of things in words and illustrates the idea in his poem "The Thought Fox". The fox gets up somewhere in the darkness and comes walking towards him. Ted writes:

> The deeper one goes into the language,
> The less visual is its imagery and more
> Audial its system of tensions.[4]

This accords with the biological facts. Thus the idea that the communication of poetry and all effective language is physiological in nature. Evidently, Hughes considers that language, particularly the spoken language, has its roots in an inner life of which the speaker may not be conscious. This is consistent with the dialect.[5]

In his first Volume Hughes most obviously attempts to create poetry with a material body by employing language which demands a conscious physical effort dense with consonants, alliteration and assonance. This can be discerned in the following lines:

> I drown in the drumming plough land, I drag up
> Heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth mouth
> From clay that clutches my each step to the ankle
> With the habit of dogged grave.[6]

In the above passage the language is so physically dense that one is intensely conscious of words and activities of the poet in putting them together. But we find by contrast a real mastery and subtlety in the description of the hawk. Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye. The effect is affable. There is the assonance of height and eye. There is rhythm springing with its foot at the centre. The

use of overtly physical language is not usually as felicitious as it is in the opening of the poem. Later, the poet describes himself as a

> Bloodily grabbed dazed last moment counting
> Morsel in the earth's month.[8]

Thus the words chosen suffice to make the effect. By contrast, the piling up of words in the "Hawk in the Rain" suggests an agitation in the poet as well as in the protagonist.

"Wind" differs from most of his poems in the clarity of its language. The first line in the simplest of words gives us a metaphor that unifies the association of the ensuing violence and summarizes the continuing sensations of the night. This house has been far out at sea all night. The woods crushing through darkness the booming hill. At a deeper level it starts off the series of suggestions that undermine the reader's faith in the permanence and reliability of the landscape. The final line of the third stanza is an excellent visual metaphor reinforced by characteristically energetic verbs, yet it too derives its greatest power from this deeper lever.

In Ted's poems the conceits are the result of concentration on a small point. While letting imagination work freely to collect every thing that might concern that still point, the stillness in concentration can perhaps most clearly be seen in

> .... A Black
> Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly.[9]

Here rhythm, syntax, imagery and repetition work together to create this effect. Repetition is the most stylistic feature of the passage and the changing functions chart the movement of the poem towards its central vision. More generally, the repetition conveys an impression of the deliberate control of the poet holding firmly onto language in the face of his vision. This effect is also produced in the last three stanzas by the stress on mono-syllabic endings of every line, especially when the ensuing line opens with a stress:

> The field quivering, the skyline a grimace,
> At any second to bang and vanish with aflap,
> The wind flung a magpie away and a black —
> Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The House
> ..........................................................................

Seeing the window tremble to come in,

Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.[10]

No other poet has observed animals more accurately, never taking his eyes from the object and capturing every characteristic upto the limits of language. His renderings are vivid, startling and true to his insights. But the description generates metaphors and the metaphors relate the creature to all other creatures and to human experiences and concepts.

In nearly all his poems Hughes strives to find metaphors for his own nature, and his own nature is of peculiar general interest not because it is unusual but because it embodies in a usually intense stark form the most typical stresses and contradictions of human nature and nature itself. In the early poems the metaphor he uses are so often related to animals because animals live out in such naked extremity, the primary struggle between vitality and death. The easy colloquial style is flexible enough to heighten instantly:

Disgorging your gouts of darkness like a wounded God

And unexpected, slightly comical metaphor and exaggerations.[11]

We are challenged all the time to reverse these metaphors, to see this landscape as an image of the human conditions. If the tree is like a crazy old woman, it is not any person hanging on to barren life as tenaciously as the tree, as crazy as the old woman:

Minute after minute, acon after acon,

Nothing lets up or develops

And neither there is a bad variant nor a try out

This is where the staring angels go through

This where all the stars bow down.[12]

"Skylark" is one of the most assured and·accomplished larger poems in the English language. Quickly the poem is into its striking descriptive metaphors:

Barrel chested for heights

Like an Indian of high Andes,

A whippet head barbed like a hunting arrow.[13]

Thus metaphor, for the authentic poet, is not a figure of rhetoric but a representative image standing concretely before him in lieu of a concept. Words, though controlled upto a point, are allowed to retain a life of their own and express more than the poet consciously knows. His imagination draws on his unconscious and on his sixth

sense, and thereby he speaks of innumerable things that speak through him. He performs a function essential to the race, a function analogous to the one performed in more primitive cultures by the *shaman*, whose function is to make the dangerous journey, on behalf of the society, into the spirit world and into his own unconscious.

Hughes is a master of hyperbole. Hyperbole is deliberate exaggeration not intended to be taken literally to express strong feelings or make a strong impression. It is as essential to poetry as metaphors and is responsible for the power of the most admired passages of poetry. The metaphysical conceit is both metaphor and hyperbole. The first line of the first poem in Hughes' first book plunges into hyperbolic verse of a high quality:

I drown in the drumming ploughland,
With the habit of the dogged grave....[14]

Here the exaggeration in the description of a man walking through mud seems to generate its own conceit. The earth is so habituated to its primary relationship with man — his grave — that it knows no reason to wait for him to die but is from the start hungry for him pulling him down with a force stronger than gravity — morality. Yet so closely does the language describe the physical experience of dragging across a phoughfield in a rain storm that we are hardly aware of its becoming either hyperbole or metaphor.

What Hughes took from Thomas was a pulsating verbal energy, an emphasis on blood and bone and a.hyperbolic imagery. Hughes prefers monosyllabic stress to iambic accents and would have surely agreed with Hopkins that sprung rhythm is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose when rhythm is perceived in them. He disdains strict rhyme and iambic pentameter. His rhythm is mimetic. Mark the monosyllables in these memorable lines:

Till with a sudden sharp hotstink of fox,
It enters the dark hole of the head.[15]

This really suggests the movement of the fox as it approaches the metaphorical foxhole.

Thus, in brief, the language used by Hughes in his great works is varied in nature. The deployment varies from words, communication and simple language to spoken, imaginative, rock-

bottom, inherited, and journalistic language. It has been intensified further by its physiological aspect, roots in inner life, overtly physical effort, use of energetic verbs, metaphors, hyperboles, rhetoric and monosyllabic stress. At its highest level, rhythm, syntax, imagery and repetitions work together to create magic effect.

Hughes's style changes almost from volume to volume. The reason is that his apprehension of the subject alters also. The manner is a device for feeling the subject fully and precisely so that it may never be forgotten. His manner is strained, pretentious, and overexcited. Occasionally the phrases are linked in a series like brass knuckle. This leaves the mind stunned. At the same time the style affects elevation. The following lines from "Egg Head" bear witness to it:

> Brain in deft opacities
> Walled in translucencies, shuts out the world's
> knocking
> With a welcome and to wide-eyed deafnesses
> Of prudence lets it speak ....[16]

The language attempts to squeeze every thrill out of its subject.

A master of language, Hughes tosses words on the page. Fresh and aggressive as his slants on his themes may be, his words themselves frequently state:

> He wanted to sing very clear
> ...............................................
> While tycoons gambled with his glands
> In a bog of cigar
> smoke ....[17]

The same is true of the longer poems. Less strained and grotesque, more often piercing and more dramatic and deeply emphatic, they have sensual and formal richness. Apart from these, he is also very particular in employing various techniques to make the description come to life and make it much more powerful and effective.

When Sylvia Plath first met Ted Hughes at Cambridge in 1956, she wrote to her mother: "... he was a man with a voice like the thunder of God — a singer, a storyteller, a lion and world wanderer, a vagabond who will never stop."[18] This story-teller's gift has emerged most obviously in his great work "Crow" and other

subsequent works. But its presence in "Wodwo" is important. In fact, the success of the poem "Wind", "Pig" and "Pike" clearly depends to a large extent on the tone of his personal narrative reminiscences.

The influence that Hughes' reading in folklore and anthropology seems to have had on his poetry is the introduction of mythical narrative in his works. Myth is a dangerous word to use in a work of literary art and it is also to be kept in mind that genuine myth is collectively produced and is inseparable from rituals. However, words have been meaningfully used by him in his poetry. Theology, obviously, anticipates the reinterpretation of biblical narrative in "Crow". The "Dream Time" and the"Rescue" seem to be intended to ensure narration. The poem "Nightfall"' alerts the reader from the start. The narrative is a journey into imagination or the unconscious. It moves from a realistic sea at nightfall through the use of metaphor to the assertion of a mythic reality.

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# THE USE OF IMAGES AND SYMBOLS IN NISSIM EZEKIEL'S POETRY

O.P. Dwivedi

Nissim Ezekiel makes an ample use of images and symbols in his poetry. The publication of three annual anthologies, *Some Imagist Poets,* by Houghton Mifflin Company of New York in 1915, 1916 and 1917 respectively gave a fllip to the literary movement called 'Imagism'. It was T.E. Hulme who had actually laid the foundation for this movement, and such great writers as W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot reinforced and popularized it. Nissim Ezekiel was deeply influenced by these writers, and when he came to composing his own poetry, especially *Hymns in Darkness* and *Latter-Day Psalms,* he took to the imagistic and symbolistic techniques in order to render it impressive, concise and concentrated in expression.

An image, in the simplest terms, means "a picture made out of words."[1] Usually, it is expressed through a phrase, an epithet, a metaphor, or a simile. Apropos of this C. Day Lewis remarks: " An epithet, a metaphor, a simile may create an image; or an image may be presented to us in a phrase or a passage on the face of it purely descriptive, but conveying to our imagination something more than the accurate reflection of an external reality."[2] Of these various constituents of imagery, Aristotle attaches too much importance to 'metaphor'. He observes thus in this regard:

> ... the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is a sign of genius....[3]

Imagery is quite useful in effecting 'concretization of emotions' and 'obliquity of expression'. It is often used to avoid direct statement in poetry.

As regards 'symbol' and its relation to an 'image', it is the outcome of the repeated use of an image, which comes to assume the shape of a signifier, a token, a concentrated meaning.[4] For example, Walt Whitman repeatedly employs the image 'leaves of grass', which comes to denote 'pages of book'. Like the leaves of grass, Whitman believes that the pages of his book will grow in size with the passage of time. As a literary movement, Symolism arose

in France between the years 1870 and 1880 under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites in painting and Wagner in music. The original theorist of Symbolism was Mallarme, who was deeply impressed by French writers like Laforgue, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Rimbaud. Such eminent writers as W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas profusely used the symbolistic technique in their works.

Historically, Ezekiel occupies a prominent place in contemporary Indian English poetry. Artistically too, he is a highly talented poet who knows well how to handle his poetic tool. His use of images and symbols in poetry speaks volumes of his trained mind and disciplined art. He makes his images functional rather than decorative. Some images are repeatedly used in his poetry, and they acquire symbolic overtones. He employs similes and metaphors adroitly in such poems as "Poems of the Separation" and the sixth section of *Hymns in Darkness.* Mark the following lines from "Poems of Separation":

> Any man may be a whirlwind,
> any woman lightning....[5]

And again the following from the poem "Guru":

> We too one day
> may grow like him,
> dropping our follies
> like old clothes or creeds. (*Hymns in Darkness,* p.25)

Here the third and fourth lines must be marked for an apt application of simile. "All metaphor and simile," says J. Middleton Murry, "can be described as the analogy by which the human mind explores the universe of quality and charts the non-measurable world."[6] This 'non-measurable world' is actually the spiritual and mystical world which can be fathomed by means of images and symbols.

*Latter-Day Psalms* also presents a feast of memorable images and symbols. The following two lines may be marked in this connection:

> I wax old as a garment,
> as a vesture I am changed.

At another place in this very poem, we have a marvellous use of metaphor:

> The images are beautiful birds

and colourful fish: they fly,
they swim in my Jewish consciousness. (*Latter-Day Psalms*, p.47)

Many more poems of imagistic skill and evocative power are to be found in this poetical collection. Of such poems, we may mention "Warning", "Two Sonnets", "Furies" (which is the third of the Postcard Poems), and "Nudes 1978" (particularly sections 3, 9 and 14).

*Latter-Day Psalms* contains some poems which are full of imagistic details and symbolic overtones. The poem "Urban" is based on the city life and the mechanical movements and actions of its people. The city becomes a symbol of distracting noises, of 'kindred clamour' and 'shadows of the night'. It is graphically portrayed in the following extract:

The city like a passion burns.
He dreams of morning walks, alone,
And floating on a wave of sand. (*Latter-Day Psalms*, p.58)

Here simile and metaphor are beautifully yoked together. The city is depicted as a burning pit of lust and passion. Obviously, the city that is so frequently portrayed by Ezekiel in the poetry is the city of Bombay. In *The Unfinished Man,* the city emerges as 'the central metaphor', just as the family serves the same purpose in A.K. Ramanujan's poetry. Poems like "Morning Prayer" and "Marriage" make use of imagery in a striking manner. While the first poem offers us an arresting simile in "Secretive as a mole" (p.61), the second poem gives us the following:

Wordless, we walked among the trees,
And felt immortal as the breeze. (*Latter-Day Psalms*, p.62)

Another poem, "Enterprise", effectively employs the metaphor of pilgrimage, though this metaphor has been more strikingly in poems like "A Time to Change", "The Worm" and "Communication".

Again, the poem "Philosophy" contains a beautiful image in the following lines:

.... I think
Of each historic passion as a blink
That happened to the sad eye of Time. (*Latter-Day Psalma*, p.48)

Each period of history is just 'a blink' to 'the sad eye of Time'. The poetic expression becomes highly figurative and evocative here. Another poem, "Night of the Scorpion", paints the superstitious

peasants as "swarm of flies" (*Latter-Day Psalma,* p.49). The poem "Poetry Reading" offers us an imposing audible image: "An image fell/ like a silver coin upon the floor" (*Latter-Day Psalma,* p.53).The poem "The Visitor", which lays out the artistic credo of Ezekiel, abounds in picturesque and fluid images:

> Outside the miracles of mind,
> The figure in the carpet blazing,
> Ebb-flow of sex and the seasons,
> The ordinariness of most events. (*Latter-Day Psalma,* p.55)

Some of Ezekiel's images, though they are not too many, assume the shape of symbols in his poetry. Of such recurring images, mention may be made of pilgrimage, nature, the woman, the city, and the basement room. While discussing the poem "Enterprise", we have seen the application of the image of pilgrimage, which usually denotes the journey of life in this world.

The frequently used image of Nature in Ezekiel's poetry denotes 'purity and tranquility' as distinct from the image of the city. Ezekiel maintains that Nature is a manifestation of the glory and greatness of God, and that through her man can look into 'the life of things.' Time and again, Ezekiel offers fresh images of sky, river, hill, wind, sun, moon and rain in his verse. In his "Morning Prayer", he writes thus:

> God grant me certainty
> In kinships with the sky,
> Air, earth, fire, sea —
> And the fresh inward eye. (*Latter-Day Psalma,* p.61)

K.D. Verma thinks that the nature images are the archetypal life-symbols, and that they "project a pastoral vision of a fully refulgent and harmonious life...."[8]

The woman is yet another repeatedly used image in Ezekiel's poetry. As a symbol, she is usually identified with 'animality and sexuality'. She is often portrayed as a sexual beast or seductress. Some of the significant poems in this regard are: "The Couple", "Poem of the Separation", "Tone Poem", "Nudes 1978", "Poverty Poem" and "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher". The image of the pagan woman comes out vividly in the following lines from "The Couple":

> Her false love became infused

with truest love
only in making love. (*Hymns in Darkness*, p.15)

And she appears as a seductress in "Poverty Poem":

She didn't know beggars in India
smile only at white foreigners. (*Latter-Day Psalma*, p.13)

And she is imaged as a creature of flesh and blood, of sensuality and nakedness, in many poems. Take "Nudes 1978" as a glaring example of it:

'Yes, this is me as I am',
naked seen, seeing nakedness,
named, flamed in detail,
womanly and vulnerable. (*Latter-Day Psalma*, p.38)

At times the poet delves deep into the physical details of the woman — her breasts, buttocks, thighs and hair, and this renders his poetry sensuous and erotic.

The city occupies, as noted earlier, a central place in Ezekiel's poetry. Like the image of the woman, the image of the city is linked up with corruption and degradation in modern human life (especially as found in metropolitan cities). The city image is predominant in poems like "Urban", "Case Study" and "A Morning Walk". The following lines of "Minority Poem" are worth citing in this context:

Polish up your alien
technique of observation,
while the city burns. (*Latter-Day Psalms*, p.21)

These lines forcefully recall T.S. Eliot's description of the city of Carthage as 'burning in the cauldrons of love' (which is the debased form of love) in the third section of *The Waste Land*.

The basement room constitutes an insistent image in Ezekiel's poetry. The basement room lingered in the memory of the poet, and in his poem "Background, Casually" he writes:

.... Philosophy,
Poverty and poetry, three
Companions shared my basement room. (*Hymns in Darknes*, p.1)

The 'basement room' becomes so dominant a metaphor that it comes to signify the poet's ceaseless struggle for artistic creation even at the cost of self-destruction. The poem "London" (the city where he had shared the 'basement room' with two of his friends) brings out this truth very aptly:

Sometimes I think I'm still
in that basement room.
a permanent and proud
metaphor of struggle
for and against the same
creative, self-destructive self. (*Hymns in Darknes,* pp.33-34)

Another poem, "The Room", clarifies that it was a place "without a fever or exaggeration" (*Hymns in Darknes,* p.42). The basement room, thus, becomes a symbol of shelter for deliberation and philosophical speculation.

To conclude, Ezekiel is a skilled and conscious craftsman who churns out his images and symbols thoughtfully. Not that he uses "isolated images" now and then, but produces "a succession of subtly related images."[9] The insistent images of pilgrimage or journey, of Nature, of the pagan woman, of the unreal city, and of the basement room (in London) make Ezekiel a poet of symbolic import and thoughtful expression.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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[3]Aristotle's Poetics; quoted from Ingram Bywater, *Aristotle: On the Art of Poetry* (Oxford: At the Claredon Press, 1967), p.78.

[4]Kristian Smidt holds the view that a symbol is a point at which pure form and concentrated meaning strive to come to terms. See his book, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S. Eliot* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p.112.

[5]Nissim Ezekiel, *Hymns in Darkness,* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.29. Subsequent citations from this source are given in the body of the paper itself.

[6]J. Middleton Murry, "Metaphor," *Twentieth Century Poetry,* eds. G. Martin and P.N. Furbank (Walton Hall, Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1975), p.12.

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[8]K.D. Verma, "Myth and Imagery in *The Unfinished Man:* A Critical Reading," *Journal of South Asian Literature,* XI, Nos. 3 & 4 (Spring & Summer 1976), 231.

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# A STUDY OF ANITA DESAI'S *CRY, THE PEACOCK* IN THE LIGHT OF THE DOCTRINE OF *AUCITYA* OF INDIAN POETICS

**Archana Tyagi**

Since Anita Desai's preoccupation is with the interior landscape rather than with the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her protagonist. The intolerable grapple with thoughts, feelings and emotions is inevitably reflected in her language, syntax and imagery. The present study aims at analysing the use of language in Desai's *Cry, The Peacock* from the point of view of *aucitya-siddhanta* of Indian poetics. It focuses directly on the poetic expression at five levels: *bhas+a* or language, *gun+alankararasa* or excellence, poetic figure and sentiment, *vyakarana* or grammar, *sanskriti* or culture and *kavya-pratibha* or creative genius as a whole. *Cry, The Peacock* possesses almost all the twenty-seven constituents of *aucitya-siddhanta* of Indian poetics, propounded by *Acarya Ksemendra* of the eleventh century who was inspired by Anandvardhana and his literary teacher, Abhinavagupta. These constituents of propriety, which are the very life of poetry, should exist in *pada* cr phrase, *vakya* or sentence, *prabandhartha* or meaning in narrative, *guna* or excellence, *alankara* or poetic figure, *rasa* or sentiment, *kriya* or verb, *karaka* or case-ending, *linga* or gender, *vacana* or number, *visesana* or adjective, *upasarga* or prefix, *nipata* or particle, *kala* or tense, *desa* or country, *kula* or family, *vrata* or custom, *tattva* or truth, *sattva* or disposition, *abhipraya* or motive, *svabhava* or nature, *sara-sangraha* or essence, *pratibha* or genius, *avastha* or state, *vicara* or thought, *nama* or title, *asirvada* or benediction and other limbs of poetry.[1]

It is interesting to note that Anita Desai could attain these proprieties naturally and unconsciously in *Cry, The Peacock*. *Bhasaucitya* or propriety of language operates at the expressiveness of the phrases, sentences and meaning in the narrative. It is because of *bhasaucitya* or propriety of language that

*Cry, The Peacock* bears alluring charm of phrases and sentences, elegant but sparse ornament, tasteful sentiments, tender-heartedness and elegance of expession. The following few extracts from the novel demonstrate the charming *padaucitya* or propriety of phrases:

> (i) Her husband came home. He was very late but as soon as he came, he did all that was to be done, quickly and quietly like a surgeon's knife at work.[2]
>
> (ii) I tried to think of the dog rolling over on his back to gaze at me with fond, flower-soft eyes. (13)
>
> (iii) But when I closed my eyes, streams of blood vanished-like the liquid mirror, the black frame of the door, the scarlet blouse flung upon the floor like an abandoned flag. (14)

All the above-mentioned phrases offer a vivid, tragic and heart-warming picture of the grief-stricken Maya, Gautama's childless wife.

Desai presents *Vakyaucitya* or propriety of sentence by the superfluity of imagery, fusion of figures with the emotions of characters, the use of emotional epithets, etc. which give lucidity, directness and force to her sentences, such as:

> (i) When he touched my hair, smoothing it down carefully as a nurse, I was flooded with tenderness and gratitude, thought of him as my guardian. (15)
>
> (ii) Panic, like a piston, does not cease to live immediately one shuts it off, but continues to beat with a slow, dying rhythm, until it fades naturally away. (17)

Here the meaning of the sentences becomes very desirable by the power of propriety consisting in appropriate sense — the sense which has been brought to a finish by vivid epithets like "carefully as a nurse", and "Panic, like a piston".

By applying *prabandharthaucitya* or propriety of meaning in narrative, Desai tries to capture the abstract ideas through concrete images as is conspicuous in the following passage:

> The doves, in a mood for mating, cooed to each other until I was distracted I counted them omens of ill fortune, of separation, for their coo was a tedious repetition of fatal words, 'Go away' The atmosphere was charged with restlessness, as my hair suddenly grown drier and finer, was charged with electricity...Gusts of wind dragged the thorny, paper-flowerd bougainvillaea creepers against the wall with a dry scratching rattle that unnerved me. (34)

*Gunalankararasaucitya* or propriety of excellence, poetic figure and sentiment, underlines the uniqueness of *Cry, The Peacock*. Desai demonstrate an appropriate experiment with all

these devices consciously or unconsciously:

> I heard that couplet alone, that couplet weighted with a rare compassion, a tender understanting, so that it hung pendent in the dark like a radiant rain-drop, catching the starlight catching it and flashing, brighter and brighter. And my heart stretched, stretched painfully, agonizing, expanding and swelling with the vastness of single moment of absolute happiness... Ultimate. A word dropped down the tall tunnel of memory–Ultimate Ah, this was it, the ultimate absolute joy. Here lay perfection. (25)

The above passage excels in the sublimity, simplicity and clarity of expression on account of *gunaucitya* or propriety of excellence. Simple but forcerful words have been used with remarkable success.

Desai amplifies her imagery through *alankarauctitya* or propriety of figures of speech . She makes a wonderful use of figures of speech in humanizing things. She humanizes the objects of Nature by bringing together reality and abstractions. For example, "Death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness" (24). Beautiful tulips of simile also bloom spontaneously in her narrative:

(i) He is like a silver oak himself with his fine, silver white hair. (37)

(ii) His lips were pink and tenuous,exposed and defenceless, like moist, peeled fruit. (45)

(iii) I felt the phrases soothe me like a stream of cold water that tumbled through the ferns of Darjeeeling, like the cold, pearl mists that crept over the blue hills and poured into the valley. (48)

(iv) My father's hair gleamed soft and white as a bird's wing in mist and shadow. (49)

(v) To live here like two mice in one small room....(50)

Desai's metaphors evince the high quality of her imagination. Consider the following examples:

(i) Arid in a camera of insanity. (104)

(ii) The moon was the mad demon of kathakali ballets, masked, with heavy skirts swirling, feet stamping, eyes shooting beams of fire. (29)

(ii) Gautama gave me a cat. She was white and had hair tassels of silk. Her large almond eyes were topaz, with undertones of grey and overtones of green. (33)

She makes an effective use of alliteration while giving vent to Maya's bewildered dilemma:

> I am torn between two worlds–the receding one of grace, the approaching

> one of madness. My body breaks in the battle. (148)

In these lines we find the subtle repetition of "o" sound in " torn" and "approaching " and of 'b' sound in "body", "breaks" and "battle". Then, there is remarkable use of marks of interrogation in the novel:

> Will it be fire? Will it be flood? Will the lizards rise out of the desert to come upon us-to crush us beneath their bellies? Will there be blood? Will there be screams? And when? when? (149)

*Cry, The Peacock* bears the conjunctions of different *rasas* or sentiments with the ultimate purpose to overwhelm the reader with *rasaucitya* or propriety of sentiment. She uses plurality of *rasas* or sentiments as *karuna rasa* or sentiment of pathos, *raudra rasa* or sentiment of fury, *bhayanaka rasa* or sentiment of fear, *vatsalya rasa* or sentiment of maternal love and *bibhatsa rasa* or sentiment of digust, etc. Mark the following lines:

> Sometimes I saw a flurry of small, tortured peahens, drab, colourless, though in their breasts, their hearts were great and rich with scarlet blood... 'Lover, I die' Now that I understood their call, I wept for them, and wept for myself, knowing their words to be mine. (84)

The very undercurrents of *karuna rasa* or sentiment of pathos also are easily perceptible in the following soliloquy of Maya:

> For, God, now I was caught in the net of the inescapable, and where lay the possibility of mercy, of release? This net was no hallucination, no. In the day-time amidst companions, I could force myself into believing that it was only a nightmare, no more ... or is it madness? Am I gone insane ? Father ! Brother! Husband ! who is my saviour ? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living I am in love, and I am dying. God ; let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest any more–only death and waiting. (84)

One can see *raudra rasa* or sentiment of fury in Maya's frenzy:

> We stared at each other, I looked at his face, the nostrils pinched with anger, the mouth tight with impatience. (97)

*Bhyanak rasa* or sentiment of fear is at its climax when Maya pushes Gautama down the parapet:

> 'Gautama! I screamed in fury, and thurst out my arms towards him, out at him, into him and past him, saw him fall then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom. (173)

There are instances of *vatsalya rasa* or sentiment of matemal love in the novel. Mark the followinf extract:

> Then, Maya thinks of her soul as the round, childish face, pretty, plump, and

> pampered, its smooth, silken skin with one, small velvet mole ; the small, shell-like ears curling around petty ignorance; the soft, overful lips, arched with vulnerable sweetness; the long curled lashes and the very heavy, very dark black brows ; the silly collection of curls a flower pinned to them -a pink flower, a child's choice of a posy.(90)

Of course, the novel begins with a note of disgust which produces *bibhatsa rasa* or sentiment of disgust in the heart of the reader:

> All day the body lay rotting in the sun... the reek of dead flesh was overpowering. crows sat in a circle around the corpse, and crows will eat anything- entrails, eyes, anything. (7)

*Vyakaranaucitya* or propriety of grammar is traceable in Desai reliance upon grammatical devices. By her use of propriety of verb, she coins new expressions in different ways such as:

> She looked at me absently, yet smiled warmly, before she rushed away, like some busy rhinoceros charging through the forest, to her dispensary, or her creche, or her workshop for the blind, the disabled, the unemployed....(44)

Here, the adverbials 'absently' and 'warmly' tell about the quick response of Maya's mother-in-law to her passive life and the use of the verb 'charging' is unique enough applying to many differnt objects. Desai puts the pronouns like 'who', 'some', 'so', 'why', 'where', etc. to qualify verbs:

> The electric bulb over her head had no shade, and it made her, who was as stout as she was short, look gaunt, her face harrowed. (45)

Desai's selection of adjectives gives birth to *visesanaucitya* or propirety of adjective. For example:

> Flies began to hum amidst the limes, driving away the gentle bees and the unthinking butterflies. (7)

Here the words 'gentle' and 'unthinking' have been used as adjectives which personify objects of Nature and charge atmosphere in tune with the meaning. These adjectival forms, more often of verbs or particles, are followed by nouns.They go in combination with personifications and metaphors which make expressions more lively. Desai enhances the innocence of butterflies by the addition of the prefix 'un' to the verb 'thinking'. This creates a marvellous poetic effect with the help of *upsargaucitya* or propriety of prefix. She exploits the device of particle through *nipataucitya* or propriety of particle as:

> Father! Brother! Husband! (84)

In this exmple, she exposes a nightmarish certainty of Maya, a girlish Mrs. Dalloway. Nobody is present to fill her spiritual vaccum. Her father is in Lucknow, brother in America and husband is engrossed totally in his own solid world of cases.

*Cry, The Peacock* is Maya's story of her married life with Gautama, and almost the whole of it is "remembrance of things past" by *kalaucitya* or propriety of tense. The opening pages about the scavenging truck carrying away Maya's dead dog Toto, and the last few pages describing what happens after Gautama's death are in third person, while the rest of the novel is Maya's memory and sensibility trying to achieve recordation and definition.

*Sankriti-aucitya* or propriety of culture is present in Desai's novel in an excellent way. The spontaneous description of the countryside creates poetic delight, surprise and loftiness in the narrative. The 'action' of the novel is located in Delhi, but the city's presence is neither obtrusive nor obsessive. There are refrences to places, no doubt:

> Birla Mandir, "the still, brooding old Delhi garden", the Ridge, "that rocky waste land", the crumbling Moghul ruins, as also "the streets alive with bicycles and pedestrians, the clamorous bazaars, the Red Fort's rose red walls swooning in dull fulvous dust, the minarets of Jama Masjid rising like a muezzin's call to prayer into a sky of heavy, grey-tinged, and people lying in the shade of trees on the ghost swept maidan."[3]

As far as *vrataucitya* or propriety of custom is concerned, it finds its way in the novel through figurative language. It works as a means to create a current of feelings between the inanimate and the animate:

> All order is gone out of my life,all formality. There is no plan, no peace...the gardens of others,...an order of lines and designs, a symmetry that has deserted my own life but I have failed to care my garden for so long now...the jasmine vines that were supposed to climb the walls have straggled across the empty flower- beds instead. (150)

*Cry, The Peacock* is embellished with *Kavya- pratibhaucitya* or propriety of creative genius too. Desai finds out the 'truth' *tattvaucitya* or propriety of truth after the futile marriage of Maya and Gautama. As Maya herself explains:

> It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage was based upon a nobility forceed upon us from outside, and therfore neither true nor lasting.(38)

The novelist unveils the awful truth about the real lives of peacocks:

> Have you seen peacocks make love Child? Before they mate they fight.... Peacocks are wise. The hundred eyes upon their tails have seen the truth of life and death. Living they are aware of death. Dying they are in love with life. (33)

Desai practises *sattvaucitya* or propriety of disposition to an extent when Maya unmasks the reality of the phrases from the *Gita*:

> (i) He is fit to attain immortality who is serene and not affected by these sensatations, but is the same in pleasure and pain.... (93)
>
> (ii) He who is free from all attachment and neither rejoices on receiving good nor is vexed on receiving evil, his wisdom is well establishhed....(94)

By her natural power of contemplating upon the lively natural objects, she allures the heart of the sensitive reader through *svabhavaucitya* or propriety of Nature:

> ... star-like flowers that had been pink and red in daylight, and now were white and strongly scented. They hung in long bunches, like these of white grapes .... They say it (Rangoon creeper) attracts snakes- this sweet, intoxicating fragrance. No, I am wrong. It is Queen of the Night that attracts snakes. Beauty and evil, evil, beauty. Snakes, summer, scent, flower, white, white, white.... (16)

Desai's novel is the expression of impassioned feelings and emotions. Her emotional flow abounds in emotional states exhibiting *pratibhaucitya* or propriety of genius:

> Christ,who went out into the world to mingle with pepole, acquaint himself with their suffering...or Buddha who meditated beneath the *bo*tree, his eyes closed to death, misery, pleasure.... The freedom of the lotus from water, of the lamp from winds, of the tortoise from all contact. Detachment in a word, detachment. (10)

Obviously, she attains loftiness of utterance with divine frenzy which lends alluring charm to his writing.

*Avasthaucitya* or propriety of state is discernible in Maya's thinking of the past and the the present:

> As a child, I had gone for walks in wild tracts of land that might now be cultivated, calmed, divided into quiet bungalows with formal gardens, but to me they remain eruptions of rock and wilderness. (82)

*Vicaraucitya* or propriety of thought manifests itself in Desai's social thinking:

> 'Father would be there, ' I confessed and felt something spring up amidst my crushed spirits, like fresh grass after rain. (40)

Also, Desai is quite particular about *namaucitya* or propriety of title, and hence charges it with symbolic meaning. Maya is obsessed with death and is haunted by an astrological prediction that her marriage is going to end in its fourth year, with the death of either wife or husband. She fails to establish an effective communication with her husband, who is matter-of- fact and twice of her age. Having no issue, her life is like orchid which never flower, and this accentuates her isolation which becomes total when she murders her husband in a fit of insane fury. The symbolism of the peacock whose dance of joy is the dance of death has, however, no adequate relevance to Maya's plight[8] creating impropriety of *namaucitya* or propriety of title. Desai realises more thoroughly and intensely the forceful influence of benediction which gives birth to *asirvadaucitya* or propriety of benediction in *Cry, The Peacock*. It provides the solution to the problem of evil. As the albino astrologer tries his best to convince Maya:

> Be wary, child, be wary and fear God. Worship Him, make sacrifices, Pray. Do we not know, all of us here, the story of Prahad? Of how Krishna saved him againand again, countless times through love and mercy? Have not all heard of how Prahlad was flung from the mountain top and Krishna caught him in his arms? Of how he was flung into a fire.... (32)

To end, Desai's *Cry, The Peacock* evidences its high merit when put to the test of *Acarya* Ksemendra's *aucitya siddhanta*. It bears intensity of music, passions and emotions, exaltation, and the universaliy of ideas. It comes from the heart of the novelist and goes deep down into the heart of the reader. Indeed, it has unlimited expanse, extraordinary power and velocity, unprecedented majesty and universal appeal, which cannot be summed up in this short paper. Undoubtedly, it contains almost all the ingredients of the *aucitya- siddhanta* as enumerated by *Acarya* Ksemendra.

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[1]Acarya Ksemendra, *Aucitya-vicara carca, Sloka* vii, ix and x.

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[6]M.K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature* (Delhi: Sahitya Akedemi, 1997), p.241.

# TAMING THE BODY TO HARNESS THE SOUL: A STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *MOVING ON*

**Binod Mishra**

The present paper is a humble attempt to understand the fact that amid all the truths, the body, too, is one to be talked of and to be admitted that it is also the base of all human ties and relationships. The neglect of the body and its vibes may lead to disastrous consequences and affect the entire human personality. The paper also tries to unravel the connection and the opposing pulls of the body and the soul, which in essence ensue from one frame and not separately as two entities. I have taken Deshpande's latest novel, *Moving On,* to illustrate all this.

The novel *Moving On* meanders around the body, which is generally considered a barrier to the sublime waves of the soul. The premise that the body is an abject being and soul the supreme entity appears bereft of any logic. Badri Narayan and his daughter Manjari strongly feel the nuances of the body having an undeniable truth and existence. Both the father and the daughter who study the structure and function of the body from the point of view of medical science stick to their premise of the balsamic dynamics of human body. Badri Narayan seems to be obsessed with the same when he writes in his diary: "Emotions can be faked, lips can speak untruths, but the body never lies."[1]

Deshpande brings to light the fact that there can be no perfect union among couples without understanding the bodily requirements of each other. Some natural instincts and societal pressure ensure in women fear, a defence even against their husbands. This leads to a disharmony and soon there ensues a cleavage between them. It is only a glorious illusion to feel satisfied with our manly duties of feeding woman and meeting her materialistic requirements. The notion of women being a possession carries no weight at all. Through the diary entry of Badri Narayan, Deshpande makes us all wonder at our own ignorance:

> Yet the enigma of our own selves remains unfathomable. The ego, the libido, the unconscious — how little they explain! Such tiny dots on vast uncharted map. The truth is that each one of us is a universe more complicated than

the limitless universe we inhabit.[2]

The heroine of the novel, Manjari is highly obsessed with the body and its throbs. A student of medical science, she is unable to control the uproar of her body and quite often longs to feel a man's arm around' to wish for a 'crushing grip'. Her impatience has an inscrutable sway over her conscience and she stamps a kiss on Shyam's forehead brazenly announcing her defiance and her declaration of love, much to the annoyance of everyone in the family and later a cause of perpetual grief to herself.

Manjari's infatuation for Shyam, a person much below the social status of Narayan family, is the outcome of her physical longing as reported by her anatomist father and writer mother. Her married life with Shyam begins on a dismal note and she finds herself ill at ease living in Shyam's house in a very disgusting and insuperable ambience. Her parents' home provides some solace but after she gives birth to a son, her requirements increase. Shyam's prospects in film making also dwindle because of some flops and some proposals abandoned. All this resulted badly and she seems to fall from the seventh sky:

> Closeted in one small room though we were, we seemed to be living on two different continents. In bed, we lay close, but without touching. It was like the game of pebbles I'd played as a girl. A game in which, if two pebbles touched, you were out.[3]

Of all the troubles encompassing Manjari, her body stands as the first and the foremost hurdle. It is this feeling for her body, which attracted her towards Shyam and distracted her from her family links. But her body, which gets some solace in the arms of Shyam, soon starts wriggling once the sexual spells are over. The practical responsibilities of human life cannot be met on the false swearing and beautiful ballads in praise of the body. Shyam's professional failures and Manjari's increasing demands fall heavy on him and lead him to a state of depression. Her short married life, which receives a severe jolt after Shyam is drowned into the sea, puts her on a razor's edge. Married at eighteen and widowed at 21, she becomes a burden to herself. Determined and self-willed though, she decides to discard all her bodily movements and rhythm but at times she feels that her body fails her.

Manjari-Shyam relationship is based on the foundations of the body. Their union is the union of two hungry bodies. The worse part is when he leaves his ailing son suffering in the lap of Manjari. His lack of concern for his wife becomes more apparent when he establishes a physical contact with Malu, Manjari's sister, who becomes pregnant and becomes a cause of worry to her parents. This leads to utter confusion and Shyam becomes a traitor in the eyes of Manjari. Manjari is full of grief when Malu dies.

Deshpande maintains her social responsibility as a writer by revealing some of the crude practices in our society. She depicts the plight of an Indian lady becoming a widow at the early age of twenty-one. In her delineation of Manjari's character, she throws ample light on how the public eye ravenously ogles the features of a widow. The rigid restrictions of social codes cannot stop the rhythms of the body. In the case of Manjari too, we witness such a situation when she fulfils her bodily hunger with a person of dubious identity. It all starts when one day she comes to touch the hand of Raman, a tenant living on the top floor. Badly disturbed, she undergoes an inner conflict. Her sense of guilt troubles her conscience and she deems it a sort of disloyalty to Shyam's soul. Her mental conflict is described as follows:

> I want to pummel my body, to punish it with savage blows until it turns black and blue. I hate it, I want to disown it, I want to touch it, to let my hand move gently along accustomed routes, to feel its softness, its curves....[4]

True, Manjari's body has made her forget the difference between good and evil, and so she feels her guilty conscience pricking her mind. Though a victim of Raman's carnal pulls, she feels ill at ease but does not stop him. This shows her excessive concern for the bodily urges.

> I don't want to hear his voice either. Only the body, his body, only my body, my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensation. The smell of sundried clothes, of sweet, the hardness, the pressure of his body, it's weight on mine and my body responding, welcoming his.[5]

Manjari considers this sexual act as a mechanical affair and she resembles the typist girl who has no compunction of any kind in her affairs with the young carbuncular man in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land.* In Manjari's case it is she who initiates this move, and it is she

who departs, and it is she who suspends this arrangement. This shows the author's intent of taking a revenge on men making their dominance felt over the ages.

Manjari-Raman relationship also hints at the changing pattern of sexual practice. Deshpande as a feminist is well aware that unlike past, sex is not an act involving man's dominance. Serious readers may find the answers to Raja's question why 'Manjari is reluctant to marry him. Raja seems to Manjari a person who believes a woman to be escorted by a male and to behave very much like a woman.His other quirks about marrying Manjari are to have a better life for Pavan, Anand and Sachi. He also believes that their marriage could ensure economic advantage as instead of maintaining two households it is cheaper to have one. All these sound hollow to Manjari since she wants things to go her way. Not believing in male supremacy, she tries to do things, which do not have a dual control. The mores of society offering different roles for men and women appear irrelevant to her. She finds it humiliating to turn to a male's help even during critical conditions. She thrashes Ratna when the latter urges to inform Raja of somebody barging into her house through back door. Frightened though, Manjari swaggers: "I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else's. I don't want a dual control, the control should be mine, mine alone."[6]

Manjari instructs Raman to vacate her house when she comes to know of his involvement with other women. This also shows her belief that not all bodily relations may lead to a union of two souls. Her revelations of her relations with Raman bewilder Raja and he gets furious. Raja, a one-time wooer of Manjari, finds it hard why she cannot accept him. Her arguments fail to satisfy him and he wants to understand what prompted her towards Raman. When she narrates everything to Raja, he only realizes the problems faced by widows in general and Manjari in particular. Manjari represents the lot of all ill-fated widows when she says:

> I gave up wearing sarees because I didn't want to look womanly, I cut my hair short like a man's, I wore my most forbidding expression but it was of no use. They can smell it, yes, they can smell the woman in you . No matter how you dress, whether you shave your head or hide behind a burkha, they come at you wanting your body, touching you, ruling over you, sniffing at you.[7]

Manjari has herself witnessed the forces of society trying dexterously to violate her widowhood. She has restrained many but how long could she fight her own body, which was her enemy. Deshpande makes us all aware of the dualistic treatment meted out to widows who become a thing of mockery and oppression. If they could satisfy the hungry male folk, why can they not be accepted again as brides? The introduction of Raja and his marriage proposal may be seen as a contrivance offered by the novelist to awaken the lawmakers.

Deshapande makes us realize that we have moved from a world of orthodox ideas where to maintain a marital bliss, women used to compose a silence about their bodies. Many marriages in the past flourished only in the name of marriages and meant the continuation of family life as extension of genealogical pattern. The body has its existence and it is the same for man as well as for woman. We cannot attain spiritual bliss at the cost of starving the body. As a writer, Deshpande also seems to hint that the ostentatious celebration of attaining salvation by making the body suffer is a misnomer. What the author tries to focus is the truth of the body, which cannot be belied:

> But if the face knows how to deceive, the body can't lie. I can lie in words, I can make my face show what is not there, I can conceal what is there, but the body can't lie. The body is honest, yes it told me its need and I have gone with it, I have given it what it wants.[8]

Manjari's father, himself a believer and a lover of human body and its urges, mentions in his diary how he was inclined towards the beautiful body of Vasu, whom he married. He also mentions how like all Indian ladies, she maintained her shyness and silence about her body and considered it taboo to enter into any discussion. It took him long to make her understand the importance of the body in relationship. Vasu and Narayan relationship flourished and consummated after both of them realized the need of their bodies. Narayan maintains a meaningful silence when Manjari shows her will to marry Shyam. Despite some aberrations, the parents keep stock of Manjari's life because of bodily attachment. Manjari's father expresses his faith in the body and bodily ties when he writes in his diary:

> We can never deny the ties of the body, we can never leave them behind

> us. The ties we forge through our bodies are the strongest, the hardest to sever. Look at the way we connect the organs of the body to emotions and feelings: we speak of blood, of the heart, the guts, the liver.[9]

Thus, we find that the novel *Moving On* in which Shashi Deshpande delves into the terrain of human mind makes us realize that all that the body does, germinates first in the mind. In the dubious game of the body and the soul, nobody remains an exception. Deshpande's plea about the body seems to be influenced by the philosopher Spinoza who holds that the body-mind relationship traces the phenomenal experience without metaphysically distorting it through interpretation. He says:

> Everything the mind knows it knows through the body. The mind has, however, no possibility of causally effecting the body. Yet body and soul always co-operate. The well being of he body heightens the thinking power of the mind and vice versa.[10]

Considering *Moving On* as a mature work concerned more with the human condition than with just the female condition, Shashi Deshpande herself admits of the focus on the physical. What she says to June Gaur amply demonstrates her concern for the human body and its needs:

> For one thing, this is a novel in which the body is the focus. Therefore, the physical could not in any way be left out or merely hinted at. Doesn't Manjari speak of " meeting Mr. Bones head on"? And does not she not criticize her mother for not doing so? And don't forget that Manjari's father, the anatomist, instilled in her an acceptance of the human body and its needs."[11]

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[1]Shashi Deshpande, 2004. *Moving On* (Viking: Penguin Books, 2004), pp.108-09.

[2]Ibid., p.111.

[3]Ibid., p.290.

[4]Ibid., p.232.

[5]Ibid., p.257.

[6]Ibid., p.88.

[7]Ibid., p.284.

[8]Ibid., p.259.

[9]Ibid., p.114.

[10]http://www.egs.edu/faculty/schirmacher/schirmacher-monism-in-spinozas-and-husserls-thought.html

[10]June Gaur, "Of Human Bondage. Literary Review," *The Hindu*, September 5, 2004.

# OF CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS AND HUMAN DILEMMAS: AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

Banibrata Mahanta

## I

The necessity for intercultural dialogue is evident in today's world, where difference and multiplicity are to be encountered at every step. Globalization and Internationalization — the two issues to which every discourse/text about the times must come back to — are at the core. Though closely related, they are nuancedly different. Globalization generally refers to the movement/transfer of goods, services and knowledge around the globe motivated by economics. Internationalization, on the other hand, is marked by the desire for a sense of recognition as well as examination of the qualities of the culturally diverse groups. Thus, culture is a crucial element in the globalized world of today.

> Culture is the totality of living patterns of a community of human beings. Their thoughts, actions and interactions, the procedures they adopt for fulfilling their needs and wants, the meaning they subscribe to their life and its aims, the shapes of their material objects and their orientation towards them, their attitudes towards their natural environmental and other communities of human beings, are all conditioned by culture which is preeminently transmittable and acquirable. [...] as the concept of zero integrates the mathematical, physical and engineering sciences, in the same way culture integrates social, psychological and philosophical sciences (Srivastava 29).

Culture has been variously defined with respect to its engagement with society, philosophy and the human mind. Raymond Williams (xiii), one of the earliest culture theorists, maps the connotative progression of 'culture' from the last deces of the eighteenth century and links it to the semantic change of four other words — industry, democracy, class and art. Before the onset of industrialization, culture primarily meant the 'tending of natural growth' and by analogy a process of human training. Linking Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and Marx, Chris Jenks (27-28) says that all of them view culture as an emergent process stemming from social action. However, all societies do not share the same classificatory systems and Durkheim opens up the question of the

relation between symbolic order and social structure. Parsons' *Social Systems* admits to the role of culture as one of the three subsystems which are functionally interrelated with social structure. Durkheim's idea of culture was based on a constitutive and interpretative symbolism, while Parson's on a singularity and fixity of meaning. For Marx, culture can be reduced to economic factors of the means and relations of production, which surface in the form of class-consciousness.

Darwin's theory of evolution provided the much-needed scientific justification for the ideologies of growth and development. The Enlightenment project received a fillip from Darwin's theory and as there was no alternative documented history, Western history was established as the ultimate in human achievement. This developmental politics thus came to be entrenched in all discourses on culture. It provided a rationale for colonialism and for privileging culture over nature. It is on these lines that the American anthropologist L. H. Morgan developed the first hierarchical scale of the evolution of human civilization. Morgan defined the historical process of evolution of man as a linear competition between culturally disparate groups in which people strive against each other to dominate their environmental constraints. Jenks (32) observes that groups that had antagonized themselves from their immediate natural environment to the greatest degree were placed first in the order of development. This comparative ethnology is still reflected in the present day problematic of development/underdevelopment, and of high/low culture. Based on the ideas of 'accumulation', 'inheritance' and 'transmission', Firth defined society as "an organized set of individuals with a given way of life", while culture is define as "that way of life" (quoted in Jenks 42).

The German intellectual tradition defines culture as the zenith of human achievement: *kultur* refers to individual perfection in areas of literature, music, fine arts, etc., and the rest of human enterprise falls under the concept of *zivilization*. This distinction between culture and civilization has continually engaged the attention of philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists and linguists. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* takes upon itself the task of identifying

and dismantling this mutually exclusive divide between civilization and culture in order to generate a dialogue between the two. The process of inevitability of dialogue is traced through the following three stages of human perception:

1. The utopian dream vision embodied by Daniel MacKinnon Hamilton.
2. The acceptance of the fact that reality is far from utopia, and the consequent need for revolution as presented through the character of Nirmal.
3. The recognition of need for dialogue across boundaries as a maturer means of surviving in today's globalized scenario.

## II

The story of *The Hungry Tide* centres around the American-Indian ethnologist Piya, the translator-businessman Kanai and their accidental meeting on their way to a common destination — the Sundarbans. Kanai is going there after a long hiatus to meet his aunt Nilima who runs a charitable hospital; at the same time he is to read a journal written and willed to him by his uncle Nirmal, a romantic-intellectual-idealist in the tradition of the 1970s Bengal. Piya is journeying to the tide country as part of her research on dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris* ). Piya's lack of knowledge of her mother tongue, which is incidentally the local language of the Sundarbans, and lack of local knowledge makes her engage the services of Fokir for her research. Through the interaction between Piya, Kanai and Fokir, and through their predicaments and their pasts, Ghosh explores the manifold cultural barriers of religion, class, language and gender that have been created in the course of the onward march of civilization. Fokir represents the biocentric world-view in terms of broadening of human conception of global community to include non-human life forms and the physical environment. For Piya and Kanai, nature is constructed as a 'place' and the narrowness of their culture's assumption about the natural world limits their ability to envision a sustainable model for the development of human society.

Daniel MacKinnon Hamilton, a Scotsman, comes to colonial

India to seek his fortune. During his travels, he chances upon the islands of the Sundarbans. "When the Scotsman looked upon the crab-covered shores of the tide country, he saw not mud, but something that shone brighter than gold"(49). He then proceeded to establish a utopian human settlement in the Sundarbans. In a land totally unsuitable for human settlement he attempted to establish a casteless, classless human society. This idea could not take root because of two reasons. Firstly, the idea of utopia is in itself fantastic:

> Utopias subsist on an optimistic view of man's potential, character and destiny, and on his capacity to be excited by wonder. Tensions and complexities of modern civilization tend to erode the one and actual achievements of science have weakened the other. (Hasan 242)

Secondly, the fact that Hamilton was merely an English colonizer, with no knowledge of the land and its people, doomed not only his enterprise but also the lives of the settlers.

Nirmal has the benefits of a Western education but is irresistibly drawn to local causes. He is an embodiment of the romantic-idealist in whom the poet and the revolutionary co-exist. The elitist poet Rilke and the revolutionary socialist Marx attract him equally. He believes that utopia can be achieved by revolution. However, even he cannot fully comprehend the vulnerability of the utopian settlement at Morichjhāpi. The revolution at Morichjhāpi cannot stand up against the combined forces of local and global reality. His unsuccessful attempt at translating idealism to reality is recorded in his notebook, which he wills to Kanai.

The comprehension of local issues and a romantic idealism are not enough to make one's way through the world. What is more important is the recognition of the fact that the opening of channels of communication, although more essentialist than idealist, is a better strategy for translating idealism into reality. Nilima and her hospital thrive in the hostile surroundings precisely because she recognizes this need. It is however through the interaction between Piya, Kanai and Fokir that Ghosh drives home the imperative of getting out of every preconceived mindset which has become a barrier to communication amongst the people living in the same world.

Piya is an embodiment of modern science which is culturally European or European-American. Her unique success lies in her ability to eliminate cultural fingerprints from her development and progress as a natural scientist. Being an Indian by origin, she has to work hard to overcome the preconceived notions of the research community by placing under erasure all aspects of her cultural difference (74). In India, her hopes of studying the Irrawady dolphin are not realized till she meets Fokir and makes use of his culturally instinctive knowledge of the dolphins. She gives no thought to Fokir's ability to communicate with her but makes much of her own ability to communicate with Fokir inspite of linguistic and cultural barriers. To Piya, the idea of 'development' has no cultural component. She links 'development' with the homogenization of diversities. When she sees a tiger being killed by the villagers for having harmed humans and live stock, her concern for the natural rights of animals overshadows her sensitivity to human life. Thus, the European-American concern for ecological preservation discounts the cultural and human dimensions involved in such enterprises. Piya, a product of the tradition of Enlightenment can talk "emphatically" about "preserving" species and keeping them in habitat even when she knows that there are more tigers in captivity in America.

If Piya champions the cause of a culture-free universal science, then Fokir comes in as a distinct cultural component in her pursuit of the Irrawady dolphin. Through the interaction between the two, Ghosh challenges the conventional notion that the total lack of cultural fingerprints is responsible for the universal validity of the sciences. Ghosh also establishes that the challenges raised by multicultural perspectives are as relevant for natural sciences as they are for social sciences.

The pressures of modernization are reducing the diversity of plant, animal and human genetic pools and are consequently reducing the diversity of cultures and the valuable human ideas developed in them:

> [M]odern science has become the major source of violence against human beings and all other living organisms in our times.... Third World and other citizens have come to know that there is a fundamental irreconcilability between

> modern science and the stability and maintenance of all living systems, between modern science and democracy (Harding 362).

The integration of non-Western scientific traditions with the Western scientific traditions is depicted through the Fokir-Piya dialogue.

Piya and Fokir in their individual capacities cannot achieve what they can by integrating their systems of knowledge. The character of Fokir is important because through him Ghosh articulates the primary subaltern concern of being heard. In an interview with Chitralekha Basu, he comments:

> ... Fokir is almost completely speechless and that's exactly the issue I wanted to address. These are the circumstances becoming increasingly prevalent around the world. How do people who have very little words communicate with the rest of the world ? There is such a gap.

Fokir's lack of language is to be seen alongside Kanai's felicity in a number of languages and the narrator's observation that "speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being (159). The difference between discourse and dialogue is underlined here. The former is a one way expression of one's ideas whereas the latter is characterized by exchange of opinions.

Kanai is a translator who has the knowledge of six languages and runs a translation agency. He is posited as an intermediary in more ways than one. With him lies the job of narrating Nirmal's journal in English, which is how the Morichjhāpi incident is communicated to the reader. He also takes the responsibility, at a later stage, of translating Fokir and other local people to Piya. That he has a local connection is also important because Fokir's lack of speech and Kanai's wealth of it are a pointer to how globalization has the positive fallout of providing one with various ways and means by which the local can be heard globally. It is Kanai who is made to realize the two obstacles related to this process, which he has to overcome if he can translate fully and effectively. The first obstacle to be overcome is that of the social and cultural heirarchy. Kanai had thought that he had overcome this bias. When Fokir takes Kanai to the island where he loses the use of his language and the advantage of belonging to the "civilized" urban world, the power line dividing the translator (Kanai) and the translated (Fokir)

is reversed. Kanai explodes into a helpless rage (326). The second obstacle is the problems involved in the act of translation in itself. When Piya asks Kanai to translate Fokir's song he says:

> You asked me what Fokir was singing and I said I couldn't translate it: it was too difficult. And this was a history that is not just his own but also of this place, the tide country (354).

It is here that one gets a clue to the modalities of the dialogue that are to be initiated. Piya moves from an "enticingly utopian" or "dangerously naive" view of being able to communicate with Fokir in spite of linguistic and cultural barriers to the need for actual communication. The cyclone which kills Fokir changes Kanai and Piya too. They realize the insignificance of stray/individual human efforts in isolation. They also realize that science cannot stand up before the fury of Nature.

Fokir who is born and brought up in this vast archipelago, thus, has a set of priorities different from those of the upwardly mobile Kanai and the globetrotting Piya. His life is an example of how man can develop a worldview, which does not treat nature just as another frontier. Rather it calls for extension of ethics — the broadening of human's conception of the global community to include non human life forms and the physical environment. This call for cultural change is realized through Fokir's innate biorhythmic adjustment in his locality, which is in contrast to the faulty cultural assumptions of Piya and Kanai and their inability to envision an ecologically sustainable human society. This call for a biocentric worldview through dialogue is the first point that Ghosh wishes to make. The second and equally important idea is that of cultural and religious syncretism especially to be viewed in the light of Ghosh's statement that post 9/11 the book is his "attempt to praise the world". In a continuity that extends from Kusum to Fokir, the cult of the Bon Bibi is an example of an oral tradition passed down the ages. The mode of worshipping and the fact that there was an idol of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongli along with a tiger shows the evidence of Hindu ritual. However the chanting "contained a word that sounded like 'Allah'" (152). The unique fusion of Hindu puja rites with Muslim prayer is evidenced in many parts of India but nowhere to the extent that it is there in the Sundarbans.

This transcultural fusion is to be viewed against the national backdrop of the Hindu-Muslim divide perpetrated by the divide and rule policy of the Britishers and globally on the cultural isolation of Muslims and hatred against Islam post 9/11. Ghosh presents the Sundarbans as a microcosm where varied cultures exist side by side.

The cyclone towards the end of the novel serves to put things in perspective. It exposes the transitory nature of human constructs posited against elemental forces. It also shows the relevance of those things that are relegated as unfit for the demands of the new world order. The cyclone, as a symbol of natural forces, serves to dismantle the hegemonic constructs of superior cultures and ways of life. In doing so it shows that the degree of syncretism with Nature determines the resilience of a particular culture. The cyclone is, thus, an agent of nature, which leaves in its wake the realization for a need for dialogue with the indigenous cultures of the world.

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# AN INTERVIEW WITH NIRANJAN MOHANTY

**Jaydeep Sarangi**

Niranjan Mohanty (b. 1953) spent most of his life in the eastern Indian state of Orissa. Presently, he teaches English in an *ashramik* environment at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan(Birbhum). He has published six volumes of poems (*Silence the Words, On Touching You and Other Poems, Life Lines, Prayers to Lord Jagannatha, Oh This Bloody Game!* and *Krishna*). His poems have appeared in magazines in India, UK, USA, and Canada, such as *Chandrabhaga, The Illustrated Weekly of India, Indian Literature, Journal of Literature and Aesthetics, Kavya Bharati, JIWE, New Quest, South Asian Review, Toronto South Asian Review, Hundred Words, Tandem, International Poetry Review, Suns Stone* and *Ucon Directory*. He has been awarded with Honorary Writing Fellow at the International Writing Program, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, USA in 1994. His poems have been translated into Hindi, Spanish, Portuguese and Urdu. Inward-looking, and at the same time, deeply rooted in cultural and interpersonal realities, his poems speak to us with frank generosity and the mystery of life come through the linguistic mélange of his creative utterance. His willing leap into the pool of memories creates a sense of presence through the metaphors of absence. The haunting presence of the metaphor of death invests his poems with a sense of mystery, a sense that is unverifiable, and non-negotiable by reason or intellect. An absence continues to haunt the poet since childhood. The fleeting nature of TIME always chants a sweeping sense of *absence*. He speaks of the mystery of love, the mystical element embodied in the man-woman relationship. His poems record and celebrate "blue whispers of hearts, immaculate," the innocence ingrained in our sense of mortality, in the immaculate sense of things passed by.

J.S. When did you start writing poems?

N.M. That was in 1971. The death of my nephew, Raja. Raja , at the age of two, died by drowning in a pond. The tragedy resulted in the composition of my first poem 'Honey Child'. It was published in the *North Hostel Magazine* of Fakir Mohan

College, Balasore, Orissa.

J.S. Did your family speak English? Why did you start writing poems in English?

N.M. No. My family language was Oriya. After Intermediate in Science I was attracted to the Romantics and the Modernist poets. My early education was in West Bengal. I started reading English from class II. I was good at English from the beginning. It matured gradually. I was a science student but later on changed to English Hons. I was moved and touched by the English authors. That possibly, tangentially rather, forced me towards reading more English poets. When I felt that I was confident in English I started writing in English. By this time, I didn't come across any of Indian poets. I was drawn to the beauty of language, the felicity of expression in English. If you ask me who were the poets influenced me most — Eliot, Yeats, Whitman and Stevens.

J.S. How was your early education?

N.M. I studied in a Bengali medium school at Beleghata, Calcutta. After class V, I went to Orissa. My medium of instruction changed from Bengali to Oriya, from Corporation School, Calcutta to A.B. High School, Basudebpur, Balasore.

J.S. Did your education in English Literature help you write poems in English?

N.M. Obviously, my training in English Literature helped me a great deal to become a poet in English. For my training in English literature I was fortunate enough to read the great poets of the West. They continue to attract me since my college days. I can never ignore the influence of Shelley, Keats, Donne, Shakespeare, Eliot and Yeats when I was first introduced to them.

J.S. Do you rate yourself as a bilingual poet?

N.M. Not necessarily, even if my first language is Oriya. I wrote some poems in Oriya, published in *Jhankar* and *Asanta Kali*. I also recited my Oriya poems for All India Radio, Berhampur and Cuttack.

J.S. Who are the contemporary Oriya poets you like?

N.M. I like the poems of Ramakanta Rath, Sitakanta Mahapatra, Hara Prasad Paricha and Bipin Nayek. But I am always reminded of another significant voice in Oriya poetry — Bibek Jena, who is no more.

J.S. Can you tell me the poets who influenced you?

N.M. In the formative stage of my creative career I was influenced by Eliot. Pablo Neruda and Wallace Stevens also influenced me. The intensity in the lines of their poems hypnotised me.The sheer magic of words and the rhythmical beauty they created in their poems were the sources of my inspiration. Keats and Donne became my favourite in a later stage.

J.S. Why do most of the Indian poets in English like Neruda?

N.M. The sincerity of a poet lives in the expression. The sincerity and simplicity of expression occupy a larger space in the mind of a reader than any other crafted mode of expression. One obviously can fathom the sincerity and simplicity with which Neruda not only looked at or looked into the objects outside the self. His authenticity to create a camouflaging effect through the canopy of words, I believe, attracts the Indian poets generation after generation.

J.S. What are your strong themes?

N.M. There are no strong or weak themes. To me, life itself is the central theme in my poetry. The mortality we live in and breathe in and whatever shapes or moulds punctuates — time, death, absences, loneliness, the inner struggle and the burdens of uncountable dreams constitute the themes of my poetry. Like Neruda, I can say, "I am the professor of life and a very vague student of death." To write poetry in any language, for that matter, the poet has to love life in its multiple voices and forms. This way of comprehending life into the fold of one's creative vision enables one to discover order out of disorder; meaning amidst apparent meaninglessness. In this context, I am remained of the celebrated Bengali poet, Jibanananda Das, more particularly, the way he legitimizes his right to celebrate as well as to condemn whenever necessary. A poet cannot do that without developing a

relationship with life itself. I believe, this is another form of *bhakti* that attracts the poets — the *bhakti* that refines the experience and intensifies the expression.

J.S. Would you like to pick out a few poems that express or reveal what you would have said?

N.M. 'Tiger', 'An Encounter with Death', 'Sshh! The Tiger is Asleep', 'On Touching you', 'My Table', 'Digging', 'Grief Once Again' and the series of Tiger poems which I am writing now, sections from my *Prayers* and *Krishna.*

J.S. Do you use symbols in your poems?

N.M. Possibly, the important symbols in my poetry are 'tiger', 'house', 'family', 'journey' and 'absence'. Every tiger poem uses 'tiger' differently. Tiger is synonymous with destruction. It also stands for life force. 'Tiger' in my poems can be read as hunger, sexuality, death and silence — a meaningful silence. Tiger, an animal when turned into symbol, records the graph of my experiences — the multifaceted dilemma of existence, leading to the certitude of silence.'Home' and 'Family' occupy a large space in my poetry because of their eternal and abiding capacities for love, security, and peace. 'Journey' remains a significant motif in my poems. The journey through words takes me to every corner of life and allows me to understand the secret recesses of my sense of modality. I remain preoccupied with *absences* (italics interviewer's) from since my childhood. This may be because of the loss of my near and dear ones: my brother (1958), sister(1958), grandmother(1964) and my father(1994). Absence is inevitable in life. One can never recover from absences. The knowledge of absence makes the presence meaningful. I make my presence felt through absences. We don't need to be *present* (italics interviewer's) always. Nor can we.... How feeble are we!

J.S. What are you trying to achieve when you write a long poem like 'Krishna'?

N.M. Nothing. Only orienting my creative idiom with a sense of humility and ecstatic expression of my sense of mortality.

J.S. Some of your poems contain a devotional tinge in it. Is there any specific reason behind this?

N.M. Possibly, yes. My access to Oriya poetry is limited. But, while translating some of the devotional poets of Orissa, more particularly, Salabeg — a 17th century Oriya devotional poet. I was drawn towards the sheer degree of innocence with which one offered prayers to God. These devotional poets impressed me with their cult of 'Bhakti'. I believe, I am spiritual at the core, as a human being. But, I am reluctant to go to a temple, always — the rocky ways, the distance, the crowd, the rituals....

J.S. Do you inherit the technique from T.S. Eliot?

N.M. As I already told you that in the initial stage of my career in poetry I was enchanted by the rhythmical quality of Eliot's lines. The alliterative habit possibly still available in my creative idiom. But, I believe, when I grew up both as a man and as a poet, I could discover my idiom and my own voice — to be entirely myself. It is entirely on the readers/ `researchers to discover whether I have left behind the earlier formative influence or not. They are the best judges I rely on.

J.S. You are the single largest contributor of critical articles/ essays on Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry. What makes you attracted to his poems?

N.M. During my M.A. days when I was exposed to Mahapatra, the man— affectionate, innocent, humble and wise — I was drawn towards him as a student. When I was exposed to his poetry I began to read with interest and enthusiasm. It was not a biased reading. His personality didn't influence my reading of his poems. My reading of Mahapatra, the poet was independent on Mahapatra, the man. When I realised that I am capable of writing critical essays on his poetry as well as on other poets too I began to devote my works on him. Whenever Mahapatra volumes were being published I was lucky enough to get a copy either from the poet or from the market. In fact, I saw the growth of the poet in him and the growth of his poetic vision. The trajectory of a poet's vision

in Mahapatra enabled me to write so many articles on Mahapatra's poetry.

J.S. How would you rate Jayanta Mahapatra among other Indian English poets?

N.M. Undoubtedly, he is one of the great poets in India writing in English. The other poets I like most is A.K. Ramanujan. I also like R. Parthasarathy. These three poets, more particularly, Jayanta Mahapatra, created a distinction through the use of the creative medium. When one reads Jayanta Mahapatra's poems he or she gets a different kind of flavour, a different kind of orchestration — a fruition of metaphors and images. The autonomy of the images demands a negotiation between the poet and the reader. Apparent reading of his poems may give us the feeling that the poems are on meditative reflections, but as we go deep into his poems we realise that there is an organised impulse that governs the poems. The other reason that propelled me to read Mahapatra is the way he establishes a deep-rooted relationship with the place he is born, to the cultural tradition he belongs to, the system of values he adheres to and the fabric of his relationship with the past. I find a rare sensibility, which is so real, in his poems. I like Ramanujan's poetry from another angle — the way he joins one image with the other and the way he juxtaposes one emotion with another. His style seems to be unassuming and the narrative flow in the poems is unidirectional. But, like a true magician he synthesises words and images with meticulous care, without being fastidious about them that captures the seeing eye of the poet. Between Mahapatra and Ramanujan the difference lies not only in the act of 'seeing' but also the act 'saying'. I believe, both of them are great in their own ways.

J.S. You differ with Jayanta Mahapatra, both in themes and style. Why does so happen?

N.M. If you think that I differ it is rightly so, because my perception about the world, about myself and about the use of the creative medium are different from him. My mind has a

different shape. My feeling of things are different. And obviously, my saying things are different. That is why, possibly, my poems differ from Mahapatra's.

J.S. How would you rate Indian English poetry with other poetry in English?

N.M. The most surprising phenomenon about Indian English poetry is that even without proper patronage and sympathy, in a world dominated by fiction-reading and fiction-publishing, more poets have started publishing their volumes. All poems are not great. It is agonising to look at the proliferative nature of publishing poetry. This cannot be called to be an unhealthy sign. Yet, care should be taken to objectively evaluate the quality of poetry, ingrained in its quality of saying. Over all, the Indian English poetry can compete with the poetry in English from other countries.

J.S. Are you satisfied with contemporary trend of poetry in English in India?

N.M. Indian English poetry is so diverse that one is reminded of the situation of poetry in the U.S. This diversity adds richness to Indian English poetry. The diversity springs from the existence of different locales, different cultures, different traditions and different attitudes to living the life. One cannot really categorise the poems under one umbrella, one theoretical framework, for good poetry, I am sure, would emerge from this inordinate diversity.

J.S. Would you mention a few names whom you think good enough like any other established poet in the West?

N.M. The names immediately strike me are obviously Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra and Kamala Das.

J.S. Are you satisfied with the recent trend of criticism on Indian English poetry?

N.M. A poet never banks on the kind of criticism that would be written on his poetry. But, I am sure, objective critical insight is absent, both in terms of identifying quality and legitimising a historicity of the genre of criticism. Literary historians in India have a tendency to ignore the poets who have not achieved

any distinction. But, a literary historian has to include the poets who experience a marginalised status in the scenario.

J.S. Senior critics like John Oliver Perry has written a significant number of critical essays on Jayanta Mahapatra. He is silent on any one of the New Poets. How do you look at this problem?

N.M. To me, this is not a problem. A critic has the right to respect his own sensibility and his own personal equations. Poets in India should not lament over the absence of Prof. Perry's indifference to their poems. There may be other critics to champion the cause to bring them to clear focus.

J.S. Your poems are rooted in Orissa — the abode of Lord Jagannatha, its tradition, etc. How do you reciprocate feelings for the land and its people?

N.M. You are absolutely right in stating that I'm rooted in Orissa. Unless a creative writer establishes an impassioned connection with his own culture, land, spiritual tradition, he wouldn't discover a meaning either in life or in his creative process. One's own gods and goddesses constitute the center of awareness. As a poet, I cannot ignore the land and its people. They occupy a significant space in my popery. I'm fully aware of my rootedness. In some of my poems Calcutta figures eminently. This may be because of early childhood and of my frequent visits to the city of joy.

J.S. Do you write in Indian English?

N.M. I don't know. If by Indian English you mean the kind of poems that Ezekiel ('Railway Clerk' for example) wrote — No. I write like an Indian.

J.S. Stylistically you don't inherit the narrative mode like Keki Daruwalla. You don't seem to create polyphony of voices— you tend to write in the first person. Do you accept my observations on your poetry?

N.M. I accept your sensitive observations. It is a modernistic technique to use the First person in the body of the text. When I use the First person I try to be myself — both as a seer and sayer. It leaves me with the feeling that I am not

creating a smoke screen to distance myself from the readers — this is how I can be. I trust in the sincerity of the expression. I don't have any space between what I experience and what I propose to say. I'm aware of the fact that language is a limited medium. It doesn't accurately represent the hidden nuances of feeling always. There remains a sustainable gap between what one longs for and what one achieves. Through my poetry I try to minimise the gap between the first hand experience and the expression through the creative medium. The degree of success rests on how my readers/ researchers 'read' the lines of my poems, and reach the core.

J.S. "The poem is the creation of a mind in despair." Do you consider this statement as 'true' to your poetry?

N.M. No. Not al all. Despair is in one's existence. It's there in one's sense of mortality. I think, despair should not marginalise other prime facets of life.

J.S. Do you have the habit of going back to your poems again and again?

N.M. No. If I remember correctly very few words in *Krishna* were changed. In most cases, my first draft becomes the final. I don't go for editing. This is the only way I happen to know.

J.S. How do you situate a poem? Does it come automatically?

N.M. Not necessarily. It depends on the kind of the poem that is being framed somewhere 'within'. I believe, even without a movement, a movement takes place in the mind. That is where the creative process begins and ends. The poem never begins or ends. It breathes and it pulsates into life.

J.S. How did you write a long prayer poem, *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha.* What was the chief force behind this creation?

N.M. It took me five years to complete the poem. It took four years to complete ten sections and about a week for the next five sections. Writing this long prayer poem was a kind of journey for me — journey into the self, into my land and people, into the cultural nuances, into the deposits of my religious faith, into the dark eyes of the round-eyed Lord. It is a poem, which

tries to locate the poet in diverse facets of life — existential, realistic and imagined. It also harps on the inner problems of a creative writer: the problems of mastering a creative medium.

J.S. What about the publishing industry in India?

N.M. Most of the publishers have shut the shutters of their sympathy for the poets. They say that poetry books do not sale. But poetry has not dried up — it cannot experience death in any situation, in any clime or time. We all know that "poetry of earth is never dead." I'm sure; this scenario would change within a decade.

J.S. Are you satisfied with the standard of journals / magazines in India?

N.M. One has to be satisfied because journals/magazines do not receive any financial patronage to maintain the quality of printing and to compete with international standard. Most of the journals in India have become the products of individual efforts; almost one-man show. The editors run their journals through personal contacts and associations. They are not in a financial position to make payments to the contributing authors. There are a few quality journals around for example, *Kavya Bharati, Indian Literature, JIWE, Chandrabhaga.*

J.S. What's your immediate wish?

N.M. I wish to write as long as I could and to inhale the fragrance of words and silences.

# THE PROJECTION OF EVIL, DECEPTION AND VIOLENCE IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *TUGHLAQ*

S.T. Kharat

Girish Karnad, a multifarious personality, is poet, playwright, director, actor, translator and compere. In 1960 he received the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship which enabled him to go to England to complete his Master degree. He was awarded the Homi Bhabha Fellowship during 1970-72. He was honoured with Padmashree in 1974 and Padmabhushan in 1992. In 1999 he received the most coveted Jnanpith Award for his outstanding career. Karnad wrote nine plays in Kannada out of which he translated eight into English.

Everyone of us aspirs for mental peace through righteousness and virtuous way. We even know that true satisfaction lies in moral order. Without virtues life ceases to have any meaning. Good conduct should be the very basis of life. But in reality we come across people using their brain to nourish evil desires, passions and selfish motives instead of destroying these poisonous instincts. They fail to judge that all the miseries and wretchedness are by-product of their submission to evil thoughts that are projected through evil acts. If evil thoughts dominate, the body indulges in evil deeds, if good thoughts prevail, the body definitely performs good actions. To explain the origin of evil in us O'Flaherty rightly says: The evil which we do commit is the result of delusion (*moha*) or deception (*maya*)....[1]

The origin of evil is found in the first disobedience by man to God. Adam and Eve were tempted by the seductive power of Satanic evil. Evil always appears attractive to victimize innocent beings. That is why Eve became the first victim to the alluring temptation of Satan and tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree. The actuality of evil in its various forms becomes a problem to man just because of our life is essentially a pursuit of values. But goodness cannot exist without evil as there cannot exist day without night. Throughout man's life there is a ceaseless struggle between the forces of good and evil. Man's mind is always preoccupied with the thought of money,

power and sex. He wants to possess them by foul or fair means in order to have mental and physical pleasure.

Evil is not only inevitable but also desirable. The universe consists of all kinds of people good and bad. In order to distinguish good qualities and bad qualities God has separated Dharma from Adharma. Even the godly figures used many demonic tactics to crush evil minded and wicked persons. Thus the problem of evil does not belong to a particular age and place. It has been there since the beginning of the universe. According to Brahmnic pantheism, "Evil is the inherent corruption and deceit of all finite existence...."[2]

While commenting on the viciousness of kings, Arjuna in the *Mahabharata* argues: "I don't see any creature in this universe that lives without injuring others; animals live upon animals, the stronger on the weaker – no act is entirely devoid or evil. Human beings exercise violence on one another making them suffer."[3] In other words, doing evil is always, directly or indirectly, making someone else suffer. Man cannot remain aloof from this universal struggle between good and evil. There is always possibility of man's committing sin. He does not have peace because his conduct is not proper. No wonder both peace and happiness elude him because of his unsocial behaviour, misconduct, immoral activities and extensive indulgence in illegal deeds. In this regard, Satish Kumar rightly says: "The mind of a modern man disturbed by various sensuous and worldly passions has been gradually turning into a veritable zoo inhabited by ravenous wild animals of worldly desires, sensual pleasures, irresponsible exercise of power and utter forgetfulness of the immperishable values of life."[4]

In the light of the above stated facts regarding the origin, nature and history of evil, in this paper an attempt is made to evaluate its projection in Girish Karnad's historical play *Tughlaq*. It seems violence, bloodshed, murder, impersonation, treachery, deceit, betrayal, bribery, adultery, jealousy, hatred, ill-will, infidelity, prostitution, selfishness, caste-descrimination, lust, pride, anger and revenge have an upper hand in Girish Karnad's most of the English plays. *Tughlaq* is not an exception to this. Karnad focuses on these

basic instincts and uncovers the dark recesses of human mind. We meet Karnad's characters in history, myths and legands. We can easily compare them with the people we meet in our day to day ilfe. Their attitudes, motives, ambitions and purposes are same, only their faces and names are different.

Karnad's first English play is a transcreation of his Kannada play, *Tughlaq* that was staged in 1970. The playwright has chosen the last five years (1327 - 1332 A.D.) from the life of Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq, who ruled the Delhi empire during the 14th century. During those days palaces and courts of kings were places where plots and counter-plots were hatched. The kings kept an efficient system of espionage to crush treachery and conspiracy. Tughlaq ascended the throne killing his father Ghiyas-ud-din and brother Muhammad Khan (Feb.1325 A.D). The Sultan was thus an offender of patricide and fratricide. It was not an accident but a well-prepared conspiracy. The Sultan had an evil intention as he didn't challenge his father and brother openly but got them killed treacherously when they were praying. In spite of the historical controversy, Muhammad Tughlaq asserts: '1 killed them yes for an ideal."[5] Like Shakespeare's Macbeth, the Sultan is a usurper and cannot enjoy the kingdom.

When the Sultan realizes a political and religious danger to his crown from the most revered saint Sheikh-Imam-ud-din, he is humiliated at the meeting place. The Sultan arranges a public meeting but behind the back his soldiers detain people at their homes and do not allow them to attend the meeting. The Sultan is a crafty politician and a hypocrite despot. He, to quell Ain-ul-mulk, makes the saint his peace-envoy and gets him killed in a most deceitful and ignoble way at the plains of Kanauj. At this time also the Sultan does not challenge the saint openly. After killing the saint the Sultan pretends to be very grief-sricken. Ratan singh, a Hindu soldier, rightly estimates the Sultan: '1 have never seen an honest scoundrel like your Sultan" (p.28). The comment is sufficient to explain the Sultan's devilish nature. The deceitful killing of the saint creates a strong resentment amongst the religious people and they hatch a conspiracy to kill the Sultan at prayer. Ratan Singh is a mastermind who persuades Shihab-ud-din, a trusted friend of the

Sultan, to the deadly plot. When seven to eight Amirs, Sayyids and Sheikhs are about to assassinate the Sultan, some twenty Hindu soldiers rush from behind the curtain and arrest the conspirators. After his *namaz* is over, the Sultan kills Shihab with his own hands. He exclaims pathetically: 'Why must this happen, Barani? Are all those I trust condemned to go down in history as traitors?..."(p.43).

The conspiracy is the climax in the play. The Sultan becomes very violent and vicious. The conspirators are beheaded and their bodies are hung for people to see. His declaration of Shihab as a martyr is also one more instance of his wicked political diplomacy. The entire conspiracy exposes the hypocracy of the chieftains. The Sultan frantically bans prayer. The prayer is also desecrated by both the Sultan and the conspirators. Inordinate ambition for power and wealth contaminate and pollute prayer and religion. Ratan Singh is a cold-blooded, shrewd and wicked fox. He informs the Sultan about the conspiracy beforehand to avenge Shihab and disappeares from the play forever. His act of machination can be summed up as 'a betrayal within the betrayal.' The conspiracy reminds us of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

There is only one female character, the stepmother, in the play. But she also shows her diabolic nature in poisoning stealthily Vazier Najib, a trusted advisor of the Sultan. She holds him responsible for the Sultan's degradation. In this connection, she does not challenge Vazier Najib openly to fight but has him poisoned deceitfully. The Sultan orders her death sentence by stoning. Tughlaq thus becomes guilty of matricide also. Her killing projects Sultan's proclivity to treachery, cruelty and bloodshed. His kingdom transforms into a kitchen of death and he becomes the lord of skin. His anguish is expressed when he says: "God, God, ... I started in search of you. Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud? ..." (p.67).

The Sultan introduces copper currency (1329 A.D.). In all transactions copper token should be accepted as legal currency like gold and sliver coins. The citizens get a golden opportunity to avenge the king and deceive the state. Every Hindu and Muslim home becomes a mint and people earn millions of coins. The state

is consequently defrauded but people make huge fortune. People thus avenge and dupe their villainous, stone-hearted and blood-thirsty king. The playwright has minutely projected the feeling of distrust and disillusionment caused by the token currency. The Sultan suffers from insomnia. Every night he walks through the heaps of counterfeit coins in the rose garden.

While shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad [1327 A.D.] unaccountable people die. People do not have food, so they start eating barks of trees or the burnt strips of the skin of animals. Truly speaking, Delhi is no more secure. Therefore, the Sultan wants to shift his capital to Daulatabad, a safer place. But he lies to his people and attributes it to the noble cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. The Sultan is a liar and hypocrite. Many people die and those who survive die while returning to Delhi. Roads are lined with skeletons. Many historians and thinkers feel that it was Sultan's unwise (mad) decision.

Even though Aziz, a low born person, and Aazam, small pick - pocket, are to provide comic relief in the play, but they are born-machiavellian cheats. Karnad has intensified the aura of distrust, deception, violence, etc. by introducing two devilish imposters in the sub-plot. Aziz is an intelligent, shrewd, imaginative and opportunist. He uses different masks throughout the play. As a Brahmin named Vishnu Prasad he deceives the state. As a state officer he misappropriates the state money. As a dacoit he loots people and in the guise of Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid he befools the king and people. Aziz, a muslim dhobi, kills the most revered Arabian saint Abbasid and thereby sacrileges the sanctity of religion. His principle is that a man must commit a crime at least once in his life time. He kills his bosom friend, Aazam. It is interesting to know his thoughts on politics. He explains: Politics! It's a beautiful world wealth, success, position, power and yet it's full of brainless people" (p.50).

It seems that Aziz is just an other side of the evil and viciousness that reside in the Sultan. Actually what Aziz does in the sub-plot amounts to an imitation of the sequence of crimes committed by the Sultan. But the fact is that Aziz shatters the Sultan's entire system to pieces. That is the reason why the Sultan fails in

introducing high plans, and Aziz successfully ascends to a higher post in the army. The secret of his success is that Aziz does not face any sort of qualms between his real self and impersonation, on the other hand the sultan faces tremendous mental conflict between his real self and appearance. That is the reason why the Sultan rewards Aziz instead of punishing him severely. Aziz and Aazam stand for the corrupted public servants in the post- Independance period in India.

The play is thus packed with intrigues, machinations, blood-shed, terrible murders, violence and horror. There is a long chain of deception and violence. Seven to eight major characters are killed and countless people die during the exodus. We like to watch evil acts and violence around and on the stage because a predator lies hidden in everyone of us. It is fruitful to cite Artaud in this context: "— the use of cruelty was a means of effecting a sort of therapy for the soul..."[6]. Audience are interested in watching hatred, cruelty, violence bloodshed and murder. Small wonder *Tughlaq* has been translated into several Indian as well as foreign languages. The play bagged Karnad ' Sangeet Natak Academy Award' and many more.

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# DISAPPEARANCE OF ISHMAEL IN *MOBY-DICK*

**Shubha Tiwari**

Herman Melville's sixth novel, *Moby-Dick* has two heroes. Ishmael enters as the hero and by Chapter 38 disappears completely into oblivion, giving the center stage to Ahab. The name Ishmael is extremely important. We take its meaning for granted. As Howard P. Vincent observes that every reader "even in our un-Biblical age, swiftly discerns the reference to Ishmael of the Old Testament"[1] James Baird has called the entire book a full-length study of the archetypal alienation.[2] However, if we look for an Ishmael who is an outcast as the son of Hagar in the Old Testament, we are bound to be disappointed.

Ishmael does not remain lonely for long. Quite early in the novel, a comical meeting gifts him Queequeg, the savage harpooner. He is no longer without the necessary human warmth and company. Ishmael and Queequeg are innately alike because the uncivilized harpooner has finer instincts. "These savages have an innate sense of delicacy, say what you will: it is marvelous how polite they are."[3] Ishmael meets Queequeg in Chapter 3 and by Chapter 4, they are bosom friends. Queequeg even shares his worldly possessions with his new friend as a mark of their friendship.[4]

Ishmael has not been made to wear garments of shame as Redburn and White-Jacket do. No one calls him by insulting names. Even his duties are dignified. It is significant that Ishmael is a partner in the Pequod's endeavor. All other previous heroes have been mere employees. Redburn may be considered indentured to Captain Riga as he is working for nothing but his livelihood. Ishmael even dreams of enlarging his new found family. He calls the whole humanity to join the whaling community. It is as though all human struggle and experience have been squeezed into one symbol and one image: "Oh! My dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come, let us squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness" (323).

Ishmael becomes one with Queequeg through the use of

marriage imagery. He becomes one with whale fishery through his inclusion of both the grand and the quotidian in the tale of the Pequod. But, most significant is the fact that he becomes one with his Captain. It must be admitted that Ishmael's bonding with Ahab differs fundamentally from his bonding with the harpooner. Ahab, obsessed as he is with the whale, is totally unaware of Ishmael's attachment to him — except as Ishmael is a member of the crew that Ahab has mesmerized with his rhetoric. While Queequeq offers him parity, and the Pequod offers him industry, Ahab offers him idolatory.

The significance of the title of Chapter 36 is often missed by the readers. The title is 'The Quarter-Deck. Ahab and All.' The second part of the title silently engulfs Ishmael into 'All'. It denotes his end in terms of individuality and influence. The very purpose of Ahab's masterful propaganda in Chapter 36 is to forge 'All' into Ahab. He wants to eclipse the personalities of the crew. He cleverly instills his monomaniacal desire in the mind, heart and soul of every member of the crew. This immersion of everyone into Ahab's madness places Ishmael in a community united in purpose and allegiance: "... my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs.... A wild, mystical, sympathetic feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine" (149-50). Starbuck questions the quest, Pip questions the quest, and even Ahab questions the quest, but Ishmael never does. This surrender is not conducive to his growth as a person. This is typically Melvillian touch of satire.

After Chapter 36, we do not see very often Ishmael as an individual character. He largely retires as a character and becomes a researcher upto the epilogue of the novel. He becomes obsessed with Ahab's quest. This obsession, on the one hand, diminishes his individuality but, on the other hand, saves him from being an outcast. For the first time in Melville's novels, we have a hero who quickly achieves his goal of communion. This is not to say that Ishmael's character is not eroded during the progress of his story as the characters of the other young heroes have been. Dramatically, Ishmael loses all that he has gained. On the third day of the chase, he is actually thrown out of the whale boat and merely watches as

the crucial action takes place. A person who has so reveled in a common life is denied a common death with erstwhile fellows.

The truth is that Ishmael does not qualify to be called the hero of the novel. When he willingly subordinates his will to Ahab's, he becomes an agent of another, an archetypal companion figure, a Sancho Panza to Ahab the Quixote. Thus, Ishmael relinquishes his opportunity to perform his own heroic deeds and subordinates himself to the quest of a greater hero. This relinquishment will be better understood if we look more carefully at the actual transition from Ishmael to Ahab, because Ishmael does not merely disappear or slide away because of what has been called Meville's poor planning.[5] The fact is that the young hero gives way to the old hero passing on the entire erosive cycle which Melville had begun with young heroes in the first five novels but had never brought to an end with an old hero.

The disappearance of Ishmael seems to give the effect of having been precisely planned whether or not it actually was. The disappearance occurs in the most famous chapter of *Moby-Dick,* Chapter 36. Ahab indulgeas in an illogical catechism: "'What do ye do when ye see a whale, men?', 'And what do ye do next?' , 'And what tune is it ye pull to, men?'" (137) Naturally all the men know the answers to these questions since they embarked on the ship. Ishmael wonders, "...'how it was that they themselves (the crew) became so excited at such seemingly purposeless questions'" (137). There is something in Ahab's speech, something archetypal which stirs the primitives aboard the Pequod, "as if each was separately touched by some specific recollection"(138). The Eucharistis evoked as one cup is passed round in communion. Ahab even echoes Hamlet when the boy returns with the communion mug: "'Ha! Boy, come back? Bad pennies come not sooner' "(141)? [6] The echo of Hamlet is more telling in this chapter than it would have been elsewhere because of the scene's obviously theatric presentation and Shakespearean diction.

At this point, Ishmael quite logically steps from the focus of the novel. The wanderer takes to the sea in the first place as a form of doing away with himself.[7] He has merged himself with Queequeg,

the Piquod and Ahab and it is only after the sinking of these three into the sea that he gets himself back.

It will be more correct to say that Ishmael, the narrator at this point, transfers the focus of the novel's action from himself to Ahab. Ishmael remains in control of the direction of the action even when he is off the stage. It is along these lines, it is suggested, that Ishmael's evaporation denotes a dialectical movement that reproduces and expands the repeated transition from narrative to drama. That it is a transition and not a surrender is proved by 'the town-ho's story' in Chapter 54. Ishmael's ability to divert us from the path of the Pequod demonstrates his narrative power and control.

We do not see Ishmael as a character very often after Ahab hypnotizes the crew with his oratory. Ishmael's narrative decision is seen clearly in the next few chapters. Chapter 37 shows Ahab alone, yet Ishmael is privy to his Captain's thoughts for the first time. The same is true of Starbuck in Chapter 38 and Stubb in Chapter 39. Chapter 40 is presented in dramatic form as had been the quarter deck scene. This causes an attractive symmetry; the first theatrical scene unmasks the Captain and the second unmasks the crew. The effect of this dramatic presentation is to remove the narrative filter from the novel. It is to be noted that in these most crucial scenes, when the crew makes its decision to support Ahab's mad quest, Ishmael becomes invisible. Ishmael started the show, sharing the stage with Queequeg. But once he bonds with Ahab, he completely steps down from the stage. The bond lasts till Ahab sinks into the ocean, and then Ishmael is a person again.

The young hero does appear occasionally as a character after Chapter 36. He reappears as Queequeg's mate in Chapter 47. He reappears in Chapter 72 tied to the savage as they work the back of the whale. Once in Chapter 93, Ishmael reasserts himself for one brief line in order to foreshadow his own fate, "the thing (that is Stubb's abandonment of Pip in the sea) is common in that fishery; and in the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen that like abandonment befell myself"(322). In this brief reappearance, Ishmael is significantly comparing himself to little Pip who, after his mind has snapped, becomes totally dependent on Ahab. This

reappearance is a contradiction in itself. It is assertion and yet it denotes dependence, not freedom.

Ishmael is now not needed as a character in the action of the novel. He is,of course, necessary as a consciousness in the novel. But his necessity to the action of the novel has changed right from the early chapters. In initial chapters, he is the center of consciousness as well as center of plot. Now he becomes a kind of awareness in the novel. Surprisingly, he is not an actor even in the scene of Queequeg's near death, 'Queequeg's Coffin' (Chapter 110). It is important that Ishmael does not mention within the actual novel his role in the final three days' attack upon the white whale itself. Yet in the Epilogue, we find that his role is relatively important, "'I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman'"(432).

Richard Chase says that Ishmael is an alternative to Ahab. We may balance the young man's perception of things against the old man's perception of the same things.[8] But it is difficult to differentiate between the converted Ishmael's and Ahab's perceptions. Ishmael's disappearance is explained by George R. Stewart by claiming that there are 'Two *Moby-Dicks*', one before Melville's meeting with Nathaniel Hawthorne and one after.[9] The earlier one is the relative of Typee and Redburn and is, therefore, young Ishmael's *Moby-Dick*, while the later one is different and hence Ahab's.

John Parke finds not two but seven layers of meanings in the novel. In his *Seven 'Moby-Dicks'* , he says that the novel is " a huge nightmare of ourselves at war with fate and the universe, one which we would do well to contemplate... to learn respect for nature and cosmos, for life and death."[10] In *Moby-Dick*, Melville was dealing with the problem of fate and he was doing so completely outside the Christian frame of references. After finishing the work, he wrote to Hawthorne, "I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as a lamb."[11] His depiction of a universe both godless and purposeless was responsible for his heroes being left unredeemed and apparently un-condemned.[12]

Out of hundred and thirty five chapters of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael

remains a lonely wanderer only in two chapters. All previous heroes of Melville suffered longer periods of loneliness. His adaptation to life on ship is swift and quick. He never contemplates desertion. Even in the face of Ahab's final maniacal quest, he never even thinks of running away. This identification is, however, not a mark of Ishmael's individuality and presence. It leads to his annihilation. Erosion of personality is an important tool of Mevellian satire. He does not laugh at his characters; actions in the novel do. The plot reduces the person to a mere puppet. Disappearance of Ishmael should be seen in this light.

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# HUMAN RELATIONS AND FEMALE SEXUALITY: A STUDY OF ALICE WALKER'S *BY THE LIGHT OF MY FATHER'S SMILE*

**Monika Gupta**

In her recent work, *By the Light of My Father's Smile,* Alice Walker portrays the relationship among the blacks in all its dimensions. Unlike her other novels, it, instead of concentrating on the prevailing racial and class discrimination, mainly highlights the repression of daughters by their father and the ultimate liberated sexuality of the black female 'self'. The title of the novel is very appropriate. According to the Mundo belief, when a black girl enjoys sex for the first time which asserts her femaleness, she is expected to have the blessings of her father. The blessings of the father are expressed in the form of a smile, "... think of a smile as the crescent moon, high in the sky"[1] (195). She expounds the belief that if a black girl enjoys sex willfully, such kind of sex can lead her to the spiritual liberation. But the condition for her is that she should get the blessings of her father during this consummation.

The book is divided into three parts: 'Angels', 'A Kiss between the dead is a Breeze', and 'Fathers'. These three main parts are further divided into short stories each having a separate title of its own and carries a separate tale. Thus, the novel is divided into many short stories, but all these have a fine, close connection with the main theme The novel puts forth mainly the story of two daughters and their father. Initially, the father represses both his daughters, Susannah and Magdalena, sexually, but eventually the daughters overcome the imposed repression. Mr. Robinson, an anthropologist by profession, moves to rural Mexico along with his family. The narrative reaches its climax when the elder daughter of Mr. Robinson enters her fifteenth year and has sexual relations with Manuelito, a young Mundo boy. The father gets angry and beats Magdalena with his belt. His younger daughter Susannah watches his brutality. Later on, Mr. Robinson dies and Susannah marries Petros Greek, whom she leaves after sometime and is involved in a lesbian relationship with another black, Pauline. Magdalena meets

Manuelito after many years and this meeting gives fire to their lost love. Both the lovers meet at a restaurant and while he walks on the road a bus crashes into him. In the novel Mr. Robinson appears as a repentant spirit, while both the daughters live happily and discover their individual selves.

Mr. Robinson dies and becomes a spirit. In the very first chapter, Walker gives us a true picture of Mr. Robinson, who keeps a penetrating eye on the activities of his daughters, specially on their sexual lives. Mr. Robinson notices the behavior of Magdalena who even at six is uncommonly attracted towards men. He considers this kind of behavior as a problem. After Magdalena's first sexual experience with Manuelito, Mr. Robinson considers Susannah pure and Magdalena a tramp. After beating his daughter he remembers that one day when he and his wife, Langley, had a discussion about such type of beating and they "did not believe in corporal beating" (31). He realizes his mistake. Contrary to Alice Walker's other male protagonists, Mr. Robinson is very caring about his wife's emotional and psychological needs (32-33). The husband-wife relationship that the novelist projects in this novel is unconventional, for most of the African- American writers, including Alice walker herself, often portray a distracted relationship between man and woman. The reason for such distorted relationship is that most of these writers depict in their works the atrocities and oppression which shatter the individuality and the emotional 'self' of the blacks. But Mr. Robinson and his family are not oppressed people. Since he and his wife are anthropologists by profession and they are financed by the church authorities, so they are happy and prosperous couples.

The chapter entitled 'Twenty kisses' brings a turn in the story which from thence onwards moves to the married life of Susannah and her husband Petros Greek. Susannah visits the church and there she meets an old woman, Irene, who is a dwarf living in the church as a caretaker. Petros tells his wife that nobody talks to Irene in the village as her mother was raped. Irene's mother dies on the day of her birth and her father donates her to a church as a servant. Irene is a dwarf and the people in the village believe that it is the God's punishment for her mother's sin. Susannah's quest

is now to know much about Irene, and so several questions regarding this black dwarf are raised all of a sudden in her mind. Irene is a woman with a philosophical bent of mind. After knowing her background, Susannah keeps on visiting her regularly. Now she comes to know that Irene is an intelligent woman. Her conversation with Irene discloses this fact:

> Of course I can speak English, said Irene.... I speak German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, as well also Latin, but there's nobody left to speak it to... I am impressed said Susannah, that you know so many languages. (54-55)

Magdalena now is a lecturer in the Eastern University. She meets Manuelito, her former lover, while she leaves Las Crues. Manuelito has changed his name and like his name he has changed his profession also. He is an army man now. He presents a book to her, which contains his photograph on its front page and has many others inside it. One of these pictures shows him receiving a medal from Ronald Regan. He also tells her about his wife and two children. This meeting gives fire to their love once again and they start to meet. During one of their meetings at a restaurant, Manuelito walks in between the road in a drunken state and a bus hits him and he dies on the spot. After his death Manuelito becomes a spirit like Mr. Robinson and both of them confront each other but this time in a different world, the metaphysical one. Manuelito discloses his love for Magdalena in front of Mr. Robinson:

> I didn't want to leave Magdalena but now from where I can see that it was a perfect time to go... I stood tall for a monument at her side. Long enough to tell her that I too understand that we were meant for each other. (90)

Lily Paul is another black woman with whom Susannah shares a lesbian relationship, which is quite frequently portrayed by the African-American writers. Black literature manifests the relationship as a symbol of women's march towards liberation and eventually their increasing independence. Barbara Christine rightly observes: "By being sexually independent of men, lesbians, by their very existence, call into question society's definition of women at its deepest level" (199). To get rid of this repression the characters are in need of liberated female sexuality. Pauline, one of the major characters in the novel, shares a lesbian relationship with Susannah. Alice Walker gives a vivid description of the relationship:

> She permits my daughter free roaming access to her heavy breasts, not to the touch.... My daughter places her nose in the crease of the woman's neck, which like her breasts is incredibly warm. She widens her body on the bed and slips of the thin chemise she is wearing in order to permit full contact.(9)

Pauline is a black woman who is not restricted to any traditional norms of black society, "a woman who dressed inappropriately to the culture, and wore her bathing suit all day long and accepted motorcycle rides from the local village males"(5). She enjoys sex freely with anyone she likes. She is a mother to the children younger than her. Later on, she marries Mr. Winston. Despite all her hatred and dislike for Mr. Winston, she is forced to marry him. Her imposed marriage clearly indicates that girls in black society are reduced to a status of subordinated self and creatures without having a separate identity and entity. She considers her first consummation with her husband a rape, "... this was a woman who had been raped at fifteen" (107). Afterwards she revolts against all domination and sets out on the path of physical and spiritual liberation.

'A kiss between the dead is a breeze' is the first chapter of the second part of the novel. Manuelito, in the other world, tells Mr. Robinson all about Mundo tribe and the culture they follow. Both of them keep on talking to each other about the spiritual and metaphysical world:

> Did you really think we did not know, we should not love one another that the person across us is our self? That stealing is bad, that wanting what other people have is hurtful to us? That we are a part of the Great Spirit and loved as such but people does not know there things. We do not believe in heaven or hell senior; we do not believe in eternal damnation. We believe in the unavoidable horror of hurting others and of likewise being hurt. Being sorry and not being sorry. Forgiving and not forgiving. Our story is one that continues only for as long as it takes us to do things. (148-149)

All the hatred of Mr. Robinson for Manuelito turns into love after his death. Both the spirits are in the hospital where Magdalena is brought in a serious condition. Mr. Robinson witnesses that his elder daughter is now coming to join him. But his assumption goes wrong as she visits her mother first. In the metaphysical world, Magdalena teaches her mother the Mundo song of ultimate liberation. Manuelito, on the other hand, also teaches the same song to Mr. Robinson, "to be really human being is to understand this" (101).

Now the only living person of Mr. Robinson's family is his younger daughter Susannah. She receives a letter written by Magdalena, which throws light on the relationship that existed between them. Irene towards the end of the novel comes to visit Susannah. Irene, Susannah and Pauline meet and discuss the comforts that the European women enjoy. Through her black women characters, Walker describes the condition of black people in their own country as follows:

> It gives me goose flesh just to imagine. Better to chop off heads and cut Indian babies in half or destroy black families in Africa by brutalizing and enslaving them- all of which they did- then to realize much of the uncivilized world unlike Europe had not been forced to kill of its mother and made to shrink its spirit to half its size. (150)

The third and last part of the novel is 'Fathers'. This part opens with a chapter entitled 'Cathedral of the future'. Senior Robinson and Manuelito feel that the Cathedral of the future will be Nature itself. In future people will have to move back to their most reliable friend, viz. Nature (193). Mr. Robinson repeatedly admits the relationship of Manuelito and Magdalena in a positive way and accepts that Manuelito is a right choice of her daughter. In the final chapter of the novel Irene dies leaving Susannah in a gloomy and stoic mood. In the end, Susannah also dies and the ultimate thinking of Mundo tribe is revealed by Alice Walker thus: "... eternity is forever but at the same time it is as long as there is need" (217).

Sexual healing is one of the important aspects of the novel. We see a father who represses his daughters but later on as a spirit he is contrite for his repression. Mr. Robinson keeps on cursing himself for this reason. Walker reveals the different aspects of the sexual life and more especially she shows its importance in order to attain spiritual liberation. She expounds the idea that willful physical sex leads to the spiritual union: "... so it's important for a woman to be alert to the spiritual growth and self-discovery that can attain by paying a close attention to their sexuality."[2]

In *By the Light of My Father's Smile* Alice Walker highlights lesbianism and realizes its importance in self-growth for a repressed black self. Susannah witnesses the brutal beating of her sister and it shocks her. She experiences sexual pleasure in its true sense

when she later on indulges in lesbian relationship with Pauline. Thus, the major women characters in the novel, except Irene, seek their ultimate liberation as a complete individual human being through their celebrated and liberated female sexuality.

The relationship between Magdalena and Susannah is highlighted. Both the sisters differ from each other. Susannah in her childhood is of a shy nature and is quite contrary to her sister Magdalena, who is very frank and almost wild. The relationship between both the sisters is not healthy. Magdalena feels very bad that she did not receive as much love from her parents as her younger sister did (120). Obviously, the expected intimacy between them is missing: "... our relationship ostensibly as sisters was in fact a relationship of strangers. I successfully killed all sisterly feelings in myself towards you" (170). The relationship between the two sisters is not built on love and affection, "I tolerated you but I never loved you" (170).

Alice Walker in several of her novels gives an account of some African tribes and no wonder she presents a tribe called Mundo in *By the Light of My Father's Smile*. This tribe is a group of people living in Mexico, who are neither Indians nor Africans but a blend of both. The norms of the tribe maintain the belief that it is not only the corporal freedom that is necessary but it is the spiritual liberation that is of a greater importance for an individual.

To end, through Magdalena and Susannah, Alice Walker spotlights young black women's sexual urge. Mr. Robinson's insecurity and possessive attitude towards his daughters is a common phenomenon in any society. But after his death he realizes the inborn nature of the sexual urges of young women. Unlike Alice Walker's other novels, this novel presents a metaphysical world inhabited by real, living people.

## REFERENCES

[1]Alice Walker, *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (New York: Random House, 1998), p.195.

All subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and are given in parentheses in the text of the paper.

[2]"'Alice Walker: On Finding Your Bliss' Interview by Evelyn C. White," quoted in *By the Light of My Father's Smile*. p.14.

# BLACK-AMERICAN POETICS

**Rajendra Nath Mishra**

The early Afro-American poetry was a mere protest against slavery. Most of the early poets were imitators. They did not have any style of their own. While writing they did not think of the Black as their readers. They took it for granted that most of the readers would be white. Gradually, things began to change when more and more Blacks became literate. Then came the concept of Black readers in the States and that was the beginning of a new kind of writing among the Black-American writers.

One must be always rooted in his culture. Once he is denied to identify himself with his culture, he becomes rootless and frustrated. That was really the problem of the Black writers in America. Slowly they began to be conscious of their racial pride. They started to realize how rich their cultural heritage is. In the second half of the twentieth century all these things became prominent. The Black came to understand the concept of Black aesthetics. The Black experience is really quite complex. Abraham Chapman puts it as follows:

> The Black experience includes the historical roots and beginnings in Africa with its cultures and arts; the involuntary transatlantic crossing; the experience of slavery ... the system of racism, oppression ... which deprive Black people... of their personalities and lives ... and develop ... individual personalities in a dehumanizing and depersonalizing environment. (Brown 11-12)

With such a complex background a Black-American writer has to take a cautious approach before he steps into the shoes of a responsible literary artist. Thus came into being a different approach to literature altogether which stood for the Black people's own identity. They preferred to describe their own life style, use their own rhythms, images and languages. That perhaps rings the bell to announce the commencement of an original Black-American writing style.

When one considers Black-American poetry as a different genre, immediately the name of two stalwarts come to one's mind. They are LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and Don. L. Lee (Haki R. Madhubuti). LeRoi Jones urges to change the entire style of approach. He puts emphasis on Blackness. In an essay entitled

"The Legacy of Malcolm X, and the Coming of the Black Nation" he affirms:

> Because for many Black people, the white man has succeeded in making this hell seem like heaven. But Black youths are much better off in this regard than their parents. They are the ones who need the least image reversal.
>
> The Black artist, in this context, is desperately needed to change the images his people identify with by asserting Black feeling, Black mind, Black judgement. (Jones 247-248).

While writing about the problems and expectations of particular people one has to make sure that one's writing should be relevant to that particular race, both in respect of geography and way of thinking. That, in fact, is the advice offered by Le Roi Jones. Dudley Randall in "Black Poetry" means to speak the same thing:

> Writing for Black audience out of Black experience, the poets seek to make their work relevant and to direct their audience to black consciousness, black unity, and black power. (Gayle 112)

Before preparing the writers to stick to a particular set of principles, the emphasis was on the de-Americanization of the Black. It was a kind of approach to take corrective measures to help them come out of the polluted cultural surrounding. Two diametrically opposite cultures can never co-exist together unless due importance is given to the oppressed class. In "Black Writing" of *Home: Social Essays,* Le Roi Jones cautions against such type of misinformation:

> Let no one convince any black man that he is an American like any body else. The Black writer should be deaf to such misinformation, especially since he can prove... that something different is the case. (Jones 165)

According to LeRoi Jones, the aim of Black literature is to bring an awareness to the Black regarding their enslaved position. Literature must help them gathering energy to face any situation. In an interview with Mel Watkins in 1971, he says:

> As for black literature, it must function to bring us to an awareness that we are — that is a weak, powerless, enslaved people — or it must give us the energy or the spirit to do something about our situation. (Reilly 90)

Thus, he openly advocates that literature has to cater to the needs of the society. It has got to do its duty to the society. Literature should not build its castle around imagination. It must be rooted in the daily problems of the society. Through the help of literature he advocates

to change the static reality of the surrounding. He is not afraid of any violent approach to achieve this.

At certain points of time Jones would like to go beyond the text. In comparison to the text, he lays more emphasis on spoken words. When asked whether he is interested in "moving away from the idea of the written page," he answers as follows:

> The page does not interest me that much — not as much as the actual spoken word ... I'm much more interested in the spoken word. (Harris 147)

While commenting like this, he goes back to the tradition of spoken folk-literature where the spoken words, its mood and the scene create an evocative surrounding.

Jones is perhaps the first person to declare like a Marxist that art is a weapon: "I see art as a weapon, and a weapon of revolution" (Harris 149). Most of his poems are highly revolutionary:

> Come up, black dada
> nihilismus. Rape the white girls. Rape
> their fathers. Cut the mothers' throats. (Baraka 41)

He does not hesitate to use politics in poetry. According to him, the poet is a part of the society in which he lives. If his identity is endangered, it is obvious that he would write about it in poetry. There should not be any watertight compartment between politics and society. Russell Brooks in *C.L.A. Journal,* 15 (September 1971) puts it as follows :

> Black poetry and the other black arts are utilized to proclaim the revolution unequivocally and directly and to serve it indirectly as a powerful didactic medium calculated to prepare the minds of Afro-Americans for the roles that they are expected to play in the coming struggle. (8)

In the preface to his book *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Readers*, he describes the essence of his writing. Here he gives importance to society, politics, literature, music and language. He is not afraid of using literature as propaganda. That, in fact, is the main aspect of Black-American poetics.

Out of the two stalwarts of Black-American poetry and poetics the second one is Don L. Lee, later known as Haki R. Madhubuti. The two created a new way of thinking and prescribed new norms of Black American writing. Their poetry and comments, their rejection of everything white, and their creation of new tools to evaluate Black-

American writings put them on high esteem. Other writers of the 1960s and 1970s followed their footprints.

Lee starts from a basic point that in white America everybody teaches the Black not to be Black. Nobody encourages them to feel proud of their rich ancestry. So Lee begins his task from the grass root level. He speaks of confidence and optimism which can persuade the Black to achieve what they want. In "A Message All Black People Can Dig," he writes:

> We are going to do it.
> US: black people, beautiful people; the sons and
> daughters of beautiful people.
> bring it back to
> US: the unimpossibility
> now is
> the time, the test
> while there is something to save (other than our lives). (Lee 129)

Black poetry became the weapon of social ramification. It rejected the white middle class values and academic poetic standards. Bernard Bell describes it in these words:

> .... "Black Art" gives evidence of an unprecedented revolutionary fervour and commitment to the concept of art as weapon. In fact, much of the power of contemporary Afro-American poetry is generated by a rejection of white middle class values and academic poetic standards. Looking neither to white critics nor posterity for fame, the poets of the sixties raise their voice in song for black masses. (Bell 11)

Thus, for the Black literary artist, substance became more important than form. The social concern gets the upper edge in comparison with the aesthetic. Lee in particular lays more emphasis on Black beauty, Black identity and Black revolution. In Introduction to *Crowell's Handbook of Contemporary American Poetry*, he attempts to establish the link between politics and Black vision:

> Unlike most contemporary white poets we are profoundly conscious of forces that ironically protect us from the empty patterns of intellectual gentility and individualism, and at the same time keep our approach fresh. We constantly mean our poems to reshape the world .... (Malkoff 38)

In this context, Lee has to offer the following advice to all young Black poets:

> The only thing I say to most young Black writers is, never forget who you are, that you are not a writer who happens to be Black, but you are a Black

person who writes, I think that's the key .... (Melhem 120)

Another aspect of Black poetics is the rejection of white criticism in all aspects. Black critics must be trained and prepared to do justice to Black literature. Gwendolyn Brooks explains this in the following words:

> There are Black critics for the curative assessment of black literature. Thoughtful blacks understand that white critics, even those with the best will ... strictest "objectivity"... can not judge black works with the nuanceful intution and empathy of blacks intimate with both substance and essence of life involved. (Randall 8)

Lee wishes to see Black poetry with a completely different taste with regard to form, structure, language and rhythm. He rejects standard English, its punctuation marks, grammar, etc. He distinguishes Black poetry from White poetry thus:

> Black poetry in its purest form is diametrically opposed to white poetry. Whereas black poets deal in the concrete rather than abstract (concrete : art for people's sake; black language or Afro-American language in contrast to standard English & C). Black poetry moves to define and legitimatize black people's reality (that which is real to us). Those in power (the unpeople) control and legitimatize the negroe's (the real people's) reality, out of that which they, the unpeople, consider real. (Lee 9)

Lee is quite critical of the Black who "talk black and sleep white." He warns that with white inclination one can not be Black. Lee goes a step forward in his poetic language setting when he jumbles up words, extends a particular word into a long line, divides a word into several broken parts, and lengthens a word in sound by adding innumerable "a a a a a a ...." That perhaps reflects the lifestyle of the Black. In addition to that jazz, rhythm plays a major role in Black poetry as some poems are meant to be sung or enacted.

While rejecting standard English, Lee advocates for Black language. It is complained by white critics that Lee's language is unconventional and non-communicative. But Lee clarifies this point as follows:

> By Black language, we mean a language which is not recorded in a dictionary — a language as changeable as Blacks who left the south. (Lee 34)

Very often Lee uses unconventional abbreviations and strewn-together words. For participation and Black speech he uses the

technique of visually rendered dialect. He wants other Black poets to do so in order to establish their own identity in literature. The following extract from *Ebony* would sum up the writing technique of Lee in which David Llorens speaks of Lee's disjointed form and broken structure:

> Don Lee ... splits syllables, invents phrases, makes letters work as words, and gives rhythmic quality to verse that is never savage but often vicious and always reflecting a revolutionary black consciousness. (Llorens 75)

In short, rejecting the Euro-American style of writing, the Black poetics encourages Black rhythm, Black language, Black theme, Black treatment of the subject matter, and aims at creating consciousness among the Black to stand united against the unpeople and their oppressive tradition.

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# *BOOK REVIEWS*

## W.J. Mc CORMACK, *BLOOD KINDRED: W.B. YEATS, THE LIFE, THE DEATH, THE POLITICS*
**(London: Pimlico/Random House, 2005), pp.482, £8.50**

**R.W. Desai**

To some readers Yeats is an intolerably aberrant kind of poet. Eliot was appalled by his outspoken sexuality; many feminists are repelled by his avowedly patriarchal poems like "Adam's Curse," "A Prayer for My Daughter," or "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz"; Auden and Ivor Winters found many of his ideas "silly"; Professor Abinash Bose was upset by Yeats's reply, when asked for a message to India, "Let 100,000 men of one side meet the other. That is my message to India"; while Mc Cormack's book is one long diatribe against Yeats for the role that "action and violent action played in the hidden formation of his art" (p. 23), as nurtured by the influence of Nazi Germany and The *Bhagvad Gita* (pp.23-9), thus revealing him to have been a reactionary, a right-winger, a fascist, and a proto-Nazi.

But recognition that Yeats was in many ways a reactionary is nothing new: John R. Harrison in his *The Reactionaries: Yeats, Lewis, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence. A Study of the Anti-Democractic Intelligentsia* (New York : Schocken, 1966) had said all that needed to be said on the subject; what Mc Cormack does is to lay it on with a trowel by minutely examining the post-1939 (the year of Yeats's death) era with reference to Nazi Germany under Hitler and to dovetail his policies and subsequent developments, like the holocaust; with Yeats's politics from around 1922 onwards so as to demonstrate his "reprehensible views": "How did a man of Yeats's intelligence, sensibility and knowledge of human affairs," Mc Cormack asks, "come to hold such reprehensible views?" (p. 244).

The counter-question I should like to put to the author is, are we justified in proleptically shaping our criticism, pretending insight when all that we really have is hindsight? Consider this scenario:

George Bush, President of the world's most powerful democracy, and Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the world's oldest democracy, have been seen – not only by the Islamic countries but by many others as well – as perpetrators of atrocities and human rights violations in the same category as what happened in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Viet Nam, and now Iraq. Are we, then, justified in regarding the electorate that voted them to power five years ago as guilty of crimes against humanity? If totalitarianism can lead to excesses, so can democracy: the recent electoral victory of Hamas carries the stamp of democracy – the party came to power with an overwhelming majority – yet the avowed political agenda of Hamas is the annihilation of Israel. Democracy is not necessarily the open sesame to a political utopia.

The problem is one of phenomenology or, put differently, what I believe is right is right, what you believe is wrong. To see in views that Yeats expressed in the 1930s the seeds of Nazi extremism that fully manifested themselves during the war years, long after the poet was dead, and thereby to make him (or his ghost) one of the accused at the Nuremberg Trials – so to speak – is vicious hostility to which level neither literary criticism nor ethics should sink. But, alas, they do, in Cormack's book. An indefatigable researcher, Mc Cormack – presently Librarian-in-Charge at the Edward Worth Library, Dublin – has accumulated a massive store of what he considers evidence to prove Yeats guilty of whatever happened under Nazi rule during the war years. Ignorant of, or, perhaps, resolutely shutting his eyes to, the fact that ideologies undergo mutations because of changing circumstances which are a part of the historical process, Marxism evolving into Communism with the ruthless purges of Lenin and then Stalin, or Fascism into Nazism with the horrors of the extermination chambers of Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen, Mc Cormack's strenuous efforts are, it seems to this reviewer, totally misplaced and grossly unfair.

A correct perspective, I suggest, would be to explain Yeats's sympathy for Fascism as the quest for a bulwark against the excesses of Communism before it mutated into Socialism. (In more recent times we saw this taking place in China, Tinnamin Square

mutating into a globally-conscious capitalist-driven economy). "The blood-dimmed tide" of "The Second Coming" has its historical roots in the Russian revolution which was a reality, not just a political ideology, in which more than 500 members of the bourgeoisie were shot in Petrograd alone as a reprisal for the attack on Lenin. Red terror was proclaimed and raged against suspects in the towns and villages – "Can leave the mother, murdered at her door, / To crawl in her own blood" ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen"). Yeats wrote "The Second Coming" against this backdrop. And yet, as John Stallworthy has shown in *Between the Lines : W.B. Yeats's Poetry in the Making* (Oxford : Clarendon, 1963), as the poem progressed through several drafts, the poet excised the particulars, subsuming them under the general. Thus the line "The Germans are now to Russia come," a direct reference to the invasion of Russia by Germany in July 1917 as a counterthrust to the excesses of the new Communist regime, gradually evolved through revision after revision into the powerful "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold, / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." It is this extraordinary critical objectivity of Yeats that makes his poetry so all-encompassing, the ability to sift out the specificities of time and place and see history in terms of inexorable movements, as described in the section "Dove or Swan" of *A Vision*.

Mc Cormack's approach lacks this recognition of the poet's genius. True, to be fair to him, he does have words of praise for Yeats, as the following two examples will testify, but these are swallowed up by the torrent of denigration that fills the book's pages:

> Some readers may fear that I am striving to perpetuate an obsession with ideology that characterised the 1930s. Others may suspect a degree of insensitivity to his poetic work itself. In reply, I want to say that Yeats is probably the greatest poet in the English language since John Milton, and certainly the greatest since Wordsworth. What follows is a personal as well as professional undertaking, a brief account of which is unavoidable. The objective of understanding without sympathy can only be pursued after a frank admission of one's own historical situation and the efforts made at self-understanding. (p.44)

and

> He was truly a great man unrivalled as a poet in the English language (perhaps

> any language), a former member of parliament, a Nobel Prize winner, and a fastidious cultivator of his own image. (p.119)

But it is difficult to understand how Mc Cormack can honestly praise a writer whose political ideology he sees reflected in the philosophy that could justify the extermination of six million Jews. I would like to put the author this hypothetical question: would he be able to respond favourably to the "poetic work itself" of a writer who celebrated the ingenious technological methods employed by the Nazis in exterminating six million Jews? In other words, how can the reader/critic isolate the "poetic work itself" from the "reprehensible" ideology that he is convinced the poet espouses? The two are incompatible. Better, I should think, to roundly denounce rather than to pull one's punches with praise "false and hollow," as Dr. Johnson described to Boswell Lord Chesterfield's "two papers in *The World* in recommendation of the [*Dictionary*]", after the work had been published.

Mc Cormack is on ground more consistent with the abhorrence he feels for Yeats's politics when he criticizes, rather than damns with faint praise. Continuing with the former, he devotes a whole chapter entitled "The Unspeakable Question" in which he equates Yeats's views on eugenics, as stated in *On the Boiler* (1938) and the one-act play "Purgatory," with Nazi eugenics that fuelled the holocaust. That a German newspaper had congratulated Yeats on his seventieth birthday is, for Mc Cormack, proof of the equation's validity:

> The *Berliner Tageblatt* (14 June) gave Walter F. Schirmer nearly one-third of a page in which to celebrate the Irish poet (or rather dramatist) whose work was a protest against the spirit of the nineteenth century. Karl Arns, who had been writing about Yeats since the mid-1920s, marked the occasion with a piece in the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* (12 June). Unlike James Joyce or T.S. Eliot, Yeats was himself a trophy whom the Nazis wished to claim: his 'mystical' and folklore interests were mainfestly compatible with their ideology .... The articles effecting this compact scarcely amounted to a satanic embrace, but they contributed to the anaesthetising of the poet at a time when other views of the Reich were brought to his attention. (p.119)

Further, that Yeats's personal library had on its shelves

> pamphlets from Terramare Publications of Berlin, including Fritz Edel's *German Labour Service* and Rudolph Frercks's *German Population Policy* (both 1937)

> ... establishes that he was a privileged recipient of Nazi material. (p.128)

Though unconvinced by Mc Cormack's line of reasoning, one cannot but be impressed by his inquisitorial tenacity!

What I find surprising is that Mc Cormack, apparently Irish as his name would seem to indicate, overlooks Ireland's (and Yeats's) gratitude towards Germany for her support during the Irish struggle for independence from seven hundred years of British rule. During the Easter uprising of 1916, immortalised in Yeats's poem with that title, German ships carrying armaments for the revolutionaries (the IRA) were intercepted and sunk by the Royal Navy, to mention just one instance of German intervention thwarted by Britain's control of the sea. In India, simultaneously, the freedom struggle was gaining momentum. In the late 1930s militancy rather than Gandhi's pacifism was being advocated by Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose. Bose created the INA (the Indian National Army) which allied itself with Japan after her attack on Pearl Harbour and subsequent occupation of Burma and south-east Asia. By Mc Cormack's logic all such endeavours towards the attaining of independence from foreign rule, both in Ireland and India, are deserving of condemnation on account of atrocities committed against the Allies by Germany and Japan. But in Ireland and India today no such condemnation has been voiced. Yet Mc Cormack takes umbrage at what he regards as Yeats having "supped with the Devil":

> Yeats was of course dead when Poland fell, but he too had supped with the Devil or, at the least, sipped tea. Sometime in September 1938 he accepted a copy of *Germany Speaks*, an English-language anthology of propagandist essays by more than twenty Nazi experts in such areas as education, health, land, race and women's affairs. The donor was Eduard Hempel (1887-1972), minister at (i.e. head of) the German Legation in Ireland, and Hempel's inscription spoke of 'an unforgettable afternoon' which the two men had spent together that month. It has been suggested by the Yeats scholar Warwick Gould that Maud Gonne's house at Clonskeagh may have been the venue for this encounter .... The Mac Brides were hand-in-fist with the German Legation .... In the early summer of 1940, both Maud Gonne and her daughter Iseult Stuart were rightly suspected of assisting the German spy, Gortz; indeed, Mrs. Stuart was tried in July and miraculously acquitted. (p.21)

When Mother Teresa was asked by a troubled admirer whether her conscience wasn't bothering her for receiving a donation from

a drug baron, she replied that she wouldn't hesitate to accept a donation from the Devil himself. Undoubtedly, Mc Cormack would endorse the justice of Tantia Topi and Bhagat Singh's executions by the British administration.

Not satisfied with his indictment of Yeats, the author then goes on to investigate the involvement of Yeats's "blood kindred" – Iseult, her husband Francis Stuart, Helmut Clissmann (a German spy), and others – with events in Nazi Germany during the war years. The last chapter entitled "Demob" focuses on Francis Stuart for his "anti-Semitic bias" (p.417) during the years from 1939 onwards. Mc Cormack interprets his career as a vicarious expression of Yeats's beliefs, being, as he describes him, Yeats's "posthumous Anti-Self" (p.418) – a strange formulation becuase "anti" would imply the opposite of Yeats! Yet Mc Cormack's account of his activities suggests, rather, that he was Yeats's 'alter ego', not "Anti-Self":

> He was no democrat ... and delivered broadcasts [on the Reich's] long-range wireless service.... One broadcast – on 16 December 1942 – certainly praised Hitler. (p.421)

Interspersed throughout the 482 pages of this tangled thicket of biographical and political minutae are innumerable bits and pieces of salacious gossip, speculation, and sex scandal, with not a shred of evidence cited, that reflect the author's hostility (along with a touch of envy?) towards his subject. Some samples:

> As the seventy-three-year-old smiling private man approached what he knew to be his last months, he planned something of a regal visit to his English lovers. Having left his wife behind in Dublin (to follow later), Yeats had intended to stay first with Dorothy Wellesley at Penn in the Rocks in Sussex, and then to progress to Steyning in the same county, where Edith Shackleton Heald occupied a pleasant sixteenth-century house. Since Brenda Maddox published *George's Ghosts* (1999), it is difficult to know where the line of decorum can be laid down in the matter of Yeats's sexual behaviour. Yeats's rejuvenation in the 1930s can be considered in that context. Quite what his 'Steinach operation' did for him physically is not clear. (p.34)

or this:

> Despite Georgie Yeats's efforts to tidy up her late husband's personal and philosophical legacy, an aura of disreputable unconventionality has never quite lifted from his Olympian shoulders. Negotiating this, she was aided by dutiful biographers – first Joseph Hone (1943), then Richard Ellmann (1948)

> and A.N. Jeffares (1949). These naturally played down the irregularity of Yeats's sexual behaviour, not least because the numerous other parties were still alive. But, for reasons that differed in each case, they also played down the poet's political views and activities. In this, they took their lead from Mrs. Yeats, who had quickly set about editing her husband's controversial prose works even before the Second World War had begun. Yeats's reputation has benefited more from her generous (if not always honest) engagement with his late writings than from the advocacy of any critic or academic commentator. (p.35)

and this:

> Since the end of 1934 Yeats had been having an affair with [Ethel] Mannin and other young women whom he met principally in London. One of their common interests was the Sexual Reform League of which she was a member; she was also a friend of Norman Haire, who had performed a limited vasectomy on the poet the previous spring, with a view (evidently successful) to reviving his erectile manhood. Perhaps the confusion of sexual and political interests was typical of Yeats at this time; it certainly did Ossietzky no good. London was the Irish poet's happy playground, where he tolerated no hard-luck stories. In many ways he was a provincial lad belatedly sowing his wild oats. (pp.118-19)

and, finally (for lack of space):

> The first version of this [Yeats's poem "Politics": 'How can I, that girl standing there'] had been written in May 1938, and the inspiration for it was Cora Hughes, a red-headed young woman of strongly left-wing views, whom Yeats had encountered on O'Connell Street in Dublin. The following month he left Ireland to stay at the Chantry House, in the village of Steyning, Sussex. His hostess was Edith Shackleton Heald, with whom he (at the age of seventy-two) had been having an affair since the previous year. During several sojourns in his lover's well-appointed home, Yeats wrote the desolate one-act play 'Purgatory', the premiere of which later provided him with a platform for his views on eugenics and German law. The plot arises from an act of what Yeats terms *mésalliance*, a sexual union deemed inadvisable on grounds of class, and his developing this theme in the house of his lesbian lover should be accounted a triumph among Yeats's liberal inconsistencies. (p.122)

We must give Yeats the last world, in reply:

The Spur

> You think it horrible that lust and rage
> Should dance attention upon my old age;
> They were not such a plague when I was young;
> What else have I to spur me into song?

Others, closely associated with Yeats, are not spared. Iseult and

her husband Francis Stuart receive the treatment:

> The next logical step was Trinity College Dublin, but Stuart never took it. He was regarded as intellectually dim, a view occasionally endorsed by W.B. Yeats. The great moment in Stuart's drifting life was an encounter with Iseult, daughter of Maud Gonne and Lucien Millevoye, whom Maud subseqently married and divorced. The wife-beating major had been executed after the 1916 Rising, and the beautiful widow (Yeats's inviolate rose) epitomised martyrdom, self-pity and a good deal of racialist bile. Iseult was very beautiful too, and lacked some of her mother's vices. The young pair eloped to London, but returned to Dublin where they were married a few weeks before the groom's eighteenth birthday. (Iseult, at twenty-five, had already been deflowered by Ezra Pound and, even earlier, had been forced to witness her stepfather exposing himself). (pp.416-17)

Nor is poor Mrs. Yeats let off:

> Not that she was a paragon of suburban virtue: given to drink, she was suspected of mild hydrophobia in matters of personal hygience. (p.35)

"Yeats's politics is one which his various biographers have failed to examine," the blurb on the book's back cover informs the reader. Not only is this sweeping pronouncement incorrect but, in attempting to redress the balance, Mc Cormack goes overboard. Wrong-headed and unfair, despite the enormous amout of research that has gone into the writing of these 482 pages, the only service that the book performs is to demonstrate how misleading biographical criticism can be when carried to an extreme and driven by an obsessive holier-than-thou agenda.

## K.K. SHARMA, *THE LITTERATEUR AS ART-THEORIST: SOME APPROACHES TO ART*

**(New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2003), pp.137, Rs.400.00**

**P.C. Pradhan**

K.K. Sharma's penetrating analysis of the theories of art of the five major littérateurs of the first half of the 20th century in this book is a sincere endeavour to help the academic circle to have a better understanding of the ideas and visions of these celebrated artists and make them understand the nature and function of art in its proper perspective.

K.K. Sharma has carefully chosen the only eastern littérateur Rabindranath Tagore. He argues that though Tagore does not believe in defining art, he explains art as "the response of man's creative soul to the real." Sharma shows how Tagore believes that art "originates from the superfluous that is present in man's emotional relationship with the world"(3). Then Sharma illustrates how Tagore opines that art gives us a higher kind of joy through beauty. Further, Tagore believes that "Beauty" is born of the "unity of the Good and the True." K.K. Sharma further explores how in Tagore's view art cannot strictly adhere to any tradition because of the subjective touch of the artist. However, Tagore thinks that objectivity in the artist is essential for creating a great work of art in spite of the fact that the artist has absolutely no hesitation in modifying the bare reality according to his likes and dislikes. Thereafter Sharma illustrates Tagore's views on the elements of art.

Sharma takes his arguments further by elaborating Tagore's ideas about some important forms of art, such as music, painting and literature. Tagore differentiates, Sharma points out, between European music and Indian music: Indian music is spiritual in contrast to the romantic and materialistic nature of European music. Sharma then focuses on Tagore's concept of artist's personality vis-à-vis creation of art. The artist's personality is central to his work of art and imparts solidity and permanence to his work. Sharma explains Tagore's view of the relationship between art and reality with rare clarity and precision. As an aesthetic theorist, Tagore firmly believes that the nature of all arts is to provide us with the taste of

reality through freedom of mind.

The second chapter is devoted to D.H. Lawrence's view of art. Lawrence holds that "a great piece of art is the record of the artist's own life history, his struggle inside himself" (46). Further, Lawrence believes that art is a religious experience and it is the product of an immediate impulse towards self-expression. Art is not merely beautiful or decorative; it does rather explore and convey "some powerful emotion or idea. Art does not aim at solutions; it only declares." Lawrence thinks that art helps man to understand life and seek comfort in it. Art can be revitalised only when it has great concern for man and woman. That is why Lawrence does not find anything wrong with sex and obscenity which are inalienable from life. A genuine piece of work explores both the known and the unknown aspects of life. Lawrence has, thus, the firm conviction that art should be a spontaneous expression of the whole consciousness of man — mental, intuitive and instinctive. To him, art, morality and life are identical. He feels that the great artist is concerned with "finer morality" rather than the greater morality which is institutionalized and conventional. Morality in life is to be true to the living spirit rather than mental abstractions. Though misunderstood as pornographic, Lawrence actually tries to bring out the difference between "sex" and "phallic consciousness". To him "sex" is cerebral, a mental consciousness. On the other hand, "phallic consciousness" is emotional and natural in life. Also, he holds that art must be symbolic as the artist cannot express his ideas adequately without symbols, which must be closely related to reality. He thinks that symbols and myths are eternal in form and appeal because their basic functions never change. To Lawrence, detachment is a prerequisite in a great artist.

In the third chapter, K.K. Sharma analyses Virginia Woolf's concept of art. He considers that Woolf's approach to art is not comprehensive, However, "her intellectual curiosity made her familiar with the thoughts and researches of the leading intellectuals and artists of her age" (73) and the earlier ones. She believes that an artist is to reject the rigid conventional approaches of his contemporaries and predecessors to create an original work of art.

In her concept of higher inner reality of human life, she was influenced by Bergson, Freud, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Marcel Proust and the French Impressionists. Virginia Woolf opines that the androgynous mind of the artist, which is a balance between the man part and woman part, is the source of all artistic creations. A piece of creative work produced by such a mind contains the wholeness and richness of life's experience. Analysing the artistic process, Woolf says that the creative process is quite complex because the conscious and the unconscious aspects of human mind are to work in complete harmony for the creation of a genuine work of art. She further explains that the real aim of art is to portray the various aspects of life honestly and truthfully. However, she does not believe in photographic representation of it. Life is quite complex and baffling, "a luminous halo", and the artist is to interpret this complex reality in his art. That is why the chaotic life must be presented in good order. Woolf lays stress on emotion rather than any other aspect including pattern in her concept of form. There should be a "central line" to unite all the emotions as a single entity, and the form of work depends on the successful exploration and communication of his vision. The form and content should be organically interrelated. Woolf feels that symbols often come to the rescue of the artist when his words fail to convey his thoughts, feelings and impressions.

The next chapter in Sharma's book deals with Forster's idea of art which is "basically traditional, and is strikingly different from D.H. Lawrence's unconventional conception of the nature and function of art" (105). According to Sharma, Forster believes that art is the artist's prerogative rather than others' influence on him. The artist makes new experiments and discoveries which are of permanent interest. Another important conviction of Forster is that art is not governed by life; it has its own entity. Its laws are therefore different from those of daily life. To Forster the phrase "Art for Art's Sake" is a profound one because it means that "art is a self-contained harmony". Art is valuable because it "has to do with order, and creates little worlds of its own, possessing internal harmony in the bosom of this disordered planet" (109).

In the fifth chapter of his book, Sharma demonstrates how Joyce Cary has given us one of the most serious and systematic theory of art. Cary believes that the artist "starts with an experience that is a kind of discovery" (117). The most important function of art is "to make the world contemplate and understand itself, not only as rational being but as experience of value as a complete thing"(119). Art begins when the artist seeks for an answer to men's basic question of the meaning of life. According to Cary, art should not only lend meaning and order to life, but should also "fill man with the conviction that human life is worthliving" (121). To Cary, form includes the whole presentation, the theme, point of view, style, etc. The work is actually a total complex experience of a real world. A successful artistic production should be a synthesis of form and emotional content. Since the different aspects in a work of art are related to one another in consonance with their significance, a man can get more meaning about life from an artistic creation than from actual experience. Cary thinks that art is moral in nature and the moral judgment is also an element of every aesthetic judgment. Because of the enormous power of art, the authorities are always afraid of it. That is why great works of art are often banned or censured on the plea that artists and writers distort the truth. But Cary rejects such a view because censorship can only turn men into beasts rather than making them free moral beings. Little wonder he condemns censorship of arts and pleads for freedom of artistic expression.

The book is a pioneering one in the field of art-theories. Professor Sharma's analysis and comments are authoritative and enlightening to those who are interested in the study of theories and functions of art. Though the book is well brought out, the occasional spelling mistakes are rather the natural faults of Indian printing industry. Further, the book would have been more enlightening and effective, if K.K. Sharma had added a concluding chapter with five to seven pages making a comparative study of the pertaining points of the great art theorists he has discussed. In spite of this, the book is rather a landmark because of Sharma's original approach to the art-theorists of East and West.

## C. L. KHATRI, *RIPPLES IN THE LAKE*

**(Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2006), pp.72, Rs.60.00**

**Patricia Prime**

In *Ripples in the Lake,* C. L. Khatri's second poetry collection, he makes an important point in his letter to the reader, "Let us cultivate poetry in ourselves. It is also a kind of fight against the dehumanising forces." The title poem "Ripples in the Lake" says, "I couldn't hold ripple/They filled in my pages/Critics called them verse." What Khatri describes is actually the litmus test of a poem, the bubbling from within that cannot be contained. The poems in *Ripple in the Lake* pass this test with ease.

Part serious and part humorous, Khatri tackles a whole range of "issues" in his collection that in the hands of a lesser poet could be monochromatic. The poems work as a miniature cultural critique on life, encompassing environmentalism, consumerism and our greed for the new and exotic: "He who has never fulfilled his wish/ donates calf, goat, clothes, foodgrains..../ to the *Mahabrahmins* for his comfort in heaven" ("Pitririn"); and, "Children, they are the future of the nation. / They are not children who work / in your houses, chemical factories" ("Children").

The reader is taken on an entertaining and provocative jaunt, where Khatri examines excess and instant gratification in their many forms with an acerbic wit and an eye for small detail. Sometimes the rapacious business of straining to write poetry also comes in for comment, as in the poem "Poetry":

> I carve out the rough pain
> smouldering in my lotus
> in a statue of poem like a sculptor
> I undergo the labour trauma
> in each delivery my veins
> trickle with the milk of mother.
> I gaze it for hours
> dress it, comb it, kiss it.
> I fathom the deep bed
> of my conscience in it,
> to discover nature's treasure
> to fill the void at inner level

to redefine my role
on the stage of the world.

But excess has a voluptuous quality too, as we see in the poem "Culprit":

Yesterday when the worried wind stopped
to confide with you its confidential
you overlooked the storm in the cup.
Faded flowers, suffocating leaves
kept lamenting their lot, you drove away
talking on your mobile.

Khatri's vision of today's social climate is apocalyptic and is very disturbing. In "Karbala in Grief", for example, he writes:

Karbala is in grief
wrapped in blood, clustered bomb
sky smoke shrouded
dust of debris, dynamites, death
making mountains in the sky.

The apocalypse here is seen as a type of spiritual death. This vision pinpoints a very different sensibility in Khatri's poems.

The distilled residue of an Indian background permeates the poetry, mixed with a more contemporary flippant existence. Khatri makes use of objects to build up the feeling of a world around the corner from this one, which is sinister, mythical yet highly recognisable. Seeds, sands, laws, birds, etc. are subjects of some poems, as will as the occasional tribute to family, friends and morning ritual. The gods are mentioned too, and sometimes they are seen as benign, as in "Dashanan":

Every morning when I go out
I pray to Dashanan
To lend one of his heads
As a spare part
If I am beheaded, I'll use it.
If I escape I'll return it.

Structurally, these are economical and beautifully put together poems: perfectly balanced consisting of six stanzas of three lines each. "Hangover" is a good example of Khatri's use of structure. In a word, *Ripple in the Lake* is a rich and comprehensive collection, fulfilling Khatri's concept of poetry being "a kind of fight against the dehumanising forces".

## K.V. RAGHUPATHI, *SAMARPANA*

**(New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 2006), pp.51, Rs.95.00**

**Patricia Prime**

K.V. Raghupathi's latest collection *Samarpana* (a Sanskrit word meaning "offering") contains 50 reflections has much formal patterning. In the first poem, he writes in almost notebook style:

> Here comes the ashy morn stealthily from the unknown,
> the first morn like the melted spring ice
> into my cabin on the roadside
> as I lie like a just awakened cock in my bed alone....

Raghupathi's purposes here are both subtle and deftly economic. These seemingly unremarkable lines turn out to be complex, simple, interwoven and quite revealing of the poet's state of mind. His subtlety of purpose is achieved at no expense to an engagement with nakedness, gardens and palaces, a cat on a wall, a winding road, and much more. He is a conversationalist whose subject matter is the immediate world around him, as in Poem III:

> It is home here
> for me and every one in this city of gardens and palaces
> the same cracked trees, the same contorted branches
> the same verdant fields, the same interlaced water
> the same unblemished sky, the same plaintive calls.

At the same time, his poems are contoured by a highly sensitive degree of selectivity, a classical sense of form. His position is that of an outsider, as we see in Poem VIII:

> Longing for Eternity
> I walk towards the west of Dhavanyaloka
> in a cool evening light missed with showers
> down the winding road, up the curved road
> into a big village dotted with the wetted houses.

A persistent signature of Raghupathi's work is his willingness to engage with philosophical and critical ideas. This philosophical signature equally allows him to play with the emptiness of language, with its status as pure and vacuous nomination. It is what allows him, as he puts it, in this poem, to

> ... retrace my footsteps in timidity
> and retreat like a monk in the fading light
> saluting without compunction.

*Samarpana* is a fascinating text. A fluid sense of time, place and individual thought generates complexities of meaning and feeling with which the readers will be able to identify (whether in terms of difference or similarity of thought). Raghupathi's use both of sentence and paragraph, his ability to use structures of both prose and poetry in a very accomplished way, and to challenge and subvert orthodox assumptions about their processes and purposes, makes for constantly thought-provoking writing.

Typically, *Samarpana* has its share of Raghupathi's wonderfully imagistic writing, such as in Poem XIII:

> By the huge pylon-like trees
> I build my hut with leaves of child's dreams
> that hand like a peeled off bark
> on the wedged sprout from the trunk.

*Samarpana* starts with the poet alone in his cabin and ends with him as explorer both of himself and his surroundings. It confirms Raghupathi as a poet of nature and the environment.

Raghupathi gives us an update in the fragmentary or diary form of his ruminations. In rich and beautifully chosen words, *Samarpana* offers a world of imagination, beauty and reality. The result is a comprehensive record of a major poet accompanied by critical insights and ideas that engender enquiry.

## R.K. SINGH, *SRI AUROBINDO'S 'SAVITRI': ESSAYS ON LOVE, LIFE AND DEATH*

**(Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2005), pp.130+40, Rs.250.00**

**O.P. Mathur**

The book under review with its fresh approaches and analyses is useful for teachers and Sri Aurobindo scholars alike. The opening essay of the book studies *Savitri* as a romance, but with a difference, for it shows *Savitri* encompassing "all levels of outer and inner world" blending "the poetic and the philosophical, the emotional and the rational". The next essay is a fairly lucid and fresh analysis of Sri Aurobindo's 'Yoga' and of the descent of the Divine in the garb of "the growth of new collective values" with the "seeker acting in inaction ... to divinise the society". Sri Aurobindo had himself hinted at the

relation of his concept of 'Yoga' with 'Karmayoga' in *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* (1945) and R.K. Singh has well analysed the relationship leading to a 'collective value-system', an inspiring ideal for the whole world. Remarkable touches of originality of approach can also be discovered in the essay on Sri Aurobindo's poetics in which Singh suggests the similarity of Sri Aurobindo's poetry to 'Mantra' or 'incantation', "a rhythmic revelation of Reality" embodying a harmony of 'dhvani' ('suggestion'), 'Rasa' (or 'Ananda') and 'vision'. They all together embody "a development of an archetypal aesthetics".

Besides these valuable general essays, the book also contains some perceptive insights into a few issues not earlier noticed. They include the discovery of one of the parallels between the mythic tales of the East and the West — the confrontation with Death and its ultimate conquest by Savitri and that of the devoted wife Isis laboriously ensuring the resurrection of Osiris in a Greek legend. The essential commonality of the global imagination can also be traced in many other tales of devoted wives like those of Sita and Penelope. R.K. Singh has stressed on this global direction of Aurobindo studies. Similarly, a universal grammar of metaphysics, epic traditions and styles has been discovered in the three essays that follow. Singh establishes *Savitri* as an epic *sui generies* — a culmination in "a spiritual culture beyond reason and religion", depicting in Sri aurobindo's own words, "a harmonious unity of the life of man with the spirit of Nature and the spirit of the universe." The concluding essay on the texture of *Savitri* explores the originality and the orchestration of the various elements of its 'texture', treating the term as a multi-coloured umbrella covering not only the originality of the celebration of its epic form as a traditionally unepical 'quietism' of the spiritual experience but also the originality and spiritual symbolism of its characters and events, the rhythmical scheme of its blank verse and its superb blending with its spiritual message.

R.K. Singh's perspectives as revealed in this book are both microscopic and telescopic, the minutiae growing into a mountain, the worldly transcended into the spiritual. The book is a notable contribution to the study of this spiritual epic, an inner odyssey.

## O.P. MATHUR (ED.), *SRI AUROBINDO: CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS*

**(Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, Second Enlarged Edition, 2003), pp.272, Rs.300.00**

**N.S.S. Raman**

The book on Sri Aurobindo edited by Professor O.P. Mathur consists of essays by reputed Aurobindo scholars like V.K. Gokak, Karan Singh, V.P. Varma, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Prema Nandakumar, Sisir Kumar Ghose and others. As O.P. Mathur has pointed out at the very outset, the theme of the Supermind pervades all the major works of Sri Aurobindo including his literary output. Srinivasa Iyengar has contributed a scholarly paper to this volume comparing Milton and Sri Aurobindo.

V.K. Gokak writes on Indian English poetry in the first essay of the volume in question, and valuates the work of some of the poets like Anand Acharya, Armando Menezes, J. Krishnamurti, G.K. Chettur and many other lesser known poets; Dom Moraes dos not find mention here. One would agree with Gokak's remark that "Nature, love, man and human heritage are the poet's field of exploration in the outer world. Thought, passion, visionary or mystical power and spiritual illumination are the four directions in which he moves in the inner world." Is this an echo of the characterization of poetry by a great English poet as recollections of inner tranquility? Dr. Karan Singh in his own inimitable style characterizes this inner vision of the poet Sri Aurobindo as a vision of the Divine, which is so important for the understanding of his philosophy. Dr. Karan Singh draws our attention to the 'official version' of Sri Aurobindo's thought; I am not even aware if such a thing indeed exists.

Of course, there is a spirit of nationalism in most of Sri Aurobindo's writings; more than any other Indian English poet, he is conscious of our heritage, and his poetic expression is indeed rooted in the great ancient poetical works like the *Gita* and the *Upanisads*, even as his philosophy is rooted in the *Vedanta*. Shyam Kumari writes on nationalism in Sri Aurobindo's early poetry, which Sri Aurobindo himself called the 'Mantra of the real'. Further

elaborations of Sri Auobindo's poetic genius is to be found in the learned essays by K.K. Sharma, L.S.R. Krishna Sastri, O.P. Mathur, C.D. Narasimhaiah, R.R. Pandey. But of all the poetic works of Sri Aurobindo *Savitri* must naturally find special mention. The late Prof. Sisir Kumar Ghose, Nirodbaran, Prema Nandakumar and R.K. Singh have written special articles devoted to this great spiritual poem written in epic style, narrating the well-known story of Savitiri and Satyavan in Indian mythology, her defence and glorification of conjugal devotion in her dialogue with the God of Death. K.D. Sethna, one of the devoted admirers of Sri Aurobindo, declares that the poem is "from every angle a right correlative, a task incumbent to create a mould as massive as that of *Life Divine.*" The correlation is between the mortal and the immortal, between God and man. The heroine of the poem Savitri, who symbolizes the eternal feminine, succeeds in overcoming inevitable death by a firm affirmation of the inner soul. As Sri Aurobindo himself put it: "The soul in man is greater than his fate." There are also essays in the volume on Sri Aurobindo's dramatic works. It is a great pity that Sri Aurobindo's achievements in this regard are overshadowed by his philosophical works like his magnum opus, *Life Divine*. Apart from Dr. Karan Singh's article on the spiritual thought of Sri Aurobindo, there is only one other essay in the volume on Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics by U.C. Dubey.

Books like this remind us of our own literary, spiritual and philosophical heritage, even if most of the contributions to the volume are highly laudatory to the great artist and thinker that Sri Aurobindo undoubtedly was. I suppose genuine appreciation bordering on faith is more trustworthy than criticism, which has a tendency to ignore or bypass the genuine debt that we owe to some of our great men in this century. Sri Aurobindo was undoubtedly one of the greatest Indians of this century, and this volume has highlighted some of the aspects of his greatness. I must say unhesitatingly that this book must be read carefully by all the students of literature and Sri Aurobindo's thought.

## RASHMI GAUR, *WOMEN'S WRITING: SOME FACETS*

**(New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2003), pp.151, Rs.300.00**

**A.P. Trivedi**

This collection by Rashmi Gaur is a commendable critical attempt to trace and to review women's writing from an altogether new perspective. The writer has taken up the works of ten prominent women novelists, belonging to different cultures and races, for analysis. The collection highlights the presence of a universal feminine urge to self-actualize by transcending the barriers of a gendered existence despite the peculiarities of and differences within social milieus.

The first article in the collection discusses the novels of Virginia Woolf from the perspective of what may be termed as a post-feminist angle. The writer holds that Woolf's women protagonists display remarkable courage to project their selfhood without negating the possibility of nurturing relationships traditionally offered to women. From *Jacob's Room* to *To The Lighthouse*, Woolf traces the initial loneliness of women in different situations — as a single parent, as a lonely tutor, as an enigmatic adolescent, as a housewife and as a mother. Tracing their struggle against the gendered identity, Woolf aesthetically presents the idea that the woman's cause is also the man's cause and one should not marginalize the other.

The second article on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* analyzes the inhuman cruelty of slavery and how it is doubly oppressive to women, particularly mothers. Sethe tries to kill her children because she perceives this sub-human act to be the only way to thwart the system and protect them from the brutalities of slavery which does not distinguish between a slave and an animal. The third article discusses the complexities of the struggle of black women as presented in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. The next article traces the presence of gender stereotypes in *Lives of Girls and Women* by Alice Munro, a Canadian novelist. The analysis shows how the debilitating presence of gender roles even in liberated society mould women to perceive their personal and professional preferences in a way which is essentially different from that of men.

The next eight articles of the collection concentrate on Indian women writers. The article on Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* investigates how the traditional male psyche negates the possibility of individuality among women and expects them to live only by their conventionally defined roles. The next novelist is Shashi Deshpande, whose three novels have been discussed in detail. The article on *That Long Silence* focuses on the images of Indian Women perpetuated by mythological and social traditions. The essay on *Small Remedies* is written from the point of view of Buddhist philosophy, integrating it with the feminist desire towards emancipation. The article on *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is based on the mother-daughter relationship, a complex and at moments a strange one. It shows how mothers are often tools to perpetuate the patriarchal designs and prepare their daughters to become good wives instead of becoming good human beings. The daughters turn rebel against this attitude, but carry a twinge of guilty conscience to their adulthood as in order to carve their identity they have to travel through the dark and horrifying bylanes of their memories.

Namita Gokhale's novel *Paro* is the theme of the next critical piece. By presenting the characters of Paro and Priya as foil and counterfoil, the novelist has highlighted the obsessive patterns of behaviour among women — those who are victims owing to their socio-economic dependence on men, and also those who want to negate the pre-fixed norms of the society. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies* has been assessed from the perspective of relationships and human despair therein. *The River Churning* by Jyotirmoyee Devi conveys the social repercussions of the Indian partition that women had to face. The last article is on Sunita Jain's *A Girl of Her Age*, which, though ostensibly set against the backdrop of 1960s, remains to be a universal story of a girl who is unable to exercise her true choice owing to societal pressures.

To sum up, the book is undoubtedly a fruitful critical document that presents prospects and possibilities for further exploration. It not only touches upon the various aspects of women's writing but also succeeds in promoting the readers'response to and involvement in it.

## M.K. NAIK, *A CRITICAL HARVEST: ESSAYS AND STUDIES*

**(New Delhi: Creative Books, 2005), pp.192, Rs.400.00**

**Visvanath Chatterjee**

*A Critical Harvest* is literary criticism for the new millennium. The author, M.K. Naik, is the doyen of literary critics. In this book he has cast his net wide enough to cover all the diverse areas in which he has worked for about forty years. The areas include British literature, American literature, Anglo-Indian writing, Translation, British language teaching, and, of course, Indian English literature on which he is an internationally acknowledged authority. The essays are breathtaking in their wide range. All the sixteen scintillating essays are remarkable as much for their profound scholarship as for their originality. Naik has something new to say in each one of them.

The opening essay, Presidential Address at the All-India English Teachers' Conference in 1982, is an illuminating discussion of modernity and takes note of at least seventeen ways of looking at it. The author is well read and such exotic and exhilarating quotations as Mayakovsky's 'Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy overboard from the Streamer of Modernity' are scattered throughout this essay, nay, throughout the book. Here, as well as elsewhere in the book, Naik very pertinently points out that while we must welcome whole-heartedly the winds from the West, we should never forget that 'home is where one starts from', as Nissim Ezekiel puts it, 'Home is where we have to gather grace.' The author is well-versed in Sanskrit, Marathi and quite a few other literatures, and he often surprises us with apposite references and allusions to them. When he quotes from Horace's *Ars Poetica,* he uses Byron's delightful translation of which only a few of us are aware.

Romantic echoes are diligently traced in T.S. Eliot's juvenilia and, in the next essay, it is rightly pointed out that the Indian literary tradition, right from its beginning in ancient Sanskrit literature, has always been predominantly 'romantic'. Naik has always been an able and enthusiastic champion of Indian English literature and writes in its defence in more than one essay of the book.

Humanitarianism in Mulk Raj Anand and the theme of alienation in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry are comprehensively and competently dealt with. R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* is revisited and it is plausibly suggested that Sriram and Bharati are lovers who are incapable of true love.

The essay on James's *The Golden Bowl* is impressive. The container of the title is taken by Naik as a symbol of Europe. His study of the impact of Europe on American character in James's fiction is commendable. Walt Whitman's 'A child said, What is the Grass?' and the Marathi poet B.R. Tambe's poem 'A Blade of Grass' are perceptively compared by the learned critic in 'Two Answers'. We come to know from this essay that Tagore's poem in *The Gardener,* 'I try to weave a wreath', has a curious resemblance with Tambe's well-known lyric, 'Your eyes are such tyrants, Dear'.

The essay 'The Ignorance of the (Learned) British: An Aspect of Anglo-Indian Fiction', the first Professor G.C. Banerjee Memorial Lecture at the University of Bombay, begins with a glowing tribute to the departed scholar. In the rest of the essay the author is at his best, pointing out the limitations of most Anglo-Indian novelists. They did not know enough. 'Bottom's Fate' contains the thoughtful observations of Naik (himself a noted translator) on the art of translation. In 'A Lesson for the Teacher (of English)' and 'On Doing Research' Naik sagaciously enumerates some of the important tasks awaiting the teacher of English in India today. He inspiringly quotes the lovely lines of Emily Dickinson:

> We never know how high we are
> Till we are asked to rise;
> And then if we are true to plan,
> Our statures touch the skies.

The subject of the last paper, 'L' Envoi', is the author's farewell to Karnatak University, Dharwad, after thirty years of dedicated service. It is touching in its pleasing nostalgia and wistfulness.

To conclude, I know of no recent book of literary criticism, published in India or elsewhere, which is so ambitious and so significant. I have been refreshed by the rare phenomenon of a genuinely creative criticism. An altogether splendid book.

## M.K. NAIK, *INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY*

**(Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006), pp.180, Rs.300.00**

**K.K. Sharma**

*Indian English Poetry* by Professor M.K. Naik, who is indefatigably dedicated to the cause of the rightful place of Indian English writing in world literature, consists of sixteen critical articles on, as the author proclaims in the "Foreword", "various aspects of Indian English poetry: general surveys of periods and schools; evaluations of prominent poets; analyses of outstanding poems, long and short; and considerations of significant issues, such as Alienation and Indianness in respect of Indian English poetry" (5). The true value of the book lies in the fact that it is the first endeavour by an individual to give due consideration to the entire Indian English poetry from the beginning upto 2000.

The book opens with a concise, insightful survey of Indian poetry in English from the beginning upto Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's last poetic work published in 1965. He calls early Indian English poetry "The Romantic Dawn". He holds that most of this poetry is imitative, but the best poetic output of three poets -- Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu — is unmistakably conspicuous for its authenticity, individuality and rootedness in the Indian tradition. The second essay presents a reappraisal of Sri Aurobindo's poetry. After referring to the extollers and debunkers of Sri Aurobindo, M.K. Naik brings out the essential originality of the author of the inimitable epic *Savitri* and more than two hundred shorter poems. The next critical piece offers a comparative study of Rabindranath Tagore and the Marathi saint poet Tukaram. Somehow, it smacks of the critic's bias towards the Marathi saint poet. It is followed by another interesting comparative study of Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das as poets of love. M.K. Naik's perceptiveness is evident when he states that while Sarojini Naidu's love poetry is centred upon the innocence of love, Kamala Das's is mainly concerned with the experience of love.

The next ten essays are devoted to modern poetry. There is a very useful article on the modernist school of poetry (beginning with Nissim Ezekiel) which the veteran critic concludes with the

observation that all modernist poets have their models in great modern English poets like T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden but "they have produced their best work, only when they have seen themselves in relation to their roots: as Ezekiel does in *Hymns in Darkness*, Kolatkar in *Jejuri* and Mahapatra in *Relationship*" (66). A brilliant analysis of Nissim Ezekiel's famous poem "Night of the Scorpion" follows it. The learned critic opines that the basic theme of the poem is the mystery of Evil and the suffering accompanying it. He demonstrates that it is one of the best modern Indian poems in English by virtue of its thematic richness and technical excellence, and concludes that only an Indian could have written it because "the experience and the responses to it recreated here are rooted in the modern Indian situation. And an art rooted in the soil has a freshness and a vigour which no amount of clever pastiche dressed up in sheer technical virtuosity can ever hope to possess" (71).

M.K. Naik examines the poetry of Dom Moraes to highlight change, continuity and unity in it. I wish this essay should have been more comprehensive. But he is at his best when he writes on A.K. Ramanujan's search for roots. Though the poet could clearly see, and tried to make others see, "the supreme importance of having roots", the critic laments the poet's premature death because it "cut off the possibility of his reaching the very tap-root of his heritage" (90). The article that follows it is on K.N. Daruwalla's poetry which is described as "Drama Talk". It is maintained that the poet's best compositions present a captivating human drama. Explaining Daruwalla's "drama talk", he writes: "... his best poems possess a substantial thematic core, clear visualization of scene, compact and arresting presentation of incident, evocative imagery and an impressive unity of tone and effect" (99).

The tenth critical piece in the book focuses on the imagery of Jayanta Mahapatra. It begins with Mahapatra's significant statement: "Today's poem utilizes a number of images and symbols to form a whole, leaving the reader to extricate himself with the valid meaning or argument from them.... This is true of much of the poetry I have written" (103). M.K. Naik reveals that the poet draws his images from two worlds — the external world of phenomenal reality and the

surrealistic world. Then the scholarly critic infers that for Mahapatra the image is " not merely what Wyndham Lewis called the primary pigment of poetry; it is almost his characteristic way of reacting to experience, ordering it and recording it" (104). The next article offers us a perceptive analysis of Arun Kolatkar's well-known long poem "Jejuri" which overtly deals with religion. Although it presents "modern urban scepticism impinging upon ancient religious tradition", but, as M.K. Naik points out, it "is actually a conscious attempt to present in sharp contrast three major value-systems viz., those of ancient religious tradition, those of modern industrial civilization and a value-system older than both these — the Life-Principle in Nature and its ways" (118). Of these three value-systems, the last is most important.

As the book encompasses almost the entire Indian English poetry, it has a full-length essay on younger modern/ modernist poets, and one exlusively on modern women poets. In between, there is a sketchy appraisal of Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate.* I feel Seth deserves more serious consideration and Naik fails to do full justice to his poetic genius. The last two pieces are invaluable, since one concentrates upon the theme of alienation in contemporary Indian English poetry and the other upon the tantalizing issue of the Indianness of Indian English poetry. M.K. Naik rightly points out that Indianness means an awareness of the Indian synthesis, the derivation of artistic sustenance from the Indian heritage, Indianness of imagery and the artistic portrayal of Indian ethos.

In short, the book under review is essential reading for anyone interested in Indian English poetry. But it disappoints a senior scholar of Indian English literature, for it has little new to give him: most of it appeared in other books and journals years ago. The fact that a lot of old material has been reproduced without any change is evident from the lack of uniformity in the documentation of the varied essays contained in this book. M.K. Naik, being an outstanding scholar, is fully aware of this repetitiveness and hence he cites T.S. Eliot's poetic lines in his defence in the "Foreword". But everyone knows that repetition is not tedious in good poetry, while it is invariably so in prose howsoever great it may be.

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