

## Writing the Self in English : Contemporary Indian English Women Poets

–*Nishat Haider*

Indian women poets in English, despite an occasional Toru Dutt or Sarojini Naidu, could evolve their full identity as modern women only in post-independence period. The female voice, which was never fully acknowledged till recently, has emerged as a strong and powerful non-canonical device challenging the institutional hegemony. Feminist poetry, laden with defiance and rebellion that advocates a principled recalcitrance to definition, a conceptual fluidity and openness which laughs in the face of tyrannizing attempts to fix it as just one more category to be subsumed by the vast historical catalogue of male-generated concepts is a uniquely post-independence phenomenon in Indian English women poetry. Recent Indian English poetry by women may be described as the boldest assertion of the modern Indian woman. Contemporary women articulate a sense of exclusion from the masculine tradition and alienation from their feminine poetic inheritance as women at the turn of the new millennium. Reiterating that ‘our poetic ancestors are not necessarily those who come just before us in time’ (Nine Indian Poets), Eunice de Souza says, that the contemporary Indian English women poets, in relation to the conventional idea of Indian woman express themselves very freely. This is indeed true of all the Indian English women poets. They use English with clear sighted and they use English with a sense of ease. Their language, style, rhythms and forms are inventive, original and contemporary.

All thought and language is gendered and that there can be no neutral thought. The poetic creativity has itself proved to be a valid poetic experience for many of the women poets. The poetic creativity of women is primarily confined to the ethos of the self while the men

1

tend to explore it in the context of the social ethos. The conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male-oriented universe is predominantly the theme of much poetry by women. Women write to break the silence, they write in anger, they write to avenge themselves, and they write to tell their stories. Mamta Kalia, the bilingual poet, in a conversation with Eunice de Souza says, “Instead of fighting I started writing”(Talking Poems 58). For Mamta Kalia it has a cathartic value :

In my hour of discontent  
I neither shout nor rant  
I simply fill ink in my pen  
And spill it with intent.

(‘My Hour of Discontent’, Poems 78,p.17)

Elaborating on the colloquial voice, the humour and the apparently casual attitude to poetry, Mamta Kalia says, “In 1998 you cannot write in the manner of 1948. Today language is breaking down, diction is splitting up.... My words whether in English or in Hindi were never blue-blooded....It’s no good using other people’s words when you write. Others’ words are like turds when they find a place in your work. I like to work without gears or breaks”(Talking Poems 58-59). Now is a time when women are taking and moulding ‘that old material, language’ English in a way that gives them a voice. The division between genders seems irreversible. As Rukmini Bhaya Nair says:

A woman is a thing apart.  
She is bracketed off, a  
Comma, semicolon, at most  
A lower case letter, lost  
In the literate circus.

She is just a striptease  
Artist, but when she speaks  
Her poems bite, ferocious.

Rhyme and shape, primitive  
Beasts, come tamed to her  
Endangered species, they  
Recognize her desperation.

She wants, she badly wants  
Not a fresh lover, strong-man

Or clown, but a new language  
In which to hold her own.

A decentring of patriarchal power structures and reordering of the language of hierarchy to include the marginalized categories of experience is what the woman writer tries to achieve. By writing the self, the woman writer comes out of the imposed 'silence' and thereby subverts patriarchal stereotypes both ideological and linguistic. Helene Cixous states that a "feminine text" is more than subversive", designed to "smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to below up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 292). Exhorting women to bring into being a female language, Cixous says: "Woman must write herself.... Woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movements ("The Laugh of the Medusa," 279). To write with the body implies facilitating a return of the repressed, a resurrection of that which has been subordinated and treated as secondary, as dirty, as weighing us down and preventing us from rising to the perception of higher truths. Emphasizing the validity of authentic women's voice, Eunice de Souza says :

What I am as a poet is a result of what I am in all aspects of my life. I am different from other Indian women in my form of expression; what is individual is that I am willing to take the risk. But women's experience and socialization as a whole is different. So it is expected that what they write will be different. The point is not to have these differences but to be aware of them. Though all poets take risks, only

women can really talk about their lives. The battle is to validate the material to begin with- the stuff of women's lives, women's experience, not to 'transcend' being a woman. The whole level of discussion is different for male and female poets.(Zide xix)

Nabaneeta Dev Sen (a poet and a former Professor and the Head of the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, Calcutta), too, is most vocal on the question of the validity of what women have to say: 'There has been a silencing of women, simply by not reading what women write. When they want to praise you they say, "you write like a man". I don't like this; "like a man" means reaching towards a certain standard – a male standard which makes women less honest' (Zide xx). Filmmaker/poet Beheroze Shroff's strongly worded views reflect a current of thought that ran through many of the statements by poets from many different areas, writing in different languages. We need a language, she says :

There is a constant trivialization of women in India, whatever they do, but the whole area of experience that males have not touched and have refused to consider is important (e.g. the unpaid labour of motherhood). But [women poets are frequently]... dealing with anger against a world which brutalizes women, whether it's the space being taken away from them (e.g. you are always expected to do your 'duties' as a daughter, wife etc.), so that women themselves have had difficulty taking themselves seriously as writers. This is reinforced by men's discomfort with too much truth.(Zide xxvi)

We need to stop seeing each other through men's eyes (and language!); we have to have a different 'women's voice' speaking to our problems in a phallogocentric society. Kamala Das (b. 1934), the most important bilingual poet (writing novels in Malayalam and poetry in English) stands first, as she literally mapped out both linguistically, socially and emotionally the terrain of post-colonial women poets. Her manifesto in "An Introduction" (from Summer in Calcutta, 1965) speaks for all of the contemporary Indian English women poets :

I am Indian, very brown, born in  
 Malabar, I speak three languages, write in  
 Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,  
 English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave  
 me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
 Every one of you? Why not let me speak in  
 Any language I like? The language I speak  
 Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
 All mine, mine alone...

'Half English, half Indian', this poetic and literary language is now recognized and admired worldwide, but in 1965 Das had to justify her choice in India of the ex-colonial language which ought to be no one's mother-tongue. In her replies to the questionnaire of P. Lal in the Miscellany regarding the viability of English as a medium of poetic communication, she poses a counter question which is as relevant as it is emphatic: "Why in English", says she, "is a silly question. It is like asking us why we do not write in Swahili or Serbocroate. English being the most familiar, we use it. That is all."

Kamala Das presents a new aesthetic in poetic terms. As she puts it herself: "The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by the words"(The Miscellany). She confirms the view that the choice of medium is only of marginal significance since a genuine poet does not choose to write in a language which he is not fully conversant with. Kamala Das shows it in her poetry that her thought has been adequately contained in her words. Suresh Kohli observes: "'An Introduction' is vitally communicative in as much a comment on the poem as an indication of Mrs. Das's use of language which is not her mother-tongue." In "Words" the poet shows her understanding of the elusive dialectic of words :

All round me are words, and words and words,  
 They grow on me like leaves, they never  
 Seem to stop their slow growing  
 From within.....But I tell myself, words

Are a nuisance, beware of them, they  
 Can be so many things, a  
 Chasm where running feet must pause, to  
 Look, a sea with paralyzing waves,  
 A blast of burning air or  
 A knife most willing to cut your best  
 Friend's throat....words are nuisance, but  
 They grow on me like leaves on a tree,  
 They never seem to stop their coming  
 From a silence, somewhere deep within...

Last but not least, and to return to Kamala Das's poem first quoted, there is the question of language. If English is a language claimed as one's own despite the local critics, and the medium of communication with the world at large, it is also the language of colonialism. Sujata Bhatt asks :

Which language  
 has not been the oppressor's tongue?  
 Which language  
 truly meant to murder someone?

There are echoes of Derek Walcott ('... how to choose/ Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?') in her conclusion:

And how does it happen  
 that after the torture,  
 after the soul has been cropped  
 with a long scythe swooping out  
 of the conqueror's face -  
 the unborn grandchildren  
 grow to love that strange language ('A Different History').

She has much to tell about her native India and her native tongue(Gujarati), about America and Britain, and about Germany where she eventually settled down. She is, Adrian Mitchell in the New Statesman declared, 'one of the finest poets alive', and alive in a unique

way to language, to issues of politics and gender' to place and history. So if English puts Indian English women poets (and writers in general) in a peculiarly slanted position within their own country while granting them a kind of world citizenship, the multilingual Indian world is also present in a host of sounds, inflections and words. Again Sujata Bhatt in particular has made the tension between the Gujarati of her childhood and English which will not be adequately translated by any English word, a theme in her work :

The way I learned  
to eat sugarcane in Sanosra:  
I use my teeth  
to tear the outer hard chaal..., (Sherdi SugarCane')

Even when writing in English, Gujarati is ever present, just below the surface as part of that first skin, that *core* of identity

Women need to stop seeing each other through men's eyes (and language!); they need to have a different 'women's voice' speaking to their problems in a phallogocentric society. In their writings the women poets have revealed their feminine sensibility in various forms. They evidence a very strong sex-conscious- 'every woman'. Sunita Jain is 'a woman, bearer of life', Gauri Deshpande, 'an old woman' and Lakshmi Kannan, 'mere woman'. The poets are always conscious of the 'female in body' and poetry is replete with references to 'womb', 'breasts', 'pubis' and 'thighs'. Elaborating on the choice of English as the medium of poetic creativity Nabaneeta Dev Sen says :

Honestly English distances you from your mother and frees your tongue from her moral conditioning... When I was in England I started writing in English and it was much less inhibited... for example, I have a poem in English called The Emperor's New Clothes where the central image is that of a bare maple tree. In it I use the sentence, "Standing naked, in a constant state of erection." I couldn't have written it in Bangla, in fact I have not succeeded in translating it yet, even after 30 years. But when you speak in English you can say shit, you can say

4

fuck...you've been hearing them and reading them for the last twenty years, these swear words mean nothing. You can say even worse things, read them... write them, too. An ordinary word like masturbation, you can use it in conversation, a woman can, but in Bangla even a man needs guts to use these words. It's not easy. Because the language itself is inhibited. Women don't use these words in conversation and they don't use them in writing unless you want to shock your readers. Writers who want to be different have used such slang in Bangla but it's an irregular practice, a rebellious, aggressive act that is consciously transgressive. It's a good thing for the literary scene, but the language does not support such transgression. (Joseph 76)

On the stylistic front a break through has been achieved with Rukmini Bhaya Nair, the technical wizard, who has introduced English *Shlokas* and Sujata Bhatt who has added an innovative multi-lingual poem where she uses three languages (Gujarati, English and German) simultaneously in the original scripts. The stylistic front looks quite bright with these poets who proclaim:

Tears are not our style  
Erudition says it better  
( 'Shalagram' :Rukmini Nair, The Hyoid Bone,p.64 )

Never afraid to experiment with words and ideas, Rukmini Bhaya Nair (Professor of Linguistics and English at IIT Delhi), explores the complexities of gender and politics in an unusual and striking manner. Indeed, her own view has always been that she writes poetry for the same reason that she does research in Linguistics- to discover the limits of language. Expressing her sense of privilege and implicit guilt in the use of English in her poems Rukmini Nair says :

...there is something called the 'bad rani' syndrome which operates especially among women who write in English, who belong to the upper class. If you look at myth and fables and folktales, from which I draw quite a lot of my inspiration, one of the recurrent figures you get is this bad rani, the woman who, instead of producing- and this goes back to the metaphor of motherhood-who instead of producing normal children,

produces goats or chickens or some other unnatural form of offspring. As a result she's a focal point of misogyny. The offspring that she produces are unnatural but is she to blame? I think in some ways, 'foreign' English language productions constitute exactly these changeling offspring. One feels an awful sense of guilt because one is not writing in a mother-tongue. One gets into a frame of mind where one thinks, I do not have a mother-tongue, I'm producing a changeling child and so I'm producing language turned inside out. I'm unwholesomely elite, a bad rani. I may be a rani, but I'm alien, the seed that I'm producing and giving birth to is unnatural seed. I could be wrong, but I think the male writer doesn't carry this burden of guilt to the same extent because of not having to deal with the metaphor or birth, of giving to language. He is not so trapped in that metaphor. So I think the bad rani syndrome affects people like myself much more. It makes me feel that my privilege is something that distorts my language and therefore the style in which I write can become extremely contorted. But more than that it also affects the way in which I look at problems, I look at details. I am driven by the possibly false dogma that my position should push me to speak for those who are also marginalized but don't have the privileges that I have.(Joseph 144-145)

Within the patriarchal power structures, the very act of writing poetry by women is an act of emancipation. For women writers in particular, there is the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography to be explored. But there is also a difficult and dangerous walking on the ice, as women try to find language and images for a consciousness they are just coming into, and little in the past to support them. Indian English women poetry of pre-independence India was predominantly reminiscent of the romantic poetry by the British women writers. In contrast contemporary Indian English women poets (torn between commitment to feminist revolution and individual exploration, expression of female experience and sexuality), undertook an authentic expression of female experience (with a new frankness about the body) using a new range of language (English), accepting anger and sexuality as sources of creative power.

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## The Poetry of Kulbhushan Kushal : An Assessment

–N.K. Neb

Kulbhushan Kushal's poetry is in the process of gaining recognition in academic circles. Though his first collection of poems in English appeared long back in 1989 (*Shrinking Horizons*), he has been regularly contributing poems to different journals including Poetry, Poetry time, Chandrabaga, Pragati's English Journal etc. The publication of his two books in quick succession *Rainbow On Rocks* (2005), *Whirlpool of Echoes* (2006), shows that he is a prolific creative writer. Apart from being prolific, a clear progress in his poetic art, themes, and widening of his poetic concerns can be easily traced from the three books he has contributed to the Indo-English poetry.

In *Shrinking Horizons*, the poet seems to be making a deliberate attempt to explore and concentrate on philosophical aspects of language, Time, Death and the conflict between the natural and the artificial. At this stage, his major achievement lies in keeping his poetic musings free from any fixed ideological framework. He is more concerned with the nature, complexities and limitations of language as a means of communication. The treatment of Time and Death is related to their presentation as inherent threat to human existence. Thematically, these poems can be put in two different categories: the poems directed to study and analyze the hollow nature of human communication through the use of words. These poems not only expose the gap that exists between the words and meanings but also convey the message to evolve certain means for authentic ways of communication.

The second category of poems brings out the contrast between the natural and the artificial, material and the spiritual, illusion and reality, masks and faces.

One also finds poems like *Cunning Craft*, *Adventure* that refer to socio-historical and political incidents marking the poet's awareness and concern for the world around. The way the contemporary turmoil has been expressed in a subtle and artistic presentation brings out the poet's grasp on the reality informing the contemporary world. The achievement of the writer and the literary value of his creations make these poems valuable documents asserting a probe into the basic human condition the constant threat it has been subjected to.

In *Rainbow on Rocks*, Kushal concentrates on the conflicts, tensions, complexities and inherent weaknesses of the contemporary life. The loss or disregard for authentic human experience and the acceptance of the virtual reality as the natural reality forms the main concern of his poetic creation. Consequently, the poems form an expression of an anguished mind craving for the realization of uncorrupted human self. In the absence of a stable, ever valuable pattern of norms that provide spiritual bliss and peace, human beings in the present day world have been degenerated into self seeking, materialistic beings. The dazzling nature of the worldly success does not allow them to understand the shallow nature of their achievements. Instead of craving for humane values and working for the spiritual bliss and fundamental human concerns, people now remain restless to achieve false glory and the magic world of capital :

It's the time when our sly smiles  
And our magic stratagems  
Invite us to embrace  
Barren successes  
Mock satiations  
Proxy fulfillment (p.45).

The poet feels that people involve themselves in petty tricks and deep rooted conspiracies only to achieve the success which lacks the quality of providing everlasting happiness.

The poet here invites the attention of the readers to the present state of decay and its impact on human relationships. The present day

world that finds expression in different poems informs the advent of a civilization founded on money values and rationalism that tends to crush emotive and sensitive responses to life. The result of these developments has made this world a 'country of rocks' :

In the country of rocks  
Rocks alone will grow  
Rocks wrapped in rainbows  
Shall dance with the sun (Whirlpool of Echoes p.41.)

The world sans feelings and emotions has adversely affected human relationships including the commonly understood and accepted as the most sacred child – mother relationship. As everything and every aspect of human life is now based on reason, usefulness and functional utility, sanitized mothers are preferred to real mothers. Instead of a source of love, succor, security and emotional warmth mother now stands reduced to the object of display. It shows how market oriented forces and the sham that charms life in the present times has intruded human relationships.

The perception of an innocent mind uncorrupted by the 'wisdom' and reason of the prevalent thought patterns has been used by the poet to build an effective contrast. His poems 'crafty craft', Pooran, Lajjo, in Rainbow on rocks, capture the working of an innocent, rustic mind governed by a sensitive and emotional response to the world around. Whereas the poem Crafty Craft, registers the impact and understanding of the simple, innocent people regarding art, there are poems like Vengeance, Barren Successes that exhibit how the innocence and the simplicity of the innocent minds is ravished and exploited by the powers that be. Instead of the purity of mind and sincerity it is the expertise to manipulate and exploit that becomes more useful in the world governed by the power of wealth. And in such a world,

Sanitized faces  
Sanitized lips  
Sanitized sanity

Is our passion  
Decorum of the dead  
Is our passion (R.R.29)

It implies that appearances and the projected self functions as an effective currency to make the movement \ upward movement in this world smooth.

Through the presentation of people's concern for superficial aspects of life and reality Kushal highlights the postmodernist feature of the present day reality and the nature of the emerging culture. In this culture nobody has any regard for the fundamental values and community feelings that used to direct human efforts for a holistic development of personality. The underlying social values, stable norms that were used to make sense of the world and human behaviour have lost their earlier hold and seem to have become altogether irrelevant. It makes the poet think that

These are the strangest times  
When all that glitters not  
Is not gold  
And the mares now don't go  
Well with money  
And for honey you need not  
Practice hard brahmcharaya (R.R.)

Similarly, the prevalent consumerist culture and its ways are hinted at in which not only the objects even the relationships have lost any permanent relevance. In the capital oriented culture nothing seems to have the quality of being preserved and retained: Therefore,

Use and throw  
Throw and use  
Recycle bits  
Recycle wits  
And recycle relations  
Have become the way of life (p. 41)

The concept of human identity and the existence of an ultimate transcendental human self stand destabilized and challenged. In the absence of an all pervasive originary human self as the norm against which different aspects of human personality were to be understood, what gains significance is the fragmented and disseminated human identity. There is no recognizable human self to hold the ground. Consequently, the predicament of human identity can be described in the following words of the poet:

We have devised many shallow pools  
And in the moonlit nights  
Our smiles ripple in water  
And hundreds of faces are there (p.42).

the existence of multiple fragments of human self does not allow an understanding of the real original self.

In the present state of affairs even language no longer remains a competent medium to express feelings, emotions and reality. Words fail to perform their traditionally understood function of conveying the message objectively and in an authentic way so that the medium itself was associated with the message. It has resulted in a confusing gap between the medium and the message :

Medium is no more the message  
And messages all are messy  
How to interpret the interpretations  
And how to de-mean the meanings  
And disrobe the solours  
Of velvet hued flowers R.R.p. 70

The poet is rightly pained to note that such a situation creates hurdles in authentic expression of reality and communication. the repeated reference to the role of language and its limitations as a medium of expression bring out the poet's anguished reaction. It is perhaps due to the changed concept of language that now the earlier words sings and symbols appear in altogether different and strange contexts destabilizing the traditionally ascribed sense of the fixity of meaning . As the meaning

now indicates of being constructed instead of being originary, it is not only the words that stand displaced from a close relation with meanings even the sacred and pious symbols and mythical elements stand dislocated and used in commercial rather than the religious or spiritual context.

It's the festival of brands  
Dronacharya is back in our studios  
With all his archery stunts  
And Krishna is there  
On our pastes and paan masalas  
Goddesses are guarding  
The commodities cheap P.49

In their callous pursuit of wealth and success in business and commerce, the people have stopped respecting the difference between the high and the low, material and spiritual, emotional and the economic, the sacred and the profane. It is all due to the destabilized sense of the relationship between words and the meanings, signifier and the signified. In the name of multiplicity of possibilities people have not only ruthlessly exploited all aspect of life for commercial ends but also found an easy excuse for their indifference towards values and moral concerns. Kushal's poems exhibit his awareness of this aspect of contemporary social reality.

In Rainbow On Rocks, the poet registers the sensitive responses of a mind gradually being exposed to the dangers of this change informing the nature of the present day world. The poems in this collection may be treated to be indicative of the second stage of the poet's journey. Starting with philosophical views expressed in Shrinking Horizons, his poems mark the poet's encounter with life in the topsy-turvy world his encounters with different situations and understanding of the experiential world in a culture sans roots make his poems valuable testaments of the emerging reality and the tensions resulting out of it. It is through his journey in this chaotic world marking spiritual

barrenness that he notices how human beings have turned insensitive. Oblivious to the nature of their existence people fail to realize the deterioration that has made life stagnant. Being ignorant or insensitive to the present conditions of decay they do not ever think of changing their lot. They seem to have become accustomed to the life they are leading. The innate state of human existence has been expressed in Kushal's poems through the symbol of rocks. Human beings, in this world have turned into rocks. They simply exist without trying to evolve any vision of life.

The next stage of Kushal's poetic journey can be traced in his recently published collection of poems, Whirlpool of Echoes. These poems exhibit a sustained effort of the poet to unearth the underlying patterns of life in the form of fundamentals against which the journey of the self be evaluated. In the process, while examining the external world, the poet seems to be more involved in the exploration of his own real self. It brings out a persistent clash of personalities within. There are multiple personas that intensify the conflicts within. These selves take the shape the symbolic form of different things. They come forth as different characters, objects, ideas in the form of objective correlatives etc. these elements emerge to dramatize different contrasting world views. Though the strain involving self discovery runs throughout Kushal's poetry, Whirlpool of echoes forms a more concentrated effort to voice this concern. In this context, the interaction dramatized between You and I, in 'The Perils Ahead' seems to develop in the form of a dialogue of a Self with the Self'. Both the selves carry multiple meanings and embody plethora of interpretations and possibilities. In the same way the poem Mirror, and Mirror yours sincerely, effectively present the inner conflict related to the authentic and the created self:

Tell me mirror whose face is this  
Dancing behind the glass wall  
Whose eyes quiz me  
Whose lips kiss me  
Through whose ears I listen  
The songs of cactus p. 82.

The dilemma regarding the nature of the self continues when the poet exhibits how the different shades of the self appear in a sequence to keep the real self either hidden or elusive :

Is it the face of a boy  
Who quizzed his looks  
Is it the face of a friend  
Who promised stars and springs pp 82-83

The poetic self in Whirlpool of Echoes, marks that stage of the self's journey in the world at which the impressions both positive as well as negative, seek expression. Their jumbled nature blurts out in the form of unrecognized voices that have turned into sounds that lack an order. Their impact on the mind does not follow a systematic, linear ordered pattern. This working of human mind, in which it receives different images as a passive receptor forms one of the major thematic aspects of Kushal's poems. The images in the mirror occur without any order fixed by the mirror. It is after the images captured by the mirror are awarded some order by the onlooker that they gain some meaning. Similarly, the human mind receives different images and experiences but does not award any meaning to them until they are associated with some already adopted system of understanding. It implies that the existence of an ordered world of reality is a myth. Kushal's poems in this collection highlight the mythical nature of the ordered world. In fact this myth is created by man to develop a referral against which the external reality is understood. These ideas find artistic expression in his poems, Lost an won, Mirror Yours Sincerely, Curious River.

Defamiliarization is a very effective strategy in creative writing. It not only adds to the element of surprise to intensity the poetic effect but also gives new perspectives to look at and understand different things. Kushal's poetry uses automatized expressions and images in such a way that they gain new significance and add fresh perspectives to the already existing ideas, concepts and beliefs. In the process, sometimes these poems tend to destabilize traditionally accepted views prevalent in the

form of public wisdom. For example, we find references to wisdom of the fables like Pigeons and the hunter, the hare and the tortoise, etc. the poet here wants us to understand these things in the changed contexts. Instead of rejecting them altogether, the poet intends to reorient them :

And those often quoted  
Recipes of success  
Are stale mantras  
Ineffective  
Promising no instant solutions p. 17

The ideas that formed a part of folk wisdom and were considered to be stable principles have lost their relevance in the changed scenario. The poet feels that these elements :

Are no good  
In this season  
Of murky dealings  
And ruthless trade  
Of elusive transactions p. 16 – 17

His poems Dreams are ..... and Coffin of dead facts offer altogether fresh views about dreams and newspapers.

Apart from concentrating on specific themes concerning human predicament in general and the nature of decay informing contemporary social reality, Kushal's poetry exhibits his artistic growth through the use of corresponding poetic devices. Instead of unidirectional movement in a systematic, ordered way, Kushal's poems develop in the form of multi-directional poetic pieces emitting sparks of fresh thoughts. Most of his poems constitute micro units that tend to form independent entities. The poeticity in these smaller units lies in the form of patterns based on meanings, contrasting pairs of words, twisted thought patterns and metaphors carrying multiple possibilities. The use of images like barometer of truth, mock action drills, captured birds, parrot pecking slices of honour, prayers are confetti, Gods swallowing the prayers raw etc., mark the use of fresh images. Such images gain greater

significance in their potential to trigger off a series of associations to the elements of folklore, literature and myth.

A discerning reader of poetry finds that Kushal's poetry gives a befitting expression to the contemporary world of false glory, sham and deathlessness. His poetic craft suits the themes taken up by him. His subtle use of irony, effective use of paradox, use of certain sentences and phrases that have the quality of remaining stuck to the mind of reader compensate the reader for the difficulty faced in unearthing the real significance of his poetic structures. Kushal's poetry may seem demanding to the commonplace or the casual readers, it no doubt, has the potential to carve a specific place in the world of Indian English Poetry.

## Images And Expressions Of Reflections In The Poetry Of Tejinder Kaur

–Gurdev Singh Chandi

Poetry is a means of discovering the man in himself. The poet is desirous of witnessing different shades of poetry spreading far and wide. Poetry raises some fundamental questions to manipulate relationship between Consciousness and self-consciousness. In this way the poet tries to explore the relationship between his conscience and external realities. Likewise a poet aims at manifesting common humanity. In this era of high technology and the concept of globalization, the poet too wishes to explore the farthest layers of relationships. He seeks to be composite, expressive, concise and contradictory as well.

Women poets are no exception. They too are willing to express themselves trenchantly. “With regards to the new trends and techniques in women’s poetry there is a remarkable movement connecting the domestic with the public spheres of work.... Other than the skilful use of standard devices, the semiotic, symbolical and metaphorical properties of language help to emphasize the feminist strategies of interrogation”(Biswas:17). They write with the awareness of the psycho-spiritual strains, the moral dilemmas and the paradoxes. Their feminist quest for identity is consistent. They write about nature, reality, socio-political conditions, traditional values, intellectual and moral challenges, love, sex, desire, dreams and disappointments. Their metaphors and images reflect their inner responses to what they observe.

Tejinder Kaur, an emerging voice of a new poet, has three collections of poems to her credit, *Reflections*, *Images*, and *Expressions* published in 2001, 02, 03 respectively. By asking a question from herself, what is a poem? she explains, “ Not binding it in any traditional definition, I

11

would say, it is the outlet and expression of a person’s experienced- personally or intuitively-, sincerely reflected, heartfelt thoughts, feelings and observations.”( *Reflections*:iii). She not only defines but also relates the reason for her writing, in her poem ‘Why I Write?’

Some thoughts, feelings, emotions,

Ideals, dreams, conflicts,

Bubble up in me,

.....

Yearning to be shared.

(*Reflections*:33)

Tejinder feels relieved after the expression and extends her thanks to the act of writing which helps her grow and organize herself. She seems to be believing in the Yeatsian dictum that poetry is essentially a method of organizing oneself through words. Her poetry is an imagistic expression of her reflections on the various experiences of life. She writes having her eyes fixed steadily on the object and she treats her poems as a medium of remaking herself. But these experiences are not personal records only. She has tried to represent in her poetry what all people experience in their own ways. “Poetry in Indian English expresses Indian ethos and sensibility and is in no way cut off from the main trends, which find powerful utterances in Indian literature” (Kumar: 41). Tejinder Kaur analyses the situation and carries on an eternal discourse with the realities around her. Cultural environment and degradation of values appear to be deeply rooted in her thoughts

Ha! they stand on pulpits

In high positions, delivering lectures

On declining values and culture

.....

Forget they grabbed positions

By sacrificing values

Which they advocate to restore.

( *Reflections*:14 )

There are three major trends running parallel in her poetry compiled in three collections: poetry of self, poetry of social consciousness and poetry of super consciousness. This is a journey from personal self to social self, leading it to universality. Poetry is a criticism of life as Carlyle says, ‘the genuine voice’. “Tejinder Kaur thinks and feels ‘the rhythm of life, which is not smooth/ to be set in a pattern.’ She understands the design ‘at deeper level / planned and schemed by Maker’ just as she is aware of transitoriness of the drama, the ‘foolishness of grabbings, manoevrings/ leaving materials, carrying/ accumulated imprints.’ She reflects the process of her personal growth vis-à-vis the complex of egoistic clashes, lack of mutual understanding, and weakening values of fidelity, honesty, commitment and love” (Singh : 6-7). Kaur chronicles the events which influence her, represent the age she lives in. She expresses her anguish on the repressing establishments and yearns for freedom

I seek shattering of cocoon  
 Built round my own self  
 To meet my Source. (Reflections: 26)

and grieves over the plight of human beings who remain

Occupied in conflicts, manoevrings,  
 Revenges, scheming, plotting  
 .....  
 Stuffing our minds and hearts  
 With evil impressions. (Reflections: 20)

Kaur feels discontented with the obnoxious and terrorizing pursuits of individuals who are

Making the mother- earth barren  
 Environment deadly  
 Through nuclear and  
 Biological weapons. (Images:15)

She feels that no doubt the world has become

A global village  
 Vast expanding space  
 No longer  
 An elusive mirage. (Expressions:10)

but the unpredicted and disappointing behavior of man, around the globe, presents the picture of a hollow man. The poem ‘University Dons’ lays bare the hidden faces of the university leaders behind the mask and beneath the layers of hypocrisy. The poetess derides their non-academic pursuits

Experts in  
 Tricky use of words  
 Dominating  
 Powerful scenes  
 Achieving  
 Self-pertaining targets  
 Lobbying with  
 Like aiming’ friends’ (Expressions: 11)

The same discontented agony appears in ‘Where is the Nation?’ where the mercenary pursuits of national leaders are exposed

Busy achieving  
 Selfish ends  
 Filling their coffers  
 By attaining power. (Expressions : 41)

Apart from reflecting over the negative attitudes of human beings, in the context of social, economic disorders, the poetess in these three collections also explores a variety of themes embodying self-analysis, observations and reflections. While reflecting over “Who am I?” she introspects

I am-  
Body, soul  
Mind, intellect  
Emotions, passions  
Desires, feelings  
Aims, ambitions.

(*Expressions* : 43)

The poetess is perturbed at the basic anxiety that raises question about human life. She is fully conscious of the limitations of human beings and the transitoriness of youth and beauty

This sight of beauty  
Will give a feast  
To eyes  
Till the painting lasts.  
Ah! my youth and beauty  
Waning  
Day-by-day.

(*Expressions*: 15)

Kaur reflects that in the age of hi-know-how and fastest means of communication every one is actually stuck in narrow grooves. What one needs is 'self correction' with the help of 'meditation' to cultivate the moments of 'aleness'. These poems are also infested with divine, spiritual and religious themes. The poetess heaves a sigh of relief in 'Surrender' with the belief that 'Faith does Heal' which establishes 'A Divine Image.'

Kaur in these poems also explores woman from different angles, shades and in various relations and roles as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, student and maid-servant

She passes her life  
doing household chores  
meeting family's hopes  
pleasing all at home

keeping harmony and peace  
ends her life  
playing roles.

(*Reflections*:16)

In another poem 'She' the combination of being and nothingness of woman exalts the circumstantial rupture. R. K. Sharma ( Sharma:75) rightly comments on Tejinder's feminist stance, "Truly feminist in her statements, Tejinder takes up the cause of demoralized , marginalized woman who is a victim of ' oppressing systems'"

Awaiting her  
Entrapment  
To crush  
Her being.

(*Reflections*:22)

In the lower realms of society, woman has to face an inhuman behavior. The poem 'Tandoor' reveals the destiny of an ill-fated woman in the hands of money hungry politicians

Woman, you suffer so much.  
Now they roast you in the tandoor  
for political gain. Your torturers  
shock and shame the civilized world  
in novel ways every day.

(*Reflections*: 47)

The amalgam of visual, auditory and kinesthetic imagery in these poems is quite rich. Kaur discovers new meanings through images of woman and nature, explores life and its purpose, the relationships between body and soul through unmitigated passions. She finds glimpses of infinity in nature. She is enamoured of the beauty of nature which reincarnates itself into a woman and this provides ample opportunities to the poetess to dwell on the mystery of life. The poetess imbibes objects and forces in nature personified with human qualities

Nature-  
Like a youthful bride

Clad in  
Multi-hued  
Flowery dress  
Waits for valentine  
Radiating  
Message of love.

(Expressions: 13)

Renu Gupta comments in this connection, “Tejinder’s love of nature’s beings and objects is reflected in ‘She-a-Mother’, ‘Cute Kittens’, ‘Rays of Sun’, ‘Cycle of Nature’, ‘Bougainvillea’. Her acute sensibility enables her to find beauty in and learn from a very common but neglected object- a dust bin- in ‘Ode on a Dust Bin’”(Gupta : 76).

Being a University Professor, Kaur finds herself always amidst young boy and girl students. She empathizes with their joyful experiences in the poem “University Boys and Girls”

Bubbling with life  
Cracking jokes in Coffee house  
Clad in best attire  
Planning to go on picnic tours  
Full of zeal and fun  
I see a new crowd of youth  
Freshening the aura  
Of University.

(Expressions:17)

But at the same time the poetess does contemplate about their dark future and reflects on the issues of education, knowledge, repression, and dependency. In the age of unemployed crowd she is worried about the ‘Dark gateways of emptiness’ and ‘frustration’ waiting for them who would be

Hankering here and there  
.....  
To be made use of

Acquired knowledge  
Suitably paid for.

(Expressions: 17)

God is the unending quest for the poetess. She searches Him everywhere in the cosmos with the desire to clarify some unsolved queries

I close the eyes to have a look of You

But I do not see Your presence anywhere. (Reflections: 9)

There are many other thematic motifs prevailing in various other poems. There is a rich variety of subjectivity. These poems are the generalizations of her own intimately felt experiences. In the ‘Preface’ to *Expressions* Kaur expresses her feelings about her urge for creativity:“an attempt has been made to express my observations, feelings, thoughts, experiences, beliefs, reflections, responses and revelations pertaining to various issues. My observations and critique of University dons, clergy class, politicians, dark future of young boys and girls and degenerating values have been sitting heavy on my heart for long to find an outlet through poetic expressions.” The poetess gives an un-inhibited expression to her thoughts. She transcends her concern about social issues, borrowing images, metaphors, symbols and similes from nature. She feels free from emotional tension, discreetly and cautiously describing man-society relationship, and in the process, establishing deep emotional ties with her readers. She seems concerned about human existence, identity, and the existential crises in the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious and plural society of India.

In these three collections, the style is growing firm and smooth. The subject matter has advanced from simplicity to complexity. The first collection *Reflections* suffers from some evident shortcomings such as repetition of subject matter, words, interjections and phrases. The tone is informal and colloquial. In the second and third collections, *Images* and *Expressions*, despite the surface transparency, the contemporary references have been juxtaposed with the variety of themes. The poems are short verses and each one is a poetic vignette.

In each poem the structure is determined by experiential logic patterns. Some poems have ironical touches too but the satire is not very pungent. Language is fully able to enact the meanings. Poetry is well concerned with the contemporary issues and it is both conventional and innovative. “She has touched different aspects of human life, its sorrows, joys, desires, emotions, relations and simple but subtle truths as the themes of poetry.”(Beri:82) .The poetess believes in the presentation of reality, divinity and transcendentalism. “The critic in her helps the poet articulate her views in a simple and straight forward manner without losing her rhythm.”(. Singh: IBC, 9). Her poetry is simple, introspective, analytical and an intuitive representation of life. “The scaffolding for Kaur’s poetic method can be seen in her lines. Kaur’s poems make claims for community.... One aspect of this malaise is its splintering of consciousness.... With their recurrent motifs of pain, mercy, time, laying good foundations and overcoming conflicts, the poems are the voice of Kaur’s heart, soul and mind” remarks Patricia Prime (Prime:17). These poems are a personal testament of Tejinder Kaur’s spectrum of varied experiences ranging from personal and social to universal.

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## Auden as a Love Poet

–R.S. Jhanji

Whystan Hugh Auden belongs to the age of change and anxiety of twentieth century. First World War influenced the modern society tremendously. There occurred a destabilisation and shattering of religious, moral, social, economic, political and humanistic values. In order to remove disillusionment, jealousy, selfishness and decaying of personality from England, Auden made his appearance. He advocated 'a change of heart' to bring happiness in the bitter, dark and sorrow lives of the modern men. It is through the principle of love that Auden tries to establish an atmosphere of brotherhood, tolerance and co-operatoin. He regards love as the panacea for all evils and sorrows.

Throughout his poetic career, Auden shows a remarkably steady development in his concept of love. In the very beginning, love had a rather vague and undefined meaning :

*Love is in him one of the most elusive of terms  
whose aspect and meaning changes as fast as  
Protens changed when seized by aMenelaus in  
hopes of getting him a propesy.<sup>1</sup>*

As Auden's thought developed, his 'love' took on fuller and clear meaning, thus, there are continuous shifts in his ideas regarding love.

The most remarkable characteristic of Auden's love poetry is that it distinguishes itself from the traditional love poetry in England by its significant intellecutal content and effect. Love is not presented as an emotional realization of personal experiences but as vitalizing force or a healing principle. There can not be two opinions in labelling Auden as a Romantic poet in his earlier poetry because it exhibits a few traces

of Romanticism. But as he matured, he discarded the early influences of Romanticism and adopted his dispassionate and realistic attitude of anti-Romanticism. His anti-Romanticism can be proved by enumerating some peculiar techniques, ideas and themes of his poetry. *First*, there is no rapture, agony, regret, yearning passion in his love poetry unlike Keats, Yeats, Browning, Shakespeare, Donne etc. There is no description of red lips and rosy cheeks of a lady in his poems. *Second*, he was keen to communicate his views to his readers, and, if possible, to establish a rapport with them. He was also against the Romantic notion of 'art for art's sake.' *Third*, a poet, according to Auden, should be impersonal and objective :

*A poet must be clinical, dispassionate about life...  
A poet must have no opinions, no decided views  
which he seeks to put across in his poetry.<sup>2</sup>*

By taking these facts in consideration, we can dare say Auden as an anti-Romantic poet.

The acute moralistic and intellectual concern of Auden forbades him indulging in realization of love as a felt experience in the conventional manner. He has ever been in search of a principle that may set in order the warring elements in human personality as well as in human society, and thereby bring about a state of social harmony and individual fulfilment. Richard Hoggart analyses only a few of Auden's love poems, first, exemplifying his objective manner and generalizing habit in these lyrics and secondly, while dealing with his early themes.<sup>3</sup> M.K. Spears deals with Auden's love lyrics while discussing the style of his songs and makes no attempt at a detailed aesthetic analysis of such poems.<sup>4</sup> Gerald Nelson and George W. Bhalke concentrate mainly on his longer poems in which love ceases to remain a dominant theme.

Auden as a poet always fights on two points-one of analyzing and defining love in relation to the human condition; and the other of exploring the suitable modes of expression for his ideas. In certain

cases we fail to apprehend the proper ideological significance of love. The *Poem X* of *Poems* begins with the poet's acknowledgement of the impossibility of defining love :

*Love by Ambition  
of definition  
suffers partition*

But one can understand the proper ideological significance of love as a concept from the thought and imagery of the poem. In the prologue to *Look, Stranger* : love is invoked as the "*Interest itself in thoughtless Heaven*", to make simpler, "*the beating of man's heart*". It is obvious that love here is a personification of some abstract integrating force that may cure and pacify the disorders of troubled heart. Love cannot exist in disintegrated individuals or persons who have a strong death-wish. Love exists everywhere with vitality. It is equated with the Freudian Eros-the basic life-giving force in human beings which realizes itself in the full freedom of instincts in man. To Auden, failure of life, evident in numerous perversions, guilt and ailments is the result of the failure of love. Auden also says that mere exchange of greetings is not love and mere instinctive look is just a perversion :

*And smiling of  
This gracious greeting  
'Good day. Good Luck'  
Is no real meeting  
But instinctive look  
A backward love*

**(*Poems, XVII*)**

Similarly, *Poem X* of *Poems* describes that love is not a negative phenomenon but it is something positive, and, therefore, different from the negative attitudes of selfishness, jealousy and despairing guilt. Love ends up in most people by becoming a search for happiness or a gratification of the senses. *Poem IX* of *Poems* is the expression of

17

disillusioned and disheartened lover who finds himself completely incapable of loving as life has failed him. He is in conflicts and aware of his incapacities which do not offer his love any guidelines to assert itself. He can be taken as a prototype of T.S. Eliot's Prufrock, having indecision and inertia as the chief traits of his personality. Although the effect of pathos of a situation is the determining factor in both the poems but Eliot's treatment of the love song is more dramatic and emotional than the psychological lyric of Auden. Auden uses the Lawrencean idea of "*lumbar ganglion*"<sup>5</sup> along with the evolutionary idea of extinction of species. The way in which Auden's speakers "*talk the things they say, the allegorical framework they often exist in-all have a psychological cast.*"<sup>6</sup>

The perversion of Eros is described as the '*negative inversion of will*', which has produced '*intolerable neural itch*' and '*distortions of ingrown virginity*' instead of a vital and life-giving love. In such condition, the lover's sole aim becomes to gratify his senses, to achieve happiness from every source. Thus, Auden presents a panoramic view of a diseased land which is devoid of a vitalizing kind of love. Self-regarding love causes failure of life in every society because it is the worst kind of love in which everybody turns out to be a faithless and selfish person. In the "*Others*" Auden describes three types of such lovers who have a great role in befalling sorrows and miseries on the human beings. The first are those who are excessive lovers of themselves and their neighbours, the second are defective lovers of God, and third, the perverted lovers. Auden's purpose is to suggest this degeneration and perversion of love as the cause of social and moral degeneration of his country. The inhabitants of his land are victims of defective and excessive self-love, and consequently they have all become dreamers engaged hopelessly in the task of wish-fulfillment through their elusive dreams. Fear and hatred dominate man's life and love has lost its healing power only due to perversion to Eros into narrow forms of self-regarding love. In Auden's poetry "*we are given so many lists of the fetishes of*

*abnormal and difficult sexuality that we tend to believe a normal or easy sort not only rare but non-existent."*<sup>7</sup>

Auden celebrates love as an idea of human fulfillment attained through reconciliation of the self and the ego-the unconscious and conscious forces operating in human life. Alongwith description of Eros, he deals with the death-wish also which expresses itself in various forms of self-love. Hence, Auden, instead of writing poems of love in sensuous diction, makes psychological analysis of the failure of love, and thus indirectly suggests the validity of love as a healing principle.

The dominant theme of the poetry of the thirties is the self-love. "*Look Stranger*" has certain poems with a thematic structure of love, and the antithesis presented here is between selfless, disciplined, authentic love and selfishness props up in it. Its function of an elixir starts diluting with the advent of guilt and narrowness. Physical passion and desire for sexual gratification initiate the degeneration and disintegration of true and disciplined love. Similar idea is contained in *Poem XX* of "*Look Stranger*" where love goes in a wrong direction and as a consequence brings about a weakening of the will :

*Look gave thee power, but took the will.*

Climbing the mountains of fears alone was painful experience for the lover but when the beloved accompanies him, he feels much convenient and satisfied. But, they fail in their mission to see the view of the other side of the mountain because they looked only at each other's eyes. Although the poem deals with a felt experience, the tone is discursive instead of being emotional. The final effect, which the poem has on us, is intellectual rather than of a feeling state. Similarly *Poem XXVII* of "*Look Stranger*" makes us cautious about the dangers of sexual love because it originates from guilt, ill-will, jealousy and hatred. This type of love widens the gap between two lovers and the process of heart purification is confronted with impediments. Love, which fails to bridge the gap between conflicting lovers, which fails to purify the heart, to spread an atmosphere of brotherhood and goodwill, is the worst kind

of love. This should be left away because it exhibits an unhealthy atmosphere in society.

Auden's condemnation of selfish love does not originate from the freedom of unconscious but from an urge to change the environment with the help of reason and discipline. He tries to harness love for the benefit of society so that people may come up from their selfish and petty interests to build an atmosphere of creativity, brotherhood, and well-being. For the achievement of this goal, Auden gives an alternative from of love for the selfish love. The love which he devises to champion the hearts is selfless and disciplined love. This love rises above the interests of an individual person or group to include love for the whole community, for the whole world. Individual and private interests must be sacrificed for the larger interests of the country. Selfish love is the manifestation of hatred whereas the social love is realization of true love. Love and hatred are now seen as two hostile and conflicting forces operating in the form of selfless and selfish love respectively. *Poem XXVII* of "*Look Stranger*" depicts how selfless and disciplined love is pushed aside by hatred and ill-will and how calamities and suffering befall on a person :

*While the disciplined love which alone could have  
employed these engines*

*Seemed far too difficult and dull, and when hatred  
promised*

*An immediate dividend, all of us hated.*

The ultimate choice rests with the individual who can make or mar his/her life. If a person adopts the diseased life of selfish love or the healthy one which is promised by a disciplined love, he will be responsible for his own state of affairs. He wishes to make people aware of the fact that the gains of hatred are very short-lived and vulnerable. People must champion hatred to inculcate love among one another, and Auden advocates this very idea in his "*September 1, 1939*" when he writes :

*We must love one another or die,*

Similarly in *Poem XXI* of "*Look Stranger*", the necessity of a right choice and action as a means of the fulfillment of true love is made evident in an effective poetic form in which thought and feeling are harmoniously blended. As the speaker in the role of a lover speaks directly to his beloved, his love-speech is "*less formal than usual*.<sup>8</sup> The moral of the poem is that love that prompts instinctual desires is not to be trusted, and love can attain its fulfillment only when instinct is made subservient to reason.

As Auden's thought and philosophy matured, he felt that human beings are neither the paragons of virtue nor the embodiment of evil but they are normal beings with a queer blending of virtues and vices, joys and woes and cheers and sufferings. It is, therefore, natural that nobody can be free from limitations or shortcomings of one sort or the other. At this stage, Auden's concept of love becomes humanistic, a way of living. In "*Lay your sleeping head, my love*" (in "*Another Time*"), the lover accepts the love of his beloved even when he is conscious of her faults and limitations. The lover meditates that though her beloved is lying asleep on his human though faithless arm, she is very beautiful and acceptable to him with all faults and lapses :

*But in my arms till break of day*

*Let the living creature lie,*

*Mortal, guilty, but to me*

*The entirely beautiful.*

Auden is more interested in the acceptance of love than with the passionate treatment of the emotional situation. Thus, love is not altogether emotional; it is guided by intellect as well as emotion. Only this attitude of humanistic love can redeem us from our guilt and anxiety to become a source of human satisfaction. In "*Dear, though the night is gone*", (*'Look Stranger'*) the lover's dream of his beloved confessing another love suggests the lover's own unconscious desire of seeking a

19

new love. This poem depicts realism of human love with great emotional force and rhythmic beauty. Similarly, in "*Fish in the unruffled lakes*" (*'Look Stranger'*) the lover finds perfection, innocence and majesty of animals' life in the voluntary love of his beloved. These qualities are absent from the life of human beings.

Man must make a complete surrender to "*Love*" to attain his ultimate objective—redemption from sin, guilt and anxiety. In *Poem IX* of "*Another Time*" Auden makes it evident that only by surrendering oneself to "*Love*" can one go to Eden which otherwise cannot be attained through any other method. The important thing at this stage is the acceptance of the human conditions as it is because man is able to improve his lot through love. Love at this stage is not described as a source of creative vitality or as a selfless commitment to the goal of social harmony and order but is presented as a source of our fulfillment as human beings. This concept of love varies from the concept of love as Healer, but it leads us to the same destination.

Auden's "*Epithalamion*" (*Another Time*) is an expression or celebration of universal love which transcends the national barriers that divide man from man. He takes love beyond both conjugal affection and an integrating force, and exalts it to the level of universal humanistic level. Similar idea is expressed in "*Prothalamion*" with a greater effect. Auden says about the poetic speech of Robert Frost that "*it is the speech of a mature mind, fully awake and in control of itself, its not the speech of dream or of uncontrollable passion.*"<sup>9</sup> This statement can be applied well to his own poetic speech.

The acceptance of religious faith is caused by our broadmindedness which forces us to accept love alongwith all its limitations and imperfections. The ugly face of love is accepted warmly by a humanist man who is aware of guilt and is reconciled with the importance of love as "*Agape*". *Agape* is the Christian concept of love which is universal, disciplined, divine and selfless as opposed to the human, narrow, and selfish love. Auden's original idea of guilt as caused by

repressed sexuality or by a diseased environment is now linked with the idea of Original Sin, and the personal or social love of the earlier phase transforms into universal love. Freedom is now found in the recognition of man's sinfulness, and it can be redeemed only by a humble acceptance of it before God. Agape is *"the emotion that the spiritual man feels to exist between him and God and fellow Christian."*<sup>10</sup> Auden also says that *"Agape requires that we love our enemies, do good to those that hate us and forgive those who injure us, and this command is unconditional."*<sup>11</sup> Agape is, therefore the highest form of love which brings us closer to God as well as to our fellow-beings.

Agape or universal love is the theme of *"September 1, 1939"* where it is regarded as a great healer and is contrasted with selfish and personal love which is so frequent :

*For the error bred in the bone  
Of each woman and each man  
Craves what it cannot have  
Not universal love  
But to be loved alone.*

Auden describes here that divine love or Agape is far superior to Eros which we all possess and leads us to *"negation and despair."* It is only through leaving Eros that man can find Agape as *"an affirming flame."* By attributing more importance to religion and Agape, the theory of curing human love through Marxism started losing its grip from Auden. The psychology of Freud and the theory of Marx failed to give solution to the deplorable conditions of man. Selfless love is the only cure which can solve this problem more effectively by accepting a faith in God. In *"New Year Letter"*, Auden stresses upon the need of universal love by saying :

*We need to love all since we are  
Each a unique particular  
That is no giant, god or dwarf,  
But one odd human is isomorph;*

In *"For the Time Being"*, Auden personifies love as the abstract concept of the divine will. The Agape can be realized through the reconciliation of the individual will with the Logos-the divine will. As Gabriel tells Mary :

*Hear, child, what I am sent to tell  
Love wills your dream to happen, so  
Love's will on earth may be, through you,  
No longer a pretend but true*

Gabriel further explains the fall as consequence of the denial of the divine love. Though Auden continues to explore new meanings of love, his concept of love as a Healer does not change. It always remained *"a form of mental therapy, a gloriously effective psycho-analysis, a liberator, a cleanser, a realizing and enlarging power."*<sup>12</sup>

The poem, *"In sickness and in Health"*, also celebrates the same theme of human weakness of self-love and the possibility through Agape. The neurotic sexual perversions and political violence are both described as expression of a metaphysical despair caused by self-love. The lover finds it very difficult to achieve true love as there are many obstacles and hindrances on the way. However, in the later poems of the fifties and sixties, love as an idea or theme ceases to be Auden's major concern. By adopting Christianity as the ultimate solution for human miseries, his quest for the meaning of love came to an end.

By using Marxism and Freudianism, Auden failed to solve the problems of human beings. It is only through the acceptance of Agape, through the sacrificing of private interest in the larger interest of humanity, that man can be redeemed from his guilt, anxiety, sufferings and sins. Though Auden's meaning of love continued to change throughout his life, his concept of love as a healer remained the same.

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10. J.B. Broadbent : *Poetical Love* (Lodon : Chatto and Windus, 1964) p.9.
11. W.H. Auden, "*The Prince's Dog*" in *The Dyer's Hand*, (London, Faber Faber, 1963), p.200.
12. Richard Hoggart, quoted in R.N. Srivastva's *W.H. Auden the poet*, (Doaba House, Delhi 1979), p.73.

## Mumanistic Concerns and Lofty Messages in the Poetry of Vijay Vishal

–*Tejinder Kaur*

Vijay Vishal is one of the forceful voices in the literary gamut of Indian English Poetry whose poems in the two poetry collections titled *Speechless Messages* (1992) and *Parting Wish* (2001) like those of the other poets of the third generation who began publishing in 1980s and 1990s are “city-struck, linguistically dazzling and experimental, explicit and earthy, strongly individualistic, meditative and esoteric...gender-conscious and uniformly ‘clever’” (Shah, 14). Like them he too speaks in a “self-searching and self-assuring voice”(Dwivedi, 4). Assessing the contribution of these “new voices” C. Subba Rao remarks that with their poetic creations

Indian English Poetry has come a long way from either playing the sedulous ape to English masters or being overwhelmed by the rich legacy of the Indian past. Not only has the poet brought about a secularization of the sacred idiom in which the Indian poet was wont to refer to Gods and Goddesses, he has been able to put in perspective age-old beliefs, rituals and rites of passage of immemorial India and their relevance to contemporary times. (Rao, 58).

Rao proclaims that these “small scale reflections” “need not be dismissed “ Bijay Kumar Das, while comparing the new poets with those of earlier two generations, comments :

Indian English Poetry has now taken for its themes various Indian subjects from legend, folklore to contemporary Indian situations. Our poets no longer sit in ivory towers and sing about birds and cuckoos.

They are alive to their contemporary situations. (Das, 20).

Makarand Paranjape too points out the immensity of themes and styles available in the new poetry but he emphasizes its freshness, "new ethos "and "celebration of difference rather than conformity." (Paranjape, 58).

Visual's poetic voice is unique, confident and optimistic and the range of his concerns is vast and varied stretching from "social criticism to universalism, female exploitation to male hegemony, gender bias to dual standards, hypocrisy to self-knowledge, childhood to age, personality development to anecdotal wisdom, social barrenness to spiritual awakening, familial relationships to conjugal ties, philosophical puzzles to environmental imbalances, racial harmony to human dignity, and patriotism to humanism" (Vishal, "Introduction," *Parting Wish*, 10). A few critics e.g D. C. Chambial, Usha Bande, Patricia Prime, Bijoy Kant Dubey, Jaswant Singh, P. C. K. Prem, P. N. Sharma, Monohar Saghar Palampuri, R. K. Singh, R. P. Chaddah, Dev Bhardhwaj and Niranjana Mishra in their appraisals of Vishal's poetry have talked about the richness and variety of its humanistic content and lucidity, deceptive simplicity and "delicate individuality and jouissance" of style (Prime, IBC, 4). D.C. Chambial finds in them "things of taste [and] philosophical ideas that force one to sit up and meditate besides social – consciousness made pregnant with his spruce drawn from animate and inanimate sources." (Chambial, 55).

Like a good poet, who does not "go far in search of themes" rather sees "the world in the reality of its ordinariness" (Bhatnagar, 96), Vishal too reads messages in the smallest objects of Nature as Tagore and Wordsworth did. "Golden sea waves" rolling "onto" the "sunny, sandy shores" seem to him to be

Scribbling continuously  
In letters of gold

A mysterious message  
On the curvaceous sandy expanse

.....  
Touch the topmost tip  
Of all that lies ahead. (PW, 19)

And the "jingling music" of the waves means to him  
Aspire high and strive higher

Neither tire nor retire. (PW, 28)

in whose movements Matthew Arnold had heard "the still sad music of humanity." The battalion of ants working in co-operation carrying a crumb of food in unison leave for him

A latent lesson  
In diligence  
And corporate living (PW, 36)

Entire phenomena in Nature from morn till eve appears to him to be working ungrudgingly and selflessly for the benefit of others. Like Shelley he sees the "sweet spring" following the "dryness of winter," "brightness of smiling sun" ensuing the "darkness of night" and the blooming and dancing rose "under / the very shadow of thorns" imparting "the speechless message" of smiling forever which Vishal says

Was eloquent enough  
For me to remember  
All through life. (PW, 98)

The poet observes that the objects of Nature even when trampled stand erect soon to serve others. As a Nature lover, the poet enjoys the beauty and joys of spring. The tall deodars and other trees are for him not only the

Robes of Mother Earth  
Locks of Nymph Nature

but he is also very much aware of their utility for life on the earth-planet as they are

Harbingers of rain  
Perennial ponds  
Of peace and plenty  
Never- failing friends of man  
Custodians of his clan  
Sanctuaries of insects, birds and beasts  
Stately sentries  
Of flora and fauna

But the speed at which these are being destroyed by man is like axe-ing  
... the very branch

You are resting on? (SM, 35)

The poet is perturbed not only over the annihilation of their “life source “ by the human beings, he also empathizes with the pain and grief suffered by the trees. Like other contemporary Indian English poets he is also sensitive to the stresses and challenges of the modern world – a world of hypocrisy, sham, deceit, double-dealing and opportunism. He is critical of the problems of the day- social, political, economic and moral. The world appears to be “ An amazing market “ which sells

Sweet sourness  
Magnanimous meanness  
Lofty lowliness  
Polite harshness  
Selfless selfishness  
Faithful faithlessness (SM,48)

In his poem “ Kitty Coquettes” Vishal like Tejinder Kaur in her poem “War Widows Given Mementos” exposes the shallowness of these” social butterflies” (Kaur, 38), who with their

23

“glossy dress up,” “painted faces” wear “shady smiles”, “carry coquettish hearts” and “assemble to dissemble” and “to smash reputations” whom the poet ironically calls “ amorous aesthetes” who

Outfat fat sums  
On paintings of shying poverty  
But  
Shy away from the poor! (SM, 12)

Monohar Saghar considers this poem “ a powerful satire which graphically paints a scene of ostentation parade of wealth-sick idle women”(Saghar). If Vishal is critical of these modern day Belindas with “borrowed beauties” sans the beauty of mind, heart and soul, he also condemns the artificial culture in vogue among the nouveau rich, He feels sad to find cacti adorning the drawing rooms of rich people instead of “ pansy, marigold and rose”

Flowers are not in favour  
Thorns prick the drawing- rooms

“Cactus craze” is used by the poet as a metaphor for” depravity”,” deformity” and “cold cunning” which are

Exchanged  
As gifts of love  
Exhibited  
With puff and pride  
Freezing all fine feelings. (SM, 27)

The poet’s historical gaze in the poem “Riddle” confuses him with a mystery

Why man  
An enemy of man  
Why trampled over  
By his own clan? (SM, 57)

for power and pelf. The wonder of wonders in this world is what the eldest Pandav, Yudhishtira too had felt that in spite of our seeing our dear departed being

Consigned to flames  
Or buried in the grave  
We talk of things mundane  
Blissfully forgetting the fact  
The very next departure  
May be  
Of any one of us. (PW, 55)

In the speedily rising skyscrapers Vishal no doubt appreciates the intelligence, prosperity and architectural acumen of man but he also feels that they make the poor man's hut feel small. Vishal calls these big buildings "soulless structures" because in them he perceives- 'he' is missing. To him in the mad rush of hectic modern life

Man is lost  
In concrete jungles  
Of steep skyscrapers  
Busy broadways  
Crazy crowds  
Of walking shadows (PW, 29)

Like a few other modern poets who have tried "to define and describe the kind of alienation and angst confronting the modern Indian life arising out of the pressures of living" (Kurup, 316), Vishal too talks of the anxieties which lead to depression. He has enumerated various factors such as

Financial constraints  
Teething tensions  
Sizzling stress  
Sexual abuse

Social, official, incestuous

Marital discord,

Financial disharmony (PW, 40)

and many other "unidentified / Deeply depressing causes" which "trigger suicide." The poet is also aware of the 'dear' cost of living in the contemporary times

All that meets the eye

Or enters the ear

Or tastes the tongue

Is becoming 'dearer' and 'dearer

Except human life

Hence ironically and satirically he declares

It's not life

Which is 'dear'

It's 'living'!

It's 'living' My dear! (SM, 42-43)

The poet is also sore over the degradation of values in humans which forces him to put them in contrast to a dog since the latter appears to him to be "faithfulness' incarnate" and the former is "Fathoms deep in 'faithfulness' who "fawns on his benefactor" when his ends are served and his designs are gratified.

Though Vishal denounces man's negative traits yet he also believes that man is basically not bad. Rather he is an incarnation of the "Divine" and in times of adversity and natural calamities like earthquakes, floods etc. human beings stand by one another. Man commits heinous deeds only when he is under the grip of "Devil" who "sits in every heart" and who "doesn't like that "Humans love make" and keeps on poisoning every mind and turning every tongue into a snake, flaming the fires of jealousy and furies with the aim of breaking the bridges of love and delicate feelings so that "mankind is torn/And mate kills mate" (SM, 57). But if with his will power man conquers the evil, he becomes "the

God incarnate.” Man’s conscience whom William Blake too calls the Divine in him, keeps pricking him, and acts as a judge showing him his true face but if he continues ignoring its voice it too sleeps and leads to his downfall.

Like many other Indian English poets such as Govin Chandar Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Sarojini Naidu, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Rajeswar, Imtiaz Dharker, Hemant Kulkarni, Nar Deo Sharma, Yazna Sri Nambiar, R. Parthasarthy, Ashok Mahajan, Nissim Ezekiel, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Tejinder Kaur, Kulbhushan Kushal, and C. L. Khatri, who have commented upon family relationships “with high seriousness because the traditional heritage of India gives great importance to the family unit” (Nandakumar, 64) Vishal too is an upholder of the sincere bonds between parents and children, husband and wife, grandparents and children. This “family poetry” has “undeniable sociological relevance”(Nandakumar, 64) in the present day world when

“Knots of filial ties” are ‘Loosening like lies’ ( *SM*, 20) and due to the fast fading bonds of relationships parents and grandparents are landing in old age homes leading a lonely life. In his poems “Reversal” and “ Lost Son” the poet strongly voices his concern for the elderly parents. But in his poem “ Sinning Son” “ Vishal shows that the children may turn however cruel to their mothers but the heart of a mother remains worried about the welfare of her children. Nissim Ezekiel in his poem“ Night of the Scorpion “ too has revealed the feelings of care and concern of a mother. Instead of supporting the father- son conflict, the poet shows in his poems the

“Solomon” like wise father giving the lessons of worldly and spiritual wisdom to his growing son not through preaching but by tactful and practical means to put him on the right track. These lessons convincingly go deep into the heart of the reader as well. The father too realizes his mistake when he asks his son to tell a lie to inform the visitor that his father is not at home.

In man - woman relationship too Vishal finds that in many cases fidelity, warmth, sincerity and commitment are missing. But since in his poems Vishal is not critiquing only the negation of values in every walk of life but is also providing alternative vision and messages also, in the case of human relationships too his title poem “ Parting Wish “ lays down certain values to be lived by the human beings. The poem which is written by the poet in the memory of his departed wife where he eulogizes her virtues and behaviour as a daughter, a daughter-in-law, wife mother, neighbour and above all as a good human being, sets a role model for various relationships. The perfection and satisfaction of the loveful life of the union of heads and hearts that the poet acknowledges here to have lived with her which make him miss her too much find an expression in many poems composed by him in Hindi and Punjabi also. Her acceptance of death with a smile on her” blooming face” is “etched’ by the poet in his “memory”

Echoing a speechless message

‘Smile while alive

And smile out of life’ ( *PW*, 16)

What emerges from these is an image of an ideal man woman relationship and family life upheld in Indian culture, which are vanishing in the materialistic, glamorous and shallow world of today. Referring to the message and appeal of the poem “Parting Wish” Patricia Prime rightly observes that it is “ full of that work that draws the reader back to it- not in code cracking mode but in order to re-experience more deeply, the original thrill.”( Prime, *PI*, 22).

Along with other social issues, Vishal is also concerned about the gender question and denounces vehemently the practices of forced prostitution and female foeticide carried on in our society and the secondary status granted to the girl child who is taught to learn, practise and perpetuate the maxim

‘Sons are gold

Daughters silver’ ( *PW*, 33)

in the house of her parents and of in-laws where she has to adapt and comply with the whims and needs of everybody. It is an “irking irony ‘ for the poet

That in the land  
Of Sita and Saviri  
Still we treat  
Our women-folk  
With fire and smoke  
By sealing them alive  
In funeral pyres  
Of their errant men-folk (PW, 32)

Apart from her economic independence a working woman virtually enjoys no freedom. Rather the treatment meted out to her by her “ hubby “ is very shabby at home whereas outside he poses to be very chivalrous and caring even putting “ a gallant knight to shame”. Infact, he

Eagerly awaits her pay-packets  
To inflate his elephantal ego  
To double his earnings  
To actualize his yearnings (PW, 31)

By voicing the victimization, marginalization, oppression, suppression and repression of women, the poet is not only highlighting the gender bias prevailing in our society but by condemning these he is also raising a voice for their equality and emancipation from ages old mindsets and practices for which both men and women need to come forward.

Apart from exposing many social evils ruining the fabric of our society, Vishal does not spare the politicians too who bluff, mislead and cheat the people who give them power through votes. Like I.K. Sharma, who in his remarkable poem “The Leader” ( Sharma, *The Sand-dunes*, 10) makes a “tellingly oblique satire on the political leader,

who like the cock, is the first to announce a dawn, presumably before an election, but soon ‘ hides the rising sun’ not allowing even his followers to bask in the warm comforts of sunshine which he reserves for him” (Mathur, 60). Vishal, too mocks at the “ service-unto self” principle of a politician in the poem “ Portrait of a Politician” comparing him to

A canker  
Who cankers the very wood  
Wherein he stays.  
A climber  
Who sucks  
The marrow of those  
Who nursed and nourished him  
With pills and potions of power.  
A snake  
Who stings and bites  
Those  
Who managed milk for him. (SM,52)

The poet is also sad to see his native province Punjab

Cradle of Vedic civilization  
Sword- arm of the nation  
Pride of the people  
Granary of the motherland  
Land of saints and sages  
Hermits and heroes  
Poets and patriots  
Love and lovers (SM, 49)

suffering death and destruction in the wake of militancy. He wants the colours of holi to be splashed instead of bloodshed and prays for peace and prosperity to prevail.

In some of the poems we also notice Vishal's anger and a voice of threatening revolt in the reactions of the "bruised- buds" who have been continually exploited by the rich who have deprived them of all the good things of life. The poem " Wary Warning " expresses these feelings sharply. " Vishal's anger is aroused by opportunism, depravity, deformity and cold cunning of ' Modern Mind.' Terrorism, politicians' vileness, female foeticide and injustices enrage him." rightly observes R. K. Singh (Singh, 20).

The poet also gives a vent to his patriotic feelings when like C. L. Khatri who salutes the " *veer jawans* " of Kargil war " Who have reduced enemy's pride to nil" ( Khatri, 19) he pays a homage to the Kargil heroes

O matchless martyrs of Kargil  
 O valiant victors of Tiger Hill  
 You have conquered  
 Not only an unprincipled enemy  
 .....  
 You have proved  
 To the astounded world  
 The invincibility  
 Of the Indian soldier. ( PW, 52)

But his vision is not parochial. In the new millennium when the world is shrinking into a global village, Vishal feels that it is expected of man

To outgrow  
 His narrow national mindset  
 And hoist high  
 The flag of universal brotherhood (PW, 47)

In order to achieve progress, prosperity and equality for the entire mankind it is required to

... pool together  
 All scientific skill  
 Mental ingenuity, physical force  
 To banish poverty, disease, illiteracy  
 To gain human fulfilment  
 irrespective of their nationality, caste, colour and creed  
 Because to Him  
 Man is man alone  
 Neither European  
 Nor Asian  
 Or African. ( PW, 49)

Vishal thus dreams of a happy and healthy, equality and fraternity based set up at inter- per sonal, domestic, regional, national and international level. Though he wants to " touch the topmost tip" but he does not want to lead a grand heroic life. Rather he wants to "sweeten the stream of life" by not letting slip

Sweet small occasions  
 O doing good ( P W, 28)

It is self- discipline and self conquest, he believes, which lead man to "Lady Greatness" and "Lady Luck"" smiles on those who make proper use of Time and run before it. But this path is to be tread by living an honest life. The virtue of honesty though is

Dull to look at  
 But lovely to live with  
 Seemingly uncomfortable  
 But intrinsically stable  
 Hard to inculcate  
 But sure to make great.  
 and for Vishal  
 An honest person is he

Who keeps clean  
Even in the face  
Of an opportunity to steal. (S M, 23)

For becoming virtuous, according to Vishal, one needs to make constant self- introspection and self-correction purging

Of deceit and dishonesty  
In myself and around (P W, 20)

instead of merely preaching and moralizing others.

Thus a reading of Vishal's poetry reveals that the " ecological, socio-political, familial, philosophical and spiritual" messages communicated through these simple poetic creations "relate to their hidden unstated human content." (K. C. Malhotra, ' Preface,' S M). The remarkable feature of his poetry is that he does not imitate anybody and writes with courage, conviction, honesty and sincerity what he feels and thinks. In his poems like those of other post- eighties poets "the inner and outer worlds coalesce"(Shivram, 194) and he shares with them the traits of "novelty and freshness" in his "way of communicating his ideas, feelings..." (Sharma, 8). No doubt "Mr. Vishal builds his own philosophy of life, lives on, writes and unburdens his heart through his poetic effusion "(Usha Bande, 33) but there definitely emerges a philosophy and vision of life from his poems which can be summed up in R. K. Singh's views about his philosophy of life given in his interview with Atma Ram.

I believe in the unity of mankind and equality of sexes, and am secular and non-moral in my attitudes and values. I recognize the world as one earth, one nation, one country just as I love all the races, tribes, nationalities, religions and languages. I accept the spiritual oneness of people and my concerns cut across national boundaries. I believe in living without prejudices as man belonging to the whole world, honest to myself." (Ram, Atma, 69).

Out of his personal experiences Vishal has been able to express

effectively many serious humanistic concerns and impart universal messages retaining all the particularity of his experience.

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29

## POEMS

### Prayer

–*Kulbhushan Kushal*

We are aliens  
 Alienated beings  
 Thank you seasons  
 For disowning us  
 Never had we been  
 Sincere to you

Spring  
 Never we walked  
 With you hand in hand  
 Yet you continue  
 To gift flowers to us

The winter  
 We have tinkered  
 With your warmth  
 Very discomfoting are  
 Our comfoting air conditioners  
 Poor substitute  
 For your magic touch

Autumn thank you  
For staying away from us  
We would have made you  
Utterly uncomfortable  
In our homes

And rainy season  
Thank you  
For raining profusely  
On mountains and rocks  
In our cemented houses  
You are an unwelcome guest

Our children crave for you  
And have a fancy bath  
When we capture your drizzles  
In the screens of our television sets

The sky  
You have been very wise  
Right from the beginning  
You have not mixed with us

You preferred  
To stay away  
And above from us  
And watching our shallow games  
With million stars- your eyes

30

And the earth  
Thank you  
For not responding  
To our prayers  
We claimed to be  
Your adopted sons

Thankless are our prayers  
And hollow is our gratitude  
We eat what you give  
And in turn we pollute  
Your heavenly stretch  
With our curses

And the trees  
The plants and the creepers  
Thank you  
For not walking  
From your places  
We would have cut your feet  
And nailed your fingers

We are the alienated aliens  
Blessed with your blessings  
Cursed with our curses  
We pray to God  
To make us permanent aliens

Lest we should trample  
On the secret sky

The loving earth  
Gentle trees and the fire

31

We pray to you  
Please stay away from us  
Our touch shall temper your heat  
Shall steal your warmth  
And shall rob your sacredness

## Markets

The smiles of the sales girls  
And the life-size statues  
Greet me to the super marts  
The faces of the icons  
Splashed on the newspapers  
Sponsored commercials  
Attract my attention

For a while I feel  
For me and me alone  
The icons smile  
And the packaged goods  
Are there for me

But what are the sales girls to me  
What is that statue of a woman  
With that inviting breasts  
And enticing smile

What do they want from me  
What I want from them  
Who runs the markets  
For whom are the markets  
Are they negotiated places  
For fabulous civilities  
And hard commerce  
I think they have  
Already played the trick

I am market addicted  
Take the markets away  
I may shrink  
My son may get depressed  
My wife may not have much to talk  
And I may be exhausted  
Without saying much

The global identity  
The brands in vest  
Is a cruel joke of the century  
Markets generate million images  
Greedily collected lustily preserved  
In the chambers of our minds  
Till we start visualizing  
Our minds as market

Our dreams are market oriented  
Our themes market centered  
Markets we are  
Markets we live

Who shall deliver us  
From market monsters  
And lead us from markets  
To homes sweet homes  
Bitter memories  
Of melting markets

## Graveyard

Graveyard is  
The right place to dance  
Not that the floor is crisp  
Not that the musical instruments  
Are music addicted

Graveyard is  
An ambience supreme  
For the dreams to grow  
And for the realities to be buried  
For the skeletons to speak  
And for the spirits to soar

No crammed lessons  
No noisy, wild knowledge  
In the corridors of graveyard  
No traffic jams  
Though heavy  
Full of emotions  
But a quick transaction

Just seconds  
A huge crowd thronged  
And Lo!  
It has dwindled away  
Even those  
Who have not touched  
The departed body  
They also want  
To wash off the connection  
With the sprinkling spree  
Of calm water

The pyres in the graveyard  
Are the *mudras* of dance  
The flames of fire  
Aspirations flow  
A heavenward stretch of hands  
At rhythmic inter-flow  
Of the fire and the earth

Enough space  
For the poetry of movement  
For the celestial spirits  
It's a delight to see  
The perishable elements to join  
And as on the earth  
Imitate the divine

Shiva performed  
The first dance in the grave

With skeletons around the neck  
And the hissing cobra  
Jumping around  
With hisses providing  
A celestial music  
To the dance of  
The mysterious steps of Shiva  
And the clattering  
Clanging of bones  
A great music  
Instrumental accompaniment

You may wonder why  
Grave is the right place for dance  
And may announce it perverse  
As it is not tuned  
With the festivals and festivities  
The dance of lust  
With meandering gestures  
Contrived restlessness in the body  
Jumpy, throbbing breasts  
A sequence of oozes  
Before the hungry mirrors  
An insatiable hunger  
For the flesh

Here the dance will be watched  
By the thousands

Of Greeks, Jews,  
Christians, Muslims  
Who subtly trans-migrated  
In the wild earthquakes  
And volcano eruptions  
What a fantastic  
Inter-space exchange  
And inter-continental  
Collaboration of ghosts!

We lack patience  
If we leave to nature  
We may be transported  
To countries unknown  
And the known  
The fancy islands  
And the ancient museums  
Without any transportation  
But hurry we do

Who will wait for million years  
For the earthquakes to come  
And for the volcanoes  
To hold us in their mouths  
And the wild oceans  
To take us through  
Subtle under-water sub-ways  
To the countries afar

Dance in the grave  
Is an invitation  
To cosmic connectivity  
To hold the hand of *Maya*  
Multiplicity of propensities  
The graveyard is

Just offer your gestures  
Your rhythmic movements  
And regulated steps  
To the million spirits  
Readying to be launched  
To the flesh

## **Dogs And Owls**

Dear are dogs and owls to me  
Dogs are dear for their colours  
And the clumsy movements  
They are loafers  
Wandering in streets  
Sometimes chasing  
But often chased away

Left to themselves  
Dogs may decide  
Not to bark at odd times  
And not to come  
Closer to humans

Men bark volumes  
But cannot stand  
The barks of dogs

Dogs are dear to me  
As they do not pretend  
They are not pedantic  
In their expressions

We are disturbed-  
Why do they bark  
The way they bark?  
We curse them  
If they bark late night  
And if they croon  
It predicts doom  
And with the stones  
We chase them away  
Shout through our windows

Dogs are dear to me  
In spite of  
Their unscrupulous cohabitation  
Unscheduled intercourses  
And the puppy love

They are very careful  
Dogs don't die of AIDS  
And diabetes

We're so jealous of them  
We've declared them wretched

35

Left to themselves  
Dogs may laugh at us  
At our contrived faces  
At our gullibility  
As we believe  
We are sleeping  
And they are awake!

Strange are humans  
And eccentric their fantasies  
Among themselves  
They sign the contracts  
But expect dogs to work  
To wait and watch  
Without even "smiles" in return  
It is both penny wise  
And pound wise

Owls are dear to me  
Owls can swim  
Through the darkness  
The relics of  
Mohenjodaro and Harappa

Owls had endless celebrations  
They revisited all the streets

Sat on the architectural wonders  
And unearthed at night  
The whispers of millions  
Before they submitted  
To the collapse of civilizations

Owls had several conversations  
With Karl Marx  
And Jean Paul Sartre  
And guided them-  
Beware of these humans  
Don't sanitize their insanities  
Through your system camouflage

Humans are confirmed betrayers  
For facility for organizing  
They experiment  
Each century they sit  
On the shoulders of a philosopher  
And felicitate them  
With honours and awards  
And then consign them  
To the curse of forgetfulness  
Arresting their words  
In books, videos for entertainment

Owls are dear to me  
They are proxy  
To the women craft  
Nights are very dear

To the feminine clan  
They prepare all  
Their lotions and potions  
And their murky magic  
In the dreary nights

Owls know their sneaky movements  
Owls are jealous of them  
As they too walk in the nights  
To their lovers' beds  
Seldom missing the goals  
And the owls know  
The dreams of the children  
And around their bed  
Owls play  
Because their dreams  
Show the owls the way

### **Vampish Afternoons**

Green, raw afternoons  
Wrapped in simmering silences  
And the dreary  
Murmurings of the dead  
Awake fast

Feasting  
Around the cremation grounds  
Strange afternoons

Mingling sounds with silences  
The endless stories of pirates  
And the parrots

These afternoons  
Were not meant for  
Solving ratio and  
Proportion sums  
Angling the triangles

And those numericals  
Who caressingly invite you  
But just two steps after  
Leave you in the lurch  
For conjecturing the solutions  
The fine,  
Ultimate answer statements  
Immaculate-  
Leaving no scope  
For zeroing in  
Even zero mistake

And those fantasized hurrahs  
After getting hundred out of hundred

Those afternoons  
Green and raw  
Were not the times  
To remember

The names of the capitals  
Of the distant countries  
And the names of rivers  
Flowing far, far away  
From the docks  
Beyond the horizons

I forgot my Sangarma  
Remembering  
The names of those rivers!!  
And my wonder  
Was thunder-struck  
By the terms and terminologies  
Like heaps of empty shells  
On the beaches  
I gathered leaving no foot-prints  
On the sands of time

My dead aunts and dead uncles  
Frequently came to meet me  
Those afternoons  
Under the guava tree

The feast  
In the cremation grounds  
And those lullabies  
A string of sounds  
Without words  
Celestial music

In those barren afternoons  
  
Now those afternoons  
Are just interruptions  
Without regrets  
They are neither raw,  
Nor green

Just a point, a span after noon  
Till it transforms  
Back into evening  
An uneasy calm  
A mechanical break  
For looking around

May be, fooling around  
Through meticulously kept hedges  
And well trimmed branches of trees  
For striking casual conversations  
Digging sensations  
Out of senseless, stupefied routines  
And looking beyond  
Those flowers, persons  
Moving up and down  
Shouting, shutting their ears

Afternoons are actually  
No man's time  
Generally we are not disturbed

And are left alone  
To plan the hunting strategies  
So that we have the trophies in hand  
Before closing them

Very mischievous  
Are the afternoons  
They trigger demonic thoughts  
In our demonic minds  
May be-  
Planning a cold-blooded murder  
Or strangulating the girl friends  
Through strategies of silence

38

## Pupil—A Customer

—G.C. Mago

Modern pupil a customer declared  
And at once a teacher seller be  
Shaken off his feet to the values sacred  
And good bye to all regards.  
Adieu to gratitude  
Expectations and bond  
And there crashed the pious relation  
But says so the modern *mantra*.

Crippled fancy, squeezed intention  
No impulse to create for him  
Copied, cooked and readymade  
Available to one and all.  
Nothing innovative , nothing imaginative there be  
But the written vomited  
Slides, statistics and data  
Nothing more, nothing less.

Why stray in to fancy  
To fly to fathom deep  
Enough to remain on surface  
And content with the hackneyed.  
None is restless for more  
Why should he be?  
He knows not beyond periphery  
And remains a satisfied pig.

No yearning for more  
For he is hardly provoked  
To taste the untasted  
And remains a frog in the well.

After a decade  
Blind to the blind  
All grope in darkness  
And alien to philosophy.

To poetry a stone  
To art a hog  
A technical salesman  
And buffalo to a manager.

## Spiritual Discourse

Divinity was on sale  
Seated on dias the preacher  
Mute but excited sat the devotees  
On earth descended God.

Then followed exhortation and myths  
Fright, fables and falsehood  
Extolled the *gurudom*  
To expel the darkness.

'Heaven to the cash donors  
Service, a ladder to god  
Total surrender to *guru* the real *mantra*  
Closed circle the panacea'.

Confounded they heard  
With devotion they clapped  
Swirled their heads  
As marks of approval.  
Preacher to the limousine retired  
Devotees tasted the ensuing dust  
As dry *amrit* of his shoes  
And felt blessed.  
Divinity disappeared  
Dais was heavily paid  
God flew away  
Devotees left in worldly mire.

## To My Beloved

In thy warm lap I lay gay  
The world slumbered, the society perished  
Neither Mammon nor any goddess  
Had sway on me.  
The old ties were in a blind alley  
I had reached a dead end  
Every thing merged in a slippery sand  
Time had stood on a bad clock.

I lived in the aura you created  
Bliss was around, I soared  
A new life ensued on a new day  
So many births after so many deaths.  
In a coiled coil bulb you sparked  
The energy was enough to light the world  
But where was the world?  
In thy spark I was consumed.

## **With Love**

*–J. S. Anand*

40

Very very dear  
are skies  
and topless glories  
to a building

but dearer still  
are the blocks  
the stones  
which support  
its imaginary flight  
and bind it hard  
to the ground.

## **The Dusty Lane**

My feet prefer  
the dusty lane;

a lump of earth  
feels more at home  
than in the metalled one  
where wisdom has  
spread a sheet of bizdom  
dividing man and his nature;

bends in a road  
horrify it not  
but diversions do  
which change the flow;

broken from the Chain  
I have turned into an entity  
lacking rhythm

trying to find  
my own logic.

## **The Captive**

Captured images lose  
spontaneity  
surprise  
and suspense  
which life is.

Certainties  
slacken suspense  
strain surprise  
and stale joy.

Eagerness and uncertainty  
bring pleasantness  
to life  
making it more liveable.

Blessings unknown  
matter more to mankind  
than benedictions  
foregranted.

## The Selfish Clan

From eating animals to survive  
to eating human flesh  
for a mere spooky smile  
denigrates the grandeur built into  
the civilized empire;

lights sprinkle its beauty  
in the backdrop of the dark;

the brighter the light  
the denser the night;

high rise buildings  
project my indomitable spirit  
bordering on pride –

– I only wanted to life better,  
to enjoy better  
the sweet smelling earth  
and hear better  
the harkening rivers –

I was meant to connect  
to the cosmic harmonies.

Body and its desires  
only the roughage  
to be consigned to the earth.

## Wisdom

It is not scarce; It is singularly lacking  
Else how come the entire human clan  
fails to pass just one truth  
from tooth to tooth?

Why every child craves for the sun  
and growing up  
settles for the setting glories?  
What turns blind  
the eyes with visions proud?  
What cripples the mind?

Millions I see  
ratting in the race;  
eyes on the skies legs in the grave;  
Going and coming  
Caught in cycle  
Beyond their powers

What makes man better  
than beasts but his language  
which carries treasures  
of ancient wisdom  
to the spreading human clan;

Where is the wisdom  
Each born babe  
Denies the sun  
Cries for the Moon.

## Why Can't We.....

*-Seema Jain*

Why do we often  
 Feel a surging urge  
 To sing a dirge  
 Over a human error  
 That hurled in terror  
 The lives of innocent few.

Why can't we think of  
 Those countless conscientious humans  
 Who never brag,  
 Who hold the flag,  
 Through fog and rain,  
 Through difficult terrain.

Why do we often  
 Think of God's fury  
 In ravaging storms,  
 In unbridled cyclones,  
 In devastating quakes,  
 In cold handshakes.

Why can't we remember  
 Someone's cheery smile  
 And forget about

The malice, the envy  
 And the vile.

Why can't we think of  
 Some tender life  
 Peeping out of the rubble  
 Revealing how  
 Life triumphs  
 Over the coldness of death.

# PRAGATI'S ENGLISH JOURNAL

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*Pragati's English Journal* is published by **Pragati Educational Council** in collaboration with **Dayanand Institute of Education Management and Research (D.I.E.M.R.) Panvel, New Mumbai, Maharashtra** in June and December.

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*Typesetting :*  
**Krishna Lazer Graphics**  
Jalandhar.

*Printed by :*  
**Paper Offset Printers**  
Jalandhar.



# PRAGATI EDUCATIONAL COUNCIL

H.O. Jalandhar City.

(Registered at Chandigarh in 1988 under the act XXI 1860)

**Pragati's English Journal** is a house-journal of the Pragati Educational Council. It is published in June and December every year.

Editor : **N. K. Neb**

Editorial Advisory Board : Dr. Gurupadesh Singh  
: Dr. Kulbhushan Kushal

**Pragati's English Journal** is published by **Pragati Educational Council** in Collaboration with Dayanand Institute of Education Management and Research **(D.I.E.M.R.) Panvel, New Mumbai, Maharashtra.**

All correspondence pertaining to subscription/publicity should be addressed to the General Secretary Pragati Educational Council at the following address :

61/75A–Garden Colony, Jalandhar City.

## Subscription :-

(For individuals)

Per copy (Postage extra) : Rs.50/-

Annual : Rs.90/-

(For institutions)

Per Copy : Rs.80/-

Annual : Rs.150/-

Payments should be made through a bank draft or a money order in favour of Pragati Educational Council, Jalandhar.

Opinions expressed by Contributors are not necessarily those of the editors.

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