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CONTOUR

ISSN: 2349-6398

An International Peer-Reviewed
Online Journal Of Studies In English



Volume 1 | Issue 2
thecontour.weebly.com

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Volume 1, Issue 2

ISSN: 2349-6398

Website: thecontour.weebly.com

E-mail: thecontour.contact@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/thecontour2014

October, 2014

Editor-in-Chief

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Cover Designing & Formatting
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Publisher

Dr. Susanta Kumar Bardhan,

On behalf of LOKAYATIK

Suri, Birbhum, 731101, W. B.

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EDITORIAL

In the present day of crisis in all spheres of life, be it academic or non-academic, the publication of an academic journal at regular interval is a challenging task. Still with kind help of the The Contour fraternity we have been able to give the final shape of its Volume 1, Issue 2 with the stipulated time. We sincerely convey our hearty gratitude to the reviewers and advisers for their critical perspectives and suggestions much needed for upkeep of the sound health of the journal. For several reasons we have not been able to accommodate all the papers submitted in the present issue.

The readers and the well-wishers of the journal are requested to give their valuable suggestions for the improvement of its future issues.

It is also declared that the views and observations presented in the writings are solely of the respective authors, not of the editor/editorial board of the journal.

Special thanks should go to Suman Saha who with his expertise in computer has worked strenuously and sincerely for giving the shape to the journal out of sheer enthusiasm.

27. 10. 2014



Susanta Kumar Bardhan
Editor-in-chief
The Contour

ARTICLE

Existential Predicament of Indian women in Anita Desai's Novels

Vinay Kumar Dubey

ABSTRACT

Anita Desai, among all women Indian-English novelists has discussed the art of fiction most comprehensively. She is not only well-versed in the theory and practice of the novel but also in vision and art. She analyses her creative self and explores the inner dilemmas and resources of her characters. Dealing with inner world, her fiction grapples with the intangible realities of life. She delves deep into the inner most depth of human psyche and discovers the inner turmoil and the chaotic layer of mind. Her characters thus reveal the infinite variety of life.

Desai, looks into the inner world of reality and prefers it to the outer world of reality. She reiterates the difference between truth and reality. For her truth is synonymous of Art, not of reality, so her novels discover and convey the significance of things. The search for truth, she believes, consists in the life of the mind and the soul- the inner life. In regard to the use of the stream of consciousness technique, she captures the prismatic quality of life in her fiction. With this vision and art of Anita Desai, her novels deal with the problems of love and marriage along with other human problems. All her protagonists discover the tragedy of human soul trapped in the adverse circumstances of life. The tragic effect in her novels is intensified by the external conditions in which her characters are involved.

[Key words: inner dilemmas, human psyche, stream of consciousness, protagonists, adverse circumstances, external conditions.]

Anita Desai's vision and art centres round her preoccupation with the individual and his inner world of sensibility - the chaos inside his mind. This is the keynote of her unique vision of the predicament of the individual is contemporary Indo-English fiction. This distinguishes her from other Indian women novelists - Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya. She is much concerned with the exploration of the interior world, penetrating deep into the fathomless depth of human psyche. This inner introspection of the individuals, the inner impressions, passing into fancies, thoughts and dreams, Jhabvala is mainly interested in the social background for comedies. Kamala Markandaya's main purpose is to deal with diverse contemporary problems through her principal characters; Nayan Tara Sahgal's main concern is exclusively concerned with the existential predicament of an individual "which is projected

through incompatible couples, callous, acutely sensitive wives and dismals, inconsiderable, ill-chosen husband."¹

Anita Desai, among all women Indian-English novelists has discussed the art of fiction most comprehensively. She is not only well-versed in the theory and practice of the novel but also in vision and art. She analyses her creative self and explores the inner dilemmas and resources of her characters. Dealing with inner world, her fiction grapples with the intangible realities of life. She delves deep into the inner most depth of human psyche and discovers the inner turmoil and the chaotic layer of mind. Her character thus reveals the infinite variety of life. In this respect she seems to be influenced by Virginia Woolf who maintains that "life is not a series of big lamps symmetrically arranged, life is a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."²

Desai, looks into the inner world of reality and prefers it to the outer world of reality. She reiterates the difference between truth and reality. For her truth is synonymous of Art, not of reality, so her novels discover and convey the significance of things. The search for truth, she believes, consists in the life of the mind and the soul- the inner life. In regard to the use of the stream of consciousness technique, she captures the prismatic quality of life in her fiction. With this vision and art of Anita Desai, her novels deal with the problems of love and marriage along with other human problems. All her protagonists discover the tragedy of human soul trapped in the adverse circumstances of life. The tragic effect in her novels is intensified by the external conditions in which her characters are involved. For example, Nirode, the chief protagonist in *Voices in the City* moves from failure to failure in order to explore the depth of his soul. He tells his friend David emphatically, "Happiness, Suffering. I want to be done with them, disregard them, see beyond them to the very end."³ Such is Nirode's vision of absolute negation of life. In reply to Amla's question he points out, "you destroy, you destroy yourselves, and you destroy that part of others that gets so fatally involved in you. There is this - dreadful attractiveness in your dark ways of thinking and feeling through life towards death."⁴

Likewise the chief protagonist of Desai's novel *Cry, The Peacock* is Maya who is a married girl, young and sensitive, haunted by the psychic tumult as the result of a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster. Having lived a carefree life under her loving father, she desires to have similar attention from her husband Gautama. Maya's neurosis is caused by persistent obsession of the

prediction of the albino astrologer of death either for her or for her husband within four years of her marriage. There is a gap of communication between husband and wife. This leads to her morbid thoughts resulting into their tragedy. Thus the novel throws light on the inner emotional world of one character Maya. In *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* there is a clear departure from the theme of the psychic tumult of her self-afflicted characters. Instead, she deals with the topical problem of adjustment faced by black immigrants in England. Dev and Adit have their own problems to solve. They are all real and tangible problems.

In her novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Anita Desai again repeats her favourite theme. She tries to probe into the consciousness of an introvert and sensitive woman Sita, who is frustrated by her hum- drum life. She struggles to escape into purposeless and unproductive loneliness. She seeks refuge in the magic island of Manori : "If reality were not to be borne, then illusion was the only alternative. She saw that island illusion was a refuge, a protection."⁵ Her father calls his house Jeevan Ashram "the home of the soul" Sita loiters about the island, sometimes alone and sometimes with her brother Jivan. To Sita her father remains an enigma. When Sita is in her forties, she conceives for the fifth time. A strange problem confronts her mind. If she gives birth to her fifth child she will be performing an act of creation. In case she does not she will only be destroying the new, born child. She behaves like a mad child and the hardship of island disillusionments Sita about her life in it.

Her novel *Fire On The Mountain* is again the story of inner emotional world of Nanda Kaul, the wife of an ex-Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University. Her apprehension that her privacy is going to be threatened by the presence of Raka creates emotional disturbance in her heart. The shocking death of Ila Das clearly torments her placid self:

Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen - he had only done enough to keep her quiet while she carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life."⁶

In *Clear Light Of Day* Desai deals with the emotional reactions of two main characters Bim and her younger sister Tara. Both of them are haunted by the memories of the past. They differ in

their attitude because of their differing temperament and circumstances of life. Tara nurses about her romantic and sentimental glamour whereas Bim is left alone to nurse her ailing brother Raja. Bim feels loneliness in her neglecting and decaying house but her peer of art is regained with her love for Raja and Tara.

Anita Desai's vision of life centers round the nucleus of internal states of mind of her characters. Therefore her images, symbolic and myths are written in the language of interior thoughts. All these images reveal the inner nature of her character with their obsessions, changing moods and psychic aberration. Her novels bear the testimony of this fact. All this illustrates her handling of situations and the problems of love and marriage, along with other human problems.

Anita Desai has emerged as a very serious, skilled and promising novelist of today. Her popularity is not so much due to the choice of her themes, such as man-woman relationship, alienation and East-West encounter, as to their treatment by her. She has presented through her novels, the miserable plight of women's suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands, she has given a new dimension to the Indian novel in English by turning from outer to inner reality. In her own words she writes, "not the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees to above the surface of the ocean" but "the remaining nine-tenths of it that lie below the surface."⁷ She prefers to go deeper and deeper in a character or a scene, rather than going round about it. That is why she gives more importance to the private than to the public world. For her literature is neither a means of escaping reality nor a vehicle for making political, social, religious and moral ideas, but an exploration and an inquiry. Every novel possesses its own qualities and information. Her *Cry, The Peacock* is an externalization of the interior of Maya's cocoon. *Voices in the City* is the reflection of the rattling reverberation of her sensitive characters under the tyrannizing force of the city of Calcutta. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and *Fire On The Mountain* are lyrical outbursts of women seeking peace and quiet in life. *Clear Light of Day* is the story of slow and maturing consciousness a woman wrapped up in the world of fantasies and visions. Generally in these novels Desai imparts no message and preaches no morals.

Desai feels that a writer must have certain traits of the head and heart which are essential for writing a novel. Besides the art of creative genius, a novelist must be sensitive and have a power of keen observation so that he could give acute descriptions and "pick up the tiny details that

other might not notice."⁸

The technique selected for the novel should be related with the subject matter and theme. One kind of technique cannot suit all novels. Desai believes in action, experience with thought, emotion and sensations and consciousness. That is why she followed the technique adopted by D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster and Henry James. Thus the stream of consciousness technique is used in some of her novels.

In *Cry, The Peacock* the first and the last chapters have been written in third person whereas the middle part in the first person. In *Voices in the City* she arranged beautiful sights, sounds and smells of the city of Calcutta with the help of appropriate words, symbols and images. In *Clear Light Of The Day*. Desai has skilfully woven past and present together. Brijraj Singh appropriately compares the novel to "an extended place of music, subtle, sensitive, sensuous in its life and melody but also complex and richly integrated in its total effect."⁹ Indian writers in English have given stress more about the subject matter than about the form. Desai occupies a unique position in the world of Indian writing in English. One of the most important aspects of her work is her ability to fuse form and content. For example, a writer like Mulk Raj Anand lays more emphasis on the subject matter of fiction than form were as Desai is more concerned with form and technique.

In her very first novel Desai interviews closely form with content. The novel is divided into three unequal sections. The first section describes tensions and conflicts between two characters. The last section presents an ironic view of the world in which woman has no place. The large middle section presents the tragedy of the central character. In this way the whole story is presented from her own point of view. An analysis of the first section highlights the characteristic device of Desai as a novelist. This section is in less than four pages and shows her skill in building up a mood.

In *Voices in the City* Anita Desai adopts a slightly different technique. She employs the more conventional third-person mode of narrating the story of three *Voices in the City*. The novel presents a different variety of sights and sounds of the city Calcutta. In the opening pages of the novel, she describes the confusion on the railway platform-the red-shirted coolies, the tea-vendors and the station master, the army of the passengers with bundles of luggage in search of

right carriage-all create the picture of environment in which three protagonists struggle for existence. Desai once again divides her major and inner characters into two groups, the characters suffer and the minor characters standing for dull stupid and senseless lives. Nirode, Monisha and Amla are sharply contrasted with victims of conformity. They are all presented as rebels-successful or unsuccessful.

Bye-Bye Blackbird is more unsuccessful than the earlier novel. The character are once again neatly divided. The English and Indian characters are merely stereotypes. The conflicts are unreal and behave like hysterical. But there is one grace about the novel and that is Desai's unfailing ability to give vivid pictures of the teeming life in the city. *Where Shall We Go This Summer? Fire On The Mountain* and *Clear Light of Day* do not really represent anything new in terms of either theme or technique. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Desai presents once again the theme of conflict between two individuals Sita and Raman represent the eternal opposition between the passion and prose of life. *Fire On The Mountain* is in certain respects different from the earlier novels of Anita Desai. The heroine of this novel is not a young or middle aged woman in conflict, Nanda Kaul, the central character is an old woman who in her youth and middle age had been actively involved in social activity. In her old age she was withdrawn from society and the novelist pictures the tragedy of old age. There is no real action in the novel. Ila Das and Nanda Kaul are seen as prisoners of their past. Thus structurally this novel is defective and psychologically unconvincing. Anita Desai expresses her views on the plot of the novel and remarks :

I prefer the word 'pattern' to plot as it sounds - more natural- and even better one should have a pattern and then fit the characters, the setting, and scenes into it - each piece in keeping with the others and so forming a balanced whole."¹⁰

Plot is as important to a book as the skeleton is to a human body. Desai first novel *Cry, The Peacock* is the psychological story of a childless young woman Maya, obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, kills her elderly husband, goes mad and finally commits suicide. The book is divided into three parts, each one dealing in turn with the origin, development and culmination of her neurosis. Parts one and three are so brief-covering only three and ten pages, turned into 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue'. However part two highlights the ups and downs of the life of Maya and Gautama a reputed lawyer who is twice her age and friend of Maya's father. The husband-wife

alienation which lies at the root of tragedy, is started from the very beginning. Thus the death motif is built skilfully into the structure of the novel. The action of the novel takes place in two cities: Delhi and Lucknow.

Voices in the City may be looked as a living spirit and for powerful characters in it. Just as the novels of Charles Dickens, James Joyce and Lawrence Durrell are called the epic novels of England, in the same way, this novel may be regarded as an epic on Calcutta. The novel is divided into four unequal parts - Part I, "Nirode", part II, "Monisha: her diary", part III, "Amla", part IV, "Mother the story of brother, two sisters and their mother. Third novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* deals with the theme of coloured immigrants in U.K. It presents their difficulties of adjustment there and those who return to the native land, often complicated by interracial marriages. The novel is divided into three parts "Arrival", "Discovery and Recognition" and "Departure." It is the story of these Bengali youths - Dev and Adit Sen and latter's English wife Sarah. Dev comes to London to stay with the Sens in their Clapham house. In the beginning, Dev feels disgusted at the contemptuous behaviour of the English towards Indians but later on he decides to stay in England. Adit who was satisfied with his life of London, leaves for India along with his pregnant wife. Thus the struggle is going on throughout the novel.

Next novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is structurally same to Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*. Both reveal heroine's consciousness through three successive stages of perception, memory and dream. Novel is divided into three well - defined parts in terms of time part one I monsoon, dealing with the present and immediate past of the protagonist, Sita; part two / winter, 47 with her remote past; part three / monsoon,' with her present.

Anita Desai's fifth novel *Fire On The Mountain*, is divided into three titled parts - part I : Nanda Kaul at Carignano, part II : Raka comes to Carignano, and part III: Ila Das leaves Carignano. Carignano a Villa situated in Kasauli on the Simla Hills, is the residence of the central, character, Nanda Kaul. The setting of the Novel symbolizes the desolate state of Nanda Kaul's mind as well as her great - grand daughter Raka. Thus the theme of loneliness, the image of the forest fire and the locale of Carignano lend structural unity to the novel.

Clear Light Of The Day is also carefully constructed and beautifully written. Shifts from the present to the past tense create an appropriate mood of nostalgia for the principal characters'

stream of consciousness. *The Village By The Sea*, sub-titled: An Indian Family story recounts the struggle of Lila, a girl of thirteen. This novel is different from Desai's previous novels in many respects, structurally; other novels are divided into three or four parts whereas this novel has no such broad divisions. It has been written in thirteen chapters-arranged chronologically. For the first time Desai has written a realistically moving tale about rural characters with economic problems.

Being a psychological novelist and concerned largely with the atmosphere of the mind of her characters, Anita Desai swerves away from the main tradition of characterization followed by Anand, Narayan, Bhattacharya, Markandaya and Malgonkar for whom it implied largely the social and economic background, physical features, dress and behaviour of a person. For Raja Rao and Nayantara Sahgal, the philosophical and political ideas dominated other traits of characters. But Anita Desai has no philosophical or social ideas of a character but only characters, their motivation, their consciences and consciousness and their tensions. Being a sensitive woman novelist and gifted with good observation, sensitiveness, a penetrating analysis and a skill of paint with words, Anita Desai creates a rich gallery of characters both male and female. B. Ramchandra Rao feels that in "their novels environment only adds to presenting "each individual as an unsolved mystery."¹¹

Desai's characters are not ordinary, nor are their problems concerned with food, clothes and shelter she writes:

I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against or made a stand against the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out "the great No" who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them."¹²

Anita Desai has drawn her characters from real life. They are men and women as we meet in daily life. Some times in her novel *'Bye-Bye Blackbird'* she has portrayed a beautiful contrast between the two male characters Dev and Adit - both are the 'coloured immigrants to India:

willing to make their permanent settlement in England. Dev shows his deep love and attachment for the hopeful environment. On the other hand, Adit shows his homesickness and is prone to go to his country India. Her vivid portrayal of Indian characters clearly displays a unique love hate relationship with England. She has shown her skill by making them individualized or typical characters or sometimes both. They are first flat characters but then, with the change in their attitude, they assume the shape of 'round characters. E.M. Forster in his book *Aspects of the Novel* has plainly differentiated both 'flat' and 'round' characters thus: "Flat characters were called 'humorous' in the seventeenth century and are (2) sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round."¹³

Individual characters display their personal behaviour, manners of speech, habits, physical features and facial expressions and even their dress on the basis of these personal traits, they may be characterized as individuals because they may be easily distinguished from other characters. On the other hand, typical characters typify a particular class or section of society. They represent a group. Among the major characters drawn in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai has created Adit as a home sick young man gifted with patriotism and his teaming towards Indian culture and soil out of which he is born, Indian's way of thinking is based on mental slavery to English culture and society. So in England he enjoys Sunday leisures, indulges in arrogant talks about horses and dogs and assumes his superiority on other Indians. Though he was among all the immigrants of India-known as blackbirds to whom England always bids bye-bye, yet he clings to that country. Like Adit, Sarah also has both individual and typical traits. Being an English lady, she loves Indians who made the permanent nests and feel proud of calling themselves *England Returned men*. Hence her characters reveal the simplicity of life. Maya in *Cry. The Peacock*, belongs to a rich family has a well-up to-date husband but has no emotions. Her problems are not typical but psychical. They show the opposition in their temperaments. Maya is romantic and hungry for love but Gautama is realistic and cold. Owing to sensitivity she weeps on the death of her dog Toto but for Gautama a pet dog has no importance. Nirode, Monisha and Amla in *In Voices in the City* are also not ordinary characters but sensitive artists with ego and self respect. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita is so sensitive and afflicted with the violence all around that she wishes to check the delivery of her baby. Nanda Kaul in *Fire On The Mountain* tries to attain the peace for home which is violated by the arrival

of Raka and the death of Ila Das. *In Clear Light of Day* Bim lives in the past world of dream and wakes up in the clear light of the day to mend her relations with her brother.

Most of the women characters are sensitive but male characters are not and they create the problems for women characters. Gautama is detached, philosophical and rational as preached in the Bhagvad-Gita. In *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* Adit is insensitive to the sufferings of Sarah and like a typical Indian husband expects her to dance to his changing tunes. Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* fails to understand the problem of Sita. He is also some, intelligent and rational like Gautama, but fails to understand his wife's feelings and problems.

Some of Desai's characters suffer from various complexes and psychic diseases which check the healthy growth of personality. Anita Desai shows her depth in human nature. A significant part of Desai's characterization is her 'connection of external object or landscape with her characters.' Maya is associated with peacocks whose agonised cry and knowledge of life and death becomes her own. Nirode's mother is identified with Kali and the city of Calcutta. She identifies herself with the eagle and is killed by the greedy crows and Nanda Kaul with the barrenness of Carignano.

Thus Anita Desai has her limits because of the fact that "she belongs to the upper middle class and being a woman, can have no access to the dirty and dusty corridors of power hungry politicians and blood-thirsty criminals, her portrayals of men and women of the upper class are sophisticated, well-chiselled, and true to life, even though they, unlike her minor characters, are mostly from her imagination."¹⁴ The selection of the characters has to be according to the subject matter of the novel. Since Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya were writing for life's sake. They chose their characters from both economic and social victims. Anita Desai is concerned with the portrayal of psychological reality so she prefers those characters who are peculiar rather than general. Hence most of her major characters are not from real life but are different characters based on imagination. Most of her female characters are sensitive and solitary neurotic beings. Anita Desai's novels reveal the world of woman characters in place of man. Each heroine is seen in attaining the peace of life but fails to achieve. Her female protagonist points out 'the mad clarity' of all family relationships, the nature of all marriages, and the quality of all human relationships male and female. What she portrays is deeply felt and suffered against the entire system of social relationships. Through her female characters she tried

to raise the question of real love. The female character in each novel of Desai has shown the extra amount the intelligence to realise the extraordinary queerness and seriousness of world in which she lives. The tragedy in each novel has happened as the result of the sensibility of female characters. She finds "the links between female quality, myth and psychosis intriguing; each heroine is seen as searching for, finding and absorbing or annihilating the double who represents the socially impermissible aspects of her femininity. Sexual politics and madness have been noticed and treated as concomitant aspects of the awakened feminine consciousness, both in contemporary Indian and western fiction."¹⁵

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The Gender Equation In Stereotypic Representation Of Women

ABDUL KAYOOM.V

ABSTRACT

Gender issues still exist as a perennial source of apprehensions regarding the oppressions of women though the feminist struggles continue to be waged against the patriarchal representations of women in the literary works produced from centuries back to the contemporary scenario. The canon formations and the privileged status to certain works are not free from gender equations. Critical and theoretical approaches are always needed to have serious reflections over the gender issues in ever changing socio political milieu that constructs, reconstructs and deconstructs the entire literary corpus.

The formula of ‘means to end’ dates long back, as early as the origin of human kind. It assumes its significance in a plethora of discourses. The discursive structures and practices in art, literature and culture determine these formulae. Since Performing arts is always a vibrant and active medium of the enactment of the reality in a societal frame work, the gender equations too practiced in a social context are found signified in the performance theatre. So, the gender equations analysed in a social reality are approximately analogous to those of the performing culture. Gender issues is one of the moot points surfacing on the deliberations involved in the artistic, literary and performing aesthetics.

It is a fact that everything including religion and family has been transformed to sheer means for maintaining the end of power. Machiavellian politics, Gandhism, Marxism, marriage, literature, psychology etc accommodate the elements of this ‘means to end’ formula. Most often, the women community is rendered the status of the means for the end of the male community.

As far as the position and the representation of the women are concerned in the current consumer culture which does not exempt the discipline of arts and literature too, a different outlook is needed towards the gender issue. Generally, the patriarchal discourses always relegate women in to the background and those counter discourses standing for women’s liberty and emancipation from the shackles of dominant patriarchal system.

It is important to trace the root cause of the issue by pitting it against the current profit-motivated social milieu in which, the identity, faith, religion, arts, politics, literature etc are commodified and institutionalised. So, the absence of the women's voice or the representation of the women under a negative light is to be looked from the consumerist cultural scenario. Advertising, films, performing arts etc are often manipulated and misused for sexualisation of the women. These media only focus upon the peripheral and external paraphernalia while rejecting essence or self of the women. It is to be noted whether the cheer girls represented in sports (Indian Premier League) are really cheerful. They must not be essentially cheerful. But they are paid to be cheerful for the sake of male dominated sponsors and players of the match. This performance does not go in line with traditional performing arts which gives an opportunity to reveal one's artistic faculties and aesthetic tastes, whether it is man or woman.

Metaphorically speaking, the Political scene has become one of the great stages of false and fake performance in our real life, which is corrupted by the hypocrisy shown towards women. There is a lot of analogy between a politician and gender biased male theatre manager and, Shakespeare's famous line *All the World is a Stage* supports this holistic approach towards the stage where enactment of all the world affairs takes place. One (theatre manager) plays the gender politics of false representation on the stage while the other (politician) does the same off the stage. Both project their activities as ostensibly objective and sincere in representing others. It has become natural and ubiquitous for political parties to allot women's representation in politics for the name sake to falsely consolidate a public opinion that women are also given due consideration. The ultimate motive behind this is not the sincere approach towards the issue related to the representation of the women community in politics, thereby materialising the political empowerment of the women, but it is a 'a strategic essentialism', as coined by Gayatri Chakroberthy Spivak in her "*Can the Subaltern Speak*", through which the possibility of the dominant community coming to the power is broadened. Here, the women community then is used as a mean or tool of vote bank politics to the end of patriarchal society for capturing or maintaining power which opens up the possibilities of corruption and other financial irregularities. So, rather than representation, it is the motive for the representation that is to be put to test. The issue of this motive remains insoluble question as in the case with false representation or under representation.

It is a fact that women are used as a mean to the end in literary works too. For instance, in the genre of detective fictions, women used as '*femme fatale*' are mere tools to the end of identifying and trapping the criminal as well as other rivals. Nevertheless, she is not raised to the level of the detective who uses her as a tool. Some metaphysical detective stories portraying women as the main detective figures like Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* or Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* are not considered under classical detective conventions, though exceptions may be found. So, in detective fictions too, Woman is a mean to end. In ghost stories too, the representation of the women as ghost or source of mystery or an exorcised one or the demonic personality is common because there has been a general conception that the role played by the women in the ghost stories is the only mean to achieve the end of maximum effect in the audience. Woman is objectified as a mere tool for maximum artistic effect. The representation of a woman in the form of ghost often with a male's voice problematizes her own identity. She is oscillating between man and woman. The Malayalam film, *Manichitrathazhu* is an example. The fluctuating nature of female identity has been theorized by Julia Kristeva, which will be mentioned here.

Way back to the history of English theatre, women's representation is far from satisfying. For instance, in *Macbeth*, though Macbeth has got the tragic flaw of falling victim to the towering ambitions of usurping the throne, his inherent sense of criminality was initiated by the witches and then boosted by his own wife, Lady Macbeth who is represented as easily prone to the mental disorder. So, the witches are not only the mystic and demonic ladies inscrutable to the human rationality but also represented as the dangerous creatures with feminine inclination, capable of instigating violence thereby destabilising the whole country. In *King Lear*, the cause of Lear's entire pathetic condition is none other than his merciless and impertinent daughters, Goneril and Regan. The entire nation was tormented by these daughters. If Shakespeare had replaced the daughters with the sons for Lear, it would not have had a desired artistic effect from the perspective of Electra complex which accentuates the father's excessive love toward his daughters. So, the daughters are the better means to be instrumental for Lear's pathetic condition which evokes the entire attention of the audience. So, women characters are represented as the apparatus for the cause of men's emotions and feelings like affection, desires, sadness, ambitions, happiness etc.

The institution of family and marriage and other related domestic affairs are the perennial themes for dramatic performance. Women are construed as tools of reproductive necessity of the patriarchal desire. Her domestic and public space is limited and she is left to the carnal pleasure of the audience, though some glimpses of her values are portrayed. Her silence is falsely glorified as her patience though it could be out of fear of repercussions if the voice is raised. Women are represented as those who elope with her boyfriend or lover bringing dejection and degradation to the family, or those who are susceptible to wooing, leading to the loss of husband's trust in her, or those incompatible to chaotic social circumstances, falling victims to psychological disorders. The audience has reached a state where they are capable of enjoying even a rape scene. It is not that the viewers have to be emotional to such scenes; but that they neglect the gravity and seriousness of the scene. It can never be out of context, if the former CBI director, Ranjit Sinha's controversial statement on rape is quoted. He stated that, "If you can't prevent rape, enjoy it". (Hindustan Times, Nov 13, 2013). (He has apologised for it later and concerned that his statement was taken out of context)

Art and literature are different forms of media through which social issues are projected according to the taste of the audience. The case of rape is sometimes represented as if it was a rare incident in society though it is a rampant social issue we are destined to know. For instance, the media representation of notorious Delhi gang rape shows that it is the only rape that has ever occurred in India. The incidents of rape as a recurring issue corrosive of the moral and cultural tradition of the country were perceived as a political failure also the existing government has to burden. Rape was set for the formation of public opinion against the government which is already corrupted. Then it was looked as both shifted a gender issue and a political one too. So a public awareness of social justice was formed in this particular case. Yet it is not always the case since the political helm of affairs is male dominated. It is an instance where media is capable of contributing to assuring to social justice to the women Justice.

In the representation of the women, the feminist theoretical concerns also are manipulated. The pre-mirror stage of a girl child, as Julia Kristeva says, is semiotic which is tied to feminine and associated with the emotional, the poetic, the rhythmic and the music, which lacks meaning, order and structure. The child identifies herself with the mother. Even after entering the mirror stage which helps the child to distinguish between the self and the other, and enter the realm of shared cultural meaning and world of language, known as symbolic stage in which the

development of language allows the child to become a “speaking subject” and she develops her own identity separate from the mother. Yet, contrasting to Lacan, Kristeva argues that even after entering the symbolic stage, the subject continues to fluctuate between the semiotic and the symbolic so that the female child both rejects and identifies with the mother figure, thereby leading the concept of fixed identity “in process”. So the female audience also can identify with what the female character rejects the mother figures in the performance where as the male audience can sexualize the mother figure (mother figure is the embodiment of all the feminine qualities) from the perspective of Freudian Oedipus complex. Since the female identity is not fixed one, the mother figure in any artistic and cultural representation cannot be attributed the respectful values and dignity. It follows the lack of necessity of valorising the woman figure so that she is reduced to mere an enjoyable object with no fixed identity. She is represented as the figure of the semiotic in origin that is evocative of her inherent emotions, rhythm and music and is only meant for or tool for balancing the masculine rationality, order and intellect. So, the women’s emotional inclination is manipulated to arouse maximum effect of sympathy and identification from the audience since the emotional tendency of the women characters are not mere external dramatisation, but an inherent element lying in them.

The objectification of the women has a lot to do with the theoretical frame work of French feminist, Luce Irigaray, for whom the women assumes both the use value and exchange value. In advertisements, the women are assigned both exchange and use value. She is treated as a commodity in high demand so that their exchange value soars. As per the theory of Irigaray, there are three types of women. They are mother (with only use value), virgin (with only exchange value) and prostitute (with both use value and exchange value). Here, the women in advertisements can unfortunately be construed as mere prostitutes. They are used as well as exchanged by the capitalist and neoliberal forces controlled by male dominated system. Irigaray’s the *Speculum of the Other Woman* puts forth the idea that male projects himself as subject while woman as the objects.

In performing arts like cinematic dance, the frequency of men wearing the attire of women’s dress is far less than those women appearing in the attire of men, though the specificity of the dress assigned to each sex in the postmodern contemporary social scenario is problematised and called in to question. In the performance of these dances, the women presented as those trying to be equivalent to be that of men in terms of attire is shown “natural” in the performance while the

reverse is shown comical. Luce Irigaray is critical of the end of equality since it is like becoming equivalent to men. So, it shows that women are the defective variation of her counterpart dancing on the stage.

The social function of the art and literature, no doubt, is not meagre. They can serve as a conduit for a bloodless revolution bringing desirable social changes. Women and children can participate in this process, in contrast to bloody social revolution in which women's participation is comparatively less. Gandhian mode of protest and resistance with mass women participation against social evils is finding a parallel to the peaceful stage performance against the social malice. But, it is doubtful how far the gender issues and patriarchal repressive practices are an eye-opener to male dominated theatre business.

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‘O Blessed Misery!’: Reading Select Poems of Swami Vivekananda

ARUNABHA GHOSH

ABSTRACT

Since this conference his epoch making speech at the World Religion Parliament in September, 1893, Vivekananda was exposed to the audiences of America and Europe; as a result, he had to write a number of letters to meet the queries of various people. Apart from his writings and talks/ lectures on the nature of Hinduism as well as the true nature of all religions, his letters, generally prompted by personal urge, make his ideas clear to us. Often Vivekananda composed short poems to accompany them as part of his letters. This paper attempts to interpret some of his short poems found along with the letters. Our study aims to discover Vivekananda’s ideas of ‘true’ religion, cosmopolitanism in society, the idea of the real sannyasin, and his rebel spirit. Moreover, in some poems (like “The Cup”, “To an Early Violet”, “Thou Blessed Dreams” etc.), we find an ordinary man’s struggle against life’s existential questions, and how he challenges this crisis with his idea of the Brahman. The paper is an attempt to examine how these poems became an emotional weapon to face life’s little ironies on personal as well as on universal plain.

[**Key words:** Hinduism, Cosmopolitanism, Sannyasin, Brahman, Existentialism]

In November 1898, in a poem, “Angels Unawares,” Swami Vivekananda wrote:

One bending low with load of life—
That meant no joy, but suffering harsh and hard—
And wending on his way through dark and dismal paths
Without a flash of light from brain or heart
To give a moment's cheer,¹ (1-5)

The poem registers the unhappy sufferings of life; the ‘One’ in the beginning is a passer-by who takes on a journey on an uneven road and faces different challenges on his way. The poet portrays how amidst all these adversities of life the passer-by finds an insight, a ‘ray of light’ that descends to him on ‘one blessed night.’ Albeit unaware of the source of it or even of its true nature, he welcomes this as God and worshipped it. Hence, though, the sages sarcastically called it ‘superstition,’ he answers back, ‘O Blessed Superstition!’ As the poem is divided into three sections, in each of them we find different sensibilities of the passer-by—in the first, we find the dark passageways of life through which he passes with his share of the loads of life; in the second, we find how once the world seemed to him like a ‘pleasure garden’ and how it was

transformed gradually into a place of pain and sorrow as he form kinship ‘with all the human race/ In groans and tears;’ in the last, the passer-by, ‘born with healthy frame,’ ultimately got ‘ope’d his eyes for e’er,’ and he finds the ‘blessed’ power in man. Thematically the poem could be summed up as a statement of how a man finds a divine impetus from within. The use of the word ‘unawares’ in the title of the poem is of momentous value as the poet indicates that it is more like a sudden discovery than a trained or systematic process. This is not just another serendipitous finding, but the divine ‘ray of light’ comes in his darkest hour. The night is darkest just before the dawn. The first ray of the spiritual dawn appears in the most requisite hour of the man. Empowered by the strength of the soul he could deny the sages’ winking and the world’s expulsion of him. With an illumined heart, though not totally free of scepticism, he accepts superstition, misery, and sin as ‘blessed.’ Interestingly, what people call superstition, misery, and sin, are to him, nothing but the new found ideas and ideals of life under the light of divine truth that ‘man alone/ Is blest with power to fight and conquer Fate.’

A passer-by, Swami Vivekananda, started his journey to the foreign lands on May 31, 1893, and after almost four years, returned home on January 26, 1897. What made an ordinary man fight against all the odds that came to his way in a land where it was tough to find a helping hand? What was the source of energy with which he struggled against real and practical situation? To find an answer, we can turn to the poem we have already discussed; in its first section he writes,

Hope, an utter stranger, came to him and spread
 Through all his parts, and life to him meant more
 Than he could ever dream and covered all he knew,
 Nay, peeped beyond his world.² (11-14)

We can easily discern that the passer-by in the poem is none other than Vivekananda himself—the poem registers his epiphanic experience³, a sudden revelation, a divine manifestation. After this, even misery seems ‘blessed’ because all experiences of life now lead him to reach the highest form of divinity, i. e., the road to salvation.

Vivekananda did not write many poems, the number of all his poems would reach nearly fifty.⁴ He has written in Bengali, English, Sanskrit, and Hindi. In our study we tried to examine some of the short poems written in English, which accompanied his letters to various people. It is interesting to note that in these short poems we find the worldview of Swami Vivekananda. In

the poems, on one hand, we find the self of an ordinary man behind his religious aura; on the other, a social reformer with his idea of a cosmopolitan society. In his lectures we find a monk prepared to answer the questions on religion and ideal way of life. In his letters which were written to his worldwide acquaintances, he does the same; but as could be easily understood, in the letters, we find the informal self of Vivekananda. In the letters to his disciples, to the ‘brothers and sisters’ of the whole world, he offers solution to personal problems, advises in their time of crises, extends helping hand in form of valuable spiritual suggestions. In the letters we find his pragmatic self. Oftentimes we encounter a man who does not bother the conventions of the society. In a letter, dated April 24, 1897, to the Editor of *Bharati*, a Bengali magazine, he wrote:

Education, education, education alone! Travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people, and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got. Through education comes faith in one's own Self, and through faith in one's own Self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant.⁵

It is to remember that Vivekananda’s diagnosis of the problem of India and its poor was never an exaggerated or a romanticised one. He goes to the roots of the problem. According to him, it is education which has the power to awake the *atman* (self) in man. He realised that wealth is not a possible solution; money cannot eradicate poverty but proper education. His cosmopolitan benevolence impartially extended to all races and all creeds. In the same letter, he praised contemporary America as a land where the true ideals of democracy are practised; he also praised it for spreading the idea of equality and abolishing the despicable tradition of human slavery. Noting that discrimination in education as the prime cause of discrimination among men, he made education itself the weapon to eliminate discrimination. His idea here matches with one of his great contemporaries, the greatest product of the Bengal Renaissance, Rabindranath Tagore. In his essay, “*Lokahit*” (“Welfare of Man”, 1914), Tagore draws the examples of the West and declares that the only way for upliftment of the poor in India is education—basic or primary education. Because on the basis of this primary education there would be a nexus among the downtrodden, and this communication with the others would make

them aware of the real condition in which they are. As products of the 19th century Bengal Renaissance, both Tagore and Vivekananda held same ideas regarding the role of education for the benefit of the downtrodden. This idea has worldwide scope and applicability.

Regarding the universality of Vivekananda's ideas—on both religion and society—we need to mention what the Wisconsin State Journal noted on 21 November, 1893:

Albeit he is an idol-worshipper, many of his teachings can be easily followed by the Christians. His religious faith is universally liberal. He acknowledges every religion. He is ever ready to accept truth whenever and wherever he finds it. (*Complete Works*, Bengali Version, Vol. X 22, translation by the present author)

His poem “Quest for God” illustrates the point that the Journal noted:

O'er hill and dale and mountain range,
In temple, church, and mosque,
In Vedas, Bible, Al Koran.
I had searched for Thee in vain.⁶ (1-4)

The poem is about the poet's search for god and his ultimate realisation of god's presence in everything. He finds that god has no caste, neither creed, and he is beyond any narrow religious practices. His dwelling place is the core of heart of man himself, as he feels, ‘A flash illumined all my soul;/ The heart of my heart opened wide.’ The ‘illumined’ soul now perceives god ‘Over hill and dale, high mount and vale,’ in ‘moon's soft light, the stars so bright.’ With the strength in his heart he has no fear of ‘A thousand deaths.’ His god is the god of the ancient pristinely state of all creations, who is beyond the confinements of time—from him come all religions; the poet notes,

All creeds do come from Thee,
The Vedas, Bible, and Koran bold
Sing Thee in Harmony.⁷ (74-76)

It is important to note that “Quest for God” was written on September 4, 1893, in a letter to Professor John Wright. Addressing him as *Adhyapakji*, Vivekananda wrote, “Here are a few lines written as an attempt at poetry. Hoping your love will pardon this infliction” (*Complete Works*

VIII, 449). The literal meaning of the word ‘inflation’ is accepting ‘something that is unpleasant or not welcome’ (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 611). The poem surely speaks about the painful, somehow unpleasant state of seeking god, the poem itself is not unpleasant; instead, it could be considered as one that registers one’s true search for his god. This can also be taken as a quest for truth which is never circumscribed within the sacraments of any religion—as truth is freedom from all these shackles that bind men to the lower earthly passion. His quest it is that takes him to the higher realm of divinity. Related to this is his vision of cosmopolitanism. In a letter to Mary Hale, dated July 9, 1897, he wrote, “I never wanted earthly enjoyments. I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next. . . .”⁸ We might wonder that what actually constitutes this machine. The date of the letter is to be noted here—he writes this in the July of 1897, the year of his return from the West. Within this very short span of time what device could he set in India to benefit mankind? The answer again lies in his poem “The Living God,” which was a part of this letter; he writes,

Ye fools! who neglect the living God,
 And His infinite reflections with which the world is full.
 While ye run after imaginary shadows,
 That lead alone to fights and quarrels,
 Him worship, the only visible!
 Break all other idols! (*Complete Works VIII*, 16-21)

The ‘living God,’ the ‘only visible’ is none other than the god whose presence is felt through everything—‘through all hands’ he works, ‘on all feet’ he walks, and he is inside and outside all. The divinity of the god of “Quest for God” is to be perceived here, but it is added with the all rounded aspects of a fuller vision of god. Here, in the present poem, we find a god that pervades the ‘high’ and ‘low’ equally, the ‘sinner’ and the ‘saint’ in equal fashion, and hence, he is ‘visible, knowable, real, omnipresent.’ With a supreme realisation of this god, Vivekananda confirms that he is at the same time ‘Both God and worm.’ His call to ‘Break all other idols’ is a great tribute to god who is perceived through the senses. At the same time, however, however, this god could be best perceived in the poor and downtrodden people of the world (and India). The words that precede the poem in the letter are important:

. . . may I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls — and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.⁹

In the letter he talks about his work and his dedication to the oppressed humanity, the poor people of the entire world. The poem—though at the outset it talks about god and man’s perception of him in all living things—it is under the shadow of this poem he puts forward his philosophy of serving mankind as man is the centre of the whole world in whom to be found god’s greatest manifestation. Underneath the spirited lines of the poem, we find Vivekananda talking about his ‘machine.’ A machine is a mechanical device that transmits or modifies energy to perform or assist in the performance of human tasks. The so-called ‘machine’ of Vivekananda is nothing but the burning idealism of serving mankind; and we understand that this was his motivational force behind the establishment of Ramakrishna Mission Association in May 1897. This is the remarkable ideal of *Shibjnane Jeebseba* (serving men to serve god), which was to become one of the most famous icons for the later social reformers of India and abroad.

Vivekananda was an advocate of humanism, a spokesperson of the interests and welfare of the downtrodden; his vision is never confined within the narrow domestic walls of his own religion or country, but spread through all roadblocks. In the letter to Mary Hale dated July 9, 1897 (where appeared “The Living God”), Vivekananda expresses strong feelings of dislike at the effort of some American newspapers trying to defame him for his utterance about American women and their effort to ‘outcast’ him. With a touch of sarcasm in his tone, he writes, “I had also a lot of cuttings from different American papers fearfully criticising my utterances about American women and furnishing me with the strange news that I had been outcasted! *As if I had any caste to lose, being a Sannyâsin!*”¹⁰ (emphasis ours). What he wants to mean is that the ideal of a *Sannyâsin* is to remain always beyond any kind of sectarianism or parochialism; a *Sannyâsin* should be a truly liberated spirit. One of his earlier poems, “The Song of the Sannyâsin,” written in July 1895, clarifies this point. On one hand, he indicates the path of salvation; on the contrary, the poem becomes a picture of what a true *Sannyâsin* should be. The literal meaning of the word ‘*Sannyâsin*’ is Hindu religious mendicant. But the way Vivekananda interprets the word in his poem, the connotation goes beyond all religious confinement to reach the ‘global’ religion of humanism. It becomes a song for all the people of the world—irrespective of caste and creed,

race and religion, nationality and status—who ever wanted redemption. The song, its ‘note,’ according to the poet, has its origin in a distant place, ‘where worldly taint could never reach,’ and its deep calmness is impenetrable ‘for lust or wealth or fame.’ This song gives the much needed force to fight all the odds—‘Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,/ Of shining gold or darker, baser ore.’ A strong urge to discard all that bind humans from earning the *moksha*, to cast aside all the earthly worries, to remain detached from happiness and sorrow equally, to strive towards knowledge, to be always open towards truth—the religious iconography of the poem presents a secular worldview. Invoking the biblical proverb of ‘sowing and reaping,’¹¹ he gives his poem a scope beyond any regional philosophy:

‘Who sows must reap,’ they say, ‘and cause must bring
The sure effect; good, good; bad, bad; and none
Escape the law.’¹² (23-25)

At the same time he also warns, ‘But whoso wears a form/ Must wear the chain.’ The real duty of the *Sannyâsin* is to break free this cycle. The entire thrust is on the self, the *Atman*—‘There is but One – The Free, The Knower – Self!’—and the ‘Self’ is nameless, formless, stainless. Again and again he emphasises on the fact that it is the freedom of the self that a *Sannyâsin* must try to achieve, because it cannot be bestowed by anything from the outside, but from inside—‘The Self is all in all, none else exists’—and hence, ‘He conquers all who conquers self.’ This idea is entirely secular. Here the ancient Hindu advice of *Atmanam Viddhi* and the biblical idea of ‘Know Thyself’ amalgamate with each other. He finds love and hate, good and bad, happiness and sorrow to be the opposite sides of the same coin. Here we find a reflection of what Sri Krishna said in the *Geeta*:

*Dukkeshwanudwignamana sukhesu bigataspriha,
Beetaragavayakrodha sthitadhirmuniruchchate.*

[“A true *Sannyâsin* is the man who has no anxiety in sorrow, no desire in happiness and whose affection, fear and anger have been fully desisted.” *The Geeta*, IV. 56, translation by present author]

The reflection of the *Geeta* in his poems shows how deep his faith was in the cosmopolitanism of the Hindu religion. His philosophy gets a different dimension when we understand that though

being an orthodox Hindu, he never believed in the narrowness of any religion, but his vision was always liberal, open and free from all superstitions. The nameless, formless, all pervading, immeasurable Self (the *Atman*) goes beyond all dreams, *maya*, and unreality—‘*Om tat sat, Om!*’—the Vedantic philosophy is never as resplendent as in “The Song of the Sannyâsin.”

We should note that before Vivekananda has travelled to the West in 1893, he spent a period of almost five years, i. e. 1888 to 1892, to travel in India, to get a clear first hand picture of his beloved land. This firsthand knowledge, and not a bird’s eye view of the miserable condition of the downtrodden, brought a momentous change to his mind. So when he returned from the West in 1897 and witnessed the same situation prevailing, it caused a great pain to him. On July 4, 1897, writing from Almora to Sister Nivedita he talks about his ‘work’ in the famine stricken areas:

Just now I am very busy with the famine, and except for training a number of young men for future work, have not been able to put more energy into the teaching work. The “feeding work” is absorbing all my energy and means. Although we can work only on very small scale as yet, the effect is marvellous. For the first time since the days of Buddha, Brahmin boys are found nursing by the bed-side of cholera-stricken pariahs. (*Complete Works VIII*, 407)

Our study, however, leads us to discover a different side of Vivekananda. We find in him not only a social reformer who feels and works for his countrymen, but a man who felt the acute pains of existence that life hurls on him. Some poems written in this period show how the man was facing life’s unanswered questions. From ancient times, humans have tried to find out the meaning and purpose of his existence on earth. The situation of absurdity is created out of the conflict between man’s search for the meaning and the resolute silence of the universe. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Albert Camus has compared modern man’s situation with that of the mythical figure Sisyphus. In his tireless effort Sisyphus faces an eternal situation of pain. In the poems like “The Cup,” “To an Early Violet,” “Angels Unawares,” “Thou Blessed Dream,” “My Play Is Done,” we find the Sisyphus-self of Vivekananda—a man trying to understand his existence on earth by carefully scrutinising the path of his life. In “The Cup,” his God says him to swallow the ‘dark drink’ of ‘fault’ and ‘passion.’ He finds that his way is ‘a painful road and drear,’ his path is made up of ‘the stones that never give . . . rest.’ It is his ‘task’ that ‘has no joy

nor grace,' neither is 'meant for other hand.' With a touch of celestial irony, his God tells him, 'I do not bid you understand./ I bid you close your eyes to see My face.' Camus' Sisyphus faces the same situation. Under this ancient myth, Camus tells the story of agony of man. All of man's efforts to understand the universe and its ways, all his attempts to find a design behind the chaotic nature of his existence on this earth fall short as the mysteries of the universe remain inscrutable and incomprehensible. Man's progress in the fields of theology, material and biological sciences, history (anthropology), and philosophy only lead him to a certain point beyond which lies the probable answer. Vivekananda's Sisyphus-self is, nevertheless, different from that of the mythical or Camus' Sisyphus. Camus' Sisyphus is condemned "to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight" (Camus 107). Hopeless, futile labour is the greatest punishment for him. In the conclusion of his thesis on man's condition like the Sisyphus, Camus writes:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He, too, concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (111)

Lack or absence of response gives the author the chance to "imagine Sisyphus happy." In the last sentence the use of the word 'must' is to be noted as it reveals the forced conclusion of *imagining* Sisyphus happy. On the contrary, the Sisyphus-self of Vivekananda is not forcefully happy—he gets response from his God. Though the road is painful, though the task is joyless, it is never lacking in its reward at the end. God speaks through him to give him this hope that there lies eternal peace at the end of his life's *karma*.¹³ With this solace at the core of his heart he finds the strength to fight all odds on his way—his is not hopeless situation. Another poem, "To an Early Violet," written to Miss Mary Hale from New York on 6th January 1896, also exemplifies the theme of harsh life in which he is thrown. Violet is the spring flower of the West, but when it blooms in late winter, i. e. before the advent of spring, it has to fight against the cold blast. The poem is meant to give encouragement to the disciple to stand up to adverse circumstances. But it becomes the emotional weapon for the poet himself with which he struggles with the unknown

and faceless future. We cannot help quoting the entire poem to show the strong imagery that he uses:

What though thy bed be frozen earth,
 Thy cloak the chilling blast;
What though no mate to clear thy path,
 Thy sky with gloom o'er cast;

What though of love itself doth fail,
 Thy fragrance strewed in vain;
What though if bad o'er good prevail,
 And vice o'er virtue reign;

Change not thy nature, gentle bloom,
 Thou violet, sweet and pure,
But ever pour thy sweet perfume
 Unasked, unstinted, sure! (*Complete Works VIII*, 1-12)

This is how Vivekananda grapples with life's grave questions—to find an answer in an absurd situation; and here too he is different from Camus' Sisyphus. In "My Play Is Done," talking about, 'Ever rising, ever falling with the waves of time,' he finds himself, 'rolling on . . . / From fleeting scene to scene ephemeral, with life's currents' ebb and flow.' The sickening, 'unending force' does not 'please' the heart any more; this is 'ever running, never reaching,' and there is not 'a distant glimpse of shore!'

With an acute feeling of existential angst, which the world was yet to witness in the great Modernist literature of the 20th century Europe and America, Vivekananda writes:

From life to life I'm waiting at the gates, alas, they open not.
Dim are my eyes with vain attempt to catch one ray long sought.
On little life's high, narrow bridge I stand and see below
The struggling, crying, laughing throng. For what? No one can know.¹⁴ (4-8)

Whoever dares to go beyond, to know further, 'comes to grief.' He continues:

In front yon gates stand frowning dark, and say: `No farther away,
This is the limit; tempt not Fate, bear it as best you may;
Go, mix with them and drink this cup and be as mad as they.
Who dares to know but comes to grief; stop then, and with them stay.'¹⁵ (9-12)

However, this dead end is not the end for him; he says, “Alas for me, I cannot rest.” We find a continuous struggle towards his goal, to reach the truth of life. He acknowledges his fatigue; he realises the transitory nature of the universe; he comprehends the unreal ways of the world:

Tossed to and fro, from wave to wave in this seething, surging sea
Of passions strong and sorrows deep, grief is, and joy to be.
Where life is living death, alas! and death—who knows but `tis
Another start, another round of this old wheel of grief and bliss?
Where children dream bright, golden dreams, too soon to find them dust,
And aye look back to hope long lost and life a mass of rust!
Too late, the knowledge age doth gain; scare from the wheel we're gone.
When fresh, young lives put their strength to the wheel, which thus goes on
From day to day and year to year. 'Tis but delusion's toy,
False hope its motor; desire, nave; its spokes are grief and joy.
I go adrift and know not whither.'¹⁶ (21-31)

These lines describe the temporal nature of the world. They are unique in Indian English poetry in the sense they come with full poetic sensibility from a man who was not a systematic poet. Interestingly, we perceive the shadow of Keats' “Ode to a Nightingale” in Vivekananda's perception of the temporal nature of the world.¹⁷ It should be noted here that Brajendranath Seal introduced Shelley's poetry to Vivekananda.¹⁸ Along with Shelley's “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and some other poems, his ideas on the nature of Platonic love, his vision of a glorified millennial humanity made a great impact on the philosophical self of Vivekananda. From a somewhat dry philosophic standpoint he entered a world of artistic innovation; it is through Shelley's poetry he found the unifying force that binds the world with a spiritual thread. In Vivekananda O Bangla Sahitya (Vivekananda and Bengali Literature), Pranabranjan Ghosh remarks, “. . . Shelley, Biharilal and Vivekananda—all three poets emerged from romantic to mystic sensibility—so they could be considered of the same category”¹⁹ (126-127, translation by

present author). Evidently, Vivekananda's romantic consciousness could be seen in "Thou Blessed Dream," where the temporal world emerges to him as a 'dream':

If things go ill or well—
If joy rebounding spreads the face,
Or sea of sorrow swells—
A play—we each have a part,
Each one to weep or laugh as may; (*Complete Works VIII*, 1-5)

In this 'play,' he finds that 'Each one his dress to don—/ Its scenes, alternative shine or rain.'
The dream is 'blessed,' he calls:

Thou dream, O blessed dream!
Spread far and near thy veil of haze,
Tone down the lines so sharp,
Make smooth what roughness seems. (*Complete Works VIII*, 8-11)

Its touch 'makes desert bloom to life.' He concludes the poem describing the embalming effect of death in human life, 'Harsh thunder, sweetest song,/ Fell death, the sweet release.' To understand his concept of death and dream we need to look at his letter written on August 28, 1900 to Sister Nivedita; he writes in the letter:

. . . All our efforts are only to stave off, for a season, the great climax — death!
Oh, what would the world do without you, Death! Thou great healer!

The world, as it is, is not real, is not eternal, thank the Lord!! How can the future be any better? That must be an effect of this one — at least like this, if not worse!

Dreams, oh dreams! Dream on! Dream, the magic of dream, is the cause of this life, it is also the remedy. Dream' dream; only dream! Kill dream by dream!²⁰

We understand that, to him, the healing touch of dream and that of death become synonymous. His 'dream' is not only a result of his romantic imagination, but like a true mystic it is an esoteric

experience to him which goes beyond the confinements of the senses to reach the metaphysical realm.

Vivekananda's poems were written more on a personal purpose, and, as is said earlier, he was no systematic poet, rather a social reformer and a religious guru. Shankariprasad Basu, in *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatbarsha (Vivekananda and Contemporary India)* opines, “. . . Poetry did not get his enough attention, and while writing poetry he gave more attention to theme—he was not as careful about rhythm or other matters related to form” (Vol. V, 179, translation by present author). But along with the themes of the poems, the iconography, the style in which the ideas are expressed, the images from nature as well as those of the archetypes, the matter-of-factness, and the use of absolutely no word that did not contribute to the main purpose of his theme—all are unique in themselves because these are the qualities to be found in great poetry. Moreover, they served their purpose in the letters being complementary to the ideas expressed in prose. In *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, Romain Rolland notes,

‘Do you not see,’ he [Vivekananda] said to Miss MacLeod, ‘that I am first and foremost a poet?’—a word that may be misunderstood by Europeans; for they have lost the meaning of true poetry—the flight of faith—without which a bird becomes a mere mechanical toy. (225)

We understand that though not primarily a poet, he was full of the aesthesia of a poet. Within the limited scope of this article, it is not possible for us to discuss Vivekananda's Vedantic philosophy, religious consciousness, and spiritual dimensions which are manifest in his poems. However, we may conclude by quoting from “Light,” a very short poem that appeared in a letter to Miss MacLeod on December 26, 1900:

I look behind and after
And find that all is right,
In my deepest sorrows
There is a soul of light. (*Complete Works* VIII, 1-4)

The ‘soul of light’ which denies explanation in words, and which can only be realised on a metaphysical level, has been the force behind all his endeavours. Vivekananda's entire life was

an effort to know the nature of this ‘soul of light.’ Among all his writings, poetry is just an index to that.

Notes

1. We have quoted this poem, like several other poems, from an internet source (<http://www.vivekananda.net/Poetry.html>); wherever it is quoted from the internet source, it is mentioned in the Notes, and if it is quoted from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, it is mentioned in the main text. In all cases, we have mentioned line numbers in the main text. The web link along with relevant details is given in the Works Cited list.

2. See note above.

3. The word ‘Epiphany’ refers to Twelve days after Christmas, celebrating the visit of the three wise men to the infant Jesus. We, however, deliberately use the word not in its Christian connotation, but to mean a divine manifestation, a moment of sudden understanding or revelation.

4. See Prof. Pallab Sengupta’s essay on Vivekananda’s poetry.

5. Like some poems we have also quoted some letters from the internet source (<http://www.vivekananda.net/KnownLetters.html>); in each case it is mentioned in the notes. Quotations from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* mentioned in the main text along with the Vol. no. and page numbers. The web link along with relevant details is given in the Works Cited list.

6. See Note 1.

7. See Note 1.

8. See Note 5.

9. See Note 5.

10. See Note 5.

11. The proverb in the *Bible* is: “A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from

the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up' (*The New Testament, Galatians 6: 7-9*).

12. See Note 1.

13. By the word 'karma' we mean the tasks, the duties of one's life.

14. See Note 1.

15. See Note 1.

16. See Note 1.

17. In "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats wrote about the real world:

The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow. (23-30)

The poem was quoted from *The Golden Treasury*.

18. For details, see Pranabranjan Ghosh's book *Vivekananda O Bangla Sahitya (Vivekananda and Bengali Literature)*.

19. Biharilal Chakraborty, mentioned in this context, was a famous Bengali poet who lived from 1835 to 1894, i. e., in the time, known as the first phase of the Renaissance in Bengal.

20. See Note 5.

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Bridging the gaps : A Reading of Derek Walcott's *A far Cry From Africa and Ruins of a Great House*

Narendra Ranjan Malas

Colonialism and forced migration in the Caribbean Islands resulted into the existence of different ethnic groups which include remnant natives, a large number of Africans, a small number of European settlers and a substantial number of Indians and Chinese. The people of the region have no other way but to accept their multi-ethnic, multi-cultural heritage. Caribbean writings today register the personal angst of the writers with their fragmented identity, cultural diversity and their strive to resolve the paradox of their hybrid inheritance. Walcott was reared up in such a very complex schizophrenic situation of the Caribbean society with its cultural fusion of African and European elements. Like other Anglophone Caribbean poets his poetry registers this socio-cultural plurality, ambivalence and quest for a legitimate identity, but at the same time there is an attempt to resolve the contradictions and bridge the cultural distances. The two poems under discussion exhibit Walcott's inner divisions, his schizophrenic experiences, but they also explore his desire to harmonize the discord between his African and European cultural inheritance and his endeavour to build a bridge between two cultural traditions.

Walcott is a man of biological plurality as he is a descendant of two white grandfathers and two black grandmothers. The formation of his identity as an Anglophone black West Indian poet was influenced by both European and African traditions. He became acquainted with great European classics from an early stage and developed a strong passion for the English language and the cultural heritage associated with it. But he, like some other black Caribbean poets who consider Africa as their homeland, has never lost contact with his African roots. At the same time, in his works, he incorporates the landscape, the seas, harbours and the themes typical of the region.

A far Cry From Africa, Walcott's best known lyric, elaborates the poet's ambivalence and his Philoctetaean situation in choosing between what is right and what is wrong, and his strive to resolve the paradox of his cultural and racial hybrid inheritance. This struggle appears to be irreconcilable. The poem reveals his psychological conflict, divided loyalties and his angst for not being identified with a particular tradition:

*I who am poisoned with the blood of both
Where shall I turn divided in vein ? (CP 18)*

In the beginning the poet's response to both the cultures is negative. The brutality and savagery of Europeans as well as Africans do not receive favourable comments and they are relegated to non-human existence – 'worm' and 'flies' respectively. The imperial and anti-imperial bloodshed finds an expression in this poem; but the problem is how to express this painful experience, because it is always difficult to depict blackman's agony in whiteman's words. Ramazani in this context comments :

His name taken from the culture of colonizer and slaver, yet his wounded black body allegorizing their cruelty, Philoctete recalls the "divided" speaker of "A Far Cry from Africa," cursing the brutality of the colonizers yet cursing them in the language they have given him. (188)

As a member of a colonized society Walcott is aware of this issue of language, that the very act of 'writing back' or expressing the bitterness against the brutality of the masters, forces him to use the tongue of the conquerors. To quote Victor Chang,

For the West Indian writer, then it has always been an issue of language how to express the colonial experience , how to write back to the conquerors, how to come to terms with something 'torn and new', all the while using language which is a part of that colonial heritage.(235-236)

But Walcott is completely in tune with the English language and a contemporary of anyone writing in English anywhere in the world. The great voices of English verse including Shakespeare, Marvell, Eliot and the works of others imbued in him a love for English language and culture. But, as pointed out by Balakian, "*Using the English tongue he loves does not preclude his moral outrage at the crimes that the Empire has committed against his people*" (45). He is unequivocally in love with the 'English tongue', but *he distinctly repudiates the yoke of its imperial regime, represented by "the drunken officer of British rule"* (Ismond 18). The poem focuses on the speaker's divided self and his dilemma in choosing between ancestral Africa and his birth right in the English tongue:

...how choose

Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?

Betray them both, or give back what they give?(CP 18)

Walcott's response to these contradictions and complexities involves a process of self-address and self-interrogation. There are several questions, rhetorical as well as open, pointing at the poet's agony for cultural in-betweenness and his resolution to stand in-between two cultures and harvest the best of both the worlds.

Ruins of a Great House ponders over the conflicting aspects of colonial legacy. The period when Walcott was writing this poem was a time of conflictual decolonization. The poet is caught between conflicting emotions which seem difficult to resolve. Like *A Far Cry from Africa* this poem also reveals the poet wrestling "with the complex identity ...his irreconcilable and pluralistic cultural situation as a transplanted African in a colonial English society" (Balakian 45). In the poem the poet persona moves from a state of anger, resentment and bitterness to a compassionate understanding of the British Colonizers who themselves were once colonized by the Romans. The poem reinforces the tension of merged identities and mixed feelings. Though contradiction and paradox are characteristics of Walcott's poetry, here is an attempt to reconcile the differences and harmonize the disparities.

Ruins of a Great House brings forth Walcott's rage at the injustice done to the Caribbean during colonial period. Patricia Ismond comments, "Walcott takes his first naked look at the violations and injustices of the slave past and is provoked to strong outrage, and to condemnation of its surviving ills" (40). The Great House, in the poem, stands as a symbol of plantation economy based on slavery. It reminds the poet of the cruel past, white aggression, the murder and the crime which the colonial amnesia could not erase out. The eminent Jamaican poet and scholar Edward Baugh notes,

The 'great house' or 'big house', residence of the slave master, which had dominated plantation landscape and society, is an emotionally charged image in the West Indian imagination. In the poem, the persona's walk round the ruins of a great house is the occasion for a probing into the midden of history, an action which rekindles a flame of rage at the history of slavery and 'the leprosy of Empire' (43)".

The ruins of the great house marks the end of empire and scattered stones are reminiscences of fallen pride of great colonial authority: “*Stones only, the disjecta membra of this Great House*”(CP 19).The ‘great house’ is also an emblem of dispossession, servitude, and loss of dignity. The poet appears to be uncompromising in exhibiting his bitterness at the colonial past, the ‘evil days’ and ‘evil times’, debauchery, genocide, killing of innocence :

...the abuse

Of ignorance by Bible and by sword.(CP 20)

But the anger soon recedes and is transformed into compassion. Though there is outrage and revulsion, bewilderment and perplexity , there is a sense of solidarity because England shared the same fate as Caribbeanas--it had also suffered the colonial past.The poet’s tension is intensified as his flame of rage rises at the murderous excess of colonialism, but at the same time he is passionately inspired by the English language and its rich poetic tradition. It is similar to the basic situation in *A Far Cry From Africa* where the colonial domination is repudiated , but there is still a desire for kinship with the European tradition. Considering this ambivalence in *Ruins of a Great House* Patricia Ismond comments,

The real sting comes from an anomaly to which Walcott is especially sensitive: that the literature and crimes of the empire were produced from one and the same source...”(41).

The shock and the revulsion for the historical wrong done to the Caribbeans are expressed in the following lines:

...as dead ash is lifted in a wind

That fans the blackening ember of the mind,

My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.” (CP 20)

The conflicting emotions in the poet’s mind is reflected in the contest between ash and ember-two entities of fire, fighting for space. But as the poem proceeds, the conflicting emotions are reconciled and the crisis is resolved:

But still the coal of my compassion fought

*That Albion too was once
 A colony like ours,...*(CP 20)

Thus the rage is neutralized, eyes are no longer burning or ablaze; the heart is full of compassion that paradoxically streams from ‘ashen prose of Donne’, from the core of English literary tradition. The poem ends with a widening , harmonizing tone of sympathy and fellow-filling-
 “*All in compassion ends...*”(CP 21)

While reconciling the opposites, Walcott, as a poet, aspires to fashion himself in great European poetic tradition. The conflicting emotions and cultural in-betweenness are not assessed negatively, rather this very complex and ambivalent situation is used for creative purpose. So Walcott successfully assimilates the past literary masters of the English language with the various aspects of Caribbean poetry. *Ruins of a Great House* highlights this endeavour to adopt European literary tradition in the West Indian context. Baugh’s comment is noteworthy here:

Another factor which motivates the resolution is the effect of the English poetic tradition, on which Walcott draws, in an Eliot-like weave of quotations and allusions – Browne, Donne, Milton, Blake, Shakespeare. The poem is at once an appropriation and celebration of that tradition. (43)

However, there is a difference in the nature of reconciliation of the opposites in *A Far Cry From Africa* and *Ruins of a Great House* . The dualism and ambivalence have been delineated at different levels of psychological reality. In fact, there are many layers of ‘divided self’. In *A Far Cry From Africa* the poet at first expresses his dissatisfaction at the cruelty and savagery of both the cultural houses, European and African, inherited by him. He juxtaposes the two cultures and reveals each side’s transgression. Yet he cannot turn away from his African root and also cannot give up his claim on the English literary tradition. In words of Ismond, *his love of and claim to the English tongue are as natural as the bond of kinship with Africa* (18) . Here the dualism shows the divided loyalties and the gap between Africa and Europe, between black and white of his own body. But Walcott, the mulatto, is not to be intimidated by his hybrid history, rather by assimilating both Eurocentric and Afrocentric cultural elements in his works , he attempts to bridge the distance between the two cultures and two parts of his physique as well as psyche. As *half-European and half-African, Walcott was privileged to bear both horrible histories and cultural resources* of both of them. Though the concluding questions relate an apparent

bewilderment, they actually assume his resolutions to stay in between, choose the best of these two, befriend both of them and respond positively to these most dominating influences in the formative stages of his life .But *Ruins of a Great House*, on the other hand , focuses on the two apparently irreconcilable aspects of the British colonial rulers: the brutality and the system of colonial dominance on the one hand and on the other, a very rich literary tradition Walcott is passionately in love with. Here the conflict primarily is between the brutality and resourcefulness of the English culture-the two inseparable constituents of the British tradition. The poet is caught between two conflicting emotions : rage and compassion, repulsion and attraction, animosity and desire ; but these emotions are perceived as one. It is the long written tradition of British writers, “...the iron grill works / Of exiled craftsmen” (CP 20), that Walcott mounted on to examine the ruins and remains of the colonial empire. What is significant here is that the works of past white writers enable him to look beyond the boundary of colonial history.

Walcott, therefore, in his works attempts to reconcile the differences and resolve the contradiction. He refuses purist aesthetic. He does not look at his hybrid identity from a negative point of view, rather celebrates it and exploits it with his capacity for ‘cunning assimilation’. Educated as imperial subject, yet immersed in indigenous traditions and customs, Walcott considers the tension between an imposed and an inherited culture as productive and his powerful poetic mind successfully articulates the dualities, paradox and ambivalence of this cultural in-betweenness.

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“The leaden circles dissolved in the air”: Feminism and beyond in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*

Monali Hui

ABSTRACT

Virginia Woolf has long been held as a key feminist figure of the first half of the twentieth century who upheld the need for women’s emancipation from household bondage and their participation in the socio-economic development of a nation. The present paper attempts to look into the deeper recesses of the female psyche as represented in Woolf’s celebrated work Mrs. Dalloway and fathom the divergent aspects of Woolf’s ‘feminism’ therein. It further tries to gauge how the novel evolving out of and commenting critically on women-related issues such as gender bias in society, emotional/psychological cravings and disillusionment of the lonely woman’s mind develops into a mature work of art with its sympathies for the suffering humanity.

Scholars are not unanimous in their opinion about Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* being a feminist text. Woolf is nevertheless sensitive to and concerned with issues involving problems of women in a patriarchal society such as gender bias, inequality of treatment and respectability a woman receives compared to a man and issues of sexual harassment of women with its damaging psycho-social impact and the like. She has expressed unequivocally the need for women’s empowerment through education and economic independence. Women should break away from their passive cocoons of inert homemaking complacency and assert their distinct identities and personal rights. These thoughts and musings continue to be expressed in Woolf’s writings in various ways and that is why a number of critics tend to categorise Woolf as a feminist writer. But like Jean Paul Sartre, who disliked the idea of being called an existentialist, Woolf too was not a self-proclaimed feminist. She seems to have recognized the possibility of growing antagonism to male ideology leading to sexual separatism in society as Michael Payne observes:

A consciousness of humanity can be lost in the contemplation of what is a function of gender. Thus Virginia Woolf advocates a transcendence of feminism itself and a recognition that once the obsolete word is burnt—we can discover the real issue, the value of human life itself in its natural freedom. In her novels –and particularly, I think,

in Mrs. Dalloway—Virginia Woolf creates an artistic model, for such a movement beyond gender. (Payne 2)

Payne further adds that “Virginia Woolf resists the yoke of unqualified feminism; furthermore, in both her criticism and her fiction art takes precedence over ideology.”(2) It is significant that right from the beginning Clarissa seems to dominate the centre stage and readers can feel her influence curbing the course of the entire novel. Other characters assess her from their own perspectives and from their varying opinions about her character. This strategy might have been required to cover up Woolf’s own opinion about Clarissa. Clarissa does not play the role of the author’s mouthpiece and Woolf, without influencing her readers, retains impartiality and avoids gender politics. Clarissa’s character attracts and repels at the same time and the readers are free to form their individual opinions. Clarissa attains a relative quality and is assessed in terms of who observes her:

The other characters’ fragmentary glimpses of Mrs. Dalloway exist side by side, each contradicted but uncanceled by the others, all of them together suggesting the total incompatible aspects of her personality of which only she is aware. The special way that each character has of seeing Mrs. Dalloway reflects an incompatibility in points of view. While one character can see her significance, another sees her triviality; while one sees her generosity, another sees her selfishness; while one reacts to her life-giving force, another responds to her parasitism. Thus her personality begins to emerge as a relative quality, determined by who observes her rather than by what she is. (Gelfant229)

Virginia Woolf, however, shares one major trait of the feminist writers which is to portray a woman’s world. Clarissa’s character is placed vis-à-vis significant male characters of the novel i.e. Septimus Smith, Peter Walsh or Richard Dalloway and the contrast in their outlook and approach is made conspicuous throughout the novel. Even if the author maintains the difference with a sense of conscious purpose, the natural course of events is not manipulated to make the female protagonist emerge triumphant. The psychological crisis being to some extent similar, the two characters Clarissa and Septimus react to their individual suffocation differently. Their gender difference might not be the cause; they differ in their choice and values. Both of them are perturbed by the scrutinizing gaze of the society. Though well aware of gender discrimination in her society Woolf never intentionally maligns male ideology. Clarissa interacts with characters—

she agrees or disagrees with their views—and through this constant emotional confrontation and coalescence her character grows. The readers penetrate her complex thinking and she becomes much more a flesh and blood human being. So, other characters are instrumental in revealing her latent feelings—her anger, depression or sadness during her periods of long, solitary brooding. In this respect, Woolf's attitude towards the patriarchal social structure, thus, remains subjugated to the claims of her creative art.

Virginia Woolf is singular in breaking down rules and conventions in her fictional writings. In this novel too, Clarissa is neither a rigid, orthodox, Victorian hostess nor a modernist rebel trying to break away from existing sterile social rules. Clarissa is modern in outlook but introvert in nature. She cannot bear with her society's excessive preoccupation with the notion of 'proportion'. Sometimes she feels suffocated as her present identity is imposed on her. Here Woolf touches upon the sensitive issue of a woman experiencing identity crisis within the institution of marriage:

She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen, unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (*Mrs. Dalloway*13)

For this, Virginia Woolf is generally acclaimed as a feminist writer. Critics continue to identify and refer to occasions and contexts where she condemns the insensitivity as well as claim to control and dominance of male ideology as Shannon Forbes notes:

...Big Ben is gendered male. The implication is that Mrs. Dalloway thrives in London because the patriarchal status quo of the city validates her choice relinquish her independence and to become Mrs. Richard Dalloway. Big Ben interrupts, according to Clarissa, like a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate during moments when she questions or doubts her choice. Thus, every time Clarissa hears Big Ben she is reminded that the city validates and celebrates her decision to perform her chosen role. There is no need to doubt, Big Ben reminds Clarissa, because the dominating, powerful strikes – symbolic of London's strength and ability to provide for its inhabitants—will always protect one who abides by its male patriarchal values. (Forbes 42)

But she transcends her mundane existence to get preoccupied with more complex notions of self, sanity and death. Her existential question regarding her identity and social position remains unresolved and her serious concern for the much mechanized contemporary society seems to outweigh her feminine anguish. She is torn between her past life and present state of being. Her too much brooding over her past at times disrupts her present occupation. In this respect her character is comparable to that of Septimus Smith; Woolf considers them ‘one and the same person’ paying little heed to their gender difference. In spite of their different social backgrounds they fall victim to harsh social realities equally. Ralph Samuelson rightly observes in “The Theme of *Mrs. Dalloway*”:

Both Clarissa and Septimus reveal in a great part of their thought a Hamlet-like, death-brooding bent and both are in sympathy with the idea of self-destruction as a way of preserving their integrity against forces in their common social world which threaten to annihilate them as individuals. (Samuelson 62)

Again Samuelson provides justification for Woolf’s creation of a character like Septimus Smith that acts as Clarissa’s ‘double’: “It is when she (Clarissa) clearly allies herself with the point of view of Septimus Smith that she takes on the flesh and blood of a living character.”(71) These two characters, however, have subtle differences in their respective approaches to life. Mrs. Dalloway is submissive, docile and her latent anger towards her society is more controlled compared to Septimus’s rage. Septimus is more passionate and his over sensitivity and emotional outbursts lead him to much-anticipated catastrophe, as John Hawley Roberts comments:

Our ‘joy’ in the novel consists in our recognition of the rightness of their basic design, that is, of the way in which Clarissa and Septimus complement each other, Clarissa’s elementary love of life marching Septimus’s repudiation of it. The two emotions complete each other to form a whole. One attitude cannot, within the limits of the novel, exist without the other. (Roberts 837)

Clarissa sees in his death “...an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which mystically, evaded the, closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.”(204) Somewhere lies within her psyche a desire to have Septimus’s fate. Intuitively she shares with him his need for death. Here Woolf very prominently

transcends the barrier of gender and brings both the characters on the same plane only to show the similarity of their suffering. Both of them are exasperated by their claustrophobic society.

Woolf has always been against any kind of propaganda in art. Her novels, therefore, seldom show direct authorial intrusion in the form of commentary. In this novel also she expresses her innate intensions through subtle hints as Alex Zwerdling sums up succinctly: “Woolf works by indirection, subterraneously undermining the officially accepted code, mocking, suggesting, calling into question rather than asserting, advocating, bearing witness: the satirist’s art.” (70)

The scattered hints in the novel make some critics believe that Woolf employs a feminist’s strategy covertly. Clarissa is intentionally made passive to show a woman’s vulnerability in the society. She oscillates even long after taking a decision. She is not directly involved in the activities around. In spite of her depression she maintains her outward composure as a ‘perfect hostess’. Septimus, on the other hand, loses his sense of propriety at every possible instance:

In Woolf’s preliminary notes for the novel she treats this as the essence of Septimus’s character: ‘he must somehow see through human nature—see its hypocrisy, and insincerity, its power to recover from every wound, incapable of taking any final impression. His sense that this is not worth having ...’but afterwards discovers a psychic wound from which he has no wish to recover because it is a badge of honour in a society that identifies composure with mental health. (Zwerdling 75)

Septimus’s rejection of life is a distinct rebellion against the emotional aridity of a society, preoccupied with the notion of ‘proportion’. Clarissa feels the same but being an upper class lady cannot show the guts of a rebel. Her psychological agony is no less than Septimus but she must conform to the social norms. Septimus’s final action of committing suicide is the potential outcome of Clarissa’s inner desolation and dissatisfaction with life. Without meeting him even once Clarissa can feel his agony behind this drastic decision. In doing this, Woolf transcends the traditional gender-biased binary of a conventional society as Jacob Littleton perceives: “While Woolf labels judgment and hierarchy generally as masculine, and love and acceptance as principally feminine, her novel uses them as potential traits for either gender.”(38) Kathleen M. Helal in her essay “Anger, Anxiety, Abstraction: Virginia Woolf’s ‘Submerged Truth’ ”feels that Woolf’s representation of the character of the psychiatrist is an example how aggressive and malevolent the portrayal of Mrs. Bradshaw can be. She thinks this happens due to Woolf’s

repressed anger against patriarchy. Woolf expresses this, sometimes even unknowingly, in different ways towards the existing social system that determines how a woman has to talk, behave and even react in a given situation: “In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse* Woolf suggests that her confusion is gendered. Women have been denied access to ‘the reigning discourses of our century’ and thus cannot express the outrage generated by our culture that labels them inferior.”(Helal 80) Later in the same essay Helal speaks of her own realization of Woolf’s gender representation in this novel: “While masculine rage seems socially inherited and justified, feminine fury is latent, repressed and punished.”(81) But in spite of certain feminist traits in the novel the aim of it cannot be narrowed down to be a manifestation of female grudge for an insensitive and harsh male-dominated society. There is isolation, disillusionment and emotional suffocation within but that is not created by the patriarchy only. Woolf never undermines other issues that are equally responsible for creating this dissatisfaction. So the scope of the novel broadens to incorporate these too:

To be sure, while Kilman and Clarissa’s struggle represents the attempt to regain control in a world that disempowers women, Kilman’s anger is explicitly connected to more legitimate reasons as a working class subject of German descent for protesting her economic and racial subordination by upper class British society. (84)

So their disparate economic and national/racial identities have been highlighted. The intersection of class-race-nation specificities are thus problematized by Woolf. She is touched by the grief of common man and woman and also by the issues that disrupt their lives. Her perspective, therefore, is not strictly bounded by the vision of a traditional feminist. Her concern over gender-related issues further finds expression again when she portrays the characters of Sally Seton and Doris Kilman as potential lesbians.

Clarissa seems to be annoyed with both Walsh and Kilman. She calls Walsh’s love and Kilman’s love “the cruelest things in the world...clumsy, hot, domineering, hypocritical, eavesdropping, jealous, infinitely cruel and unscrupulous.” Both Peter and Kilman criticize Clarissa for her upper-class sophistication. They bracket her with other rich, pompous, artificial society women unable to show true sympathy to common men. These two characters are held responsible for Clarissa’s emotional devastation that she develops within. The character of Elizabeth is seen to reject London’s patriarchal status quo. Her journey through the city sitting on top of the omnibus

or her ambition to become a professionally qualified woman reveals her difference from her mother. She ‘liked the feeling of people working’ and believes in personal freedom. But her father’s pride in her beauty and its ostentatious projection ironically assigns a stereotypical role to her-- just like her mother—the role of a perfect hostess. She is more of an eligible bride in the marriage market than a self-sufficient professional woman. Woolf is perhaps trying to drive the point home that many a time it is necessary for a woman to resist the temptation to confine oneself within the narrow domain of coercive social compliments such as the perfect hostess, the dutiful mother/wife or just the angel in the house. To celebrate her selfhood and the multifarious roles she is capable of performing in the society, the woman must assert her individuality and proclaim her terms and conditions of life unabashedly. Social sanction need not be the only marker of choice for her.

Thus, the novel attempts to incorporate different problems of people coming from different social strata and economic backgrounds. Woolf treats them with much sensitivity and care and her texts, therefore, are sites for opposing points of view and belief as Anna S. Benjamin rightly observes:

Mrs. Dalloway, whatever disagreement may exist about its meaning, is a work past the tentative stage implied by the word “experimental” for in this novel, Woolf was able to find a way of expressing her view of reality and of presenting the complexities of the life of a human being in this reality. Specifically, *Mrs. Dalloway* embodies an organic view and unfolds a woman’s attempt to find meaning for her life within this organic universe. The acceptance in *Mrs. Dalloway* of the organic view of reality and the concentration upon the problem of the meaning of human life within such a universe have had an effect on the representation of time and the presentation of the double plot, among other things that merits review...(Benjamin 214-15)

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Painting Riverscape with the colour of Poetry: the Unvarnished Reality in K. N. Daruwalla's River Poems

Bidhan Mondal

ABSTRACT

In present times, poetry as a genre is gaining less popularity as writers, and researchers are hankering after lucrative fictions, and hence under such circumstance, this work essays to ensure the progression of Indian English poetry by ascertaining the poetic oeuvre of Keki N. Daruwalla's river poems under study, in which the poet skillfully portrays riverscapes with the colour of his poetry. Historically, the Post-Independence Indian English poets can be grouped together according to their affinity in issues, sensibility, poetic style, or geographical location as they have tried especially to maintain the harmonious relationship between socio-economic values and environmental values. The social milieu which dominated their creative process hasn't completely blurred their concern for natural and environmental influences and inflexions. Nar Deo Sharma opines, "New Indian English poets are sincerely committed to social, political and religious perspectives to the extent that they do not feel shy of poetizing stark realities which might not satisfy the parochial norms of the good and the beautiful altogether, but highlight the unvarnished truth in poetry" (Sharma, 49-50). Since, there has been an emergence of innumerable poets in the last sixty years; the researcher's focus is restricted to K. N. Daruwalla, who has a distinct poetic quality in manufacturing landscapes and more importantly painting riverscapes. Anguished over the decay of the profaneness of the Indian rivers, the poet seems to convey the idea that nature has made everything beautiful but man has rendered it ugly because he has lost the sense of wonder and beauty and the poet has succeeded in presenting this idea through contrastive pen-pictures. The present article is an assessment of Daruwalla's' understanding of the environment while creating poems.

[**Key Words:** Landscape, Riverscape, Sacred Rituals, Indian Sensibility, Nature]

“**T**he environment designed to be used exclusively by humans, to serve the needs of humanity, is in the profoundest sense of humanity's source and support; its ingenious, inventive life giving matrix” (Rowe, 106). Many Indian English poets have written poems on and about rivers. The impact of rivers on the poets' lives fascinated the poets so much that their poetic images are drawn mostly from various aspects of the river. The rivers have strong presence, especially in the works of poets who live in Bombay; Ezekiel celebrates the sea in 'Love Sonnet'. In the poem 'O My Very Own Cadaver', Gieve Patel imagines the association of water and body. A. K. Ramanujan depicts the river Vaikai in 'A River' to contrast the attitudes of the old and the new Tamil poets towards human suffering. The

poet writes about the cruelty of the river floods in Madurai City. According to V. S. Skanda Prasad the river is God's beautiful sublime expression. To R. Parthasarathy the river Vaikai has become a sewer of the city. He bewails the degradation to which the sacred river of the sweet city has been turned. Jayanta Mahapatra too has written poems which deal with rivers. However, his poem 'Evening Landscape by the River' is deceptive in its title as it is a view from the riverside while the poem, 'Again, One Day, Walking by the River' tells the readers about the stoic presence of the unchanging river and the sun while the miserable and the helpless forms of human beings pass on. K. B. Rai in his poem 'The Sacred Ganges' beautifully portrays purity, peace and tyranny of the Ganges and says that great cities on the banks of the Ganges got great names and holiness. K. N. Daruwalla is certainly one of the major voices in then Indo-Anglican poetry, who won the Sahitya Academy award and he writes with obvious Indian elements in his verses, especially in his use of nature, landscapes and human passions. Basically he is a nature poet; he romanticizes nature with a sense of ecstasy. There is an abundance of nature in his poetry collections. These collections affirm strong emotions, which is experienced in confronting the sublimity of and its picturesque qualities. Nissim Ezekiel writes: "By putting Daruwalla among his contemporaries one sees how he scores over them. By depth of feeling, economy of language and originality of insight, Daruwalla commands respect" (Ezekiel, 65).

His presentation of both the malevolent and nurturing aspects of the nature convey his understanding of the natural world, which is absolutely other in comparison to the divided nature of man. Like many British romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, Shelly and Indian poets, Daruwalla also uses many symbols and images from nature and landscape. Especially, the natural architecture, one finds in the river has a grandeur which humbles and ennoble him and stimulates him to write poetries. The river for R. N. Sinha means a different thing at different places, but generally it stands for the principle of change and continuity. Similarly, Daruwalla's poems are also abundant with the use of rivers as symbols, which emerge with different connotations. R. N. Sinha comments, in his collection *Night River* the river symbolises peace, a continuity of life and sublimity. Daruwalla's third book *Crossing of Rivers* contains some remarkable pictures of nightscape, riverscape, mudscape in poems like 'Boat-ride along the Ganga', 'Nightscape', 'Vignettes I, II & III', 'The River-Silt', 'Crossing of Rivers', and 'Harang', in poems like 'Vignette I' the river is powerful, sacred entity "swollen with hymns". Again in 'Vignette II', river is "solitude", there is equally realistic and authentic imagery in the

poem entitled ‘Crossing of Rivers’. Here much of the imageries are presented through the use of metaphors. For instance, the river “coughs” and “eddies” and “converses with the mud”. The waters are placid, and “glassed with green moss”. Then there is a picture of a young man jumping into the water and finding himself in great danger. The young man’s head is rising about the surface of the water, then sinking below it, alternately, till a fisher-girl comes to his rescue. Here too we have imagery which is charged with emotion. According to Vilas Sarang , Daruwalla is at his best when he works with selective image and metaphor, as in ‘Vignette I’. Poems like ‘Dream Log’, ‘The Room’, ‘The House’ and ‘Melons’ from *Night River*, reinforce the worries, the anxiety, stresses and desires of the conscious mind. The poet treats inanimate natural objects like river with human feelings, thoughts, and sensations to create empathy.

This unique quality of empathising with nature and the inanimate objects deepen the intensity through the unification that even the current, running under the stillness of water makes the sky pulsate, this makes the person question: “What makes the sky throb here?”(Daruwalla, 14). His images are tense, taut, and suggestive and they also reflect his experiences. Vilas Sarang writes:

Daruwalla is at his best when he works with selective image and metaphor
 ...juxtaposed effectively, and described with economy, achieving an intense,
 Dramatic effect. (Sarang, 228)

He responds to a questionnaire given by Satish Kumar: “For me poetry is firstly personal-exploratory, at times therapeutic and an aid in coming to terms with one’s own interior world. At the same time it has to be a social gesture, because on occasions I feel external reality bearing down on me from all sights with a pressure strength enough to tear the ear-drums” (Kumar, 225). As in the poem ‘Grass’, Jayant Mahapatra tries to find out relationship of sun, grass, loneliness and activity, Daruwalla wants to hear the echo of his heart in nature. Another poet Kulbhushan Kushal endears trees and mountains, intends to know them, to understand their language and through their language he hopes to refine his own language. Likewise Daruwalla’s escape into the natural world is not to be treated as a romantic’s shying away from the burdens of reality. It is only to redefine his perception of unvarnished reality that he drowns his perception deep into the rivers.

Daruwalla’s poetry is suffused with the varied aspects of Indian sensibility. Daruwalla, in an interview confesses that if he moved out of the country (India), he cannot write poetry. Therefore

like Nissim Ezekiel, he too felt safe in India to write poetry. His poetry is conspicuous for the vivid and picturesque portrayal of the variegated landscape of North India. Its rivers, hills, plains and pastures are beautifully described. Daruwalla writes to Satish Kumar: “I am not an urban writer and my poems are rooted in the rural landscape. My poetry is earthy, and I like to consciously keep it that way, shunning sophistication which, while adding gloss, takes away from the power of the verse” (Kumar, 228). Daruwalla’s landscape is essentially Indian. R. Parthasarthy remarks: “when it isn’t ornamental, the landscape comes alive as a presence as its own. The language then is pared to the bone. Images are concrete and exact” (Daaruwalla, 39).

In most of his river poems the scene is laid in Varanasi and the central metaphor here is Ganga, ‘with all its primal, religious and emotive connotations’. Ganga appears in these poems, Vrinda Nabar writes:

The River’s Rhythm is that of life and death, of birth and rebirth, of passion and rejection. In and round it are all signs of stagnancy the tonsured heads, the fossilised anchorites, the Tat toed harlots, and the dead who are brought to it shrouded in the anonymity of white. (Nabar, 223)

In Daruwalla’s first collection entitled *Under Orion*, there is a very powerful river poem called ‘The Ghaghra in Spate’. The poem invites a comparison with A. K. Ramanujan’s ‘A River’. Both poets describe the river as a violent force. The river in Ramanujan is the unseeing, all-powerful fate, while in Daruwalla’s poem she is a cunning animal. Daruwalla’s poem is more intricately structured and the river has almost an animal presence as the angry river eats up the village:

Twenty minutes of a nightmare spin
and fear turns phantasmal
as half a street goes
churning in the river belly.

... a buffalo floats over to the rooftop
where the men are stranded. (Daruwalla, 14-22)

The Ganga is known to wash away sins and to “lighten misery, but here it flows not to lighten the misery but so show it” (Daruwalla, 40-41). The real damage, which the river does, becomes

evident only after the flood has subsided and the water had retreated. The land, where the flood waters had stayed for a number of days, begins to sink; the houses in the village, which had withstood the fury of the flood, are now seen almost on the verge of collapse; and the rice-fields, into which the flood-water had brought plenty of fish, now begin to dry up and the fish begin to die. The fish are killed by mud and the heat of the sun. but in spite of this huge loss men do not indulge in curses or in any crazy kind of talk because they are familiar with the behaviour of this river. Moreover, they do not even pray to God for help because they know that their prayers in this situation are futile.

K. N. Daruwalla in his collection of poems *Crossing of Rivers* evaluates his obsession with rivers and the associated images of life and death, journey and sojourn. In the words of Vrinda Nabar, “appears here with all its primal, religious, and emotive connotations. The river’s rhythm is that of life and death, of birth and rebirth, of passion and rejection...” (Nabar, 10). Daruwalla’s poetry represents the composite religious culture of secular India. The purification rituals associated with the Ganga as the sportive framework extend his poetry to tradition, to antiquity, to myth and to the symbolic, even spiritual dimension. He freely uses words which are indicative of rituals and religious aspects of many cultures. In yet another poem ‘River Silt’ Daruwalla compresses the entire creation from the beginning into the three parts of the poem by crowding the poem with images drawn from afar in space and time and the overriding image of river journey where the boatman forgets to shift the sails on the waters of life. It is an accurate picture of the progress of mankind from time immemorial on the river of memory. His words about the sacred Ganges are:

Flow, O flow, forever flow

O symbol of purity

O harbinger of peace

O subduer of tyrants.

We look in consort at the distant sea,

And feel it turbulent and salty there,

A passionate and perpetual mystery.

I see my body float on waters

That rush down the street,

Like a leaf that humps its way

Over pebbles. (Daruwalla, 81-82)

The opening poem 'Boat-ride along the Ganga' presents a vivid and realistic description of the Ganga whose banks are littered with flaming pyres:

And once more the pyres; against a mahogany sky
The flames look like a hedge of spear-blades
Heated red for a ritual that bades no good.
The mourners are a cave painting grotesque
Done with charred wood. (Daruwalla, 35-39)

There is a sense of the unreal in the opening of the "ghat-amphitheatre" which unfolds like "a diseased nocturnal flower in a dream". The idea of disease is reiterated in the simile of "freak" ones. The contrast between the timeless "legend-talk" of the *Panda* and the "sewer-mouth" trained "like a cannon" symbolises the violence done by the city to the holy river. The *Panda* who calculates, "the amount of merit that accrues to you", represents the fact that Varanasi stands a place to die and to get an instant salvation. There is a hidden satire there in these lines of the poem. A. N. Dwivedi while discussing the 'Second Vignette' takes up this argument and says: "It is not that Daruwalla deliberately denigrates Varanasi: he rather discovers it to be no better than many other ancient cities of the HindusHis 'seeing' eye enables him to grasp things as they really *are*, not as they *ought* to be" (Dwivedi, 176). The scene along the river Ganga could not have been depicted in a shorter compass than has been done in the poem "Vignette I". This whole poem is written in lines each of which is strikingly short and yet vivid and adequate. Then we come across the following two lines which contain a striking simile and also convey the idea briefly and yet most effectively:

Beggars hoist their deformities
As boatmen hoist their sails. (Daruwalla, 40)

This irony is more clear in the poem 'Vignette I' is not lost on the reader wherein the poet while praising the religious supremacy of the river Ganga:

The Ganga flows swollen with hymns
The river is a voice
In this desert of human lives.

The Ganga flows through the land. (Daruwalla, 40)

The Ganga is known to wash away sins and to lighten misery, but here it flows “not to lighten the misery but so show it” (40-41). In ‘Vignette II’, the religious face of Varanasi is highlighted. The landscape peopled with pilgrims is drawn vividly. Description merges with myth here:

You go the rounds of the panchtirath
starting from the ghat where Durga
had dropped a sword
to where she dropped an earring
and the Panchganga Ghat where four rivers
are said to meet the Ganga,
like this river of faith going down
the stone-steps to meet the river. (Daruwalla, 40-49)

The poet brings to life the rituals on the bank of the Ganga:

Tonsured heads explode along
the water-surface.
All is spider-thread ritual here;
Sandal-paste and *mantra*
Chanting of the *gayatri*
shaved head and the *pinddan*. (Daruwalla, 53-58)

The expression “spider-thread ritual” indicates the poet’s cynical attitude about these rituals especially the Hindu rituals like “chanting of gayetri mantra”, “shaving head”, “pindadan” etc. In ‘Naryal Purnima’, the poet expresses superstitions about the rain. The poem concludes with an ambiguous note on the eventual result of the ritual: “The rains may truly fail this year. Our prayers may go unheard” (Daruwalla, 67). All these rituals have a spider-web quality; they are designed to trap the unsuspecting pilgrim. The “river of faith” then becomes blind faith making people vulnerable to crafty priests. The river is a witness to all that goes on its banks, but she does not say anything:

Only the river doesn't speak here.
She is thought itself,
a soundless interior monologue. (Dauwalla 2006: 70-73)

Arun Kolatkar in his 'The Boat Ride' creates this kind of hypnotic stillness in spite of some minor activities like noises of birds, water, sound, etc. poems in this collection are thus enriched with naturalized details, marked by precision and detachment. It very often verges on the surrealistic form.

The earthiness of his poetry exhibits itself in descriptions which, according to Gopal Gandhi, have "a three-dimensional quality". Of course, his ability to describe a scene is exceptional, a quality which P. D. Chaturvedi terms "almost Hardy-esque". He goes on to say:

He paints a landscape which acts not only as a backdrop to his Poems, but also participates in its action and movement. The Essential poetic significance of the landscape is the question of Reflection which that scene evokes in us. (Chaturvedi, 95)

In his poem 'Dawn' he portrays an excellent landscape of the Ganga and a holy city on its bank (probably Varanasi). This describes the rising sun personified as a bald headed devotee. The lines remind the reader of Shiv K. Kumar's 'Banaras : Winter Morning', although the difference between the two poems is one of tone as Shiv K Kumar's persona is almost in a state of ecstasy , while the voice in Daruwalla's 'Dawn' is somewhat cynical. The dawn on the Ganga is a bizarre illusion in case of Daruwalla, while the dawn in Kumar's poem is "sacrosanct". In 'The Dip', the river is a warm and comforting presence. When approaching the river all doubts disappear: "These are the stone-banks where the ship of doubt is wrecked" (Daruwalla, 43-44). Entering into the river is like leaving behind all the infirmities of the body. These doubts are momentary only. The poet "shooes away" his thought and finds himself "in her warm, dark heart". The river is almost a different world quite separate from the cacophonous life on her banks. The life on the banks of the river has been described in terms of animal images, like those of a dog or goats on a cliff. The poet expected to feel the frozen paws of the river, but found it warm and welcoming. In a poem like "Mother", there is a complete identification of the poet with the river:

Sleeping on your banks
as you flow by
I find you flowing within my body. (Dauwalla, 11-13)

M. Sivaramkrishna finds a sudden heightening of the basic perception and believes that “the mother is the landscape, the river and to a certain extent one’s mother too” (Shivaramakrishna, 16). The description of the different stages in the life of the river is extremely vivid. Unlike the “grey monotones” and the “half-light mudscapes”, the river in its infancy is a “dialect of colours”:

foam-white
and kingfisher blue
and the pure, transparent green
in which grass could not be reflected? (Daruwala, 15-18)

The preponderance of ‘r’ and ‘s’ sounds in these lines re-creates the sound of swiftly flowing water over smooth pebbles. The clear water reflects the blue sky, a reflection that merges with the white and green of the river. An element of drama creeps in when the poet speaks to the river and asks her if she remembers that purity and beauty now when she is slow and laden with filth:

Can you recall
the abyss-floor at Rishikesh,
the rapids of *Bhabar*
your devotees at Hardwar ?
Do you dream of them
the grottoes that nestled at your side,
ploughed fields – one vast furrow
across the mother-silt,
mango-groves.(Daruwalla, 30-38)

The poet has glimpses of the unvarnished nature of life; man is submissive to his ultimate fate. The poet do not think that these silly religious rituals which are more or less spoiling the profaneness of the rivers. Man can never have a cleansed feeling as one gets while walking the temple after a river bath. But unfortunately man can never experience the cleansed feeling as sin

sticks so deep that sophisticated man is incapable of redemption. In his poem 'Notes', included in *Collected Poems*, in the last stanza, he presents the "solitude" of river bank, which is utilized by the lovers to engage in illegal sexual activities secretly. Bruce King while commenting about this poetry, he writes: "...it is an adult poetry of someone who has disciplined himself of the moral ambiguities and irresponsible conflicts of human condition" (King, 47). It is because of the sex hungry males and females using the river bank as their bedroom for doing illicit sexual activities, making it a red light area during the dark hours.

An eminent critic M. K. Naik has called Daruwalla, "one of the most substantial modern Indo-Anglican poets" (Naik, 21). But although he is certainly one of the major voices in the Indo-Anglican tradition of poetry, not enough attention has been paid to his works. Naik further states:

It is rather surprising and disappointing that a poet of Calibre as a poet, who has equalled Nissim Ezekiel's Achievement in the field of poetry even though his themes and his style are entirely different. (Naik, 22)

His thematic canvas and subject matter which includes hope, search for identity, nostalgia, death, violence, corruption, love, sex, nature, apocalypse, riverscapes, transcend the boundaries of India and stretches itself into then abroad. Like other Indian English poets, Daruwalla, often in his river poems, bewails about the unvarnished reality of the degradation to which the sacred rivers of India have been turned. It has become a storehouse of junk, a place for unhealthy and unholy activities. As an environmental thinker, the poet seeks fundamental changes in values, attitudes and behaviour of the individuals and social institutions through poetries. Therefore, he presents poetic images and picturesque details of Indian riverscapes in his poetries, so that it may fascinate the readers and change their perception about rivers.

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CREATIVE WRITING

The Silk Road

H.S.Chandalia

From Xian to Nepal
Via Tibet India, Afghan and Rome
Was built a road

Hundreds of years ago.

My silk route begins

From my heart and reaches yours

Through the words of Poesy.

Xuan Zang traveled to India

And brought scriptures.

My heart is the Pagoda

Where in lie

The sermons of your love.

They speak the legends of learning

The mysteries of music

And the myths of melody.

Xian sends the message

Of peace, and so do I.

The silk road is built

From heart to heart

And connects humanity.

Wonder

H.S.Chandalia

Here we are
At Juong Tuan
Near Beijing watching

A long serpentine mark

On the shoulders of the hills

Known as The Great Wall

One of the wonders of the world!

I call you from here.

Thousands of miles away

You pass a smile,

As always, you say

‘Climb up

Sky is the limit’

And I start

Climbing the steep stairs

Your smiling face

Beckons me from the top

A wonder –isn’t it?

Dr.H.S.Chandalia

The Morning at Chalthan*

H.S.Chandalia

The morning at Chalthan
Is foggy and calm
A crow sits on the public water-tap

The thirsty crow

Knows that the tap leaks

And there is no need to

Go for pebbles any more,

A passenger train rattles down

Tight, plain, tired faces

Jam the entry to the Railway wagons

Some body shouts, "Chaudhary Chai",

"Garam Chai".

The super fast moves slowly

People with polysacks on their heads

Move out of the station-

You do not like tea with too much of milk,

I remember.

The sugarcane fields

Are rich with juicy canes.

Should I call you

To hear your sweet voice?

*A Railway station in South Gujarat

Mesmerizing Drawing

Sunil Sharma

Eucalyptus trees
Tall and slim
White giants

In the buff

Huddle together

In a close group,

Like old friends whispering

And slightly leaning among them;

Vertical fine lines drawn strongly

Against a clear dazzling sky

Of early summer,

In Mumbai suburb,

A tight sheet of stunning blue

Stretched out taught above,

The whole terrestrial scene,

Serene and calm,

Dappled in various colors,

A fine work drawn by a hand divine.

Who am I?

Pranay Sarkar

I behold the big blue open sky,
And the horizon disagrees to expose herself,
She covers up herself in some kind of mystic mist.

As I get to listen a child crying,

Is this happening because I want to grow up no more?

But there's no turning back, so I let the wall sleep.

Hiding in ambushes, running through this necropolis;

Defeats don't bother me,

I'm spanked by peace and stability.

Afraid of death growls,

I wish I could afford someone to walk with me.

But I've always been a loner,

I don't talk instinctively or impressively,

And I don't know behavioral strategies.

My mind is an empty crossword,

Pre-occupied with scribbles all around;

My condemnation is your praise,

Imprisoned by your pride.

Tell me where your hallow land is,

Cause I only see wars and blood everywhere.

Show me the right way you do it,

Instead of your consistent leg-pulling and reluctance.

It seems that you've gone deaf and dumb,
As you always have only one opinion, that's of you.
My own shadow fluctuates in my solitary room,
The postcards seem to absorb all the colors of this life.
No visions like Nostradamus,
But still I dream big of flying high;
No gene to make a wish,
And still I have hoped to live well.
The desires die every day in the whirlwind of my mind,
Victims of my pessimistic bullets,
But they get exhumed the next day.
Outbursts of the passionate fissure,
The blue magma waters my lust.
Stop reading your nonsensical happy-ending fables,
I'm not interested in joy,
My dawning is a severe punishment.
Lots of things to do,
Yet I feel no rush;
I would never be complete,
And won't accept as what you are.
Tips of grasses,
Or are they foils!
I can't even lie;
Coffin of wisdom,
Is buried underground,
So now I can die.

I'm the last leaf of that dying sapling,
The last raindrop to fall from your eyes;
The last man to miss the bus to immortality;
The last rainforest in this worldwide desert;
The last insanity in the crowd of vanity,
The last mourning in this feast of death;
The last window to relax, to wait and to watch outsiders,
The last door to walk out from;
The last horizon of a new hope,
The last repeat telecast of that daily soap;
The last key to be entered,
The last latch to be unlocked;
The last theft to steal some air,
The last struggle to gain some more suns;
The last mark of lipstick on the cup,
The last letter to be thrown into waste bucket;
The last ship getting sailed away,
The last dwelling to be defeated in this array;
The last gum to be chewed out,
The last time to observe time;
The last flame before turning into ashes,
The last blizzard before I get bizarre;
The last good will fighting all the way,
The last evil diminishing my entire fray,
The last wound so deep that none can soothsay;

The last cigarette to hold in my mouth,
The last ring of smoke to exhale in peace;
The last night of isolation,
The last drive on this maddening street;
The last trick on this ever going show,
The last rabbit out of the hat;
The last rose left upon the grave,
The last jump from roof of reality,
The last discrete decision about me;
The last invitation to join sadism,
The last anarchy in your heads;
The last infliction of knives in disemboweled bodies,
The last pacification of mental disorder,
The last polarization of good and bad;
The last grey lying in the hands of misery,
The last breeze flowing in the greenery,
The last appreciation in the form of flattery;
The last negotiation with my unrelenting obscurity,
The last tree falling down like a skeleton;
The last king burning with his crown,
The last fling cause for this time we all will drown,
The last circus with everybody as a clown.
I'm the last warrior in this unfair game,
I'm the last unsung hero of a forgotten incantation,
I'm the last one to play with the dust of apocalypse,
I'm the last god taking down love,

I'm the last devil, who will forever deceive,
I'm the last one you'll ever kill and leave.

But I know that I can only be perpetually perplexed,
Never to know my true identity,
I'm hanging on the edge of nothingness,
And still I am everything.

God particles are mere jokes in front of me,
You can't draw the limits that my wings can achieve.

But I'm Icarus as well,
Not that fortunate to be something that I want.

You should remember me as a thing to forget,

I'm not anything you all have wished for,

I'm hollow, meaningless, unsatisfied ghost of time;

Don't be bothered to think about me,

I'll be dispersed in the every space and dimension.

And still the question will remain,

A foreboding which will reverberate in the mountains of mankind,

It can't be a happy sigh,

I'll never get a satisfactory answer -

Who am I?

TRANSLATION

Ulysses's Adventure

To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

Krishna Ranjan Paul

Broken words of the day
I preserved like a spy in my chest pocket
The night deepens
The words cry in agony
Oozing out drop by drop
On my sickly flower vase.

I light the lamp
I try to make a garland
The words fly away
Leaving behind
A bundle of dumb tears
On the linings of my chest

I put out the lamp
I gaze
At the uneven moon
I search for the 'sapta –sindhu'
On the river moon light.

At one time
My earnest prayer
Releases the fountain of words
On my poetic desk

I sit again to string
The garland of my words
On the camphor rhythm stanza.

Strange enough!
The words dance about my space
Like an unruly mirage.

I dance along with the sea of words
Whirling and whirling
Jingling like an anklet
Jingling like a stringed doll...
Unsure.

Translated by **Mala Sharma**

Peyara Gachh (Guava Tree)

Sanjiv Chattopadhyaya

*Didi*¹ has been scolded furiously by mother for me, and also has got two big slaps. Ok! What is my fault! I love my didi so much. What will happen if she falls! I am telling repeatedly, didi don't climb up to the high branch of the guava tree. It is monsoon. If you fall by slipping your legs, you will break your hands and legs. You see Sourav, falling from the tree that day has been admitted to the hospital. Didi replied from the high branch of the tree, '*vitur dim*'².

What will happen if you fall down didi! I raise a hue and started crying. I am such a boy. Can't I sob like didi? I am crying for didi and didi said from the high branch, "Monkey! I have climb up too high to bring down rotten guava for you. See how you shouting."

As soon as we were telling this mother has run towards us. Seeing to the high of the tree Said in a strict voice, "come down. Come down quickly. Tree-langur." As soon as didi comes down, she got two big slaps.

Didi sat down in grief beside the pond which is little bit far from our house. She threw the guavas one by one which were left in her *kochor*³. After sitting beside her I tell her, "what is it Didi!" She quickly turned her face other side. Though I was sitting for a long time she does not speak. I tried three times to talk with her but she does not reply. I know what man will do in sorrow. They dive in water. I do the same. "It is ok didi" telling this, I jumped straight in the water. I do not know swimming. I certainly jumped to plunge into water.

Didi is a good swimmer. She jumped in the water and dragged me holding my hair to the ferry. I have eaten a lot of water. She turned out the water by pressuring on my chest. I woke up. After giving me a number of slaps she clasped me in her breast. We two are crying.

Didi's marriage. A pavilion has been built in the field. There are uproar and grandeur from the morning. Many things are coming, many people are coming. The preparation of the sweetmeats has been started from the night. The scent of frying '*darbesh*'⁴ and '*pantua*'⁵. Someone is asking to bring that, another one is asking to give that. Sometime there is grimace. '

“Where is the casket of saffron which was here a minute ago? Has the basket gone to have fresh air?” They are taking tea repeatedly. The older people are talking a little and are coughing incessantly. They said to my father, “you have done a big work. It is not a small thing to marry a girl. So where did the expenditure reach? Is it crossed lakh?” In the meantime a man has come in rush and told, ‘see the fish is not come yet.’ All the Brahmin cooks are sitting down. “Who has gone? Who has gone to bring? He might be asleep.”

This is the boundary of the pond, that is the guava tree. My didi became older. A boy from somewhere will come and take my didi to somewhere tomorrow morning.

“The groom has come. The groom has come.”

The sun has set in that side of the field and on the opposite side of the mosque. There is huge light of the marriage ceremony in this side but darkness to that side. The market is small and the traders trade in the light of flask. There are many flasks. There is a row of flasks. Narrow paths. It is quite a thing. There are variety of people and their variety of talks.

I do not want to stay in this marriage. I even do not like the husband of didi. His figure is like iron! The friends of him are also bad. One of his friend said, “Hey ‘chora’⁶! One packet cigarette is not enough, bring a bandage of cigarette.”

I came to the tailor shop of uncle which is in the small market. He is an A-class man. His skin color is snow-white, white hair and beard. His eyes are lined with collyrium. He wears kurta with delicate texture. He prays the ‘namaj’⁷ three times. I like tailor shop very much. There are small pieces of clothing of various colors scatter on the floor. The sound of cutting cloths by scissors. The machines are running ‘gharr, gharr.’⁸ I came in front of uncle and sat down on a stool for a long time.

‘I am very sad. Didi is now going! Didis do not stay. Uncles do stay.’

The marriage of didi was not good. The iron-monster gave so much suffering to didi that she had to come back in about two years. This didi is not my that didi. I can understand that there is no place for didi. The elder people give blame to didi. She should compromise. He is such a high-class man, the owner of a cold-store. If he drinks wine then drinks. Though the husband of Roma drinks local wine, Roma has adjusted with him! Your husband drinks English!

Didi sits in the garden in the plant floor most of the time. I also go there sometime. One day looking to the guava tree she said, “*Buro*’, we have eaten so many guavas of that tree. Now there is no desire to eat. You know *buro* everyone tries to kill girl. I have nowhere to live.”

“I am here.”

“You are a man.”

I became silent. It is true. No one knows where I will go in future. Didi said, “Do you remember one day you jumped in this pond.”

“If you did not rescue me, I would die in that day.”

“Buro what will you do if I jump?”

“Now I know swimming. I will drag you holding your hair.”

“Buro, you will name this pond in my name, ‘Krishna Sayar.’

I know how to cross over the hindrances but still I remained inactive. Didi drowned in that pond. She tied pitcher in her voice. In the morning the long loose hair was scattered on the water. It is waving by the small waves. The ducks are floating apathetically by the side.

The iron-man even did not come to see. The owner of cold-storage!

Didi was right. “Will you take care of mine? There is no exact place where will you live.” Mother asked. “Are you checked? Is everything okay?”

“It is ok mother.”

The flight is at 2a.m. Didi I am going to America. The outgoing meal completed in the noon. Many relatives have come. There are many gossips in relax mood. This is the chance. I went round the lonely pond-side. There are many memories of didi. At last I came to the guava tree floor. The tree is now older. I came older just like uncle. There is a touch of my didi in every branches of the tree. Tree, you are my didi! I hugged the tree.

What is that?

Something is hanging on the high branch of the tree.

I climbed up to the tree for which didi ruled me boxing my ear. I am older now so I am nervous.

A necklace is hanging. As far as I know, it is ‘Mangalsutra.’¹⁰ Then didi was climbed up the tree last time in that night. She gave the mangalsutra to the tree who was her most favorite. I kept it in my pocket.

The time for parting came forward. The flight is taking off. High, higher, higher than the clouds. I touched the mangalsutra of didi in my forehead. I clearly listened to the voice of didi around my ear,

“Buro! I am with you!”

NOTES

1. Didi: elder sister of a boy or girl
2. Vitur dim: in Bengali, people call someone by this expression who is very coward
3. Kochor: a small pocket near the waist
4. Darbesh: name of sweet
5. Pantua: do
6. Chora: lad, chap
7. Namaj: the prayer of Allah by the Muslims
8. Gharr: the sound of working machine
9. Buro: a hearty expression to call someone
10. Mangalsutra: a necklace which a wife wears after marriage.

Translated by **Supratim Saha**

Translator sincerely expresses his indebtedness to Mr. Swajal Kumar Sadhu for meticulously correcting the errors in the previous version of this text and giving it the present shape. But for his kind help, this would not have seen the light.