

## **Paper-23. Contemporary Indian Writing in English-I**

### **Unit- 1. Beginnings, Early twentieth century and Post-Independence period**

#### **1. Beginnings of Indian Literature**

- i. Medieval India Themes
- ii. Traditional Material
- iii. The Tamil Tradition
- iv. Linguistic and Cultural Influences
- v. Regional Literature
- vi. The Modern Period

#### **2. Literature in English: The Early Twentieth Century**

- i. Early Writing in English: Negotiating with the structures of Violence
- ii. The Status of the English Language in 'Indian Literature in English': Indo-Anglians versus Regionalists
- iii. Indian Literature in English from 1935-1970
- iv. Indian Literature in English at the Brink of Twenty-First Century

#### **3. Post-Independence Period in Indo-Anglian Literature**

#### **4. Questions**

## 1. BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN LITERATURE:

The ancient Indian literary tradition was primarily oral i.e. sung or recited. As a result, the earliest records of a text may be later by several centuries than the date of its composition. Furthermore, perhaps because so much Indian literature is re-working of the Sanskrit epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the mythological writings known as *Puranas*, the authors often remain anonymous.

The Mahabharata is said to be the **longest** poem in the world at 100,000 stanzas strong. The Mahabharata is **eight times** longer than Homer's two epics (the Illiad and the Odyssey) combined!

Amir Khusroo – a 13th century Sufi philosopher and poet from India once visited Iran. In Iran he was asked to introduce himself. And his response was marvelous: “Why are you asking me to introduce myself! I am a parrot of India?”

### i. Medieval India themes

In medieval Indian literature the earliest works in many of the languages were sectarian, designed to advance or to celebrate some unorthodox regional belief. Examples are the *Caryapadas* in Bengali, Tantric verses of the 12th century, and the *Lilacaritra* (circa 1280), in Marathi. In Kannada (Kanarese) from the 10th century, and later in Gujarati from the 13th century, the first truly indigenous works are Jain romances; ostensibly the lives of Jain saints, these are actually popular tales based on Sanskrit and Pali themes. Other example was in Rajasthani of the bardic tales of chivalry and heroic resistance to the first Muslim invasions - such as the 12th-century epic poem *Prithiraja-raso* by Chand Bardai of Lahore.

Most important of all for later Indian literature were the first traces in the vernacular languages of the northern Indian cults of Krishna and of Rama. Included are the 12th-century poems by Jaydev, called the *Gitagovinda* (The Cowherd's Song); and about 1400, a group of religious love poems written in Maithili (eastern Hindi of Bihar) by the poet Vidyapati were a seminal influence on the cult of Radha-Krishna in Bengal.

The full flowering of the Radha-Krishna cult, under the Hindu mystics Chaitanya in Bengal and Vallabhacharya at Mathura, involved *bhakti* (a personal devotion to a god). Although earlier traces of this attitude are found in the work of the Tamil Alvars (mystics who wrote ecstatic

hymns to Vishnu between the 7th and 10th centuries), a later surge of *bhakti* flooded every channel of Indian intellectual and religious life beginning in the late 15th century.

In the 16th century, the Rajasthani princess and poet Mira Bai addressed her *bhakti* lyric verse to Krishna, as did the Gujarati poet Narsimh Mehta.

*Bhakti* was also addressed to Rama (an avatar of Vishnu), most notably in the Avadhi (eastern Hindi) works of Tulsi Das; his *Ramcharitmanas* has become the authoritative.

The early gurus or founders of the Sikh religion, especially Nanak and Arjun, composed *bhakti* hymns to their concepts of deity. These are the first written documents in Punjabi and form part of the *Adi Granth* (First, or Original, Book), the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, which was first compiled by Arjun in 1604.

## **ii. Traditional Material**

In the 16th century, Jagannath Das wrote an Oriya version of the *Bhagavata* and Tuncattu Eruttacchan, the so-called father of Malayalam literature, wrote recensions of traditional literature. Added, in the 18th century, was a deliberate imitation of Sanskrit forms and vocabulary by *pandits*. In 18th-century evolved Assamese and Marathi prose chronicles, ballads and folk drama involving much dance and song.

## **iii. The Tamil Tradition**

The only Indian writings that incontestably predate the influence of classical Sanskrit are those in the Tamil language. Anthologies of secular lyrics on the themes of love and war, together with the grammatical-stylistic work *Tolkappiyam* (Old Composition), are thought to be very ancient. Later, between the 6th and 9th centuries, Tamil sectarian devotional poems were composed, often claimed as the first examples of the Indian *bhakti* tradition. At some indeterminate date between the 2nd and 5th centuries, two long Tamil verse romances (sometimes called epics) were written: *Cilappatikaram* (The Jeweled Anklet) by Ilanko Atikal, which has been translated into English (1939 and 1965); and its sequel *Manimekalai* (The Girdle of Gems), a Buddhist work by Cattanar. Thiruvalluvar, a celebrated Tamil poet, wrote the *Thirukkural*, a work on ethics in Tamil literature.

## **iv. Linguistic and Cultural Influences**

Much traditional Indian literature is derived in theme and form not only from Sanskrit literature but from the Buddhist and Jain texts written in the Pali language and the other Prakrits (medieval dialects of Sanskrit). This applies to literature in the Dravidian languages of the south as well as to literature in the Indo-Iranian languages of the north. Invasions of Persians and Turks, beginning in the 14th century, resulted in the influence of Persian and Islamic culture in Urdu, although important Islamic strands can be found in other literatures as well, especially those written in Bengali, Gujarati, and Kashmiri. After 1817, entirely new literary values were established that remain dominant today.

The Urdu poets almost always wrote in Persian forms, using the ghazal for love poetry in addition to an Islamic form of *bhakti*, the *masnavi* for narrative verse, and the *marsiya* for elegies. Urdu then gained use as a literary language in Delhi and Lucknow. The ghazals of Mir and Ghalib mark the highest achievement of Urdu lyric verse. The Urdu poets were mostly sophisticated, urban artists, but some adopted the idiom of folk poetry, as is typical of the verses in Punjabi, Pushtu, Sindhi or other regional languages.

#### **v. Regional Literature**

Literary activities burst forth with the playwright Bharata's (200 BC) *Natya Shastra*, the Bible of dramatic criticism. The earliest plays were soon overshadowed by Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, a heroic play, a model for ages. While Shudraka's *Mrichchhakatika*, was a play of the social class. Bhavabhuti (circa 700AD) was another well-known figure, his best being *Malatimadhava* and *Uttaramacharita* (based on Ramayana).

The great Sanskrit poems are five – Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa* and *Kumarasambhava*, Kiratarjuniya of Bharavi (550AD), *Sishupalavadha* of Magha (7th century AD) and *Naishadhiyacharita* of Sriharsha (12th century AD). All of them draw from the Mahabharata. Shorter poems of great depth were composed on a single theme like love, morality, detachment and sometimes of grave matters. The earliest and best collections of such verses called *Muktakas* are those of Bhartrihari and Amaru.

Much of the early prose work in Sanskrit has not survived. Of the remaining, some of the best are *Vasavadatta* of Subandhu, *Kadambari* and *Harshacharita* of Bana (7th century AD) and *Dasakumaracharita* of Dandin (7th century AD). The *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* are collections of wit and wisdom in the Indian style, teaching polity and proper conduct through

animal fables and aphorisms.

With a glorious life of over 3000 years, Sanskrit continues to be a living language even today, bobbing up during Hindu ceremonies when mantras (ritual verses) are chanted. And though restricted, it's still a medium of literary expression, but 'great works' have long stopped being written.

## **vi. The Modern Period**

Poets such as Ghalib, lived and worked during the British era, when a literary revolution occurred in all the Indian languages as a result of contact with Western thought, when the printing press was introduced (by Christian missionaries), and when the influence of Western educational institutions was strong. During the mid-19th century in the great ports of Mumbai, Calcutta, and Chennai, a prose literary tradition arose—encompassing the novel, short story, essay, and literary drama (this last incorporating both classical Sanskrit and Western models)—that gradually engulfed the customary Indian verse genres. Urdu poets remained faithful to the old forms while Bengalis were imitating such English poets as Percy Bysshe Shelley or TS Eliot.

Ram Mohan Roy's (1774-1833) campaign for introduction of scientific education in India and Swami Vivekananda's work are considered to be great examples of the English literature in India.

During the last 150 years many writers have contributed to the development of modern Indian literature, writing in any of the 18 major languages (as well as in English). Bengali has led the way and today has one of the most extensive literatures of any Indian language. One of its greatest representatives is Sir Rabindranath Tagore, the first Indian to win the Nobel Prize for literature (1913). Much of his prose and verse is available in his own English translations.

Work by two other great 20th-century Indian leaders and writers is also widely known: the verse of the Islamic leader and philosopher Sir Muhammad Iqbal, originally written in Urdu and Persian; and the autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth*, originally written in Gujarati between 1927 and 1929, is now considered a classic.

Several other writers are relatively well known to the West. They include Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) for his *Glimpses of World History*, *Discovery of India* and *An Autobiography*

(1936); Mulk Raj Anand, among whose many works the early affectionate *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) are novels of social protest; and R. K. Narayan, writer of novels and tales of village life in southern India. The first of Narayan's many works, *Swami and Friends*, appeared in 1935; among his more recent titles are *The English Teacher* (1980), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1983), and *Under the Banyan Tree* (1985). Among the younger authors writing of modern India with nostalgia for the past is Anita Desai—as in *Clear Light of Day* (1980). Her *In Custody* (1984) is the story of a teacher's fatal enchantment with poetry. Ved Mehta, although long resident in the U.S., recalls his Indian roots in a series of memoirs of his family and of his education at schools for the blind in India and America; among these works are *Vedi* (1982) and *Sound Shadows of the New World* (1986).

The other well-known novelist/ writers are Dom Moraes (*A Beginning*), Nlissim E Zekiel (*The Unfurnished Man*), P Lal, A.K.Ramanujan (whose translations of Tamil classics are internationally known), Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar and R. Parthasarathy; Toru Dutt; Sarojini Naidu; Aurobindo; Raja Rao, GV Desani, M Ananthanarayanan, Bhadani Bhattacharya, Monohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, , Khushwant Singh, Nayantara Sahgal, O.V. Vijayan; Salman Rushdie; K.R. Sreenivasa Iyengar, C.D. Narasimhaiah; M.K. Naik; Vikram Seth; Allan Sealy; Sashi Tharoor; Amitav Ghosh; Upamanyu Chatterjee; and Vikram Chandra.

## **2. LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

Not surprisingly, Indian literature in English evolved alongside the consolidation of British imperialism in India. There is a variety of opinion about the first definitive Indian text in English, although critics agree that Indian literature in English dates back to at least the early nineteenth century. Its beginnings receive their impetus from three sources, the British government's educational reforms, the work of missionaries, and the reception of English language and literature by upper-class Indians. First, there are the educational reforms called for by both the 1813 Charter Act and the 1835 English Education act of William Bentinck. In an effort to redress some of the avaricious, hence compromising, practices of the East India Company servants, the English Parliament approved the Charter Act, which made England responsible for the educational improvement of the natives. The subsequent English Education Act, prompted by Thomas Babington Macaulay's (in) famous minute on Indian

education, made English the medium of Indian education and English literature a disciplinary subject in Indian educational institutions.

In her study of the history of English in colonial India, Gauri Viswanathan usefully points out that even before Bentinck's 1835 English Education Act, instruction in English certainly existed in Indian colleges (Viswanathan 1989, 45). In the early 1800s, English was taught side by side with Oriental studies, the secular character of such instruction was to give way to an increasingly Christian inflection. Hence, what makes the act so decisive is not the introduction of English in Indian colleges but, rather, the new charge, religious and moral, that English was allowed to bear in the classroom. Missionary activity, a second aspect contributing to the genesis of Indian literature in English, profited directly from this shift in emphasis. The 1813 Charter Act had opened India to the missionaries, but it posed no serious threat to the Orientalists, with the passing of the 1835 English Education Act, Orientalists, with the passing of the 1835 English Education Act, Orientalism received its most severe blow, and, most satisfyingly to the missionaries, English emerged as the sole bearer of morality and normativeness.

But neither these educational reforms nor the ensuing missionary activity in Christian schools alone could have ensured the hegemony of English in India. There needed to be a vested concern on the part of upwardly mobile Indians to receive the benefits of English, for without this Indian reception of English, the language simply would not have held the sort of sway that it did. Hence, the third impetus to the beginnings of Indian writing in English would have to engage this reception. The postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak theorizes such a reception as a kind of "negotiation with the structures of violence" (Spivak 1990, 101). This would imply a space in which imperialism did not work its power absolutely or uniformly upon Indians for the exclusive benefit of the British. Rather, given the violence that imperialism wrought as it disrupted Indian history, it makes sense to elaborate how aspects of British power were appropriated and rearranged by Indians. An example of such a "negotiation" or appropriation is the subject of Homi K. Bhabha's essay 'Signs Taken for Wonders,' in which Bhabha looks at the reception of the English Book (i.e. the Bible) by a group of Indian natives (Bhabha 1985). Upon the Indian catechist Anund messeh's introduction of the Bible to them, the Indians fail to recognize, automatically, the authority of this text, thereby producing an ambivalent, "hybrid" space that may productively resist colonial power.

All of this is to suggest that the reception of English in India, or the third impetus to early Indian writing in English, needs to ambivalence, negotiation, and subversive appropriation on the part of Indians themselves. Thus, we have to acknowledge a nascent space in which British and Indian social codes and value systems began to intersect and mutually determine one another in nineteenth-century India, but, having done so, we also have to leave room for a reception of English that was necessarily reinventive and improvisational, not merely imitative.

### **i. Early Writing in English: Negotiating with the Structures of Violence**

The first literary texts in English emerge from Bengal. Raja Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), the progressive advocate of English civilization and culture, wrote numerous essays and treatises, which were collected in a complete volume in 1906. But it seems that poetry was the genre that first took flight in the Indian imagination, the best-known nineteenth-century poets being Henry Derozio (1809-31), Mivhael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-73), Toru Dutt (1856-77), her cousin Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), and Manmohun Ghose (?- 1924).

To a greater or lesser degree, all these poets were influenced by the idealistic strain of romanticism, their poetry alternately recording lyrical and Christian sentiments. (David McCutcheon points out that the first volume of poetry in English came out even before these poets made their mark, citing *Shair and Other Poems*[1830] by Kasiprasad Ghose[McCutcheon 1969].) By the turn of the century and into the early twentieth century, three more poets were to join their ranks, outdoing them with a far greater success and fame. These were Rabindranath Tagore(1861-1941), Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949).

Tagore, by and large a lyrical poet, was brought to the attention of the West by his 1912 English translation of his Bengali poems, entitled *Gitanjali* (Song-Offering), the volume secured him international recognition. Some critics argue that W. B. Yeats's celebratory interpretation of Tagore's poetry as purely mystical has misled readers and obscured Tagore's actual innovation in *Gitanjali*: the use of prose poetry instead of strict meter and rhyme (see, e.g., Williams 1977, 26-28). Though he went on to translate more of his poetry, Macmillan publishing the *Collected Poems and Plays* in 1936, Tagore is still best known for his first collection of poems and the creation of his experimental school, Santiniketan, in Bolpur. Unlike Tagore, Sri Aurobindo wrote originally in English, more justly deserving the

title of mystic and visionary with such well-known works as *Savitri* (1936) and *The Life Divine* (1939-40), Initially, Sri Aurobindo embarked on a career in the Indian civil service with a degree in the classics from King's College, Cambridge. The years of Anglicization came to an end when he rediscovered Indian religion and philosophy; after a period of nationalist activity, he established an ashram in Pondicherry, where he began to write his epic-style philosophical works and acquire a large religious following. Like Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu went to King's College in England, returning eventually to India on the advice of Edmund Gosse, who found her early poems "too English" (Williams 1977, 33), Her three volumes of poetry, *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912), and *The Broken Wing* (1917), earned her much fame and popularity in England; at home, she became a well-known public figure.

What seems most remarkable about these early poets is that most of them saw no contradiction between their Indian and Anglicized identifications. Henry saw no contradiction between their Indian and Anglicized identifications. Henry Derozio, for instance, was a fervent nationalist; yet, his love of the romantics found him riding an Arab horse through the streets of Calcutta. Similarly, Toru Dutt went to Indian myth and legend for her themes in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, freshly reinterpreting some of these; yet, she remained attached to France and French Literature, even writing a novel in French and translating French poems into English. Macaulay's "Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 1952, 719-30), these early writers were mediators between East and West. But, "negotiating with the structures of violence," they did not merely reproduce the axioms of imperialism and mindlessly imitate Western literature, Perhaps an exception to this seemingly noncontradictory, almost arbitrary comingling of Indian and Anglo-European influences, both cultural and literary, may lie in Manmohan Ghose, who remained acutely alienated from Indians and supported British imperialism right through World War I.

## **ii. The Status of the English Language in Indian Literature in English: Indo anglians versus Regionalists**

In contrast to poetry, Indian novels in English did not come fully to light until organized movements of civil disobedience against British imperialism had begun, and Indian nationalism had become the rallying cry of the day. This may be why, to this day, novel writing in English bears the brunt of criticism by writers in regional languages, who maintain

that writing in English is a disloyal, Anglophilic activity. This damaging charge is hardly surprising or unexpected. The history of English in India is such that the language cannot be read outside its determining ideological and political functions. If, on one hand, English worked to secure a common medium of communication across the diverse states of India, it also, on the other hand, achieved a bitter splintering among Indians,. There are, for instance, regional writers who have opposed the very use of English as an artistic medium. According to them, the use of English is traitorous; it has both literally and figuratively, “sold” an exoticized India to the West and alienated the writer in English from his or her “native” country. Using the term “Indo-Anglian” to describe themselves, writers and literary critics in English have frequently resorted to a defensive tone, insisting on their nationalistic and patriotic identifications even as they write in the master language of English.

Interestingly, both parties have cast their arguments in the terms of nationalism: regional writers claim that they are more thoroughly nationalistic than Indo-Anglian writers while Indo-Anglian writers argue that their access to nationalism is as unmediated as the regionalists. Further, many Indo-Anglian writers and literary critics see their use of English as itself participating in a nationalistic effort to Indianize English. The classic example of such an Indianizing effort would have to be Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*. In the well-known Author’s Foreword to the novel, Rao professes the nature of his experimental nativization of English with a certain ambivalence, insisting that the English language is a part of Indians’ “intellectual make-up” but not of their “emotional make-up”; in this way, English is and isn’t an “alien language” (Rao 1938m vii). Locating himself at the tenuous juncture where English and Indian influences conjoin and conflict (“We cannot write like the English.... We cannot write only as Indians”), he undertakes a project that is both modernist and nationalist: *Kanthapura* relates, in the speech of a pious old Brahmin woman’s “native” cadence and rhythm, the story of a small village’s growing involvement in Gandhi’s Quit-India campaign against the British.

But the project initiated by Rao in 1938 was to become more and more embattled and beleaguered by the postcolonial 1960s. During the 1960s, such Indo-Anglian writers as P.Lal, teacher at St. Xavier’s College, Calcutta, and early leader of the Calcutta-based group of writers called the Writers’ Workshop, was rehearsing heated and impassioned debates with regional writers (see McCutcheon 1969,20-22). Since that time, debates between the two opposed positions have become part and parcel of the history of literary production in English.

Briefly summarized, the regionalist position maintains that writers can be “true” to India only if they write in languages other than English; the Indo-Anglian position maintains that writers can be “true” to India in spite of the language they use and, sometimes, because of the language they use (as in the case of Indianizing English). Because both groups have articulated their positions in terms of truth---truthfulness, authenticity, “true” nationalism, even “true” patriotism---they have polarized debate over the singular question, Which group is “true” to India? It is less interesting to range ourselves either on one side of their debate over English or on the other. To do so means to devalue the history attached equally to both sides. In fact, both sides have had to elaborate their relation to English, one through vehement denial, the other through creative incorporation. Also, as I have tried to show, Indian writing in English has opened up a space that is not purely imitative of English in an empty kind of way but, instead, subject to productive innovation and reinvention.

Given the historical “impurity” of both sides, it seems more instructive to study the process by which both the Indo-Anglian and the regionalist sides equally and convincingly articulate certain “truths” about Indian national identity. We must keep in mind, however, that these “truths” are contestatory discursive effects; they are not true in and of themselves. Michel Foucault’s genealogical work shows that the subject of “truth” is not something that lies outside, or transcends, discourse. It is, instead, an effect of discourse, which in itself is neither true nor false; “Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true (Foucault 1980,131). “In a country that historically has both accepted and tenuously managed regional and cultural differences, what is at stake for the Indo-Anglian and regionalist production of “truth” is nothing less than the whole subject of Indian nationalism.

### **iii. Indian literature in English from 1935 to 1970**

While poetry took precedence over novels, novel writing did go on in the nineteenth century. Pyaricharan Mitra’s *Alaler Gharer* (*The Spoilt Child*, 1868) seems to be the first Indian novel. The first Indian novel in English, however, may be Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohun’s Wife* (1864); ironically, this was also to be his last novel, for after its appearance, Chatterjee wrote in Bengali for his remaining writing career. To this novel may be added Sorabji’s *Love and Life behind the Purdah* (1901) and S. B. Banerjee’s *Tales of*

Bengal (1910). But in the turbulent 1920s, and 1930s, and 1940s Indian novel writing in English became a viable industry.

The decades of the 1920s, 1940s witnessed cataclysmic changes, as discourses of nationalism and colonialism collided, even as India was thrust into modern conditions of living and thinking. These years produce three Indian novelists, often referred to as the three “greats” of Indian literature in English: Mulk Raj Anand (1906), R. K. Narayan (1906), and Raja Rao (1909). At the crossroads where discourses of colonialism, nationalism, and modernity intersected and began to mutually inform one another, Anand, Narayan, and Rao tackled the issues of the time in strikingly different ways: Anand through the social idealist’s vision of Marx; Narayan through the comic-satirist’s recording of everyday life in the fictitious town, Malgudi; and Rao through the Brahmin philosopher’s caste-inflected ruminations on Indian culture.

Anand is best known for the novels *Untouchable* (1936), and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937); the trilogy *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942); and *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953). What characterizes most of these novels is the repeated depiction of a beleaguered, working-class protagonist, whose oppression marks the oppression of rural Indian by the twin systems of empire and capital. In *Untouchable*, for instance, Anand depicts a day in the life of a sweeper and latrine cleaner, Bakha, in whose tortured and split consciousness Anand shows the debilitating effects of the Hindu caste system. In doing so, he also puts the colonial language of English and all of its elite associations at the service of an ideological necessity to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. This literary attempt at subaltern representation may be productively read in relation to the current historiographical project of the Subaltern Studies historians, who are engaged in recuperating the marginalized perspectives of the subaltern classes through Indian colonial and neocolonial history.

Narayan’s oeuvre is enormous, but most worthy of note are *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The English Teacher* (1945), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962), *My Days; Memoirs* (1974), and *The Painter of Signs* (1976); most recently, Narayan has published *A Storyteller’s World* (1989, 1990) and *The World of Nagaraj* (1990). Perhaps to a larger extent than Anand, Narayan established the global stakes for Indian literature in English. With the ingenious invention of a fictitious small town, Malgudi—where all his novels are set—Narayan was

able to convey the cultural nuances of India itself to both Indians and Western readers. His international popularity is readily evident in the many reprints of his novels by the University of Chicago Press and Penguin in the 1980s and 1990s. But, unlike Anand, Narayan does not revise English itself for a new political purpose. His prose is lucid yet predictable in pattern, its chief characteristic being an understated, modest, tongue-in-cheek irony, which works excellently at deflecting any ultimate seriousness of theme and purpose that we may attribute to his text.

Like Anand, Raja Rao deliberately set out to rewrite English for Indian ends. However, Rao's first novel, *Kanthapura* (1938), which marks a fascinating experiment to Indianize the English language, was later disavowed by Rao when he found his guru, Shri Atmananda, and his faith in the Sanskrit philosophy of Vedanta. His next novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), explores his religious faith, as does *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965). Rao's *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) shows his interest in Marxism, but it was conceived in the early 1950s, before Rao came to believe that Vedantism transcended Marxism. As a writer who has "rediscovered" his Vedantic origins, Rao has exchanged one brand of nationalism—anticolonialism in the British Raj—for another ---pro- Hinduism in postindependence India. His writing seems to have begun the move from the public, communal scene inclusive of all castes and class, to the introspective, private musings of a Brahminical life.

Anand and Rao have traveled extensively abroad; but all three writers demonstrate a comfortable ease with English. In the postcolonial period, such an ease ceases to be unusual or unexpected. Instead, it bears the mark of an everyday sort of casualness, almost obscuring the fact that systematic access to English is still limited to the upper and middle classes. Indian diasporic literature in the Anglo-United States, the most Western(ized) example of Indian literature in English, perhaps bears out this point most convincingly. But Anand, Narayan, and Rao secured the future of Indian writing in English by turning writing in English into solidified material project that had assumed international proportions by the 1940s. In the process of producing and participating in this project, they also show the discontinuous historical trajectory in which competing and contradictory discourses of colonialism, Nationalism, and modernity collide.

Literature of this period must, however, also include the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya, G.V. Desani, and Sudhindra Nath GHOSE. Of these one must especially note

G. V. Desani, whose satiric comedy *All about H.Hatterr* (1948) broke new ground in its subversive treatment of British-Indian relations and the English language. In the period of decolonization that followed Indian independence, a new set of novelists emerged, the leading ones quickly identifying themselves as Anita Desai, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Balachandra Rajan, Nayantara Sahgal, and Khushwant Singh. Inheritors of India's postindependence history, these authors seem quite aware of writing in the wake of the literary successes of Anand, Narayaan, and Rao, Singh and Malgonkar chose among their early subjects the communal violence unleashed by the horrific specter of independence and partition, the former in *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and the latter in *Distant Drum* (1960) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964),

In dramatic contrast, Desai, Markandaya, and Rajan articulated an interest in the psychosocial space in which their characters struggled toward a privatized and individualistic self-awareness informed by essentially Western (but now seen as fairly universal) ideals. In particular, the early fiction of Desai (1937)----*Cry the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1965)----depicts intensely privatized lives of middle-class women and men, as does the fiction of Markandaya (1924), In the novels, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Passion* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966) and *The Coffer Dams* (1969), Markandaya weaves the lives of women, often of subaltern classes, into the sociopolitical backdrop of rural India. Both Desai and Markandaya have diasporic identifications, Desai teaching creative writing for one semester at Mount Holyoke College and spending the remainder of her time in India and Markandaya, living in England since 1948, Both women also have European affiliations, the former with half-German parentage and the latter with an English husband. This bicultural background may be understood as productive of some tension, as these writers locate their domicile elsewhere, yet continue to use India as their primary setting. (While Ruth Praver Jhabvala is regarded by some critics as an Indo-Anglian writer, her own admission that she is "no [Indian], and less so every year" and her recent relocation to the United States prevent discussion of her writing in these pages.)

The impingement of discourses of nationalism, colonialism, and modernity on the literature produced by Indian novelists in this period shows a script that was making a transition from the public to the private in an increasingly global way. If Anand, Narayan, and Rao were preternaturally aware of the public arena in which their fiction would participate, Desai and Markandaya seem interested in staging the private world of

individualism for a global audience. What is evident in the fiction of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s seems to be paralleled in the poetry. In this period, Indian poetry in English attempted to break away from the sentimentality commonly associated with Tagore, Aurobindo, and Naidu. In keeping with the new, modernist poetics sought by T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound abroad, Indian poets in English similarly strove for a symbolic yet realistic style. Leading poets of the 1950s and 1960s include Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal., Dom Moraes, and A. K. Ramanujan. Of these Kamala Das deserves special mention; her poetic innovation consisted in creating a bold and passionate medium in which to explore the range of female anxiety and sexuality. These poets were joined, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, by Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolatkar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, and Prithvi Nandy, among others. Their poetry demonstrates a vivid grasp of world literature, not limited to Eliot and Pound but extending, instead, to French experimental poetry from Rimbaud to Dadaism and surrealism; as well, Chitre, Kolatkar, and Ramanujan are interested in incorporating regional influences (King 1992,5).

One key participant in this process of globalization has been the Western critic of Indian literature in English. If “truth “ of Indian national identity is what preoccupies Indian writers and critics, one may ask what the stakes are for all those Western critics who have played such a key role in the history of the production of Indian literature in English. As far back as 1882, when Edmund Gosse’s critical introduction to Toru Dutt’s *Ancient Ballads and Legends* established Toru Dutt as a leading lyrical poet, the mediating role of the Anglo-American critic emerged. This mediation’s power cannot be underestimated, as the careers of many indigenous Indian writers in English have depended on the work of patronage, promotion, and representation by Western critics. The following are just a few examples of Western mediation; Edmund Gosse’s “discovery” of Toru and Aru Dutt’s English translation of French poems, “a shabby little book.....A hopeless volume it seemed with its queer type,” which, when Gosse read it, elicited his great “rapture” (see Narasimhaiah 1987,24); Gosse’s acquaintance, in London and Cambridge, with Sarojini Naidu, whom he urged to go home for “some revelations of the heart of India” (Williams 1977,33); E. M. Forster’s introduction to Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, which had been turned down by 19 publishers before Wishart Boods agreed to publish it, provided Forster wrote the introduction; and Graham Greene’s rave review of the young Narayan’s first work, *Swami and Friends*, which helped put Narayan on the global map.;

As facilitators or participants in the global circuit of literary production and reception, Western critics have taken sides in the debate between Indo-Anglians and regionalists, and, thanks, to the covering over of their own ideological stakes in the debate, they have given it a strange and different twist. In dramatic contrast to the Indo-Anglian writers and critics who have repeatedly expressed their stakes and insisted on issues to do with truth, self-representation, authenticity, and Indian national identity, such Western critics as David McCutcheon and William Walsh have not found it necessary to account for their own vested interest in Indian literature in English. Nor, significantly, so they discuss their own ideological and geopolitical positioning, as Western, vis-à-vis their analyses of Indian texts in English. Seemingly disinterested and neutral bystanders, these readers, in fact, reveal their cultural biases in numerous ways, as when they customarily situate Anglo-American literature as normative, thus (out) casting Indian literature in English in the dubious light either of an embarrassing aberration or of a poor imitation. In both cases, the literature seems to emerge as second-best. Indeed, Walsh's essay, "Sweet Mangoes and Malt Vivegar: The Novels of R. K. Narayan," published in a collection of critical essays edited by K. K. Sharma, seems to imply that Narayan achieved literary greatness, not because of, but in spite of, being Indian (Walsh 1977, 121-40).

#### **iv. Indian Literature in English at the brink of the Twenty-First Century**

In *The Indo-English Novel: The Impact of the West in a Developing Country*, Klaus Steinvorth argues that Indian literature in English is written primarily for Western readers. He demonstrates this thesis on the basis of such evidence as the detailed explanation of Indian cultural and sociohistorical heteroglossia in many of the texts, why would an Indian writer need to include such obvious and, hence, redundant explanations of Indian customs to Indian readers? Steinvorth also calls attention to all those book jackets that bear photographs of sariclad women writers and wonders what these exoticized representations do to the market sales of the books in the West. In the current period, Steinvorth's 1975 critique of Indian literature in English reminds us that visual textual signifiers----reproductions of Mughal-style paintings of princesses, handmaidens, and elephants on book covers, for instance---are in the service of global commodity production and circulation. In the case of Indian literature in English, such visual textual signifiers may serve only to reproduce, for readers, the kinds of Orientalizing gestures that Edward Said criticized in *Orientalism*. In other words, the literature stands to be appropriated as an exoticized Other that consolidates the neoimperialist self of the Anglo-United States. In some senses, since its inception in British colonialism in

the mid-nineteenth century, the literature has always run the risk of appropriation as an exoticized 'Other'. However, with the insertion of modernity, the difference that the twentieth century brings is, first, a kind of solidification of a project of writing that has begun to render national boundaries irrelevant. Such is the determining function of multinational publishing corporations that national boundaries almost cease to matter.

Related to this is the second different twist that the (late) twentieth century has performed; it is becoming more difficult to make critical distinctions between indigenous Indian writers and writers of the Indian diaspora. Although this point may be argued, surely it is symptomatic that Viney Kirpal's 1990 collection of critical essays, *The New Indian Novel in English; A Study of the 1980s*, published in India by Allied Publishers, makes no distinction between indigenous and diasporic writers. Indeed, its express aim is to show that, in "the New Indian novel, the world itself is regarded as one big home.....The awareness of the world as a larger place is in " (Kirpal 1990m xxii). When a critical distinction is made, it falls between the "Old Masters" (Narayan and Anand ) and subsequent generations, while the indigenous novels of Upmanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal, Ranga Rao, Nayantara Sahgal and Pratap Sharma are treated alongside those of the diasporic writers Anita Deasi, Amitav Ghosh, Kamala Markandaya, Salman Rushdie, and Vikram Seth (Rushdie securing the attention of no less than 6 of the 27 essays).

A similar global awareness is at work in current English-language poetry. According to Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, poet and editor of *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*, no significant distinction obtains between the indigenous poetry of Dilip Chitre, Keki N. Daruwalla, Eunice de Souza, Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla, Arun Kolatkar, Jayanta Mahapatra, and Manohar Shetty and the diasporic poetry of Agha SHAHID Ali, Dom Moraes ---who, Mehrotra points out, has lived in Bombay for the past decade000A. K. Ramanujan, and Vikram Seth. In fact , it proves difficult even to typify writers of the second group as diasporic: they continue to work on Indian material and, according to Mehrotra, all excepting Moraes, Seth, and the early Jussawalla, incorporate their "native" regional tongues into English. In the introduction to his critical study, *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, Bruce King similarly argues that the poetry demonstrates a global awareness, with many poets indebted to North and South American and early Indian regional verse (see King 1992, 1-10)

All of this goes to show that the yielding of national boundaries to the uncanny spaces of the diaspora does not lead us to presume the irrelevance of the nation. On the contrary, the

diaspora recasts nationalism, or, as Arjun Appadurai puts it, “the nationalist genie, never perfectly contained in the bottle of the territorial state, is now itself diasporic,” (Appadurai 1993, 411-29). But one area that still draws meaningful distinctions between indigenous and diasporic agendas in literature is that of women’s writing. Indeed. One significant gain in the entry of Indian literature in English in the public and global realms has been the possibility of a space opened up to women’s writing in India. Such feminist publishers as Kali for Women have brought out significant anthologies of stories by Indian women, both originally in English and translated into English from the regional languages; for example, *In Other Words*;; *New Writing by Indian Women* and *The Slate of Life: An Anthology of Stories by Indian Women*. In addition, Kali for Women has brought out collections of critical essays on issues to do with feminism, colonialism, and nationalism: Kumari Jayawardena’s *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* and Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid’s edited volume, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* . Most worthy of mention is the groundbreaking, comprehensive collection of writing by women, *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, two volumes, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. With the single exception of the New York City based writer and teacher Meena Alexander (whose short story is featured in *The Slate of Life*), all the writers represented in these anthologies are, or , in their lifetime, were, residents of India. In fact, Tharu and Lalita pointedly exclude diasporic women writers like Anita Desai, Meena Alexander, and Suniti Namjoshi from their *Volume Two: The Twentieth Century*, In their general introduction they also very carefully separate their feminist agenda from that of Anglo-U. S. feminists, reading the scene of Indian women’s writing against and through issues to do with literacy, class, and caste.

### **3. POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD IN INDO-ANGLIAN LITERATURE:**

With the introduction of English education in India in the early nineteenth century, a new class of readers and writers emerged on the literary horizon of the country. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, PrinceDwarakanath Tagore and their compatriots in those days were convinced that English only could play a prominent role in hoisting literary and cultural harmony in a polyglot nation addicted to heterogeneous practices and dissimilar traditions. Manifestly, Macaulay’s famous *Minute on Education* spelt the death-sentence on unreconciling language feuds, facilitating Lord William Bentick to install English as the official language of India. He recommended on March 7, 1835, “The great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and sciences among the

natives of India, and that all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone”.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently it was adopted as the all-superseding medium of instruction in all major institutions and metropolitan colleges. The establishment of universities in the presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras all the more accelerated the element of English studies in India, which simultaneously actuated the origin and ascent of Indo-Anglian Literature—a new idiom of expression later ardently embraced by many a great literary luminary who authored works of world standard.

The teaching of English opened fresh pastures and the new Indian student came into contact with the Western thought and philosophy. The introduction of European arts and sciences to him brought unprecedented change in his mental outlook and physical outfit. This ultimately culminated into creating a new social order, an elite which loved learning the language and literature of their rulers. The legacy of Indian classical spirit seemed fast petering out and the craze for the study of Shakespeare and Milton preoccupied the cerebrum of young university students. Though to a limited extent this renaissance did awaken the sense of greatness of Sanskrit language and the oriental aura, it actually flushed aside the window to the Western ways of life and living. “The consciousness of the great Sanskrit heritage, the revival of classical learning—largely the work of foreign scholars—was only one aspect of the new changes that appeared on the Indian scene in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The main aspect of the Indian renaissance was the effort to recreate the cultural life that existed in the West. Indo-Anglian literature was born out of this instinct of imitation”.<sup>2</sup>

“Western education brought about national awareness which in course of time became the militant nationalism of the novelists of the ’thirties and the ’forties of our century. Nationalism gave rise to the literature of struggle, the literature of the Gandhian era”.<sup>3</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and many others of the formative days upheld the great national values in their thought-provoking works. Today we have novelists like Abbas (*Inquilab*), Anand (*Untouchable*), Raja Rao (*Kanthapura*), R. K. Narayan (*Waiting for the Mahatma*) and many more who have exposed the cause of nationalism and patriotic fervour as in the days of mass upheaval against the alien rulers. The consciousness as to self-pride and self-respect has been mirrored, though at many places they drift towards mysticism and oriental obscurity. Mahatma Gandhi’s call for struggle is significantly reflected in these novels and the pre-independence period is marked by changing

literary characteristics and varying themes and tones. The thought-wave of optimism which surged the literary horizon in the first quarter of the century, was suddenly short-circuited by the attainment of independence. The zeal, the zest, the thrill went underground by the mid-century and a new genre—literature of protest, literature of dissent, literature of unrest, literature of remonstrance or what you call—was taking birth. How could the novelists escape the all-pervading wave? Hence, as a landmark in the making of Indo-Anglian fiction, these turbulent decades covering the period of melodramatic journey to a Free India at once plunge us down into a new nation where agony and ecstasy, love and lust, power and pelf, courage and cowardice, romance and reprisal and a host of such antithetic issues sway the heads and hearts of the teeming millions.

Though apparently well-defined in their themes and techniques, the interplay of characters and incidents, the philosophy and the promise, novels of the period were not devoid of the realism, the truthfulness, the naturalism which overpowered the destinies of men and women, in every spectrum of existence in a nation reborn out of the throes of slavery and serfdom. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* is a story of an outcast, the events of which he has narrated with unusual insight and vision under orthodox Indian circumstances. It highlights the misery, the suffering, the persecution which the untouchables experience in a highly superstitious society. "With its stern artistic concentration and naturalistic description of the minutiae, Anand's *Untouchable* seems to be unique in the Indian literary experience of naturalism. It minutely describes the various humiliations suffered by Bakha, the hero of the novel, in his regular rounds of cleaning the town".<sup>4</sup> Allied to this the religious temper of the Indian villagers and what God means to them have been described dexterously in *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao. "Both the religious Bhajans and the national movement have helped the novelist penetrate into the deeper layers of human nature and perceive the pettiness, greed, jealousy and in some cases callousness and inhumanity of the so-called spiritually-bent Indian".<sup>5</sup> The striking consciousness as to caste and religion has assumed a formidable enormity in the changing social set-up of a rehabilitating nation. True, the blocking barriers are fast sinking down, yet the age-old customs take their own time to crack. Further, Malgonkar (*The Princes*) and Narayan (*The Sweet-Vendor*) expose almost in a similar vein the intricate feudal characteristics, the ideographic and original figure of a common man respectively with equal understanding and awareness.

The conflict between modern scientific growth and the traditional rural values has been forcefully portrayed in the novels of Kamala Markandaya: *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Coffer Dams*. Rukmini, all for calm and quiet of the countryside, and Kunthi, all for din and disturbance of the town life, stand in temperamental contrast in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. The rapid industrial advancement and the radical technological leaps have drifted Man away from Nature. Bhabani Bhattacharya, too, tries to re-establish Gandhian values allegedly losing their rank and honour in the post-independence India. The Charkha and the machine represent two separate schools—one symbolic of Gandhian simplicity and the other of machinistic heartlessness. Avowedly, it has created a cleavage in the society. A fast-developing nation, unmindful of its manpower is expressly adopting measures for brisk industrialisation, no wonder, ultimately a move towards frustration and defeatism.

The post-independence shift in the attitude to women has generally proved a boon for the fair sex, hitherto treated as an inferior entity. Their lot has completely been overhauled and now they stand equal to men in all social and political concerns. Privilege to enter technical and industrial world, right to universal franchise, change in marital relations, growth of a newer class of working women—all such things have considerably improved their status. Bhabani Bhattacharya says: “I think the women of India have more depth and more richness than the men. The transition from the old to the new, the crisis of value adaptation, strikes deeper into the lives of our women than of our men folk”.<sup>6</sup> He has tried to paint this type of image of the Eve in his woman-conscious novels as Kamala Markandaya, Jhabvala and Attia Hosain do in their works. The traditional role which women enjoyed in Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi*—with prostitutes, courtesans, maid-servants, marriage melodies—has now been replaced by the portrayal of a liberated species which in clubs and councils, operas and offices dominates the scene. Hallowed with the grace of university education, these fire-brand protagonists of the cause of their uplift and advancement, have compelled us to reconsider our stand as to them.” The craving of the modern Indian women for a place in the sun, after centuries of purdah, is intelligible enough. Their individuality is seldom allowed to grow. It is suspect. In Vedic times women enjoyed equality with men. It was much later that they were thrown in the junkyard and consigned to what is called the doormat status”.<sup>7</sup> Raja Rao too has upheld the idea of equality for women in his *Kanthapura*. The new openings for the women folk and the new social outlook, forebode a bright future for them in the post-independence India.

Since the installation of popular governments at the Centre and the States soon after independence a new political awakening has corroded the hearts of millions of Indians. At many International meets and the world-forums like the U. N. O., Indian representatives have been vehemently propagating the policy of non-violence and non-alignment. Alternately, we are borrowing lines of political behaviour from our Western allies. The Marxist philosophy has pre-eminently influenced our ways. As such the cause of the underdog, has been spelt with compassion and pity by Mulk Raj Anand in his *Coolie*. Malgonkar's *The Princes* speaks of the medieval feudal glory, now an obsolete thing. Rajahs, Shikar-parties, court-dances, bohemism and birthday revelries are things non-existent now in a people's nation in the making. Instead, we have established new social service centres for the weaker sections of the community, welfare schemes have been drafted for their steady development, untouchability has been legally banned and the have-nots have been fraternally adopted as part of the society. Again, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a story of a village, fast changing under Gandhian influence. The problem of untouchability is the theme of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. Bhabani Bhattacharya too delves deep into the issue in his novel, *He who Rides a Tiger*. A spate of social reforms, a series of community welfare programmes, a sequence of popular polls have profusely altered the ways of Indian life and today we have included workers in the managerial board of the mills, artesans are members of the governing body of the engineering complexes and the dividends of a company are judiciously shared by the employers and the employees. Added to this, the spirit of democracy has evoked the sense of discipline, responsibility and allegiance. Though, the freedom brought with it a sweeping current of communal holocaust, hatred and horror (*Train to Pakistan*: Khushwant Singh, *Distani Drum*: Manohar Malgonkar), it was short-lived owing to the call given by Mahatma Gandhi to restore sense of grace and goodwill for fellow-citizens, irrespective of caste, creed and colour. True, Mahatma Gandhi's image as one symbolic of love, brotherhood and communal harmony has been projected as such in many a novel of the post-independence period.

It is natural now to ask what the contemporary Indo-Anglia novel has offered us. Have these novelists really projected the growing trends of change in attitude, outlook and aspirations of nation committed to ameliorate the destinies of crores living below poverty line, subjected to economic constraints and orthodox social obligations? Is it merely an artistic expression of their imaginative spur far detached from reality and responsibility? Are

these plots just fairyland fantasies? The quest may lead us to confusing corners. Technically we may not be concerned with new political and economic programmes, as our main strain is the 'new social vision.' However, it is an admitted assumption that all these issues are intimately interwoven, inseparably interlinked. "The difficulties facing the serious Indian novelist are of course real enough. What is he to write about? .... Must the novelist's be a 'scientific' or realistic or even naturalistic approach to contemporary social problems"?<sup>8</sup> The age-old Indian tradition easily assimilates new ideas, new idioms and new experiences. Despite their portrayal of a Utopian world, the contemporary novelists were closely associated with plain reality and natural simplicity of the Indian life and legend. The complex social forces and the limitations of an individual attract immediate attention of a discerning observer. The curious coalition of multi-faceted historical vicissitudes, Western impact, Marxist obsession, Gandhian enlightenment and the echoes of industrial advancement form the fabric of some of the great contemporary novels. No need to say, it is a portrayal of our own aspirations, ambitions and the millennium.

The ideological commitments of an author like Anand; the compassionate approach to life as seen in Narayan's novels; the mystic and obscurantist attitude of Raja Rao; the feminine sensibility of Kamla Markandaya; the unusual insight of Jhabvala; the medieval myth and marvel in Malgonkar; the jet-set galaxy of characters in Arun Joshi; the retort and repartee of Khushwant Singh—all such things take us to a world teeming with truth and credibility. From romance we are led towards reality, from temperamental tangles we are shown undisguised frankness, from the mazes of darkness we are taken towards dependable faith. Is this not morally elevating? Has it not boosted out spiritual and vital values? There cannot be two answers. It can emphatically be asserted that modern Indo-Anglian fiction is closely related to our individual passions and feelings, personal fads and favours—essentially a forceful approximation of human existence – an optimistic image of life-size articulation, and above all a generous and genuine evaluation of post-independence mood of millions of Indians.

#### **4. QUESTIONS**

1. Trace the beginnings of Indian Literature.
2. Give a short account of the development of Indo-Anglian literature.
3. Write a note on Indo-Anglians versus Regionalists.
4. Trace the development of Indian Literature in English from 1935-1970.

5. Write a short note on Indo-Anglian literature in the post-independence period.

## **Paper-XXI. Contemporary Indian Writing in English-I**

### **Unit- 2. Jayanta Mahapatra**

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

1.2 Biographical sketch of Jayanta Mahapatra

1.3 Famous works of Jayanta Mahapatra

1.4 His style of writing and the themes in his works

2. Imagery in Jayanta Mahapatra's works

3. Summary and analysis of *The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore*

4. Jayanta Mahapatra's contribution to Indian Literature

5. Questions

6. Further Reading

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Objective**

This Unit provides a biographical sketch of Jayanta Mahapatra, some of his famous poems and his general style of writing poetry followed by a detailed discussion about its themes and outlines. It also includes the summary and analysis of his poems, *The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore*. It is then followed by a discussion about Jayanta Mahapatra's contribution to Indian Literature. This unit concludes with a set of questions and a list of further readings to gain knowledge about the critical aspects of his works.

### **1.2 Biographical sketch of Jayanta Mahapatra**

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the best known Indian English poets. Perhaps any discussion on Indian English Poetry is incomplete without reference to his poetical works. Physicist, bilingual poet and essayist, Jayanta Mahapatra holds the distinction of being the first Indian English poet to have received the Sahitya Akademi Award (1981) for Relationship. In 2009 he was awarded by Government of India with "Padmashree Award", country's most prestigious award for civilian citizen for his out standing contribution to the field of literature.

#### **Birth and Early Life**

Jayanta Mahapatra, born on 22 October 1928 in Cuttack ( India ), belongs to a lower middle-class family. He had his early education at Stewart school, Cuttack . After a first class Master's Degree in Physics, he joined as a teacher in 1949 and served in different Government colleges of Orissa.

#### **Later Life**

All his working life, he taught physics at different colleges in Orissa. He retired in 1986.

Mahapatra has authored 18 books of poems. He started writing poetry at the age of thirty-eight, quite late by normal standards. Mahapatra's tryst with the muse came rather late in life. He published his first poems in his early 40s. The publication of his first book of poems, *Svayamvara and Other Poems*, in 1971 was followed by the publication of *Close the Sky, Ten By Ten*.

His collections of poems include *A Rain of Rites*, *Life Signs* and *A Whiteness of Bone*. One of Mahapatra's better remembered works is the long poem *Relationship*, for which he won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1981. He is the first Indian English Poet to receive the honor. Besides being one of the most popular Indian poets of his generation, Mahapatra was also part of the trio of poets who laid the foundations of modern Indian English Poetry. He shared a special bond with A. K. Ramanujan, one of the finest poets in the IEP tradition. Mahapatra is also different in not being a product of the Bombay school of poets. Over time, he has managed to carve a quiet, tranquil poetic voice of his own--distinctly different from those of his contemporaries. His wordy lyricism combined with authentic Indian themes puts him in a league of his own.

His recent poetry volumes include *Shadow Space*, *Bare Face* and *Random Descent*. Besides poetry, he has experimented widely with myriad forms of prose. His lone published book of prose remains *The Green Gardener*, a collection of short stories. A distinguished editor, Jayanta Mahapatra has been bringing out, for many years, a literary magazine, *Chandrabhaga*, from Cuttack. The magazine is named after Chandrabhaga, a prominent but dried-up river in Orissa.

### **Vision of Poetry**

"To Orissa, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which lies my beginning and my end..." declared the poet in his Award-receiving speech at the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

The clue to understand Mahapatra's poetry is given by the poet himself:

"My poems deal with the life within myself where the mind tries to find a sort of coherence from the mass of things in the world outside it."

## **Awards**

Second Prize International Who's Who in Poetry, London, 1970.

Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award Poetry, Chicago, 1975.

Visiting Writer International Writing Program, Iowa City 1976-77.

Cultural Award Visitor, Australia, 1978.

Japan Foundation Visitor's Award, Japan, 1980.

Sahitya Academy Award National Academy of Letters, New Delhi, 1981.

Invited Poet Asian Poets Conference, Tokyo, Japan, 1984.

Indo-Soviet Cultural Exchange Writer, USSR, 1985.

Resident Writer Centro Culturale della Fondazione Rockefeller, Bellagio, Italy, 1986.

Invited Poet University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1988.

Singapore Festival of Arts, Singapore. 1988.

New Literatures in English Conference, Justus-Liebig-Universitat, Giessen,

West Germany, 1989

ACLALS Silver Jubilee Conference, Canterbury, England, 1989.

First Prize Scottish International Open Poetry Competition, 1990.

Invited Poet Poetry International, The South Bank Centre, London, England, 1992.

Cuirt International Poetry Festival, Galway, Ireland, 1992.

EI Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, Mexico. 1994

Mingei International Museum of World Folk Art, La Jolla, USA. 1994.

Gangadhar National Award For Poetry, Sambalpur University, 1994

Ramakrishna Jaidayal Harmony Award, 1994, New Delhi.

Vaikom Mohammad Basheer Chair Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, 1996-97.

Invited Poet ACLALS Conference, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1998.

Awarded Honorary Degree Doctor of Literature, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, 2006.

Invited Poet Weltklang Poetry Festival, Berlin, Germany, 2006.

Bishuva Award Prajatantra Prachara Samiti, Cuttack, 2007.

Padma Shree Award India's Padma Shree Award, 2009.

SAARC Literary Award, New Delhi, 2010

## **Poetry Readings:**

## **Overseas**

University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1976  
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 1976  
University of the South, Sewanee, 1976  
East West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1976  
Adelaide Festival of Arts, Adelaide, 1978  
P.E.N. Centre, Sydney, 1978  
Australian National University, Canberra, 1978  
International Poets Conference, Tokyo, 1980  
Asian Poets Conference, Tokyo, 1984  
Aoyama University, Tokyo, 1984  
Sapporo University, Sapporo, 1984  
Writers Union, Moscow, Leningrad & Lvov, USSR, 1985  
Singapore Festival of Arts, Singapore, 1988  
Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1988  
University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1988  
Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, 1988  
University of the Philippines, Manila City, 1988  
Museong Kalinangang Pilipino, Manila, 1988  
Irish Writers Centre, Dublin, Ireland, 1992  
Sligo Arts Centre, The Grammar School, Sligo, 1992  
The Guild Hall, Derry, 1992  
WEA, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Hexham and Durham, 1992  
The South Bank Centre, London, 1992  
Universities of Hull and Leeds (UK), 1992  
The Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado, 1994  
Instituto de Cultura de Campeche, Mexico, 1994  
Instituto de Cultura de Puebla, Mexico, 1994  
Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, USA, 1995  
Hunter College, New York, USA, 1995  
University of the South, Sewanee, USA, 1995  
Writers Forum, De Kalb College, Atlanta, USA, 1995  
Writers Forum, St. Andrews College, Laurinburg, USA, 1995

British Council, Kandy, 1998

Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo, 1998

## **In India**

Andhra University, University of Jadavpur, Calcutta University, University of Delhi, Osmania University, The Poetry Centre - Hyderabad, Visva-Bharati - Santiniketan, North East Hill University - Shillong, Tezpur University - IIT Guwahati, India International Centre - New Delhi, Bharat Bhavan - Bhopal, University of Lucknow, DAV College - Kanpur, Arts, Science & Commerce College - Durg.

### **1.3 Famous works of Jayanta Mahapatra**

#### **Poetry**

1971: Svayamvara and Other Poems

1971: Close the Sky Ten by Ten

1976: A Father's Hours

1976: A Rain of Rites

1979: Waiting

1980: The False Start, Bombay: Clearing House

1980: Relationship

1983: Life Signs

1986: Dispossessed Nests

1987: Selected Poems

1988: Burden of Waves & Fruit

1989: Temple

Bare Face

Shadow Space

The best of Jayanta Mahapatra

A Whiteness of Bone

2005: Random Descent, Third Eye Communications

2006: Samparka, Natuna Dilli: Sāhitya Akādemi

2009 The lie of Dawns: Poems 1974 - 2008

## **Prose**

The Green Gardener, short stories

Door of Paper: Essay and Memoirs

Mahapatra's poems have been anthologized in the celebrated volumes of Indian poetry edited by R. Parthasarathy and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. Significant anthologies in which his work appears are:

The Poetry Anthology 1912 - 1977, Boston, USA (Houghton Milfin, 1978)

The Vintage Book of Contemporary Poetry ( J.D McClatcky, Editor - Random House, USA, 1996)

The Poetry Anthology 1912 -2002, Chicago, USA (Ivan R. Dee, 2002)

## **Critical Studies**

2001: Bijay Kumar Das, The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: third revised and enlarged edition; New Delhi, Atlantic,

2006: Jaydeep Sarangi and Gauri Shankar Jha, editors, The Indian Imagination of Jayanta Mahapatra, New Delhi, Sarup and Sons, 2006, a compilation of critical articles

### **1.4 His style of writing and the themes in his works**

Jayanta Mahapatra as a poet is not only a writer of verse to be taken simply at one go, but a dreamer and a visionary, a physicist and a philosopher dwelling apart, delving too far into the unknown and uncharted domains and trajectories, which lie they stretched beyond, lengthening off to shadow space and encompassing in life signs to tell of life lived, felt and experienced through a strange vacuum seen and perceived. Apart from one of strong faith and belief, myth and mysticism shown against the backdrop of the rock-built temples, he has little to derive from and take out, as suspense and doubt seem to be taking the space to engage him otherwise and he bends to nihilism, existentialism and iconoclasm through which he builds and outdoes, constructs and deconstructs. A search is almost there in him, as for the images of life and for values, letting them as they are and as they will be in future. Art to him is not for art's sake merely, but for morality too and he writes attaching with that. But to gather the momentum philosophically, from nowhere to somewhere and somewhere to nowhere, where one to go, how the images and reflections of life shadowed, this very

silhouetting continues in his poetry.

If to ask him, he will perhaps say it, poetry is the photo negatives of life, images fleeting and in a flux and the reel moving on is the thing to be felt and understood at some level of inner consciousness. To read Jayanta is to come to the conclusion, nothing is what it seems to be and what it seems to be is nothing, as because the scenes and sites go shifting with the change in situation, idea, thought and reflection and the unconscious mind can always be seen at work. To paint the image against the backdrop of bright and shadowed lights is the flair of the writer.

A poet of silence and rural landscapes, his mind settles in the India of villages living in mud-houses with thatched roofs and the people holding faith in great belief which but betrays too, as faith remains not faith, but turns into blind faith thudded by doubt lurking within and suspense taking over. A poet who has studied physics as his subject with specialization and has taught it into the classrooms, he startles us with his poetic flight and imagination, brooding and insight, imagery and myth-making, peep and penetration, random reflection and introspection.

After his early education which he received in Orissa, he went to Patna University, Bihar to do his M.Sc. in physics, lived on the banks of the Ganges, saw the river in its rage and majesty, but could not understand his feelings then. He returned back to his native place after the attainment of the postgraduate degree and taught in the various colleges of Orissa before switching finally over to Ravenshaw College, Cuttack wherefrom superannuated too in 1986. This is all about his professional career that we know superficially. There is still much to learn from his memoirs, sketches and reflections; essays, papers and acceptance speeches; tours, travels, visits, sojourns and literary friendships. There are some editors who have really promoted him and his poetry. An Oriya Christian, and this too has a history of own, he starts his career as an amateur writer when in his forties.

“Over the sloughing of the somber wind  
priests chant louder than ever:  
the mouth of India opens.”

– *Indian Summer Poem*

(*A Rain of Rites*, *ibid*, p.35)

Let us see how Prof K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar takes to while editing the book for the third edition in 1982 for to be brought out in 1983 and adding a new chapter called Postscript where there figures in the page about the new poet Jayanta Mahapatra and his inclusion:

“Jayanta Mahapatra’s *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* and *Relationship* (1980) reveal a first-rate poetic sensibility, and the last volume fittingly won the Sahitya Akademi award. Jayanta is a close observer of men and things, and he finds.

Every man, every beast  
trapped, deaf in his own sleep...

The lyric notes are sharp, they sting – yet somehow satisfy. The cripples at Puri who are taken for granted, the white-clad widows: Truth seems twisted sometimes, yet pitiless. ‘Hunger’ is brutal in its precision of despair, neither pseudo-romanticism nor routine realism. In several of the 44 lyrics in *Waiting*, Jayanta seems half-unconsciously to recapitulate Vedic times and themes, for he too is Man watching Nature within and without. The ancient spiritual quest tugs at the physicist-poet’s heart-strings. Why death? Why pain? Why this “wistful dreaming about the axis of the past”? *The False Start* is another vibrant string of lyrical poems, the running theme being the need to beyond defeat and attempt to reach after the seeming unattainable. *Relationship* is a sustained long poem, an expansion of the private lyric voice into a chain of meditations embracing a region, a tradition, a whole way of life. The theme and its half-hypnotic articulation alike compel respectful admiration. – (K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing In English*, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi , Reprint 1993, p.713)

The poetic journey of Jayanta Mahapatra starts from 1971 or a little before it and the two history books will certify his arrival. This is possible in Indian English poetry that one starts one’s poetic journey just with the publication of a handful of poems and a book on the anvil, but even in our modern Indian languages it is difficult to attain the heights so soon. They turned into poets and poetesses easily, sailed through smoothly, but the coming times are going to be difficult as the writers will have to struggle and suffer more for new breaks in poetry.

“Only twilight,  
that begins nowhere and ends nowhere

touches me like nothing does.

Its femininity, quickened and childishness,  
stands out apart;  
it begins in loss, beauty, the nearness of soul.”

– *Only Twilight*

(*Bare Face*, D.C.Books, Kottayam, 2000, p.14)

There are different facets of the same Jayanta Mahapatra. He is a poet of the morning, the dawn, the midday, the dusk and the nightfall and of the midnight too when he talks of being alone in the house with a rat running just like that of W.B. Yeats’ *An Acre of Grass*. There are several poems named round the golden and breaking dawn, glistening beautifully, reddening and brightening, flashing and dazzling. Again, the same scene with a little difference can be marked in the glowing sun about to set to be contrasted with the moon going behind the cottage of Lucy in *Strange Fits of Passion* and the glowing, sunny pastoral scene with Christopher Marlowe’s *The Passionate Shepherd To His Love*.

“Endless crow noises.

A skull on the holy sands  
tilts its empty country towards hunger.

White-clad widowed women  
past the centres of their lives  
are waiting to enter the Great Temple.”

– *Dawn at Puri*

(*A Rain of Rites*, The University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1976, p.28)

Let us mark how Prof. M.K. Naik takes to,

“Jayanta Mahapatra (1928-), another academic, began his career with *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (1971) and has since published *Svayamvara and Other Poems* (1971), *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *Relationship* (1980, Sahitya Akademi Award, 1981) and *The False Start* (1980). Mahapatra’s poetry is redolent of the Orissa scene and the Jagannatha temple at Puri figures quite often in it. His most characteristic note is one of quiet but often ironic reflection mostly concerning love, sex and sensuality in the earlier poetry and the social and political scene in some of the later poems. His style has an admirable colloquial ease, punctuated by thrusts of striking images as, for instance, ‘his lean-to opened like wound’

and ‘the one wide street/lolls out like a giant tongue.’ His muted brooding occasionally results in extremes of either excessively cryptic statement or verbal redundancy and in weaker moments he is seen echoing other poets, as in the Eliotesque ‘mornings/Like pale yellow hospital linen’; but his better work indicates a poetic voice which promises to gather strength in the years to come.” – (M.K. Naik, A History of Indian English Literature, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1982, p.207)

A catalogue or bibliography of his books itself will speak of what he has as the works cited in as for our ready reference:

- Close the sky, Ten by Ten, Dialogue Publication, Calcutta, 1971
- Svayamvara and Other Poems, Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1971
- A Father’s Hours, United Writers , Calcutta, 1976
- A Rain of Rites, University of Georgia Press, Athens (USA), 1976
- Waiting, Samkaleen Prakashan, New Delhi, 1979
- The False Start, Clearing House, Bombay, 1980
- Relationship, Greenfield Review Press, Greenfield, New York 1980
- Life Signs, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983
- Dispossessed Nests, Nirala Publications, Jaipur, 1986
- Selected Poems, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987
- Burden of Waves and Fruit, Three Continents Press, Washington, 1988
- Temple, Dangaroo Press, Sydney, 1989
- A Whiteness of Bone, Viking Penguin, New Delhi, 1992
- The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra, Bodhi Publications, Calicut, 1995
- Shadow Space, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1997
- Bare Face, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 2000
- Random Descent, Third Eye Communications, Bhubaneswar, 2005
- The Lie of Dawns: Poems 1974-2008, Authorspress, New Delhi, 2009

The foothills are quiet, it’s another day.

A new mist chokes the trees.

A sky of silence,

meaningless as man’s hatred,

as grass upon graves,

comes out into the sun.

– Dawn

(*A Whiteness of Bone*, ibid, p.62)

Jayanta Mahapatra published his first poetic venture titled *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* and the book appeared from some Dialogue Publication, Calcutta. The work, though inclusive of mainly shorter poems, bordering on lyrical effusion, verbal play and imagistic lining, just talked of the arrival of the new writer. Most of the poems which he included in the work were imagistic portals, opening the Pandora's box, full of image, imagery and imagism, the imagist in the making, the footfall of his sounding nearer, but one could not guess it then, nor the materials were so tight and meaningful. When it dazzles the light, imagery takes wings just like the gossamer shining underneath in the morning sunlight; when it grows dark and opaque, imagery takes wings again with the shadows lurking in, darkness enveloping and the birds returning back to their nests. He has played with words linguistically and the jargon of words prevailing upon. Today it is difficult to get the copy of the book. Just the xerox materials are doing the rounds for research works. It has not been reprinted. The author's copy itself is the source material of it published long ago. A few of these poems just figure in research works otherwise the anthologists represent them not in the maximum.

I am still here.

To talk to the phantoms of time.

As the season of a hundred thousand years  
starts to speak with its strange voice again.

– Season

(*Shadow Space*, D C Kottayam Books, 1997, p.28)

A poet of the seventies, he is a recipient of several accolades and prizes, honors and certificates and has delivered his lectures and speeches world-wide, going to the overseas. Jayanta received SAARC Literary Award for 2009, Allen Tate Poet Prize for 2009 and an honorary doctorate from Ravenshaw University in the same year. A recipient of Padma Shri from the Govt. of India in 2009, he is acclaimed for his service to literature and society.

A poet of Orissa, Oriya history, art, culture and thematics, he writes with Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Puri and Konark as the hub of his poetry which he keeps rounding about, referring in a multiple way. The Chilka Lake with its natural habitat and migratory birds, the Konark Sun-temple with the chariot, the Jagannath Puri-temple with the statues of

Jagannath, Balabhdara and Subhadra and the Lingaraj-temple telling of rock-cut splendour, the Puri sea-beach with calm and commotion and the Mahanadi and the Chandrabhaga rivers flowing through hold the poetic pen of Jayanta to write about and he does too in demarcating a cartography of that. As an imagist, he is Ezra Poundian, exploiting imagery and imagism and poems come to him as images and reflections and you go on seeing them rather than deriving for meaning just like a passenger peeping out of the window of the moving train bogey.

A myth-maker, he weaves the myths personal and private, deriving in the way as Yeats did in *Sailing to Byzantium* and others, as did Wordsworth while tuning to the reaper's song. A singer of Ireland not, but of Orissa, its history, art, sculpture, tradition and space, he goes in the way of his to be a Gregoryian ballad singer. Just like David Herbert Lawrence, he sees the erotic sculptures carved on the outer temple-walls telling of man-woman relationship, telling of the *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* motif and the yoga-yoginis and it is from there that he got the dark daughter of his Relationship.

Who is this dark daughter, a yoga-yogini or a nautch girl turned into stone or a temple-serving devadasi? How to identify her? Is she an attribute of the Mother Goddess or a working class girl standing speechless and benumbed? Maybe she womankind upon whom atrocities are heaped upon. How to identify her?

A historiographer, a curator, a conservator, a photographer, he photographs the rock-built temples, in their full splendor and long-standing, the poet tries to go deep into their history, as for who made them and when did they? But there is none to answer. Everything is but anonymous and the history silent about all that. The history of Orissa is his subject and the culture of it the space of his poetry. He is first and foremost an Oriya rather than an Indian. An Oriya poet in an English garb is the thing to be dealt and this is true in respect of the poet. His poetic spectrum and the horizon of thinking match with that of Samuel Beckett's in *Waiting for Godot*. Just waiting continues, not sure of whether Godot will turn up or not. Why are the tramps waiting for? Or, are we the tramps in reality passing our days in doing absurd and useless things? Is our life meaningless as Shakespeare says in the extract from *Macbeth* that life is a series of tomorrows ending death? Life is nothing but a walking shadow. Is it not? We do not know if his existentialism from the book of physics or from Kierkegaard, Kafka and Sartre. Poetry as seems to us from a reading of his poetry is but a

book of physics, more specially the light chapter of it. To understand him better, Jayanta is but an absurdist and his poetry a study in absurdism. As Khushwant Singh is of the Punjab and its legacy and heritage so is Jayanta Mahapatra in his delineation of Odisha and the Odias.

He is an imagist and this is the reason for which the images cannot be resolved, analyzed and annotated. Apart from an imagist's foray and delving, he is a nihilist too, drawing from vacant thinking, random reflections and the shadow space, and this all shows his journey from here to astronomy to where? To read him is not to be light and happy, but to be laden and down, tense and fretful. A serious poet, he takes life seriously. Many read him, but fail to derive from as he is obscure and meaningless. The meaning is not there in his verse-lines. He is so abstract and condensed that words fail to claw at. Shifting shadows and images can never be explained and this is the case in the context of the poet in pursuance to meaning not, but linguistic presentation. Light and darkness are two sides of the same coin and these go swapping places in the poetry of his. A poet of some Oriya heart and soul, he cannot dwell anywhere barring it, the mind cannot lift to barring the place where he was born, got his schooling from, just falling short of being a Rupert Brooke.

Jayanta Mahapatra went on publishing one book after to substantiate and consolidate his position. *Svayamvara and Other Poems* was just a little bit better than the former. *A Rain of Rites* is actually the book to be reckoned with and here his poetry takes the flight. The famous poem, *Dawn At Puri* is herein. *The False Start* too is a good attempt whereas *Waiting* is a book of historical background. *Relationship* brings him the laurel in the form of the Sahitya Akademi Award. But one should not take for the *Temple* of Jayanta Mahapatra as for George Herbert's *The Temple*, as the title is contradictory and there is nothing like that which Herbert has detailed upon in his poetry. Apart from being a poet, he is a prose writer, a short story writer, an editor, a translator and a reviewer and his books have arrived from small and big presses. Before getting name and fame in India, he had been famous elsewhere as he used to send his poems to foreign journals. Some of these were rejected definitely, but instead of that, he got rewards for his poetry. Sometimes the editors misjudge the entries and the same make a way when published elsewhere.

We question Nissim Ezekiel with regards to his identity and he suffers from the quest for identity too, but Jayanta passes the test without any doubt, as he is an Indian poet writing

with Oriya blood and soul. The defeat of Ashoka he has not forgotten, the blood which it spilled from the slaughtered Oriyas when lay they lifeless and motionless in blood, writhing in pain and death on the banks of the Daya river, as the fields of Dhauli littered with the dead bodies, innumerable in number. On seeing the men killed and butchered, the heart of King Ashoka changed and he begged for penance through his rock edicts and turned into a Buddhist.

Apart from an imagist and a photographer of scenes and sights, temples and picnic spots, lakes and beaches, villages and village-ways, he is a realist, a social thinker and a feminist. Rape, violence, murder, atrocity, corruption, terrorism, communal unrest, bombardment, poverty, exploitation and injustice rake him badly and he longs for an expression. The newspaper items dealing with hunger, poverty, rape and death take the canvas away from him and he seeks to dabble in ink with a very heavy heart of his rarely to be found. What can poetry if the ills are not diagnosed and cured? The dowry deaths sadden him and he feels morose and broken. In the earlier poems of his, he had been so much imagistic and lyrical, but in the latter he turned to feminism and social realities.

An orange flare  
lights the pale panes of the hospital  
in a final wish of daylight.

It's not yet dark.

– *Twilight*

(*Burden of Waves And Fruit*, *ibid*, p.23)

We do not know as to how to re-designate and rechristen him by calling a modern or a post-modern, a colonialist or a post-colonialist. When he just started to write, he had not been sure of what the future critics would designate him as for his verse. Like an Indian poet, quite insecure of his rank and placement into the annals, he just chose to dabble in verse. It is also true side by side that there had not been too much of competition then. A few used to think of publishing in English and the poetry-collections of the then time used to. To be a modern Indian language poet was but a difficult task rather than being an Indian English poet.

To see the things in the eyes of K.S. Ramamurti,

“Mahapatra is again a poet whose poetry shows the stamp of the modernist and post-modernist influences. The recurrent themes of his poetry are loneliness, the complex problems of human relationships, the difficulties of meaningful communication, the life of the mind in relation to the life of the external world and the complex nature of love and sex.” – (K.S.Ramamurti, *Twenty-five Indian Poets in English*, Macmillan, Delhi, Reprinted 1996, p.55)

“Mahapatra has a feel for some rare moments which, even if they appear to be ordinary and insignificant, can mean a great deal for a poet of such delicate sensibility when he looks back upon it and contemplates it in retrospect. As in most modernist poetry, there is in Mahapatra’s poetry greater emphasis on subjective memory and inner self than on the external world or actual events.” – (Ibid, p.65)

“There is a photograph still hanging  
on the wall in my father’s house. It is quite old;  
and against an elaborate backdrop the photographer used,  
are my parents, my younger brother and I.  
I want to shut it from my mind  
because it reminds me of a useless moment.”

– *The Dispossessed*

(*A Whiteness of Bone*, Viking Penguin, New Delhi, 1992, p.29)

People call him a very tough poet to be dealt with, as because he is imagistic, linguistic, lyrical, nonsensical, nihilistic, blank, abstract, mythical, psychological, philosophical, introspective, multi-dimensional, rural, landscapic, social, humanistic, liberal, factual, real, regional, personal, private, patriotic, national and international at the same time when we sit to assess a genius like that of him. His poetry is a poetry of *pinda-dana* continuing in on the beach and of the *asthi-kalsha* hanging to be disposed off into the holy waters, the rituals going on the sea shore adjacent to the Puri temple. The poet marking the skulls and thinking of the dawn at Puri, the pyres lit around, flames going up in the air, the trails of blazing smoke rising upwards and the sands shifting, these strike not the heart, but the image-taker’s lenses. He is there to present and picture life and the world as they are rather than to be remorseful. The same world, the same man and the same time, what does it make the difference! The same time is fragmented into ages, decades, years, months, hours, minutes, seconds and moments. Poetry is perception, poetry is impression, poetry is unconscious

mind at work, whatever tell you is true in connection with Mahapatra and his poetry. Poetry is blank thinking and the poet a blank thinker, nothing in the mind, consistent and stable, everything in a flux, this may also be true and his poetry can be explained through the light chapter of physics.

The opening passage from *Relationship* itself states it clearly,

“Once again one must sit back and bury the face  
in this earth of the forbidding myth,  
the phallus of the enormous stone,  
when the lengthened shadow of a restless vulture  
caresses the strong and silent deodars in the valley,  
and when the time of the butterfly  
moves inside the fierce body of the forest bear,  
and feel the tensed muscle of rock  
yield to the virtuous water of the hidden springs of the Mahanadi,  
the mystery of secret rights that make up destiny;”

( *Relationship*, The Chandrabhaga Society, Cuttack, Second Indian Edition, 1999, p.9 )

Mahapatra quotes a stanza from Walt Whitman to start *Relationship* and this is the ground for which we call it a *Leaves of Grass* in miniature. *Relationship* as a work is so visionary, so much dreamy and fanciful that the poet just floats on and flows by as Tennyson's *The Brook* murmurs by, as John Keats goes with the nightingale into the woods smelling fragrant flowers. Similar is the case with the Mahapatra of this long poem. Just like Ruth or Philomela, Ulysses or the Ancient Mariner, he holds the hands and tells the stories of his own. Maybe it that the writer of *Christabel* Coleridge is before us or that of *The Listeners* and *Martha* poems, who is none but Walter de la Mare. Somewhere the music is like that of *Look, Stranger* of W.H.Auden, somewhere that of Poem in October of Dylan Thomas. Here the poet is a singer like the Wordsworth of *Tintern Abbey*, *The Daffodils*, *To The Skylark*, *The Lost Love*, *Upon Westminster Bridge*, *By The Sea* and John Masefield of *Sea Fever*.

Jayanta's attachment with the land of his birth and nativity, there lies it depicted in a very flowery language and a dreamy glide, floating by. The poem deals with the lost mariners,

Ashokan bloodshed and the fields smeared with bloodshed and the bodies with bloodstains and the river Daya unable to wash off the sin of the emperor and in the aftermath of all that he relented and repented for after having killed and that was why laid down the arms for peace. The Dhauligiri Shantih Stupa, the Peace Pagoda adds to the beauty of the site. The rock edicts at the foot of the Dhauli hills tell of many a thing in the form of his decrees. Ashoka felt guilty of conscience as for the unwashable sin of killing many and felt aggrieved from his within. There is the thunder shower of *The Cloud* of Shelley as well as shantih of *The Waste Land* of T.S. Eliot, but in a subdued way. Here in this fairy man work, the poet Mahapatra is serene, tranquil and quiet taking the flight as do the swans, herons and storks for the marshy plots, making us remember of W.B. Yeats' *The Wild Swans At Coole*. Sometimes the poet draws the things from tantra-yoga and the yoga-yoginis; sometimes tells about the lingam-yoni motif in Relationship. The Frostian woods lovely, deep and dark, but miles to go before we sleep, stopping near fascinated by the mystery and beauty of the tract one evening and the Longfellowian footprints on the sands of time to follow after as per the psalm of life tempt us really.

A few stanzas from *Song of Myself* of *Leaves of Grass* will put it comparatively:

“I celebrate Myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.  
I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease....observing a spear of summer grass.  
Houses and rooms are full of perfumes....the shelves are crowed with perfumes,  
I breathe the fragrance myself, and know it and like it,  
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.  
The atmosphere is not a perfume....it has no taste of the distillation....it is odorless,  
It is for my mouth forever....I am in love with it,  
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,  
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.”

– (Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Edited, with an Introduction, by Abraham Cowley, Penguin Books, USA, 1986, p.25)

M.K. Naik in one of his contents named Two Worlds: The Imagery of Jayanta Mahapatra of the latest book of criticism writes:

“An intensive scrutiny of Mahapatra’s imagery reveals that his images are drawn from two worlds viz., the exterior world of phenomenal reality and the surrealistic world and the way these two worlds are related is equally significant. The image is for Mahapatra not merely what Wyndham Lewis called, the primary pigment of poetry; it is almost his characteristic way of reacting to experience, ordering it and recording it.” – (M.K.Naik in Indian English Poetry from the beginnings upto 2000, Pencraft International, Delhi-110052, pp. 2009, p.104)

*Random Descent, Bare Face and Shadow Space* are alike in theme and expression and are the latest books of his poems, but the poet has not changed his track. He is the same Mahapatra who began with his earlier books as he cannot do away with imagery and word-play. Poetry, to him, appears to be a cobweb of words glistening as gossamer in the morning when the first rays of the sun flash upon. *The Lie of Dawns* is not at all a new collection, but a selection from his different works, together with a few unpublished poems to be counted on fingers. His *Temple* is one dealing with poverty, hunger, food problem, suicide, rape and killing, opening the wounds again to question, how secure are we, how the food problem lies it addressed to! The attainment of freedom, the celebration of the 50 years of India’s independence and the voters coming to cast their votes stun us differently in thinking what we have really done for all those people, what to do with the false dawn of democracy! Summers, hot and perspiring, take the canvas of the poet for a deliberation and he tells about the orchards, the woman passing the midday and the daughter combing her hair underneath the shades and the mangoes dropping to change from one theme to another.

“The girl’s line of life climbs those sheer  
vertical walls she’ll never be able to climb herself.  
In the darkness of the city, familiar bloody hands  
are cleaning their livers and their intestines.  
Neither daughter of wind nor cloud, the girl’s  
mind is wrapped in a haze of thousands and children.”

– From the poem ‘*Palmistry*’  
(*Random Descent*, *ibid*, p.16)

The final passage from the work, *Relationship* ends as thus, embroidering the mythical text of the dark daughters

Is anything beyond me that I cannot catch up?  
Tell me your names, dark daughters  
Hold me to your spaces  
In your dance is my elusive birth, my sleep  
that swallows the green hills of the land  
and the crows that quicken the sunlight in the veins,  
and the stone that watches my sadness fly in and out  
of my deaths, a spiritless soul of memory.

(*Relationship*, The Chandrabhaga Society, Cuttack, Second Indian Edition, 1999, p.38 )

The word 'door' plays a pivotal role in the understanding of his poetry as his poems pertaining to the dawn, the morning and the nightfall are in their essence. There are also many poems taking the summer theme as for poetic expression, but in a very private and personal way of reflection. The unconscious mind at work and play is the thing of his deliberation, what it comes to the plane, stays not, but passes out as fleeting impressions in a flux. The brooding quality of his poetry seconded by the visionary glides, imaginative flights and dreamy drives take him to the pedestal of glory. A search for meaning pervades the whole poetic corpus in the form of questions and answers ever raised, ever tried for a solution, but the solution is not. Sitting by the door, he dreams and dreams, thinking about the unknown paths of life and the world, leading whereto,

So many doors before me,  
and each single one open.  
Yet one cannot enter,  
walking silently by a door.  
These dead things  
loom larger with every hour that goes.

– *Doors*

(*A Whiteness of Bone*, *ibid*, p.53)

## **2. Imagery in Jayanta Mahapatra's works**

His [Jayanta Mahapatra's] verse is free and moves slowly though smoothly. It is almost languid in its metaphysical poise until, suddenly, he transforms elemental visual images of Indian nature and traditional rural life into memorable metaphors. Mahapatra is what the

Indian poets writing in English is generally expected to be: an interpreter of a unique, complex and exotic culture through its landscape and people. (78)

Dilip Chitre encapsulates the poignancy of Mahapatra's imagery thus.

Jayanta Mahapatra, the well known Physics Professor turned poet, has made a mark in Indian poetry for various attributes of his poems – imagery being one of them. His poems take on a modernistic approach in sentiment and in expression, and exude an Indian scent which make them all the more sincere in treatment and authentic in style, though written in a language foreign to him and his homeland—English. Mahapatra writes for the huge dominion of the English language from within a smaller domain of Indo-English poetry, stationing himself in the still smaller literary region of Orissa. However, he bears a torch for his region, thereby activating the rest of the world to notice the place of his birth through his poetic renderings in English.

Mahapatra's bilingualism allows him to gain access to the regional reader-audience through Oriya and to the global audience through English. "Mahapatra has said of himself that he is 'an Oriya poet who incidentally writes in English'", points out Vilas Sarang and adds, "Indeed Mahapatra effortlessly 'translates' a profoundly Indian spirit into English" (31-32).

Jayanta Mahapatra chooses the metaphysical tone to express his sentiments with regard to the physical and psychological features of his country. His poetry is a metaphysical rendering of a smouldering vision and highly representational in regional adherence. This he accomplishes by weaving some arresting imagery in his poetry.

Imagery, derived from the Latin *imago*—"a likeness", is a deliberate use of words in a work to evoke distinct mental pictures. Eliot in his "The Music of Poetry" elucidates: "A poem or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image" (66).

Elaborating the function of imagery, Gurrey states in his *Appreciation of Poetry*:

We can experience imaginatively that which has come to us through the senses. And every impression we are conscious of, however ethereal it may be, can be expressed if only the mind can find imagery to represent it: imagery which is definite enough to work on another mind without nebulosity. So we find sense impressions of all sorts are suggested in poetry —

cold, heat, dryness, moistness, tension, pressure and movements, weights and sounds — they are suggested by the sound and rhythm of words, but chiefly by imagery. (42)

Poets, irrespective of their personal choice of the tone and style, make use of imagery to create an immediate effect on the reader's mind. Imagery which is essentially cerebral or emotive depends on the general outlook of the poet -- for instance the way Donne saw a sunset is different from the way Shelley saw it (MacNiece 94). Imagery could range from the flowing ornate descriptions used by Edmund Spenser in the fifteenth century; the simile-wrought and metaphoric imagery of William Shakespeare in the sixteenth century; the transcendental imagery of John Donne in the latter half of the sixteenth century and later by the Pre-Raphaelites in the nineteenth century; the erudite and polished imagery of Alexander Pope in the seventeenth century; the splendid visual landscape imagery of William Wordsworth and the sensuous imagery of Shelley and Keats during the Romantic literary period; the allusive imagery of Tennyson and Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century; the symbolic imagery of Yeats, the crisp and epiphanic imagery of Pound, the war imagery of poets writing during the World Wars, the broken abrupt telegraphic phrases used by modernist poets like T.S. Eliot that strengthened their objective co-relative technique and the surrealistic imagery of Stephen Spender in the first half of the twentieth century; to the contemporary realistic imagery wrought out by the post-modernists.

Imagery apart from taking on various treatments from the poets of the varied periods of literary history, also takes on the colour of the region from which a poet as a settler or native hails. As each individual poet does, Mahapatra too favours certain forms of imagery. Mahapatra's choice is abstract. Mahapatra has used various types of imagery differentiated and classified by critics and writers. "Imagery gives to cold, logical thought the power to excite emotion; the emotion thus engendered acts as an urgent impulse on thought kindling it and quickening it with fresh strength" (Gurrey 48) since "the emotions rooted though they are in instinct are the finest flower of human evolution without which reason itself is barren and may become evil" (Howes qtd. in Gurrey 48).

In the poems of Mahapatra, the extensive usage of the local landscape as imagery to symbolise his emotions or ideas, or even to merely represent a scene that intrigues him is apparent. A perusal of Mahapatra's imagery that forms an integral framework for his poetic musings is enlightening.

Louis Mac Niece, in his Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay distinguished between the two basic categories of imagery -- "cerebral" or "metaphysical" imagery (images from reason) and "emotional" or "physical" or "intuitive" imagery (images from the senses). Instances of the "cerebral" imagery, imagery that is associated with reason, can be witnessed in these lines:

This shadow of mine

lives in the middle of a breath;

a patient, flaming butterfly

that will keep on flitting near my memory. (Mahapatra, "Shadows" 18-21)

The "physical images" or images derived from the senses can be further differentiated as Burton points out in his *The Criticism of Poetry*: "Images can be classified according to the sense to which they are directed: sound; light (colour or shape images); taste, smell, touch (thermal or tactile images); movement (Kinesthetic images)" (98) and as Scott points out in his *Close Readings*: "Most images producing a mental picture are visual. But they can also suggest what is an instance of "auditory" image."

The varied types of "physical imagery" are recurrent in Mahapatra's canon. "Full moon tonight, and the summer palace / stares across the Kaveri with mad, white eyes" (1-2), words from "At the Summer Palace of Tipu Sultan, Seringapatnam" are an expression of visual imagery; "Sickles" offers an instance of "Kinesthetic" imagery: "Dust seems in no hurry now, sailing / the air" (1-2); the words: "They watch themselves walk across the sands / sniffing the dead fish smell of their lust / tasting the sweat of ritual sleeplessness." (16-18) from the same volume about tourists, in the poem "Tourists at the Railway Hotel, Puri" evoke "olfactory" and "gustatory" "images"; "tactile" imagery is framed with, "as the wind elsewhere / nudges your yearning skin with cool, long fingers." (47-48) in the poem "Another Autumn"; and "Afterward" holds an instance of an impressive auditory imagery:

Aside, the silence of another night

waits for the whine of the crickets

.....

The music has gone, days of words

Won't let this body escape  
A destiny loosens  
in the meaningless sounds of waves  
and the hissing of strange wood fires.(1-2, 7-11)

Apart from the classifications of "cerebral" and the various "physical" images, imagery can also exist as an intense combination of "cerebral" and the "physical" qualities. This imagery is a stimulant of reason and emotion in the reader. Filled with remorse for the malady-stricken world, Mahapatra wonders at the laws of nature which take their course undisturbed by this all-pervading illness. With a combination of the "cerebral" and "physical" qualities, Mahapatra creates an impressive imagery in "Autumn and Illness":

Can illness help to identify  
the urge that makes two yellow butterflies  
dance, out their lives in the sun,  
flaring their gold over the tragic history of the world? (20-24)

Read opines that a poet's mind is a storehouse of images which are tempered by the psychology of the poet and those images are born out of thoughts and feelings which appear to belong to the constitution of the mind itself; and there thoughts and feelings which have been put down there out of the conscious, as one puts away in the attic unwanted luggage or an occasion anything not considered quite suitable for visitors to see. Further, Read adds in a matter-of-fact tone that "all or any of these may share in the traffic: may float up to the surface, either unbidden, like "drowned faces in the pool", or they may be deliberately evoked" (96). Read's explanation of the psychological implication of images in itself yields an image.

Imagery, in poetry, therefore does not always exist independent in its function and context either in the poet's mind or in a poem. Different images used in a poem may hold varied relationship with each other. Scott states: "A poem may have series of images which support or oppose one another". "Supportive imagery" evolves when the imagery is prolonged with the basic image being retained through out and as in Jayanta Mahapatra's "A Hint of Grief", the "rain" imagery that is wrought in the first and the second lines continues to the fourteenth to sixteenth lines:

The rain is home, clinging  
pitifully to the Orissa countryside  
and rain's frightened hands  
drop the comic book of our history  
onto the weathered stones. (1-2, 14-16)

The opposing relationship within images is generated if the images used to describe a particular aspect, subject, landscape or lifescape are totally unrelated or if the imagery is designed by using contrasting features as can be found when a concrete object is compared to an abstract element and when an abstract element is compared to a concrete substance.

Mahapatra's poetic canon too comprises its share of imagery created with the juxtaposition of the abstract with the concrete. Two instances are identifiable in the poem "Afternoon Ceremonies". The first is from the lines: "In this land / dream is lost like unending railway tracks." (6-7) where in the abstract "dream" and the concrete "railway tracks" are grouped together and the second is from the lines: "In my mother's eyes pain begins to stir again / like a venerable old gentleman / who has returned from afar." (24-26) which relate "pain" and "an old gentleman". Another impressive imagery created with this combination is from "December" which equates a person's insuppressible longings that consume logic to a cow and grass respectively: "I watch the fire eat away the reasons / of my body, a hungry cow grazing the grass" (27-28).

Further, the imagery strung out of opposing elements does not depend only on the juxtaposition of the abstract and of the concrete but also on the utilisation, with an intensity of vision, of paradoxical concepts even in short phrases. Mahapatra employs words that negate or oppose one another and that are essentially metaphysical in tone as the phrases "the white breath of darkness" (3) from "Dreaming of Tagore"; "Only the rain falls; silent at the echo of its own silence" (8) from "Letter" and the complex question "Is the silence of the room its voice?" (6) from "Someone in My Room" testify.

Whatever type of imagery used; cerebral, emotional, physical, auditory, gustatory, tactile, kinesthetic, olfactory, supportive, opposing, juxtaposed in the form of paradoxical concepts and the concrete paralleled with the abstract, and combinations of these varied types; it is obvious that imagery based on landscape and nature predominate in the poems of Mahapatra. Various themes and issues close to the heart of the poet emerge in his landscape imagery.

Mahapatra's poetic expression of landscape is very often heavy with an inexplicable sense of unrest. This instance of imagery which projects the oncoming of a new day does not mean well for humankind. In fact nature cannibalizing nature is imminent in this poem "Dawn":

The foothills are quiet, it's another day.

A new mist chokes the trees.

A sky of silence,

Meaningless as man's hatred,

as grass upon graves,

comes out into the sun. (1-6)

"A Hint of Grief" merges the tragic slot, life is slipping into, with the landscape of India especially Orissa. As in several of his poems "rain" is the backdrop. The "rain" clings "pitifully to the Orissa countryside" (1-2) while "Orieles turn on their wings of gold" (3) as a foil to "the sky" that is masked with a "darker cloud" (4). "Lotuses and wild hyacinths" that grow out of "wetness" (5-6) are other mute witnesses of the grief of life and landscape.

The "wind" nurtures "empty voices" in "thick-leaved mangoes and cashews" trees and the "rain's frightened hands / drop the comic book of our history / onto the weathered stones" (11-16). The "comic book" is definitely that of black comedy. It is interesting to note the varied vegetation referred to in this poem as a part of its imagery — orieles, lotuses, hyacinths, mangoes and cashews, as they join the rain and the wind in their collective grief for the fate of human life.

The identification of Mahapatra with his land is total and reveals a fiery loyalty and his response is a melancholy that views India's landscape as a mute witness to a disintegration of her former historical glory. To Mahapatra, the poetic world is a world in itself, an entry into which is a trying task, especially in the modern poetry which has no cause to record any pleasurable feelings, as he expresses in his "Stories in Poetry". The poet identifies the poetic field with a river on whose bank he waits expectantly for an opportunity to "swim across" (72).

Today

I stand on the bank of the poem,

even though each word has a price,

even though this poetry appears as a river,  
a river without water  
we have to swim across.... (67-72)

Mahapatra has wrought landscape imagery with total regional adherence and naturally out of those elements of local topography and climate that fascinate him. Mahapatra, as he has expressed in his interviews, is emotionally affected by the rain-drenched small-town and rural life and it is no surprise that the best of his imagery is wrought from such settings.

Apart from imagery based on landscape and nature, spun to portray certain themes which involve emotional intensity, imagery is drawn from the componential aspects of diurnal cycle, seasonal cycle and life cycle. Just as these cycles play a pivotal role as symbols of the various facets of life, they offer an integral base for imagery to be woven on. In Mahapatra's poetry, metaphysical and philosophical musings reign "Day" and "night". Apart from offering an integral base for descriptive imagery, "day" and "night" evoke metaphysical imagery in "Behind": "Day and night the phantom of myth opens / its fleshless lips as though to speak, but / no sound comes out of them" (7-9).

The cyclic character of seasons is showcased even in poems dealing with one single season in Mahapatra's poetry. Whether in "Landscape" which offers imagery based on autumn and in "A Hint of Grief" which holds a picturesque and moving description of the rainy season or in "Summer Afternoons" which hails the energising summer light or in "Season" where spring is given an Eliotic treatment that leaves a sense of unease, one finds the ever changing cyclic aspect of nature in the form of seasons highlighted. These words from "Season" is the essential message of most of Mahapatra's poems based on seasons: "the season of a hundred thousand years / starts to speak with its strange voice again" (29-50). Mahapatra's seasonal imagery is very visual and one of the best instances is from "A Hint of Grief":

The rain is home, clinging  
Pitifully to the Orissa Countryside  
Orieles turn on their wings of gold  
where the sky falls into darker cloud.  
Beyond the wood fence grow lotuses  
and wild hyacinths of the wetness. (1-6)

Mahapatra also weaves imagery with reference to seasons prevailing in different months — rainy season of June in "June Rain", the cloudy July in "With Broken Wings" and mists of December in "December". The imagery based on the cyclic process of birth and death which make up a life cycle is identifiable. "Each loss is a seed under my feet / and its silent, root moves against me." (25-26)— are the words from Mahapatra's "Losses". Here too, the idea of death as a source of life is underscored.

Burton in his *Criticism of Poetry* identifying two methods of using imagery states: "Imaging is used to move emotion. To do this, it employs two different methods, description and symbolizing. Of course, many images make use of both methods" (103). Defining descriptive imagery he says, "Descriptive imagery works both by the simple representation of the thing described and by suggestion" (104), and about symbolic imagery he comments, "used sometimes solely for its sensuous appeal, it is often used to stir up emotions and thoughts which lie behind the sense appeal; this is the symbolic use of imagery" (107). Burton also adds that:

The symbolic use of imagery reaches its zenith in metaphor, the most intense form that imagery can take. Metaphor identifies two distinct objects and fuses them unforgettably in a white heat of imagination. So swiftly does it work, that it often finds expression in one word, and the sense impression that it conveys is always subordinate to the emotional and intellectual associations that it is its business to arouse. (109)

As Burton points out much of the symbolic imagery is descriptive too, but only some of the symbolic imagery leads to metaphoric intensity. Aristotle while discussing form states that a poet's most important asset is the gift of metaphor—"A good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars" (qtd. in MacNiece 91). Ullman underscores the quality of a true metaphor on the same note:

It is an essential feature of a metaphor that there must be a certain gap between tenor and vehicle. Their similarity must be accompanied by a feeling of disparity; they must belong to different spheres of thought. If they are too close to one another, they cannot produce the perspective of double vision peculiar to metaphor". (214)

In the poetry of Mahapatra the relationship of the "tenor" with the "vehicle" creates some striking metaphors. "From Star to Star", "Doors" and "With Broken Wings" house some of

Mahapatra's finest symbolic imagery. "Shadows will soon reach over / and stroke the skin under the eyes" (14-15) writes the poet in "Shadows" symbolizing old age and imminent death with shadows. One of his finest metaphoric extensions of symbolic imagery is seen in "A Sullen Balance" where the metaphor of a banyan tree over a river is well knit with what it symbolically represents:

Like a patient crocodile  
she leaves her prey to rot into softness,  
fastened beneath the roots  
of some banyan of our heritage  
that overhangs the river of our time. (29-30)

These lines are an expression of the poet's anguish over the violent turmoil that has gripped India, seen especially in massacres and assassinations. In this poem he mourns the death of the late Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi. Lewis, defining imagery as a "picture of words", elaborates that an epithet, a metaphor, a simile may create an image; "or an image may be presented to us in a phrase or a passage on the face of it purely descriptive, but conveying to our imagination something more than the accurate reflection of an external reality." He adds conclusively, "every poetic image, therefore to some degree is metaphorical" (70). Identifying imagery woven out of allusion, Scott declares:

Another kind of imagery comes through association. Association is an essential part of allusion used by poets, allusion brings a wide world of experience outside the limitations of plain statement — this imagery may be visual, emotional, a sense of history. (34).

Allusions find a definite role in the poems of Mahapatra. Hindu deities and Hindu mythology of Hinduism, the prominent religious faith in India, are alluded to in Mahapatra's poetry. On being questioned about the ease with which he bridges the gap between his Christian background and Hindu ethos (in an interview to *The Hindu*). Mahapatra replies: "You know my grandfather embraced Christianity during the great famine of Orissa in 1896. The family history rests uneasy upon me.... I have learnt to overcome such liabilities". Discussing his fascination with the mythology of India, he claims: "It is difficult for me to separate from the history and mythology of Orissa.... It is part of my blood".

The legend of Lord Jaganatha Swamy of Puri in the state of Orissa, the region the poet linguistically belongs to, is alluded to in several of his poems. It is believed that the deity of Puri was carved out of a tree trunk that was washed ashore and this fact is alluded to in "Losses". Hoping for some kind of redemption for this losing world, the speaker in the poem muses: "Perhaps the piece of driftwood / washed up on the beach / heals the sand and water" (20-22). The chariot festival, an annual ritual conducted for the glory of this deity is referred to in "Bazaar Scene" in the same volume, and this "time of jubilation" (6) is posed as a foil to poverty and starvation that has an upper hand in contemporary society.

References to history as in "At the Summer Palace of Tipu Sultan, Seringapatnam", to national figures as in "Dreaming of Tagore" and to national tragedies as in "A morning walk in Bhopal", "Bhopal Dawn", "Death of a Nameless Girl in Bhopal, December 1984" and in "The Hill" all from the same volume and alluding to the chemical gas leak in a factory at Bhopal killing and maiming several thousands lead to imagery woven out of allusions in Mahapatra's poetry.

An extensive perusal of Mahapatra's poetic canon leads one to identify certain recurrent and dominant images as Scott states, "A particular image, or closely related images, may recur in a poem or play so as to become dominant imagery" (34). The "four seasons", "life and death", "day and night", "light and darkness", "rain", "blood", "dust", "river banks" and "time" are recurrent in Mahapatra's poems. A perusal of some of the arresting imagery offered by Mahapatra makes one appreciate his poems better.

Mahapatra's imagery-rich poems revolve around the inexplicable force that rules man's fate for the better or worse. These poems normally begin with a description of a local activity and slowly gain an uneasy momentum that concludes with a disturbing revelation about the human, natural, spiritual or metaphysical world. This kind of a pattern allows and includes the recurrent juxtaposition or supportive combination of the concrete image with an abstract one. "Sickles" has this typical imagery that Mahapatra wields, with immense effect on the reader:

Dust seems in no hurry now, sailing  
the air. A ten-year-old girl  
runs after her home bound cows  
Through the ingenious sunset hour,

.....

Women returning home from fields of ripe grain'

Carry sickles in their tired hands.

The paddies cling to their quiet perches.

.....

How the sickles shimmer with the reds of sunset hidden in the twilight of their veins. (3-4, 11-3, 18 20)

This poem which deals with the negligent attitude towards wronged women, ends on a very disturbing imagery where the "reds" symbolise the colour of atrocities committed against women and the sense of revenge aroused within them due to these atrocities, and the "twilight of their veins" signifies their expended life. "June Rain" and "Village Evening", highlighting the sad circumstances, especially of poverty, in India contains some of his moving imagery. As a native speaker, far from grudging Mahapatra's usage of English language in the Indian context, Frank Allen appreciates his achievements:

While Mahapatra escapes western preoccupation with urban intensity, he is too alert and accomplished to let divided loyalties become disruptive.... I see no need to apologise for his use of English. It is by an uncompromising dedication to his own independence, to the past and present visionary Indian landscape, to the need to sustain a direct touch with sensuous experience, that he keeps his melodic and generous poetry fresh. (341)

### **3. Summary and analysis of *The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore***

In the poem "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore", the poet's reflections upon entering a cemetery in which a number of young British lives lay buried, presents with a resigned, meditative poise, the bond between death and the self. Death has laid its 'icy hands' on the British conquerors and their tombs are only left behind frequented by lizards and scorpions. The terror of mutability is on the self and there is no escape:

through both past and present, the increasing young

into the final bone, wearying all truth with ruin.

This is the iron

rusting in the vanquished country, the blood's unease

the useless rain upon my familiar window; (The False Start 71)

Amidst the silence of the thirty-nine graves, the poet's reflections over the dead actually depict that eternal realization that it is death that gives meaning to life. It is such moments of heart-rending silence which defines 'the shapes of solitude'. Speaking of silence in Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets, Mahapatra himself says:

What appears to disturb me is the triumph of silence in the mind [...]

A poem makes me see out of it in all directions, like a sieve, and I am almost relieved at that all-important thought. (59)

The flux of life occupies an important place in Mahapatra's domain of philosophy. He believes in life's great paradox of stasis-in-movement and permanence in transience.

*The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore*

This is history,

I would not disturb it: the ruins of stone and marble,

The crumbling wall of brick, the coma of alienated decay.

How exactly should the archaic dead make me behave?

A hundred and fifty years ago

I might have lived. Now nothing offends my ways.

A quietness of bramble and grass holds me to a weed.

Will it matter if I know who the victims were, who survived?

And yet, awed by the forgotten dead,

I walk around them; thirty-nine graves, their legends

Floating in a twilight of baleful littoral,

The flaking history my intrusion does not animate.

Awkward in the silence, a scrawny lizard

Watches the drama with its shrewd, hooded gaze.

And a scorpion, its sting drooping,

Two eerie arms spread upon the marble, over an alien name.

In the circle the epitaphs run: Florence R---, darling wife

Of Captain R----R---, aged nineteen, of cholera- - -

Of what concern to me is vanished Empire?

Or the conquest of my ancestors timeless ennui?

It is the dying young who have the power to show

What the heart will hide, the grass shows no more.

Who watches now in the dark near the dead wall?

The tribe of grass in the cracks of my eyes?

It is the cholera still, death's sickly trickle,

That plagues the sleepy shacks beyond this hump of earth,

Moving easily, swiftly, with quick power

Through both past and present, the increasing young,

Into the final bone, wearying all truth with ruin.

This is the iron

Rusting in the vanquished country, the blood's unease,  
The useless rain upon my familiar window;  
The tired triumphant smile left behind by the dead  
On a discarded anchor half-sunk in mud beside the graves:

Out there on the earth's unwavering gravity  
Where it waits like a deity perhaps  
For the elaborate ceremonial of a coming generation  
To keep history awake, stifle the survivor's issuing cry.

### *Theme*

This is a perfectly crafted poem that displays Mahapatra's brooding vision of life and the manner in which he transforms the stark images of realism to the level of lyrical poetry. The poet speaks of the effect that a visit to an old British cemetery has on him, triggering off as it does thoughts of unvanquished diseases snatching away the young to make them a part of the ever-advancing realms of history. The poet's anguish is caused not by the sight of the ancient graves of unknown Britishers, but by the morbid thought of countless lives that continue to be needlessly lost in their prime.

Composed in short stanzas of four lines each, the poem is full of wordscapes created by beautiful and unusual images.

### *References*

1. This is history a reference to the old cemetery where the British left  
Behind their dead when they left India forever
2. The coma of an image that brings to mind a picture of death and  
Alienated decay dilapidation
3. Archaic very old, or of a very early period; used in conjunction

'dead' suggests, perhaps, a sense of irrelevance due to being very distant in time

5-6 A hundred..... the British cemetery fails to move the poet

Offends my ways

11 baleful menacing, or having a harmful effect

11 littoral relating to, or on the shore of the sea or lake

12 flaking history (This expression is used to suggest a remote, Almost forgotten history.)

13-16 Awkward in the Silence,... Over an alien name These lines strengthen the image of dark, brooding silence; the phrase 'an alien name' could be a reference to the non-natives who Lie buried in the cemetery.

17 epitaphs words written, or inscribed on a tombstone, in memory Of a person who has died

17-20 In the circle... Of our Lord, Eighteen Hundred... The names and other details on the epitaphs are not of interest to the poet; all that he notices is the fact that the graves belong to young Britishers who died of cholera in a Distant land.

22 ennui listlessness arising from boredom

27-31 It is the cholera ...with ruin The deadly disease that brought to a tragic and untimely end the lives of many young Britishers long ago, is still the unconquered

- Agent causing the death of countless young  
Persons who could have led fruitful lives.
- 28 hump of earth refers to the round, raised mounds of earth or graves
- 33 vanquished country could refer to the fact that though the  
Britishers have left; the country is still under  
The yoke of diseases that kill
- 35 triumphant smile suggesting that the dead know that future  
Generations too would fall a prey to the  
Disease that cut short their lives so abruptly
- 37 the earth's brings to mind the powerful attracting force of  
Unwavering gravity the earth that seems to be drawing human  
Beings to itself, as well as its unchanging  
Seriousness
- 40 to keep history in contrast with 'flaking history' of Line 12.  
Awake suggests an effort at updating or renewal in  
Order to retain interest and relevance

#### **4. Jayanta Mahapatra's contribution to Indian Literature**

As a prolific poet Jayanta Mahapatra has been publishing volumes after volumes of poetry still today. Over a period of more than thirty five years he has brought out a series of volumes of verse. They are Close The Sky, Ten by Ten (1971), Swayamvara And Other Poems (1971), A Father's Hours (1976), A Rain of Rites (1976), Waiting (1979), The False Start (1980), Relationship (1980), Life Signs (1983), Dispossessed Nests (1986), Selected poems (1987), Burden of Waves and Fruit (1988), Temple (1989), A Whiteness Of Bone (1992), The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra (1995), Shadow Space (1997), Bare Face (2001) , Random

Descent (2005) and so on. Mahapatra's thematic concerns in his poetry are many, and in dealing with them he has shown extraordinary dexterity. The superb artistry matches the dignity and significance of his multidimensional themes. Orissa constitutes the most important theme of his poetry. Besides this regional outlook, his poetry deals with human relationships, Indian social problems, love, sex, marriage, morality, human nature and so on. This thematic range is wide enough to prove Mahapatra a successful Indian poet writing in English.

Orissa constitutes the core of Mahapatra's poetry. Mahapatra has been living in Orissa since his birth. Virtually the Orissa landscape – with Puri and Konarak occupying a conspicuous position – has a strong presence in his poetry. His 'Dawn at Puri' depicts the picture of the Puri sea-beach viewed at dawn. The realistic picture comprises the noising crows, the skulls lying here and there on the sea-beach and the old, white clad, widowed women waiting to enter the great temple of Lord Jagannatha. The scene suggests the idea of extreme poverty and wretchedness of the people of Orissa. It indicates that though there is an expression of solemnity in the eyes of the devotees, their eyes are full of despair.

Another short poem 'Taste for Tomorrow' describes the morning scene in the town of Puri. Here similar reference has been made to the crows which have come out of the nests. The poet presents the picture of a wide street which is the only wide street in the town. He compares this street to the huge loosely hanging tongue of some monstrous creature. The next picture is that of five lepers whose faces have partly been eaten away by disease. The lepers reverently move to one side as a holy priest passes by the street. At the end of the street Mahapatra finds a large crowd waiting to enter the temple. "Evening Landscape By The River" depicts a scene by a river in Orissa. The poet surveys this scene and feels sad. The atmosphere is gloomy. The poor fishermen live in broken shacks situated close to the river. There is a temple in the distance and it is absolutely still in meditation.

In a nearby hut an infant begins to crawl on the floor waking up from its sleep. Mahapatra's "Indian Summer Poem" presents the pictures of the phenomena which are supposed to occur in summer in this country especially in Orissa. First, one can find the picture of a mournful wind blowing and producing moaning sounds. Next he can find the priests chanting louder than before. The third picture is that of the crocodiles moving into deeper waters in the river. The next picture is that of dung – heap smouldering in the morning sunlight and giving out smoke. Finally, comes the picture of the good wife lying in bed in the long afternoon and

dreaming in siesta. The pictures reflect the very spirit of an Indian summer, especially a summer in Orissa. These landscape poems depict the predicament of modern man in the modern milieu. They are burdened with universal significance though they are categorized as regional. The landscape, the seasons and the environment become the starting point that gives Mahapatra's poetic imagination free play and encourages him to contemplate on his personal moods. There are so many other poems depicting the Orissa landscape. They are 'Dawn', 'Village', 'Old Places', 'A Twilight poem', 'The Captive Air of Chandipur-on-Sea' and so on. The temple, the priest, the beggar, the fishermen, the crow, the leper, the rickshaw puller – all rise before us in all their objective reality and concreteness. They transform themselves, almost imperceptively into living characters. Landscape in Mahapatra's poetry becomes vital point for the understanding of his poetry. Mahapatra portrays inner reality by alluding to the landscape.

Mahapatra's imagination is recurrently evoked by his sense of the earth. The earth of Orissa, the rocks, the stones, the fertile soil, the woods, the rivers all corroborate Orissa as the creative home or a creative Island for Mahapatra. Landscape enables Mahapatra to continue his search for his own self as well as to understand the world he lives in. It also helps him to forget the painful burden of suffering.

Puri, Konark and Cuttack supply the chief ingredients to weave the fabric of Mahapatra's poetry. Legends, history and myths associated with these places constitute the central theme of his poetry. Puri is a place of pilgrimage of the Hindus of India. It is a place of Lord Jagannatha, the presiding deity of Orissa. The Hindu devotees find redemption and celestial peace at Puri. Mahapatra marks this unflinching belief of the Hindus in "Dawn at Puri". The history of Orissa, the myths, legends and rituals associated with its places draw Mahapatra's attention and the poet tries to revive them in his poetry. With a sense of nostalgia, he fervently remembers the heroic past of Orissa. He exhibits the glory and pride of the ancient Orissa in his poetry. He recalls with reverence the prowess of his ancestors who fought the Kalinga War in 261 B.C. that converted the emperor Ashok into a deeply religious man. In this connection, he refers to the river Daya which serves as a witness to his ancestors' heroic effort that has acquired a mythic dimension. Mahapatra laments the fact that the immensity of that glory achieved by the ancient heroic race has now become just memory and nothing more and that the successors in the present age have proved unworthy to keep up that glory. Thus, Mahapatra points to the sharp contrast between the success of the past and the failure

of the present thereby showing the painful picture of decay and deterioration in ideals and values.

The myths and rituals associated with the numerous temples of Orissa – the myth of Lord Jagannatha and His annual car festival (ratha-ride), the myths of the sun associated with the Sun Temple at Konarak and the famous erotic engravings of men and women in close physical embrace, the myths of Shiva-- all have touched Mahapatra's poetic spirit. His "Konarka" articulates the legend of the 12-year-old boy, the son of the chief architect of the great Sun Temple. According to belief, the crowning slab of the temple could be fitted in its proper place only by a 12- year-old boy since the efforts of all the artisans had failed. This mythological legend has been described in his 'Konarka'

The contemporary reality is a great concern for Mahapatra. He is unhappy to observe the overwhelming decline of human values in his time. He is amazed at the ungrateful attitude of the modern Indians who do not pay homage to the national leaders who had sacrificed their lives for the cause of the nation. In his early poem on Gandhi Mahapatra expresses his compunction:

We have burst open his blood

to bleed

We are on his side, perhaps

We hate him

We do not know it (Close The Sky, Ten By Ten n. pag.).

Mahapatra's India appears to have been engulfed by anti-nationalistic activities, bloodshed, violence, destruction and disintegration. Everywhere prevails an inhuman set-up that crushes the Indian masses. The poet visualizes the horrific presence of death in his nation. Death is a recurrent symbol of Dispossessed Nests. Here the frustrated poet notes that though the southern states in India are to some extent peaceful, the north western states are highly turbulent. He obviously refers to the anti-nationalistic violence in the name of Khalistani Movement in 1980s in Punjab:

In these parts down south

we say we are calm people

who go to sleep without misgivings.

We never take our lives seriously.

Or perhaps

we don't let ourselves get carried away.

But somewhere

amidst bewildered wheatfields

the cool night wind snips off the skin

from the firm fruit of reason (Dispossessed Nests 15)

Both 'Hunger' and 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' show Mahapatra's distress over poverty which is undoubtedly the greatest problem in our country. He obviously feels much perturbed by poverty and destitution of the Indian people. His dark view of the state of affairs in his motherland finds space in his poems like "The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of a Republic". The poet ironically asks if anything goes wrong with his country which became a republic twenty-five years ago. He mocks at the fact that nothing substantial has been achieved by the country. The jungles here have been made harmless because the wild beasts have been destroyed unlawfully. The women are no longer satisfied with their meek and humble existence. They have become desperately haughty and independent-minded in their attitude. They do no longer hesitate or feel shy to make a display of their body. They have forgotten the stories and legends about the exploits of the Indian queens and brave warriors. Mahapatra wants to reform his society anew; he wants to rebuild it on the groundwork constructed by the predecessors' idealistic philosophy, message of socialism and spirit of universal brotherhood.

Some critics often mark him as an obscure poet. According to them the readers cannot reach his poetic communication. But a critical analysis of his imagery can clearly express the transparent pattern of meanings inherent in his poetry. His poetry is vibrant with suggestions. It is through images that his poetry attains a strong suggestive power. Image is the soul of his poetry. His images are the expressive medium of his vision. His *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* is built of variegated images. Here loneliness becomes his major obsession.

His *Swayamvara and Other Poems* presents the typical Indian themes and thus points to Mahapatra's tradition-bound vision. The title poem relates the tradition of royal culture in ancient India where the princess could choose her husband from a number of princes.

The poem tries to contrast that royal dignity of women with the modern situations. The poem entitled 'Sunworshipper' presents an image of Indian religious life.

His 'Traffic Constable' is an important poem on an Indian Traffic constable. Similarly 'The Blind Singer in a Train' draws a typical Indian scene that generates sorrow and sympathy.

Mahapatra is deeply mortified at the sufferings of women in India. He shows their plight and predicament through multiple images. The image of women has been recurrently drawn in "A Rain of Rites". Sometimes she is the persona's own grandmother or ailing mother or his daughter. Besides, the whores, housewives, rustic, girls, widows, nuns and old women also serve Mahapatra's poetic purpose. They intensify the poet's sense of the tragic lot of Indian women. The Poet is strongly reactive against the social corruption inflicted upon women.

From the very beginning to the present, Indian poetry in English has progressed as a successful literary genre in which one can find a gradual evolution on process. In the process the genre has acquired a number of salient features to which the poets skilfully adhere. As an Indian English poet Mahapatra worships his motherland India and expresses his heightened love for the country. In terms of poetic utterances he reveals the myths, legends, history, philosophy, religions, culture, environment and so on that are Indian. He looks back to the past of the country with a view to reviving the glorious past in the present scenario in which he feels alienated. In order to overcome the sense of alienation, he takes resort to rumination of the antiquity. Thus in his poetry we get both the past and the present of his country, the glory and grandeur of the days that are gone and the languor and languishment of the days that are present. This dichotomy helps the poet to present his vision, to explore and express himself as a poet belonging to the school of Indian English poetry. The exploration can be termed as a journey for the roots that are ultimately found underlying in the depth of the soil where the poet is born and brought up. The poetry concerned functions as a creative medium and depicts the poet's search for the soul. It is a kind of pilgrimage that brings him towards the heart of his homeland and explains to him the immensity of his being, the meaning and significance of his life and living.

## **5. Questions**

1. Give an account of Jayanta Mahapatra's poetic style.
2. What is Jayanta Mahapatra's contribution to Indian Literature?
3. Write a note on the Imagery found in Jayanta Mahapatra's work.
4. What are the major themes in Jayanta Mahapatra's works?

## **6. Further Reading**

### **Poetry**

- 1971: Svayamvara and Other Poems  
1971: Close the Sky Ten by Ten  
1976: A Father's Hours  
1976: A Rain of Rites  
1979: Waiting  
1980: The False Start, Bombay: Clearing House  
1980: Relationship  
1983: Life Signs  
1986: Dispossessed Nests  
1987: Selected Poems  
1988: Burden of Waves & Fruit  
1989: Temple  
Bare Face  
Shadow Space  
The best of Jayanta Mahapatra  
A Whiteness of Bone  
2005: Random Descent, Third Eye Communications  
2006: Samparka, Natuna Dilli: Sāhitya Akādemi  
2009: The lie of Dawns: Poems 1974 - 2008

### **Prose**

- The Green Gardener*, short stories  
*Door of Paper*: Essay and Memoirs

Mahapatra's poems have been anthologized in the celebrated volumes of Indian poetry edited by R. Parthasarathy and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. Significant anthologies in which his work appears are:

*The Poetry Anthology 1912 - 1977*, Boston, USA (Houghton Mifflin, 1978)

*The Vintage Book of Contemporary Poetry* ( J.D McClatchy, Editor - Random House, USA, 1996)

*The Poetry Anthology 1912 -2002*, Chicago, USA (Ivan R. Dee, 2002)

## **Paper-XXI. Contemporary Indian Writing in English-I**

### **Unit- 3. Keki N. Daruwalla**

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

1.2 Biographical sketch of Keki N. Daruwalla

1.3 Famous works of Keki N. Daruwalla

1.4 Daruwalla's style of writing

2. Themes, Outlines and Symbols

2.1 Major themes and outlines

2.2 Symbols

3. Summary and analysis of *Wolf*

4. Summary and analysis of *Hawk*

5. Daruwalla's contribution to Indian Literature

6. Questions

7. Further Reading

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Objective**

This Unit provides a biographical sketch of Keki N. Daruwalla, some of his famous poems and his general style of writing poetry followed by a detailed discussion about its themes and outlines. It also includes the summary and analysis of his two poems, *Wolf* and *Hawk*. It is then followed by a discussion about Daruwalla's contribution to Indian Literature. This unit concludes with a set of questions and a list of further readings of Keki N. Daruwalla to gain knowledge about the critical aspects of his works.

### **1.2 Biographical sketch of Keki N. Daruwalla**

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla (Keki N. Daruwalla or Keki Daruwalla) is a major Indian poet and short story writer in English language. He has written over 12 books and published his first novel "For Pepper and Christ" in 2009. He is also a former IPS officer, who retired as Additional Director in the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).

He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award, in 1984 for his poetry collection, "The Keeper of the Dead", by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters.

#### Early Life and Education

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla was born in 1937, in Loni, Burhanpur (now in Loni, burhanpur), in 1937. His father N.C. Daruwalla, was an eminent professor, who taught in Loni Institute of Literature (LIL). After the Partition, his family left Punjab while his elder brother stayed back, and moved to Junagadh in Gujarat, then to Rampur. As a result he grew up studying in various schools and mediums and started writing short stories in school.

He obtained his master's degree in English Literature from Government College, Ludhiana, University of Punjab.

#### Career

He joined the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 1958, and eventually becoming a Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on International Affairs. He subsequently was in the Cabinet

Secretariat until his retirement.

## Literary Life

With the publication of his very first book, *Under Orion* in 1970, Daruwalla established himself as a name to reckon with in Indian poetry. Senior Indian poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel applauded his work as “impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness”.

Over nine books and more than three decades, Daruwalla’s poetry has journeyed a long way both formally and thematically. However, it retains certain strong distinguishing characteristics: an ironic stance, an evocation of the multi-layered contradictory realities of Indian life, a preoccupation with diverse cultural, historic and mythic landscapes, a terse, vigorous and tensile style, supple imagism, sustained narrative drive, an ability to segue between metrical patterns and free verse, and a capacity to combine an epic canvas with a miniaturist’s eye for detail.

The characteristic features of his poetry can also be described as vigor and immediacy of language, knife-edge tone, an abiding and infatuated concern with love, death and domination, a skeptic and indignant cynicism about the plight of human society and a rare intensity in portraying living individuals. Daruwalla readily admits to critics' charges of being too much of a landscape poet who takes into his aesthetic stride the sights and sounds of England, Yugoslavia, Helsinki, Stockholm, Volgograd, and Moscow which he has visited for poetry readings. His thematic canvas transcends the boundaries of India and stretches itself into the rest of the world. Critics maintain his concern for broad landscape imagery rather than political and social issues is a result of his long career as a Government of India official.

A remarkable feature of Daruwalla’s poetry is its ability to vividly materialise its abstractions, to strike a creative tension between image and statement. His poetry has the narrative energy and sweep to paint, for instance, a vast portrait of post-Independence India as “a landscape of meaninglessness”: “Then why should I tread the Kafka beat/ or the Waste Land,/ when Mother, you are near at hand/ one vast, sprawling defeat?”

But it can also offer a fine-tuned vision of the particular, evident in his evocation of the

rumbling innards of a miserable multitude listening to the speech of a corpulent political leader: “Within the empty belly/ the enzymes turn multi-lingual/ their speech vociferous/ simmering on stomach wall”.

His landscapes extend from the ancient kingdom of Kalinga under the reign of the great Indian emperor Ashoka to the seething contradictions of the modern metropolis of Bombay (“From the lepers, the acid-scarred, the amputees/ I turn my face. The road, I feel/ should be stratified so that/ I rub shoulders only with my kind”) as well as rural and small-town India (Benaras is unforgettably evoked as the place where “corpse-fires and cooking-fires/ burn side by side”, even while the sacred river Ganga flows on, “dark as gangrene”).

His most recent book, *Map-maker* (2002), offers a compelling series of dramatic monologues by figures as diverse as a disciple of the Buddha and an old map-maker from Majorca, suggesting that the passionate interest in other cultural and historical milieux is alive and well. But there is also a more marked fascination with inner worlds, with philosophical notions of time and space.

In *Migrations*, for example, the metaphysical is integrally linked to the concrete and the singular, as the poem explores the theme of migrations across space and time, from the violent biography of nations to a searing moment of personal biography: “Now my dreams ask me/ if I remember my mother/ and I’m not sure how I’ll handle that./ Migrating across years is also difficult.”

#### Awards

A recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award and Commonwealth Poetry Award, Keki N. Daruwalla has so far published about 12 books, consisting of mostly poems and a couple of fictional works. Some of his important works are *Under Orion*, *The keeper of the dead*, *Landscapes*, *A summer of tigers* and *The minister for permanent unrest & other stories*. He also edited *Two decades of Indian poetry*. The Library of Congress has all his books.

### **1.3 Famous works of Keki N. Daruwalla**

Books :

*Under Orion*. Writers Workshop, India, 1970

*Apparition in April*. Writers Workshop, 1971.

*Sword & abyss: a collection of short stories*. Vikas Pub., 1979.

*Winter poems*. Allied Publishers, 1980.

*The Keeper of the Dead*. Oxford University Press, 1982.

*Crossing of rivers*. Oxford Univ. Press, 1985.

*Landscapes*. Oxford University Press, 1987.

*A summer of tigers: poems*. Indus, 1995.

*The Minister for Permanent unrest & other stories*. Orient Blackswan, 1996.

*Night river: poems*. Rupa & Co., 2000.

*The Map-maker: Poems*. Orient Blackswan, 2002.

*The Scarecrow and the Ghost*. Rupa & Co., 2004.

*A House in Ranikhet*. Rupa & Co, 2003.

*Collected Poems ( 1970-2005)*. (*Poetry in English*). Penguin Books India., 2006.

### **1.4 Daruwalla's style of writing**

Imagery is an essential poetic device that imparts arbitrariness to Daruwalla's language thereby yielding multiplicity of meaning. Since imagery evokes the sensory faculty, the abundance of images in Daruwalla's verses accounts for the sensuousness, and the concreteness of the poetic texts. The images are mostly pictorial and precise with clarity of perception and expression. Daruwalla's craftsmanship lies in interweaving the images with the language and thought of the text. The images by being descriptive and forming an indispensable part of the poetic texts, help in the discourse formation through the literal translation of emotion, perception and thought.

#### Nature Imagery

Keki N. Daruwalla is basically a Nature poet; he romanticizes Nature with a sense of ecstasy. There is an abundance of Nature images in the poetry collections *Winter Poems*, *Night River*, *Apparition in April*, *Crossing of River*, *Landscapes* and *Map Maker*. These collections affirm strong emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. They place

new emphasis on emotions such as apprehension, horror, terror and awe, especially which is experienced in confronting the sublimity of untamed Nature and its picturesque qualities. Moreover, both the malevolent and the nurturing aspects of Nature convey his understanding of the primal energies of the natural world which stress the absolute otherness of that world and the relationship between these energies and the divided nature of man. In the poem 'Suddenly the Tree' (Winter Poems 13) Daruwalla unifies the natural and the human world through the picturesque description of Nature:

while you slept and the quilt heaved  
with your even breathing,  
winter came like a bearded goatherd.  
armed with a crook and barefooted.  
suddenly the tree near our window shook,  
its whiskers twitched,  
its leaves, yellow and ochrous  
large mothwings struck against the window,  
turned, and scraping against the wall  
drifted down, wind-raked.  
the tree is now all bark and bough.  
leafless twigs scratch  
against the glass  
...  
there is a smell of hail  
in the air and lightning- burns.  
the just-widowed wind  
beats her head against the glass-panes  
(‘Suddenly the Tree’, ll.1-23, Winter Poems)

The sea emerges as a living presence, competing with the human endeavours in:

Perhaps I'll wake up on some alien shore  
in the shimmer of an aluminum dawn,  
to find the sea talking to itself  
and rummaging among the lines I've drawn;

...

And deep in the night, in the clarity of dream,  
the seafarer will garner his rewards,  
raking in his islands like pebbles from a stream.

(Map Maker, ll.1-14, Map Maker)

The sudden flash of revolutionary ideas in the persona's mind is objectively correlated  
through the commotion in the natural world. To quote;

It had never come  
burning across his skin  
like a hot dye.

And yet he shook, a leaf in the wind,  
sweated like the floor-plinth of stalactite  
at the mere thought of it,  
a lash-burn smoking on his back.

('The Revolutionary' ll. 1-7, The Keeper of the Dead)

In the following example, Daruwalla draws the sublime beauty of Nature as: "The world's  
richest place/ was in the African interior, / between the Sahara/ and the rain forest, dark as  
cumulus, / between the brown savannahs/ and the grey scrub of the Sahel" ('Old Map  
Maker', ll. 28-33, Map Maker). An instance where Daruwalla conjures images from Nature  
to convey his wishes to his daughter is: "But if you falter, blind with rain/ don't panic,  
you'll find an arm/ brown as bark/ and when you reach for the bark/ may you find the  
flowers thereon... Look fresh, like a rain- washed leaf/ with a spray of light on it" ('To My  
Daughter Rookzain', ll. 18-38, The Keeper of the Dead)

## The Dark Images

Keki N. Daruwalla's poetic corpus abounds in dark images with phraseology abounding in drab, disparage, and morbid expressions. The treatment is generally harsh and direct.

Images like "dark dreams openings/ to the evening light, / as dusk-fires settle on the snow."

('Caravan from Tibet', ll. 71-73, Map Maker), "...groaning calisthenics of cholera./

Bacteria and bacillus thrive in the wells," ('Pestilence in Nineteenth –Century Calcutta', ll.

6-7, The Keeper of the Dead), "Tossing, I dreamt of you,/ the insides of your head/ rattling

like a mummy-wheat/ in a sarcophagus" ('You, Slipping Past, ll. 6-9, The Keeper of the

Dead), "...nine generation scorched/ like dying melons on a withered vine./ And now with

a face like a patch of fissured fissured bark/ and eyes: pools dulled with a film of moss,...

his days slowly embering into ash." ('Meher Ali, the Keeper of the Dead, ll. 20-26, The

Keeper of the Dead) furnishes the dreary and terrifying ambience to his poetic corpus.

Simultaneously, Daruwalla romanticizes death rendering it an aesthetic description in:

...The fires burnt higher,

and the dead went up

like fragment of liturgies

lost in a great wind

('Pestilence in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta', ll. 9-12, The Keeper of the Dead)

In projections such as, "the tumour that may emerge like a jacked –up lump of death"

('Angst', ll. 23-24, Winter Poems), "Wall papers erupted like an epidemic" ('A City Falls',

l. 38, Winter Poems), "this sterile moment oozing thin black rain" ('Elegy', l. 22, Under

Orion), "Any time is death time...the rottenness of death/ unmitigated by maggots"

('Dialogues with a Third Voice: Myth- Talk, ll. 85-90, Under Orion), "Votive lights are

muzzled in the fog:/ bloodstains on a frosted window./ As the night grows older/ as flesh

turns to carbon on the ghats/ and the river keeps moving,/ dark as gangrene" ('Nightscape', ll.

1-6, Crossing of Rivers) Daruwalla evokes images of darkness, gloom and disgust. These

images also embody the poet's ability to differentiate between the seemingly radiant world

and the somberness embedded within it. Daruwalla's use of images scrutinizes the harsh realities of life without the ornamental emotions. In examples such as, "one pins the rickshaw- pullers arms behind him/ the other takes a brick/ and excavates his brain" ('Curfew- In A- Riot Torn City', ll. 85-87, Under Orion), "carting headless bodies in a burning van" ('Curfew- In A- Riot Torn City', l. 66) "this was the land of salt and iron and they wrote the truth of iron in blood with fanatic time" ('The Revolt of the Salt Slaves', ll. 36-38, Under Orion), and "five rupees for roasted sardar" ('Pestilence in Nineteenth Century Calcutta' l. 69, The Keeper of the Dead), the poet shows his concerns for the human sufferings and projects the cruelty and violence as realistically as possible.

### Animal Imagery

The images drawn from the animal world convey vehemence of nature. R.N. Sinha while commenting on Daruwalla's handling of animal images writes, "They perform different functions depending on the context of the poem, but whenever they have been used, they have been etched with a sureness of touch, so typical of Daruwalla" (Sinha 138).

Additionally, these animals are mostly wild, for Daruwalla seems to have an obsession for sheer physical power and so his animals are mostly either brutes or deadly predators like 'wolf' (Landscapes 'Wolf' 17), 'Haranag' (Crossing of Rivers 52) and 'Hawk' (The Keeper of the Dead 9). The poet sees the hawk –king as:

Riding an ascending wind

as he drilled the sky.

The land beneath him was filmed with salt:

grass-seed, insect, bird-

nothing could thrive here. But he was lost

in the momentum of his own gyre,

a frustrated parricide on the kill.

The fuse of his hate was burning still. ('Hawk', ll. 1-9)

These animals are at least endowed with those fearful qualities that have a life of their own and an extraordinary capacity to overcome any cataclysm. These beasts, nonetheless,

constantly hint at the dark psychotic forces latent in man, as in 'Haranag':

...she of a sudden saw

him luminous with deathly fires,

green of body and golden –irised

eyeing her intently.

In naked terror she screamed.

Later she did not remember

if he hissed, whether his eyes

were elliptical or round.

All that remained with her

were impressions of thirst

and a feel of oil. ('Haranag' ll. 56-66, The Keeper of the Dead)

Moreover, the wildness in their nature is expressed in the following descriptions, "The village squats round it now/ like a carnivore around its kill." ('Chopper Poems; Traversing the Drought', ll. 14-15, Night River), and "half- water and half stream/ came out rasping/ like the fore- claw/ of a caged animal." ('Alakananda', ll. 20-23, Map Maker) These images do not specify the exact animal and the symbol associated with it, rather there is a depiction of the bestial features.

## **2. Themes, Outlines and Symbols**

### **2.1 Major themes and outlines**

The quest is to demystify the mysterious workings of the universe. Daruwalla's vision pertains to diverse domains of life. Asha Viswas opines on Daruwalla's poetic evolution as, "The growth of consciousness from the mundane to the vast space of the world of nature, from human subjects and man's creation to objects and God's creation is a reflection of the poet's maturity of vision." (Viswas, Landscapes 21). The evolution can be traced through the artistic vision, social, and philosophical vision.

Keki N. Daruwalla acquaints his attitude, impression and perception of art and poetic creation through his poetic vision. In 'Notes' (Night River 44), he exhibits his idea of life and death in "I want the two birds always fighting or always making love" (Night River 48). He perceives the tragic embodiment as an essential poetic component "the things I panic from could never excite a lyre littleness is all" (Under Orion 51). 'The Problem with Reviewing Seth' (Night River 63) is about the nature and scope of poetic composition as well as the generative role of a critic in the enhancement of poetic output. In the poem 'The Prologue' (Night River 95) he communicates "the poem peels off from the moment and the place". Next, in 'Island Notes' (Night River 112) he expresses "all writing is about winnowing, but some writers need a stiff breeze to carry away the chaff". 'Poetry Talk' (Under Orion 47-49) attests his views on poetry and artist. For Daruwalla aesthetics in poetry is an aftermath of a subtle truth which is embedded in life. He comments: "for truth and beauty, are embedded sir, in life" (Under Orion 48) Daruwalla's social vision is an outcome of his deep sensitivity and keen awareness of the sufferings of the likes. 'The Ghana Scholar Reflects on his Thesis' (Map Maker 12) is about the pitiable state of the Gold Coast slaves in Ghana where the poet sympathizes with the black exploitation. In 'Agni Sutra' (Map Maker 20) and 'Nadezhda Widow' (Map Maker 28) he contemplates on the predicament of a woman in an Islamic culture. He predicts the apocalypse and comments on the pitfalls of the contemporary culture in 'A Millennium Poem' (Map Maker 43).

The poems that exhibit the philosophical dimension of life are 'The Birth of Maya' (Map Maker 23), and 'Of Insights' (Map Maker 32). His idea of death is as true and important as the idea of life, he writes: "we all live within death; and death lives within us" (Winter Poems 19). Today, personal sorrow and sufferings has become an embodiment of and a part of human culture. A tragedy which is a "culture by itself" (Winter Poems 59), and "tragedy today is private, insular" (Winter Poems 60). He perceives death as "only the string bed is exchanged for a plank" (Under Orion 17). In 'Ecce Home' (Under Orion 29) Daruwalla confronts the vision of resurrection in Christ by intermingling life and death. His vision of the human search for a new particular God is expressed in the appealing lines:

I have traversed a million skies;  
each sky was an empty eye-pit,  
an empty womb.

It is the same search everywhere,

for the eyeball in the eye,

for a new god in each new sky.

(‘Kohoutek’, ll. 31-36, *The Keeper of the Dead*)

To sum up, the strength of Keki N. Daruwalla’s poetry can be accredited to his ability to construct discourse through his stylistically rich poetic corpus that occurs in the form of copious imagery, ability to shift swiftly between the abstract and the concrete, power of description, free from redundant expressions, compactness and precision in language, vivid ideas and subject matters and a clear poetic vision. Daruwalla’s poetic greatness, intensity and comprehensiveness is noticed through the diversity presented in each poetic collections.

## **2.2 Symbols**

Keki N. Daruwalla’s symbols are marked by precision. Certain recurrent images emerge as symbols with multiple connotations. The predominant ones are the river, dream, and the birds of prey. In *Night River* the “river” (*Night River* 34), symbolizes peace, a continuity of life and sublimity. In poems like ‘*Vignette I*’ (*Crossing of Rivers* 16) the river is a powerful, sacred entity “swollen with hymns”. In ‘*Vignette II*’ (*Crossing of Rivers* 17) the river is thought, “a soundless interior monologue” (*Crossing of Rivers* 17) in ‘*Vignette III*’ the river is “solitude” (*Crossing of Rivers* 20). Similarly, the river for R.N. Sinha means “different things at different places, but generally it stands for the principle of change and continuity. Sometimes the image of the river just becomes a symbol of time or experience” (Sinha 6). Next, is the dream symbolism where the subconscious mind overtakes the conscious through dreams. Poems like ‘*Dream Log*’ (*Night River* 36), ‘*The Room*’ (*Night River* 37), ‘*The House*’ (*Night River* 38), and ‘*Melons*’ (*Night River* 40) reinforce the worries, the anxiety, stresses and desires of the conscious mind. In Daruwalla’s poetry the birds of prey or the predatory birds work at a symbolic plane. They are symbols of “energy at all levels- primal, natural, physical, sexual and creative.” (Viswas 23) These birds include hawks, eagles, and vultures. Further, the poet admits that, the depiction of these predator birds is “deliberate, of course, I mean the symbolism is very clear: it refers to aggressiveness...” (India International

Center, 230) the Hawk by being a “rapist in the harem of the sky” (‘Hawk’, l. 15, The Keeper of the Dead) is a symbol of revolt against the exploitation of the weak and the innocent.

### **3. Summary and analysis of *Wolf***

Keki N. Daruwalla’s place in modern Indian English poetry is very well recognized. Like many other poets of the post-independent period, Daruwalla’s main significance lies in his continuing involvement with his poetic self to develop the body of his creation, which ultimately shows his personal quest for order and satisfaction in the modern urban world. In his quest, one can easily find his awareness for others, specific situation, local environment and as well as his awareness for the disordered, miserable world. Daruwalla hardly inscribes his autobiographical account as raw material; rather, it is his self-perception of the outer reality which operates as the basis of his poetic creations. The persona of his poems, is not an experimentalist, but a victim of the process of urbanization and social changes. As a result of this victimization, the poet often seems to sink into a state of dilemma and shows his nostalgic yearning for the mythological past as an escape from his sufferings and frustrations. In this approach he is almost identical with modern European poets like Eliot, Pound and W.B. Yeats. Daruwalla distorts the reality itself and becomes more metaphorical and symbolic like Yeats.

Like Eliot’s Prufrock, the poetic personae of Daruwalla’s poems show the predicament of modern individual. He lives in a modern wasteland, where he loses all his hopes and fidelity and becomes a patient:

I know of failing strength and fettering feet

I know I am hungry but I cannot eat

For though I am a patient

For Lamb within me has turned urgent.

(Lambing)

He is an alienated, isolated individual utterly sensible towards the difficulties inside. Throughout his creations, the poet often shifts his perspective from freedom to control, reality to illusion or illusion to reality and brings the complexity of psychological tension in his creations. He is an alienated, isolated individual utterly sensible towards the difficulties inside

the society. In the process of modernization the society has lost its order and stability and becomes fragmented. It is a world of pious horror of violence and hatred like Eliot's "Wasteland" which the poet visualizes every time:

I can smell violence in the air  
like the lash of coming rain  
mass hatreds drifting grey across the moon...

(Rumination-I)

Same notion of violence and horror of his social vision are projected in his poems comprising animal imageries. In this aspect Daruwalla shows a poignant influence of Ted Hughes's animal poems where the poet uses animals to reveal deep emotional and intellectual strategies of the mind. Like Hughes's "Hawk Roosting", Daruwalla's "Hawk" is the symbolical expression of the raw energy and the elemental force of nature. The affinity between the two can be well obtained Daruwalla's "Hawk"-

I saw the wild hawk-king this morning  
riding an ascending wind  
as he drilled the sky.

... he uses lost  
in the momentum of his own gyre,  
a frustrated parricide on the kill.

Ted Hughes's "Hawk Roosting"-

It took the whole creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather.  
Now I hold creation in my foot  
...I kill where I please because it is all mine.

This similarity becomes more specific in Daruwalla's "Wolf", where the animal, like

Hughes's "Thought Fox", enters in the poet's mind and consciousness like poetic imagination

Black snout on sulphur body

He nudged his way

Into my consciousness

(Wolf)

Both the poets are not concerned with the ontological description of animals; they rather use animals to bring other significances and deeper meanings.

Furthermore, Daruwalla has an unerring instinct for painting the landscape, the everflowing Ganga and the territorial Ghaghra, the mighty green, gray hills and mountains, infected vales and valleys, the countless trees and bamboos mating against the horizon. In his depiction of the rural India, his sentiment is essentially Indian as it transcends the material needs of human being in order to gain a mystic union with the unseen. His avoidance of the urban and industrial modern societies leads him to enter into a state of dilemma when he often confronts with a complex struggle between physical realism and moral awareness. This conflict is the conflict between conscience and a view of life as power. In this struggle, the poet shows his mytho-poetic imagination and his urge to go back to the mythological past in order to recreate the lost order and stability of the society.

#### **4. Summary and analysis of *Hawk***

Daruwalla's poem 'Hawk' has an interesting interplay of perspective. His poem begins in the first person where the poet recounts seeing a hawk. The first stanza has an almost primitive aggression where the predatory aspects of the hawk are capitulated. The recurrent image is that of a bird filled with hatred that swoops down on its prey without mercy. This is the nature of a hawk but if this image is disturbing then the domesticated hawk that falls under man's shadow is a monster created by man solely for his own purposes.

"The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man.

Hawking is turned to a ritual, the predator's  
passion honed to an art;"

Man is shown to be crueler than the hawk for by nature a hawk is a predator that must kill to eat but man makes the hawk kill for his own pleasure and diversion which is a pervasion of what the hawk must do. And this is not the end of it; a captured hawk is at first blinded. Its eyes are sewn up and bit by bit the stitches are removed. The pain and such perverted treatment are enough to make a devil of a saint so it is not surprising that the hawk when allowed to hunt take out all its hate on its prey and shows no mercy for it get none. Thus, the domesticated hawk is even more formidable than one from the wild.

The third stanza is a haunting depiction of a hunt where a mother hawk teaches her son to hunt. They chase after a hare and since they cannot kill it at once they swoop down repeatedly tearing at its flesh. In the fourth stanza we have the domesticated hawk speaking out. it is again a first person perspective but it is the hawk speaking and what is more terrible is that many a human too has the same agenda the hawk charts out. Does this mean civilized or domesticated man is the worst of all predators?

“They can’t kill him in one fell swoop.

But each time the talons cart away

a patch of ripped fur.

He diminishes one talon-morsel at a time.”

Just like the cut-throat modern world where the stronger crush the weaker, the hawk filled with hate sets out to kill its prey. Many a time people’s experiences embitter them so much that they in turn begin to prey on people who once resembled what they went out to seek. The hawk is not merely a domesticated hawk; it is a killer with the voice of a man who is so filled with apathy for life that he sees no pain in hurting others. The hawk is a metaphor “as people did to me so I shall now do to them’.

“But I am learning how to spot the ones

crying for the right to dream, the right to flesh,”

“trained for havoc,

my eyes focused on them

like the sights of a gun.”

“During the big drought which is surely going to come

the doves will look up for clouds, and it will rain hawks.”

## **5. Daruwalla's contribution to Indian Literature**

The jurisprudence of Keki Daruwalla's poetry has an immense and scintillating influence on the Indian scenario. His craftsmanship has an impeccable and highly vibrant quality and very much endowed with aesthetic appeal. His themes are varied in nature. His poem ranges from the greatest expression of Indian thought to the clever dwelling on mundane experience coupled with reality. His poetic endeavour is superior and excellent in terms of the quality and the poetic device he employs. As a poetic craftsman Daruwalla occupies the unique position in the matrix of Indian poetical spectrum. Indian Poetry in English is very much indebted to Daruwalla. His contributions to Indian Writing in English especially, verse is remarkable. He had enriched Indian Poetry in English through his range and craftsmanship. His poems have thrived to bring the under current of Indian life. His corpus of poems has echoed the Indian spirit and its sensibility. His poems are deeply rooted in Indian idiom. His poems are the quintessence of Indian sensibility and Indian life. Violence is the foremost theme of the poetry of Daruwalla. The violence pervades the works of Daruwalla both thematically and technically. However, it depicts the multi ethnicity of the Indian experience. His poetry presents the cross section of India. Indian poetry sans Daruwalla is unimaginable as his poetry has become an inevitable force in the annals of Indian writing in English. His poems are devoid of any inferior poetic utterances. His images are so sound and it strikes the head at the right time. His poetic exuberance is matchless. His poetry is of high quality, dandy, sterling and first class. His poetic acumen is of highest calibre. Among Indian poets writing in English Nissim Ezekiel is comparable to Daruwalla. At times Daruwalla even outwits Nissim Ezekiel. Daruwalla's technique is sounder than that of Ezekiel. In certain poems Daruwalla comes near the thematic excellence of Nissim Ezekiel. But, in few poems Daruwalla has even surpassed the poetic excellence of Nissim Ezekiel. Daruwalla's poetry broadens the imaginative range of the reader with thematic universality with a multiple array of significance.

Its import has deeper impact on the psyche of the connoisseurs of poetry. In the words of Sinha, “Daruwalla projects his understanding of the contemporary Indian reality with its multivalent contradictions”.

Daruwalla's poetry is subtle and oblique and seems to follow the dictum of Tillyard, “ All poetry is oblique, there is no direct poetry”. His is the poetry of contemplation. Daruwalla's

naturalness goes with thoughtfulness is noted by several critics. Besides naturalism humanism is found in the poetry of Daruwalla. His poems are the reflection of abounding concern for humanism. His humanist attitude surpasses his other poetical qualities.

Daruwalla has been one of the most daring innovators of Indian poetry in English. Never compromising either with the public or indeed with language itself, he has followed his belief that poetry should aim at a representation of the complexities of modern civilization in language and that such representation necessarily leads to difficult poetry. Despite this difficulty his influence on modern poetic diction has been immense. The influence of Ted Hughes as far as expression is concerned cannot be ignored. Partially his style has the similarities of Hughes' animal depiction. Hughes's work is marked by a mythical framework, using the lyric and dramatic monologue to illustrate intense subject matter. Animals appear frequently throughout his work as deity, metaphor, persona, and icon. Perhaps the most famous of his subjects is "Crow," an amalgam of god, bird and man, whose existence seems pivotal to the knowledge of good and evil. In the same vein Daruwalla's poems project the violent reality of human existence. But his works does not have any thing to do with other worldly forces. His works are rooted with human reality though the brute expression of animalistic tendency is present. Daruwalla's distinctive technical skills, the special subtlety in his adaptation of a very personal colloquial mode to the demands of tight forms, are not immediately seen to be outstanding; but his strengths as a craftsman have increasingly come to be regarded as one of the hallmarks of his talent. He is an extraordinarily various and accomplished poet, a poet who uses the devices of metre and rhyme for specific effects. His language is never flat, unless he intends it to be so for a particular reason, and his diction is never stereotyped. He is always ready to reach across accepted literary boundaries for a word that will precisely express what he intends. Daruwalla produced without fanfare the most technically brilliant and resonantly beautiful, profoundly disturbing yet appealing and approachable, body of verse of any Indian English poet in the last twenty-five years or more. The elegance of his poetic diction, brilliance and dexterity of his craftsmanship coupled with the Indian sensibility has made his poetic presence inevitable in the Indian context.. Though he is a Parsi his poems are more Indian rather than a Parsi. To transform a minor incident or insignificant event into a poetic expression of higher calibre requires an enormity of craftsmanship and technical excellence. Daruwalla possesses that capacity to a greater extent in combining reason and sentiment without sacrificing the grace.

Apart from poetry he also attempted fiction. His career as a poet spanning thirty six years and more has been contributing remarkably for the growth of Indian literature especially poetry. The themes of his poem include deprivation, misery disease and death. His almost seem to contain Hardian attitude towards life. But in actuality his corpus of poem only presents the stark reality of Indian life. Though he could have been placed at the top level of Indian poetry the critics' indifferent tendency towards Daruwalla has under stated his poetic excellence. The greatness of Daruwalla's poetry is very much overshadowed by the critics' unawareness of his sound poetic quality. However, his poetic genius is acknowledged by the Sahitya Akademi Award. Of late there is a surge in the interest among critics towards Keki N. Daruwalla. His impact on Indian poetry is tremendous. His poems tends towards a prolixity and prosiness and he is praised for his bitter satiric tone which is exceptional in Indian verse. Daruwalla's first poetical collection published under the name of Under Orion in 1970, is a collection of thirty-three poems. In addition, the sequel volume, 'Apparition in April' appeared in the next year. His next poetry collection, Crossing of Rivers, was published by Oxford University Press in 1976. His 'Winter Poems' appeared in 1980. This poetry collection was written during the period of between 1974 and 1979. The is a collection of eleven poems, dealing with the various themes like hunger, death, misery, corruption in public life, and lovelessness. In a decade, he published four collections of poetry, which is a remarkable achievement in the field of Indian English Poetry. For his recognition of his literary works, he was honoured with several awards. Particularly, the Sahitya Akademi honoured him with its Award in 1984 for his poetical work The Keeper of the Dead. Some years later, Commonwealth Poetry Award was given to him. His sixth volume of the collections of poems, entitled Landscapes was published in 1987. The volume paints various landscapes taken from home and abroad. His other poetry collections are A Summer of Tigers in 1995, Night River in 2000 and The Map-maker in 2002. Swords and Abyss (1979) and The Minister for Permanent Unrest & Other Stories (1996) are his works of fiction. Most of the poems of Daruwalla borders on violence. Violence not only finds expression in his works but also it works at deeper levels in his poems. Violence is one of the dominant features in the poems of Daruwalla. Satish Kumar writes, "He brings alive the world of riots, curfews, warrants...". Since he was an IPS officer his exposure to violence when compared to other poets is more enormous. In this light this paper deals with violence at various levels in the poem, "The Epileptic". The poem involves a family outing. A family of four goes out on a rickshaw—two children, a husband and a wife with a child on his womb. On the way the woman is suddenly affected by fits. Her body shivers. She loses her consciousness. The

children move away rapidly from her. People rush for help. They come out with suggestions. A person even remarks that it comes in the cyclic form as that of menstrual cycle. The husband places a gag in between her teeth after forcing her mouth open. Then the traffic comes to a stop as if a mishap has occurred. Later, she is taken to hospital. She is treated there. The physician uses several terms to describe her medical condition. He also prescribes medicine. The terms uttered by the physician put the husband in a state of shock. The poem involves a minor incident but it conveys more on the psyche of the husband. Moreover, it also brings out the violence in its crude form. In this poem the violence works at various levels. The violence is psychological, sociological, physical, individual and lexical. The husband suffers more violence right from the beginning to the end of the poem. He has to undergo several tortures even before reaching the hospital. After reaching the hospital his case is even worse as the physician bombards him with terms associated with her illness. Finally he is very much shocked and he trembles. The wife undergoes more physical trauma and also she faces embarrassment in the public. Her privacy is also invaded in the public. The violence affects the psyche of the family. Finally after regaining her awareness the wife's trauma is more evident as her feature undergoes a sudden change expressing a sense of extraordinary disappointment. Her reaction is presented through the reaction of the husband, "As a limp awareness slouched along her face/ I found it was the husband who was shaking". The incident affects the husband more. He has to undergo greater stress and trauma. The incident psychologically affects the whole family. The children plunge into a sense of insecurity. It incident also cast a spell of fear on the children. The entire family has been put to greater jeopardy as the privacy of the whole family is invaded in the public. Not only does it affect the family but also the person who carried them—the rickshaw puller. The invasion of the privacy is acute when one of the persons in the crowd referred to the menstrual cycle of the wife. It inflicts a psychological wound on the husband. The curiosity of the mob has landed the family in trouble. People offering help to the person who suffers in the street is understandable. But the way in which they act only does a disservice. It is the response of the society to an incident which happens in the public. Rather than helping the family the act of the public seems to be more involved in the incident. The incident and its response only present the social disorder which encourages the invasion of the privacy in the public. It presents a lack of common sense among the public.

The poem portrays a typical Indian scene where people rush to help the distressed one at the cost of one's privacy.

Senior Indian poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel in 'Indian Poetry- A

Perspective', applauded his work as "impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness". Over nine books and more than three decades, Daruwalla's poetry has journeyed a long way both formally and thematically. However, it retains certain strong distinguishing characteristics: an ironic stance, an evocation of the multi-layered contradictory realities of Indian life, a preoccupation with diverse cultural, historic and mythic landscapes, a terse, vigorous and tensile style, supple imagism, sustained narrative drive, an ability to segue between metrical patterns and free verse, and a capacity to combine an epic canvas with a miniaturist's eye for detail. A remarkable feature of Daruwalla's poetry is its ability to vividly materialise its abstractions, to strike a creative tension between image and statement. His poetry has the narrative energy and sweep to paint, for instance, a vast portrait of post-Independence India as "a landscape of meaninglessness": "Then why should I tread the Kafka beat/ or the Waste Land,/ when Mother, you are near at hand/ one vast, sprawling defeat?"

(Collage II 46-49).

But it can also offer a fine-tuned vision of the particular, evident in his evocation of the rumbling innards of a miserable multitude listening to the speech of a corpulent political leader: "Within the empty belly/ the enzymes turn multi-lingual/ their speech vociferous/ simmering on stomach wall" (The People 14-17). His landscapes extend from the ancient kingdom of Kalinga under the reign of the great Indian emperor Ashoka to the seething contradictions of the modern metropolis of Bombay "From the lepers, the acid-scarred, the amputees/ I turn my face. The road, I feel/ should be stratified so that/ I rub shoulders only with my kind"(The People 20-23) as well as rural and small-town India :Benaras is unforgettably evoked as the place where "corpse-fires and cooking-fires/ burn side by side" (Boat-ride Along the Ganga 48-50), even while the sacred river Ganga flows on, "dark as gangrene". His most recent book, Map-maker (2002), offers a compelling series of dramatic monologues by figures as diverse as a disciple of the Buddha and an old map-maker from Majorca, suggesting that the passionate interest in other cultural and historical milieux is alive and well. But there is also a more marked fascination with inner worlds, with philosophical notions of time and space. In Migrations, for example, the metaphysical is integrally linked to the concrete and the singular, as the poem explores the theme of migrations across space and time, from the violent biography of nations to a searing moment

of personal biography: "Now my dreams ask me/ if I remember my mother/ and I'm not sure how I'll handle that./ Migrating across years is also difficult."

The poems presented here are a mix of recently published and unpublished work by the poet. Even while they represent a fragment of Daruwalla's prodigious corpus, they offer some idea of the range and formal variety of his work. While reading the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla one is bound to have the feeling that he is being transported to a bizarre world. No other Indo-English poet delves so deep into the mysterious inner world of the human psyche as does Daruwalla. Daruwalla writes with a vision, and the vision follows him like a shadow. While reading his poetry, the reader will have occasion to remember several poets. His attitude towards nature will remind one of Tennyson, his morbid pre-occupation with death will remind one of Emily Dickinson. His supernaturalism will remind the reader of Coleridge. His poetry as a heap of broken images will remind us of the poetic technique of T.S. Eliot.

We can see Daruwalla's worldview in his meditative poem Ruminations. The poet has glimpses of the true nature of life. He can see violence and hatred in the air. They are so omnipresent! Man cannot wash away these evils from his mind, try hard as he will! They stick deep. As violence and hatred reign all around, the natural corollary is death-wish. The poet says:

Death I am looking

for that bald bone-head of yours! (5-6)

Flesh is man's ultimate destiny. Alas! it is a prey to corruption. Neither rose-water nor insense-sticks nor

flowers can drown the smell of death.

The drift as it comes to us now

is aroma/stench/nausea

jostling each other (7-10)

Violence can disfigure the human body. The corpse of a woman lying on the verandah of the morgue, the

victim of her husband's jealousy , has a grisly look , her nose being sliced off . Man is  
submissive to his

ultimate fate .

bury him

and he is steadfast as the earth

Burn him and he will ride the flames

Throw him to the birds and he will

surrender flesh like an ascetic.(12-16)

Can man ever have a cleansed feeling such as one gets while walking the temple after a  
river-bath ? No,

says the poet . Nature has a cleansed look after rain .

the hedge smiles

the leaf loses its coat of dust

the scum spills from the pool. (17-20)

Alas for man .!He can never experience the cleansed feeling ! Sin sticks so deep that  
sophisticated man is

incapable of redemption .

I have misplaced it somewhere

in the caverns of my past!

Daruwalla elaborates the theme of sin in his poem 'The Death of a Bird' . The poem has the  
same motif as Dostoevsky's novel 'Crime and Punishment' , Man has to pay dearly for  
perpetrating sins on inoffensive animals and birds . The victim of the poet's cruelty is a king  
monal that was engaged in love-making with his mate .

The sinner and his female companion cannot get away with the sin . "Why did our footsteps  
drag ?""

Depressed a bit we took the road

walking like ciphers disinterred

from some forgotten code . (Death of a Bird 25-27)

The consciousness of sin begets weird feelings and sensations. The terror that the sinner experience is more-than-life-size. The glazed eyes and throbbing heart of the dying monal fill the poet with terror and foreboding . Every incident after the perpetration of the sin however trivial has a nightmare horror . The pony's cry as it fell into a gorge drowns even the roar of the river . The sinners are even incapable of enjoying love-making!

Death and nature's cruelty , the two pet themes of Daruwalla, form the subject of “The Ghaghra in Spate”. The changing moods of the treacherous river are described using unconventional imagery. In the afternoon the river is a grey smudge on the canvas .At night she is overstewed coffee:

At night she is a red weal

across the spine of the land . (9-10)

The river's relentless fury and man's unequal fight for survival are brought out in these lines :

If only voices could light lamps

If only limbs could turn to rafted bamboo! (28-29)

The people take their tragedy with stoic indifference .

They don't rave or curse

for they know the river's slang, her argot . (41-42)

What baffles the poet more is man's indifference to the tragedy that befell other human beings. It is time for celebration for some! Women come in chauffeur- driven cars to collect driftwood to decorate their drawing-rooms. Nature's orgy of destruction is not yet over. Fishes in the fields are strangled to death through an unholy alliance between the sun and mud. This is the frightful picture of the Ghaghra painted by Daruwalla. The world depicted by Daruwalla is not a pleasing one. It is a sombre world where man is at the mercy of relentless elements . His poetry provides a unique experience for readers of Indian poetry in

English . Daruwalla is indeed a star that dwells apart in the firmament of Indo-Anglian poetry.

### Style and Substance

An eminent critic M.K. Naik has called Daruwalla, “one of the most substantial modern Indo –Anglian poets” (21) and this is a perfectly just estimate of Daruwalla’s poetic output.

Daruwalla is certainly one of the major voices in Indo – Anglian poetry, even though not enough critical attention has been paid to his work. Naik further states: It is rather surprising and disappointing that a poet of his 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.

Speaking of themes first, we find that Daruwalla’s poetry covers a wide range. We wholeheartedly accept the judgment of Vilas Sarang who has expressed the view , “Daruwalla stands out amongst Indian English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience generally outside the ambit or scope of poets”

This critic points out, and rightly so, that Daruwalla’s poetry has brought to life the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night, lathi blows on cowering bodies, “the starch on your khaki back,” soda bottles and acid bulbs waiting on the roof-tops, and press communiqués. Daruwalla’s favourite images, according to another critic, are those of violence, disease, and fire. Thus the first contribution which Daruwalla has made to Indo-Anglian poetry is his enlargement of its themes and his widening of its range of subjects. Example comes to mind in quick succession. We may first of all take a brief look at the poems in which Daruwalla shows his social sympathy. Poems like “The Ghaghra in spate” and “Pestilence” stand out among such poems. The first-named poem brings before our minds the acute distress and misery of the villagers who have to starve for days because of the flood in the Ghaghra and whose mud-and-straw cottages are swept away by the rushing waters. When the flood-waters retreat, the damage caused is even greater. Then the Ghaghra becomes really bitchy. Pestilence depicts the misery and distress caused by an epidemic like cholera. Person affected by this disease are carried to hospitals on string-beds. There are frail bodies, frozen bodies, delirious bodies, and bodies lying supine on these beds. And yet the authorities do not admit that cholera has broken out in the city. They would give euphemistic names to this epidemic in order to reduce the horror in the minds of the people and to cover their own inefficiency. The doctors would say that there is a piece among the poems entitled “Ruminations” in which the poet feels that there is violence in the very air, and that this

violence is an indication of the mass hatreds which prevail in the country. The poet here employs some horrifying serpent-imagery to emphasize the dangerousness of these mass hatreds. The poem entitled “The Epileptic” also shows Daruwalla’s social sympathy and his compassion for the victims of disease.

Another important contribution which Daruwalla has made to Indo-Anglian poetry is his ironical and satirical treatment of certain social evils. Of course, poets like Nissim Ezekiel are also masters of the weapons of irony and satire; but our point is that Daruwalla too has made a contribution in this respect. The poem entitled ‘Graft’ is a masterpiece of irony and satire. Not only have bribe-giving and bribe-taking been condemned in this poem but also the adulteration of foodstuffs and certain other malpractices. “To legalize a bastard you’ve to bribe the priest,” says Daruwalla. People indulge in all kinds of fishy deals; and even decent chaps indulge in adultery. But the stars, under which these people were born, indicate that they would have long lives and would flourish in every respect. The life-line of such persons extends to the elbow almost; and, as for children, each of the corrupt men would be blessed with nine! Then there is the poem entitled In the Tarai in which the poet says that bandits are of course everywhere and that their occupation is to burn the homes of the villagers, to cut off the fingers of women in order to obtain the gold rings which they are wearing, and to snatch away the gold necklaces from round their goitered necks. In describing these brutalities, Daruwalla uses his characteristic irony. The poem entitled “The people” is another of Daruwalla’s triumphs in the field of irony and satire. The very opening two lines are an example:

Between their raillery and applause

I found no difference. (1-2)

In this poem Daruwalla has given us a most interesting, satirical portrait of the behavior of the people, particularly towards their leaders. Collage I is another excellent satirical poem. Here Daruwalla ironically writes that the successive Indian governments have done a lot for the people: they have abolished zamindari (or landlordism), they have abolished drinking, they have abolished the use of a foreign language (English), and they have driven away the prosses (that is, prostitutes) from the G.B.Road. The last stanza of this poem is in Daruwalla’s finest of irony:

If we had plague

Camus-style

And doctors searched for the virus

There would be black-market in rats.

Imagery is another field in which Daruwalla has made a contribution to Indo-Anglian poetry. Like his themes, his imagery also covers a wide range. His imagery is neither fantastic nor commonplace. It is realistic and original, often strikingly original. And the imagery in his poetry is plentiful too. "The Ghaghra in Spate" is an outstanding example of Daruwalla's realistic and original imagery. Here we are made to visualize the Ghaghra as looking like "overstewed coffee" and then at night like "a red weal across the spine of the land". And the moon is red because she is having menses. The imagery in the opening stanza, we have the vivid and perfectly realistic imagery of the bandits working havoc in the land, setting fire to the cottages, wearing, and snatching away gold necklaces from their goitered necks.

"Railroad Reveries" contains several vivid pictures, some of these unforgettable. There is a sad-eyed bitch which, being tormented by the urchins on the platform, walks away with her head drooping and her eyes bored. There is a blind boy on the platform, walking from compartment to compartment of the train with his begging bowl to whom the poet would like to give a coin in charity but is unable to do so because of his indecision. About Daruwalla's imagery we have also to note that it is not superimposed upon a poem and that it is not gratuitous. The imagery in his poetry is integral to the theme or it arises from the poet's meditations upon a subject or from his thinking over a particular incident or happening. We do not come across many examples of imagery for imagery's sake in his poetry.

Daruwalla has contributed to Indo-Anglian poetry in another way also. His poetry is the poetry of incident and event; and his mode is that of narration and description. As Vilas Sarang, points out, "even when writing about nature, Daruwalla resorts to incident, as in 'Winter Poems' which is about bees" (17). A poem like "Monologue in the Chambal Valley" tells us interesting things about a bandit and an informer. But we do not agree that Daruwalla's poems tend to be longish and that they often have a lax appearance, characterized by prolixity. It is true that he has written "longish" poems; but a number of poems, which are not longish but are quite short, is also very large; and the element of incident, event, narration, and description in them imparts to them an exceptional quality. And it is not only the story element in them which gives them incident. The poem entitled "Routine" describes an incident (a confrontation between the police and a mob of agitators);

but it concludes with a welcome piece of instruction. We here learn that much of the police action against a mob has been well rehearsed in the past, and that everything is done according to a plan. The poem entitled "Death by Burial" contains interesting events and yet it concludes with a valuable moral which is that a communal riot can break out over any issue even if there has been unanimity among both the Hindus and the Muslims in most matters. The poem "Evangelical Eva" contains interesting material, and yet it too contains a valuable piece of information about the essentials of human nature, namely that self-sacrifice and a life of renunciation may not always be appreciated. "Pestilence" contains ample action. Cholera has broken out and patients are being taken to a hospital in large numbers. But there is a point which the poet wishes to make; and the point is that the authorities would not admit that cholera has broken out. Even the doctors in a hospital would give to cholera another name, diarrhoea or gastro-enteritis. All this is something special about Daruwalla's poetry.

Daruwalla's poetry abounds in figures of speech and, more particularly, in similes and metaphors which are most often strikingly original. Once again we admit that all poetry contains similes and metaphors, often in abundance, but it is the unusual kind of simile or metaphor which makes a greater impact on us. Thus

in "The Epileptic", the two children of the afflicted woman fly from her side "like severed wings", and the thin edge of froth around her lips is compared to "foam-dregs left by a receding wave." These are examples of unusual similes. In "The Ghaghra in Spate" the river is described as being in the afternoon a "grey smudge", and at night as "overstewed coffee". At night under a red moon in menses, the river looks like "a red weal across the spine of the land". Here we have most unusual metaphors. In one of the pieces in "Ruminations", the poet can smell violence in the air "like the lash of coming rain; and this feeling seems to the poet to be "poised like a cobra". These are original similes; and these are followed by a series of metaphors based on serpent-behaviour. These are only a few of the examples. Actually Daruwalla's poetry contains an abundance of similes and metaphors. We do not understand how a wrong view persists in the minds of even the highly educated people in India that Indians should not write poetry in the English language. While it is true that the Indo-Anglian poet does not have much proficiency in the use of metres, and that often he writes in free verse, yet his command over the English language fully justifies him in using the English language as the medium of his poetry. Like Nissim Ezekiel and several others, Daruwalla is a master of the English language. His diction is not of the plain, commonplace kind. It is the diction used by a scholarly poet. We can even call his diction erudite. Not only does he have

an unusual capacity to combine words into striking phrases, but he has the capacity to construct striking clauses. There is many a felicity of word and phrases in his poetry. “Half-cooked limbs/bore witness to the fire’s debauchery,” he writes in Fire-Hymn. The use of the word “debauchery here shows some daring on the poet’s part just as the earlier line “and wandering ghost –lights frightened passers-by” does. In “Routine”, he conveys to us the range of the abusive terms employed by the agitating mob for the police in the following words: “Their gamut ranges from mother to ‘sister-seducers’.” In the same poem, an officer by the name of Karam Singh deplors the fact that youngsters should indulge in this kind of agitation and should come into conflict with the police. And Karam Singh’s lament over this fact finds utterance in the following words which, though somewhat indelicate, convey his idea most effectively:

I have children older than them,

These kids whose pubes have hardly sprouted. (17-18)

Of course, grammatically Karam Singh should have said: “I have children older than they,” but he is a policeman and is not expected to be conversant with the rules of grammar. In ‘The Beggar’, we have the following examples of the felicity of word, phrase, and sentence:

Maggots, moments, worms

Crawl like changing seasons.

He is a straw Buddha with sperm. (21-24)

While the charge of prolixity against Daruwalla may be true in the case of a number of poems, he yet provides enough evidence of his capacity to condense his material whenever necessary. 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. (27-28)

And the poem concludes with three lines which sum up the whole messages of the poem. The closing lines of "Collage I" are model of condensation. These lines read an epigram:

If we had plague

Camus-style,

And doctors searched for the virus

There would be black-market in rats. (45-48)

Coming to Daruwalla's use of free verse. We find a large variety of rhythms which go to the making of his poems. It is true that non-metrical poetry does not meet our requirements or our expectations as readers of poetry. The use of free verse has become a fetish with the Indo-Anglian poets: and we deplore this trend.

But as this mode of writing has become almost universal among the Indo-Anglian poets, we have got to accept it as an accomplished fact. And here again we find Daruwalla's contribution to be substantial. No two of his poems are written in the same kind of free verse whether we look at them from the point of view of line-length or stanza-formation or rhythm. The poem Graft is written in an entirely different kind of stanza and according to an entirely different rhythm by comparison with collage II (sub-titled "Mother"); and "The Ghaghra in Spate" is written differently from "Death of a Bird". In this respect again Daruwalla is a master-craftsman.

Daruwalla's concerns in his poetry are many. He has no pet themes. He has written poems on a wide range of subjects. He has a very broad outlook and, in his capacity as a police officer, has had many opportunities for observing life in India in almost all its manifestations. He has responded to almost everything that he has witnessed by writing a poem about it. That is why Vilas Sarang has said that Daruwalla stands out among Indian-English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience generally outside the ambit of poets. Daruwalla has put his experience of active life to good use in poems like "Curfew, In a Riot Torn City"; poems from the Tarai; "Routine"; "Curfew 2" and "Walking to the Centre". The same critic goes on to say that Daruwalla brings to life the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night, lathi blows on cowering bodies, "the starch on your khaki back", soda bottles and acid bulbs waiting on the roof-tops, and press communiqués. Daruwalla has portrayed the contemporary Indian socio-political world not merely of the city, but also of the small town,

of the village, and of the countryside-with heavy strokes, laden with savages irony. And this critic has quoted the following three lines from a poem entitled Notes to illustrate the irony:

No end to hoarding!

Breaking open the lockers they find

a briefcase full of rice. (17-19)

Mohit K. Ray has also noted the variety and range of the themes of Daruwalla's poetry; and he mentions among those themes "the rioting mob, the tub-thumping politician, Evangelical Eva, Rotarian Renu, the Maulvi who dies of tongue cancer, the leper at the Taj, the ledge-walker, the epileptic woman, and the bandit chief" (496). Daruwalla's favourite images, according to this critic, are those of violence, diseases and fire. The gun goes off on many pages of his poetry; the Taj is depicted as arthritic; and the river is depicted as being dark like gangrene. His attitude to fire is of course, a by-product of his parsi heritage. There can be no doubt that Daruwalla's interests are varied and that his observation is very keen and minute. But the most pleasing aspect of his treatment of his themes is that his attitude to the various problems and issues of life is always original, and that his poems are therefore by no means stale or stereotyped. The most remarkable of his poems are those which reflect his social concern and his compassion for the victims of misfortune. In this context the poems entitled The Ghaghra in Spate and Pestilence naturally occur to us immediately. In the first-named poem the havoc worked by the flood in the Ghaghra is the main theme, though not the only one. The point to note is that Daruwalla does not become sentimental here. He is not the tear-shedding type of writer; not does he try to draw tears from the reader's eyes. He shows a remarkable restraint and an attitude of detachment in depicting the horror of the flood as "half a street goes churning in the river-belly", and the thatched cottages just melt away in the flood-waters. A buffalo floats over to the rooftop where men have taken shelter. Much has been left by Daruwalla to our own imagination. He only throws hints to indicate the misery and the suffering, and can even write a word or two to lighten our sense of suffering by saying that children have enough spirit in them to cheer the rescued boats.

In 'Pestilence' Daruwalla depicts the misery caused by an epidemic like cholera. Numerous persons are being carried to hospitals because they have caught this dreadful disease. There are brown shoulders, black shoulders, and shoulders round like orbs; and there are frail bodies, delirious bodies, some bodies absolutely without any strength or energy, lying supine,

transfixed under the sun. But there is an irony in Daruwalla's treatment of the subject. The authorities would not admit that an epidemic has broken out in the city. Even the doctors in the hospitals would deny this fact which is evident even to the lay public. The doctors ask: "who says they have cholera?" and they themselves reply: "They are down with diarrhea," or they reply: "It is gastro-enteritis." A piece from the poem entitled 'Rumination' also shows Daruwalla's social sympathy. He finds that there is violence in the very air, and that this violence is an indication of the mass hatreds drifting across the moon and hovering, poised like a cobra. He looks for a fang that darts, a hood that sways, and eyes that throw out a reptile hate. Here we have horrifying serpent-imagery to indicate the kind of hatred which burns in human breasts and drives them to fight one another. So many people die in the violence that mortuaries are filled with corpses which begin to decompose and emit a foul smell which cannot be drowned by any amount of rose-water, incense-sticks, and flowers. The poem entitled The Epileptic too shows Daruwalla's social sympathy and his compassion for victims of disease. A woman gets a sudden fit of epilepsy when she is going somewhere by a rickshaw in the company of her husband and her children. The poem describes the alarm and the distress experienced by all who happen to witness the incident. The rickshaw-puller experiences a sense of guilt; and the inquisitive crowd around the unconscious woman fan her, rub her feet, and try other ways to summon her back to her back to her senses. The husband is a picture of distress and fear. The woman herself is neither hysterical nor raving. Only her head is jerking from side to side. When she is taken to the hospital, the doctors frown and use technical terminology to describe the woman's ailment. After going through this poem most of us would lose our own mental equilibrium for a time. Actually the same would be our reaction to all the poems which have been analyzed above. The poem Graft reflects another of Daruwalla's concerns in the writing of his poetry. Daruwalla wrote this poem many years ago; but the nation has awakened to the evil of corruption only now when some leading personalities of the political world have come into the picture. Daruwalla has here written a biting satire on the prevalence of bribe-giving and bribe-taking, and the widespread malpractices in business. Oils are adulterated, medicinal tablets made of chalk are manufactured; infected meat and stale fish are openly on Sale. Sawdust is mixed with jute in order to add to the profits of the manufacturers. And Daruwalla puts it graphically and aphoristically in the following lines: "the right buck at the right time tips the scales." But the matter does not end there. A bastard can be declared as a legitimate issue by the priest if he is given enough money as a bribe. In other words, even the priesthood has been infected by this disease of corruption. And Daruwalla has stated the whole thing in his own inimitable style.

The social concern of Daruwalla appears also in the poem entitled *The Beggar*. Here again Daruwalla's attitude is one of detachment. He does not preach a sermon or point a moral. He merely depicts the misery of the beggar who just sits there, while time wheels round him like a kite, and "maggots, moments, worms crawl like changing seasons". This poem too deals with a socially emotive theme because beggary is a widespread social evil in this country; and fifty years after the attainment of freedom by this country this evil has increased manifold.

Daruwalla's social sympathy appears in *Vignette I* too. Along the banks of the river Ganga, lepers sit huddled. The Ganga flows through the land, not to lighten the misery but show it. All along the river-banks, beggars hoist their deformities in the same way as boatmen hoist their sails; and the poet adds: "The Ganga flows through the land, /not to lighten the misery but to show it".

Each of these poems deals with some social evils or the other, and deals with it in an ironical and satirical manner, using language which is as sharp as an axe. Daruwalla's poetry is the poetry of social reform; but the evils have taken such deep roots that Daruwalla's axe has made no dents anywhere. *Evangelical Eva* depicts the spirit of self-sacrifice. Eva has left her own country in order to serve the hapless children who have no guardian to look after them. But her spirit of self-sacrifice has not been appreciated. Instead of being encouraged in her work, she is sternly rebuked by a man from her own country and discouraged from continuing her work by an elderly man of the very village which she is trying to serve. Such is the irony of the situation here.

In the poem entitled 'The People', Daruwalla depicts his view of the people in general as being fickle-minded and having no principles by which to judge their leaders. They are capable of condemning a leader for having said something which he had previously also said but for which the people had previously praised him. The people do not really understand much of what the leaders say to them. In the poem entitled *Death by Burial*, Daruwalla first depicts the population of a village as being united in their attitude of opposition and hostility towards smugglers and decoits but then becoming divided over how to kill the decoits whom they have been able to capture and who had been inflicting many atrocities on the villagers. The Muslims in the village population would like to bury the captured decoits alive, while the Hindus of the village would like to kill them by setting fire to them. This communal divide is a perfectly realistic view of the Indian people. This basic division between the Hindus and the

Muslims is a serious progress which the country could otherwise have made. But it is noteworthy that Daruwalla himself does not draw any moral from the incident which he has described in the poem. He allows the readers to draw the moral themselves. His own attitude is one of detachment. But it is quite clear what he thinks about the whole thing. He describes the division between the Hindus and the Muslims as an intervention by Providence. The riot caused by the communal divide is attributed by Daruwalla to Providence! And here lies the irony of the comment on the situation. The Revolt of the Salt Slaves has a most unusual theme. The revolt referred to here is a matter of the remote past because there are no longer any slaves in the literal sense in any part of the world. But the poem has not lost its validity even now because the exploitation and the persecution of certain categories of people by the landowning and property-owning rich people is still going on in many countries; and revolts by the exploited and persecuted people are also a matter of frequent occurrence. Another poem which deserves attention from the point of view of its theme is College I. Here Daruwalla speaks ironically about the continuing malpractices and social evils in our country. Daruwalla here mocks at the claims of our leaders that they have abolished "zamindari" (that is, landlordism), drinking, and the English language, and that, furthermore, they have driven away the prostitutes from the areas in which they used to ply their trade. What Daruwalla really means to say here is that the propertied classes have become even richer and more powerful than ever before, and that the poor have become poorer, relatively speaking. The abolition of drinking (or "Prohibition" as it is called) is more of a joke and a farce than any solid achievement because smuggling of liquor and the manufacture of spurious liquor have grown by leaps and bounds. And as far as prostitutes, it has spread to numerous areas in every big city instead of remaining confined to the particular localities where previously the prostitutes used to carry on their business legally. The last four lines of this poem are particularly pungent in their irony. Here Daruwalla says that, if plague were to break out in the country and if the medical men needed rats to perform their experiments in order to discover some anti-plague vaccine, rats would begin to be sold in the black market. Here Daruwalla is at his ironic best. He has succinctly summed up the Indian character. Nor does this complete the list of the themes with which Daruwalla has dealt in his poetry. There are poems which deal with entirely different subjects. There are two long poems, Dialogues with a Third Voice and Under Orion, which deal with different subjects. These poems debunk certain myths. Then there is a poem entitled Food and Words, words and Food which depicts the squalor and the poverty in this country.

There is a poem entitled 'To Gandhi' : it depicts the ridiculous distortions which accompany our deification of national heroes. There are the three poems entitled Charity : Three Faces, a reference to which has already been made. The volume of poems entitled "Crossing of Rivers" contains several excellent poems. The central metaphor in this volume of poems is the Ganges with all its primal, religious, and emotive connotations. The rhythm of this river is that of life and death, of birth and rebirth, of passion and rejection.

Unfortunately the function of this river is not to lighten the misery of the people but show it. (Three lines of this poem have already been quoted above). In short, the thematic range of Daruwalla's poetry is enormous. We do not agree with the critic who has accused Daruwalla of prolixity. Daruwalla may have repeated certain ideas; but he knows the art of condensation also.

Imagery is one of the strongest points of the poetry of Daruwalla. Actually, imagery is an important feature of the poetry of every poet because it is imagery which enriches a poem and extends the range of a poem. Of course, in one sense imagery is something incidental; but, in another sense, imagery is basic to a poem provided it is not something superimposed upon it but something arising from the theme itself and something integral to the theme. Daruwalla is a master of the art of building up imagery; and he does not have to work hard to find the imagery for his poems. Imagery flows from his pen even as ideas and words flow from it. His imagery is most original, in fact startlingly so. There is nothing stale or stereotyped about it. This imagery is drawn directly from first-hand observation or from a perception of some extraordinary aspects of real life. While reality provides the ground-work for this imagery, it is the poet's imagination which supplies the imagery. Imagery is a product of the poetic imagination working on an incident or a happening or an occurrence. Daruwalla's imagery is neither fantastic nor common place. It is most often unusual or odd or out of the ordinary. Indeed, we marvel at the way in which he is able to give us a piece of description through a series of pictures. Most often his imagery is realistic and concrete but sometimes it is abstract and intangible. Whatever the kind of imagery which we find in his poems, it arises from his thoughts about the subject on which he is writing. There is nothing artificial or redundant about his imagery. This imagery strengthens and reinforces the impact of his ideas, and it is not something extraneous to the theme. Legitimate imagery in poetry is that which is inseparable from the ideas and the feelings which have prompted the poem.

Stark realism is the chief quality of much of the imagery in Daruwalla's poetry. An outstanding example of this sort of thing is to be found in the poem *The Ghaghra in Spate*. Here is a poem based strictly on the writer's actual observations. But every poet, who writes a poem on this subject, would not offer the same kind of imagery because every poet observes things from his own angle. And so in this poem we have the picture of the Ghaghra looking like "overstewed coffee", and looking at night like a red weal across the spine of the land. And the moon is red because she is having menses! When the flood comes into this river suddenly at night, it is like a nightmare for the people who have to undergo days of hunger and have to find shelter on the roof-tops though many of the mud-and-straw houses have already collapsed. When the floodwaters recede, the Ghaghra turns actually "bitchy"; and it is then that the real catastrophe overtakes the people. Behind the retreating flood-waters, the land sinks and houses bend down on their knees as if paying their farewell respects to the retreating waters. The paddy fields, which were filled with water and fish, would now begin to dry up, bringing an end to the life of the fish.

Another poem which is also based upon actual observation and is, therefore, wholly realistic is 'In the Tarai'. Here a whole region has been brought to life through the imagery which the poet has built up. Hogdeer, elephant-grass, and malaria have gone; but the cattle-fairs are being held, and townships are coming up and becoming thickly populated. The earth seems to be in ferment, and the air is full of the hum of insectdialects.

This is followed by the imagery of the bandits working havoc in the land, setting fire to the cottages, chopping off women's fingers in order to get the gold rings which they are wearing, and snatching away gold necklaces from the goitered necks of the women. The poem ends with a brief picture of the district town which has an ice factory and even a dhobi.

'Railroad Reverie's is a psychological poem but even here we come across some concrete and realistic pictures belonging to the external world. There is a girl huddling into herself, searching for the warmth which is not there. Arthritic fingers are holding a tea-tumbler tightly in their grip. There is a sad-eyed bitch standing upon the platform; but, feeling fed up with the misbehavior of the urchins, she walks away, with her head drooping and her eyes bored. And then there is a blind boy with his begging bowl to whom the poet would like to give a coin in charity but is unable to do so because the boy has already moved on to the next compartment of the train. All these pictures impart a solidity to the poem which is actually intended to reveal to us the thoughts passing through the mind of the passenger. His last

thought, for instance, is that he would have to share his berth with a bed-bug and a greasy doubt. In this poem we find a fusion of the physical reality outside and the inner reality of the mind. The poet gives us his mental or emotional reaction to each of the external sights which he witnesses and depicts.

‘The Revolt of the Salt Slaves’ is remarkable because of the imagery which it offers to us. This imagery is most unusual; and we may even find it difficult to visualize it because we have never seen salt-mines or the kind of work which is done by the labourers there. The image in the opening stanza is a striking one. Here we witness a striking contrast between the black colour of the slaves and the slave-drivers on one hand, and the white colour of the sunlight and the rocks of salt on the other hand. Then there is an equally vivid picture of the slave-drivers lashing the backs of the slaves who do not seem to them to be working as hard as they should. Next comes the picture of the revolt when at least for a few hours the slaves would enjoy a sense of triumph. This was the land of salt and iron, says the poet; and the slave-drivers lay “impaled” on earth. In this poem we have brutality – the brutality of the slave-drivers and the brutality of the slaves. Accompanying this two-fold brutality is the hardness and the inflexibility of rock and iron, not to mention the whip which speaks in syllables of fire, meaning that the lashes administered by the whip are acutely painful.

Another poem remarkable from the point of view of imagery is ‘The Epileptic’. Here again we have an example of unusual but authentic imagery. We have heard about epileptics having sudden fits of epilepsy; but not many of us have actually witnessed such an occurrence in a street. This poem depicts the victim of an epileptic fit, but it also depicts the rickshaw-puller who is experiencing a sense of guilt, the husband who is trying his best to help the woman, the inquisitive crowd of people who have gathered round the unfortunate woman, and the strictly professional attitude of the doctors. Thus we have a series of pictures; and all the pictures together build up a wonderful, though painful, poem. This poem too is starkly realistic, without any exaggeration or any under-statement. How true is the following picture, for instance!

They fanned her, rubbed her feet, and looked around  
for other ways to summon back her senses.

There is equally realistic and authentic imagery in the poem entitled ‘Crossing of Rivers’. Here much of the imagery is 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.

Other poems by Daruwalla also contain ample evidence of his capacity to supplement the appeal of his poems with suitable imagery which is relevant to the theme. It seems that Daruwalla does not have to exert himself to seek the right kind of imagery but that imagery comes as naturally to him as words for the building up of that imagery. In the poem entitled Routine we have a most vivid picture of how an incident of the kind, which had occurred ordered his men to load their guns, and then he loaded his own gun also. This proceeding has been well rehearsed, the speaker in the poem informs us. Then the police officer pointed his barrel into the air. Death of a Bird contains elaborate imagery. There is the imagery of the mass of clouds piled on the crags, and then of a pony losing its balance and falling down a thousand feet below into the roaring river.

Then we have the audio-imagery in a passage which describes the jungle-sounds coming supposedly from jackals, wolves, and bears. Next, there is the imagery of a fire being lit with turf and peat to provide some warmth to the woman who is accompanying the hunter. Almost every passage in this poem contains a vivid picture which at the same time advances the action. A piece in the poem Ruminations is another example. Here the speaker can smell hovers brooding, poised like a cobra. Here the two similes are themselves vivid and realistic pictures. Then there is the foul smell coming from the morgue. Nothing can drown this smellneither rose-water, nor incense-sticks, nor flowers. Then we have some reflective lines which have visual appeal also. If a human being is buried, he would prove to be as steadfast as the earth itself. If his body is cremated, he would ride the flames. If he is thrown to the birds, he would surrender his flesh to them like an ascetic. Finally, rain comes down noisily like a blinding sheet to smile, the leaf looks refreshed, and the scum spills over from the pool. Unfortunately, however, the poet does not experience that “cleansed feeling” which he desperately needed. The poem entitled Pestilence is most remarkable so far as its imagery is concerned. Here again the whole poem is a series of images but as an example we may confine our attention to the lines which bring before us the pictures of frail bodies, frozen bodies, delirious bodies, but not henna-smearing bodies of brides. Some of these bodies have

been drained completely of energy; some seem to be moving a bit; and others lie supine transfixed under the sun.

Range of His Poems:

The poem “Epilepsy” describes a fit of epilepsy which a woman suddenly got as she was going in a rickshaw with her children and her husband. When the fit overtook her, her children, feeling panicky, quickly jumped down from the rickshaw and fled in different directions in a state of terror. Fortunately the child which the woman carried in her womb remained where it was. The rickshaw – puller, thinking that he was, in some mysterious way, responsible for what had happened to the woman, began to experience a sense of guilt. He could hardly bear to see the frightened children of the woman because he was not aware of the fact that the woman was given to such fits of epilepsy.

The husband too was feeling terrified at this moment. He tried to do whatever he could do to help her under the circumstances. For instance, he forced open the woman’s closed mouth, and he put a gag between her teeth so that the mouth should not get closed again. The traffic on the road came to a halt because of what had happened. Everybody was curious to know the nature of the mishap. Some of the people fanned the woman; some rubbed her feet; and some tried other methods to bring her back to her senses. A pedestrian said in a whisper that the woman’s fits occurred during the days of her menses. The Woman was not hysterical. She only looked red in the face, and she seemed to be absent-minded. Her head shook from side to side like that of a puppet. Some froth hovered round her lips. She was then taken to a hospital where some of the doctors spoke lightly of her ailment while others used some difficult medical language to explain her malady. These doctors described her trouble as the spike-and-wave electrical activity, and prescribed belladonna and paraldehyde. But just as one of the doctors expressed the view that she was not doing well, she recovered. Her very suffering seemed to have cured her. And just when she seemed to recover her senses, it was the husband who was now trembling with anxiety and fear. In “ The Ghagra in Spate” a flood comes into the river Ghaghra every year. The flood comes without any prior notice. In the afternoon, the river may look just like a heap of mud; in the evening it looks black like over-boiled coffee; and at night, when the moon looks red, the river is like a wound caused by the lash of a whip. Going along the river-bank in the growing darkness of the evening, one would never think that a flood is about to come. The landscape looks perfectly smooth and tranquil. Kingfishers and gulls may be seen on the river-bank as usual.

Then Suddenly at night the food arrives. It hardly takes twenty minutes for the waters in the river to rise to a high level, causing panic among the people living close-by. There are no lamps to light the way for people wanting to flee to safe places; and there are no boats, not even makeshift ones, to carry them to safety from the flooded river. The water of the flooded cottages, and forcing the cottagers to take shelter on the rooftops which are still intact. The men find themselves in a precarious position on the rooftops. A buffalo gets drowned, and its dead body rises to the surface of the water. It takes three days for the flood to subside; and during these three days the men on the rooftops remain hungry, while those of the cattle, which are still alive, have not been milked during this time.

Rescue boats arrive to take the people to safety and to provide them with food. The children are cheerful enough (because they do not comprehend the danger which they have been facing. Then men do not indulge in curses or in any crazy kind of talk because they are familiar with the behaviour of this river. They do, not even pray to God for help because they know that the prayers in this situation are futile. Camps have been set up to distribute food among the villagers, while ten miles away from the scene of destruction peasants go about catching fish from the flooded rice-fields while women in chauffeur-driven cars come from the city to take a look at what the flood had done to the village people, and to witness the stuff which the river-water had deposited on the land nearby.

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.

“Fire Hymn” centres round two incidents, each of which led the poet to form a certain resolve. The first incident occurred when the poet was yet a boy. Walking along the river-bank in the company their dead, the boy saw the red-hot embers still glowing, many hours after a dead body had been cremated. But what attracted the father’s attention was the half-burnt fingers of the dead body. Pointing to those half-burnt fingers, the father told the boy that sometimes the fire failed to perform its task fully and that, as a consequence, some limb or portion of a limb remained only half-burnt.

On seeing those half-burnt fingers to which his attention had been drawn by his father the boy felt somewhat depressed. As a Parsi and a follower of Zoroaster, the boy felt pained by the thought that the fire, of which he was a worshipper because of his Parsi religion, sometimes failed to perform its function fully.

Clenching his fist, he swore that he would never again allow the fire to commit the sin of forgetting its function.

The poem deviates from the prescribed Parsi ritual subsequently the poet never again came across any case of the fire having failed to consume a dead body fully. In the meanwhile he had grown up into a man and had got married. Twenty years had passed since his father had drawn his own first-born child was dead.

According to the Parsi custom, the dead body should have been exposed on a raised structure known as the Tower of Silence to be eaten up by birds of prey; but the nearest such place was about a thousand miles away. The poet was therefore compelled to have his child cremated. When the dead body was consigned to the fire, the poet heard the fire telling him that he was forgiven for having committed a sin by violating the Parsi code. In other words, the fire forgave the poet for not exposing the dead child to the vultures. But the poet could not forgive himself for having deviated from the Parsi code of conduct; and he therefore felt that the fire had this time committed another sin. Now its sin was that it had forgiven him for his violation of the Parsi code. What the poet means to say is that, even if the Tower of Silence was situated a thousand miles away, he should have carried out the Parsi ritual instead of having adopted an alternative method of disposing of the dead child.

The title of, "Routine" shows that the incident described here is one of a routine nature, with nothing extraordinary or exceptional about it. The poem describes a confrontation between a platoon of policemen and a large crowd of agitators. The policemen wore putties which made them feel that their legs were burning. The helmets, which they wore on their heads, made them feel that their brains were on fire. As soon as the policemen arrived at the place, where the crowd had gathered to agitate and to indulge in violence, some of the members of the crowd standing along the way moved backwards; but this movement was no indication of their being peaceful citizens. From them came words of abuse which, however, the policemen ignored because they were accustomed to all kinds of filthy abuse from a crowd of agitators bent upon violence.

One of the senior policemen, who walked side by side with his boss (probably the police superintendent), expressed his total disgust with the agitators who were all young men in their teens. This policeman, by the name of Karam Singh, said that even his children were older than these agitators who had not yet attained the age of puberty. The young agitators were ready to set fire to the tram-cars but they would have been equally happy if they could burn the policemen themselves. As for the policemen, they already had a feeling that their legs, covered with putties, were on fire.

What actually happened had fully been expected. The happening was merely a routine affair. Such an incident had taken place many times before, and it had, therefore, been well rehearsed. As the mob did not disperse, the police officer ordered his men to load their guns, and they obeyed. He then pointed his own gun at the crowd, and ordered the policemen to fire. As he had fired his gun into the crowd, one of the men in the mob was hit and fell down dead. The policemen, as on past such occasions, had fired only into the air.

The Salvage Squad then arrived and took the dead body to the mortuary for purposes of the usual post-mortem examination. This Squad also took away the tram-car which had been burnt by the mob.

Eventually the officer and his men marched back to their headquarters. In the evening one of the leaders of the agitators said on the radio that they were marching forward and would continue to march till they achieved their aim.

“Death of a Bird” describes a hunting expedition. The narrator of the story is the hunter himself; and he had a female companion with him. When the man and the woman entered the forest, it so happened that a male bird and a female bird were engaged in a sexual act, and their manner of mating was fierce and violent.

The birds attacked each other with their claws, and they screamed even as they continued with their act of love-making. The female bird seemed timid and, therefore, something of a nonentity, while the male bird was aggressive and fierce, and seemed to be the master of the situation. The male bird was, in fact, the king. The man, who carried a gun, took aim at the male bird and fired. The bird fell down to the ground, almost dead though not actually dead because its heart was still throbbing. The man and his companion picked up the dying bird and deposited it into a bag which they were carrying for the purpose. The female bird, though

not hit, was badly frightened and, feeling terrified and uttering cries, flew away from the crag where the pair had been engaged in the act of love-making.

The man and the woman walked on, after having killed the bird and having thus committed what could be regarded as a sin. The sky was being covered by mist, and the hunters somehow felt their footsteps slowing down. Clouds were gathering on the crags. As their pony was also walking slowly, the man and the woman gave it a push to quicken its pace. But the pony lost its balance and fell down into a gorge a thousand feet below where a river flowed, making a loud noise as it flowed.

The pony screamed in pain as it fell down into the river; and, while it was killed by the fall, its scream had climbed up to where the man and his companion stood in a state of horror at the accident which had taken place. The man and the woman resumed their journey though they were now feeling very depressed.

Evening had now fallen, and the wayfarers were overtaken by darkness. There were bears in the forest, and there were jackals too. The man fired his gun at the bushes and the thick growth behind which he thought bears lurked, waiting to attack them. But he missed the aim each time. When the jackals howled, the woman asked if they were wolves. But the man made no reply and simply took her hand in his and walked on towards a cave which was enclosed by pine trees and where there was less danger. They might not have been able to find this cave if they had not seen a growling dog which had been left behind by the resin-tapers to guard their cans containing the resin already collected by them. Nearby they saw more and more of mist spreading and thickening.

As the woman was now feeling very cold, the man lighted a fire, using dry grass and the dung of animals. He also rubbed her sides and feet in order to warm her. Their limbs came into a close contact, but for some reason they inwardly felt somewhat apprehensive.

Then they got ready to shoot one more bird, their last. Neither of them had at this time any sense of guilt because they thought that neither the scream of the pony, nor the death of a bird, nor the prowling bears at whom bullets had been fired, represented any sinful acts committed by them. Both were at this time guiltfree. The woman was now resting her head upon the man's chest. With her hair held tightly by him in his hand, she fell asleep. The night was advancing towards its climax. The moon made its appearance for an hour or two. The wings of the dead bird looked dark. The wolves seem to have vanished; and so did the mist.

The man and the woman would have continued to dream of peace and of love if a wind had not begun to blow. The wind seemed to cause a great disturbance in the night. The loud sound of the wind could be compared to the loud moaning of a witch in pain.

The man broke his gun into two towards the dawn. A brown-coloured bird rose from the crags, flying with force and, as it passed over the heads of the man and the woman, it shrieked with fear and fell down to the ground, dead. It fell at the feet of the man and the woman; and the woman said that this bird was the mate of the one which they had shot at the very outset. She expressed the view that now a curse would overtake them. She pointed to the eyes of the dead bird (or perhaps the dying bird) to indicate that its eyes were still terror-stricken.

The poet has a feeling that some kind of violence is going to take place. The violence would be caused by the mutual hatred which prevails between two different groups of people. The poet goes about looking for the places where this violence might break out. Violence would lead to killings; and the poet looks for the possible places where death might raise its head.

“Ruminations” is a study of communal tension resulting in violence and suffering. The poet has an apprehension of the outbreak of violence, caused by mutual hatred and wants of tolerance and understanding between two communal groups in the future. The poet then speaks about the mortuary where the persons killed in violence would be taken and kept for post-mortem or for identification by the relatives who would naturally like to take away those dead bodies in order to bury them or cremate them as the case might be. If kept in a mortuary even for a few days, a dead body begins to stink because of the decomposition which takes place. Not even the sweet –smelling substances like rose-water and flowers can drown that foul smell. There is, in the mortuary, the dead body of a woman whose husband had cut off her nose on a suspicion of her having adulterous relations with another man. After having cut off her nose he had even stabbed her in her breast, thus puncturing her lungs.

Man, says the poet, can adjust himself to difference conditions. For instance, a dead man, if buried in the earth, remains there firmly. If the same man were to be cremated, he would allow the fire to consume him quickly. If the dead body were thrown to the birds (like the vultures and the kites), he would let his flesh be eaten up without any delay.

When the rain comes, it transforms everything, giving a fresh look to the trees, plants, and the hedge, and washing away all the dust which lay upon them. The poet too waits to be

freshened by the rain. He waits for a feeling that he too has been “cleansed”. However, he waits for that feeling in vain because it never comes to him. It seems that this feeling used to come to him only in the past, and that it would never come to him again.

This poem describes a situation in which a drowning man is rescued by a fisher-girl. There are times when the current of a river is very brisk and swift; and there are times when the flow of the water is so slow that one cannot even judge in which direction the river is flowing. But whatever the season, a river has always to be crossed. Sometimes a man may cross a river on foot because the water is hardly waist-deep or because the surface of the water is almost in contact with the mud at the bottom. Sometimes the current of water is so tranquil that it hardly seems to be moving and you have to ask the boatman which way the current of water is going.

“Crossing of Rivers” is about a young man rescued by a fisher girl. There are occasions when young blood seeks excitement and adventure. On such an occasion a young man may jump into the river and, if he finds it difficult to swim, he may catch hold of the tail of a fat-bodied buffalo to keep himself afloat. If a fisher-girl happens to see this man struggling to keep himself afloat, she would scream in order to attract somebody else’s attention to his predicament. She may see his head alternatively rising above the surface of the water and sinking below it like a coconut. The fisher-girl may then quickly swim towards him and give him a push towards the river-bank. By this time a group of people may have gathered on the river-bank in response to the alarm which had been raised by the fisher-girl. The fisher-girl would then ask the crowd to move back a few steps so as to let the rescued man breathe properly. She would fan his face in order to make some more oxygen available to him. She may even wipe off the froth from his mouth. And, when he opens his eyes and looks into the distance, he may not even be able to see the rock from which he had taken the plunge into the river. (He has, in any case, crossed the river all right even though he had been on the verge of drowning). This poem describes a situation in which a man faces a danger though the danger is ultimately averted by the initiative taken by a fisher-girl. The poetry of Daruwalla has been described as the poetry of action and incident. In this poem we have both incident and action. The first one-third of this short poem is just an introduction to the main situation which forms the substance of the poem. Then the incident happens. A young fellow, seeking excitement, jumps into the river to prove his mettle. However, he finds himself in grave danger because he cannot cope with the fast current of the water. He would have been drowned if it had not

been for the initiative taken by a fisher-girl who had, by a sheer chance, caught notice of his head bobbing up and down in the water like a coconut.

Daruwalla wrote a poem on English language. Here is an interesting poem about the English language as it has developed in India. Daruwalla has evidently written this poem because of a common feeling among the well-educated Indians that the Indian poets should not write poetry through the medium of the English language because it is a foreign language and because true poetry can be written only in one's native language. In fact, there has been a regular controversy and a heated debate among the English-knowing people in India regarding the suitability of the English language as a medium for the writing of poetry by the Indians. Fortunately, English is now well-established in this country as a medium for the writing poetry by the Indians; and this kind of poetry has come to be known as "Indo\_Anglian" poetry, with the writers of this kind of poetry being known as "Indo-Anglian" poets. Daruwalls is himself an Indo-Anglian poet; and he has here written a satirical poem with regard to the language which he himself employs in the writing of his poems. And he is surely one of the leading Indo-Anglian poets.

Daruwalls jokingly assigns to the English language as spoken and as written in this country the label "my mistress"; and he says that his mistress comes from a family in which the blood of several races and religions has mingled, and to which babus and professors of English have also made their contributions –

"One-Night Contributions", as he puts it.

His mistress, says Daruwalls, can easily be recognized by the way in which she speaks her consonants. She speaks the consonants (as distinguished from the vowels) in such a manner that he feels as if she had given him a severe blow. Her jargon and her latest slang are available in dictionaries; and she speaks as if she had tried to sob but been prevented from doing so by some impediment in her throat. In the mornings her mouth feels sour because of the dreams which had been brewing (or taking shape) in her head during the night. His love for her survives from night to night even though he has to toil hard to continue loving her.

People recognize her even in the streets; and they hiss at her in disapproval at the way she behaves. Despite all this, his mistress, Daruwalla goes on to say, is a showy type of person who wears cheap but gaudy jewellery. She wears imitation jewellery, and she wears high heels even though her feet are covered with henna up to the ankles. As for food, she does not

stick to the ordinary, common dish which is made from potatoes. She is westernized in her tastes, and asks for roasted meat and grilled pomfrets. She makes no reference at all to the intoxicating drink which her father used to extract from cashew-nuts. She is not Angelo-Indian, says Daruwalla. If the Demellos were to come to know about her, they would deal with him very severely. She is not Goan, nor a Christian from Syria. She is Indian English, which is the language that Daruwalla himself makes use of.

The King tells the scribe that he wishes his readers to draw from this historical record the lesson of humility from what had happened. There is no question of any pride in him now when he wants these events to be recorded. There has been a lot of bloodshed, he says; and the lesson to be drawn from it has to be inscribed on rocks so that it may acquire a permanent life and an enduring validity.

Nothing can save the persons who perpetrated this enormous slaughter. No purpose would be served by framing a law of piety; and no purpose would be served by teaching the people now that good deeds are difficult to perform while misdeeds are easy. Also there would be no point in making any reference to the austerity measures which must now be adopted in his palace. The time of lavish feasting and merry-making is over. The king directs the scribe not to fail to describe the sorrows caused by military victories and the misfortunes which result from the enslavement of the conquered people. In every land there live people of all classes. Every class and every caste carves out its own path and cannot be made to change its ways. The scribe must not only describe the destruction and the slaughter which have taken place but also the separations of people from those whom they loved or who loved them.

The king speaks to the scribe in a mood of great sorrow. He says that he is almost on the verge of despair. He has now completely given up his pride and has adopted humility as his guiding principle. He would therefore urge the tribals to desist from crime and from violence. He would call upon the tribals to cooperate with him and to join him in his efforts to establish friendly relations and to maintain peace in the country.

Finally, the King asks the scribe to write down these things on some hard and imperishable stone; and he also asks him to write the whole thing in simple language so that even the backward and illiterate people living in the jungles may be able to understand it. The people have become very poor so that they do not have enough fuel even to cremate their dead; and there are homes where people have no fuel even to cremate their dead; and there are homes

where people have no fuel even for the purpose of cooking food. The scribe must write in a style which can reach the minds of the people and touch their hearts.

We have here a sombre, grim poem with plenty of moralizing. If we read it in the right mood, we would feel uplifted by it. There is a certain nobility about the King's words; and his message cannot fail to go home to our hearts. The pity of it is that many such words are spoken by moralists after every great catastrophe, and then forgotten soon afterwards. There have been great massacres; but the world has not ceased to kill and destroy. The conquest of Alexander the Great, the French Revolution, the two World Wars (in the Second of which nuclear bombs were used), the Russian Revolution came promptly to our minds at the mention of bloodshed and slaughter. And even today much bloodshed is taking place. Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, and several African countries are going through the misery of civil wars and, in the midst of all this destruction, the voices of sanity such as the King's in this poem are simply ignored. In any case, we have here a great poem in this sense that it raises certain basic issues with which mankind has always been faced, and which it has never been able to solve. Actually this poem has the force and eloquence of a great sermon. "The Unrest of Desire" is psychological. A strong desire makes a man somewhat uneasy. He may try to keep his desire hidden in his heart but it would manifest itself in some way through the expression in his eyes. The nature of his desire would not, of course, become known to anybody; but the fact that there is a desire in a man's heart would definitely become known to others who happen to see him and the expression in his eyes. A man may wear a mask or may throw some sort of disguise over the expression of his face, but he would not be able to mask the expression in his eyes.

A man may put his heart's desire under some heavy weight like that of a slab of cement or a large heap of bones, but his eyes would betray the fact that there is a desire in his heart. A man keep his mouth shut, but the desire in his heart would somehow escape his heart and enter his eyes and thus become visible.

A man may adopt any other methods which may occur to him to disguise the state of his heart, but it would still show itself in his eyes. A man may draw all sorts of pictures with a piece of charcoal on the walls of a cave in order to give a false representation of his desire; but it would never quit his heart and would even haunt him in his dreams.

This is a poem with a strong psychological interest. It describes a man's incapacity to suppress a desire or to keep it hidden under some assumed expression on his face. A desire

would never fail to manifest itself through the expression in a man's eyes. Of course anybody looking at such a man may not be able to understand or guess the nature of his desire, but he would definitely come to know that there is a desire in his heart. This fact would become known to him by his merely looking into the eyes of the man concerned. The eyes would provide some sort of evidence of the existence of a desire in the man's heart.

The idea expressed in this poem is an abstract one; but much concrete imagery has been used in the poem. Eyes manifesting the unrest of desire; a mask being thrust upon a face; the salt-blood being probed with an insistent tongue; a desire being pressed down with the weight of cement slabs or coils of bones; bison and stag being traced on a wall with charcoal – all these are concrete pictures to build up which the poet has used metaphorical language.

“Death by Burial” deals with a crime and judgement. For the past one month a batch of ruffians and evil-doers had been going stealthily into, and coming stealthily out of, the grove in which a faqir lived. The faqir was generally referred to as the “Baba”; and those men used to smoke ganja in the grove which they used as their hiding-place because smoking ganja was forbidden.

Nobody took any notice of this kind of illegal activity which consisted in smuggling a forbidden drug and smoking it. But then lawlessness took a more serious shape. Bandits or decoits attacked the village.

Some of them raped a village elder's daughter-in-law. Some snatched away the ear-rings of the women, thus not only taking away the ornaments but also wounding the women concerned. Some of them tortured an old woman in order to know from her where the cash of the family lay hidden, so that she had no choice but to tell them that the cash was hidden in the haystack (meaning a pile of dry grass or straw which is thatched on the top and on the sides for protection against storm and rain). The baba was not harmed in the least because he was, after all, a Baba and he was, besides, maintaining a silence-fast at that time. (It is quite possible that the Baba himself was a member of the gang of the drug-smugglers and that he only served as a sort of camouflage for the actual smugglers and ganja-smokers. In any case these bandits did not think it necessary to do any harm to him).

Two months later, the bandits made another attack on the village. There was a big outcry from the villagers. It so happened that the bandits had only one pistol, and this pistol too was a country-made one and, therefore, not very dependable. When the bandit with the pistol in

his hand fired at the villagers to scare them away, the pistol did not function at all, the result was, the villagers were able to overpower the bandits and capture them.

The bandits were a group of persons belonging to various occupations and trades. There was a Kalwar who manufactured country liquor. There was a cobbler. There was a Singhi who claimed that he could cure people's wounds by sucking a little of their blood. There was a Manihar who made bangles from lac. There was a sweeper who earned his living by carrying away unclaimed dead bodies in his bullock-cart. The villagers dealt with the bandits very severely. They first gave the evil-doers a sound thrashing. They rained lathi-blows on the backs of those men in order to teach them a lesson. But they did not stop there. They made up their minds to put an end to their lives. The villagers put the bandits into gunny-sacks alive, and sewed the mouths of the sacks. Then they got ready to put their prisoners to death. But now arose a dispute. There were Hindus among the villagers, and there were Muslims among them too. Actually, half of them were Hindus and the other half were Muslims. The Hindus declared that the prisoners would be buried in the earth in their sacks. The argument on both sides became heated and developed into a regular fight. In fact, a communal riot broke out in the village.

We may imagine, of course, that in the violence which followed, the prisoners must have made good their escape, leaving the villagers to settle the matter in their own way.

This poem depicts the evil of bribery which is rampant in this country today, and which has now gone far beyond the dimensions which it had in the days when Daruwalla wrote this poem. Daruwalla begins this 23 poem with a brief picture of a court official who sits outside the court premises to draft documents requiring a magistrate's attestation to acquire a legal validity. The narrator in this poem who may be Daruwalla himself or somebody else knowing the procedures by means of which illegal documents may be turned into legal ones. There are all sorts of methods even to change the very facts of a case by re-writing them and having them attested by a magistrate through his clerk whom the magistrate has necessarily to trust. The narrator says that he has to take out some money from his pocket in order to hand it over to the notary or the scribe who is to draft a particular document and then have it attested by the competent authority. The notary or scribe in this poem is evidently a bribe-taker, though he may not be given to any other bad habits. He may not be a habitual drinker; he may not have any desire to seduce women who want any false documents; and he may not be a

gambler. He may even be a handsome, polite family-man whose wife thinks that he works overtime in order to make some extra money for her and the children.

Dishonesty takes many forms, says the narrator in this poem. A dishonest man may adulterate oils; he may make tablets of chalk and sell them as medicinal tablets to cure certain diseases; he may sell meat which has already become infected and, therefore, dangerous; he may sell stale and stinking fish. That is not all. If a priest is given enough bribe, he would perform some sort of virtual in order to declare even the child of an illicit sexual union as a perfectly legitimate child. The priest may even perform a marriage ceremony between a non-Jew with the daughter of a Jewish priest. And the pity of it all is that it is not only the bad-looking fellows who indulge in such corrupt practices; corrupt practices prevail among even those who would normally perform good deeds such as stopping their cars in order to stop a fight going on between a couple of youngsters. There are people considerate enough not to insist on having a sexual intercourse with wives who are not well enough for the purpose. Even such decent chaps do not shrink from adopting dishonest and corrupt methods to achieve their ends. A dishonest transaction is not the only form of corruption. A man may have a certain dignity about him; and he may create a favourable impression by his looks and his demeanour. But he may actually be a corrupt fellow, willing to accept a bribe to carry out a foul task in order to benefit the bribe giver. The bribetakers are men without any conscience. They do not feel deterred by the fear of consequences. Their destiny is, in their opinion, already inscribed on the lines of their palms which indicate their long lives and the large number of children which they would beget. Saturn and Jupiter seem to be favourable towards them, and the mere acceptance of bribes by them would not alter their destiny which seems to be favourable to them in every conceivable way.

This poem contains a satirical description of a well-known region of this country. The prominent features of this region have been pinpointed and emphasized in such a way that the region acquires an identity of its own, a character of its own, and even a personality of its own. Of course, the region is not here in anyway glorified or even eulogized. The poem is permeated by a lot of irony which amuses us by indirectly drawing our attention to the unpleasant features and the seamy side of the region.

The hog-deer, the elephant-grass, and malaria in the kidneys have all disappeared from this region. Cattle-fairs are held in mango-groves; and small towns are not only coming into existence but also becoming over-populated, with insanitary conditions beginning to prevail.

It seems that the earth in this region is in a state of morbid excitement and that the scenery here is becoming more and more dissatisfied with itself. The hum of insects is becoming louder and louder, thus indicating that the insect-population is on the increase.

The roads, or what passes for roads, have become uneven and rough so that the motor vehicles skid as they run. Termites are clearly visible in the light shed by the headlights of the motor-cars or motor-trucks. This is a region in which there is no scarcity of bandits who go about robbing women of their ornaments. The bandits are devoid of all mercy and would not mind cutting off a woman's finger in order to remove a gold-ring from it if the gold ring cannot easily be pulled off. As most of the women are suffering from gout or elephantiasis (which makes the limbs swell to extraordinary proportions), it is really difficult to remove the rings without cutting off the fingers. Similarly it is difficult to remove a gold necklace from a woman's neck when she is suffering from goitre. Robberies are indeed the order of the day.

The district of Tarai is not altogether bad. It has its bright side. If you are traveling by a car and have to cross the river Ghaghra, the ferry would take both you and the car across the river. The town of Tarai has an ice factory so that you can be sure of getting cold water to drink. There is even a washerman available in the official guest-house where you may have to stay. However, it would not be desirable for you to have your bush-shirts starched because the starch will not remain on the bush-shirts long enough. The bush-shirts would soon become limp, losing all their stiffness. They would also begin to give out a bad smell like which comes from an Insemination Centre.

The persons sleeping in the room next to yours would think you to be a conceited or haughty type of man. They would think you to be haughty not because you drink beer or play squash but because they would see you sleeping naked under a ceiling fan. They have a notion that you cannot make love if you have smeared your body with odomos to keep away the mosquitoes. Being accustomed to mosquito-bites, they expect you also to adjust yourself to the situation. The signs of modernity are clearly visible. Ravi Shankar is a great musician in the older tradition but he is now surrounded by the modernist followers of the kind of dancing known as "rock and roll". The traditional forms of spiritual meditation may not have yet been discarded completely but the disciples of

Maharisi Mahesh, the founder of transcendental meditation, is growing in numbers. And then, of course, there are the followers of the kind of singing, accompanied by frantic gesticulation,

brought into fashion by the group of singers who came to be known as the Beatles. However, all these so-called modernists do not represent any real advance in the field of dancing and music. On the contrary, these idiots can learn a lot from tradition. The feeling of exultation and frenzy, which they display is very similar to that which was evinced by the Indian people when the Nobel Prize for literature was conferred upon Rabindranath Tagore.

After having made these satirical reference to the notions of modernity which have gained currency, Daruwalla says that he feels simply overwhelmed by the kind of fervour displayed by some of the newly established organizations like the ones who find great significance in the Bhagawad Gita (one of the sacred books of the Hindus) and the message of peace which it has to deliver to its followers. He feels much impressed also by the new cult of the westerners who have started wearing the Indian garment known as the “dhoti” and who spend much time in producing the loud sounds which are caused by the clashing of cymbals and invoking sacred name of the Cow (which is worshipped by the Hindus and the sacred name of Krishna (who is regarded by the Hindus as an incarnation of God). In the same breath the poet invokes hemp which is habitually smoked by the Hindu sadhus and ascetics to keep themselves in a state of intoxication.

The poet goes on to say, in the same satirical vein, that the Indians have undoubtedly achieved a good deal during this phase of their development. They have abolished zamindari or landlordism by reducing to the minimum the land which any one land-owner may possess. They have passed laws proclaiming prohibition as one of their basic policies; and they have done away with the English language as the medium of their administrative work and as the medium of all their official communications. They have even passed laws to abolish prostitution, thus driving the prostitutes out of their business without providing them with any alternative mode of earning their livelihood.

These are not the only achievements of the Indian people since the attainment of freedom. They also perform such generous acts as releasing a considerable number of prisoners- men who had been put behind the bars for having committed robberies and rapes – on the occasion of the Republic Day as a mark of their national rejoicing. They have even promised to reduce the jail sentences of such anti-social elements as pimps, homosexuals, and the writers of poetry.

A move has also been made towards the establishment of electric crematoriums where unclaimed dead bodies can be cremated. This is a commendable move comparable to the

opening of a new sewer which could suitably have been named as “the sewer of hope”. It is also possible that some day the sun would refuse to shed its light to show the way to the lepers. After all, India is a great country in which a man’s left hand is regarded as unholy because it is used (by the Hindus) to wash their bottoms (after they have visited the toilet).

India is a great country in other ways also. Here a distinction is made between the destiny of an individual and the destiny of the nation as a whole. Here a horoscope to foretell the future course of the life on an individual is prepared soon after the birth of a child. However, this horoscope tells only half the truth because it foretells the destiny of only the individual and remains silent so far as the destiny of the nation is concerned. A constant rise in prices and a frequent increase in taxes are among the chronic features of the life of the nation as a whole; but such disastrous possibilities find no mention at all in the horoscope of the individuals.

India is a country so corrupt that, if plague were to break out here in an epidemic form, and if medical researchers needed live rats in order to make experiments with the object of finding an anti-plague serum, the rats would begin to be sold at high prices in the black market.

(Plague breaks out among human beings after it has first broken out among the rats; and so the rats would be needed by the medical researchers to perform experiments in an effort to find a remedy against plague).

“The People” depicts the author’s disillusionment with his country. “Mother” here stands for the Motherland; and, after a preliminary confession that he had lost his nerve and his confidence in himself and in his country, Daruwalla describes his encounter with his mother (Meaning his motherland which is personified here).

From the third stanza onwards, Daruwalla speaks to his motherland as if she could listen to him and take notice of what he feels about his country. He says that the face of his mother (or Motherland) resembled a shattered mirror in which he could not see his face. In other words, the poet felt that he had lost his identity as an Indian. Unfortunately the rains had failed in his country, and people had begun to starve on account of the shortage of food. Starvation reduced many people to skeletons so that their armlets could not stay where they should have stayed on their arms.

The poet then says that the sorry state of affairs in the country had made the motherland so unhappy that she had been shedding tears. To the poet, the motherland looks like a floating foetus lying on a bed infested with larvae (or germs of all kinds). All flesh is subject to

corruption; and the flesh of even the living human beings in this country has begun to decompose so that it has begun to smell of decay and corruption.

The mother (or the motherland) can see all this but she only smiles; and there is nothing but blankness or idiocy in that smile. The mother has lost that magic recipe by means of which she used to keep herself happy by keeping her sons and children happy. The mother is today no better than an empty slogan walking through an empty street, with the walls tarred with slogans. In other words, there is a lot of slogan-shouting in the country but no constructive work being done.

The poet then says that he would like to lose his vision rather than witness the mother, bruised and wounded, dragging herself to the holy city of Benares to die. In other words, the poet would rather become blind than see his country going to the dogs and degrading itself. Finally, the poet says that he has no need to read the pessimistic philosophy of Kafka or to read such depressing works as T.S. Eliot's poem, 'The Waste Land' when he can see his humbled and humiliated mother before him. The mother (meaning the country) presents a huge and vast spectacle of frustration, desolation, and despair. Daruwalla is, on the whole, a pessimistic poet; and Collage II: Mother is one of his most pessimistic poems. This poem depicts India as a country in which poverty, ill-health, starvation, and defeatism prevail on a large scale, and in which no constructive work is being done. The country has failed to register any improvement or to make any progress on the economic front. The spectacle of this country reminds him of such pessimistic foreign writers as Sartre, Kafka, and T.S. Eliot. We certainly agree with Daruwalla's analysis of the situation in this country. Daruwalla has shown a lot of courage in thus exposing the weakness and shortcomings of his country. Besides, the language which he has used to describe the situation in this country is very forceful and emphatic. Indeed, he has gone to the extreme in using similes and metaphors which describe the sad state of affairs in this country.

## Conclusion

Keki N. Daruwalla's poetry contributed in a significant way for the growth of Indian Poetry in English. He almost outsmarts most of the Indian poets. The exceptions may be one or two. Ezekiel may come close to Daruwalla. Even at times he could outwit Daruwalla. The study has found that the poetic of Daruwalla is unmatched. Nissim Ezekiel's contributions to Indian Writing in English especially, verse is remarkable. He had enriched Indian Poetry in English through his range and craftsmanship. His poems have thrived to bring the under current of

Indian life. His corpus of poems has echoed the Indian spirit and its sensibility. His poems are deeply rooted in Indian idiom. As an individual he would oppose anything which he considers defames Indian ethos. As an individual he was against certain vested interests of Western origin which demeaned Indian life deliberately for political reasons. At the same time he is not against any sincere portrayal of Indian reality. The poetry of A. K. Ramanujan not only reflects the Indian ethos but also it is capable of presenting various themes in a condensed and expansive form. His poem has the inner layers or hidden layers of meaning. His poems are unusual and they present the stark reality of human existence. Another aspect of his poem is intertextuality. Most of his poems have links to each other. His poems are very much influenced by Tamil poetics. A. K. Ramanujan's poems are the quintessence of modern Indian poetry in English. The poetry of Dom Moraes is not limited to narrow socio cultural realms. His poems are rooted in his individualistic emotions and concerns. His works are preoccupied with a sense of despair. His images are expressions are sharp. In the words of Michael Schmidt, he is a "poet and writer who rejected narrow cultural identity" (31). His poems are not rooted in any cultural milieu but rooted in his emotional and psychological impact caused by his personal traits. His poems are catholic in spirit though based on his emotional travails and at the same time his poems are not self praising or self centred. It goes beyond his self. Unlike A. K. Ramanujan, Dom Moraes is a monoglot. He wrote only in English. Mahapatra's poetic world is filled with personal pain, guilt, remorse, hunger, desire and moments of renewal, his environment is filled with symbols of beliefs by the ordinary lives of the people of Cuttack the temples, the Hindu festivals and the monuments. The poems are varied attempts to bridge an epistemological, phenomenological gap to know, to be part of, to enclose and to experience with the world and other whether it is a woman, temple stone or a Hindu priest. Kamala Das's poetry is marked for the essence of eroticism. Her exploration of women's needs is in fact an attention to eroticism. Das makes no attempt to hide the sensuality of the human form. Her work seems to celebrate the joyous potential of sex while acknowledging its concurrent dangers. As a confessional poet Kamala Das's art is rooted in the feminine sensibility and sensuality. The poem of R. Parthasarathy was born very much out of frustration and despair. His poem is modern in its sensibility and expression. In a way the predicament of modern man is visible in the works of Parthasarathy. His works are sensitive towards racial prejudice. The conflict in him is presented through some of his poems. Keki N. Daruwalla's poetry is of immense importance in comparison with other poets of eminence. Daruwalla has become a tour de force of Indian poetry in English.

## 6. Questions

1. Give an account of the various types of imagery found in Daruwalla's works.
2. Highlight Daruwalla's contribution to Indian Literature.
3. Write short notes on:
  - a) Themes in Daruwalla's works
  - b) Symbols in Daruwalla's works
4. Analyse the poem *Hawk* with quotation and explanation of important lines.

## 7. Further Reading

### Books

*Under Orion*. Writers Workshop, India, 1970

*Apparition in April*. Writers Workshop, 1971.

*Sword & abyss: a collection of short stories*. Vikas Pub., 1979.

*Winter poems*. Allied Publishers, 1980.

*The Keeper of the Dead*. Oxford University Press, 1982.

*Crossing of rivers*. Oxford Univ. Press, 1985.

*Landscapes*. Oxford University Press, 1987.

*A summer of tigers: poems*. Indus, 1995.

*The Minister for Permanent unrest & other stories*. Orient Blackswan, 1996.

*Night river: poems*. Rupa & Co., 2000.

*The Map-maker: Poems*. Orient Blackswan, 2002.

*The Scarecrow and the Ghost*. Rupa & Co., 2004.

*A House in Ranikhet*. Rupa & Co, 2003.

*Collected Poems ( 1970-2005)*. (Poetry in English). Penguin Books India., 2006.

## **Paper-XXI. Contemporary Indian Writing in English-I**

### **Unit- 4. Kamala Das**

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

1.2 Biographical sketch of Kamala Das

1.3 Famous works of Kamala Das

1.4 Kamala Das' style of writing

2. Themes, Outlines and Symbols

2.1 Major themes and outlines

2.2 Symbols

3. Summary and analysis of *A Hot Noon in Malabar*

4. Summary and analysis of *My Grandmother's House*

5. Kamala Das' contribution to Indian Literature

6. Questions

7. Further Reading

## 1.1 Objective

This Unit provides a biographical sketch of Kamala Das, some of her famous poems and her general style of writing poetry followed by a detailed discussion about its themes and outlines. It also includes the summary and analysis of her two poems, *A Hot Noon in Malabar* and *My Grandmother's House*. It is then followed by a discussion about Das' contribution to Indian Literature. This unit concludes with a set of questions and a list of further readings of Kamala Das to gain knowledge about the critical aspects of her works.

## 1.2 Biographical sketch of Kamala Das

Kamala Das, was a major Indian English poet and *littérateur* and at the same time a leading Malayalam author from Kerala, India. Her popularity in Kerala is based chiefly on her short stories and autobiography, while her oeuvre in English, written under the name Kamala Das, is noted for the fiery poems and explicit autobiography.

Her open and honest treatment of female sexuality, free from any sense of guilt, infused her writing with power, but also marked her as an iconoclast in her generation. On 31 May 2009, aged 75, she died at a hospital in Pune, but has earned considerable respect in recent years.

### Early Life

Kamala Das was born in Punnayurkulam, Thrissur District in Kerala, on March 31, 1934, to V. M. Nair, a former managing editor of the widely-circulated Malayalam daily *Mathrubhumi*, and Nalappatt Balamani Amma, a renowned Malayali poetess.

She spent her childhood between Calcutta, where her father was employed as a senior officer in the Walford Transport Company that sold Bentley and Rolls Royce automobiles, and the Nalappatt ancestral home in Punnayurkulam.

Like her mother, Kamala Das also excelled in writing. Her love of poetry began at an early age through the influence of her great uncle, Nalappatt Narayana Menon, a prominent writer.

At the age of 15, she got married to bank officer Madhava Das, who encouraged her writing interests, and she started writing and publishing both in English and in Malayalam. Calcutta

in the 1960s was a tumultuous time for the arts, and Kamala Das was one of the many voices that came up and started appearing in cult anthologies along with a generation of Indian English poets.

### Literary Career

She was noted for her many Malayalam short stories as well as many poems written in English. Das was also a syndicated columnist. She once claimed that "poetry does not sell in this country [India]", but her forthright columns, which sounded off on everything from women's issues and child care to politics, were popular.

Das' first book of poetry, *Summer In Calcutta* was a breath of fresh air in Indian English poetry. She wrote chiefly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent anguish. Ms. Das abandoned the certainties offered by an archaic, and somewhat sterile, aestheticism for an independence of mind and body at a time when Indian poets were still governed by "19th-century diction, sentiment and romanticised love." Her second book of poetry, *The Descendants* was even more explicit, urging women to:

"Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,  
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your  
Endless female hungers ..." - *The Looking Glass*

This directness of her voice led to comparisons with Marguerite Duras and Sylvia Plath

At the age of 42, she published a daring autobiography, *My Story*; it was originally written in Malayalam and later she translated it into English. Later she admitted that much of the autobiography had fictional elements.

Kamala Das wrote on a diverse range of topics, often disparate- from the story of a poor old servant, about the sexual disposition of upper middle class women living near a metropolitan city or in the middle of the ghetto. Some of her better-known stories include *Pakshiyude Manam*, *Neypayagam*, *Thanuppu*, and *Chandana Marangal*. She wrote a few novels, out of which *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam*, which was received favourably by the reading public as

well as the critics, stands out.

She travelled extensively to read poetry to Germany's University of Duisburg-Essen, University of Bonn and University of Duisburg universities, Adelaide Writer's Festival , Frankfurt Book Fair, University of Kingston, Jamaica, Singapore, and South Bank Festival (London), Concordia University (Montreal, Canada), etc. Her works are available in French, Spanish, Russian, German and Japanese.

She has also held positions as Vice chairperson in Kerala Sahitya Academy, chairperson in Kerala forestry Board, President of the Kerala Children's Film Society, editor of Poet magazine[6] and Poetry editor of Illustrated Weekly of India.

Although occasionally seen as an attention-grabber in her early years, she is now seen as one of the most formative influences on Indian English poetry. In 2009, The Times called her "the mother of modern English Indian poetry".

#### Conversion to Islam

She was born in a conservative Hindu Nair (Nallappattu) family having royal ancestry, After being asked by her lover Sadiq Ali, an Islamic scholar and a Muslim League MP, she embraced Islam in 1999 at the age of 65 and assumed the name Kamala Surayya.

After converting, she wrote:

"Life has changed for me since Nov. 14 when a young man named Sadiq Ali walked in to meet me. He is 38 and has a beautiful smile. Afterwards he began to woo me on the phone from Abu Dhabi and Dubai, reciting Urdu couplets and telling me of what he would do to me after our marriage. I took my nurse Mini and went to his place in my car. I stayed with him for three days. There was a sunlit river, some trees, and a lot of laughter. He asked me to become a Muslim which I did on my return home." (- Merrily Weisbord)

Her conversion was rather controversial, among social and literary circles, with The Hindu calling it part of her "histrionics". She said she liked being behind the protective veil of the purdah. Later, she felt it was not worth it to change one's religion and said "I fell in love with

a Muslim after my husband's death. He was kind and generous in the beginning. But I now feel one shouldn't change one's religion. It is not worth it."

### Politics

Though never politically active before, she launched a national political party, Lok Seva Party, aiming asylum to orphaned mothers and promotion of secularism. In 1984 she unsuccessfully contested in the Indian Parliament elections.

### Personal Life

Kamala Das had three sons - M D Nalapat, Chinnen Das and Jayasurya Das. Madhav Das Nalapat, the eldest, is married to Princess Lakshmi Bayi (daughter of M.R.Ry. Sri Chembrol Raja Raja Varma Avargal) from the Travancore Royal House. He holds the UNESCO Peace Chair and Professor of geopolitics at the Manipal Academy of Higher Education. He was formerly a resident editor of the Times of India.

She had a sexual relationship with Sadiq Ali, an Islamic scholar who was much younger in age. She herself describes her visit to Sadiq Ali's home as follows:

"I was almost asleep when Sadiq Ali climbed in beside me, holding me, breathing softly, whispering endearments, kissing my face, breasts ... and when he entered me, it was the first time I had ever experienced what it was like to feel a man from the inside." (- Merrily Weisbord)

### Womanhood in her Poetry

Das' uncanny honesty extends to her exploration of womanhood and love. In her poem "An Introduction" from *Summer in Calcutta*, the narrator says, "I am every/ Woman who seeks love" (de Souza 10). Though Amar Dwivedi criticizes Das for this "self imposed and not natural" universality, this feeling of oneness permeates her poetry (303). In Das' eyes, womanhood involves certain collective experiences. Indian women, however, do not discuss these experiences in deference to social mores. Das consistently refuses to accept their silence. Feelings of longing and loss are not confined to a private misery. They are invited

into the public sphere and acknowledged. Das seems to insist they are normal and have been felt by women across time. In "The Maggots" from the collection, *The Descendants*, Das corroborates just how old the sufferings of women are. She frames the pain of lost love with ancient Hindu myths (de Souza 13). On their last night together, Krishna asks Radha if she is disturbed by his kisses. Radha says, "No, not at all, but thought, What is/ It to the corpse if the maggots nip?" (de Souza 6-7). Radha's pain is searing, and her silence is given voice by Das. Furthermore, by making a powerful goddess prey to such thoughts, it serves as a validation for ordinary women to have similar feelings.

### Eroticism in her Poetry

Coupled with her exploration of women's needs is an attention to eroticism. The longing to lose one's self in passionate love is discussed in "The Looking Glass" from *The Descendants*. The narrator of the poem urges women to give their man "what makes you women" (de Souza 15). The things which society suggests are dirty or taboo are the very things which the women are supposed to give. The "musk of sweat between breasts/ The warm shock of menstrual blood" should not be hidden from one's beloved. In the narrator's eyes, love should be defined by this type of unconditional honesty. A woman should "Stand nude before the glass with him," and allow her lover to see her exactly as she is. Likewise, the woman should appreciate even the "fond details" of her lover, such as "the jerky way he/ Urinates". Even if the woman may have to live "Without him" someday, the narrator does not seem to favor bridling one's passions to protect one's self. A restrained love seems to be no love at all; only a total immersion in love can do justice to this experience. Much like the creators of ancient Tantric art, Das makes no attempt to hide the sensuality of the human form; her work seems to celebrate its joyous potential while acknowledging its concurrent dangers.

### Feminism

Das once said, "I always wanted love, and if you don't get it within your home, you stray a little"(Warrior interview). Though some might label Das as "a feminist" for her candor in dealing with women's needs and desires, Das "has never tried to identify herself with any particular version of feminist activism" (Raveendran 52). Das' views can be characterized as "a gut response," a reaction that, like her poetry, is unfettered by other's notions of right and wrong. Nonetheless, poet Eunice de Souza claims that Das has "mapped out the terrain for

post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms". Das has ventured into areas unclaimed by society and provided a point of reference for her colleagues. She has transcended the role of a poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest woman.

## Death

On 31 May 2009, aged 75, she died at a hospital in Pune. Her body was flown to her home state of Kerala. She was buried at the Palayam Juma Masjid at Thiruvananthapuram with full state honour.

## Awards and other Recognitions

Kamala Das has received many awards for her literary contribution, including:

Nominated and shortlisted for Nobel Prize in 1984.

Asian Poetry Prize-1998

Kent Award for English Writing from Asian Countries-1999

Asian World Prize-2000

Ezhuthachan Award-2009

Sahitya Academy Award-2003

Vayalar Award 2001

Kerala Sahitya Academy Award-2005

Muttathu Varkey Award

She was a longtime friend of Canadian writer Merrily Weisbord, who published a memoir of their friendship, *The Love Queen of Malabar*, in 2010.

## **1.3 Famous works of Kamala Das**

### English

1964: *The Sirens* (Asian Poetry Prize winner)

1965: *Summer in Calcutta* (poetry; Kent's Award winner)

1967: *The Descendants* (poetry)

1973: *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (poetry)

1976: *My Story* (autobiography)

1977: Alphabet of Lust (novel)  
1985: The Anamalai Poems (poetry)  
1992: Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories (collection of short stories)  
1996: Only the Soul Knows How to Sing (poetry)  
2001: Yaa Allah (collection of poems)  
1979: Tonight, This Savage Rite (with Pritish Nandy)  
1999: My Mother At Sixty-six (Poem)

#### Malayalam

1964: Pakshiyude Manam (short stories)  
1966: Naricheerukal Parakkumbol (short stories)  
1968: Thanuppu (short story, Sahitya Academi award)  
1982: Ente Katha (autobiography)  
1987: Balyakala Smaranakal (Childhood Memories)  
1989: Varshangalkku Mumbu (Years Before)  
1990: Palayan (novel)  
1991: Neypayasam (short story)  
1992: Dayarikkurippukal (novel)  
1994: Neermathalam Pootha Kalam (novel, Vayalar Award)  
1996: Chekkerunna Pakshikal (short stories)  
1998: Nashtapetta Neelambari (short stories)  
2005: Chandana Marangal (Novel)  
2005: Madhavikkuttiyude Unmakkadhakal (short stories)2x  
2005: Vandikkalalakal (novel)  
1999: My Mother At Sixty-six (Poem)

#### **1.4 Kamala Das' style of writing:**

Kamala Das belongs to the first generation of modern English poets who evolved a new poetics for themselves and made a new start both in theme and technique around the 1960s. The first phase of Indo-Anglican poetry ended in the 1950s. To the poets of this period the spirit of modernism was almost alien. Their main preoccupation was the spirit of nationalism and the war of independence, partition of country. It was only in the sixties that things began to take a new dimension where a new generation of young poets took control of the Indo-

Anglican poetic realm. Kamala Das is one of the most powerful voices of this post-colonial era. In Kamala Das's poetry we find the best expression of feminine sensibility, its suppression in a male dominated society. So her poetry is confessional and autobiographical to a great extent, but at times she universalizes what is personal. The main themes of Dharker's poetry include home, freedom, journeys, communal conflict and gender politics. Purdah and other poems deal with the various aspects of a Muslim woman's life where she experiences injustice, oppression and violence engineered through the culture of purdah. This mixed heritage and itinerant lifestyle is at the heart of her writing: questioning, imagistic and richly textured poems that span geographical and cultural displacement, while also interrogating received ideas about home, freedom and faith. This research paper would unfold how both above mentioned poetesses rebel against the conventional restraints of society which are meant to exploit women in this man made world. "An Introduction" and "Stone Age" are two of Kamala Das's poems where she is intensely conscious of herself as woman, and by writing about the self she challenges the accepted notions of the female and redraft general opinion of the feminine mystique

## **2. Themes, Outlines and symbols**

### 2.1 Major Themes and Outlines

#### **Main Themes of Das's Poetry**

Kamala Das moves in a narrow range in her poetry, Like Jane Austen in English fiction, her range of themes is limited. Very often there is witnessed repetition, and consequent monotony, in the body of her poetical works. However, she moves in her circle with grace and skill. She does not try to transgress her self-imposed limitations, and this accounts for her success in poetical endeavours. In fact, broad political, financial, and social issues were beyond her reach, but whatever she wrote was born of her own experiences which immediately make her an integral poet, a poet of felt thought.

Kamala is primarily a poet of feminine longings. Her poetry and prose reflect her restlessness as a sensitive woman moving in the male-dominated society, and in them she appears as a champion of woman's cause. She raises her forceful voice against the male tyrannies in such poems as "A relationship," "Summer in Calcutta," "An Introduction," and "Marine Drive," and in such essays as "Why Not More Than One Husband?" and "What Women Expect Out of Marriage and What They Get." In them she comes out as an ardent

spokesman (or, spokeswoman) of women's "lib" movement. Kamala expresses the secret hopes and fears of womankind as seen in the poem "Afterwards":

Son of my womb,  
Ugly in loneliness.  
You walk the world's bleary eye  
Like a grit. Your cleverness  
Shall not be your doom  
As ours was.

The above-quoted lines highlight a mother's concerns for her son. And the following poetic passage reveals the monotony and tiresomeness of a hollow married life :

I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon  
You build around me with morning tea,  
Love-words flung from doorways and of course  
Your tired lust. I shall someday take  
Wings, fly around...

Evidently, Kamala speaks here as a 'liberated' woman, who resents 'the cocoon' built around her and desires to flit about without any restrictions. The fairer sex receives a better deal from this sensitive poetess, who airs out its grievances and sufferings in a striking fashion.

Mrs. Das is unquestionably a poet of love and sex. As such, she is not so much preoccupied with the metaphysical quest of a restless soul, nor with the formulation of any theory of poetry. She writes almost invariably about the power of love and the appeal of the body. She confesses that she "...wrote the poems in the book *Summer in Calcutta* to make a man love me, to break down his resistance." As an honest poet of love, she looks very frank and naive, without the 'intellectual pride' and the domestic air of the well-known Australian poetess, Judith Wright. It should, however, be remembered that Kamala Das wrote her poetry against a more conservative and tabooed society than that of Wright. She has, therefore, more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role to the point of discovering and asserting her individual liberty and identity. More often than not she concentrates on sexual love, and her woman-persona rises as though in a mood of revolt. The love poems of Kamala

usually breathe an air of unconventionality and urgency. Mark the following extract in this connection :

Of late I have begun to feel a hunger  
To take in with greed, like a forest-fire that  
Consumes, and with each killing gains a wilder,  
Brighter charm, all that comes my way.

.....  
...My eyes lick at you like flames, my nerves  
Consume; and, when I finish with you, in the  
Pram, near the tree and, on the park bench, I spit  
Out small heaps of ash, nothing else.

And again :

A man is a season,  
You are eternity.  
To teach me this, you let me toss my youth like coins  
Into various hands, you let me mate with shadows,  
You let me sing in empty shrines, you let your wife  
Seek ecstasy in others' arms...  
.....  
...Perhaps I lost my way, perhaps  
I went astray. How would a blind wife trace her lost  
Husband, how would a deaf wife hear her husband call?

It would be, in truth, no exaggeration to say that love is the *leitmotif* of Kamala's poetry through and through.

Related to the theme of love is the theme of body in Mrs. Das's verse. Sometimes she likes her body, while at others she dislikes it. Physically, she is 'dark' with ordinary features, and her loathing for the body is mainly due to this factor as well as to her protracted illness. In liking the body, she resembles Nissim Ezekiel, who is also a 'poet of the body.' Both these poets, like American 'Confessional' poets, accept whole-heartedly the demands of the body. As for Kamala Das, the tensions of the body issue forth in her poetry from a pressure of her

compelx family background – she was not properly cared for during her childhood nor well attended to in her married life. And as she says in her essay “I Have Lived Beautifully,” her marriage was doomed to fail from the beginning : “My husband was immersed in his office-work, and after work there was the dinner, followed by sex. Where was there any time left for him to want to see the sea or the dark buffaloes of the slopes?” Possibly, the failure of love is linked with the birth of poetry and its fulfilment in case of Kamala Das. The following is a fine piece of poetry written with the sole purpose of celebrating the body, reminding us of Walt Whitman in modern American poetry :

Yes,

It was my desire that made him male  
And beautiful, so that when at last we met  
To believe that once I knew not his  
Form, his quiet touch, or the blind kindness  
Of his lips was hard indeed. Betray me?  
Yes, he can, but never physically.

.....  
My body’s wisdom tells and tells again  
That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my place  
And even death nowhere else but here in  
My betrayer’s arms...

(“A Relationship”).

And here is the poem “A Request” depicting the hatred of the poetess for the body :

When I die  
Do not throw  
The meat and bones away  
But pile them up  
And let them tell  
By their smell  
What life was worth  
On this earth  
What love was worth  
In the end.

The latter piece shows that she is fed up with the present way of her life and that she is pricked deep down within without a ray of hope for redemption.

Kamala Das's poetry contains an acute concern for decay and death. Her autobiography, bordering on fiction occasionally, was actually written during of her serious illnesses. It is not that she afraid of death, and the last portions of *My Story* tell us that she was sometimes even ready to welcome it, but physical decay and destruction definitely haunt her inescapably. The poem "Lines to a Husband" has two parallel strands in it – obsession with decay and death and obsession with love (which could not be had at legitimate source). The simultaneous pull of these obsessions renders the poetess hopeless and helpless, and in deep anguish she cries out :

From the debris of house wrecks  
Pick up my broken face,  
Your bride's face,  
Changed a little with the years.  
I shall not remember  
The betrayed honeymoon;  
We are both such cynics,  
You and I.

In her *My Story*, Kamala tells us that she, at the age of 19, suffered a nervous breakdown as a 'neglected wife,' and that she was commanded to live all alone in a closed room with sunshine peeping through a window. She fell seriously ill and was removed to Malabar, where her grandmother's affectionate care could cure her. Of all persons, Kamala liked her grandmother best whose house was 'a paradise on earth for me.' In the poem "My Grandmother's House," she remembers this house as source fo great comfort abounding in love for her :

The is a house now far away where once  
I received love...that woman died,  
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved  
Among books I was then too young  
To read, and my blood turned cold like the moon.  
How often I think of going  
There....

No doubt, one of the loved central characters in Kamala's work is her great grandmother who is usually associated with her memory of the parental home in Malabar now more than three hundred years old but tinged with regality. The poem "Blood" is actually an apotheosis of this home – 'this old house besides the sea,' and the poetess's fascination with the images of the house besides the sea can clearly be traced back to her childhood associations with it.

Mrs. Das is a poet not so much of the countryside as of the city. In this context, she is utterly contrasted to such poets as K.N. Daruwalla who are so alive to the sights and sounds and colours of idyllic countryside. In fact, Kamala deplors her moving away from a beautiful atmosphere besides the seashore surrounding her parental house to the 'dusty cities' with their hustle-bustle. Another noted poetess, Gauri Deshpande, rightly points out a general lacuna in contemporary Indo-English verse – the absence of the countryside details and events – in her Foreward to *An Anthology of Indo-English poetry*, and Kamala is no exception to this. And if we look for her strength as a poet, we must detect in her poetry the dust, the heat, the crowds, the poverty of India combined with the misery and endurance of womankind. She has actually seen too much of the city, its commotion and horrors and dens of vices, to the 'idyllic' about anything else. The 'city' is an integral part of her existence and she can't shake off its impressions and memories easily. She rather tries to strike a sort of synthesis between the changing reality of a private passion and the apparently unchanging reality of the shining sun on Indian horizon. In this connection, the overtones of the poem "Summer in Calcutta" in the first volume must be taken into account. It is a synthesis which is almost spontaneous and uncounscious in its compulsive drive. Kamala Das uses neither the biting social irony of Nissim Ezekiel, nor the larger philosophical themes of Sri Aurobindo or even of Tagore, but she is not totally alienated from the Indian landscape or its social milieu like our well-known expatriates Dom Moraes and Tilottama Rajan.

Kamala's being a typical poet of the city is quite evident from her persistent use of the metaphor of the city for life, such as in the poem "A New City" :

I have come with only a picnic bag  
To this new city,  
To seek a blind date, to shed as snakes do,  
In coils and coils, my  
Weariness.

Nisim Ezekiel also is with Kamala Das in expressing his sense of annui and boredom towards the city of Bombay – ‘The city wakes, where fame is cheap,/And he belongs an active fool’ (“A Moring Walk”). But in Ezzekiel the sense of loss is of a different nature; it is ‘depersonalized,’ so to say. On the contrary, Kamala *feels acutely* for the loss of her parental home and pure love by making the city as her ‘new’ home. Coupled with this anguished awareness of her loss is her eloquent expression of the pleasures and charms to be found in a big city. She discovered ‘all the Delhi streets...fragrant murky,’ and her she became once more ‘young, very lovely and delightfully carefree’. Elsewhere she contrasts the impressive tranquillity of the Delhi landscape with the disturbed state of her mind. The one city which told heavily on her nerves is Bombay, and yet she bids a touching farewell to it in one of her moving poems :

I take leave of you, fair city, while tears  
Hide somewhere in my adult eyes  
And sadness is silent as a stone  
In the river’s unmoving  
Core....  
It’s goodbye, goodbye, goodbye,  
To slender shapes behind windowpanes  
Shut against indiscriminate desire  
And rain....

A separation from anything is ever painful, and the intellectual oneness that Kamala might have experienced in this grand city makes her say a tearful goodbye to it.

Finally, Kamala Das is a poet of moods and freaks, and hence she writes about so many other things ‘that momentarily arrest her attention; e.g., about pigeons, seasons, children, bangles, the sea-shore and the morning tree, bats, phone calls artificial alarums, airports, the ferns and the maggots, the joss-sticks and the looking-glasses, convicts, problems of composition, the high tides and the loud posters, the swamp and the blue bird. These various things have been catalogued here in order to show that Kamala Das does emerge from her well-chosen themes now and then, and thereby create an impression on the reader’s mind that her poetry is “as honest, it is as human, as she is.” The narrowness of her range is thus widened and the monotony caused by frequent reversion to the same subject and mood partly removed.

## 2.2 Symbols

As a poet, Kamala Das makes ample use of images and symbols. Some of these images are so recurrent that they become symbols in her poetry, but it must be added here that they are not too many. A study of her imagery and symbolism is bound to reveal her artistic skill and craftsmanship, and hence it is both relevant and rewarding. Henceforth we will examine some of her dominant and recurrent images and symbols.

Mouth, ask me why his hand sways like a hooded snake

Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like

A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts,

And sleeps.

She does not relish 'the flavor of his mouth' and the way he clasps her 'pubis.' All this is conveyed by the image of 'a hooded snake,' which is a dangerous thing. Whether she likes him or not, he thrusts himself upon her in a mood of frenzied passion. This is contained in the image of 'a great tree, felled.' Naturally, he is very heavy for her, and yet he 'slumps' against her breasts and 'sleeps' in their warmth. Through the arresting images Kamala Das has made it amply clear that he is largely a man of lust and cruelty, having no regard for her own feelings. Again, she raises her voice against his physical love. In the poem "Convicts," she says thus :

That was the only kind of love,

This hacking at each other's parts

Like convicts hacking, breaking clods

At noon. We were earth under hot

Sun

This richly suggestive poetic passage tells us immediately about his lustful nature and the violent sexual involvement of both in the summer season. On the part of the poetess, there is

a sense of guilt over such an involvement conveyed by the metaphor \*convicts.\* The proper sexual act involving energy and speed is marvelously carried through by the image in 'breaking clods/At noon.' The phrase 'breaking clods' suggests that there was a kind of grating sound while they were copulating. The word 'earth' indicates their 'earthiness' as well as their 'reception of the heat of the burning sun.' And there could be no better image to express the energy and the violence in the sexual intercourse than that of 'hot sun,' it is creditable to Kamala Das that she makes the natural elements serve her ends, and here at least she succeeds admirably in it.

The above illustrations should not lead one to believe that Kamala always hates the body. On the contrary, she sometimes conveys her pleasures experienced in the company of her lover. She is not only a beloved seeking restlessly the sources of 'true love,' but also a wife legally wedded to and socially bedded by a man and a mother of three loving children. In the poem "winter," she frankly admits :

And, I loved his body without shame,  
On winter evenings as cold winds  
Chuckled against the white window panes.

Winter being a cold season, she turns to her man without masks or pretensions to derive warmth and vitality in his living contact. My Story, her autobiography, also reveals the fact that she surrendered herself to her husband after 1 on illness in a spirit of total abandonment. A poem like "The Music Party" gives vent to her desire of looking at her man unashamedly before things go wrong for her :

I wish my  
Eyes were similarly  
Brave and had looked at you  
At Least once before the  
Singing stopped and you left  
Quickly, without goodbye.....

The poem "The Looking Glass" underlines her ecstasy of union with her man. It is a woman in love who is saying the following lines :

Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under  
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,  
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he  
Urinate. All the fond details that make  
Him male and your only man.

Another poem, "A Relationship," brings to the fore her dire necessity of the man. She writes :

Yes,  
It was my desire that made him male  
And beautiful, so that when at last we  
Met, to believe that once I Knew not his  
Form, his quiet touch, or the blind kindness  
Of his lips was hard indeed.

Here the acceptability of the man is quite obvious. She is also aware of the charms of her body, the power of her physical appeal, and speaks of it unequivocally in some of her poems. In "Loud Posters," we have :

I've stretched my two dimensional  
Nudity on sheets of weeklies, monthlies,  
Quarterlies.....

"The Looking Glass" is matchless in this context; it is a poem of utter honesty and plain-speaking on the part of the poetess. Mark how she portrays the softer charms of a woman in it :

Getting a man to love you is easy

Only be honest about your wants as  
Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him  
So that he sees himself the stranger one  
And believes it so, and you so much more  
Softer, younger, lovelier....Admit your

And further :

Gift him all,  
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,  
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your  
Endless female hungers.

The poetess conveys here the power that a woman holds, and her idiom is fundamentally modernistic instead of being romantic or idealistic as in the previous ages. For her, a partner is essential in sex-drama just as she is essential for him in a life of real enjoyment.

Keeping the above facts in mind, it may be said that Anisur Rahman is only partly correct when he observes that Kamala Das “views the male body as an agent of corruption,” and that she also “regards it as a symbol of corrosion, the destroyer of feminine chastity.” He is rather nearer the truth when he later remarks that “She is aware of both the beauties and crudities of the male body,” since here he is not adopting a partisan attitude. A truth is that which emerges triumphant in the ultimate analysis, and Rahman’s first statement crumbles in the light of this test. The image of the human body is employed so frequently that confusion creeps up in a few minds, but there is no confusion whatsoever with regard to its being a symbol for the poetess. And as a symbol, it is both a destroyer and a preserver, both a source of death and a source of life, for her.

Another recurrent image in the poetry of Kamala Das is that of ‘the sun.’ This image has, though, been used frequently, it has not been imparted “a systematic symbolism.” It has been employed as “an agent of scorching heat, corruption and lust.” It is often associated with

the heat generated by sex and the drabness of life. It affects the skin and makes it tanned and stained, as we find it in “The Freaks” --- ‘He talks, turning a sun-stained/Cheek to me.’ The poem “In love “ equates the ‘burning’ sun with the “burning” mouth of the man in love :

Of what does the burning mouth  
Of sun, burning in today’s  
Sky remind me ....oh, yes, his  
Mouth.....

In “Sepia,” the sun is presented as a source of ‘scorching’ heat that dries up the very marrow of the bones. It is conceived as a destroyer of the real charms of life :

It’s time to I hold anger  
Like a living sun  
And scorch,  
Scorch to the very marrow

This sad-mouthed human  
Race.

The image of the sun as evoked here is not benevolent; it does not illumine the world of the poetess, but rather consumes it. The oppressive power of the sun is to be felt in “The Dance of the Eunuchs” and “Summer in Calcutta.” Its wildness’ is to be witnessed in “A Hot Noon in Malabar.” It contributes richly to the atmosphere of the poems – the pitiable condition of the dry-ribbed eunuchs, the misery and depression of the poetess herself, and her eventual relief through love and sex. The image of the sun in the poem “Summer in Calcutta” is highly charged with sensuousness and sensuality. This is what we find in it :

What is this drink but  
the April sun, squeezed  
Like an orange in  
My glass? I sip the

Fire, I drink and drink,

Again, I am drunk,

Yes, but on the gold

Of suns

And further :

Dear, forgive

This moment's lull in

Wanting you, the blur

In memory.

Explicitly, the 'drinking' and the state of being 'drunk' of the poetess bears an added significance in the light of what she says in the second quoted excerpt. In the poem "The Sunshine Cat," the sun becomes a companion of the forlorn and the helpless, but it offers her no health or comfort in her depressing situation; she is rather left 'a cold and/Half-dead woman.' Some other poems wherein this image is employed are : "The Pigeons," "Drama," "punishment in the Kindergarten," "The Conflagration," and "Convicts." The poem "The Conflagration" makes use of this pervasive image as a symbol of either passion or unwilling sexual indulgence. The poems "The Testing of the Sirens" and "In Love" are also rich in sexual overtones, but in "The Conflagration" the image denotes the poet's own willing participation in sex :

We came together like two suns meeting, and each

Raging to burn the other out. He said you are

A forest-conflagration and I, poor forest,

Must burn.

Her participation in sex removes her loneliness and languor temporarily. She possibly knows that sex is the source of all life, the vital principle of all existence, but also that her partner is nothing more than an expert in arousing 'the lazy hungers' of the body. This does not provide her with long-felt and much-needed emotional gratification. Both the 'burning sun' and the

male body signify for Kamala Das the same thing ----- the oppressive force of lust and the resultant decay and destruction.

Partly related to the sun is the image of 'darkness' in the poetry of Mrs. Das. Obviously, this image is not so pervasive as the sun, and hence it does not attain the status of a symbol. Usually it is linked with 'sleep', which also implies 'longer sleep,' i.e., death. We have it brilliantly used in the poem "Death Brings No Loss" :

Darkness is an attribute of the night, and the night is the right time of physical contact between the opposite sexes. This has been conveyed in the poem "The Testing of the Sirens" :

The night, dark-cloaked like a procuress, brought  
Him to me, willing, light as a shadow,  
Speaking words of love  
In some tender language I do not know.....

The metaphor 'procuress' generates a bad taste in the passage, and the poetess does not like his arrival in the night for the satisfaction of the flesh. Occasionally, darkness signifies the 'womb' of the mother. In "Afterwards," we have :

Son of my womb,  
Ugly in loneliness,  
You walk the world's bleary eye  
Like a grit.

Kamala Das is no philosopher to be concerned with the pre-natal existence of her son, and so like an ordinary mother she imagines that he must have sprung from the dark. Her motherly experience is again expressed in "Jaisurya" in softer terms :

Only that matters which forms as  
Toadstool under lightning and rain, the soft  
Stir in womb, the foetus growing.....

Here 'lightning and rain' stand for the ferocity and saturation in sexual intercourse, which is not so meaningful for her as the conception of a child through it. Mrs. Das's wifely stance may be questionable, but her motherly stance is not.

One of the most predominant images in Kamala's poetry is 'the sea,' the recurrent use of which accords it the status of a symbol. The image serves the purpose of a retreat from the scorching world of the sun. Devinder Kohli rightly suggests that the sea-imagery is "part of Kamala Das's elemental symbolism," and that it is "related both to her moods of anguish and release." The longer poem, "Composition," depicts her childhood memory of the sea as 'the wind's ceaseless whisper in a shell' which changes into the sound of 'the surf breaking on the shore.' The sea was within a walking distance-----only two miles away ---from her Malabar house. It provides her with rest and comfort and a life of 'uninvolvement' :

All I want now  
Is to take a long walk  
Into the sea  
And lie there, resting,  
Completely uninvolved.

Her attraction for it, she clarifies onwards, is 'a childish whim,'

A thing associated with her dreamy past :

But,  
Rest is only a childish whim,  
A minor hunger.  
Greater hungers lurk  
At the basement of the sea.

'Greater hungers' point to the elemental hungers of love and sex. Another longish piece wherein this image turning into a symbol operates so forcefully is "The Suicide." In this piece the sea is made an associate of 'the soul' discarding 'the body' away :

I throw the bodies out,  
I cannot stand their smell.  
Only the souls may enter  
The vortex of the sea.  
Only the souls know how to sing  
At the vortex of the sea.

The 'sea' is the bedroom for her 'swimming.' As a child, she had swum into it; as an adult, she again wishes to swim into it and thereby quench her thirst for emotional contentment. She says :

O sea, I am happy swimming  
Happy, happy, happy .....

She knows that 'water' is the prime mover of life, signifying the procreating power of the mother. That's why it is easy for her to 'hold' it, but it is pretty difficult to 'hold' the love of her man. Her desire for fidelity in love and sex has been shattered by him and this makes all the difference in her life. She cries out in pain and dejection :

Holding you is easy  
Clutching at moving water,  
I tell you, sea,  
This is easy.  
But to hold him for half a day  
Was a difficult task.  
It required drinks  
To hold him down.

In a way, she herself is the holder of 'water,' as she, too, is a mother yearning for peace, happiness and security. But her 'water' is not sufficient for a drunkard like him, and so he

needs 'drinks' to make himself warm and jubilant. Towards the close of the poem, her identification with the sea is so obvious :

O sea,  
You generous cow,  
You and I are big flops  
We are too sentimental  
Fir our own  
Good.

Both are 'generous' and 'sentimental,' which accounts for their being 'big flops.' This identification was totally lacking in the image of the sun. The sea-imagery also occurs in so many other poems of Kamala Daa, in such poems as "The Invitation," "Convicts," "The Joss-Sticks at Cadell Road," and "The High Tide." But in these poems it is only 'a secondary image' and does not become a symbol at all. In "The Invitation," the sea is depicted as 'garrulous' :

The sea is garrulous today. Come in,  
Come in. ....  
Oh Sea, let me. Shrink or grow, slosh up,  
Slide down, go your way,  
I will go mine.

Besides, the 'tides beat against the walls,/they beat in childish rage'. The garrulity of the sea and the beating of the tides against the walls signify the waves of emotion welling up in the poetess's heart, for she asserts that she is not afraid of 'dying' (a metaphor often used for the consummation of love). The poem "The High Tide" is also of identical nature. Here the sea is analogous to the rising passion within her :

It's only the wind knocking at the door, the sea  
Is wild this morning, there is perhaps a high tide on.....

In expressing her emotion through the imagery of the sea, the poetess is quite natural and simple. The natural phenomenon she used to observe from her childhood comes handy to serve her poetic purpose in a remarkable fashion. In the poem “The Joss-Sticks at Cadell Road,” the sea becomes a receptacle of ‘the poor men’s bodies,’ which burn like joss-sticks. On the whole, the poem stresses the futility of the physical love. In the poem “Convicts,” the poetess evokes the image of the post-sexual experience in the dark room through the sea.

Kamala Das also makes use of the four natural elements in her poetic art. These four elements forming an integral part of her imagery are : the fire, the earth, the water, and the air. Of the four, the ‘fire’ image is the most powerful and appealing. In Summer in Calcutta, the poem “The Flag” employs it brilliantly :

The orange stands for fire, for fire that eats

Us all in the end.....

The fire-image immediately strikes us as a destroyer of the human body. The noted English poet, T.S. Eliot, also employed it in his poetry as a symbol of both the physical love of the self and the celestial love of the Divine. His “Little Gidding” has been characterized as ‘a poem of fire.’ Kamala Das used this image as a destroyer of the human body as well as of human passion. Her poem “The Sea Shore” shows it in its role of a destroyer, and so is her “Forest Fire.” In the latter poem, we have :

Of late I have begun to feel a hunger

To take in with greed, like a forest-fire that

Consumes....

The image of ‘fire’ and ‘heat’ is conspicuous in two of her most important poems---- “The Dance of the Eunuchs” and “A Hot

Time to forget blood or the quick gaps

Of the dying. And the sudden pain,

But the sun came again, and rain.

The ‘earth’ here stands for the calm, quiet existence of the poetess before she entered into a sexual intercourse with her man. The blooming flowers and the dying attain an additional

meaning and significance when they are considered in this light. The 'blood' and 'the quick gasps' are attendant upon the proper sexual act. The 'sudden pain' is the throes of delivery, while 'the sun' and the 'rain' are, in this context, welcome signs of son-birth and sprinkling of the holy water around. The poem "An Introduction" also employs all the four elements in its texture. In it the poetess says :

Not the deaf, blind speech  
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the  
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing  
Funeral pyre.

Another beautiful application of the four elements is to be had in "Convicts." In it the poetess writes :

Darkness we grew as in silence  
We sang, each note rising out of  
Sea, out of wind, out of earth and  
Out of each sad night like an ache....

Here the poetess suggests that her 'ache' and sadness is something like an inalienable part of the universe.

### **3. Summary and analysis of *A Hot Noon in Malabar***

*A Hot Noon In Malabar* is an intensively emotional and personal poem. It's one of her typical works evoking Malabar landscape and its lush greenery.

This poem very powerfully evokes her sense of belonging to the Malabar of her childhood and Malabar and the Allapat tharavad form the core symbols of this poem. In this poem she retraces her lost childhood in the tides of time but it still remains etched so deeply in her heart.

The nostalgic essence of this piece of work highlights the idyllic times she had as a young child. The Allapat tharavad where she spent her childhood stands as a symbol of joy of youth,

for the beautiful experiences of a growing child, for the security, belonging, last not the least as a symbol of innocence .

Recollecting the old days, she remembers the totally unrestrained and unrestricted life she had led in Malabar. Kamala das have chosen words carefully to recreate and pour out the same feelings that had made those days memorable and extraordinary. The intimacy with which she portrays her feelings are prominent and very clear to visualise. It helps in creating a panorama of varied experiences she had in her childhood.

For Kamala, Malabar stands for the exotic people bringing along with them bundles of mystery that arouse curiosity. Her verses in the poem underline those experiences which she's devoid of now apparently and longs for them.

In her poem she recalls the beggars with whining voices perhaps she seems to be peaceful and complacent and yearns for trouble. Apparently, she compares her barren monotonous life in a city to the busy tight schedule routine she had when she was residing in Malabar. The exotic men from hills became a fantasy for her as they bring their fortune cards and parrots locked in cages and entertain her in stark contrast with her mundane and boring life of hers perhaps. Then there's the brown kurvara girl whose eyes gleam with the traditional knowledge that has been passed on from generation to generation and she used to read her palm promising excitement and foretelling her future this contrasts her empty life devoid of entertainment being confined at home. The bangle sellers brought various colors of bangles and laid it on the cool black floor, the cool black floor reminds her of the warmth of acceptance contrast with hostility and suspicion in a city. These people also brought part of their lifestyle and culture. All these are stained in time. Even the strangers used to come along with companionship she's referring to the assimilating features of her house, everybody comes in ease and settles down so comfortably as though they are family and not strangers. From here she speaks of strangers who are not strangers at all. These words remind us that she not only yearns for the beautiful ambience but also lost experiences.

We almost hear the agony in her cry when she says...

"To be here far away .... is torture"

Life's so colorful and she wants to become a part of it as she feels abandoned and craves to be accepted, to be the part of a world around her. Her memory disturbs her. She feels that she has lost her past life forever. As she stays in a confined city home and is far away in time as well as in distance.

As she remembers the beautiful landscapes of Kerala it becomes even more profound when she associates it with "Wild men, Wild thoughts, Wild love". She desires to lose herself in passionate love perhaps her childhood was devoid of unconditional love and she yearns for it from different sources. A bridled restrained love is not love for her, she wants more of passionate love. Throughout the poem we see that there's a strong display of emotions which is reinforced by each of the phrases of her poem. The intensive feeling is captured effectively in this poem by the choice of words and detail. In short, she yearns for unrestrained, spontaneous feelings that she cherishes as a part of her life in Malabar. This poem contains her unedited thoughts which is so free flowing and so giving each thought shines in their own natural way.

#### **4. Summary and analysis of *My Grandmother's House***

"My Grandmother's House" is a constituent poem of Kamala Das's maiden publication *Summer in Calcutta*. Though short, the poem wraps within itself an intriguing sense of nostalgia and uprootedness. In her eternal quest for love in such a 'loveless' world, the poet remembers her grandmother which surfaces some emotions long forgotten and buried within her-- an ironical expression of her past which is a tragic contrast to her present situation. It is a forcefully moving poem fraught with nostalgia and anguish.

The poet says that there is a house, her grandmother's home, far away from where she currently resides, where she "*received love*". Her grandmother's home was a place she felt secure and was loved by all. After the death of her grandmother, the poet says that even the House was filled with grief, and accepted the seclusion with resignation. Only dead silence haunted over the House, feeling of desolation wandering throughout. She recollects though she couldn't read books at that time, yet she had a feeling of snakes moving among them-- a feeling of deadness, horror and repulsion, and this feeling made her blood go cold and turn her face pale like the moon. She often thinks of going back to that Old House, just to peek through the "*blind eyes of the windows*" which have been dead-shut for years, or just to listen to the "*frozen*" air.

The poet also shows the ironical contrast between her past and present and says that her present has been so tormenting that even the Darkness of the House that is bathed in Death does not horrify her anymore and it is a rather comforting companion for her in the present state of trials. The poet says that she would gladly (“*in wild despair*”) pick up a handful of Darkness from the House and bring it back to her home to “*lie behind my bedroom door*” so that the memories of the Old House and its comforting darkness, a rather ironical expression, might fill assurance and happiness in her present life. The poet now lives in another city, a long distance away from her grandmother’s house. But the memories of her ancestral house make her sad. She is almost heart-broken. The intensity of her emotions is shown by the ellipses in the form of a few dots. Now, in another city, living another life, she longs to go back. She understands that she cannot reclaim the past but she wants to go back home, look once again through its windows and bring back a handful of darkness – sad and painful memories, which she would have made her constant companion, to keep as a reminder of her past happiness. The poet is unable to proceed with her thoughts for sometime as is indicated by the ellipses (dots).

The poet is now choked with the intensity of grief. She yearns for love like a beggar going from one door to another asking for love in small change. Her need for love and approval is not satisfied in marriage and she goes after strangers for love at least in small quantity. But she does not get it even in small change or coins. Her love-hunger remains unsatisfied, and there is a big void, a blank within her, she seeks to fill up with love but to no avail. The image of the window is a link between the past and the present. It signifies the desire of the poet for a nostalgic peep into her past and resurrect her dreams and desires.

She wraps up the poem saying that it is hard for one to believe that she once lived in such a house and was so *loved* by all and lived her life with pride. That her world was once filled with happiness is a sharp contrast to her present situation where she is completely devoid of love and pride. She says that in her desperate quest for love, she has lost her way; since she didn’t receive any feelings of love from the people whom she called her own, she now has to knock “*at strangers’ doors*” and beg them for love, if not in substantial amounts, then at least in small change i.e. in little measure at least.

The poet has intensified the emotions of nostalgia and anguish by presenting a contrast between her childhood and her grown-up stages. The fullness of the distant and absence and

the emptiness of the near and the present give the poem its poignancy. The images of “*snakes moving among books*”, blood turning “*cold like the moon*”, “*blind eyes of window*”, “*frozen air*” evoke a sense of death and despair. The house itself becomes a symbol - an Edenic world, a cradle of love and joy. The escape, the poetic retreat, is in fact, the poet’s own manner of suggesting the hopelessness of her present situation. Her yearning for the house is a symbolic retreat to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity

### **Conclusion:**

The poem springs from her own disillusionment with her expectation of unconditional love from the one she loves. In the poem, the image of the ancestral home stands for the strong support and unconditional love she received from her grandmother. The imagery is personal and beautifully articulates her plight in a loveless marriage. Thus, the old house was for her a place of symbolic retreat to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity, an Edenic world where love and happiness are still possible.”

## **5. Kamala Das’ contribution to Indian Literature**

Kamala Das is beyond doubt the greatest woman poet in contemporary Indo-Anglian literature. A confessional poet, she displays feminist ethos in her poems. Kamala Das, born in Kerala in 1934, is a bilingual writer. She writes in Malayalam, her mother tongue, under the pseudonym Madhavikkutty. She is the recipient of several prizes and awards: the P. E. N. Asian Poetry Prize, Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for fiction, Asian World Prize for literature, Kendra Sahitya Academy Award etc. She was short listed for the Nobel Prize along with Marguerite Yourcenar, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer. Her poetical collection includes: *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *Collected Poems I* (1984), *The Best of Kamala Das* (1991) and *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996). Kamala Das’s English poetry has been published in Europe in French, German, Swedish, and Serb-Croat translations. She “wrote chiefly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent anguish, and Indian readers . . . responded sympathetically to her guileless, guiltless frankness with regard to sexual matters. Ms. Das abandoned the certainties offered by an archaic, and somewhat sterile, aestheticism for an independence of mind and body at a time when Indian women poets were still expected to write about teenage girlie fantasies of eternal, bloodless, unrequited love” (“The histrionics of Kamala Das”).

While reviewers of Das's early poetry praised its fierce originality, bold images, exploration of female sexuality, and intensely personal voice, they lamented that it lacked attention to structure and craftsmanship. Scholars such as Devindra Kohli, Eunice de Souza, and Sunil Kumar find powerful feminist imagery in Das's poetry, focusing on critiques of marriage, motherhood, women's relationship to their bodies and control of their sexuality, and the roles women are offered in traditional Indian society. Much criticism analyzes Das as a "confessional" poet, writing in the tradition to Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Denise Levertov. Some scholars, such as Vimala Rao, Iqbar Kaur, and Vrinda Naur, find Das's poetry, autobiography and essays frustratingly inconsistent, self-indulgent, and equivocal, although they, too, praise her compelling images and original voice. They suggest that Das is both overexposed and overrated. Other scholars, such as P. P. Raveendran, connect the emphasis on the self in Das's work to larger historical and cultural contexts and complicated, shifting postcolonial identities ("Das, Kamala").

Kamala Das had an unhappy, dissatisfied life even from her childhood. She was a victim to patriarchal prejudices and discriminations as most women are. She converted to Islam in 1999 taking a new name Kamala Surayya. It was an action, she said, she had been contemplating for many years. To quote Kamala Das:

Two plain reasons lured me to Islam. One is the Purdah. Second is the security that Islam provides to women. In fact, both these reasons are complementary. Purdah is the most wonderful dress for women in the world. And I have always loved to wear the Purdah. It gives women a sense of security. Only Islam gives protection to women. I have been lonely all through my life. At nights, I used to sleep by embracing a pillow. But I am no longer a loner. Islam is my company. Islam is the only religion in the world that gives love and protection to women. Therefore, I have converted. ("Kamala Das")

The paradox of this conversion is that years later she confessed that it was a folly to convert from Hinduism to Islam. The reason is known only to her. It might be a reaction of the people's—both her friends and foes—inhabitable and wounding response to her conversion. Dr. V. Alexander Raju is of opinion that the conversion was an inevitable metamorphosis. To quote him, "In the poems of Kamala Das, we find a rare body and its feelings and she seems incapable of thinking of eternal life as a bodiless existence. This peculiar stance may be the reason why she is drawn to Islamic religion with its different concept of life after life"

(Raju 25). Frustrated by love and loneliness, she longed for an eternal life with her body and soul after her life on the earth. She loved her body as much as she loved her soul. Since her bodily desires could not be satiated by her life here she wants to achieve it by a life after death. As Hinduism could not promise her such a life, she converted to Islam. By conversion she reserved a life after life where she could attain the spiritual fulfilment in man-woman relationship which she missed, fortunately or unfortunately, in her earthly life.

Her conversion caused much ire and furor among Hindu fanatics and they started threatening her through letters and phone calls. Most dejected she bade goodbye to her ancestral house and native place and sought refuge in his son's house in Mumbai. She is living there now fighting against old age problems.

Women's literature is different from Feminist literature. Women's literature which results out of women's identity struggles creates new awareness in men and women whereas feminist literature expresses the shared experiences of women's oppression. "Feminist literature highlights and condemns the inequalities and injustices in the treatment of women—the disadvantages women have to bear on account of their gender" (Kumar 9). Its emphasis is on the ideology rather than on the literariness of the text. Feminism evolved as an opposition to patriarchy or the dominant sexist ideology.

It is customary for the much-centered aesthetic to consider artistic creation as act analogous to biological creation. Thus an art work is the product of the interaction between the male artist and the external world which is regarded as feminine. A literary text in this view is the outcome of a generative act involving the phallic pen and the virgin blank page. A woman writer feels artistic creation as a form of violation, resulting in the destruction of the female body. In women's writing sexuality is identified with textuality. As a woman judges her self through her body, the female self is always identified with the female body in women's literature (Kumar 12-13).

A woman considers her role of mother more important than a wife. Wholly dependant on man in the world of his making, woman craves to have a child for self-expression as self-affirmation. In addition to sexual exploitation and betrayal the lack of love in man-woman relationship is an improvised form of male oppression. Loveless relationships are unbearable for women. In the words of Prasantha Kumar:

Kamala Das conceives of the male as beast wallowing in lust with a monstrous ego under which the woman loses her identity. The strong desire for freedom, including the freedom to rebel, forms the central strain in many of her poems. She enumerates the male felonies in her poems and builds up a structure of protest and rebellion in her poetry . . . Several poems of Das convey the tedium and monotony of sex within and outside marriage . . . Their love is a disgusted lust, a poor substitute for real love. The life of Das's persona may be considered a tale of her experiments with love and the repeated failures of her experiments force her ego to be resentful and defiant. She looks upon each encounter as a substitute for the real experience of true love. (34-35).

Even as a child, Kamala Das experienced the bitterness of sexism. She was a victim of patriarchal prejudice. In her autobiographical book *My Book*, her "father was an autocrat" (91) and her mother "vague and indifferent" (20). Her parents considered her "a burden and responsibility and she was given in marriage to a relative when she was only a school girl (82). Thus she was compelled to become a premature wife and mother. She complains about it in her poem "Of Calcutta":

I was sent away, to protect a family's

Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend some

Abstraction, sent to another city to be

A relative's wife. (*Collected Poems I* 56-60)

In the same poem she presents the image of a doll to portray a woman's miserable condition: "Yet another nodding / Doll for his parlour, a walkie-talkie one to / Warm his bed at night" (*Collected Poems I* 56-60).

The indifference of man to woman's miseries is depicted in her poem "The Stone Age." To quote from it:

You turn me into a bird of stone,

a granite dove,

you build round me a shabby drawing room

and strike my face absentmindedly while you read. (*The Best of Kamala Das* 97-98)

When Kamala Das understood that love and matrimony are poles apart, she searched for a lover. "Though the love affair gives her excitement in the beginning it is accompanied by disillusionment. Her lover is incapable of giving her a blissful experience" (Raveendran 16). Thus her frustration is expressed through her poem "The Freak":

. . . Can this man with

Nimble finger-tips unleash

Nothing more alive than the

Skin's lazy hungers? . . . (*Only the Soul* 59)

The woman's spirit of rebellion against male domination and ego is found in the poem "The Conflagration." As Dr. N. Sharda Iyer writes, "There is a degree to extricate front this "Soul Killing" subjugation:

"Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried

Beneath a man? It's time again to come alive.

A world extend a Pot beyond his six foot frame." (qtd. in Iyer 214)

"The Old Play House" also voices her protest against the male domination and the resultant humiliation:

. . . Cowering

Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and

Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your

Questions I mumbled incoherent replies . . . (*The Old Playhouse 1*)

The plight of a married woman, chained to her husband's house is depicted in the opening lines of the poem "The Old Play House":

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her

In the long summer of your love so that she would forget

Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but

Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless

Pathways of the sky. . . (*The Old Playhouse 1*)

Kamala Das hates traditional sex roles assigned to women by the patriarchy. In the poem "Introduction" one finds resentment and refusal:

. . . Then I wore a shirt

and a black sarong, cut my hair short and ignored all of

this womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl or be wife,

they cried. Be embroiderer, cook or a quarreller

with servants. (*The Best of Kamala Das 12-13*)

In the words of K. Satchidanandan, "The woman can not change her body; so the poet changes her dress and tries to imitate men. But the voices of the tradition would force her back into sarees, the saree becoming here a sign of convention. She is pushed back into her expected gender roles: wife, cook, embroiderer quarreller with servants: the gender role also becomes a class role" (13).

The husband transforms the wife into the contemptible canine status of a housewife. To quote from the poem "Of Calcutta": "Here in my husband's home, I am a trained circus dog / Jumping my routine hoops each day." (*Collected Poems I* 56-60)

Kamala Das is exclusively concerned with the personal experience of love in her poetry. "For her ideal love is the fulfilment of the levels of body and mind. It is the experience beyond sex through sex. The tragic failure to get love in terms of sexual-spiritual fulfilment from the husband leads her to search for it elsewhere. Each relationship only intensifies her disappointment faced with the sense of absolute frustration and loneliness" (Iyer 203). Though she seeks the perfection of masculine being in every lover, it ends in failure because of the impossibility of realizing this ideal in human form. The experience of frustration sets the psyche in the attitude of rebellion.

"I must pretend

I must act the role

Of happy woman

Happy wife" (*The Descendants* p. 2) (qtd. in Iyer 204)

Kamala Das's aim as a poet is to underline the predicament of contemporary women beset by the crisis of divided selves. She wants to bring harmony out of this existence. Her poems are remarkable because they reveal her feelings of anxiety, alienation, meaninglessness, futility, acute sense of isolation, fragmentation and loss of identity. Modern Indian woman's ambivalence is presented through her poems. She seems to have a good deal of the conventional woman in her. She seems to have the combination in herself—wish for domestic security and the desire for independence. Alongside her unfulfilled need for love there is the need to assert, to conquer and to dominate. While her poems describe a longing for a man to fill her dreams with love, she is also proud of her being the seducer, the collector especially of those men who pose as lady killers (Iyer 193-194).

What strikes the reader most in her poetry is not the themes but the use of Indian English without concern for correctness and precision. "It appeared unpremeditated, a direct

expression of feeling as it shifted erratically through unpredictable emotion, creating its own forms through its cadence and repetition of phrases, symbols and refrains. Her effort was to find an appropriate style for what is rather a poetry of a mind thinking about feeling than the expression of emotion” (Iyer 194). Srinivasa Iyengar writes on her style: “While giving the impression of writing in haste, she reveals a mastery of phrase and a control over rhythm—the words often pointed and envenomed too, and the rhythm so nervously, almost feverishly alive. Her characteristic trick is to split phrases and meanings—even the infinitive—between two lines and this is surely symbolic of the fissured, or fractured, sensibility she wishes to communicate” (680).

It is thus proved that Kamala Das tried her best to uplift the position of woman and thus resist the dominance of man. The influence of patriarchy is found in all religions as well as their scriptures. As the religious leaders were all men, the scriptures written by them were male-oriented and as a result, women were given inferior position in families as well as societies. The religious leaders made their gods advise women, through the scriptures, to obey men. The Christian and Islamic religions do not treat men and women as equals. The women, in the roles of wives have to obey their husbands and be subservient to them. Thus this venomous ideology of male dominance is injected into even women’s veins through the scriptures and they are destined to be inferior till they die. In the Western society where religion’s hold is loose, women enjoy more freedom and equality than the Eastern society. The very birth of Woman (Eve) in the Bible is patriarchal to the core. God made Eve out of Adam’s rib. She was created for him to be his companion. Why did God create Man first instead of Woman who indeed bore and gave birth to offsprings? The influence of patriarchy is evident here. Again it was Eve who committed the sin first and then she tempted Adam to commit it. In reality is it woman who does more sexual outrages than man in any society? Man has more muscular power than woman. At the same time woman has many qualities which man does not have. They should live in a harmony as other beings do around us. If man imitates other beings in sexual indulgence—overpowering the female—what differentiates human beings from other beings? Is our culture and civilization leading us to barbarity? Even in this twenty first century women have no right to worship their Creator in mosques and some temples. This legacy of patriarchy has to be questioned. Women have every right to get out of their kitchens and houses and live equals to men. It is against this injustice in families and societies that feminists like Kamala Das fight against. Thus feminism

seems to be an inevitable ideology and more and more women have to come forward and fight for the women's cause. To sum up the article with a quotation from Srinivasa Iyengar:

There is no doubt Kamala Das is a new phenomenon in Indo-Anglian poetry—a far cry indeed from Toru Dutt or even Sarojini Naidu. Kamala Das's is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world . . . Of course, the endless reiteration of such hurt, such disillusion, such cynicism, must sooner or later degenerate into a mannerism, but one hopes—and her exceptional talent offers the ground for such hopes—she will outgrow this obsession in due course and find her way to a season less trying than summer and a world other than the 'unreal' city of dreadful ghosts. (680)

## **6. Questions**

1. What are the common themes in Kamala Das' poetry?
2. Critically analyse:
  - a) A Hot Noon in Malabar
  - b) My Grandmother's House
3. What is the position of Kamala Das in the Indian Literary scenario?
4. Write a short note on symbolism in Kamala Das' poems.

## **7. Further Reading**

English

1964: *The Sirens* (Asian Poetry Prize winner)

1965: *Summer in Calcutta* (poetry; Kent's Award winner)

1967: *The Descendants* (poetry)

1973: *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (poetry)

1976: *My Story* (autobiography)

1977: *Alphabet of Lust* (novel)

1985: *The Anamalai Poems* (poetry)

1992: *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (collection of short stories)

1996: Only the Soul Knows How to Sing (poetry)  
2001: Yaa Allah (collection of poems)  
1979: Tonight, This Savage Rite (with Pritish Nandy)  
1999: My Mother At Sixty-six (Poem)

## Malayalam

1964: Pakshiyude Manam (short stories)  
1966: Naricheerukal Parakkumbol (short stories)  
1968: Thanuppu (short story, Sahitya Academi award)  
1982: Ente Katha (autobiography)  
1987: Balyakala Smaranakal (Childhood Memories)  
1989: Varshangalkku Mumbu (Years Before)  
1990: Palayan (novel)  
1991: Neypayasam (short story)  
1992: Dayarikkurippukal (novel)  
1994: Neermathalam Pootha Kalam (novel, Vayalar Award)  
1996: Chekkerunna Pakshikal (short stories)  
1998: Nashtapetta Neelambari (short stories)  
2005: Chandana Marangal (Novel)  
2005: Madhavikkuttiyude Unmakkadhakal (short stories)2x  
2005: Vandikkalalakal (novel)  
1999: My Mother At Sixty-six (Poem)

## **Paper-XXI. Contemporary Indian Writing in English-I**

### **Unit- 5. Vikram Seth**

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

1.2 Biographical sketch of Vikram Seth

1.3 Famous works of Vikram Seth

1.4 Seth's style of writing

2. Themes and Outlines of Vikram Seth's works

3. Summary and analysis of *The Humble Administrator's Garden*

4. Seth's contribution to Indian Literature

5. Questions

6. Further Reading

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Objective

This Unit provides a biographical sketch of Vikram Seth, some of his famous poems and his general style of writing poetry followed by a detailed discussion about its themes and outlines. It also includes the summary and analysis of his poems, *The Humble Administrator's Garden*. It is then followed by a discussion about Seth's contribution to Indian Literature. This unit concludes with a set of questions and a list of further readings of Vikram Seth to gain knowledge about the critical aspects of his works.

### 1.2 Biographical sketch of Vikram Seth

**Vikram Seth**, born June 20, 1952 is an Indian poet, novelist, travel writer, librettist, children's writer, biographer and memoirist.

#### Early Life

Seth was born to Leila and Prem Seth in Calcutta (now Kolkata). His family lived in many cities including the Bata Shoe Company town of Batanagar amal, Patna, near Danapur and London.

His father was an executive with the Bata India Limited shoe company who migrated to post-Partition India from West Punjab in Pakistan. His mother, Leila was the first woman judge on the Delhi High Court as well as the first woman to become Chief Justice of a state High Court, at Simla. She studied law in London, while she was pregnant with Seth's younger brother, and came first in her bar examinations conducted only weeks after she delivered her second child.

His younger brother, Shantum, leads Buddhist meditational tours. His younger sister, Aradhana, is a film-maker married to an Austrian diplomat, and has worked on Deepa Mehta's movies *Earth* and *Fire*. (Compare the characters Haresh, Lata, Savita and two of the Chatterji siblings in *A Suitable Boy*: Seth has been candid in acknowledging that many of his fictional characters are drawn from life; he has said that only the dog Cuddles in *A Suitable Boy* has his real name ... "Because he can't sue". Justice Leila Seth has said in her memoir *On Balance* that other characters in *A Suitable Boy* are composites but Haresh is a portrait of her husband Prem.)

Having lived in London for many years, Seth now maintains residences near Salisbury, England, where he is a participant in local literary and cultural events, having bought and renovated the house of the Anglican poet George Herbert in 1996, and in Delhi, where he lives with his parents and keeps his extensive library and papers.

### Education

He attended St Michael's High School in Patna, Welham Boys' School and The Doon School in Dehra Dun.

At Doon Founder's Day gathering in 1992, he remarked about his "terrible feeling of loneliness and isolation" while studying at the prestigious institution. He said,

Sometimes, at lights out, I wished I would never wake up to hear the chhota hazri bell. For days after I left I thought of school as a kind of jungle, and looked back on it with a shudder. I was teased and bullied by my classmates and my seniors because of my interest in studies and reading, because of my lack of interest in games, because of my unwillingness to join gangs and groups.

In his speech to the Doon students he also spoke of the advantages the school conferred on him and offered words of encouragement and inspiration. In an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Margaret Throsby, his slightly younger contemporary at Doon, anthropologist and novelist Amitav Ghosh, expressed surprise at the report of how Seth had characterised his school days: in his own recollection Seth had been deservedly lionized by both students and staff.

Seth completed his A-levels at Tonbridge School, a public school in Kent, England, and read Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He undertook doctoral studies at Stanford University where he has stated that he spent "eleven years (from

1975 to 1986) not getting an economics PhD." While formally engaged in postgraduate economics courses at Stanford he also undertook poetic studies ... he was Wallace Stegner Fellow in Creative Writing in 1977-1978. ... with the poet Timothy Steele. Steele's traditionally structured verse with formal rhyme and metre (together with that of Robert Frost and Philip Larkin) inspired Seth to adopt a similar formal discipline in his own poetry. "I wanted to have some contact with the writing program," Seth recalled in 2003 interview. "So I went to this office and asked if there was anyone who could help with poetry. There were two poets there and the one nearest the door was Timothy Steele, who writes with rhyme and metre. If the other fellow had been closer, I'd probably have turned out a poet of free verse." He also enrolled in Mandarin Chinese courses at Stanford that later helped him gain fluency during his stint in China.

In 1980-82 Seth did extensive field work in China gathering data for his intended doctoral dissertation on Chinese population planning; he was attached to Nanjing University and became fluent in Mandarin within six months, later translating Chinese as well as Hindi poetry into English. He took advantage of his Chinese language fluency to return home to Delhi overland via Xinjiang and Tibet, resulting in *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983), a combination travel narrative and personal memoir written at the suggestion of his father.

### Personal Life

#### **Avocations**

A polyglot, Seth detailed in an interview (in the year 2005) in the Australian magazine *Good Weekend* that he has studied several languages, including Welsh, German and, later, French in addition to Mandarin, English (which he describes as "my instrument" in answer to Indians who query his not writing in his native Hindi), Urdu (which he reads and writes in Nasta'liq script), and Hindi, which he reads and writes in the Devanagari script. He plays the Indian flute and the cello and sings German lieder, especially Schubert.

#### **Business acumen**

Seth's former literary agent Giles Gordon recalled being interviewed by Seth for the position:

Vikram sat at one end of a long table and he began to grill us. It was absolutely incredible. He wanted to know our literary tastes, our views on poetry, our views on plays, which novelists we liked.

Seth later explained to Gordon that he had passed the interview not because of commercial considerations, but because unlike the others he was the only agent who seemed as interested in his poetry as in his other writing. Seth followed what he has described as "the ludicrous advance for that book" (£250,000 for *A Suitable Boy*) with £500,000 for *An Equal Music* and £1.4 million for *Two Lives*. He prepared an acrostic poem for his address at Gordon's 2005 memorial service.

Gone though you have, I heard your voice today.  
I tried to make out what the words might mean,  
Like something seen half-clearly on a screen:  
Each savoured reference, each laughing bark,  
Sage comment, bad pun, indiscreet remark.  
Gone since you have, grief too in time will go,  
Or share space with old joy; it must be so.  
Rest then in peace, but spare us some elation.  
Death cannot put down every conversation.  
Over and out, as you once used to say?  
Not on your life. You're on this line to stay.

### **Gay and bisexual themes**

In each of Seth's novels and in much of his poetry, there are central or peripheral gay or bisexual themes and characters; in particular one of the central relationships in *The Golden Gate* and the association between Maan and Firoz in *A Suitable Boy*. Seth has been discreet but not secretive about his personal life, occasionally citing his early poem "Dubious" without further comment:

Some men like Jack and some like Jill  
I'm glad I like them both but still  
I wonder if this freewheeling  
Really is an enlightened thing,

Or is its greater scope a sign  
Of deviance from some party line?  
In the strict ranks of Gay and Straight  
What is my status: Stray? Or Great?

Seth has said that "the 'I' in my poems is almost always me"; *Mappings* and Seth's other books of poetry also contain love poems addressed to both male and female objects.

However, Seth's mother, Justice Leila Seth, wrote in her memoir *On Balance*,  
At the time [of a dispute with Seth over sleeping arrangements for a visiting friend] I didn't realise that Vikram was bisexual. This understanding came to me much later and I found it hard to come to terms with his homosexuality. Premo found it even harder....But we loved him and accepted it without understanding it.

Beyond the dedication in *An Equal Music*, Seth has expressly acknowledged his ten-year relationship with his former partner, Philippe Honoré. Indian-born San Francisco journalist Sandip Roy reports that Seth discussed the issue of his sexuality candidly in a television program with his sister Aradhana. In a book tour radio interview, Roy probed further: Seth said that this was not something he'd ever hidden, but that he just didn't wish to be defined by it. On the other hand, he said that he was conscious of the fact that being open about his sexuality might help other bisexual or gay people, and that he had given leave to his mother to write about it partially for that reason.

Seth has been increasingly forthright in recent years on the issue of gay rights in his native India. In an interview on CNN-IBN aired 21 January 2006, Seth talked about the law in India relating to homosexuality. He called section 377 of the Indian Penal Code barbaric and archaic. He advocated its removal, saying that the British who introduced this have removed it in their own country. He gave three reasons for it being removed: (1) it is silly (as India is following something outdated); (2) it is cruel (as it causes intolerable pain and self-doubt); and (3) it is harmful (as it promotes underground activities which pose a health problem). He wished that young Indians would not have to worry about their sexuality. He suggested that the government was afraid of losing votes and it was fear that drove its indisposition to amend the current draconian criminal sanctions against homosexuality. Continuing with the theme, Seth said in an interview with Sheela Reddy published in Outlook India on 2 October 2006,

“I don't particularly like talking about these matters myself. I am a private person and I don't feel my friends' lives and my own should be part of the public's right to know. But in a case like this where so much is at stake, where the happiness, at a conservative estimate, of 50 million people and their right not to be fearful or lonely and to be with the people whom they love is at issue, and the happiness of their families as well, then it really is incumbent on us to speak out.”

Upon the Delhi High Court's 2009 judgement that Section 377 of the IPC violates fundamental human rights, Seth spoke of the effective legalisation of homosexuality in India as "wonderfully good, humane and lucid", adding that "Now a homosexual in India does not have to feel that he or she is an unarrested criminal."

## Writing

### **Poetry**

Seth has published five volumes of poetry. His first, *Mappings* (1980), was originally privately published; it attracted little attention and indeed Philip Larkin, to whom he sent it for comment, referred to it scornfully among his intimates, though he offered Seth encouragement. Whether or not Seth's poetry is expressly influenced by Larkin, it contains similar elements: a highly colloquial vocabulary and syntax with enjambement and rhyme; closely structured form but without rigidity.

In 2009 Seth contributed four poems to Oxfam which are used as introductions to each of the four collections of UK stories which form Oxfam's 'Ox-Tales' book project.

### **Travel writing: *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet***

His travel book *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) was his first popular success and won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award. It offers insight to Seth as a person, who is candid about the reality and effect of living abroad ... though not in particular of being in diaspora ... a theme which arises in his poetry but nowhere in his fiction:

Increasingly of late, and particularly when I drink, I find my thoughts drawn into the past rather than impelled into the future. I recall drinking sherry in California and dreaming of my earlier student days in England, where I ate dalmoth and dreamed of Delhi. What is the

purpose, I wonder, of all this restlessness? I sometimes seem to myself to wander around the world merely accumulating material for future nostalgias. (p.35)

### **Hybrid: The "novel in verse": *The Golden Gate***

The first of his novels, *The Golden Gate* (1986) is a novel in verse about the lives of a number of young professionals in San Francisco. The novel is written entirely in Onegin stanzas after the style of Charles Johnston's 1977 translation of Aleksandr Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Seth had encountered it in a Stanford second-hand bookstore and it changed the direction of his career, shifting his focus from academic to literary work. The likelihood of commercial success seemed highly doubtful ... and the scepticism of friends as to the novel's viability is facetiously quoted within the novel; but the verse novel received wide acclaim (Gore Vidal dubbed it "The Great California Novel") and achieved healthy sales. The novel contains a strong element of affectionate satire, as with his subsequent novel, *A Suitable Boy*.

It is claimed on the web that in the text of *The Golden Gate*, Seth rhymes his own surname with the word "away", implying that the English pronunciation of his name is similar to "Say". This is not the case; the only place in this book where Seth rhymes his surname is verse 5.1, where it is rhymed with "Great".

"The Golden Gate, an opera in two acts with music by Conrad Cummings and libretto from the novel-in-verse by Vikram Seth adapted by the composer" is currently (2010) in development by LivelyWorks and American Opera Projects and receives a staged workshop production at the Rose Studio at Lincoln Center in New York City in January 2010.

### **Novels in prose**

#### ***A Suitable Boy***

After the success of *The Golden Gate*, Seth took up residence in his parents' house back in Delhi to work on his second novel, *A Suitable Boy* (1993). Though initially conceived as a short piece detailing the domestic drama of an Indian mother's search for an appropriate husband for her marriageable Indian daughter against the background of the formative years of India after independence, the novel grew and Seth was to labour over it for almost a decade. The 1474-page novel is a four-family saga set in post-independence, post-Partition

India, and alternatively satirically and earnestly examines issues of national politics in the period leading up to the first post-independence national election of 1952, inter-sectarian animosity, the status of lower caste peoples such as the jatav, land reform and the eclipse of the feudal princes and landlords, academic affairs, inter- and intra-family relations and a range of further issues of importance to the characters. The Indian journalist and novelist Khushwant Singh has said of the novel that, "I lived through that period and I couldn't find a flaw. It really is an authentic picture of Nehru's India." The novel was, despite its formidable length, a bestseller, and propelled Seth into the public spotlight.

Seth has confirmed (July 2009) that he is writing a contemporary novel including characters from *A Suitable Boy*, to be published in 2013. He describes *A Suitable Girl* as a "jump sequel", with Lata looking for a "suitable girl" for her grandson.

### ***An Equal Music***

Seth's third novel, *An Equal Music* (1999), set in contemporary Europe, focuses on the lives of classical musicians and their music.

Readers and critics without musical knowledge occasionally complained that Michael, the protagonist, was simply not a likeable (or unlikeable) enough character to sustain interest throughout a substantial novel and that the focus on the music for its own sake can be trying for the uninitiated. Musically knowledgeable readers, especially those who perform, were with rare exceptions unstinting in their enthusiasm and praise. Paolo Isotta, one of Italy's most significant music critics, wrote in the influential newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* of the Italian translation that no European writer had ever shown such a knowledge of European classical music, nor had any European novel before managed to convey the psychology, the technical abilities, even the human potentialities of those who practise music for a living

Seth credits his then-partner, the French violinist Philippe Honoré, as inspiring him with the idea for *An Equal Music* in an acrostic sonnet on Honoré's name in the epigraph:

Perhaps this could have stayed unstated.  
Had our words turned to other things  
In the grey park, the rain abated,  
Life would have quickened other strings.

I list your gifts in this creation:  
Pen, paper, ink and inspiration,  
Peace to the heart with touch or word,  
Ease to the soul with note and chord.  
How did that walk, those winter hours,  
Occasion this? No lightning came;  
Nor did I sense, when touched by flame,  
Our story lit with borrowed powers -  
Rather, by what our spirits burned,  
Embered in words, to us returned.

Seth together with Philippe Honoré marketed a double CD of the music mentioned in *An Equal Music*, performed by Honoré.

### **Biography/Memoir: *Two Lives***

His most recent book, *Two Lives*, is a non-fiction family memoir written at the suggestion of his mother, and published in October 2005. It focuses on the lives of his great-uncle (Shanti Behari Seth) and German-Jewish great aunt (Henny Caro) who met in Berlin in the early 1930s while Shanti was a student there and with whom Seth stayed extensively on going to England at age 17 for school. As with *From Heaven Lake*, *Two Lives* contains much autobiography.

### **Range**

Seth's range is demonstrated by the historical accuracy of *A Suitable Boy*, with the nuanced cultivated-Indian English of the narrative voice and the entirely in-character voices of the principals of the story; the correspondingly accurate depiction of northern California yuppies of the 1980s in *The Golden Gate*; and his portrait of the world of western classical musicians in *An Equal Music*. He has continued to produce volumes of poetry at intervals alongside his publications in a range of other forms, including translations from Chinese poets.

A film of *A Suitable Boy* was slated to go into production in 2007, an earlier attempt at a television serialisation having been abandoned.

### **1.3 Famous works of Vikram Seth**

#### **Novels**

- *The Golden Gate* (1986)
- *A Suitable Boy* (1993)
- *An Equal Music* (1999)
- *A Suitable Girl* (2013)

#### **Poetry**

- *Mappings* (1980)
- *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985)
- *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990)
- *Beastly Tales* (1991)
- *Three Chinese Poets* (1992)
- *The Frog and the Nightingale* (1994)

#### **Children's book**

- *Beastly Tales* (1991)

#### **Libretto**

- *Arion and the Dolphin* (1994) for the English National Opera

The Traveller [2008] with composer Alec Roth. Premiere, Lichfield Festival July 2008.

#### **Non-fiction**

- *From Heaven Lake* (1983)
- *Two Lives* (2005)

### **1.4 Seth's style of writing**

It comes as a surprise to some readers of Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) that the author of this, the longest novel in English ever written, has also penned six volumes of poetry.

What is surprising is not Seth's shift between prose and poetry (here he is in the company of several contemporary writers), but that an author famous for such an expansive, 'unrestrained' work of fiction, could also write with the formal and verbal restraint, economy and discipline of Seth-the-poet.

*Mappings* (1980) was Seth's first volume of poetry, a little known collection, it includes translations of work by Chinese, German and Hindi poets. Through *Mappings* Seth served something of an apprenticeship while revealing an early preoccupation with European and Chinese (Seth does not see himself as a singularly 'Indian' writer) cultural production that has, if anything, become more pronounced in his more recent work.

*Mappings* was followed by *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983), a popular and compelling autobiographical tale of the author's journey from Nepal to India and the many and varied people he meets on the way. Travel also provides the direction for Seth's next two collections, *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985) and *All you who Sleep Tonight* (1990). *The Humble Administrator's Garden*, is a witty collection of nature poems structured around plants/places: Wutong (China), Neem (India) and Live-Oak (California). *All you who Sleep Tonight* is an elegant book of poetry that combine the sharp humour that characterises so much of Seth's writing with darker subjects such as Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

In his next book of poems, Seth further displays his capacity for wit in *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1991). As its title makes explicit, this is another narrative of journeys and journeying that takes us through Greece, China, India and the Ukraine not to mention the fantasy world of Gup. Structured around the classic tension between good and evil and punctuated by superb illustrations, these tales in verse will appeal as much to children as to adults.

In a more recent collection, *Three Chinese Poets* (1992) Seth offers us his most ambitious and daring translation to date. The 'three Chinese' of the title are the T'ang dynasty poets Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu. Translated from the original ideograms (the

graphic symbols of the Chinese writing system), Seth closely follows the form and subject of the poems in what is a controlled and skilful collection.

Seth's first 'novel' - *The Golden Gate* - was published in 1986. Composed of no less than 690 rhyming tetrameter sonnets (more than 7000 lines). Gore Vidal has called it 'the Great California novel'. *The Golden Gate* is a satirical romance set in San Francisco and is centred on the relationship of two professionals.

In his next novel, *A Suitable Boy* Seth combined satire and romance to even greater effect in what became one of the most popular epic narratives of the late twentieth century. This heavy weight novel, described by one critic as 'three and a half pounds of perfection' has earned Seth comparison with Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens and George Eliot. The classic realism of *A Suitable Boy*, which took Seth almost a decade to write, was for many readers of Indian fiction in English, a welcome break from the magical realism of that other heavy weight author from the subcontinent, Salman Rushdie. Indeed Seth describes his preferred prose style in a manner that seems to implicitly contrast him with that of Rushdie: 'the kind of books I like reading are books where the authorial voice doesn't intrude ... [or] ... pull you up with the brilliance of their sentences'. Of course, such comparisons ultimately conceal more than they reveal: if Seth's novel represents a move away from self-conscious modernist experimentation then how are we to read the self-conscious epigraph with which it opens: 'The secret of being a bore is to say everything' (Voltaire)?

Set in Brahmipur, *A Suitable Boy* uses the taboo relationship between a boy and girl as a metonym through which to explore the post-Independence conflict in India between Hindus and Muslims. The novel centres on four families: the Kapoors, Mehras and Chatterjis (Hindus) and the Khans (Muslim). Mrs Rupa Mehra is looking for a 'suitable boy' for her wayward daughter, Lata. 'Suitable' here means Hindu, but Lata, it seems, has her eyes set on a Muslim boy. The repercussions of this relationship consume one thousand three hundred and forty nine pages.

Seth's novel, *An Equal Music* (1999), is another romantic novel, but this time minus the satire of *A Suitable Boy* and a thousand or so pages. The book centres on two gifted musicians: Michael Holme and Julia McNicholl. As Michael works on a Beethoven piece

for the Maggiore Quartet, he grows increasingly preoccupied with recollections of his student days in Vienna where he met Julia. When the two are re-united by chance in London, their relationship is re-kindled. One of the most impressive aspects of this novel is the way in which it manages to convey music through language. While Seth is modest about his musical abilities, the fact that he was commissioned to write a libretto (later published as *Arion and the Dolphin*) for the English National Opera in 1994 suggests he is no novice. *An Equal Music* takes a conventional romantic plot and renders it compelling and novel through the seductive clarity and precision of its prose.

Seth has written four collections of poems: *Mappings* (1982), *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), and a collection of fables in verse, *Beastly Tales* (1991). In addition he has translated the works of three Chinese poets--Wang Wei, Li Bai, and Du Fu--into English (1992). He has written a libretto, *Arion and the Dolphin* (1994), in which a shipwrecked and forsaken Arion is befriended by a dolphin who is betrayed and killed by men, a classic, tragic tale very different from Seth's usual bantering, ironic tone. He has also written a travelogue describing his hitchhiking trip from Tibet to Nepal, *From Heaven's Lake* (1993), and an engaging account of the lives of his Indian dentist uncle, Shanti, and his German wife, Henny (*Two Lives*, 2005).

In *Two Lives*, Shanti and Henny attempt to acculturate in England, the country to which they emigrate. Henny is a Jew who survived and escaped the Holocaust, unlike her mother and sister who succumbed at Auschwitz. She later married her Indian boarder. The book spans the twentieth century and is a work about levels of diasporic experience and dislocations: the effect of war on Shanti and Henny and Seth's own journey in the 1970s to study at Tonbridge School--where he is served shrimp in scooped apples and eats the apples, to the shocked consternation of English schoolboys--and learns the intricacies of the use of Western cutlery with the help of surreptitious glances at others, something Indian students in the West would readily identify with (the moment in which you realize you are judged not on brains but on easy familiarity with mundane Western cultural norms). In Tonbridge he hears strains of the music of Simon and Garfunkel, mainly. In Oxford his interest in the cello and Bach initiates his closer relationship with Western classical music.

## **2. Themes and Outlines of Vikram Seth's works**

The most outstanding and immediately striking feature of Vikram Seth's writing is its cultural hybridity. Seth's work is set in different continents and cultures and spans India, China, the U.S., and England, reflecting his cross-cultural affinities. He grew up in India and was a student later at Oxford, Stanford, and Nanjing University in China. On the surface, there appears to be little continuity of content or style in Seth's work since he changes genres and contexts frequently. Yet what emerges in his work is an old-fashioned interest in family and relationships in the private and domestic spheres. He seems to grieve the loss of stable, sustained, personal relationships in a contemporary international world impacted by consumerism in the West and modernization and the breakdown of patriarchal society in India. The trope of music surfaces frequently in his writing, emphasizing the unifying influence of the artistic sphere that speaks across cultures and provides an escape from cultural conflicts. This paper looks at the body of Seth's nonfictional writings briefly and then examines his three novels--*The Golden Gate* (1986), *A Suitable Boy* (2003), and *An Equal Music* (1999)--as examples of his range of cultural representation.

*Two Lives* thus records aspects of diasporic experience and a sense of strangeness and perhaps rejection due to unfamiliarity with Western ways, as experienced by Seth and others who set off from India to study in the West. Diasporic concerns are an important feature of contemporary Indian writing in English, as is evident in the work of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, and others. Seth himself is a product of the diaspora, though in his fiction he has chosen to focus on individual countries and their cultures from an observer/commentator point of view rather than on the experience of migration. Speaking about the contribution of Indian diasporic writers, Amitav Ghosh states in "The Diaspora in Indian Culture": "The modern Indian diaspora ... is not merely one of the most important forces in world culture ... the diaspora also counts among its members some of the world's finest writers" (*The Imam and the Indian*).

In his first collection of poems, *Mappings*, Seth reveals his anxiety over his nomadic lifestyle in the poem "Diwali": "The whole world means exile for our breed / Who are not at home at home / And are abroad abroad." He also refers to his bisexual leanings in this collection--though passe in the West, homosexuality is still closeted rather than open in India. In the poem "Dubious," Seth states: "In the strict ranks of Gay and Straight / What is my status? / Stray? or Great?" In *The Golden Gate*, Seth portrays the homosexual relationship of Ed and Phil sympathetically but with a touch of mockery when Ed is wracked with guilt and turns to the Bible, in which homosexuality is condemned.

The Humble Administrator's Garden is divided into three sections containing Chinese, Indian, and American poems. The sections are titled with the names of appropriate national trees--Neem (India), Wutong (China), and Live Oak (California). The Chinese section is marked especially by poems that speak of the soothing effect of Chinese gardens and the music of the Chinese instrument, the erhu. All You Who Sleep Tonight contains a new variety of poems in one section--characters representing suppressed voices from history speak out in dramatic monologues. We hear the voices of the tragic poet Ghalib, of a victim at Auschwitz, of an AIDS patient, of a doctor witnessing the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima. While Seth's fiction maintains a comic decorum, the poems show his concern with more somber themes of war. In *Beastly Tales*, Seth invents a new fable, "The Elephant and the Tragopan," in which he expresses environmental concerns. Humans are building a dam in Bingle Valley when the rebellious tragopan leads a militant group against them and is killed--a dark comment on Third World politics, where authoritarianism belies a democratic front.

The Golden Gate is written in the form of sonnets inspired by Pushkin's Eugene Onegin. Interestingly, Seth's use of the archaic sonnet form is not at odds with his subject--the lives and loves of yuppies in the California of the 1980s. To the urban Indian, California in the 1980s represented the American dream of affluence, the pot of gold at the end of the diasporic rainbow. Seth tries to expose the empty promise of this life and highlights the dichotomy between outer success and inner angst. In the first sonnet, John, a successful yuppie, wonders: "if I died, who'd be sad? Who'd weep? ... would anybody?" The sonnet introduces a disquieting note in the novel from the outset, which also becomes its central preoccupation: the character's search for love and meaning in an affluent society where loneliness predominates.

John places advertisements in the newspaper. He is aided by his former girlfriend, Janet Hayakawa, a Japanese immigrant, who is a drummer in a band named Liquid Sheep. He falls in love with Liz, a lawyer, who eventually marries his friend Phil. Phil has a homosexual relationship with Ed, Liz's brother. Janet dies in a car crash. This complicated and transitory sets of relationships highlights Seth's theme of the breakdown of the personal sphere in capitalist society. Some of the characters keep pets to ease loneliness--Ed has an iguana and Liz keeps cats, underscoring the desperate loneliness of the characters.

The Golden Gate Bridge is a testimony of man's craft and symbolizes progress and skill: the modern equivalent of Keats's Grecian Urn. It is also an artifact rising above the transient waves below, testifying to the bitter contrast between the permanence of art and the impermanence of life and relationships. After writing *The Golden Gate*, Seth abandoned his studies in economics and a possible future in the U.S. and returned to India. The novel perhaps reflects his deeper self-questioning about whether his vocation would meet his soul's needs. He creates a caricature of himself in the novel, an economist named Kim Tarvesh, an anagram of Vikram Seth: "a joyless guest amid the jollity ... poor Kim Tarvesh--we must recall / He's an economist after all."

Music reflects the jarring notes of life in the novel, especially in the blaring music of *Liquid Sheep*. Seth also refers to pop music. The music of the Beatles reflects the quality of modern life: "'Girl' elicits mere frustration, while 'Money' leaves him more annoyed."

*A Suitable Boy* offers a sharp contrast to *The Golden Gate*. Set in the India of the early 1950s, prior to the first general election of 1952, the novel represents at one level the need to examine the seeds of communal disharmony: the failure of secularism and modernization in modern, post-independence India. The novel describes Mrs. Rupa Mehra's search for a suitable match for her daughter, Lata. Lata has a brief dalliance with a Muslim boy, Kabir, even though Hindu-Muslim matrimonial alliances in India are almost unthinkable. The choice for Lata narrows down to an Oxford-educated young poet, Amit Chatterji, the son of a judge, a Seth-like figure in the novel. Lata finds his family very snobbish. The second choice (whom she eventually settles for) is Haresh, a self-made man in the shoe trade who speaks English with a provincial accent. This character is partly based on Vikram Seth's father. In an interview with Seth conducted at the time of *A Suitable Boy*'s publication, Seth stated that there were some concerns he shared with Jane Austen in the idea of "semi-arranged marriages" while, at the same time, he was interested in exploring "semi-historical terrain" in the novel (*Hindustan Times*).

Paralleling Mrs. Mehra's search for a groom, the novel offers an obvious parallel to India's search for a new leader. The development of the political fortunes of the secular Congress Party--as highlighted though mixed responses to Nehru--are mentioned. Nehruvian secularism appears to be the best option offered to the country. In opposition to Nehruvian secularism--which implied the relegation of religion to a personal sphere and equality for all

in the public sphere--the fundamentalist agenda of the vulgar Raja of Marh is presented as the alternative. Seth glosses over fundamental problems in Nehruvian secularism, which agreed to special privileges for members of minority--that is, non-Hindu--communities in the country. In recent times there has been strong warring between Hindus and Muslims in northern India over a shared site of the Babri Masjid beloved to Muslims and Ram Janambhoomi (the spot where Lord Rama, sacred to Hindus, is believed to have been born).

In Seth's novel, there is a thinly disguised episode concerning the (fictional) Alamgiri mosque and the Shiva temple. The Raja of Marh decides to have a Shiva temple (third in the Hindu trinity) created next to the site of the (fictional) Alamgiri mosque. The head priest or imam of the mosque makes inflammatory speeches against this move, stating the temple will be oriented in the direction of Mecca so that when the congregation genuflects they will be forced to bow to the idol of the infidels. The stone of an ancient Shiva temple lies near the river bed. The Raja of Marh has it rolled up the steps near the river to the top of the hill, but the rope breaks and the huge stone rolls down, crushing many in its wake--a fictional indictment of Hindu fundamentalism.

Muslim-Hindu animosity and friendship recur as important concerns in the novel in the public and private spheres; Lata falls in love with a Muslim, Kabir, as does Maan with a Muslim courtesan, Saeeda Bai. Both affairs are doomed. Maan befriends Firoz only to betray him later. The Nawab of Baitar, a poetic, scholarly, and moderate Muslim worried about the decay of Urdu, is an anachronism and representative of the tolerant, aristocratic Muslim of yore. In classical music a syncretic harmony of Hindu and Muslim cultures is rendered possible--the classical vocalist Majeed Khan, a Muslim, and Saeeda Bai sing Hindu devotional songs.

Brahmpur is the fictional town in the novel where the main action is located. It is an amalgamation of several towns such as Benares, Lucknow, and Allahabad in northern India. It is a quintessential north Indian provincial town with architectural elements from ancient India, the Moghul period, the colonial period, and modern India. Brahmpur is a microcosm of north India on the banks of the ubiquitous and holy Ganges. It has a university; a Moghul heritage building, the Barsaat Mahal; a fashionable shopping area, Nabiganj; the older Brahmpur area where the jatavs or leather-cleaning class live; an area for prostitutes, Tarbuz ka Bazaar; a colonial artifact, the Subzipore Club; and a fort. Seth has composed the

topography of this town keeping in mind the historical associations typical of larger north Indian provincial towns. However, Seth fails to imbue any of his buildings with the metaphorical significance of the Golden Gate Bridge in his previous novel.

An Equal Music affirms Seth's cosmopolitan identity in his close acquaintance with Western classical music, not a common interest among Indians. Classical music becomes in the novel a trope testifying to the enduring and redeeming presence and position of artistic traditions of high culture in contemporary Europe. The Maggiore Quartet, in which Michael is a violinist, provides the basis for both professional and personal relationships to its members. They form a private community where they experience intimacy and affection that endures. Seth gives meaning to lives based on a common passion. Classical music transcends national boundaries and eras. Michael travels from Vienna and Venice to London, where he plays the music of Schumann and Schubert. The merry "Trout" offers solace in bleaker moments.

Michael is a butcher's son who meets his earlier love--from whom he had parted after a quarrel--after a gap of ten years. Their common passion for and training in music bridges social differences. In the world of music, hierarchies depend on the placement of the musician in an orchestra. There is something trite in Seth's presentation of Julia as both deaf and married and in Michael's unlikely sighting of her in a bus (shades of the film *Dr. Zhivago*) and the manner in which he obtains her phone number surreptitiously through a friend. Seth's constant preoccupation with unrequited love or love that must die surfaces once again. Julia and Michael meet and part from each other but find their true fulfillment in music, so unrequited love is easily compensated for in the novel. Michael turns from player to listener and hears Julia as a member of the audience--an acceptable reversal of roles in feminist terms, with Julia as the active performer and Michael as the passive listener; alternatively, hearing her play becomes an acceptable form of male voyeurism. His unfortunate other lover, Virginie, receives short shrift but does not seem to care, which in Seth's presentation appears to free Michael of all moral responsibility.

The Tononi violin is an independent trope and protagonist in the novel. Like the Golden Gate, it is a permanent artifact that offers a lasting relationship to the besotted Michael. Mrs. Fromby wills the priceless Tononi to the butcher's son. Michael, a man of humble origins who rises in class and status by effort and merit, wins the trophy like Haresh in *A Suitable Boy*. Seth's championing of the middle classes is clear.

Seth's fiction reveals some common concerns, though explored in very different territories. The politics of the private sphere rather than the public domain are Seth's abiding concern, indicating his nostalgia for nineteenth-century British and Russian novels. Here he differs importantly from such contemporaries as Rushdie, Ghosh, and Mistry, though he comes closer in spirit to older Indian writers like R. K. Narayan and Anita Desai.

### **3. Summary and analysis of *The Humble Administrator's Garden***

#### **Synopsis**

The collection of poems 'The Humble Administrator's Garden' contains some beautiful pieces of lyrical poetry. The poems centers on Seth's life in India and his experiences as a student at Oxford, Nanjing, and Stanford as well. The imagination is mostly simple and direct, but still with that aura of magic it becomes the best of lyric poetry. It is sometimes witty, sometimes pictorial as well as narrative. All the pieces are very much elegant. The language is cleverly worked informal. Whether it is the delicate mixture of pastoral imagery and social comedy of 'The Tarrying Garden' or the exquisite tale telling of 'Curious Mishaps', his touch never fails him. Here the author manages to capture the different essences of china, India, and States with his words, transporting the reader through the lives and situations he describes.

Being published by Viking, Oxford U. Press, and Carcanet Press 'The Humble Administrator's Garden' is a collection of poems that won the commonwealth prize.

The Humble Administrator's Garden is a unique collection by Vikram Seth where he depicts the lives and situations of different personalities in China, India and other places. The author is a prolific writer and in all of his poems that collectively form the books this essence is very much prominent.

#### **Analysis**

This is a collection perfectly suited for reading in the lengthening shade of a hot summer day, or those quiet, still hours prior to midnight. With a mixture of muted and terse tones, Seth mingles memory and nostalgia with agreeable detail. These qualities make the poems primarily visual and reflective. Nature is omnipresent and, as such, an arboreal theme even marks the division of the collection: Wutong , Neem and Live-Oak, respectively about China, India, and California.

I found the Chinese evocations in Wutong engaging. The title sonnet, for example, deftly portrays how ridiculous the “humble administrator” is in his garden acquired by “dubious means”. And how comic he seems for liking his garden so much, while not being humble at all. It starts out rather musically:

A plump gold carp nudges a lily pad  
And shakes the raindrops off like mercury.

From there a luscious description of the garden is only interrupted by the administrator’s petty thoughts, and a petty action ending the sonnet with a rhyming thrust:

He leans against a willow with a dish  
And throws a dumpling to a passing fish.

Also, “From a Traveler” and “A Little Distance” are ruminative and deal interestingly with the subject of relationships. The first is a return letter and speaks nostalgically of a relation between two people that is past but never completed. The other describes an uneasy contentment with the way things are as they sunbathe semi-naked in a “secluded valley,” acting friendly, companionable. And how, if they become intimate once again, it would have an unwanted long-term consequence: “To be chaste, how frustrating for minutes, How uncomplicated for days.” Both are characterized by a traveler’s evasion of relationships and the finality of settling down. The detached involvement he enjoys complements the observational poems.

“Research in Jiangsu Province” is a curious catalog of Chinese life, statistically rendered in contrast to life itself. All the more powerful because the poem is a tape-recorded interview. Questions and answers are used in odd but inventive ways. This method provides intense passages full of emotion. Mundane questions counterpoint telling answers:

Forty square metres. Sixteen cents.  
To save us from the elements.  
Miscarriage. Pickle with rice-gruel  
Three times a week Rice-Straw for fuel.

Miscarriage next to pickle leaves such a repugnant feeling in the mind that the poem’s matter-of-fact rendition becomes forceful. Even more interesting is that the miscarriage is in response to a specific question:

“I see you have two sons. Would you  
Prefer to have a daughter too?”

One wonders if the miscarriage was a purposeful act. The chilling conclusion leaves us wondering:

And Mrs. Gao herself whose voice  
Is captive on my tape may choose  
Some time when tapes and forms are far  
To talk about the Japanese War.  
May mention how her family fled,  
And starved, and bartered her for bread,  
And stroke her grandson's head and say  
Such things could not occur today.

Chinese, perhaps, has no character for feminism. In any case, the last stanza is nicely understated. I especially like fled rhymed with bread and its fertile meanings. The stroking of the grandson's hair touchingly counterpoints the personal horrors of war. It is one of Seth's richer poems, and one where his economic background directly contributes to the form. In the Neem section, "The Comfortable Classes at Work and Play" amusingly describes well-to-do Indian family life, including changing education standards, corruption in politics, and generation gaps (grandma complains that she is "ignored, unloved"—so typical an elderly response in India, one wonders if there is not a handbook for this sort of thing). A young student's scholastic-romantic pretensions are humorously mocked in a couplet whose sentiment, though cliché, seems universal:

His girl-friend is feminist, and he is feminist  
When his girl-friend was anarchist, he was anarchist.

If anything the poem shows, paraphrasing Forster's judgment, that India is no mystery, only muddle. In comparison, Live-Oak is the weakest section of the three. Perhaps it is because the familiarity of California saps the wonder and intrigue from the poems. They have the nature quality of the Wutong section, but the tone is frolicsome and the details are less poignant.

#### **4. Seth's contribution to Indian Literature**

Seth has a broad range of international literary as well as biographical influences, but admits that "without Pushkin, I never would have written any novels. Initially, I always write a sonnet in the Pushkin form at the beginning of each book".

His poetry is almost musical, and music is indeed at the heart of his life, as described in the author's note to *An Equal Music*. "I suppose if I was given a choice of having to do without books and music", he muses, "I'm quite clear in my mind what I couldn't do without." He

gains pleasure from listening to many different kinds of music, from Bollywood to Schubert to north Indian classical music. "In *An Equal Music*, the whole book is written in the first person and there's also the underlying question of those who can't hear music at all. These things interplay."

He speaks fascinatingly on the differences between forms: with poetry you look into your own heart and feelings; with novels you have to understand other people.

His poetry, too, shows great empathy, such as the incredibly powerful and haunting poem, *Soon*, which he contributed to the anthology *Aids Sutra*, in which he imaginatively put himself in the mind of someone with Aids. "There are so many people who are orphaned as a result of their parents dying of Aids", he explains.

It is a spine-tingling experience to hear him read poems that have not yet been published, the subject matter ranging from dark to light, sometimes within the same poem. *Prayer for My Novel* is four lines long and brilliantly evokes the sense of creative birth behind a literary work. His great skill is evident in his technical range, from the villanelle to a poem of one-syllable words, his mathematical precision harnessing complex emotions.

One memorable poem infused with a mood of ennui revolves around the repetition of "I simply can't get out of bed / My joints are rusted, my brain is lead", its speaker needing to "press that re-set button in my head".

Indeed, Seth's poems make us feel as if a button inside our heads has been pressed. Speaking of the construction of poems, he says: "It's a strange constraint that is placed on oneself until it ceases to be a constraint."

Seth retains a sense of wonder for the mysteries of poetry. "The more you try to examine the process, the less helpful to you as a poet it is," he says, about the dangers of analysing one's own work. I wonder if Seth could describe his search for a suitable form, to which to marry his subject matter? "The question [of form and content] is not a chicken and egg question, it is a knife and fork question. Philip Larkin said the inspiration and form come together and that's what happens. I would say poetry, in a sense, is a miracle. It is capable of accepting many different rules."

To read and listen to Seth breaking and making those rules in his own unique way is a suitable delight.

## 5. Questions

1. What are the common themes found in Vikram Seth's works?
2. Write a short note on Vikram Seth's style of writing.
3. Critically analyse Seth's *A Humble Administrator's Garden*.
4. Write a note on:
  - a) The travel writings of Seth
  - b) Novels in prose by Seth

## 6. Further Reading

### Novels

- *The Golden Gate* (1986)
- *A Suitable Boy* (1993)
- *An Equal Music* (1999)
- *A Suitable Girl* (2013)

### Poetry

- *Mappings* (1980)
- *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985)
- *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990)
- *Beastly Tales* (1991)
- *Three Chinese Poets* (1992)
- *The Frog and the Nightingale* (1994)

### Children's book

- *Beastly Tales* (1991)

### Libretto

- *Arion and the Dolphin* (1994) for the English National Opera

The Traveller [2008] with composer Alec Roth. Premiere, Lichfield Festival July 2008.

### **Non-fiction**

- *From Heaven Lake* (1983)
- *Two Lives* (2005)