

# **Major Research Project in ENGLISH**

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Thanks  
to  
University Grants Commission  
for approving Major Research project in ENGLISH and providing the financial help to work on

## **Indian Culture in Indian English Poetry** (Spiritual and Philosophical Reflections)

(Initially the title was “Postcolonialism in Indian English Poetry”. At the suggestion of the Expert Committee, the title was changed to “Indian Culture in Indian English Poetry.” At Midterm Evaluation, the experts asked me to confine it to spiritual and philosophical reflections. Thanks to the experts for their valuable suggestions.)

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## Executive Summary

### **Indian Culture in Indian English Poetry** (Spiritual and Philosophical Reflections)

The year 1947 draws a line which divides Indian Poetry in English into Pre-Independence Indian Poetry in English and Post-Independence Poetry in English. Indian Poetry in English begins with Henry Louis Vivian Derozio who got his poetic collection, titled, *Poems* published from Baptist Mission Press, Kolkata in 1827. Since then, Indian English Poetry has been flowing continuously though its beginning is derivative and imitative. With the passage of time, it gets its own Indian rhythm and develops an idiom which is wholly Indian in spirit. The Nobel Prize for Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* gives Indian Poetry in English a world recognition and popularity across the globe.

Religio-philosophical ponderings influence an Indian poet because of his spiritual nurturing. Indian culture is diverse; so are the regional cultures. But, all the regional cultures prepare a way to the composite culture. Though the emerging trend is towards multiculturalism, it has yet to travel afar for its recognition. Multiculturalism is diversity in its new form while diversity is multiculturalism in the old one. By which term diversity is known is not the question. The important thing is how Indians muse over the patterns of life. Indians may change their

styles of clothing, eating and living under the global influence but they can't erase their religio-philosophical leanings which they have got as a part of Indian spiritual heritage. The design of the building may be different from what it was earlier but the foundation will remain as it is. The spiritual foundation will continue to support Indians with its myths, folk-tales, legends and cultural past. What matters to the Indians is soul, not body while, to the Westerners, body matters. Spiritual pleasure in any form through any medium becomes the priority in India. This is what makes Indian culture long lasting.

Indian culture is spiritual to the core. Aurobindo considers "philosophy and religion" to be "the soul of Indian culture, inseparable from each other and interpenetrative." He sees a vision—vision of turning human beings into divine beings and his *Savitri* reveals this transformation of human beings thorough the integral yoga. He scales spirituality with mysticism while focusing on the truth vision—a stage of bliss or *ananda*. He establishes mysticism as an institution and gives his integral yoga as a means to achieve the divine transformation which requires the binding in motion of the higher cords that include: Existence, Consciousness-force, Bliss and Supermind with the lower cords that include: Mind, Psyche (Soul), Life and Matter so that things associated with the lower cords may ascend to the higher ones and the things associated with the higher cords may descend to the lower ones. What he recommends is *sadhna* which helps in mind-adjustment from mental to supramental. God is within the heart and also in the cosmos. What a man has to do is to make his 'Self' in tune with 'Divine Self.' He emerges as a spiritual pundit who recommends concentration and meditation. The other cultural ambassador is Rabindranath Tagore, a humanitarian with the touches of spiritualism and romanticism. He represents Indian culture when he promotes the idea of cosmopolitanism, peace and love. Quite contrary to Aurobindo, he diffuses himself in all and spreads his artistic, aesthetic, philosophic and spiritualistic leanings. His God is all pervasive to the extent that he lives even in common man. He spreads love and makes all realize its fragrance because he knows that it will lead to peace—a panacea of all sufferings.

The holy texts like *the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagvad Gita, the Ramayana* etc., are the sources which have kept the spiritual heritage alive. Saints like Swami Vivekananda, Rama Tirtha and Paramahansa Yogananda recommend the essence of the holy texts through their

writings and speeches. Their poetry also reflects the spiritual spirit. Vivekananda talks of assimilation and recommends service to humanity. It is his belief that all are one and possess the sparks of divinity. Rama Tirtha gives a practical shape to what Vivekananda preached. He talks of reformation of oneself and this reformation will lead to godhead. He sees God in every atom. Peace within is his peace venture which he recommends to all in this materialistic age. He talks of service to humanity and also of universal brotherhood through love, devotion, compassion and co-operation. He believes that spiritual knowledge will remove the darkness of ignorance. He makes union with the Divine and attains the stage of bliss. This stage turns him into a poet of self-realization leading to God-realization. Sri Paramhansa Yogananda's mission is spiritual advancement that will mould the human personality to suit for God-consciousness. Like Vivekananda and Rama Tirtha, he also believes that divinity is inherent in every creature and this divinity helps man in achieving God through love, truth and universal brotherhood. He offers the two amulets 'Love' and 'Serve' which can make life worth-living and spiritually rich. He sees the spiritual fusion in 'Nature' and 'Spirit' and talks of 'Redemption of mankind' through God-consciousness. Hence, the saint poets reveal the essence of the holy texts that all are one with the divine spark and recommend love, devotion and service of humanity, the ingredients that prepare the base for worth and meaningful living.

Women poets have equally presented the basic cultural features through legends, myths and mode of living. Toru Dutt is the first significant poet who exploits the legends in order to recommend virtues like devotion to duty, feeling of sacrifice and spirit of selflessness that make Indian roots deep and life worth-living. She surprises the West when she introduces India's racial consciousness through her legends which convey Indian traditions and values with their inner strength. Sarojini Naidu is not deep and philosophical because she never makes her voyage within. But, she honestly colours the pages of her poems with the various Indian colours that she sees. Her poetry strikes the reader with charms and colours. She never stirs the soul but colours the Indian landscape with Indian people and things like the Indian weavers, palanquin bearers, corn-grinders, wandering beggars and wandering singers, snake-charmers, bangle-sellers, village-folks singing the hymns, the purdah nashin, maidens, widows, old women, priests, festivals, Indian customs and traditions, spiritual heritage in meditation and chanting the mantras, bonds of Hindu and Muslim Unity, patriots, historical places, historical people, birds, flowers,

rivers, sky and the like. She is a poet of love, beauty and romantic fervour. In her folk songs, she reveals devotion to Krishna through Radha and village maidens. Her songs emit the fragrance of Indian soil and her love for her country. The case of Kamala Das is different from that of Toru Dutt or Sarojini Naidu. She neither exploits the legends nor simply paints the beauty of her surroundings. She pens the lived experiences of her life and stirs the readers within while making them think of woman as a person and not merely a possession. A woman is not meant to be consumed and, so, she searches for her identity in the male dominated world. She oscillates between love and lust and, finally, takes shelter in the love of Ghanshyam. She moves from physical to spiritual and becomes a modern Mira or Radha who sees her Krishna everywhere. In ancient times woman was respected as a person and allowed to do what she liked. Kamala Das fights for woman in order to make the world realize that they are persons and have their own space.

Post-Independence poets neither reject spiritualism nor embrace materialism wholly; they remain somewhere in between while having a fusion out of some salient features of each. They do not glorify the superstitions and outdated traditions but remain objective and present reality as it is. They do not hesitate to point out the negative sides if they trace out any while surveying cultural ethos because they are the genuine well-wishers who long for cultural healings. This is the paradigm shift in the contemporary poets who reflect the modern tendencies with irony and satire. Though the poets criticize if they find out deviations from the usual course, they also seem to be in identification with the Indian roots.

Nissim Ezekiel, the first forceful voice of the post-Independence era reveals his sense of belongingness to Bombay, the microcosm of India and becomes a singer of its longings which he articulates through sex-landscape with all the realistic colours. He also shows how the Western effect has created a decline in the human values of the Indian people who have forgotten the mantras of tolerance, non-violence and cosmopolitanism. His poetry which creates a therapeutic effect on the reader is universal in nature. In his very Indian poems, he sketches the realistic picture of Indians and their way of life. He also seems to be offering some practical and philosophic tips which are certainly valuable pieces for leading a purposeful life.

Ramanujan weaves the fabric of his poetry with myths, history and family and attempts to awaken the cultural consciousness. Though he mixes his American impressions with the native surge, he traces out his roots in the mythical and literary past. His attitude towards Hinduism is rational and, so, he outright rejects what is superstitious and outdated in religion and traditions. His articulation is ironical because of his rationalism. He is a poet seer by virtue of his power of visualization and seeing into the things.

Keki N. Daruwalla voices his first hand experiences which he had while handling a particular situation in his career of a police officer. In his later poems, he does not paint the landscape of his poetry with blood, curfew and corruption but becomes mature enough to ponder over life and death. The angry lion meditates and, then, awakes to find himself as a poet of Indian sensibility. He uses irony and satire which certainly bite but this biting makes Indian people conscious of the cultural values so that they may become responsible and peace-loving citizens.

Like his contemporary poets, Shiv K. Kumar also imbues Indian culture but criticizes its outdated superstitions and orthodox rituals in religion through the device of irony, contrast and paradox. He never digests the idea why blood is shed in the name of sacrifice to the Goddess Kali. He wonders why people go to the Ganga for their outward purification without taking inner purification into consideration. He does not believe in suppressing desires but emphasizes for their sublimation. He values intuitions over reasons and speaks against sex merely for gratification. He considers sex as the holy flame which illumines the way to the divine within.

Jayanta Mahapatra searches for his roots in myths, legends and history of Orissa and makes an inward journey into the rich cultural past through the cultural racial memory. He presents the miserable condition of woman, becomes the voice of the people who suffered much in Bhopal gas tragedy, feels the burns as a result of terrorism, and cries out of despair because of alienation and rootlessness of the modern man. He speaks against the rituals and superstitions; and reveals the hypocrisy and the irreligious attitude of the religious people.

Arun Kolatkar is culturally conscious but he, unhesitatingly, reveals the masks of rituals, superstitions and irreligiousness worn in the name of being religious in Jejuri at micro level and in India at macro level. He shocks the readers when he brings out the truth behind the curtain. But, to tag him that he is against religion is an injustice to him. He shows what one fails to see. He becomes a poet of subalterns in *Kala Ghoda Poems* by painting the way of life they lead. He deciphers *Sarpa Satra* from the point of view of the snake man and makes it contemporary relevant by weaving its fabric with allegory, narration and myth though sometimes he comes down to the level of profanity or obscenity which generally either shocks the reader or makes him wonder at his candidness.

R. Parthasarathy follows the steps of Ramanujan and looks into his past and the Tamil culture in order to find out his cultural roots. He finds himself in dilemma when he sees that he cannot leave English while Tamil sensibility cannot leave him. In *Rough Passage*, he makes a cultural journey which begins right from 'Exile' and ends with 'Homecoming' via 'Trial'. As he feels much grieved to see the decline of Tamil culture, he longs for its restoration to its former self.

Niranjan Mohanty is a poet of Indian ethos and sensibility. He is also against the outdated values and rituals followed in the name of religion. He loves Jagannatha culture and promotes its ideals which include harmony, religious tolerance, humbleness, service to humanity, feeling of sacrifice and the faith that the true pleasure lies in divine life, not in material pursuits. He is a poet who has imbued Ezekiel and Ramanujan on one hand and Kolatkar and Jayanta Mahapatra on the other. He identifies himself with his cultural roots, weaves his poetic fabric with myths, history, family and legends, speaks against the rituals and follies celebrated in the name of religion, and paints his poetic canvas with what is contemporary.

This paradigm shift reveals the boldness and candidness of the post-Independence poets in voicing the contemporary feelings. They do not believe in glorification but like to present the things as they are. Hence, the modern poets have spoken against the outdated rituals and superstitions followed in the name of religion. It does not mean that they are not the protector of culture but the truth is that they are sincere and devoted to point out the diseased parts so that

they may be removed in time. They exploit the techniques of irony and satire to point out follies and weaknesses responsible for the decline of culture. Pre-Independence poets have focused the spiritual heritage while the post-Independence poets have pointed out the outdated rituals and superstitions that caused the cultural downfall. They (the post-Independence poets) have voiced the philosophical and spiritual tendencies through their poems. They may have the Western impact and interrogate the relevance of life but the cultural racial memory that they have inherited cannot be wiped out. Thus, the post-Independence poets, right from Ezekiel seem to be philosophizing over the issues related to life and its predicament.

Recently many poets have enriched the domain of Indian Poetry in English with their poetic outpourings which reveal the Indian cultural ingredients through myths and cultural past. Even, in the scientific age, people have not forgotten the cultural values despite the materialistic attacks. Hoshang Merchant, R. C. Shukla and Gopikrishnan Kottoor are some recent poets who have attempted to bring out the cultural values into limelight though they have adopted different ways. Hoshang Merchant loves strangeness and likes to be in love with something different. Hence, he loves boys and becomes the first queer poet or gay poet but, even then, he searches for the soul and not the body, the main essence of the holy texts. What matters to him is soul. He is a fusion of Buddhism and Sufism. He uses the myths of Radha, Krishna, Sati, Siva, Kali and others which give cultural fragrance to his poems. He lives in the dream world though his feet are on the ground reality. R. C. Shukla is a genuine poet who is much worried over the decline of the cultural values because of the impact of the Western culture. He considers women as the carrier of cultural values and, so, respects truly Indian women who celebrate festivals and follow traditions and rituals in order to keep the Indian culture alive. He dreams of an ideal cultural world where justice, equality, *samskar*, peace, tolerance, and spiritual virtues will rule. Gopikrishnan Kottoor has kept the *bhakti* tradition alive by creating Vrindavan where Krishna performs his *rasalila* with the gopis. The poet becomes Gopi and is lost in love with Krishna. Radha remains constant in her love for Krishna while it is not so with Krishna. But, the constant love of Radha attracts him to the extent that he becomes one with her and cannot separate him from her. Krishna realizes that he is Almighty because of the love of Radha. In brief, the poet in Kottoor keeps the cultural tradition of love alive through *Vrindavan*. What binds these three poets is the ingredient of love. Love makes Merchant long for soul in spite of the fact that he is a

gay poet. R. C. Shukla makes women the carrier of cultural values and considers sex not as lust but as religion. Kottoor becomes the Gopi and sings the songs of love in praise of Krishna, the Almighty. Love unites all and becomes responsible for cosmopolitan feelings.

To conclude, the early Indian English poets evoke spiritualism while the modern Indian English poets, because of their Western influence, oscillate between materialism and spiritualism but, finally, trace out their roots in spiritualism. The Western culture tempts them through materialism while they fail to wipe out the cultural memory deep rooted in spiritualism. This spiritualism makes them ponder over life so much that they articulate the religious and philosophical outpourings in their poems. They talk of *dharma* (religion), *artha* (riches), *kama* (sex) and *moksha* (salvation)—the four paths that form the essence of meaningful life. Synthesis, integration, tolerance and dialogue are the watchwords that keep the Indian culture alive. It believes in embracing the noble thoughts from other culture and does not hesitate in offering what is noble. It has wiped out the outdated rituals while making itself equipped with the new visions. No doubt, materialism is in air without having any roots within while spiritualism is a deep-rooted reality imprinted within. Love, devotion, compassion, tolerance, non-violence and cosmopolitanism are the ingredients which have translated Indian culture into all-embracing human culture with the spirit of “*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah / Sarve Santu Niraamayah.*” Concisely, Indian English poetry sincerely reflects the spirit of Indian culture and offers spiritual and philosophic reflections which illumine the vision of life. And the cultural journey continues....

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Dated *2 May 2013*....

**Dr. Sudhir Kumar's Major Research Project "Indian Culture in Indian English Poetry"**

Dr. Sudhir Kumar has selected the topic, titled, "Indian Culture in Indian English Poetry" in such a manner as would give insight into spiritual and philosophical reflections of Indian English poets. Their versatile geniuses and wonderfully complex personalities are displayed in so many different channels of culture, emotion and intellect and touched both individual and social life at so many angles that it is well-nigh impossible to do bare justice to them all in a single project. But, Dr. Sudhir's attempt is amazing and worth-appreciating. With great erudition and profundity he fathomed Indian culture in Indian English Poetry.

The explorer points out that the beneficial and stable thoughts grow in open environment uncontaminated by mental, social, physical or thoughtful pollutions. The project divulges an inner reservoir of divine inspiration of the poets to the readers and helps them experience God as conscious reality in their lives. He refers to the stalwart poets like Tagore and Aurobindo, and saint poets like Swami Vivkananda, Ram Tirtha and Paramhansa Yogananda who voiced the truths engrossing their consciousness at that moment, pouring forth priceless wisdom in a steady stream from the abundance of their spiritual experience and intuitive perception. He has also thrown light on the intoxicating love and divine joy of the women poets (Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das) apart from casting glance over modern poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Koltakar, Shiv K. Kumar and the contemporary poets like Niranjana Mohanty, R. C. Shukla, Hoshang Merchant and Gopi Krishna Kottoor.

Dr. Sudhir Kumar is quite objective and straightforward in evaluating these mentioned poets. His comprehensive vision scanned those phenomena which are wide spread but well-hidden and elucidated some of the most intriguing facets of the human soul. In fact, his project emanates that aroma which is well-acquainted to the votaries of 'Muse' and lovers / scholars of literature.

This project, I am sure, will motivate the researchers and lovers of poetry for further explorations in Indian English Poetry and, hence, contribute in the field of knowledge.

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**Comments on Sudhir Kumar's MRP in English, entitled Indian Culture in Indian English Poetry**

Dr. Sudhir Kumar's Major Research Project, entitled, "Indian Culture in Indian English Poetry", is an original, rational, erudite and penetrating interpretation of the influence of Indian culture, with emphasis on philosophical and spiritual reflections, on Indian Poetry in English since its very beginning with the publication of Derazio's poem in 1827. He brilliantly, objectively and dispassionately explores the influence of the multitudinous aspects of Indian Culture, which evolved out of the assimilation of various regional cultures on Indian English poets. The crux of Indian culture has been spirituality since time immemorial.

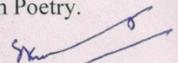
The researcher observes how Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore poetize spirituality and mysticism in their poetry. Sri Aurobindo envisages human beings transforming into supernal beings through yoga in *Savitri*, whereas Tagore, a romantic spiritualist and mystic, radiates the message of love, "sweetness and light" in *Gitanjali* and numerous lyrics.

The chapter on the saint poets is an original contribution to the enlargement of knowledge. The celebrated saint poets—Swami Vivekananda, Ram Tirtha and Paramhansa Yogananda have left a memorable corpus of poetry which is spiritual and mystical in essence.

The women poets—Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das who deftly employ myth and legends, which subsume spirituality and mysticism, stand apart in Indian English Poetry. Toru Dutt interprets myths and legends which are pregnant with rational memories and consciousness. Sarojini Naidu's poetry lacks in spiritual and mystical depth but she vividly captures the sensuous beauty of the variegated panorama of Indian life in colour world. Kamala Das, a pioneer of feminism, poetizes the lived experiences of life in order to establish the identity of woman. Both love and lust come in her poetry. She recurses to the myth of Radha, Mira and Krishna in order to impart a mystical twist to physical love.

The researcher brilliantly elucidates how the post-independent poets, who have been influenced by the Western thought, have artistically and poetically fuse together some salient features of spiritualism and materialism. They employ mordant irony and satire to discard superstitions, obsolete traditions and negative aspects which crept into the cultural ethos in course of time. The stalwart of modern poetry Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, K. N. Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar, R. Parthasarthy and Niranjana Mohanty exhibit various aspects of their cultural heritage and racial memories. Dr. Kumar also highlights the presence of Indian culture in the poetry of some recent poets—Hoshang Merchant, R. C. Shukla and Gopi Krishna Kottoor.

The entire project is conspicuous for the researcher's critical acumen, sharp insight and originality of approach. It puts Indian English poetry in spiritual perspective and opens up new vistas of research for scholars. It decidedly contributes to the expansion of knowledge in Indian English Poetry.

  
(Dr. Satish Kumar)

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## Culture, Multicultural and the Case of India

Sudhir K. Arora

Human culture, which determines the growth of a nation, is itself an outcome of a vision and art of living. Social, economic and political ingredients prepare the environment that shapes the attitude of the people. The growth of a human being in the given environment demonstrates the growth of a culture. Culture, which gives an identity to people, differs from group to group. Cultural growth is not simply an individual growth but a community growth. Societies, which vary in beliefs, customs, values, structure, policies and visions, have different cultures. Though the people are basically same physically, they differ because of a unique personality. Culture becomes a cementing force in binding them together into "a group sharing a certain degree of similarity, overcoming individual differences while setting us apart from other groups" (*The Human Portrait* 88). Hence, it binds the people in group and also differentiates from other groups.

Culture is a comprehensive term to the extent that it is often misunderstood and wrongly used. Even today, the definition given by Tylor is worth-mentioning. Tylor defines culture "as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a members of society" (qtd. in *The Human Portrait* 88). Hence, he believes that culture is acquired or learned from the members of their group through the process of socialization that includes physical and mental aspects. It cannot be an individual phenomenon; rather it is a group one. In plain words, culture is "a way of life that is common to a group of people, including a collection of beliefs and attitudes, shared understandings, and patterns of behaviour that allow those people to live together in relative harmony, but set them apart from other peoples" (*The Human Portrait* 110).

Culture brings refinement and excellence in life. Notwithstanding its categorization into regional culture, national culture, society culture,

Hindu culture, Muslim Culture, global culture etc., it possesses some universal ingredients which become keys to the basic solutions to the problems of living. Human welfare is ever present in the roots of every culture. Embracing the good things from others for the sake of human welfare is the sign that makes a culture living. Any culture that opposes changes and follows the path which does not take man to progress, peace and prosperity is no culture at all. Indian culture is dynamic not because it is Indian but because of its adaptable and assimilative nature to the changes. If it had not adopted what is good, it would have decayed earlier. Positive approach, tolerance and the ability to assimilate what is good are some ingredients that make a culture alive. Matthew Arnold, for whom, "the pursuit of perfection, then, is the pursuit of sweetness and light" believes that "He who works for sweetness works in the end for light also. He who works for light works in the end of sweetness also. But, he who works for sweetness and light united, works to make reason and the will of God prevail" (47). The concept of providing an environment of happiness and welfare all around can be an outcome of a cultured mind that thinks of bright and peaceful future.

Culture is often misunderstood as civilization. It is culture that provides the foundations to any civilization. Culture contributes to the inner growth while civilization to material growth. Culture with motivational force instills an ability to invent in man who invents and, hence, contributes in making civilization rich. Civilization is what a man invents while culture is his ability to invent. Culture, the abstract makes civilization, the concrete. The abstract culture makes a man think to the extent that he develops means that makes the building of civilization. Language, an ability to communicate creates culture which, in the long run gives birth to civilization. The foundation makes the building strong and durable. The cultural intellectual makeup prepares the civilized path for social development.

Diversity is now not a negative concept; rather it has become more popular than ever in its new form of multiculturalism. Though it is sometimes misused or overused for people with more than one culture, it is a right term for respecting and promoting multiple cultures. Respecting and acknowledging the differences or diversities create an environment for healthy relationship among the people of various groups. Multiculturalism does not force to cook various ingredients in order to turn them into one kind of food. Rather, each ingredient seems to have its own uniqueness. Its uniqueness is its beauty. Language

communicates; communication makes interaction possible with different cultures resulting in acknowledging the differences which finally give birth to multiculturalism. The concept of multiculturalism is favoured not because of diversities but because of its being a possible way of protecting the local culture of a particular place or nation which certainly be a promoting factor in making the global cultural diversity rich and safe. Two cultures come together and get in touch through a contact region which provides circumstances for learning from each other's ideologies oriented by culture. Cultural diversity is not a sin; rather it has become a virtue. One can learn what is best in other cultures and leave what clashes with the basic cultural structure. Multiculturalism provides multiple approaches to life and vision and helps in understanding the extremes—cultural interface and cultural seclusion. It does not believe wholly that race, religion and caste create culture. But, the champions of multiculturalism argue that culture is the consequence of multiple ingredients which vary with the variations in the global world. They also consider multiculturalism as the best way for maintaining the concept of egalitarianism. What translates justice into reality is not the yardstick from one culture but cultural communications via dialogues among multiple cultures. The magic is done by the idea of multiculturalism which offers possibilities to several different cultures for coexisting peacefully and fairly.

No doubt, the concept of multiculturalism seems to be alluring and protective if it is put into practice. But, some fanatics who are not in its favour perform destruction and torture the people other than their culture. Such narrow minded people certainly obstruct the path of culture that aims at welfare of the people. That everyone is ethnocentric more or less has somewhere a grain of truth. This love for one's culture in preference to other culture can be seen in the over praise of their myths, folk tales, proverbs and also language. To love one's culture is not bad but to think other cultures bad or inferior is not justified from any angle. People should be broad-minded and catholic in appreciating positive ingredients in other cultures. It is true that morals and values are based on the culture that people live and embrace but to judge other cultures on the basis of their set parameters is not fair. Cultural shock is felt when a man leaves his own culture and embraces another. He oscillates between the two cultures and feels frustration not only because of the clash of the old values with the new ones but also because of the attitude towards solutions to the problems which vary from one culture

to another. Differences concerning behavioural practices, norms and morals give each culture its uniqueness. The differences add beauty to every culture in one way or other. But, ethnocentrism present somewhere in man makes him a bit partial to his own culture to the extent that he feels that anyone who does not follow his culture or departs from the ways of his culture is a queer.

Indian culture, in spite of being influenced by the modern means of living and life-style, remains unchanged in her basic structure. No doubt, people may change their styles in clothing, eating and living but will never be away from Indian values and traditions which are deeply rooted in their heart, mind, body and soul. Spiritualism is the life breath of Indian culture. People search for solutions of their problems in spiritualism and have firm faith in cosmopolitanism. The myth, folk-tales and rich past are the archetypes before them. The action plan with the united effort is the very characteristic of the Indian people who fight against injustice. Patience and tolerance are the mantras in the reign of Indian culture. Even the foreign language is given the native touches. De-colonizing of English is being done by the Indian authors who either writing in English or in any other language are successfully propagating the Indian Culture to the West. Indian culture is not confined to any individual but is the result of totality of group ways, thoughts and action as accepted and followed by a group of people. The rich heritage of customs, traditions, values, beliefs, spiritualism and the mind-set is a legacy of the past which differentiates Indians from other groups.

Indian culture is distinctive in itself because of its rich tradition and values that follow the goal of *Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram*. Being secular in spirit, Indian culture with the feeling of cosmopolitanism has become human culture. Indian culture is based on the mantra of:

*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah,  
Sarve Santu Niramayah,  
Sarve Bhadraani Pashyantu,  
Maa Kashchid Dukhabhaavbhaveta,  
Om Shanthi Shanthi Shanthi.* ("Shanti Mantras")

Indian culture talks of the well-being of all without confining to a particular place. It longs for happiness, health and well-being of all the people. As it is broad in approach and catholic in vision, it considers the whole world its family. It promotes peace everywhere and invokes God for leading people from unreal to the real, darkness to light and death to immortality. The *Shanti mantra* reflects its character.

*Om Aasto ma sat gamaya*

*Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya*

*mrityor ma amritam gamaya*

*Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi.* ("Shanti Mantras")

Gayatri Mantra: "*Om Bhur, Bhuvah, Svaha / Tat Savitur Vareniam / Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi / Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat*" (Omnipresent Lord, Most worthy of worship / We meditate you / Remove our ignorance / And illuminate our minds) is chanted by Indians who get inner illumination and feel contentment. The spiritual character of Indian culture makes people grow inwardly. People treat their guest as god, respect elders, consider others as equal, become helpful to others in need, develop co-operation and high level of tolerance, multiply joy and happiness, share pain, embrace the Yoga and do their best to make the world a better place for all. Secularism flows in its veins. Though joint family system is the mantra that it chants, it has not denied the possibility of nuclear family in the changed circumstances. Dance and rituals are its part and parcel.

'Unity in Diversity' is the thread that binds all the people in India resulting in one composite culture—Indian Culture. Indian culture is considered to be a composite one because of her consisting of separate interconnected parts. All parts are somewhere connected resulting into a conceptual whole. But, recently some intellectuals have interrogated her composite character as they trace out multiculturalism in India. They argue that in India there is not one composite culture but several different cultures, which are coexisting successfully because of secular Indian spirit. Indian culture includes all—Tribal culture, Hindu Culture, Muslim culture, Jain culture, Buddhist culture, Christian culture, culture based on big cities like Mumbai culture, Delhite Culture, Bangali culture and the long list goes on. The question arises here: Are they really part of Indian culture? Or do they have Indian culture? Certainly they have their separate identities. When they have their identity, how can they be a part? They cannot assimilate their identity with others. Attempts have always been made but finally resulted in their recognition. Assimilation among them is possible to some extent but complete assimilation is a dream. The concept of composite culture is a way to bind all cultures into one while the reality seems to be different. Local culture never leaves its identity. If it leaves, how can it survive? All cultures struggle for their existence. Hence, they celebrate their identities, do their best to keep their uniqueness and become interconnected with

the concept of Indian culture without losing their basic structures. If minutely observed, the whole exercise leads to the way to multiculturalism. In India, theoretically there is one composite Indian culture but practically the waves of multiculturalism flow. The term, 'Multiculturalism,' is new one to Indians who, rather, use 'Diversity.' But, how far 'Diversity' differs from or equals to 'Multiculturalism' is a question worth-considering.

The concept of global culture once again has voted for the celebration of all cultures which differ from country to country or region to region but on macro level they contribute to one global culture. When one talks of country, the concept of Indian culture arises. But, when one talks of global culture, the concept of Indian culture gives place to culture of India. Again, Indian culture and culture of India differ as Muslim culture differs from culture of Muslim or Hindu culture from culture of Hindu or Christian culture from culture of Christian. It creates confusion because when concepts like Muslim culture or culture of Muslim are discussed, one fails to understand whether it is of Indian Muslim or Muslim residing anywhere in the world. Without making further confusion, it is better to confine to the theoretically concept of Indian culture which has roots in Hindu religion for its broad outlook, vision and the feeling of cosmopolitanism. There is one commonality in Indian culture in spite of different languages, religions, arts, literatures, customs and architectures. Tolerance and secularism bind all into one thread giving the form of unity in diversity. In comparison of European importance to reason, beauty, utility, pleasures and material welfare—the ingredients which serve body, Indian culture recognizes spirit and considers life to be psychological and spiritual. Man is a spirit that includes life and body. As he is a spirit, he is capable of being a god. For Westerners, man's reasoning mind and will power can make him better than what God has made him. They never consider that man is capable of becoming a God and people who think so live in illusion which is created out of their barbaric ignorance and arrogance.

Aurobindo considers "philosophy and religion" to be "the soul of Indian culture, inseparable from each other and interpenetrative" (55). He stresses that the main objective of Indian philosophy is "the knowledge of the spirit, the experience of it and the right way to a spiritual existence" (55). He pleads to search for the founts of native power in oneself in order to draw "deeper, more vital and fresher streams of the power of life than from anything the West can offer" (34). Indian

culture considers the growth and evolution of the spirit to be the main goal for which life is lived. Hence, it values architecture, sculpture and painting as they appeal the spirit through the eye.

Indian culture is spiritual to the core. Mysticism is India's invaluable heritage that believes in the concept of oneness in the entire creation, offers the message of *satyam, shivam and sundaram* to make man's life worth-living and commends the paths of knowledge (*jnana*), work (*karma*) and devotion (*bhakti*) that will take him to the gate of divine love which showers the spiritual delight—a stage of *ananda* that finally takes to the stage of satchidananda. The mystic, after following the eight steps—*yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana* and *samadhi*, makes himself entitled for attaining unitary consciousness. To realize the Divine, he crosses the *jagrat, svapna, susupt* and *turiya* states and feels His presence in soul, nature and the whole universe. For him, the world seems to be transitory. Hence, he releases himself from the *samsara*, the cycle of birth and rebirth in order to enter the state of bliss—*nirvana*. The main sources that make Indian culture spiritually rich are *Vedas, Upanishands* and, *Smritis, Darshans, Puranas, the Ramayan, the Mahabharata* and the *Bhagwad Gita* etc.

India is not simply a geographical land. It is much more than that. Assimilation and synthesis are her two virtues that make her alive despite of many races, tribes, languages, religions and creeds. Cultural synthesis is in her blood. Spirituality is her life-breath. Yoga is her strength. The figure of the cosmic dance of Shiva is her symbol that reveals the concept of creation, preservation and destruction. Though the Western culture has embraced her body closely, her spirit remains untouched. The concept of composite culture is yielding place to the light of multiculturalism which values the uniqueness of different cultures and traditions. The western storm, no doubt, has shaken the leaves of Indian culture but failed to destroy its roots which are firm and strong in their spiritual foundation. The spirit of tolerance and cosmopolitanism (*vasudevikutumbukum*), already includes the concept of multiculturalism in itself. Indian culture is now on the way to adapt itself to the new global environment that prefers the metaphor of "salad bowl" to the metaphor of "cooking pot." India which is known as *Hindustan* or *Bharat* is not simply a country but *Bharat Mata*, the mother who has fostered a continuous and uninterrupted civilization "for about five thousand years of known and partly recorded history." She is not

to be judged by the weaknesses of a few centuries but by her long history of establishment and accomplishment. "A culture," writes Aurobindo, "must be judged first by its essential spirit, then by its best accomplishment and, lastly, by its power of survival, renovation and adaptation to new phases of the permanent needs of the race" (64). Indian culture, by virtue of its tolerance and cosmopolitan character, has translated itself into all-embracing human culture. The emerging multiculturalism, though seems to be new, is somewhere an outcome of seeds sown earlier in the form of diversity in ancient times. "Diversity has a meaning and a value. I am one—may I be many—this omnipotent will of the Lord fulfills itself by projecting infinite diversities . . . . Indeed, it is the diversity on the surface projected and controlled by the Divine Unity inside that gives rise to the beauty, order and harmony of nature" (*Hinduism at a Glance* 227). There is no denying that, to some extent, the Indian culture is in the grip of Serpentine Western Culture but its spiritual roots and positive viewpoints make protective cover round it against all the polluted forces. It is hoped that it will survive because it teaches how to see "the Eternal One among the many and diverse" resulting in the unity in diversity. Swami Nirvedananda writes: "There may exist diversity of castes, but there must not be any hatred or rancor between them. Each group is sacred. Each has its place and function . . . . Each group must have a scope for cultural uplift" (235). Hence, Indian culture is altering its composite design without altering its basic design so that it may cope with the present day multicultural fashion. It has neither left its composite spirit wholly nor embraced multicultural one *in toto*. It lies somewhere in between but its needle gravitates towards multiculturalism.

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## Cultural Inheritance: The Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore

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Sudhir K. Arora

Tagore belongs to unquestionably to Bengali literature, but he belongs to Indo-Anglian literature too—indeed, he belongs to all India and the whole world...he was a darling of versatility, and still he was the same man; he was an integral whole, the Rishi, the Gurudev. (Iyengar 99)

This is what Iyengar writes in *Indian Writing in English* in honour of Rabindranath Tagore, who has almost become a symbol of Indian heritage by virtue of his realizing the ideal of cosmopolitanism in his poetry and supporting independence and interdependence at local and global levels respectively. Born at Jorasanko, Calcutta (now Kolkata) on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1861, Tagore who better calls himself "a *kavi*" has devoted his life in proving the idea of the unity of the universe despite its diverse varieties in forms under the influence of Kabir, the *Bhagvad Gita* and the *Upanishads*. This 'Great Sentinel' left for Heaven on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1941 leaving the legacy of transcreations (being 'The Child', only exception which was first written in English and later translated into Bengali as 'Shishu-Tirtha') like *Gitanjali*, *The Crescent Moon*, *Fruit Gathering*, *Lover's Gift*, *Crossing*, *Stray Birds* and *The Fugitive and Other Poems* which clearly offer a rich store house where pearls in the form of originality, thematic variety, touching lyricism, spiritualism touched with mysticism, humanism etc., are treasured for displaying the soul of India.

Tagore is a world-poet whose only *mantra* is to offer love that will bring joy and peace culminating in *ananda* that leads a man to an inward journey. His Visva-Bharati at Shantiniketan has become an international place for cultural pilgrimage which attracts both the Indian and the Western readers to come and interact in order to make themselves intimate with culture. For Yeats, Tagore who is himself like "the Indian civilization" has been "content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its superiority. He often seems to contrast his life with that

of those who have lived more after our fashion, and have more seeming weight in the world and always humbly as though he were only sure his way is best for him" (Introduction xiv).

Tagore, being a humanitarian, thinks of common man first. He is the messiah of the poor, the lost, the companionless and the lowest. His approaches to spiritualism, mysticism and romanticism bear the humanistic impressions. His god is a god whose feet rest there where "live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost" (CP 6). Work is worship. Worship with an incense and flowers in the ritualistic manner is useless as it fails to call God. He asks the worshipper to come out of the temple and leave the "chanting and singing and telling of beads" because god cannot be found in the temple. God lives with the common man who makes himself busy while doing *karma* without longing for the fruits. For him, god lives with the common men like pathmakers, tillers and labourers. "He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put of thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!" (CP 7). He has humanized his god so much that he shares with the poor, the needy and the weak. He feels himself thankful for his lot that "lies with the humble who suffer and bear the burden of power, and hide their faces and stifle their sobs in the dark" (CP 221).

Mysticism becomes a mood in Tagore's poems that reveal a kind of quest for self that opens a way that leads to intuitions and insights which make the spiritual world see with a vision—vision of unity, rhythm and harmony. Tagore has faith in oneness of Supreme Soul that appears in various forms. Man, Nature and God though seem to be different are not so as they embrace the essential identity of being in themselves. He sees fundamental unity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty in the diversity of the world. God is everywhere—be it innermost of the heart or the world outside. His mysticism that has the mixed colours of realism and humanism does not talk of leaving the world but of living the world fully and of making soul's communion with the Eternal Soul. His *bhakti* songs that show the sincerity of his feelings are influenced by the Upanishadic philosophy, Indian devotional poetry in general and the Bengali *Vaishnava* singers in particular.

The Upanishadic touch is present in Tagore who sees the presence of one Spirit in man and nature. The Spirit i.e. God pervades everywhere—be they natural objects, things or any. It is the poet who

feels the stream that flows in him also flows in all objects—animate and inanimate. He feels the flow within himself and finds himself flow in all objects. The world is the heart where resides God while the outside world is simply an illusion, a network of Maya woven at His instance. It is God who plays on the chords of the heart in order to bring out the beats of pleasure and pain. Anything that comes from God returns to Him without being diminished. Man should love humanity and dedicate himself in its service. Service of humanity is the great service of the Divine.

In Hindu culture, *bhakti marg* and *gyan marg* are the two ways that lead man to God. Devotion to God through music is the easiest and simplest way to reach God. The poet in Tagore follows the *bhakti marg* and so thinks of reaching Him through music. When he gets inspiration from God to sing song, his happiness knows no bound. He longs for mystic bliss through singing before God face to face. He knows that singing is the only way to come before Him. He is so lost in singing that he forgets himself that he is merely a servant of God and begins to call Him his friend considering Him his equal.

I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.

I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.

Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord. (CP 3)

Tagore believes in the theory of incarnation that man comes in this world and goes away as soon as his role is over. He goes away from this world in order to come again in the new form. Mark the excerpt for his staunch faith in the theory of reincarnation: "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life" (CP 3). He experiences self-realization that results in God-realization. God is everywhere and so is present in the human Self too. Supreme Soul is present in the Individual Soul. He has the *darshan* of *Paramatma* in his *Antaratman*. Spiritual salvation comes only when man gives up worldly attachment. He knows that his prayer will not be granted unless he puts off the shrouds of materialism.

The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death; I hate it, yet hug it in love.

My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy;  
yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer  
be granted. (CP 13)

Joy is the very nature of God who takes pleasure in the bond of creation—the creation that includes life and death as death leads to life and life to death. Death is not the negation but affirmation of life. Death is the way that leads to the union with the Divine resulting in consummation of life. He, himself a bride, waits for God, the Divine bridegroom for consummation that will occur in the cover of Death—the darkness that will show the way to eternal light. The bride in the poet waits for His final glance—the glance will lead to total surrender to the bridegroom in God. The mystical experiences are concretized through the functional images touched with sexual connotations. Death is not death; death is life, a gateway that directly directs to the divine Soul. “The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom. After the wedding the bride shall leave her home and meet her lord alone in the solitude of night” (CP 43).

The poet in Tagore never believes in renunciation. He feels “the embrace of freedom in a thousand of delight” (CP 35). He does not like to close his eyes to the physical pleasures which for him are essential in life and without them life will be incomplete. If pleasures had not been essential, God would have not filled the earth with them. Hence, he will kindle the lamps of pleasures at His altar and make his desires ripen to the extent that they may yield the “fruits of love.”

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame  
and place them before the altar of thy temple.  
No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of  
sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.  
Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my  
desires ripen into fruits of love. (CP 35)

Tagore is basically a love poet who begins his journey from physical and ends in spiritual. Even in his physical love description, his expressions breathe purity and sincerity of his feelings of love. He is so much inspired by love that he wishes to demonstrate it in thought, expression and action. Love culminates in sacrifice. The lover in the poet is not selfish to think of his own life, rather likes to sacrifice his life if the need arises. “Let me carry thy love in my life as a harp does its music, and give it back to thee at last with my life” (CP 278). He is thankful to the beloved for loving him and giving him “a seat where

poets of all time bring their tribute, and lover with deathless names greet one another across the ages” (CP 419).

The poet in Tagore prays to God for the blessings of love—love that will bring him joy and confidence in life. It is the magic of love that makes one see life even in death. Mark the excerpt for the poet’s prayer to God for showering love on him: “Give me the supreme confidence of love, this is my prayer — the confidence that belongs to life in death, to victory in defeat, to the power hidden in frailest beauty, to that dignity in pain which accepts hurt but disdains to return it” (CP 450). Love is bliss but it comes out of pain. “Love! when you come with the burning lamp of pain in your hand, I can see your face and know you as bliss” (CP 307). It is pain that moves soul culminating in songs. The poet has “scaled the peak” but fails to find any “shelter in fame’s bleak and barren height” (CP 329). Now, he knows that joy is the other name of God and so he asks Him to lead him “into the valley of quiet where life’s harvest mellow into golden wisdom” (CP 328). He has firm faith in the love of God who is his lover, beloved, mother, father and what is not? He is a peace-loving bird that sings the song of love and peace.

Tagore respects woman and thinks that woman is “not merely the handiwork of God, but also of men” (CP 128) because poets, painters and others offer her something or other that increase her beauty. Mark the excerpt for woman’s image touched with realism and dream:

O woman, you are not merely the handiwork of God, but also of  
men; these are ever endowing you with beauty from their hearts.  
Poets are weaving for you a web with threads of golden imagery;  
painters are giving your form ever new immortality.  
The sea gives its pearls, the mines their gold, the summer gardens  
their flowers to deck you, to cover you, to make you more  
precious.  
The desire of men’s hearts has shed its glory over your youth.  
You are one half woman and one half dream. (CP 128)

The poet peeps into the psychology of the child whom he loves. As he loves the child, he is the right man to blame and punish him. While punishing him, he punishes himself as he considers the child to be a part of his being. It does not matter what others say about the child but a father knows about his failings. He loves his child and so claims for punishing him:

I do not love him because he is good, but because he is my little  
child.

How should you know how dear He can be when you try to weigh his merits against his faults?

When I must punish him he becomes all the more a part of my being.

When I cause his tears to come my heart weeps with him.

I alone have a right to blame and punish, for he only may chastise who loves. (CP 60)

The poet is spiritual and free from narrowness and prejudices even when he visualizes India of his dream. He is a true patriot who dreams of India—free India that will be free from caste, colour and creed. He is progressive so much that he wishes to translate India into an India where people will be free, truthful and educated. He prays to God for guiding his countrymen so that they may walk on the path of progress and make India heaven of freedom. Mark the poet's sincere and noble sentiments that he has for India of his dream:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action—

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake. (CP 16)

Despite the dreamy stuff of which his poetry is made of, the imbalance that mars the harmony of form and content sometimes, the tonal monotony that if continues for a long time makes the reader yawn, the same rhythm that offers no newness, Rabindranath Tagore has entered the hearts of the Western readers who feel wonderstruck by his Indianness that flows like blood in veins, lucidity that sings through the folksong, the newness that gives the Biblical echoes and the incantatory rhythmic prose that makes them forget themselves. His concept of nation is also influenced by the West that is beyond boundary, class and caste. He wishes to translate man into *vishwamanav*—a man who is beyond caste and class. The whole world is his family and all men and women are brothers and sisters. He

represents Indian culture that believes in *vasudevutumbukum*—cosmopolitanism. He is thoroughly an Indian who has embraced all the people across the globe. As he is a mystic, he sees unity of mankind. What makes him different from other mystics is the way he humanizes spiritualism. He is a poet of man, rather common man and, so, has faith in him. That's why he is not criticized even by the Marxists who find the humanistic touches in his verses. Though he has composed his poetry in Bangla first, he is thoroughly an Indian poet in English as he himself transcended his own poems that echo Indian ethos and sensibility through symbols, myth and imagery. He speaks through suggestive symbols and evocating and functional images that bear his spiritual and mystical overtones. His images offer all the functions—be it visual, auditory or olfactory or any.

Undoubtedly, Rabindranath Tagore's poetry offers a vision—vision of life which can be made worth-living if the mantra of joy, peace and happiness is followed. It leads to the way of true pleasure which comes out of living life lively. His universal humanitarianism makes a bridge which becomes the connecting link between the East and the West. He promotes Indian culture—a fusion of all cultures—be it Muslim or Hindu or any other without disturbing or eliminating their identities. Multicultural flowers are in one vase named Indian culture. He is a cultural ambassador who has spread Indian culture across the globe. He is a world poet who has infused the message of peace and love through his poetry which has become a guiding principle particularly for the Western people who are suffering from troubles, tortures, anxiety and tensions in the world that is on the threshold of war. As for him, "Life finds its wealth by the claims of the world, and its worth by the claims of love" (CP 291), he prays for love thus: "Send me the love that keeps the heart still with the fullness of peace" (CP 209).

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The Master and the Disciple:  
Jayanta Mahapatra and Niranjan Mohanty

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(I)

WHENEVER, Mahapatra volumes were being published I was lucky enough to get a copy either from the poet or from the market. In fact, I saw the growth of the poet in him and the growth of his poetic vision. The trajectory of a poet's vision in Mahapatra enabled me to write so many articles on Mahapatra's poetry... The other reason that propelled me to read Mahapatra is the way he establishes a deep-rooted relationship with the place he is born, to the cultural tradition he belongs to, the system of values he adheres to and the fabric of his relationship with the past... If you think that I differ it is rightly so, because my perception about the world, about myself and about the use of the creative medium are different from him. (Contemporary Vibes 27-28)

The excerpt from the interview is a clear proof of the relationship of the master Jayanta Mahapatra and the disciple Niranjan Mohanty. Mohanty learnt Mahapatra's poetic mantra, imbued it in his heart, reflected over it and, then, articulated his silences in an idiom, different from that of his master. The master plays on the poetic flute; the disciple hears it in amazement and, then, offers his comments. Subsequently, he himself takes the flute, plays on it and produces sweeter tunes than his master who feels proud of having such a disciple.

And how the guru told him  
life was a mysterious tree, and that God  
has a claim on your life  
whether you are aware of it or not. (Random 54)

The master shares this fact but the disciple, who realizes the reality of life, makes Duryodhan declare: "Come death, oh my dear death, / burn away my boiling body, and freeze my breath! / What am I to do here when all is lost," (Tiger 80).

Mahapatra often talks of death and, sometimes, seems to be in love with it. Death becomes "a handcart" that one pushes "through a dayful of moonlight" (False 78). He is surprised why a man does not realize that he is "meaningless / that one is not even living for one's own sake" (Shadow 25). This irrelevance of life makes not only Mahapatra ponder but also Mohanty, who admits: "It's not death that I fear most / but my own irrelevance, my own / absence" (House 64). He philosophizes over life and death saying: "One merely breathes and whispers, / and exists / because death delays" (Touching 14). Mohanty bids farewell to the world and the master wonders how his disciple translated death into reality.

(II)

R. C. Shukla considers Mahapatra "a silken poet with very thin threads" and finds him "too gentle to thunder" ('Discovery' 115) because of his subdued lamentation. But, Mohanty is bold in articulation to the point of thunder. He never makes a subdued cry rather cries in such a forceful way which makes others cry too. The learned critic finds Mahapatra successful in giving the pictures of the land but unsuccessful in "giving the pictures of men and women"

### Sudhir K. Arora

and, so, declares that "what he has given is the picture of his mind." He finds Mohanty more acceptable than Mahapatra stating: "Mohanty who was very junior to Mahapatra has written poetry which is more universal in nature. His poetry, unlike that of Mahapatra, goes straight into the heart. This is why Mohanty is more acceptable to the wounds of human heart" (*Discoveries* 116). The purpose here is not to show Mohanty's superiority but to highlight the fact that how the disciple has followed his master and articulated truths in a natural poetic idiom which directly appeals even to the common man who is not even used to imagery and metaphors. But, master is master and disciple, disciple. The master is a major Indian English poet who has been appreciated in India and abroad. He got C. B. Cox and John Oliver Perry as well-wishers for his poetry but the disciple bade farewell from this world before he could get a C. B. Cox or a John Oliver Perry for the critical perusal of his poetic volumes.

(II)

Poetry and pain are inseparable. When life becomes painful, the flood of feelings breaks the banks of the heart and spreads on the white sheet of paper. While giving an interview to Norman Simms, Mahapatra himself admits: "Life is painful, the process of writing a poem is painful, and then poetry is going into and finding the centre of yourself, and I suppose you can't do this if you don't give up your own self" (311). He thinks that the man who talks of pain and thinks of others' pains as his own must be a poet.

This is a man who talks of pain  
as though it belonged to him alone  
maybe he has invented it himself  
and made a virtue of it.  
Maybe he is a poet. (*Whiteness* 36)

When a poet releases his feelings in the form of words, he doubts the usability of the poem. He thinks of words and fails to understand what they look for "in the dark of the soul" but he is sure of one thing that "When all else has failed, / the poem's words are perhaps justified" (*Signs* 34). He feels that his poetry which is "a coquette" simply "bruises the page" (*Bare* 39). He is of two minds as he finds himself "powerless to reveal" (*Burden* 55) his own self. He feels that he apes "a poet's poise" (*Burden* 50) and follows himself "piece by piece, everywhere" (*Burden* 57) He is not sure whether he knows himself.

Still I do not know what I want,  
I like to be here a long time  
but that wouldn't help me to make sense  
I'm not sure I know myself yet.  
There is so much I want to say,  
yet I cannot. (*Shadow* 63)

He peeps into his self and ultimately realizes: "I am never anything but myself" (*Random* 68). While exploring his identity, he associates himself with the landscape.

A man does not mean anything,  
But the place,  
Sitting on the riverbank throwing pebbles  
into the muddy current,  
a man becomes the place. (*Rites* 42)

His fractured identity (Christian and Hindu) makes him able to feel in English and Oriya both. When he writes in English, his Oriya feelings never obstruct. He shares with Norman Simms: "And I don't pause for feelings in Oriya, the English

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feeling breaks through from my Indian mind, making my use of English incidental, normal. Or that's what I think" (311).

Mahapatra's disciple Mohanty considers Poetry to be "a blackboard / where white whispers of hearts / get recorded without one's knowledge" (*Touching* 69). Like his master, he believes that it is pain that forces him to pen.

yet when I'm helpless  
and the wound in my heart  
grows wild with pain, I order  
the words in the manner of bones

and await what sweet music oozes out of them. (*Game* 44)

Like Mahapatra, he is also not clear of what he writes but feels "Sometimes, like pain, something spreads / within" (*Prayers* 74). Though he sharpens his medium in order to talk to his own self, he finds himself wavering and feels: "the more is my grief, the more / is the gap between what I wish / to write and what exactly I write" (*Tiger* 92). As he has no fractured identity, he fuses Oriya and English and creates an authentic poetic medium through which he articulates silences. His English is "half-Orissan, half-Indian" which gives him "the flavour of watered rice" and "the fragrance of plough-shares and soil" (*Prayers* 75). He is very conscious of the identity question and believes that "no order of things obfuscate / my identity" (*Prayers* 154). To explore his identity, he learns "how to begin a dialogue / with none but myself" (*Touching* 64). He feels: "It's perhaps, time to learn / what makes me myself" (*Lines* 40). He associates himself with the world and tries to locate it in himself.

With the passage of time, he becomes tolerant to all and learns "to seek the self, hidden somewhere within" (*Game* 35). He identifies himself with the native landscapes that provide him a sense of belongingness. In the poem 'Bhubaneswar', he feels: "This city is the urn of my salvations" (*Touching* 80). He shares with Lord Jagannatha saying that being "an Indian, an Oriya", he respects "all religions", believes in "fate, horoscope and palmistry" which sometimes make him "superstitious" though he dissects "bellies and brains / of toads and cockroaches, earthworms" (*Prayers* 143).

(IV)

Mahapatra is against the rituals which have become a part and parcel of the Indian people particularly Orissans. He frankly admits before Norman Simms: "I don't think I am a religious person in the way most Indians are. Frankly, I am not. ... I do not believe in ritual, which seems to hold so much for people; the Indian religions are steeped in ritual, which appears meaningless. My concept of religion would be not to hurt others, or try not to do so" (306). He gives a reference of a thirteen-year old servant girl who died of tetanus "even though / she had begun fasting scrupulously every festival-day, / didn't even touch fish Mondays and Saturdays too. / And returned from the temple with the goddess's vermilion / roaring on her amber throat. What superstition" (*Burden* 29)! No one can expect profligacy and corruption in the temples. But, he reveals the hypocrisy and the irreligious attitude of the religious people. He mentions a fisher-girl who was first raped by the priest's son and, then, assaulted by four policemen. Temple and the police station are both known for purity and justice. But, here is a different scene.

In the Hanuman Temple last night

54). For Mahapatra, "Stone is the theme" (Waiting 8). It is dreadful that stones have "turned to gods through prayers" (Random 47) and their long arms "easily batter and kill / a young woman accused of adultery" (Random 47). Mohanty also learns from stones that appear to be "saints rapt in meditation" (Game 43). Under the banyan tree, these stones "smeared by faith's innocence blood" (Game 43) have emerged as "gods". He makes them "wear a humid heart: lively, throbbing, feeling" (Touching 2). They make his song of life "holy and wholesome" and, so, he consigns his "irrepressible claim" (Game 59) over them. For Mahapatra, poetry will always remain "an attempt to remove the burden of time" which "ever present, ever passing, making us wakeful while we are asleep, making us hear our pulse in the silence of the night" (Door 5). For him, time is "just a pilgrimage / that the mind makes between our uncertainties" (Signs 32). It is time that "catches us in the act / of straightening ourselves, as if to say / that what has happened / should never have happened" (Whiteness 48). But, to Mohanty, time is "a game, or a mirage or an illusion" (House 78). He does not know "who follows whom" and, so, accepts his defeat before time. But, he does not bother much about time and is sure that one day he will "defeat / its purpose by slipping into a cave, / shadowless" (House 78).

## (VIII)

Rain is a part of Orissan landscape. But, it offers pain as well as pleasure. To Mahapatra, it brings more painful memories than the happy ones. When it rains, he locks himself into his room or watches "stray scarps floating down the Mahanadi". He feels that "pain comes from the rain" (Whiteness 50). It is "capacious, like the body of a woman" (Dawns 183) but somehow remains "clinging / pitifully to the Orissa countryside" (Shadow 13). But, Mohanty dances when the rain comes. Mark the excerpt for the hope that April rains bring:

Blood returns  
The tree of hope is laden  
with voices and songs.  
Tenacious walls of loneliness  
crumble down. (Touching 13)

It is rain that falls and scratches other woes with its nails. It is in rains that his grandmother and her three sons were burnt. But, the same rain makes him quite optimistic. He goes in the rains "holding a lantern of joy, / merely to be the sound of rain-drops, falling" (Tiger 72). It is rain that enters "every pore" of his body and makes him believe that he exists.

## (IX)

Mahapatra believes that "men have long memories. Each one of us, in a way, is made out of his or her own past-and that past, in essence, goes back to one's childhood" (Door 219). Hence, memories, mostly prove to be painful because they take him "into strange lands" (Random 19) and serve "not as heroes / but hostages that left no room for compromise" (Random 24). Mohanty also realizes that "the pool of memory by day gets dirtier / and by night, clumsier and lonelier" (House 3). He misses his grandfather so much that he associates the well with him and its clear water mirrors "the unclear / shadow-play of memory, the trajectory / of an humble pain" (House 26). Again and again, his boat in the river of memory flows towards the cholera ward where he lost his brothers and sister. How poignantly he utters:

Why does this unruly mind fly back  
to that cholera-ward in Calcutta  
where it tasted the sour grapes  
of griefs and absences? (House 53)

## (X)

Loneliness makes man lonelier. For Mahapatra, "loneliness is when an act, a word / hangs undecided and unborn / in the eyes of longing" (Close 1) but Mohanty finds it a boon in disguise with the plea: "How am I to know what flows within, / what makes me myself, what saps my song / if I'm not alone" (Game 5)? He cannot be far away from loneliness which follows him "like a shadow" (Game 36). It is dust that "echoes silence / and meanings of words in silence" (Silencing 11). For him, "silence is God" (Silencing 10). But, for Mahapatra, this silence is mystery that causes poetry. He states: "And silence exerts an air of mystery that makes me reach into the unknown, to sense things I had never felt before" (Door 23). Silence remains "the only evidence / left behind, strange solace / for mankind" (Nests 31). Both the poets praise darkness but their motives are different. Mahapatra pleads: "Darkness. Deal with it gently. / It saves. It / kills" (Whiteness 47). But, Mohanty loves darkness not because he is in love with it but because it hides his "sins, guilt, / the secret avenues" of his "unqualified dreams" (Prayers 159). He dreams dreams and thinks that there is no one "who does not dream, / or hates dreaming, or who does not care for dreams" (Tiger 38) though they are "the expressions of our repressed yearnings, / unachieved acquisitions, unattained / destination" (Prayers 149). Mahapatra also dreams but sometimes he loses his "way / beginning with the body / in the nothingness of a dream" (Svayambar 6).

## (XI)

Both the poets are well-aware of the present state of the country which is in the grip of monsters like corruption, population-explosion, unemployment, pollution and terrorism. When Mahapatra finds freakishness at individual and group level, he cries out: "What is wrong with my Country?" He is shocked to see "the women restless" and history reposing "between the college girl's breasts" (Hours 27). He fails to understand the psychology of his pretty neighbour Mina who "flashes round and round the gilded stage / hiding jungles in her purse, holding on to her divorce, and a lonely Ph. D" (Hours 27). Mohanty is also conscious of this contemporary reality. He cries within to see his country "burning" and terrorists creating "their tempestuous uproar everywhere." When he sees "blood bath" in the temples, "bomb blast" in the streets, "frozen-necked fears" in the houses and "a god-less emptiness" everywhere, he cries out: "What hell my country has turned into" (Game 79)! Mohanty's Mohan, the honest postal clerk with "seven daughters / and a son, thrice B. A. plucked" curses himself and his wife Binla, and at midnight "sleeps under the train" (Game 77).

Both the poets have depicted hunger-of belly and loin realistically. Mahapatra's fisherman persuades the protagonist saying "my daughter, she's just turned fifteen" lest he should not lose him. He asks him to "feel her" and very dispassionately tells him that he will come back at nine, the time when his bus leaves. The protagonist understands "a father's exhausted wife" and finds the girl "long and lean" and her years "cold as rubber". When she opens "her worry legs wide", he feels "the hunger" which makes "the fish slithering, turning inside"

(Rites 44). How does hunger shatter a man from inside? He feels that his mind is "blank" because of the miserable condition of a man due to hunger which "lends each one a mask" (Random 41). The fisher man is replaced by an old woman in Mohanty's poem 'Kalahandi'. The woman lives with the granddaughter as her son committed suicide due to hunger caused by famine. She cannot see the granddaughter being hungry and, hence, requests the protagonist:

Tonight, you stay here. Don't feed me  
for, I'm a ripe mango sure to fall soon  
Give that girl some food. The road lies open  
for her. Touch her tenderly. Sleep with her  
if you like, take her. Never permit her  
to be hung once again by hunger. (House 30-31)

Mahapatra's "Feel her" changes into "Touch her" in Mohanty who makes misery more poignant with the old woman's pathetic appeal.

## (XII)

Both the poets believe in the purity of relationship—whether it is the relationship with self, individual, society, country, universe or God but feels shocked when they find relationship being dominated by selfishness. When they see selfishness even in the relationship of husband-wife, they cry with their broken hearts. Mahapatra's cry: "even my wife does not look as if she belonged to me" (Signs 42) penetrates Mohanty who has come to know that "no one love me without selfishness: / and not even my wife who shares only a part / of myself, but not myself" (Game 4). Mahapatra portrays a woman in all shades. In four lines, he attempts to tell what a woman is, "Even / when she is / Even / when she is not" (Close 44). He presents her miserable plight and thinks that "There is no woman / who is not alone, / no woman who is sure / she has found her way / to her real purpose of life" (Temple 30). Mohanty reveals the psychology of wife in five lines, "Even / at the age of sixty / you cannot tolerate me / talking to a lady. / I pity me" (Silencing 30). He thinks that a woman is "neither to be seized / nor to be sized" and, hence, makes her interrogate her identity:

Do I exist in the glass  
of my skin? In the jungle  
between  
my thighs or in the cave,  
whence a red river only flows  
to hoist  
my identity? (House 51)

## (XIII)

For Mahapatra, "The form is the thing / always" (Close 9) while Mohanty makes Krishna say that "Everything is a form, needs a form" (Krishna 28). With his mythic consciousness, Mahapatra explores the silence of his self on the wings of imagination with the specs of the private symbols like 'rain', 'sleep', 'stone', 'dream', 'water' etc., which, sometimes, become a little esoteric but somehow help him in observing the landscape. He takes out his poetic camera, shoots the stillness, ponders and, then, edits with the tools of well-cooked digestible irony and juxtapositions that put the concrete and the abstract together for heightening the effect. He mixes feeling and thought in order to colour the Orissan landscapes and inscapes which are highlighted with the shades of Indianness. But, the dull shaded colours used by Mahapatra make his poems somewhat melancholic and gloomy to the extent that the reader, like the poet begins to

question his-own self and searches for the possible solution for his existence. He himself admits: "Poetry makes me write poems with a bad heart. I don't know what that exactly means, but it is the heart that makes one turn secretly into someone—a leader or loser perhaps—pushing one to choose values, attitudes, and to do the not-so-obvious; this heart, as it keeps on trying to hide the wounded walls of its house, and at the same time asking itself for a meaning to our lives" (Door 171). The question of his coming to the world always haunts him. He sees the shores which make him think of the relevance of his existence. Why does he do so? "If I seek an answer to our life / it's because I see myself everywhere" (Random 75). He associates himself with all the objects and comes to realize that "pain's blood is human" (Random 66). His poetic canvas is coloured with his identification with the Orissan landscapes, his cultural consciousness, originality of thoughts, and depth of feelings. No doubt, he has his own shortcomings but he knows the art of turning them into merits. Alan Kennedy finds him "hard to read" and thinks that "he will write 'bad' poetry, both deliberately and because of his inability, an inability to do anything else" (74). But, Madhusudan Prasad considers his poetry 'refreshing' in spite of having certain limitations. He states: "Mahapatra's poetry, like any great poet's, does have certain limitations as well. He is prone to thematic repetitiveness, logorrhea, jumbling up numerous ideas in a poem to the detriment of its structure, and occasional inelegant patterning of images. However, these demerits notwithstanding, Mahapatra's poetry both in quality as well as quantity, is impressive and refreshing" (iv).

## (XIV)

The disciple Mohanty is much influenced by Mahapatra in the beginning but with the passage of time, he fuses all the influences which, with the play of imagination, result in an idiom which certainly differs from that of his master. He weaves thoughts and feelings with metaphors like 'tiger', 'rain', 'home' 'stone' etc., to make his poetic texture rich and meaningful. He colours it with imagery, tonal variations and rhythms which appeal to the senses which, in return, carry the imprint on the mind that cannot help without appreciating the poet's poetic talent. He lives poetry and searches a way that leads to life. In the Preface to A House of Rains, he admits that "that poetry—whether writing or reading it—brings one closer to life, closer to whatever constitutes life and whatever makes life meaningful" and accepts the fact that "poetry makes something happen" with this conviction that "this happening is treasured within until it becomes the governing principle of our being and becoming". It is poetry that enables him "to connect" to "a flux that is inescapable, to a centre of faith that is interminable." As he has realized his true self: "Whatever is past or passing / or yet to pass has to recognize / the fact that I'm human to the core" (House 72), he seems to be more optimistic than his master. "Merely to be human" becomes "the theme song" (House 90) of his life and so is of his poetry. He has learnt "the alphabets of love and living together" (Game 41) from his master but he has composed his own poetic music bubbling with life in all shades. He spreads love everywhere because he never forgets what his master uttered: "I want the flames to warm the empty / heart of love, not burn a city with pitiable hatred" (Random 70). Mahapatra who, no doubt, has employed images to articulate silences stored in mind which often swims in the river of past in order to feel freshness for present but becomes so obsessed that it forgets to come out. But, Mohanty has

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imbued the lived experiences of life to the extent that somehow he succeeds in awakening his third eye that makes him able to see everything in clear perspective culminating into the growth of right vision which gives the strength of judgment. Seeing with vision helps him in saying with authority. For this, the master must be proud of his disciple.

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## Aurobindo's Savitri: A Poem with a Vision

Dr. Sudhir K. Arora

*Whoever is too great must lonely live.  
Adored he walks in mighty solitude;  
Vain is his labour to create his kind,  
His only comrade is the Strength within. (Savitri 368)*

This determination of Savitri is nowhere better reflected than in the life and works of Sri Aurobindo (August 15 1872—December 5 1950), the most debatable poet, not because he wrote something that was not acceptable but because of his philosophical vision that tagged him more as a prophet and seer than a poet. The philosopher in Aurobindo gets upperhand on the poet in him. He has philosophized poetry and poeticized philosophy. But, to think that Overmind and Supermind are one is wrong. This is the last stage that mind passes before leaping into the higher realm. To take the individuals into higher realm in order to make them Gnostic Beings is Aurobindo's dream ideal to bring a Divine life on this earth.

*Why the Legend of Savitri?*

*Savitri: Story in Flash*

Unlike the story of Savitri in Mahabharata, Aurobindo's Savitri begins with the dawn which may be a usual dawn to all but not to Savitri who is conscious of the fatal truth of Satyavan's death. She is fated to confront Death and remove the veil of ignorance that hides the way that leads to status of godhead which a man deserves. As she is the great World Mother, she knows how to save soul from the grip of Death. Being divine, she knows her "soul's issue" which is "thrown with Destiny's dice" (Savitri 17). There may be two extremes—"whether to bear with Ignorance and Death / Or hew the ways of Immortality, / To win or lose the godlike game for man" (Savitri 17) and she knows well her goal—the goal for which she has come to this earth. She is the divine fruit that King Aswapathy got by the grace of the Divine Mother as a result of his spiritual Yoga that made him able to explore his consciousness as an individual who gets self-fulfillment, as a representative of his race and finally as a yogi who aspires not for himself but for all. No doubt, he begins his spiritual journey right from human level but he soars high to the extent that his soul is released from earthly life and enters the sphere where he has a darshan of the lila of God, the writer of cosmic drama. Mystery reveals itself showing the lila of God that descends into clay—the clay that aspires for godhead. His consciousness soars high and further reaches the higher planes of being. By virtue of his spiritual Yoga, he is blessed with the darshan of the Divine Mother who responds to his prayer—the prayer of coming down to earth in the human form. The prayer results in the birth of Savitri who makes everyone spellbound by her divine presence. Her quest for a suitable mate ends in her meeting with Satyavan, the son of blind King Dyumathsena and Queen who, being deprived of their throne are forced to pass their days in the forest. As soon as they see each other, they fall in love. She shares this news with her parents but Narad shocks everyone by telling the fact that Satyavan will die in a year. Savitri is dissuaded but in vain. She is sure that through her will-power she can face Death and bring him back. Narad also assures Savitri's parents that she has come in this world to play her cosmic role designed by Destiny. One day she will stand alone "on a dangerous brink of the world's doom" while "carrying the world's future" and cross "a perilous bridge in Time" in order to reach "an apex of world-destiny / Where

all is won or all is lost for man" (Savitri 461). The joy of the wedded life is often marred because of the foreknowledge of Savitri who, in spite of being the incarnation of the Divine Mother, knows the limitation in the human form. She looks inward to know her real self and as a Yogin makes an inner journey that, in spite of the hindrances, results in her universal realization. The fatal dawn comes when Satyavan has to die. He goes to the forest, collects fuel and sings. Death comes and Satyavan, who feels pain in his head, cries, calls her thrice and dies. Now, it is the time when she has to struggle with Yama for the soul of Satyavan. For this ordeal, she moves to the world of 'Eternal Night' with all its evil paraphernalia and double Twilight. The Lord of Death dissuades her to give up her demand for Satyavan's life but she remains undaunted. Then, the Lord asks her to reveal herself because she does not seem to be an ordinary human being. She reveals herself by assuming her cosmic form. Finally, she, being a symbol of love and light gets victory over Death, the symbol of night. The fatal dawn when Satyavan has to die gives place to "a greater dawn" which she has nursed in her bosom which, being guarded by the "mystic folds of light" knows the magic of the golden change—the magic "That to feel love and oneness is to live" (Savitri 724). While appreciating Savitri, Reddy writes:

In this epic, Sri Aurobindo works upon the large canvas of human history. He deals with the origin of the Universe, of the world before the gods were awake, of the birth of gods, of man, of his godward evolution and his ultimate destiny. The seven planes of existence, and the seven worlds of Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind, Sat, Chit and Ananda are revealed to the pilgrim soul in its ascent to the light. In fact, the occult cosmogony and geography of the entire universe are unveiled to the spirit's eye. Savitri is a story of the evolution of man through the various stages of his development,—the physical-material creature, the vital-rajasic man and the satvic-mental being. (5-6)

*Aswapathy and His Yoga:*

Aswapathy, who during his voyage within, sees a greater Universe of the Unknown with his inner eye. He moves to the higher level of consciousness and realizes that man and earth are passing through evolutionary process. The mechanism of the Universe which is apparently run by inconscient laws and mechanical determinism is guided somewhere by the Absolute. Man, though seems to be a piece of clay, is indeed a spirit with the divine spark within. He is a being in the process of becoming. 'From the present temporary phase to the divine godhead' is the voyage through which he passes relieving himself from the physical, vital and mental nature. He has a darshan of his self and finds that his inner self is the self of the whole universe. With this vision of the universe, he has even a greater vision—the vision of Divine Mother—Savitri who, because of his pleadings, promises to come to the Earth for the emancipation of the humanity by divinizing it. Further, he meditates, ascends various planes of consciousness by crossing one by one and finally enters where body is not needed and where "The soul itself was its own deathless form / And met at once the touch of other souls / Close, blissful, concrete, wonderfully true" (Savitri 292). This is the place where souls after death go to take rest before taking a further fresh journey upon earth. This is the centre where creation takes place. He sees

clearly the very fountain of human and divine things. He finds "The figure of the deathless Two-in-One, / A single being in two bodies clasped, / A diarchy of two united souls" (Savitri 295). This Two-in-One figure guides the physical process that occurs in the world. Behind this Two-in-One figure, he sees the Divine Mother who guards all. Feeling emotionally blessed when he has the darshan of the Mighty Goddess, he falls down at her feet.

Savitri and Her Yoga:

Savitri is aware of the mission for which she has taken birth in human form. She chooses Satyavan for making him her life partner even knowing the fact from Narad that he will die after one year. She remains undaunted and determines saying that once her heart has sealed, "Its seal not Fate nor Death nor Time dissolve" (Savitri 432). Death can only crush the bodies but not the souls. She declares: "If death take him, I too know how to die" (Savitri 432). She challenges Fate thus:

*Let Fate do with me what she will or can;  
I am stronger than death and greater than my fate;  
My love shall outlast the world, doom falls from me  
Helpless against my immortality.*

*Fate's law may change, but not my spirit's will. (Savitri 432)*

She is ready to live with Satyavan even for a year that will make her life whole. But, she knows well that her fate is not merely "to live and love awhile and die" (Savitri 435). She has come on this earth with a purpose.

*For I know now why my spirit came on earth  
And who I am and who he is I love.*

*I have looked at him from my immortal Self, (Savitri 435)*

As she has to save this earth, she will have to share its pain otherwise how it will be possible for her to find out its cure. "He who would save the world must share its pain. / If he knows not grief, how shall he find grief's cure" (Savitri 537)? Man can hope to climb high only when he sees one of his kind scaling "heaven's peak" and so Savitri thinks that God must take birth as a man in order to inspire him to be as god. "God must be born on earth and be as man / That man being human may grow even as God" (Savitri 537). She marries Satyavan and ultimately the day comes when Yama comes to take away his soul. Now it is the turn of Savitri to get back the soul of Satyavan from Yama. She debates with him and makes him realize the strength of love but he rejects it outright. He asks her not to follow the ideal of love which is merely a desire of flesh. "Love cannot live by heavenly food alone / Only on sap of earth can it survive" (Savitri 611). But, Savitri, being a spiritual pilgrim is on her quest for the ideal—ideal of love. "My love is not a hunger of the heart, / My love is not a craving of the flesh; / It came to me from God, to god returns" (Savitri 612). She makes Yama believe that they (Savitri and Satyavan) are "The twin souls born from an undying fire" (Savitri 614). For her, Love is god and so she has cherished "God the Fire, not God the Dream" (Savitri 614). Even then, Yama states: "Vain is thy longing to build heaven on earth" (Savitri 615). This world is created out of Inconscience. The matter is not stable and the last change to it comes in the form of death. "Yet change arrives and the last change is death. / What seemed most real once, is Nihil's show. / Its figures are snares that trap and prison the sense" (Savitri 616). Mind, a child of matter imagines 'a soul within'. Man is born out of matter and becomes matter after death. But Savitri does not talk of "Truth that slays" but "the Truth that saves" (Savitri 621). For her Night is "a process of the eternal Light" (Savitri 621) and death "a spur towards

immortality" (Savitri 621). She knows that the earth is "Peopled by imperfect minds and ignorant lives" (Savitri 623) but she sees the possibility of godhead in man. No doubt man is born out of clay but has his goal in heaven. The human and the divine meet in the body. She is the Divine Mother in human form. Her humanity is "a mask of God" (Savitri 634). But, Yama is not convinced and so considers matter and spirit to be different. For him: "The Real with unreal cannot mate" and "He who would turn to God, must leave the world: / He who would live in the Spirit, must give up life: / He who has met the Self, renounces self" (Savitri 635). Death is the only truth—the only refuge where every human creature takes rest. But, Savitri is not convinced by the logic of the Yama who wishes to offer her all earthly pleasures except the life of Satyavan. She claims nothing "but Satyavan alone" (Savitri 636). She feels "The deep eternal truth in transient things" (Savitri 637). But, again, Yama asks her to return to the earth and lead her life with other man who may equally be as loveable as Satyavan. Savitri hears and remains undaunted as she has to achieve the goal of transforming the earthly life into divine life which she cannot do without Satyavan.

Yama asks her not to have hope as Mind can have a vision of a greater heaven but is helpless in guiding man how to ascend to the height as "Mind can never see the soul of God" (Savitri 646). God has created the world but after creating he kept himself aloof from his creation. He remains indifferent and untouched even to "The animal's agony and the fate of man" (Savitri 646). Hence, Yama asks her "Dream not to change the world that God has planned, / Strive not to alter his eternal law" (Savitri 647). It is better if she forgets love and takes shelter in God. He makes her believe that he is "the gate of immortality" as "thou must die to thyself to reach God's height" (Savitri 647). But, again, Savitri remains unmoved. She knows that if the Divine can descend into her person, why he cannot into other human beings. This world is not mere matter but a body of God. She rises above the bonds of body, life and mind and experiences oneness in all. She claims from Time her "will's eternity" (Savitri 652) but for Yama "the Cosmic Law is greater than thy (her) will" and "Even God himself obeys the Laws he made" (Savitri 654). He asks her to show him "the body of the living Truth" (Savitri 655). She makes Yama aware of the plan and purpose of the Divine who planted it in Matter in seed form. Only a few seekers or questers experience this truth and break all the barriers of the finite and enter the Infinite where the human spirit soars high and high, reaches the illumined mind and further enters the overmind mounting the flame-hills of intuition. The sphere of overmind is thus:

*The cosmic empire of the Overmind,  
Time's buffer state bordering Eternity,  
Too vast for the experience of man's soul:  
All here gathers beneath one golden sky:  
The Powers that build the cosmos station take  
In its house of infinite possibility;  
Each god from there builds his own nature's world;  
Ideas are phalanx'd like a group of suns,  
Each marshalling his company of rays.  
Thought crowds in masses seized by one regard;  
All Time is one body, Space a single look:  
There is the Godhead's universal gaze  
And there the boundaries of immortal Mind (Savitri 660)*

Beyond this cosmic sight, the place is illumined by the presence of the Divine Mother with her eternal child that

symbioses the divine life on earth. She states: "O Death, if thou couldst touch the Truth supreme / Thou wouldst grow suddenly wise and cease to be" (Savitri 663). If human souls are able to touch or embrace this "Truth Supreme", she is sure that "earthly life become life divine" (Savitri 663). Yama realizes that Savitri's voice "carries the sound of infinity" and so asks her to reveal her power if she wishes to take back Satyavan. Then she appears in her original form of the Mighty Mother before Yama who accepts his defeat as he realizes that his will, strength and darkness have disappeared. The thing that is worth noticing here is that Savitri does not ask for nirvana or emancipation of soul. She could do but she chose to live on earth which she wished to turn into divine. She will not sacrifice earth for "happier worlds" and so she declares thus:

*To bring God down to the world on earth we came*

*To change the earthly life to life divine.*

*I keep my will to save the world and man (Savitri 692)*

*Savitri: A Symbol*

The characters in Savitri are not simply personification of some qualities or other but are avatars of "living and Conscious Forces" that make the reader feel the concrete touch through human bodies and offer man the way of transforming his mortal state into "a divine consciousness and immortal life." Satyavan is the Soul with "the divine truth of being within itself" but is in the grip of Death and Ignorance. Savitri, the Universal Divine Mother comes to this earth in order to save humanity from the clutches of Yama, the symbol of Death, Ignorance and Untruth. She struggles for Satyavan's Soul and this struggle symbolizes the struggle of the aspiring human soul to be free from the fetters of determinism. Her father Aswapathy who performs spiritual yoga is blessed with the eternal truth of himself, of the world and of God. "If Aswapathy is Aspiration", to quote K. R. S. Iyengar: "Savitri is both the Response and the resulting Transformation—at once the individual transformation of an elected Person and the promise of the total transformation of earth and earth-nature" (200). He writes further: "And both Aswapathy and Savitri, in their aspiration and transforming spiritual action, strive, not for themselves alone but for all, for a general liberation, a universal realization and a splendid new creation" (200). Satyavan's father Dyumatsena who has become blind is the Divine Mind that has lost "its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory" (Blurb). Narad who is equipped with the "inherent ability to analyse Truth" symbolizes "inner realization or knowledge with the Divine power" (Blurb). With the advent of the Dawn, the darkness—the darkness of Ignorance is removed and the light of knowledge or Life-consciousness" spreads. The Dawn is not simply the physical dawn but the dawn of creation, of wisdom and of knowledge. Time also runs on two planes—the physical time and cosmic time. The single day event in temporal sense becomes the symbol of Eternity. This is the same single day when Satyavan dies but Savitri brings back him to life as well. Defeat of Death brings back Satyavan to life and then Savitri's reunion becomes possible. On the cosmic plane, this defeat saves the universe from the total annihilation.

Philosophical Touches:

Savitri is a literary poetic fruit of overmind. Extraordinary verses strike the extraordinary reader. The more he goes into the depth; the more depth he finds in meanings. Meanings are concentrated in the myth, legend, symbols and imagery that reveal philosophical, religious, spiritual, intuitive and mystical aroma. Reality is Brahman i.e. the Absolute. Differences, truths and ideas

seem to be different and myriads but in reality they result in one—oneness which is the very characteristic of Reality.

*And love is a yearning of the One for the One,*

*And beauty is a sweet difference of the Same*

*And oneness is the soul of multitude.*

*There all the truths unite in a single Truth,*

*And all ideas rejoin Reality. (Savitri 32)*

Everything is predetermined because of the seed present within. "Our outward happenings have their seed within" (Savitri 52). Brahman is the maker who has made this world. He is himself "the vision" and "the seer" and himself "the actor" and "the act."

*The human world lives in him.*

*He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;*

*Space is himself and Time is only he.*

*The Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune (Savitri 67)*

He lives in human form so that man may rise to his divine measure. He has set "a plan of godhead on the mortal's mould" (Savitri 67). The change from human being to godhead is "earth's due to heaven." To be divine is the right of the human being but he forgets it because of the dazzling light of Maya. But, being the son of God, he must grow divine.

*A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:*

*His nature we must put on as he put ours;*

*We are sons of God and must be even as he:*

*His human portion, we must grow divine:*

*Our life is a paradox with God for key. (Savitri 67)*

Man comes in this world, plays his allotted part neither less nor more and goes away. He has no control over his fate which is already written before his birth. "Ourselves incapable to build our fate / Only as actors speak and strut our parts / Until the piece is done and we pass off / Into a brighter Time and subtler Space" (Savitri 163). The result is that he imposes "little pigmy law" and curbs "the mounting slow uprise of man" resulting in "his too scanty walk with death" (Savitri 163). But, death which is a mere "a passage, not the goal of our walk" does not help anymore because "life's repose is in the Infinite" (Savitri 197) that will lead to Life Supreme. It is true that life will never come to an end until or unless it achieves its goal. But, even then, there is no surety of ultimate rest. Life and death are created for a purpose which must be fulfilled. Hence, man comes in this world with birth, goes with death and returns with rebirth and the process continues.

*There is no end of seeking and of birth,*

*There is no end of dying and return;*

*The life that wins its aim asks greater aims,*

*The life that fails and dies must live again;*

*Till it has found itself it cannot cease.*

*All must be done for which life and death were made.*

*But who shall say that even then is rest? (Savitri 200)*

Chance plays its play but there is always "a meaning in each play" (Savitri 271). Man acts according to "a seed-idea" present in him in parent form. Destiny is "the unrecognised child of Will" (Savitri 272). It is tragic that he neither knows his greatness nor his goal for which he has come to the world. He does not see his path in the light of his soul but is lost in darkness of his mind. Life continues its run but nowhere does he reach.

*He seeks himself and from himself he runs*

*Meeting himself, he thinks it other than he.*

*Always he builds, but finds no constant ground,*

*Always he journeys, but nowhere arrives;*

*He would guide the world, himself he cannot guide;  
He would save his soul, his life he cannot save.*

*The light his soul had brought his mind has lost (Savitri 337)*

Man lives an honest life without harming anyone. Even then he suffers. Here the concept of Prarabdha comes to light. Man suffers not because of present deeds but because of his forgotten deeds. Present form has arisen out of the past. Man cannot escape the deeds that he does. He gets the result of his past acts which he forgets and prepares the ground for future by acting in present.

*We reap the fruit of our forgotten deeds.*

*But since unseen the tree that bore this fruit*

*And we live in a present born from an unknown past,*

*They seem but parts of a mechanic Force*

*To a mechanic mind tied by earth's laws;*

*Yet are they instruments of a Will supreme,*

*Watched by a still all-seeing Eye above. (Savitri 378)*

Again, the impact of the religious books like the Gita, Vedas and Upanishads is reflected in the lines thus:

*All the world's possibilities in man*

*Are waiting as the tree waits in its seed:*

*His past lives in him; it drives his future's pace;*

*His present's acts fashion his coming fate.*

*The unborn gods hide in his house of Life. (Savitri 482)*

The tree is present in seed without being seen and waits for its growth in time to come. Possibilities in seeds form are present in man whose present acts make his future fate. He gets the result of his past which remains with him and his present performance prepares the ground for future's pace.

Man, though mortal has immortality in the form of soul. Soul is the light that has the source of bliss—bliss in the Infinite. No doubt, "To live, to love are signs of infinite things" and "Love is a glory from eternity's spheres" (Savitri 397). The light is darkened by the "baser might / that steal his name and shape and ecstasy" resulting in his forgetting of his original aim. As he has soul in him, he is "still the godhead by which all can change" (Savitri 397). He himself is not aware of his being the godhead. He lives "like some secret player's mask" and is not sure "what his lips shall speak" because he feels the force of a mysterious power that guides, rather compels his steps and finds that "life is stronger than his trembling soul" (Savitri 427). He continues to commit errors which become "the comrade of (our) thought", sees falsehood lurking "in the deep bosom of truth", searches sin that leaves a scar across the soul, observes virtue being "a grey bondage and a gaol" and discovers a snare laid for him at each and every step. He himself is not aware of the source of action which remains totally "alien to reason and the spirit's light" presuming that his action that comes from "a darkness wells" has somewhere roots "in ignorance and nescience" (Savitri 440).

Gods may remain passive to the human sufferings but it is not the case with the human beings who weep even when they hear "a tale of woe", feel the "ache of breasts that breathe no more" (Savitri 428), cry at "the sight of human pain" and "share the miseries that others feel" (Savitri 429). Loneliness makes human beings strong enough to bear the adverse circumstances. Those who possess the strength within are strong enough to stand alone.

*The great are strongest when they stand alone.*

*A God-given might of being is their force,*

*A ray from self's solitude of light the guide.*

*The soul that can live alone with itself meets God*

*(Savitri 460-61)*

Human beings come alone, remain alone and go alone. If they stand alone, they are categorized as the strongest. The seed of godhead remains in everyone but the need is to water this seed and this can be when he discovers God in self and things.

*The seed of Godhead sleeps in mortal hearts,*

*The flower of Godhead grows on the world-tree:*

*All shall discover God in self and things. (Savitri 446)*

#### **Savitri: A Mantric Poem**

In Aurobindo, what the sage sees in vision, the poet creates the image of vision through the mantric words. The poet and the sage work together in him, the result of which is pleasure—the inner pleasure. For him, "the true creator, the true hearer is the soul" (The Future Poetry 11) and so favours such poetry as stirs the soul within. The mantric poetry which is the "poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality" (The Future Poetry 17) is a fusion of the highest intensity of rhythmic movement, of verbal form and thought substance and of the soul's vision of truth. Spiritual inspiration that makes poetry mantric comes from overhead inspiration. 'From death to life or from mortality to immortality' are the words of prayer which find their echoes in Savitri, a mantric poem with its cosmic vision that talks of godhead for man from his earthly being. The yogi in Aswapathy goes on spiritual adventure and reveals secrets of his yogic sadhna. It seems that Aswapathy's adventures are of Aurobindo's. With Upanisadic mystic flavour, it also emits Vedic aroma. Vision of being in the process of Becoming becomes the motif of voyage within that flows towards Eternity that encompasses the Universe, godward evolution and destiny.

Word is not simply a word, it is Brahman, the Absolute—the magical mantra that reaches the ear and offers its message to the hearer who understands, muses and finds hints of the living truth that makes him listen to his soul. He feels spiritual power which makes him experience divine pleasure. Aurobindo writes about the magic of the mantra that makes him see a vision:

*As when the mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,*

*Its message enters stirring the blind brain*

*And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;*

*The hearer understands a form of words*

*And, musing on the index thought it holds,*

*He strives to read it with the labouring mind,*

*But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:*

*Then, falling silent in himself to know*

*He meets the deeper listening of his soul:*

*The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:*

*Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self*

*Are seized unutterably and he endures*

*An ecstasy and an immortal change;*

*He feels a Wideness and becomes a Power,*

*All knowledge rushes on him like a sea:*

*Transmuted by the white spiritual ray*

*He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm,*

*Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech (Savitri 375)*

Aurobindo gives a vision of future poetry that will offer a

vision of life to man who will be able to move on the path of growth—the growth from manhood to godhead.

*Poems in largeness cast like moving worlds  
And metres surging with the ocean's voice  
Translated by grandeurs locked in Nature's heart  
But thrown now into a crowded glory of speech  
The beauty and sublimity of her forms,  
The passion of her moments and her moods*

Lifting the human word nearer to the god's. (Savitri 361)

#### Savitri: Technical Aspect

Sri Aurobindo is well-equipped not merely thematically but technically also. He has successfully endeavoured to give "the Upanishadic and Kalidasian" touches in Savitri. He has developed his own idiom which is singularly Aurobindonian. No doubt, he is much influenced by the English poets like Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and the English philosophers but he is so imaginative and skilled that he has fused all the elements into one adding his Aurobindonian flavour. He changes his idiom according to the need of the synthesis of context and content—be it romantic, symbolic, modern or mystical. Milton is present in Indian ink when he uses epic similes, proper nouns, structural constructions. He is an Indian Newton in experimenting coining words and searching for new expressions to suit his purpose of introducing theme. High and mystical thoughts that cannot be confined to the conventional language require elevated diction rich in symbols and imagery.

Mark two more excerpts for the use of similes which reflect spiritual and mystical experiences through the concrete words:

*Matter and soul in conscious union meet  
Like lovers in a lonely secret place (Savitri 105)  
Like bride and bridegroom magically divorced  
They wake to yearn, but never can they clasp (Savitri 684)*

The use of personification in lines like "Lulled by Time's beats eternity sleeps in us" (Savitri 170) and "Earth couched alone with her great lover Heaven, / Uncovered to her consort's azure eye" (Savitri 390) is captivating and lively while the myth of Krishna and Radha in lines like "And Krishna and Radha for ever entwined in bliss, / The Adorer and Adored self-lost and one" (Savitri 525) makes the reader experience religious and spiritual feeling. He also coins new words and phrases which can be seen in the lines like "Cut down were her squanderings in desire's bazaar" (Savitri 495) and "The brilliant time-flakes of eternity" (Savitri 716). Sometimes a line that possesses meaning goes deep into the heart that experiences the poet's feelings. Mark such lines for their depth, vision and aphorism:

*A soul that is a spark of God survives (Savitri 169).  
A lie was there the truth and truth a lie (Savitri 210).  
In the beginning is prepared the close (Savitri 343).  
The soul's ignorance is slain but not the soul (Savitri 311).  
To know is best, however hard to bear (Savitri 429).  
Only who save themselves can others save (Savitri 501).  
Infinite things the conscious Infinite dwells (Savitri 658).*

Aurobindo is a poet bubbling with lyrical intensity. Sometimes his lines become devotional songs that possess the power to move the reader who is transported to the other world. For instance:

*In a world of beings and momentary events*

*Where all must die to live and live to die.  
Immortal by renewed mortality (Savitri 288).*

*I looked upon the world and missed the Self,  
And when I found the Self, I lost the world,  
My other selves I lost and the body of God (Savitri 406).*

*Ourselves within us lethal forces nurse;  
We make of our own enemies our guests (Savitri 439).*

*We came to her from a supernal Light,  
By Light we live and to the Light we go (Savitri 601)*

#### Savitri: A Mental Gymnast for an Ordinary Reader

Written with a serious purpose, Savitri is an epic journey of Savitri who, with her determined spirit enters the realm of consciousness, fights there against ignorance and finally gets victory over Death resulting in saving Satyavan, the symbol of truth and soul. It is "a sort of poetic philosophy of the spirit and life" (Savitri 735) carrying the message of the ancient wisdom reflected in the Vedas and the Vedanta with the soaring aim of transcending heights that offers ecstasy which one achieves while reflecting over the Supreme Being. To an ordinary reader, Savitri seems to be an unsolved riddle. It is so because he is not equipped with the vision—a mental state required for its understanding. For an ordinary reader, Savitri which is actually "the record of seeing" (Savitri 794) may be a poor and empty show of words but to a serious reader who is well-equipped with a vision gives him a new orientation in life by providing a supreme word "a mantric dynamo of transforming power and light, elevating and uplifting in its effect" (Reddy 7). He writes about the mystical experiences that an ordinary reader cannot grasp. He himself admits that he has not written for a general reader. He states: "But if I had to write for the general reader I could not have written Savitri at all. It is in fact for myself that I have written it and for those who can lend themselves to the subject-matter, images, technique of mystic poetry" (Savitri 735). Savitri which is "the Mahakavya as well as the Mahavakya of our age (Reddy 7) demonstrates Aurobindo's revolutionary spirit that longs for the transformation of a human being into a divine being through the integral yoga. It also reveals that Aurobindo is not a poet for the ordinary but a pure poet for the extraordinary. He is poets' poet with a vision—vision of reforming the world with the help of his Integral Yoga which he recommends through his poetry particularly Savitri.

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Arun Kolatkar's *Sarpa Satra*: Text, Context  
and Contemporary IssuesSudhir K. Arora<sup>1</sup>

My name is Arun Kolatkar  
 I had a little matchbox  
 I lost it  
 then I found it  
 I kept it  
 in my right hand pocket  
 It is still there (CP 229)  
 ...  
 Give me the matchbox  
 before you go  
 will you?  
 a sceptic match coughs (CP 47)

These are the revealing words from the pen of Arun Balkrishan Kolatkar (1931-2004), who, by virtue of his matchbox which possessed the matches that made the things visualize, is considered, to quote Aravind Krishna Mehrotra, "as one of the great Indian poets of the last century" (CP 12). Every match in the matchbox is "sceptic" that "coughs" when it finds anything unusual. This is the sceptic match that makes him see the unseen view of *Jejuri*, reveal the ugly, tiresome and struggling life of the people associated with the vicinity of *Kala Ghoda* and demonstrate the invisible fire in the visible fire lit by Janmejaya for the yagna to wipe out the species of snakes. That's why he always keeps it in his right hand pocket. It is the matchbox full of matches that possess the substances of irony, satire, defamiliarization, myths and the like which when are stuck reveal the things that confirm his poetry as non-conformist and anti-established in approach and nature.

Like his matchbox, Kolatkar's pen has the charismatic power that makes him compose poetic collections like

*Jejuri*, *Kala Ghoda Poems* and *Sarpa Satra* in English. Prash published *The Boatride and Other Poems* in 2009 after his death while Aravind Krishna Mehrotra did a recommendable job by editing all his poems and providing them in one collection, namely *Collected Poems in English* (2010).

*Jejuri*, which made Kolatkar win the Commonwealth Writers' Poetry Prize in 1977 for being the best book in English, is his *magnum opus* by virtue of his innovative technique of being involved as well as uninvolved simultaneously. He is uninvolved because he is not interested in rituals and outdated traditions and remains involved because he reveals what remains unseen to the reader who wonders at the commercialism that has entered the religious places where everything is present except faith and devotion even in the hearts of the concerned people. The poet of *Jejuri* appears in a new avatar in *Kala Ghoda Poems*. Scepticism and rationalism that he had while visiting the pilgrim town *Jejuri* in *Jejuri* disappear in *Kala Ghoda Poems* where he emerges as the champion of the underdog to the extent that he has attracted the attention of the rich civilized world towards the marginalized people who live life despite the adverse circumstances. His poetic journey from *Jejuri* to *Sarpa Satra* is replete with quotidian experiences articulated in day-today language. But, he has also inserted allegory, narration and myths in order to make his poetry contemporary relevant though sometimes he comes down to the level of profanity or obscenity which generally either shocks the reader or makes him wonder at his candidness.

*Sarpa Satra* (2004), a long narrative poem consisting of three sections namely 'Janamejaya', 'Jarataru Speaks to Her Son Aastika', and 'The Ritual Bath' with stanzas of three lines each respectively begins with a brief epigraph that runs thus: "According to *Mahabharata*, a sacrifice performed by Janamejaya with the object of annihilating the Nagas, or the Snake People." As Janamejaya wishes

to take revenge of Parikshat's death due to the poisonous bite of the snake Takshak, he performs the snake sacrifice which compels snakes through a spell to come to be burnt to death. The death of his wife in the burning of the Khandava forest by Arjuna and Krishna motivates Takshak to take revenge on Arjuna's grandson King Parikshat. With his skill of interweaving myth, history and allegory, Arun Kolatkar has exploited this revenge motif to make it into a contemporary poem that reveals the chaotic state of the present human world where festivals of hatred are celebrated to the point of mass destruction out of violence. What makes *Sarpasatra* different from the original story of the *Mahabharata* is that the human world is not seen through the eyes of Arjuna and Krishna but through the eyes of Jaratkaru, a snake woman who makes up her mind to make an end of this violence with the help of her son Aastika.

Janamejaya decides to take revenge of the death of his father and so performs a snake sacrifice which, by virtue of its spell, forces each and every snake to come to the fire to be burnt. Calling Takshak "a scheming snake", he makes his intention clear:

My vengeance will be swift and terrible.  
I will not rest  
until I've exterminated them all.  
They'll discover  
that no hole is deep enough  
to hide from Janamejaya. (CP 187)

The decision to ruin the whole species for the crime of one man shows how fanatic Janamejaya is. He is in power and no one has the courage to raise voice against the decision.

The poet Kolatkar makes Jaratkaru speak from the points of view of the snake people. She is the female protagonist who puts the case of the snake species which will come to an end because of the snake sacrifice. She tells her son Aastika about this snake sacrifice because she finds him the only man who can save the snake

species from its extinction by persuading Janamejaya for stopping the *yajna*. Great *rishes*, *mahrishis*, great thinkers and even people like Atreya, Uddalaka and Shvketu attend the snake sacrifice and the strange thing is that none stop him as they long for the profitable status in the state. These so-called "living volcanoes of conscience" who were ready to raise their voice at any wrong doing have gone astray from the path of righteousness for the sake of a job as officiating priests.

Jaratkaru does not appreciate Takshak for his action.  
To say that he was always an extremist  
is not to make excuses for him.  
He deserves the harshest punishment in the book.

(CP 193)

She calls Takshak an extremist and thinks that he deserves punishment for what he has done. His act is not less than the act of a terrorist. She blames Indra for protecting him.

And I certainly do not approve  
of the way he's hiding now  
behind Indra's throne to save his skin,  
hoping his powerful friend  
will help him escape the consequences  
of an act we're now paying for.  
It only shows what cowards  
all terrorists are  
behind their snarling ferocious masks. (CP 193)

She calls all terrorists coward because they hide themselves behind the masks and operate their terrorist activities while having a protecting cover in the form of either industrialists or politicians. Kolatkar turns the poem into an allegory as he somewhere associates the incidents to make them contemporary relevant. It always happens that politicians shelter the terrorists who get escape free and are let loose for committing further crimes that may help in making their position strong. As long as Takshaks are present in the garb of terrorists, political Indras are there to save them from being punished.

She blames Takshak for not performing his duties as

he was not present in the Khandava forest when it was being burnt by Arjuna and Krishna. Where he was is not certain. But it is certain that he should be present there to save his wife, children and the forest. She also fails to understand why he did not take revenge on Arjuna whom he could easily kill in his old age. As "true revenge accepts no substitute" (CP 200), why did he bite Parikshat not Arjuna?

Now, she narrates how the snakes are forced to be burnt under the spell of the mantras recited during the Snake Sacrifice. The snakes come "floating, writhing through the air" and "throw themselves into the fire" (CP 201). She considers it to be an insult to Agni, the fire god. It is a "mockery" or "parody / of the institution of yajnya" (CP 203) and so it should be stopped. But, who can have courage to stop this? Those who can do it are on "the payroll of Janamejaya" (CP 203) and have no courage because of selfish motive of getting advantage. The air that now blows will soon become "as something un-Indian, alien / and antinational" (CP 204) because of the smell of the burnt snakes. She is surprised to see that the wise men fail to take any action. How can they forget that this earth rests on the hood of Shesha, a snake? Shesha is her brother whom she sends a *rakhi* which reminds him of her. If he comes to know about this happening, what will happen? It will result not in the end of naga species only but of all. If he moves his head slightly, the world will come to an end.

A slight toss of his head...  
the merest shrug...  
and it will be all over.  
Khatam.

That's what I'm really worried about. (CP 205)

She thinks that it is time to intimate Janamejaya that whom he intends to rule when the earth will come to an end. She finds her son Aastika the right man because of his clear vision for this job and hence asks him to go to meet Janamejaya who either may stop him at the

to beat or insult him. She recalls how they beat Arjuna's son for no fault. But, there is no other alternative and it is not possible to sit and watch "this holocaust" (CP 207) as she knows that if it is not stopped, she with Arjuna "will end up as burnt offerings" (CP 208). She asks Aastika to see the naga family that move to the "shady river of dirty smoke / that has poisoned the earth / atmosphere" (CP 209). She cannot see Vasuki either. It is the same Vasuki, the great serpent king who "coiled himself around / Mount Mandara once / to churn the ocean for gods and demons" (CP 209). She makes Aastika recall that though he is her son, he is a man who belongs to human race. As he is a man, he is the right person to stop this sacrifice for the sake of the humanity. She blesses him with all her prayers saying:

My heart tells me  
you'll find a way  
to put a stop  
to that festival of hatred. (CP 211)

The poet in Kolatkar presents the scene when after attending the sacrificial jamborees, the officiating priests, guests and intellectual creams return to their respective homes with the gifts. As soon as the mandatory bath is over, kings return to their capital with a plan of attacking the neighbourly kingdom or levying a new tax in order to fill the coffers. She is sure that people will forget it and start talking about other subjects. They will make themselves busy in simple pleasure like kite flying, collecting wild flowers and making love. Life will come to its own normal course. She hopes that "sooner or later, / these celebrations of hatred too / come to an end / like everything else" (CP 213). But, fire which was lit will not be extinguished. Fire that was produced by Parashara for the destruction of rakshasa still continues "in the great forest beyond the Himalayas" (CP 213). Despite the fact that he stopped the sacrifice at the request of Poulastya, it continues "to consume / rakshasas / rocks / trees" (CP 214). The poem ends in despair and

does not give any message of hope. It is true that the fire of hatred continues to burn and will continue till the world ends. No doubt, the poem *Sarpa Satra* leaves in frustration of hope but it makes the world realize the havoc and desolation that it causes. It quite applies to the contemporary world which is burning with the fire of hatred and violence. It also offers an allegory to the present scenario dotted with the nexus of corrupt politicians, cunning ministers and so-called martial messiahs who do not feel hesitation in protecting the terrorists.

The text *Sarpa Satra* raises the issue of environmental pollution and the ecological problems that appear out of the forest fire. No doubt, Arjuna and Krishna are heroes but they have done the unheroic task by burning the Khandava forest for reasons unknown. The tone of Jaratkaru is satirical and mocking when she reveals the truth of these two legendary figures of history. Jaratkaru narrates how Arjuna with Krishna burnt the Khandava forest. Ironically she calls Arjuna, the grandfather of Janamejaya "the great superhero" who received the divine weapons. God knows what happened to him that he used the divine weapons for destructive purpose. He burnt down the Khandava forest, "one of the largest rainforest in the land" and reduced it "completely to ash" (CP 195). This was "the very first act of heroism" (CP 194) that he did with his divine weapons and in this heroic act Krishna with his Sudarshan chakra assisted him. The burning which resulted in ash did not leave "one green leaf, / not a single blade of grass" (CP 195) behind. The heaps of ash continued to smoulder for many months. Some old trees that "contained a wealth / of medicinal plants" (CP 196) were destroyed. Nothing remained behind, not even the great sanctuary that Indra loved. All the trees, birds, insects and animals like elephants, gazelles, antelope etc., met the same fate. While narrating this to her son Astika, Jaratkaru becomes emotional because this fire did not leave "people as well / simple

folk, / children of the forest / who had lived there for generations, / since time began" (CP 196). Their sheltering place was destroyed for the reasons which are not known yet. Mark the excerpt for the destruction of the Khandava forest for no reason

Why did they do it?

Who knows!

Just for kicks, maybe,

maybe just the fact

that now they had all these fantastic weapons

went to their heads

and they just couldn't wait

to test their awesome powers.

maybe they just wanted

a clear title to the land,

unchallenged

by so much as a tigermoth. (CP 197)

Sudarshan Chakra cuts every single honeybee and comes back to "the tip of Krishna's finger / for fresh instructions" (CP 198) while Arjuna's arrows give death to swans. These two heroes feel proud of themselves at the destruction that they have made in the forest to its birds, animals and folk people. The poet leaves the reader to reflect over the deed whether it was heroic or shameful.

Arun Kolatkar has attempted to deconstruct the text as he has made the snake woman Jaratkaru the main protagonist for articulating the viewpoints of what the snake people think. He has undermined the master narrative which favours the great men and does not hold them responsible for the crime which they commit for the sake of pleasure. The poet reveals the truth of their action which is certainly inhuman. The burning of the Khandava forest cannot be justified on the human ground. The heroes like Arjuna and Krishna responsible for burning are not heroes but villains if seen from the viewpoints of Jaratkaru who do not adore them to the extent of deification. *Sarpa Satra* also voices the snake people who seem to be subalterns. These snake people while living on the periphery tolerate the dictatorship and monopoly

of the people who have dominated the centre. If seen from this angle, *Sarpa Satra* becomes a postcolonial text that deconstructs Vyas' master narrative to bring the subaltern to the centre so that they may voice their grievances. The whole snake race has been colonized by the powerful people like Arjuna and Krishna. Later, Janmejaya represents the centre that subjugates the peripheral people. The extinction of the snake race from the world shows Janmejaya's inhuman behavior and dictatorship. To take revenge to the whole snake race for the crime committed by one man cannot be justified from any angle. The poet has shown that the centre misuses power for the sake of play and pleasure. The discourse that he has raised through Jaratkaru is contemporary and quite relevant to the present day situation.

Kolatkhar has exploited the *Mahabharata* myth to register his hatred for the violence, oppression and exploitation prevalent in the contemporary world particularly India. Hence, the text emerges as an allegory as somewhere it traces out the poison of extremism to the point of fanaticism and the fire of violence which makes the present day world burn to the extent of the danger of the extinction of the human species from this earth. Kolatkhar, with the help of the literary devices like pointed irony and pungent satire makes *Sarpa Satra* flow smoothly into the heart of the reader who feels at ease with the lucid language dotted with the colloquial phrases. No doubt, it has the impression of the poet's cynicism but the way it is narrated is praiseworthy. While going through *Sarpa Satra*, the reader recalls the ancient tradition of orally story telling. The fire of hatred continues right from the beginning of the world. This fire is more and more ignited by the terrorists who have a mission to ruin the world without realizing the fact if the world does not remain, how they will survive. Even today many Takshaks are alive in the garb of terrorists who get shelter from Indras disguised as politicians. Arujana, Krishnas and Janmajeyas are alive

in the garb of industrialists who are polluting the environment at the cost of the extinction of the human species. The poem leaves the reader in distress as it provides no solution at all but it is significant because it makes the world conscious of the seriousness of the problem which if not taken into consideration, will result in the extinction of human species.

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