

## **CHAPTER VI**

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For a long time, English Studies in India had been primarily concerned only with English literature, obviously due to the impact of the Colonial encounter. After the 1960s, the Anglocentric curriculum gave way to diverse trends in literary studies. With the emergence of post-colonial literatures and Postcolonial Literary Theory, things have changed remarkably in different Departments of English all over India. Today, besides mainstream authors, literatures produced by different men and women—urban and rural, Dalit and Tribal—have started to be examined from several points of view. During the last twenty to twenty five years, research in Indian Writing in English has had a significant history in terms of thematic studies, author studies, genre studies, etc. Surprisingly, Indian Literature in English has not been analysed and interpreted in terms of ecocritical position so far. The present research is a modest attempt of its kind to conduct an ecocritical study of Dilip Chitre's English poetry.

Chapter I introduces the theme of dislocation reflected in Dilip Chitre's English poetry due to the rupture in the life of the sensitive poet from his physical environment. The review of relevant research literature shows that while majority of Chitre's critics have commented on the poet's sense of the existentialist *angst* and nagging death consciousness, only R.G. Jadhav has written about the ecological dimension of Chitre's poetry, but he, too, has done so only about Marathi poetry. It is assumed that Dilip Chitre's English poetry is characterized by ecocentric values of meticulous observation, collective

ethical responsibility, and the claims of the non-human world. The researcher has primarily referred to Chitre's English poems included in *As Is, Where Is* but further made use of both creative and critical works produced by and about Chitre wherever necessary.

Chapter II provides a critique of the tradition of Indian poetry in English in terms of several divisions. The first division, The Rise of Indian Poetry in English (the first half of the nineteenth century), has been called as The Seedlings. The second division, The Growth of Indian Poetry in English (the second half of the nineteenth century), has been called as the Sprout or Early Plant-state. And the last division, The Maturation of Indian Poetry in English, has been regarded as a Tree, of many branches, spreading new aeriols of literary sensibility to seek, to find human reality. The chapter is a modest attempt to assess the achievement of Indian English poetry so far, examining the poetry of each phase in terms of literary concerns and historical perspectives.

Poetry of the early phase laboured under English influences. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Kashi Prasad Ghose and Michael Madhusudan Dutt made a creative use of Indian fables, myths and legends in their poetry, but did so imitating the British neo-classical as well as the Romantic models of poetry. Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri. Aurobindo Ghose and Sarojini Naidu further expressed an Indian sensibility in terms of its rituals, customs, myths, legends, spiritual consciousness and ancient Indian mystic traditions. They made experiments with the rich Indian myths and folklore taken from religious books and Puranas in order to reassert Indian national and cultural identity.

As Keki N. Daruwalla claims, earlier poets 'were untouched by either the reality around them, drought, famine, plague, colonial exploitation or by the reality within namely erosion of faith and the disintegration of the modern consciousness'. Daruwalla's criticism of the pre-Independence poetry helps us to understand the direction that Indian poetry in English took after the Second World War and Indian Independence. Modern Indian poetry in English introduced the direct relationship between literature and the cultural movement in general and the immediate physical environment in particular. Unlike the pre-Independence poets, the poetry written by many modern Indian poets such as Shiv Kumar, Nissim Ezekiel, Jayant Mahapatra, A. K. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarathy, Kersy Katrak, Keki N. Daruwalla, Dom Moraes, Dilip Chitre and many others ceased to be overtly nationalist. The most distinctive feature of poetry written by Dilip Chitre, argues the researcher, is the expression of the feelings of disinterestedness, alienation and unrelatedness due to his rupture with the idyllic life at Baroda.

Chapter III presents the literary portrait of Dilip Purushottam Chitre, poet, short story writer, critic, translator, film-maker and editor in terms of his family, travel, friends, influences, works and so on and so forth. His idyllic childhood in Baroda was shaped by *ovis* sung by his grandmother, his maternal grandfather's deep interest in Tukaram, *kirtans* and *bhajans* heard from a nearby temple and Gujarati folk songs. His migration to Bombay when he was only thirteen proved a turning point in his literary career. His entire crisis of adolescence was spent in Bombay under much cramped circumstances. Days spent in Ethiopia profoundly altered the poet's life. He encountered a new country and its ethos. After returning from Ethiopia, he worked as journalist, promotion

officer, advertising executive and magazine columnist. He started his professional film career in 1969 and has made one feature film, about a dozen documentary films, several short films in the cinema format and about twenty video documentary features. He has given readings, lectures, talks, participated in seminars and symposia, and conducted workshops in creative writing and literary translation in several places.

Different critics and scholars have examined the relevance, the level of complexity or the symbolic significance of Dilip Chitre's poetry. What has been further explored in this study is the struggle of the isolated, private self of the poet to cope up with the immediate world of physical environment.

Chapter IV presents 'Ecocriticism', a critical approach which began in the USA in the late 1980s. Ecocriticism, as a methodological approach, has taken its literary bearings from three major 19<sup>th</sup> century American writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau whose works celebrate nature, the life force and wilderness. It has also taken its bearings from the British Romanticism of the early nineteenth century.

*The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology* (1996) edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm challenges the notion that everything is socially and/or linguistically constructed and instead, proposes an ecocritical position. Taking a point of departure from this ecocritical position, the present study has explored the interconnections of human and nonhuman in Chitre's poetry.

Joseph Meeker, who has offered ecocritical analysis of literature in his book *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1974),

provides us a few important objectives of ecocritical analysis of literature:

- 1) To discover the influence of literature upon human behaviour and the natural environment.
- 2) To determine the role played by literature in the welfare and survival of mankind.
- 3) To determine the insight offered by literature into human relationship with the other species and with the world around us.
- 4) To examine whether literature adapts us better to the world or whether it estranges us from it.
- 5) To explore whether literature contributes more to our survival than to our extinction.

These objectives derived from Meeker help us to formulate an ecocritical viewpoint.

Chapter V examines Dilip Chitre's English poetry in terms of this ecocritical perspective. In his Marathi book *Punha Tukaram* (1990), Chitre argues that men have turned science and technology into the weapon for dominating the other people and that they have forgotten that natural resources are essential primary sources of life system and instead started the degradation of the environment of their own and other living beings by squandering those resources.

Dilip Chitre, who believes in the ideas of respect for earth and responsible stewardship of natural resources, brings out the contrast between the Indian past and the Indian present by means of an ironical juxtaposition of the details from the past and the present. For example

My ancestor, Kalidasa, was after all a poet  
Basking in his own classical libido,  
His body breathing language as the flute breathes music,  
While I am condemned to read,  
On waking, about the latest American bombing in  
Viet Nam,  
Or about the slow deaths of the malnourished near home.

In "Homage to Pataliputra" he expresses his concern for the famine-affected life.

Famine continues to kill  
Cattle and people.  
Water is scarce.

He establishes the connection between human suffering and the destruction of forests, natural habitats, the world's topsoil and its agricultural land.

It has been raining  
For centuries  
On this desert:  
For the forest were felled,  
And the forests failed,  
And the water-table sank lower,  
And the soil was eroded.

Commenting on the wasteful ways of living, Chitre skillfully combines the process of desertification with the decline of human civilization. The origin of human sorrow, for him, is unmistakably linked with the

destruction of habitats, loss of biodiversity and depletion of natural resources.

In "The Felling of the Banyan Tree", there is a reference to the shifting of Dilip Chitre's family from Baroda, where he had spent his childhood in the company of such trees as "the sheoga, the oudumber, the neem---, the huge banyan tree", to Bombay, "where there are no trees". This shifting from the rural habitat to the massively urbanized Bombay has played a decisive role in shaping Chitre's poetic sensibility. The father's decision to demolish all the houses surrounding their house on the hill and to massacre all the 'sacred' trees including the huge banyan tree was so shocking to the sensitive mind of the poet that the occasion of the slaughter of the tree has left its permanent impact on the poetic output of Dilip Chitre. The deforested hill, to which he calls 'a grey hill' and to which he calls 'bhunda tekaad' in Marathi, stands for the loss of older sacred ecological values.

Chitre's poem "The View from Chinchpokli" records the effects of large-scale industrialization and urbanization on the life of migrants who move from rural to urban areas like Bombay in search of better income opportunities. Overpopulation due to an increase in immigration in Bombay has placed unbearable stress on such basic life sustaining resources as clean water, clean air, food, shelter, warmth, medical care, employment, education, electricity, proper sewage treatment and waste disposal. This eco-conscious poet finds it difficult to cope up with the life in the overcrowded Bombay, whose ecosystem has been significantly transformed through human actions.

Majority poems in Dilip Chitre's *Travelling in a Cage* (1980), as has been pointed out by different critics, express his sense of the

existentialist *angst* and nagging death-consciousness. Such feelings of disinheritedness, alienation and unrelatedness in Chitre have their origin in the poet's dissociation with social and natural life enjoyed previously in his ancestral house located at Baroda during his childhood. After observing one woman's act of passionate transcendence at the river Karha on a No Moon Monday, the poet recalls his own moments of transcendence. Among these, the very first moment is that of the lasting impact left by "the bitter *neem-tree* of my childhood swaying in the summer of summer,/Exuding an absolute fragrance from its starry leaves and stellar berries,/An aroma that grew into a ripe fragrance at puberty /And became a transcendent scent as I aged."

Chitre voices his concern for the adverse effects of dangerous substances in the form of both gases and particles posing severe threat to the health of the people and ecosystems: "I breathe in the sulphur dioxide emitted/By the Bombay Gas Company, blended with specks of cotton/And carbon particles discharged by the mills/That clothe millions of loins."

Chitre bewails air pollution resulting from human activity in the context of his son Ashay 'inhaling poison in Bhopal --- on December 4, 1984'. Ashay died at the age of 'just 41' due to the effects of the Bhopal chemical trauma. Besides this immediate and personal loss of his own son, what is more exasperating to the poet is the overall negligence on the part of government machinery to study the exact effects of gas exposures on the human health.

Strange, even after more than twenty years,  
Nobody has cared to look for the right apparatus  
To decipher the thousands of deaths

Caused by methyl isocyanate  
Leaked into the atmosphere  
By a global corporate giant's local tanks

The poisoned Bhopal embryo kept in 'a ten percent solution of formaldehyde' neglected by science then emerges as a symbol of lack of human concern for environmental degradation.

To conclude, it can safely be claimed that Dilip Chitre's English poetry is characterized by ecocentric values of meticulous observation, collective ethical responsibility, and the claims of the nonhuman world.