

INTRODUCTION

Poetry from the perspective of Manohar Shetty is the art of telling details— details coiled around a central core of memory and emotion. He is a poet who does not take refuge in huge, all-meaning ambiguity and rhetoric. His art is exact. A journalist and free-lancer, Shetty began to write poetry at the age of nineteen i.e. in 1972. Thus making an early start, he emerged as the most promising of new entrants in the field of Indian English Poetry. Although small in quantity, his works proved seminal immediacy. So far he has published three books of verse and edited a short-story collection. Some of his poems are translated into Italian, Finnish and Slovenian languages. His poems have appeared into national and international journals like London Magazine, Chelseac (New York), The Bombay literary Review, Helix (Australia), Chandrabhaga (Cuttack). A serious critical attention was paid to his poetry when Prof. Bruce King in his book *Modern Indian Poetry in English* (1987) held up a bright future for him. He slowly won recognition. Vilas Sarang introduced him with Santan Rodrigues and Darius Cooper, in *Indian English Poetry since 1950 : An Anthology*. Three of them were not considered worth to find space in three earlier important anthologies i.e. Peeradina's *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English, An Assessment & Selection* (1972), Parthasarthy's *Ten Twentieth Century Indian*

Poets (1976) and Daruwalla's *Two Decades of Indian Poetry : 1960-1980* (1980).

His first verse collection *A Guarded Space* was published in 1981, and the second *Borrowed Time* in 1988. These collections were widely appreciated and excellently reviewed. However, on commercial level, they were not sold rapidly, 'probably because he will not do public reading'¹ of his poems. Still, Shetty received recognition among new generation of Bombay poets—Melanie Silgado, Rodrigues, Dhiven Bhagat, Darius Copper, along with the two slightly elder writers- Saleem Peeradina and Eunice de Souza. His third verse collection *Domestic Creatures* was published in 1994, while he edited a short-story collection entitled *Ferry Crossing: Short stories from Goa* published in 1998.

It is interesting to note that eighties began with the publication of two anthologies of poem~~s~~ one by Vikram Seth (*Mappings*, 1981) and the other by Shetty (*A Guarded Space*, 1981). Meenakshi Shivram points,

“These are the two poets (Shetty and Seth) who have opened up newer spaces of interrogation and cruised through newer direction in Indian English Poetry. Poets like Agha Shahid Ali, Gauri Deshpande, Suniti Namjoshi, Sujata Bhatt and Ranjit Hoskote have considerably built upon this sense of confidence enthused by these two poets.”²

Later, however, Seth speedily crossed the miles of popularity while Shetty slowly but confidently established himself as a new voice in Indian English Poetry.

Many of Indian English poets like Dom Moraes, Kattrack, Keki Daruwalla, Vikram Seth or Darius Cooper have advantage of having English as the family language. Shetty's case was different. Language spoken at his home was Tulu, a southern vernacular. 'He says that in Tulu, the language of his family, there was no creative literature.'³ He was educated at an English language boarding school and later studied at the University of Mumbai and has been a journalist for more than twenty years. Recently he has given up writing for papers and become a full time writer.

His poems first appeared in 'Illustrated Weekly' and after publication of Prof. Bruce King's *Modern Indian Poetry in English* in 1987, the critics turned to evaluate his poetry. The foreign as well as Indian critics praised his poetry and studied some aspects of it. Some aspects still remain to be paid attention to. Although some revives and pieces of criticism throw light on specific features of his poetry, they are mostly in the form of stray articles. They do not focus on the entire corpus but take up one or two aspects for critical study. Their articles mostly deal with such details as anthropomorphism, city-life, despair, violence, self and self-discovery, animal imagery. Prof King's book is the first major analysis of his poetry. In a daring

manner, he treated Shetty, alongwith Eunice de Souza, Nazareth, Peeradina (then all authors of single book), as a major poet, and include him among select coterie of most significant poets i.e. Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Gieve Patel, R.Parthasarthy, A.K.Mehrota, Keki Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar etc. In his review of kings book, Anand Lal, criticises him for his favour. He writes,

“They (i.e. Shetty, De Souza, Nazareth, Peeradina) may all be ‘contemporary’ but a few of them have not yet arrived at a poetic ‘world’ deep and wide enough to qualify as important writers. For instance, by no standards of world poetry can just one volume of short poems elevate a poet to this rank.”⁴

Yet Prof. King saw a bright future for Shetty. He has praised his ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘increased perception of details’ which, he says, are result of ‘kinds of techniques and expression employed’ by Shetty.

He writes,

“If recent poets, particularly Silgado and Shetty have taken a renewed interest in the more logically developed; more formally organised lyric, they can do so with a sense of having been freed from the necessity of beginning a poem with statement which is logically developed to a conclusion. Their poetry is more linear and argumentatively constructed than that of Mehrotra and Mahapatra, but it is still open, more ready to shift to the unexpected in subject matter and images and to offer unconventional emotions, than the poetry written between 1950 and 1965; it is more associated in organization than logically structured.”⁵

Prof. King also saw a confessional mode of writing in his poetry. However, the feeling of alienation, observed by him, is not so acutely present as we notice in modern Indian English poetry. Here his observation becomes unconvincing. He seems to be more subjective in his approach.

The emphasis of Daruwall's review of *A Guarded Space* is again on craftsmanship. By contrast, Jayant Mahapatra's review is more focussed on subliminal private world behind the poems. In his review of *Borrowed Time*, Shyamala A Narayan, examines him as a city poet. She writes,

“Shetty's poems revolve around life in Indian city. He reveals a keen eye for the hoardings, the cinema posters and crumbling old house.”⁶

She praises his accurate pictures of Mumbai life. However she criticised Shetty for obscurity in his poetry. Some poems in her opinion use opaque language.

Initially, Shetty's poetry was noted for animal imagery. It is treated as single largest aspect of his poetry. Anthropomorphism appears in his poetry. It is this fascination with animal imagery that tempts critics to compare Shetty with the 'zoo-laureate' Ted Hughes.

Vilas Sarang writes,

“The many poems about animals indicate Shetty's obsession with primitive and violent aspect of human existence. Here, Shetty is treading upon ground already covered by such illustrious predecessors as

D.H.Lawrence and Ted Hughes. It is to Shetty's credit that his animal poems no way appear second-hand; they shine with an individual luminosity."⁷

No doubt that the recurring motifs in Shetty's output are animals. However, this aspect of his poetry needs to be focused in detail. The comprehensive study of it will throw light on Shetty's positive outlook towards life.

Meenakshi Shivram analyses the animal imagery, and explores the special dimensions of the self search in 'guarded spaces' in Shetty's poetry. She considers him as a major voice in the post – eighties poetry. However her study is confined to major poems published in the two anthologies edited by Mehrotra and Sarang. Her article does not cover his output in detail or provides space to the other poems.

After studying reviews on Shetty's poetry, it is observed that it needs to be studied critically in a comprehensive manner. It needs to be explored into its thematic concerns. No such comprehensive attempt seems to have been made by any scholar so far. Such a study of his poetry needs to be attempted so as to explore into his motifs. It is true that Shetty's poems pose a number of challenges with regard to their accurate interpretations but, however, the critical study like this would certainly add into the glamour of his poetry on academic scene. The present study intends to make an attempt to evaluate the poems in the collections *A Guarded Space* (1981) and *Borrowed*

Time (1988) and make a modest contribution to the studies in Indian English poetry.

I have limited myself to these two verse collections only because, they represent Shetty's vision of life and future direction of his writing. These two collections are worth studying because they contain the themes like displacement, inner ugliness, brutality and death handled with quite intensity. Moreover, his poetry has a seminal influence on the up coming generation of Indian English poets. I propose the following scheme of chapterization for my dissertation.

In chapter-I of this dissertation, Shetty's life and the development of his career as a post-eighties poet in Indian writing in English is traced. In chapter-II his animal world is studied with new look. His animal world mirrors human world with its positive and negative forces. The chapter-III is on Shetty's city world. His poems on city life present a fine commentary on the condition of man in modern mechanical world. In chapter-IV his poems on love are studied in their various aspects. They are the best examples of the unrequited love. In the concluding chapter i.e. V of this dissertation, an attempt has been made to make a humble statement on Shetty's contribution to modern Indian poetry as a post-modernist poet.

REFERENCES

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