

## CHAPTER - V

### CONCLUSION

Manohar Shetty's two verse collections viz. *A Guarded Space* (1981) and *Borrowed Time* (1988) are studied here with critical approach. The aim of this dissertation was to assess his poetry and thereabout to study his vision of life and future direction of writing. To meet this goal, his poems from both the collections were grouped into major areas of his exploration i.e. animal, city and love. The poems on these areas are studied in the chapters-II, III and IV respectively. An attempt is also made to show the development of his art as a post-eighties poet in Chapter-I. His poetry is studied not only from thematic point of view but also from the points of view of language and imagery. The dissertation also attempts to make a statement on frame-work and philosophy governing Shetty's poetry.

Shetty's animal poems are his private projections on domestic creatures. Still they have a greater significance when one discerns the issues behind them. The major concerns that they deal with are struggle for existence (Well), loss of innocence as man grows (Game), disharmony (Wounds) and inner ugliness (Fore-shadows), the uncertainties of growing up, of emerging from the sheltered world of school and college into the harsh reality of the 'real world'- of jobs, career, earning a living for himself (Fireflies). These are ills of modern competitive world. In my view, Shetty considers the animal

images as fitting to bear upon these ills because he perceives man still carrying animal instincts. After immense scientific and technological progress, man has not achieved a state of perfection. He is still ruled by atavistic urges. Environment is changed but man remained animal. It does not mean that his animal poems are negative photographs of human world. His poems show his belief in man's attitude to proceed despite innumerable impediments, the necessity of which arises from struggle for survival. In a nutshell, the key-note of his animal poetry is positive. The study of these poems reveals that the ultimate concern of Shetty is man and the universe around him. It is not that Shetty is the first to write animal poetry or to use animal imagery in order to comment on the human condition. Unlike Ted Hughes' direct connection with the primitive and violent world, Shetty is very sharp and reflective. His animal poems serve as a meditative parallel between the world of men and that of animal.

It is obvious that Shetty's poems are personal utterances. They are his innervoices, showing him into a matchless social dimension. Self in the context of city occupies important place in the poetry of 1980s and 1990s. In Shetty's poetry, city acts more than merely a context, it compels him to peep into his own self. As a result, self-exploration becomes a major preoccupation in his poetry. Disturbing aspects of city life are mirrored in the projection of the persona. Emptiness of city is equivalent to the hollowness of modern man

(‘Mannequin’). Shetty writes about mundane, the quotidian and the monotony of city life (‘The Recluse’). Trapped life of common man is traced in ‘The Common Chronicle’. Shetty’s themes- loneliness, boredom, ennui (‘Neighbourhood’, ‘Bored’)- are born of the ‘daily groove’ of living, and make him very much a poet of the city.

Shetty’s poems on city address the grave consequences of mechanization and commercialization in post modern world as they have caused dismantling of human values. Man has turned into a cog in the vast and power machine. His poems show deep concerns about human spirit threatened to be eliminated by automation.

Shetty has explored love theme in the second section of *A Guarded Space*. Shetty’s place is unique in this regard. While presenting this traditional theme, he is far from the neo-romantic strain in the poetry of the 1980s and 90s and even further from modern Indian English poetry. Modern love poetry is sensual. This sensuality is carried to excess by the neo-romantic poets such as Mohanty, Merchant, Sen, Surendran etc. Human body is just like a machine made to quench the desire to them. However, Shetty’s love poems are confessions of a tender-hearted lover who understands the limitation. His love poetry is not sexual extravaganza. The concept of love that springs from his love poetry is neither romantic nor surrealistic. His approach is rather moderate. Love is one of synchronous needs. In that sense, his is authentic love poetry.

Shetty's love poetry has an autobiographic touch. His is a typical Indian love-story. Shetty himself believes that love poems are the hardest to get right. When one is apparently in love or infatuated, it is very easy to fall into false sentimentality, self-pity and flowery language. The dividing line between sentimentality and genuine tenderness can be very thin and one has to be careful threading this tricky path.

Manohar Shetty is a serious practitioner of the craft of poetry. Poetry as an art requires skill with words and language tempered by imagination. He shows a disciplined and rigorous adherence to form and structure. In this sense, he is much more of a formalist. He says,

“There should always be an inherent ‘meaning’ in a successful poem, though it may not be directed towards righting the wrongs in society. But a poem is, above all, about the use of words, about skill, about “memorable speech”, the ability to craft something with words, with only a pen as your tool to enchant the reader.”<sup>1</sup>

Shetty's poems are well-organized. They are not the outcome of loose thoughts and feelings. They are chiselled several times before they come into existence. Out of this consideration, perhaps emerges Raj Rao's comment :

“Shetty aesthetics are modernist. In his love for tangible objects and particulars, in the decorum and high seriousness with which he approaches his subjects, he belongs to that generation of poets that draws its inspiration from Eliot and Auden, I. A. Richards and new critics. Not for him, the parody or anti-intellectualism of a Rushdie or a Derrida, nor the concessions to pop culture that are found in the poetry of Mehrotra and Kolhatkar.”<sup>2</sup>

It means here Raj Rao intends to put firmly Shetty in the line of modernist poets and critics. Modern Indian English poetry is influenced by modern British poetry. Raj Rao perceives Shetty in the group of modern Indian English poets. However, a close analysis of his poetry reveals some serious differences between modern Indian English poetry and that of Shetty. The very first difference is that Shetty was influenced by the poetry of Hughes, Gunn and Heaney. The second is related to the use of English language. Modern Indian poets faced a dilemma of blending a foreign medium of expression and their Indianness. They had certain hesitation in using English language as it is, and to overcome the problem they invented Indian variety of English. To their great success, they indianised foreign language. No such inner compulsion is seen in the poetry of Shetty. Like Dom Moraes, he feels comfortable at British English. In this regard, he is close to the poets of 1980s and 1990s. Still with British diction and decorum, he succeeds in conjuring Indian environment in his poetry. As in the poem 'Street Scene', he draws a humorous picture of an Indian policemen in straight prose statements :

The policeman's teeth are saws.  
His hands are ten truncheons !  
He has kicked the top bottom like ball.

In these lines, Shetty acutely captures the public image of a policeman. The poem is a representative delineation of Indian experience of street fight. It shows a typical attitude of Indian people

to crowd around even a trivial event. His poem 'Three Hoardings' part III portrays the silent sufferings of Indian worker, while the 'Blueprints' is about unquestioning attitude of Indian labourers.

The concept of Indianness refers to both a "fixity" and a "flux". It conveys both topical and human experience as V. K. Gokak puts it.<sup>3</sup> More clear instances of Shetty's Indian sensibility are found in his poems on Mumbai. Although he states that his city poems are about any city, not about a specific city, it is Mumbai that rules his imagination. It always held fascination for him. He says so, perhaps, because when he wrote poems on Mumbai, it had acquired international urban sameness. It is typical Indian city, yet. Here his poetry on Mumbai can be compared with Ezekiel's poetry on Mumbai. We see a difference of approach and attitude to Mumbai. For Ezekiel, Mumbai is the place where he belongs to. (Island) Mumbai is a metaphor for India. In Ezekiel's poetry the relationship with the city is of a dual response - love and hate. On the contrary, Mumbai in Shetty's poetry is topos, metaphor and equivalent of the self condition. The relationship is of indifference. The city is indifferent to its inhabitants and is devoid of emotional attachment. The reason could be that Ezekiel's Mumbai is of 1960s, while Shetty's is that of 1980s, eroded and embellished as well by more and more advancement. His poems are vivid pictures of Mumbai scenes and persons. His is a distinctively nonsentimental voice. Shetty's

Indianness is marginal and mainly urban. In his poetry, traditional or rural India hardly receives any space.

Urban wit and the use of irony are prominent features of Modern Indian English poetry. In Shetty's poetry we experience urban wit but no irony. He deviates from the paradigm of Modern Indian English poetry. He cannot be categorised as a modern Indian English poet.

Shetty's poetry has certain lapses. Certain poems in both the collections are abstract and unnecessarily complex. They can be understood only by a reader well-informed in poetry. His use of personal images sometimes creates hindrance in drawing proper meaning. Tracing this point, Shyamala A. Narayan says,

“Many of the poems tend to obscure. The poem “Foot”, for instance, has a surrealistic touch, “This morning my foot walked/ out on me.” It ends with him growing a new foot, sprouting from his wrist.”<sup>4</sup>

The surrealistic imagery in the poems like ‘In a Strange Place’ or ‘Foot’ (*Borrowed Time*) results in his failure to create the proper perspectives on these poems. While the poems like ‘The Secret Life of Walter Mehta’, ‘Lines for Geetanjali’, and ‘Solo’ (*Borrowed Time*) seem unfit for the collection. Still, they do not mar the thematic concerns of the collection.

It is hardly beneficial to see Shetty's poetry on the ground of the conventional forms of sonnet, lyric, ballad etc. or to trace metrical

patterns in it. He like most of Indian English poets writes in free verse. Though he pays great attention to the form of the poem, he does not superimpose it on subject matter. There is no showiness and empty ornamentation in his work. His intermittent use of musical devices such as rhyme-scheme, internal rhythms, half-rhymes or alliteration is occasional and need-based. In fact, Shetty is against excessive use of these devices. Musical quality belongs to song, not to poem.

“I don’t believe in the fusion of poetry with music,” said Shetty. “The music inevitably tend to dominate the written word. Poetry is a moment made palpable on paper.”<sup>5</sup>

The idea is immediately struck when one goes through his poetry. His use of onomatopoeia and personification is remarkable. He has personified not only objects as in ‘Mannequin’ but mental qualities like creativity in the poem ‘secret’, where the poem itself takes on the guise of the first person singular. His poetry heavily relies on the metaphors and similes that drawn from animal world and ultramodern city world.

Shetty looks at life and its panorama with a connoisseur eye. He emerges as a neutral observer in his poetry. However, a change is being noticed about his stance in his recent unpublished poems like ‘Exotica’. He is opening himself out to ‘outer reality’.

Manohar Shetty's unique place as a poet lies in his affiliations to the earlier generation of writers with a limited influence. He continues to be the same even in the wake of post modernist poetic practices and does not allow himself to be overinfluenced and then succeeds in exerting his influence on the next generation.

Thus the present dissertation could be treated as a modest critical statement on the writings of Manohar Shetty for the kind of appeal his poems hold on various aspects of humanity and dilemma pertaining to the post-modernist condition of living.

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. This refers to the article containing Shetty's thoughts e-mailed by him dated Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2007.
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3. Gokak, V. K., *The Concept of Indianness*, K.R.S. Iyenger (ed.) *Indian Writing in English*, Orient Longman Limited : Bombay, 1978.
4. Narayan, Shymala's review on *Borrowed Time*, Journal of Indian Writing in English, Vol. 19, 1991.
5. Mukerji, Deba Shingh's article 'Living on the Fringes', The Week, June 29, 2003.

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