

CHAPTER V

THE PERSONA'S SELF AND GOD AND NATURE

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Poetry evoking God, and also nature, is not a new phenomenon in Indian Poetry in English. Almost all nineteenth century poets wrote on the rains, birds, temples, gods and goddesses. Toru Dutt's Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan (1882) is a retelling of some of the Indian myths and legends in English verse. Dutt rendered in English such Indian myths and legends as Savitri, Lakshman, Buttoo, Prahlad etc. Another nineteenth century poet, Romesh Chander Dutt (1848-1909) wrote English versions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Both Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Sri Aurobindo were primarily religious poets. Tagore's mystical lyrics express the joys and pangs of his love for his lord through images of nature.¹ Sri Aurobindo who had established an Ashram at Pondicherry, wrote mystical prose and verse. For instance, in his Savitri, an epic comprising twelve books and some 24,000 lines, he makes use of the myth of Savitri and Satyawana to record the rise of consciousness into superconsciousness through the defeat of death. Modern poets and critics dismiss the contribution of these pre-Independence poets as romantic and find fault with their verse and diction.

When Ezekiel appeared on the poetry scene in the nineteen-fifties he introduced a totally different voice in Indian Poetry. The title poem "A Time to Change" in his first book, though a prayer to the Lord, expresses truly modern sensibility in a modern idiom. Ezekiel emphasized a sense of contemporaneity in the poet and demanded the expression of personal experience, moral and intellectual, in verse.

Almost all modern Indian poets bring in a critical attitude towards their respective religions. Ezekiel, in his talk broadcast from the Bombay station of All India Radio on 12th June, 1984, told that he rejected not only Judaism, his religion, in early youth but all religions with it.² Writing about his marriage which took place according to the Mosaic Law, he says:

... I don't think
there was much that struck me as
Solemn or beautiful. Mostly, we were
amused, and so were the others. Who
knows how much belief we had?

Even the most orthodox, it was said,
ate beef because it was cheaper, and
some even risked their souls by

relishing pork. The Sabbath was for
betting and swearing and drinking.

"Jewish Wedding in Bombay"

(Two Decades of Indian Poetry, P.66)

Instead of seeking Paradise or modern Jerusalem, capital of
Israel, Ezekiel accepts India as his environment and
explores his self endlessly:

I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am.

"Background, Casually"

(Hymns in Darkness, p.11)

Ezekiel's casual approach to his Lord and to his
religion struck a new note in Indian poetry. Ezekiel and
Ramanujan share a remarkably common approach to their
respective gods. Here is Ezekiel addressing his God, in
patel's words, "the Maverick Deity"³;

Kick me around
 a bit more, O Lord.
 I see at last there's no other way
 for me to learn
 your simplest truths.

"The Egoist's Prayers"

(Hymns in Darkness, p.48)

And here, Ramanujan addressing his Lord Murugan, ancient Dravidian god of fertility, joy, youth, beauty, war and love.

Lord of lost travellers,
 find us. Hunt us
 down.
 Lord of answers,
 cure us at once
 of prayers.

"Prayers to Lord Murugan"

(Selected Poems (Delhi:OUP, 1976), p.56)

In his youth, Gieve Patel, too, was more or less a 'non-conformist'. The poem "Naryal Purnima" records his inner

struggle while confronting the urchins who gather on the shore of the sea to steal away gifts offered by the worshippers to the sea gods. His own problem of identity makes him review the history of the Parsies in India. The members of his community, being more receptive of English influence than the Hindus or Muslims, had developed rationality and stopped worshipping "the local gods". The impact of the Indian environment was so powerful that, in spite of their rationality, "The local gods.../would suddenly turn up on the walls/Garlanded alongside the king and the Queen." After the withdrawal of the British from India, the Parsies began to "look instead for something else. Even accept and belong...."

The occasion of worshipping the sea-gods make the poet-persona reconsider the position of the Parsies in the independent India. The Parsi men, 'their speech', 'their wives', 'their dress', 'their mind' and 'their children' alienate him from his community and hence, his search for identity. He doubts the religiosity of the "suppliants" who offer libations to the sea-gods to win their "grace" but who are indifferent, even repulsive, to the plight of the underdog. Instead of these worshippers and their gods, the persona prefers to identify himself with the urchins whose minds are "profanely" focused on the wave-pitched gifts and who, later, snatch "libations from under god's nose." The

poem "Naryal Purnima" exposes the hypocrisy of the Indian Parsies and reveals the persona's genuine concern for the underdog. Rather than the metaphysical, the religious, or the spiritual, he is mainly preoccupied with the practical, the concrete, the specific and the immediate in his experience.

Despite his ironical attitude towards the worshippers of the sea-gods, the persona admits in "Vistasp" (P): "I am no god-destroyer, I have little against prayer...." His position undergoes a complete change in his next volume where almost two-third of his poems deal with violence and where God is evoked twice or thrice only to negate His existence. In "To Make a Contract" he agrees to allow his fingers to be declared as God. Here, his fingernails are to be accepted as "the crescents", symbols of holiness and an act of worship is to be performed before them. His rejection of all kinds of religious emblems and religiosity that is associated with them can intensely be felt towards the end of the poem where he asks to choose "dirt, or faeces" as emblems and "run to it for sanctuary." Similarly, the persona mocks at those who claim to be deliverers and prophets. He will "reel drunkenly before/holy gestures" of a deliverer only because he is "enmeshed" in the physical and not because he believes these gestures as meaningful and fruitful ("Should One come to Me"). Each prophet is "a

two-faced, fork-tongued/creature." Hence his appeal: "Exhaust the world of heroes--/that's to flush your own heart/clean." He holds that the prophets are useless in day to day life which is full of hardships and disasters. No prophet is good enough to free us from the ultimate reality which makes us suffer physical pain ("...Nobody is Good Enough for Me"). In general, Patel's first two volumes reveal his persistent concern with matters concerning this world; God appears but seldom in this early poetry.

In Mirrored Mirroring Patel introduces a new developing interest in the spiritual.⁴ Many of the poems included in this volume express his urge for something that can calm his mind, satisfy his spirit. He, however, does not aim at resolving his conflict by abandoning himself to some faith or by submitting himself to ritual and doctrine the way others do as they grow older. He attempts to calm his self of its disquiet through the reconciliation between the physical and the spiritual. His interest in the spiritual never leads him to ignore the stark reality around him. On the contrary, external reality offers him images through which he may redeem his disquiet spirit.

The very first poem in the volume expresses the difficulty in uttering the name of God after remaining a non-believer in one's early life. The act appears to be childish. It brings in shame and confusion. For the

persona, praying causes embarrassment. The act is as ludicrous as "lispering in public/about candy." In India, one is hardly expected to be found lispering in public about candy at one's fifty. The poem expresses the wonder and doubt the persona feels at his inner need of the divine at such a later stage of his life. The reference to public suggests his feelings of guilt, the social, moral and rational self is in conflict with the spiritual self. The very next poem, "Simple", is yet another attempt to understand the need of God in him. Patel does not address his God but tries to redefine the nature of his relationship to his God. In his attempt to trace out the rationale behind his recognition of the existance of God, he gives us the causes of his earlier denial of God and the present acceptance of him one after another. The focus is on the self rather than on God; the repetition of 'I' for five times; besides 'me' in the fourth line and 'my' in 'my nose' in the twelfth indicate his obsession with his self in his relationship to his God. Although he says that he had denied Him "not from arrogance or/excessive/self-regard..." his assertion of the denial and his repetitive concern with his self denote the paradoxical nature of his relationship to his God. He had not turned to his God earlier because he screamed "No!/to/having my nose ground/into the dirt." He now turns to Him again because

I have been given
 cleaner air to breathe
 and may look up
 to see what's around.

The references to "the dirt" and "cleaner air" sound mystical and introduce new imagery in Patel's poetry. Metaphorically, grounding one's nose into the dirt suggests submission, blind acceptance and "cleaner air", wisdom.

Since the poem is not addressed to any specific God and since God does not appear in the poem it is difficult to identify Patel's God. A close reading of the poem suggests that the poet's relationship to his God is a give-and-take affair; God "wishes" his devotee to be so and so and strikes a bargain with him. The poem opens;

I shall not
 be humble before God.

I half suspect
 He wouldn't wish me to be so.

the persona hopes that his God would not wish him to be humble before him; he would wish him to be something different. He denied Him earlier only because he was

expected to be humble, even submissive, before Him. The concluding lines read:

I
now
turn to Him again
because
I have been given
cleaner air to breathe
.....

The passive clause 'I have been given' makes it clear that the persona has now turned to God because He has granted him something i.e. a sense of judgement. He will be faithful to his god in response to the gift of wisdom from God.

"A Variation on St. Teresa" is a direct address to God, but here again, the focus is on the individual self of the persona. The poem opens with a lament-the persona expressing his dissatisfaction at his condition.

Whenever You withdraw
only a little away from me I
immediately
fall to the ground.
I wait upon
the strings You hold.

God controls their relationship and therefore is more powerful than his devotee. His feeling of helplessness makes him surrender to His god against his own will.

My limbs
at best may be infused
by an outer force; and so
inconsolably
I await Your storms...

The expressions "at best" and "inconsolably" suggest how unwilling he is to lose his independence. God appears to him like a child and His storms, rattles in the child's fist. And when, finally, he expresses his recognition of divine experience, the emphasis is more on who experiences rather than on what is experienced.

These then, at last, do move me.
Yes, I am moved
indeed I am. I am,

In relating to God, individuality matters as much as, or more than, God.

The poem "God or" records the actual infusion of the persona by an outer force.

God or
 something like that
 shot
 through each part of you, down
 to your
 small fingernail, well into
 pits and wells
 you did not know of, beamed
 right into all of that,
 and into your
 crude meanness,
 and your
 fruitlessness...

This lacks the spiritual intensity, vividly realised, in
 Hopkins' opening lines in "The Wreck of the Deutschland":

Thou mastering me
 God! giver of breath and bread;
 World's strand, sway of the sea;
 Lord of living and dead;
 Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me
 flesh,
 And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
 Thy doing; and dost thou touch me afresh?
 Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.⁵

Nevertheless, Patel's vision has its own rhythmic force. The concluding lines of his poem present his complex and mystical experience by means of a concrete image of the sun.

trans
 lucence, the sun
 blaz
 ing through, lift
 ing the most of you
 out
 of sight, save for
 a persistence
 of veins.

Patel's unsolemn attitude towards his God reflected in the opening lines of "God or" ("God or/something like that...") also appears in his "Unsolemn Prayer" in which God is addressed as Monsignor and is praised for the vision of beauty.

Below me, clouds dashed against
 the mountainside like an absolute sea
 tearing through the greenery in waves,
 with breathless glimpses
 of a serene, lighted
 valley under the grey.



The use of verbs 'dash' and 'tear' and the noun 'valley' suggests sexual undertones; The physical and the spiritual coalesce.

While relating to his God, Patel never neglects the immediate world of man and nature. Indeed, his concern is less with the Creator God and more with His Creation. In the title poem, "Mirrored Mirroring", the persona suggests that man's effort to understand himself in terms of the world around him is actually "God's Effort/To Understand Himself...." The way God does so is: "Mirrored Mirroring". When the persona looks "Into the centre/of each Eye" he finds reflected there his own various moods and feelings. The eye of the donkey is "gentle,/but evasive", the tiger's hungry and that of the elephant, indefinite. Staring at man, the persona wonders:

What could God make
Of those measured glances:
Polished fish-scales for eyes,
Bouncing the light off each other?

He, like any mongrel, will wait for a certain look and when the look will appear, start liking fellow Man.

The persona's attempt to understand himself by understanding human nature through its reflection in the

world around him is a spiritual adventure. As W.H. Auden says, "Human nature is so plastic that it can exhibit varieties of behaviour which, in the animal kingdom, could only be exhibited by different species."⁶ The persona, during his encounter with the donkey, the tiger and the elephant, learns a few of his traits of behaviour, but could resolve his struggle only by identifying "a certain look" in fellow man.

The persona's concern with his God does not lead him to write religious poetry, but poetry having a concrete connection with normal experience. His god does not exist somewhere there but a part of the here and now, a part of the outer world. In "Speeding" He appears as, what patel calls about Ezekiel's God, "an urban contemporary without hang-ups about origin."⁷ he mingles with us "vulgarly" and becomes "Embroidered in detail...".

... God

Rooting into the intoxication of His Dump,
 Sniffing at our faeces, licking our genitals,
 Puzzled, puzzled--Is this My Doing, this delight
 this heady parade? Riding
 The touch and tingle of each orgasm,
 Rubbing Himself fiercely into our bodies,
 Brooding at our deathbeds,

Examining torture chambers, inhaling
 The muttonous smell of men burnt alive:
 A captive husband forcibly held down,
 Made to witness His wives and His children
 tormented by the overlords
 Of His own Creation.

Violent imagery reappears leading the persona almost to the brink of despair, but his ability to account for "detail" in which his God is embroiled helps to enjoy the world around him. At the same time, the use of banter and sardonic humour in defining God and His Universe suggests how difficult it is to do so. The persona's effort towards enjoyment by detaching himself from life proves hopeless. Just as his God becomes embroiled in His own Creation he, too, gains spiritual experience only through his confrontation of the world around him, not by abandoning himself to a supernatural world.

In his Introduction to Ezekiel's Collected Poems (1989) Patel tells us how Ezekiel hates to bring out a book of verse that has each poem in the same mode, the same level of seriousness or levity, covering largely similar territory.⁸ Patel has followed Ezekiel's practice in Mirrored Mirroring. His recurrent preoccupation with the deprived and oppressed in Poems and with the human body in

How Do You Withstand, Body gives way here to a variety of subjects and a wide range of tones.⁹ His poems range from barely descriptive ("Aged Oxen", "Passionate Professions", etc.) to deeply meditative ("Aegis", "Turning Aside" etc.); from simply objective ("Giving", etc.) to intensely subjective ("Simple", "My affections" etc.); from urban ("From Bombay central", etc.) to rural ("The Place", "Turning Aside" etc.) and from humorous ("Slummy story", "Time's Up", etc.) to serious ("Of Sea and Mountain", "Rages", "Haunting", etc.).

Again, like Ezekiel, Patel, too, is not uniform in his approach to his God. His approach to God, for instance, in "In Just Two Years, Said the Dream" resembles Ezekiel's in "The Egoist's Prayers". God appears here as, what Patel calls Him, "the Maverick Deity", lord with Diary and Appointments.

Despite his inclusion of less serious poems in Mirrored Mirroring, the overall experience is a sense of urgency, intensely felt and expressed by the persona in his confrontation of Nature. The use of imperatives, very urgent imperatives, in many of his poems testifies to his sense of urgency. Natural objects play a significant part in the persona's emotional life. Again and again, the persona invokes one or the other natural object to provide him with strength and comfort.

Patel's "Of sea and Mountain" Has in it two apostrophes: one addressed to sea and another, to

mountains. Whenever, at a friend's exhibition of paintings, the persona feels either "a sinking boredom" or "pity and anger" he rushes out "to fill lungs with air/that is not bitter with... imperfections"; and he addresses sea:

Then O sea I think of you-
 Your unbroken chain
 Of deep salt waters.

Or whenever he examines the back of "a tired ageing woman" he identifies his back with hers thinking that it will also develop "a permanent hump" like that of hers; and he addresses mountains:

At such times O mountains
 I long for your structure
 your seemingly immutable
 Rise and fall.

The poem conveys a sense of inner void which the persona intends to fill up with the qualities inherent in the outer environment. He needs the 'unbroken' quality of sea in order to overcome inconsistency in his inner life; similarly, he needs the 'immutable' structure of mountains to withstand the endless burden.

The first section of "Simpleton", too, ends with an invocation. The persona who used to watch and admire the natural beauty of the "mist-covered" hills off Borivali during his countless journeys by train loses his hope watching, sometime in the sixties, "the toxins curled in as serenely/as water vapour." And expresses his appeal:

Honest cloud,
 Concealing nothing but the body of God,
 restore my lost assurance. Release
 the sense of sight from perpetual doubt,
 Who could draw bliss from a poisoned spectacle?
 What's in store now for numskull touch?
 What for simpleton sound?

The persona, here, urges "Honest Cloud" to free him from his sense of doubt and despair.

The second section of the poem opens with a picturesque detail: St. Francis of Assisi tilting his gentle head to hear the "prattlings" of the birds on his shoulder. Instead of messages of hope and tenderness what his ear listens is "stream of steady toneless filth", "unending volleys of lies", "explications of tired lust" detailing instructions on how to torture body, mind and soul; and his ear gets "inflamed". Patel impregnates the

legend of St. Francis conversing with birds with his personal sense of despair; therefore his supplication towards the end of the poem:

Make way
for some air
to breathe.

"Simpleton", besides expressing the persona's inner turmoil, suggests his concern for environmental changes; the outward and inward worlds coexist so as to reflect a parallel development between the outer polluted world and the inner depressed world of spiritual nature.

Another poem "Hill Station" like the opening of Yeat's "Sailing to Byzantium", expresses the persona's disgust at the sensual world around him. Firstly, he feels "mounting distaste" for the monkeys which enjoy dull and dreary pleasures; "A mount, three little thrusts,/Climb down, and back to the lice." Secondly, the couple which is "hideously silent" inside the room and which has voiced the displeasing views about the hill station causes "a quiet, deep contempt" in him. The man, "Very small, very bony" and the woman, "chalk-powdered,/Coffee-brown, bashfully saucy" have made him impatient. He feels an intense need of a person who could share his terror "At their fecundity, and

their noxious,/Contented life..." and so enters his room only to find his wife "snugly" reading comics. All this leads the persona to write:

O sweets of Nature,
 Not for me to bestow or dispel,
 Each ecstatic thrust is
 Freely contaminated with an appetite for lice,
 Comics, and many more such distractions.

In spite of obstacles in relating to the world of Nature, the poet's persona always faces outward. In "Public Works" (B) he identifies himself with water which appears as an elemental power and therefore with 'w' capital. The poem has its source in the immediate experience in Bombay. When the builders curb "Water's power" by building "walls/Against Water" the persona is affected by the condition of water and feels "its sewage trickle between my legs". Further, in his "vision" he sees the city sinking by sea-water and feels, like the taps, "sympathy with the revolt". In spite of taming of water it has its own way of revolting against human life and its own way of asserting its existence. The wrecked and sliced sea takes a kind of revenge upon human beings through investing "the fur of lapdogs", "furniture", "polished chrome", "fireplaces", "electric grills",

"kerosene stoves" and "the ashes of coal fires" with "the humid fume" and more terrible than this is the accident of a double-decker bus which turns over

Releasing such torrents from stab wounds, water
 Virginal from what
 Conduits no one knew...

The persona's recognition of uncontrollable power of water reveals his deep sensitivity to his environment.

Water with its 'w' capital and thus suggesting its central function in the spiritual life of the persona appears again in "Haunting" (M). The lepers haunt the water's edge to heal their sores whereas the persona visits it at an appointed hour because the ocean "shrinks, growl/ing with inwardness", a move "contrived/by water to/heal Itself" and because

At the um
 blicus of Waters
 the tight inarti
 culate unknots, trail
 ing outward in sheets.

When in communion with Nature the persona's inner

sexual drives 'trail outward' in terms of Nature imagery; His inner feelings and desires receive a concrete shape whenever they are described by means of the device of sexual analogy. "The Arrogant Meditation" (B) expresses the persona's choice; he prefers "arrogance" to humility. He dislikes "abjectness" since the rest of nature is full of sexual potential: "Trees/push their way upward.../leopards ready/To spring..." and even, "Groveling underground/Tubers acquire volume". In "It Makes" (M) the persona expresses his satisfaction at the present structure of the human body and dislikes "to have the body/seamless,/hermetically sealed, a/non-orificial/box of incorruptibles". "Better shot through and through/Interpenetrated/--with the world". He identifies himself with a bead which "riddled/happily."

"O My Very Own Cadaver" (B), "The Return" (M) and "My Affections" (M), too, express the persona's sexual needs by making use of apt and suggestive images of nature. "O My Very Own Cadaver" is a vision of his own body after his death. He visualises his own corpse floating on waters that rush down the street. He is greatly surprised to discover that his corpse has retained "flatness", the characteristic state of his living self: "Brazenly it plans competitions with the living." Actually,

... To so reduced

To flatness like a translucent

Cellophane doll, insubstantial,
 Dented by passing feet, but
 Tough as plastics!

is a bizzare fate, but of various forms, the corpse wants flatness and thus, wants to retain its sexuality even after the death.

As my cellophane self
 Grinds and drags against rushing
 Water, watch the kicking,
 The shivering. Now who would suspect
 The inch to square
 Inch cuticular ecstacies
 Of this shameless carnal?

"The Return" opens with the persona's contemplation of "the possibly/odourless body", young and delightful, or the body "delicately jasmine-scented" in "marshier" areas. Soon he dismisses the notion as unpleasing and appeals himself to return

to sulphurous steams,
 to scarcely bearable
 volleys of suggestion
 a hair's breath from decay.

Another poem "My Affections" expresses the persona's obsession with sex in terms of the condition of the donkey. For the persona, the loss of sexual drives in him is the thinning of "the eroticism of twelve lives/crowded in one," to "a passing trace/Of air". The present state of sexlessness is indeed

... magical,
 Most longed for deprivation,
 My harness lifted off, sores
 Touched with salve.

Nevertheless, the absence of sex is a state of restlessness: "This donkey/cannot believe there could be/Living without quarry and burden."

Thus, the sex-obsessed body retaining the flatness of a cellophane doll even after death ("O My Very Own Cadaver"), the persona's preference of sulphurous human genitals to jasmine-scented ones ("The Return") and the state of sexlessness in terms of the donkey "without quarry and burden" ("My Affections") show how the inner life of the persona interrelates with the outward world of nature.

Nature does not appear as an exclusive subject of Patel's poetry. The poet's observation of Nature almost always leads him to observe his own inner life. In treatment of Nature, he significantly differs from the

English Romantics who felt beauty of the natural world and represented it by means of their individual forms of expression. For Wordsworth, an intercommunion between himself and Nature was a certainty because of his strong belief in the theory that "both Nature and man being alike from God, and existing together in God, are capable, when separated from one another in this phenomenal world, of coming together again, and finding themselves to be consciously in a union, one with another, of mutual joy and consolation."¹⁰ Shelley, too, believed "that all the universe was alive and that every part of it had its own particular life in the whole."¹¹ He felt that there is a living spirit in Nature which lives its own life and loves in its own way. Patel also expresses his need of intercommunion in "Seasons" (P) in his characteristic manner:

I would give much
To be able to believe in
universal love,

to believe in the oneness of all creation; he would then be able to say

the difference

I feel in my body
 Because the season has changed today,
 Is felt also by the air;
 The curl in the twig,
 The curve and stretch of water
 Are reflections, from them to me,
 From me to them,
 Not separable.

Since he doesnot believe in universal love now he feels that trees "cannot care whether I live or die" and that the movement of the sea can never be his own and, therefore, the idea of universal love is false.

Many poems in Mirrored Mirroring, however, express the poet's sincere attempt to achieve the harmony between himself and the natural world around him. In his youth, he was unable to believe in universal love ("Seasons") and while relating the condition either of the leper ("Nargol") or of the urchins ("Naryal Purnima"), did so tentatively, only "for the moment"; in his old age, he feels that the distance between inner and outer should cease to exist. In "Squirrels in Washington" after watching squirrels that "halt a few feet away" though their fear is diminished the persona wonders

Do I

Emit currents

At closer quarters? Are those

The few feet I would keep

From a tame tiger? Is there

A hierarchy, then, of distances,

That must be observed,

And non-observance would at once

Agglutinate all of Nature

Into a messy, inextricable . mass?

The questions, so many of them, express the urgency that the persona feels in attaining union of inner and outer; therefore the allusion to Daphne in Greek mythology, the daughter of a river god who when pursued by Apollo, was transformed into a laurel.

Ah Daphne! Passing

From woman to foliage did she

for a moment

Sense all vegetable sap as current

Of her own blood stream, the green

Flooding into the red?

For the persona, freedom means a state of intercommunion,

the lack of which as meaning existence in a cage.

The drift towards intercommunion with nature is more concretely and more elaborately realised in "Aegis" and "Turning aside", two major poems in Mirrored Mirroring; in the former, the persona seeks "a quiet, a calm" from the blazing crown of a tree and in the latter, "sweet quietude" of the buffaloes in a mud pond.

"Aegis" opens with a vivid description of the physical world.

I lie an hour under this tree's shade.
 The time is the height of summer,
 The earth is worked ready for rain,
 The clods are large, uneven.

Each detail about the pre-monsoon nature is described with a certain objectivity and exactness, but presently inner and outer confront:

Not one straw in the field,
 Say nothing of my racked human frame,
 Rests calm and level.

The state of inner disquietude is metaphorically described:

... I am a ship
 with crazy joints, passive
 to the ups and downs of a ploughed ocean,
 My heels pierced through, shoulders
 Stabbed by stubble, head flung far back:

pierced, stabbed, flung-verbs evoke the suffering of the tortured mind. The tortured mind of the persona faces the equally ruffled world of "the tree's blazing crown". Two worlds confront as if there is no possibility of reconciliation at all; nevertheless, leaves suggest hope:

Quietly, leaves mediate,
 Straining away sunlight.

Just as the persona loses hope whenever his god deserts him ("A Variation on St. Teresa"), the tree's swaying over him "The alternate hissing and silence/of a snake's hood" metaphorically suggests how transient hope is. This awareness of transitoriness of hope leads him to an awful revelation: "I am a miracle child/Under a fierce god's aegis." His God may protect him now and yet leave him helpless and hopeless next moment. To overcome the resultant despair he urges:

My fixed, twisted head looks up,
 Seeking to urge from the creature's
 Stooping frame a sign
 Of mutual regard...

and also

Seeks to coax one more wave
 Of windswept sound, inaudible almost
 Hiss or whisper of near words, to lull me
 To a quiet, a calm,...

In "Turning Aside", too, Nature appears, not merely to set the scene, but to lead to an illumination. Here, too, the sense of urgency, of inner immediacy arises naturally from the dramatic situation which is there developed. The persona aims at striking a balance between the disquietude of his mind and the quality underlying the universe of buffaloes which he contemplates. His quest for quietude gets embodied in the movement of the verse.

The common purpose has laid the persona and the buffaloes to haunt the thick mango shade at the pond's edge: "They choose to settle where it is cool./Cool is what I look for too,..." Both come to heal their wounds. The harmony between inner and outer which the persona aims at is

successfully achieved by the buffaloes.

They claim intimacy
 with breeze, with water.
 They contradict their boulder existence
 by a mere turn of mandible.
 Eyes dimmed
 against a steady whizz of air,
 jaws rotating,
 grass frothing, at the mouth,
 the pond's surface shattered
 by chin's wetted hag-prickles.

The persona wonders whether Yama, the lord of death in Hindu mythology, comes riding one of them. He feels

It is they, then, heal
 the fearful wounds
 rending His frame. It is they
 make Him whole.

It is the image of the buffaloes lying calmly in a mud pond suggests him the way to overcome the bitter experience of "soul-stabbings/by smiling friends." indeed, it ends his dualism and therefore his appeal to his own mind towards the

end of the poem.

Embattled mind, settle down so
to sweet quietude.

Thus, the leaves mediating between him and the blazing crown of a tree as well as the buffaloes healing the wounds rending Yama suggest the persona magical possibilities and evoke a feeling of hope in him.

Patel's poems evoking God and Nature, though appeared in different places at different times and later included in a book-form, possess imaginative coherence and register almost invariably the encounter between the inner world of spirit and the outer world of nature.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Narsingh Srivastava, "The poetry of Rabindranath Tagore," Indian Poetry in English, ed. Hari Mohan Prasad (Aurangabad: Parimal Prakashan, 1983), p. 58.
2. Nissim Ezekiel, "The Heritage of India," Links: Indian Prose in English, ed. G.S. Balarama Gupta (Madras: MacMillan, 1991), p. 164.
3. Gieve Patel's introduction to Ezekiel's Collected Poems (Bombay: OUP, 1989), p. xviii.
4. See Rajeev S. Patke's assessment of Patel's poetry, Contemporary Poets, ed Tracy Chevalier (Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1991), p. 745.
5. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in The Poems of Gerald Manley Hopkins, ed. Gardner and Mackenzie (London: OUP, 1975), p. 51.
6. W.H. Auden, "The Poet and the City," Twentieth Century Poetry, ed. Graham Martin and P.N. Furbank (London: The Open University Press. 1975), p. 186.
7. Patel's introduction to Collected Poems, p. xv.
8. Ibid., p. xv.
9. Elizabeth Reuben rightly points out that in Mirrored Mirroring "there are no grand myths invoked, no splendid vision at the end, no shining pathway" but she fails to notice range and variety in this book in

her attempt to trace out unity through mud imagery.
Synopsis of a talk delivered on Mirrored Mirroring,
"BEAM," (around August 91), pp. 25.27.

10. Stopford A. Brooke, "The Nature Poetry," Tennyson:
His Art and Relation to Modern Life (Meerut: Shalabh
Book House, 1986), p. 449.
11. Ibid., p. 450.