CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

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In all the three volumes of Gieve Patel's verse, Poems(1966), How Do You Withstand, Body(1976) and Mirrored Mirroring(1991), there is a complex inner-outer relationship. The aim of this dissertation was to verify and justify this inner-outer relationship.

In the third chapter this relationship was verified in terms of the themes of love, family and society. The poet-persona reacts to the outer reality sometimes as a cynical observer ("Old Man's Death"), sometimes as a sympathetic and humane commentator on the scene ("Grandparents At Family Get-Together"). The key expressions are "perhaps a whole room" ("Old Man's Death"), "I feel somewhat anxious" ("To A Coming Love"), "Unconvinced advice" and "Uncertain where we've missed" ("Grandparents At Family Get-Together"). The persona is not sure of his own feelings because in these early poems, he is a young man whose inner self is trying to read the significance of outer reality and is trying to come to terms with it.

Such poems as "Naryal Purnima", "The Solution of Servants", "Nargol" and "Pavement" spring from the contemporary situation; they have freshness and energy, for

these are records of search for identity. They tell of the adolescent's confrontation of the immediate social world and his sense of estrangement. In them the poet-persona faces the outer as seeker, defining himself in terms of the condition of the diseased and oppressed. His attempt to understand the state of the sufferers is a kind of exercise in a Keatsian 'negative capability' in poetry: he is neither moulding the outer social world nor moralising the external scene, but aims at resolving the divorce between inner man and outer world. It is noticed at the same time that each encounter, through the momentary resolution of its conflict, continually makes and unmakes the poet-persona. Often, the resolution of his moral conflict baffles and irritates him. Both "Naryal Purnima" and "Nargol", for instance, end conveying a certain tentativeness and an ironical flatness.

The analysis of the poems in this chapter shows the poet-persona's inner self visiting the social-familial realities and allowing them to touch different cords of his inner self to create feelings of despair, loss, uncertainty, regret and so on. Patel's uniqueness lies in the fact that these feelings are objectively examined and dramatised by him with a kind of otherness which he might have acquired positionally as a Parsee and professionally as a doctor.

The persona's confrontation of the outer becomes a recurrent attitude in Patel's poetry. In the fourth

chapter, an attempt is made to verify the inner-outer relationship in terms of the themes of death, disease and violence. The occasion of the brutal assassination of Kennedy makes the persona aware of the essential oneness of all human beings ("For Kennedy"); and the moment of approaching death of a "Catolic" mother's daughter teaches him that in spite of all his cares, the relatives seem closer than the doctor at the moment of crisis ("Catholic Mother : Your Child at Hospital"). Similarly, the report of a child suffering from Miliary T.B. gives rise to a number of painful questions in his mind ("Post-Mortem Report (Child Aged 4 : Miliary T.B.)").

Patel deals the cases of violene with a remarkable assurance. As stated above, he is rather uncertain of his relationship to the poor in India, but violence around him disturbs his inner self to such an extent that his experiences of tortures make him overcome his sense of estrangement and identify himself with "the century's skin". The attitudes of adolescence give way to a very conscious selection of images of violence in his second book. The human body emerges as a symbol of his self against which are aimed all the processes of violence. What it has to suffer day in and day out is a matter of serious concern for him. The conflict between inner and outer, presented through concrete situations, lends dramatic quality to his verse and

also makes a significant contribution towards the enlargement of human consciousness.

The fifth chapter analyses poems which evoke God and Nature. It is observed that the inner-outer realtionship takes on a wholly new guise in Patel's recent poetry. The relationship between the persona and his God, hitherto reflected in certain stray poems, is here developed to its utmost ramifications. Earlier, the poet-persona defines his position as "non-conformist" and dissociates himself from the irrational act of offering nuts for the gods ("Naryal purnima"). God and Nature have little space in Patel's early poetry. In Mirrored Mirroring, however, God appears every few pages later. The metamorphosis in the poet's sensibility is as surprising as worth studying. If the poetry of Poems and How Do You Withstand, Body is human and intellectual, the poetry of Mirrored Mirroring is predominantly spiritual ; if the earlier poetry is urban and is sparse in imagery, the poetry of Mirrored Mirroring evokes the associations of nature and has the structure of imagery which helps the poet to articulate his spiritual intuitions.

The poet-persona lives in a constant state of doubt and despair, both inwardly and outwardly. His observation of confusion and disorder in the outer world leads him to an immediate awareness of his inner confusion and disorder

("Simpleton", "Aegis"); yet he refuses to resolve his conflict either by giving in to despair or by seeking comfort in an ideal, a principle, or a belief. He starts very near, with the nearest, which is he himself and the reality around him and is thus preoccupied with the actual. He turns to God only because he is free to approach Him independently, without the pressure of some ritual or doctrine ("Simple"). Almost all visions of God come to him through images of nature. His God is not a transcendental being but pervades his immediate environment; he mingles with us vulgarly and becomes "Embroiled in detail..." ("Speeding").

The persona's mind, restless and disquiet, needs strength and support. His dissatisfaction with his present existence makes him invoke some object in nature; he urges the sea to bestow upon him his "unbroken" quality and mountains, their "Immutable structure" ("Of Sea and Mountain"). The images of air and water recur to suggest him infinite spiritual possibilities ("Simple", "Simpleton", "Haunting" and "Turning Aside"); and poems expressing his sexual drives ("O My Very own Cadaver", "The Return" and "My affections") evoke nature continuously.

Patel's poetry does not simply record the impressions he receives from Nature, but makes a serious attempt to achieve the harmony between his self and the world of

nature. In "Turning Aside", for example, the verse explores, and gives shape to, real experiences both of the inner and the outer worlds simultaneously: the persona tortured by "soul-stabbings/by smiling friends" and the water buffaloes tormented by the fleas both need "cool" and seek it in sitting still. The buffaloes in a mud pond, an otherwise trite image, becomes an instrument of spiritual illumination.

This study began assuming that the poet's inner self is characterised merely by his education, a secular upbringing; his position, a Parsee among the majority Hindus; and his profession, a medical doctor. The analysis of his major poems in all the three volumes of his verse in terms of the inner-outer relationship further reveals that his identification, however tentative, with the underdog; his affirmative concern for cruelties committed on the human body and his deeper quest for quietude in nature manifest sensibility that has been essentially pre-occupied with bringing about the harmony between inner and outer in human experience. His poetry focuses on the theme of the inner-outer relationship and views the outer reality in its many guises in relation to the poet-persona. His "Haunting" in its content and form explains the nature of this theme:

In clotted har
bours polythene clings
to sand, dragged up
and down the beach's
width by the
tide's pull,
discarded shopping bags,
sewer water gur
gling in their bellies. I
and the lepers are
the last hopefuls
to haunt
the wat
er's edge. They come
think
ing to heal
their sores, wishful faith
in primal salt. I
come watching for that hour,
the appointed one, when
the ocean shrinks, growl
ing with inwardness, and
presents an astral face:
a roar of absence, this; the beginning
of yet an

other move contrived
by Water to
heal Itself. O
the seas, they
nev
er rest on prim
al laurels. But un
furl a stir in the air an
nouncing
a flood of green tides.
At the Um
bllicus of Waters
the tight inarti
culate unknots, trail
ing outward in sheets.

The allusion to the traditional, popular Indian view, the juxtaposition of inner and outer experiences, the use of an apostrophe, the use of a persona are charactristics, and which we observe in the above poem, of Patel's poetic mode.

To conclude, the use of the natural order, vocabulary and movement of colloquial speech, the absence of cliche, and above all, the expression of really significant experiences of life justify Gieve Patel's standing as an important contributor to the rising body of commonwealth literature.

APPENDIX

A questionnaire was prepared in connection with this study and sent to Gieve Patel seeking information about him and his poetry. Patel sent his meticulous replies taking his own time. He has written good criticism; for instance, his introduction to Ezekiel's Collected Poems (Bombay: OUP,1989) is very insightful. His replies to the questionnaire are equally interesting. At the same time, his silence on certain questions are meaningful; he, for instance, abstains from answering the first question thinking perhaps biographical information irrelevant for understanding his poetry.

This Appendix will certainly be helpful to others because Patel's replies throw light on how a poet-critic's mind works. Besides, they bear out some of the assumptions with which this study started.

The Questions and Gieve Patel's Replies

1. May we have your personal details? Where have you lived and travelled, and at which places did you linger most?

-- No reply.

2. After Mister Behram and Mirrored Mirroring did you publish anything?

-- No reply.

3. Apart from writing poetry and plays, what other hobbies do you pursue? What do you like to read most?

-- I paint. Except that it is not a 'hobby', in the same way that writing, or medicine, isn't, either. A hobby implies dilletantism, perfunctory interest, 'pastime', dabbling, a marginal concern. To me, these things that I work on are all very central concerns, quite uniformly so. Of course, the end result of the work may not always be uniformly successful. But that's another matter.

4. You wrote plays, but we suppose you are essentially a poet. What prompted you to choose a different form of literature?

-- I chose to write plays, in addition to poetry and

painting, because each of these disciplines has for me a different potential for knowledge -- both inner and outer, as you have very perceptively stated.

5. How does a poem come to you? Do you have a poetic world of yours from which you select subjects?

-- A poem arrives in various different ways. Often, the first thing, or catalyst, is something seem or heard -- a tree fallen in the rains, buffaloes in a mud pond, or something someone says or reports. This initial thing gets linked to ideas, emotions, inner disturbances or graces, that have been lurking around, probably waiting for an excuse to get 'embodied' in a poem. The two together, eg catalyst and inner thing, take form as a poem, deriving power or energy from an inner thrust which makes its appearance unpredictably, at unforseen intervals of time, from a few hours to a few years, can never say when.

6. You are one of the major Indian poets writing in English. Did you experience any problems while expressing Indian sensibility in English? How do you relate yourself to Indian environment?

-- No problems expressing Indian senibility in English. I relate myself to the Indian environment very well, as all of us do, with a mixture of love, fear, hope,

exasperation, despair, you name it.

7. Your early poetry records your reaction to the conditions of the poor, the sufferers and the oppressed. There are no pleasant surprises, bright sun peeping into them. How would you explain this?

-- Is the early poetry really all that 'dark'? And isn't there darkness in the later? I'm not sure you are right. But to an extent, may be in our difficult country a young person has more horrors to come to terms with, than is the case elsewhere? I don't know, I'm not sure. I've seen that all countries, even the socalled happier ones, have their own scale of horrors to contend with. Ultimately, I would say, however dark the subject-matter of a poem, poetry itself, if it indeed is poetry, is a thing of light, through and because of the very articulating of it.

8. In Mirrored Mirroring your characteristic concern for violence is mitigated. Is it a self-conscious move on your part?

-- In Mirrored Mirroring, the move away from violence is self-conscious only in that I do not think violence, or anything else for that matter, should be used self-indulgently in poetry. So I was aware that if I wished to use violent imagery there should be justification for it -- it could be used if it might

help to explore areas not already explored in the first two books, or not sufficiently explored; otherwise not. Even so, there is considerable violent imagery in the book, hopefully justifiably used. The only difference from the first two books is that there is also, in this one, a glimmer of possible .. grace? hope? escape? Whatever, And even that not too easily to be found.

9. It is said that you have translated some Gujarati poems into English. Has poetry written in any Gujarati tradition influenced your own poetry in English?

-- I have translated some Gujarati poetry into English. Some verses of Vasto, Akho (both 17th century bhakti), and a couple of contemporary poems. I cannot claim that my poetry in English is directly influenced by any specific Gujarati tradition. But bhakti as a general all-India phenomenon has contributed to the making of my inner climate.

10. How would you react to contemporary poetry written by Indians in English?

-- Contemporary poetry written by Indians in English is by now, happily, a body of work to contend with. I have my normal likes and dislikes in this area, but as a poet I do identify with the work of several

other poets -- Ezekiel, Ramanujan, and some of Daruwalla, especially. I like Kolatkar, very much, but I see him as a very different animal from myself, though we are very good friends. Some of Jussawalla and Mehrotra too, but again, there are stark differences in approach. Not that these differences should not be there -- indeed they should be there, to add up to a healthy poetry scene. And not that there aren't differences in approach in the works of the first three that I mentioned, but I can sense overlapping concerns as well.

11. Who are your favourite a) poets b) novelists c) storytellers d) critics?

-- I have a longish, and inconsistent list of favourites, but I'll list some. I may miss out on some others that don't come to mind right away:

a) poets: the ones mentioned above. Incidentally, among the younger Indian poets, I like Raj Rao's work. Vikram Seth's G. Gate. Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, Shakespeare, George Herbert, Wordsworth, John Donne. In translation Dante, Baudelaire, Rilke, some Akhmatova. Early William Carlos Williams, some Roethke. Indian bhakti of various regions.

b) novelists and short-story: Dostoevsky, Balzac, Dickens, Conrad, Malamoud, George Eliot, Melville for

Moby Dick and Billy Budd, Tolstoy . I haven't read Faulkner recently, but remember liking him very much when I read him many years ago. Should re-read some of him. Zola. I like Rohinton Mistry and Amitav Ghosh. Intend to try Rushdie, shamefully enough, haven't read anything of his work!

c) playwrights: Shakespeare, Racine, O'neil (Long Day's J .., Iceman Cometh, Desire under Elms, parts of Mourning Becomes E), Tennessee Williams, some of Arthur Miller, Brecht, Buchner, the Greeks, Calderon, Schiller for Mary Stuart, Cyrus Mistry's Doongaji House, Chekov.

d) My reading in criticism is abysmal.

12. What is a good poem?

-- Poems written by different poets need to be read differently, so it would be difficult to define for all time what a 'good' poem may be. Obiviously, a Whitmanesque indulgence in wordiness would injure a George Herbert, but it serves Whitman at his best very well. It may be more useful to try and understand what a true poem could be. There can be no poem devoid of rhythm (indeed, no art of any genre). And to tell if a poem is true or not one may sometimes need to apply similar criteria to ones used to detect for oneself if a new acquaintance is a

reasonably true human being, or if he is an operator: an **instinct** which any man of the world will develop in order to function; and so too, any man of literature -- do I 'trust' this poem (poet), or do I not.

13. What, according to you, is the most distinctive feature of your own poetry?

-- No reply.

14. Why have you always chosen free verse?

-- I have chosen free verse because strictly metreed and rhymed verse reminded me of poems learned in school, and I didn't like the feel of that. For a start. Later, when I tried once in a way to work with strict metre and rhyme, the result would invariably be awful. I wasn't persistent enough, perhaps. How wonderful if one could write with as much control and ease as Robert Frost, for instance.

15. Words, their precise use clearly means much to you. How important do you think that style is to today's poet?

-- 'Style' is not something that can be put on like a piece of garment. Even if a poet should choose to, say, write in sonnet form, his own 'style' of sonnet will develop only as he slowly learns to say what he has to, and in that form. Style, possibly, evolves out of a search for efficiency.

16. How often do you revise your poems?

-- Very rarely, a poem will arrive in its clear, final form, almost in the first draft. I have had four or five poems come to me in that way. Most poems have been worked through numerous drafts, varying between ten to twenty five, even thirty.

17. What type of audience do you write for?

-- I am my own first audience. But I am aware of a literary community, and a community of friends and general readers who will ultimately see the poem. I show early drafts sometimes to my wife, who is a theatre director, and an avid and discerning reader. Later drafts I may show to friends like Ramanujan or Nissim. Still later ones I try out before audiences at poetry readings; and then the final drafts before publication.

18. Which of your poems is the best in your opinion?

-- No reply.

19. Could you mention the ideas, moods, incidents that led to the composition of the following poems: "The Solution of Servants", "Rumba", "Mirrored Mirroring" and "The Place".

-- The Solution of Servants is about a fantasy of breaking into the servants' room at night to find a couple making love, and a sardonic thought that "God" in a sense is a voyeur to occasions when I make love to someone.

Rumba replays several episodes of sexual rejection suffered in adolescene.

Mirrored Mirroring deals with one theory of cosmogenesis (?Cosmogony), that states that God in His Unified State is denied experience of Himself. And so He pours Himself out in the multiplicity of His Creation in order to 'see Himself', so to speak, in the variety of Nature. The poem starts at the end of the process, and tries to trace God backwards by trying to fathom various animal natures.

The Place is communion with God seen as a lovers' quarrel -- the place of the tryst being perfect (it could be anywhere at all), but what transpires between the lovers is often less perfect.

20. Your poems have appeared in the major anthologies edited by Peeradina, Parthasarthy and Daruwalla, but you are dropped from the current anthology edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. How would you react to this?

-- No reply.

21. Bruce King says, "Ezekiel made verse central to his life. Others wrote poems, he wrote poetry." What is your comment?

-- No reply.

22. William Walsh says, "in Patel's universe there are hard lines and set limits. Crossing these lines and ignoring these boundaries means an assault on the body's integrity and the person's being." Do you agree with him?

-- Walsh's statement seems interesting, but I do not know the context in which it was made. And it is the kind of statement that would be illuminated only by its context.