

INTRODUCTION

Creative writing in English began in India in the early nineteenth century. Much of this early writing laboured under English influences.¹ This phase of imitation was indeed followed by that of national self-consciousness. Toru Dutt (1856-77), Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) made a creative use of Indian fables, folklore and legends in their poetry. Today many critics question their reputations. Adil Jussawalla (b.1940), a poet and critic, finds their verse "atrocious" and states: "it needed saying when they wrote it...."² William Walsh, an English critic, holds: "... the reader of today who is strictly interested in poetry can ignore except for historical purposes, earlier versifying."³ Keki N. Daruwalla (b.1937), a poet and critic, denounces the contribution of the earlier poets by saying that "they 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."⁴

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. The poetry written by many modern Indian poets such as Shiv Kumar (b.1921), Nissim Ezekiel (b.1924), A.K. Ramanujan (b.1929), Arun Kolatkar (b.1932), Keki Daruwalla, Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel (b.1940) and many others ceases to be overtly nationalist.⁵ Most of these poets deal either with "the reality around them" or with "the reality within". For instance, Arun Kolatkar explores "the significance of external facts" on the one hand⁶; and Nissim Ezekiel's "specifically Indian poetry is both inward and detached" on the other.⁷

The most distinctive feature of poetry written by Gieve Patel, the poet under this study, is the constant juxtaposition of both realities, inner and outer, in human experience. In his brief introduction to Patel's poems, Daruwalla writes: "An event, an outer focus triggers off an exploration in an area of the mind. One is left with a feeling that he is conducting an autopsy over every moral problem that confronts him,"⁸ And William Walsh, in his brief survey of Patel's poems, adds:

Patel's poems do as a rule pose a problem and I mean pose, to present in a position of tension, not simply state. The problem is concerned with the balance between inner and outer in human experience or with the clash between inner and outer..."⁹

Both the statements are generalizations and, therefore, need verification and justification. A close look at Patel's poems reveals that there is indeed an insistent 'I' present in almost all his poems, the 'I' confronting its immediate outer reality. This 'I' is not the 'I' of the romantic poet. The 'I' in Patel's poems is the persona of a sensitive observer who takes a critical notice of what goes on within and without. Hence this attempt to study Patel's poetry against a perspective that is much broader in scope, larger in meaning and realistic than mere 'Indianness'.

The relationship between inner and outer is a recurrent and dominant theme in Patel's poetry. Here, the term 'inner' refers to an area of mind as distinguished from the external world; and the term 'outer' refers to things and conditions external to man's mind and soul.

To begin with it is assumed that in Patel the 'inner' is characterised by the poet's education, his position and his profession. Firstly, Patel, in David McCutcheon's words, is "a man educated to think and feel in western categories confronting the radically different culture around him...."¹⁰ Secondly, he is a Parsee, a Zoroastrian community marginal to the Hindu majority. Thirdly, and more importantly, he is a practising physician in Bombay.

These things and his choice of English as his language of creative expression give Patel a critical

distance from the Indian ethos. His poem, "The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, He Being Neither Muslim Nor Hindu in India" gives us a measure of his awareness of this critical distance:

To be no part of this hate is deprivation
 Never could I claim a circumcised butcher
 Mangled a child out of my arms, never rave
 at the milk-bibing, grass-guzzing hypocrite
 who pulled off my mother's voluminous
 Robes and sliced away at her dugs.
 Planets focus their fires
 Into a worm of destruction
 Edging along the continent. Bodies
 Turn ashen and shrivel. I
 Only burn my tail.

The mind of the poet-persona always confronts the 'outer' reality which appears variously as love, family, society, death, disease, violence, God and Nature.

PRIMARY DATA

The editions of Patel's verse used for this study are:

- 1) Poems, Bombay: Nissim Ezekiel Publications, 1966.
- ii) How Do You Withstand, Body, Bombay: Clearing House, 1976.

- iii) Mirrored Mirroring, Madras Oxford University Press, 1991.

(The abbreviations in this study are to be read as 'P' Poems; 'B' How do You Withstand, Body and 'M' Mirrored Mirroring.)

SECONDARY DATA

- i) Extensive library work has been done to determine the nature of the subject under the present study.
- ii) the questionnaire has been prepared and sent to Gieve Patel in order to get some first hand impressions about his life and his own preoccupations as a poet.
- iii) Interviews have been conducted with teachers and critics in order to find out their views.
- iv) The study of reference books available on the subject, critical works and periodicals has been done in order to make this study as complete as possible.

• This study aims at presenting the works and contribution of Gieve Patel to Indian poetry in English in a comprehensive critical perspective. The second chapter contains biographical material on Patel and describes the major influences on his poetry in order to know his position

in the history of Indian Writing in English. The three main chapters explore the inner-outer relationship in the light of three specific stages in the development of the poet-persona's sensibility: the relationship between the persona's self and love, family and society marked by a sense of uncertainty; the relationship between the persona's self and death, disease and violence marked by a sense of affirmation; and the relationship between the persona's self and God and Nature marked by a sense of urgency. The concluding chapter puts forth certain conclusions based on this study of Patel's poetry and also affirms that the poet, Gieve Patel has made a significant contribution to the developing body of commonwealth literature that is emerging from a number of cultures in different parts of the globe today. The Appendix contains the replies sent to the questionnaire by Gieve Patel. It would be of considerable help to the teachers, researchers and the students of Indian Poetry of English.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Keki N. Daruwalla in his introduction to the anthology edited by him, Two Decades of Indian Poetry, (Ghaziabad: Vikas Publishing House, 1980.) states that "the earlier Indian poetry was a victim of prevailing literary fashions" (p.xiv) and shows, quoting specific examples, how Indians, following the Englishman, wrote "on the "natural beauties" of the country" and "on the historical incidents and legends" (p.xii.)
2. Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.5(1988), pp.65-66.
3. William Walsh, Indian Literature in English, (New York : Longman, 1990), p. 127.
4. Two Decades of Indian Poetry, p. xvii.
5. H.M. Williams, Indo-Anglian literature: 1800-1970 A Survey (Madras: Orient Longman Ltd., 1976), p. 109.
6. M.G. Krishnamurthy, "Arun Kolatkar," Contemporary Indian poetry in English, ed. Saleem Peeradina (Madras: MacMillan India Ltd., 1987), p. 42.
7. Indian Literature in English, p. 130.
8. Two Decades of Indian poetry, p. 138.
9. Indian literature in English. p. 152.
10. David McCutcheon, Indian Writing in English: Critical Essays (Calcutta: A Writer's Workshop Publication, 1973), p. 15.