Urge and Approach: Plurality/ Polarity of Perception

Every creative writer has his own basic urges, instinctive as well as emotional. (S) he also has a well cultivated approach to life with which (s)he observes life and humanity and subsequently creates art. No dichotomy between urge and approach is envisaged here; urge rather provides the basis and impetus to approach and approach on its part also coheres in and streamlines urge(s) along the writer's preferred system of convictions and values.

The urges of new Hindi poets cannot be defined in a generalized way because these poets unlike the Pragtivadi Poets (or the Progressive Poets) do not subscribe to any fixed ideology or set of poetic conventions. If Gandhian aesthetics and ethics stir the creative urges of one poet, another may still continue to write in the great Vedantic tradition of mysticism, still another could write with marxist leanings. A philosophical convergence of poets of such different ideological preferences is not easy to arrive at. Here the following excerpt from the introduction to Tar Saptak, a foundational text of new Hindi poetry, is quite pertinent:

... But from this it should not be concluded that they are poets of any one 'school' of poetry or that they are supporters or members of any group or camp of the literary-world. Rather the reason of their coming together is that they do not belong to one school, they have not arrived at any destination as yet, they are wayfarers -- not even wayfarers, they are the explorers of ways. They don't
have a unity of opinion, on all important issues they have their differences of opinion -- differences with regard to life, to society, religion and politics, to poetic matter and manner, to meter and rhyme, to the responsibilities of poet -- on every issue they have their differences of opinion.¹

This creative heterogeneity of new Hindi poetry cannot easily be steamrolled into one flat, uniform and essentialized response to reality. It is only new Hindi poets' "exploratory attitude towards poetry"² that binds them together in one group.

The three poets chosen for the present study too have their distinct ideological predispositions and philosophical choices revealing a striking range and diversity of poetic endeavour under the broad rubric of new Hindi poetry. Their urges are studied first in terms of their creative perception of life and reality around them, and then in terms of their stance towards this perceived reality. Such a study would reveal the possible direction(s) of the growth of the protagonist of new Hindi poetry. Ideological leanings not only streamline and circumscribe a creative writer's response to reality; they provide the necessary momentum for his future growth.

II

Sarveshwar's protagonist perceives reality in ostensibly nihilistic terms revealing his basic disgust and anger against the dehumanized modern life and its rigid power structures. Upset by the absurdity of life, he seeks to destroy all meaning in life thus:

\[
\text{before it (meaning)} \\
\text{dies a dog's death} \\
\text{in this dear world of its own} \\
\text{I shall kill it.}³
\]

In poems like "Is Mrit Nagar Mein", "Is Aparichit Nagar Mein", "Yuddh-
“sthiti”, “Dhire-Dhire” there is an undercurrent of total disenchantment and disillusionment towards modern urban life unfolding the persona’s uneasy encounter with its non-intimate and indifferent environs thus:

Here skyscrapers
are meant for self-indulgence, and not for shelter;
Carrying them on my back, I crawl,
A huge wheel-like Time
comes rolling down;
trampling me
on some slop
it moves forward.
Whether I am alive or dead
nothing do I understand.

(“Is Mrit Nagar Mein*, K-II, p.45)

At times, the idiom of Sarveshwar’s persona turns quite sour and bitter; it becomes as pungent and even pervert as the idiom of ‘akavita school of poetry’ reducing at times his poetry to mere political polemics. The violent imagery of the following lines is simply shocking:

I tear down
government posters
write abuses in their place.
‘Eliminate poverty’ --
I have changed to
‘Eliminate wives’.

I hasten
from atop the tallest chimney
throw handbombs,

Often I think
opening the cages
of wild animals in the zoo.*

This wild and brutal imagery is extremely nauseating. Lines such as -- "putting a torch to a rat’s tail/ I see them often blowing up." ("Jaroorat hai Ek
Sarkari Jasoos ki", *Khoontiyon* p.64) Or "by throwing stones/ let us stop every car-owner/Holding him by the neck let us shake him/ pat him and laugh at/ his every cry" bring his poetry closer to highly negativized rhetoric of *akavita*. In many poems there is a feeling of exhaustion and helplessness: "abandoned after being sucked up dead worm-like/ I lie the whole night" ("Poornima-katha", *K-ll*, p.33) and "A little smoke/ a few flames/ pieces of coal/ leaving behind ash --/ like a piece of wood/ I burn/ in the hearth." ("Jungle ke Yaad Mujhe Mat Deelao", *Khootiyon*, p. 13). Such images, it so appears, are inspired by the existential idiom of suicide, sadistic violence and neurosis.

Despite this perception of reality in terms of existential jargon and slant, the protagonist of Sarveshwar's poetry cannot be branded as an existentalist or a nihilist because a visible socialist revolutionary urge consistently alternates with this existential perception of life around him. This protagonist is always aware of his petty and ordinary existence, but this does not depress him beyond redemption. In other words, like the typical existential protagonists of the Western fiction, this protagonist is not in a state of depression eternally; nor is he a fatalist always suffering from suicidal tendencies. Depression does not deter him from undertaking risky resolves.

Critics like Ramvilas Sharma and Dr. Hanumant Rao Neerav tend to dismiss entire new Hindi poetry as mere existential poetry inspired more by Sarte, Nietzsche and Camus than by actual lived experience. Looking at the trajectory of growth of the protagonist of new Hindi poetry, this observation is only partially true. Awareness of existence in its most sordid and morbid forms constitutes only the initial phase of his growth which he outlives as he grows further. In fact from a point of total dejection, this protagonist comes back in life with a metaphysical vision that transcends all existential concerns.

In terms of ideology, the protagonist of Sarveshwar's poetry to begin with has romantic predilections which repeatedly impel him to get out of the existential morass. Nature soothes and comforts the persona's existential angst:
One hazy shadow of a twig trembles
and my conscience perching on the blazing stones of the day
again and again gathers the sinking waves of possibilities.
("Sanjh Hote Hi", K-I, p.180)

Vasant -- the season of spring with its connotations of refulgent life has a
balming effect on the dislocated and uprooted sensibility of the persona:

For the first time I realize
that walls also can tremble
and spring too can enter my room.
("Vasant-smriti", K-I, p. 195)

A simple invocation of spring is enough to reinvigorate and rejuvenate the
sinking spirits of the persona. The nostalgia for spring on a wintry evening
of "dead silence" (p.206) is inevitable:

Where are those winds
which bestir beauty
and resound love?
("Hament ke Sandhya: Ek Pratiksha", K-I, p. 206)

The sagging morale of the persona is redeemed by the very prospect of the
multihued waterfalls which would "come to own me [him]/ some flood-tide/
would knock at/ my [his] desolate door/ somewhere the sea of some new
attraction/ must be on its way to engulf me [him]/ ("Naya Varsh Phir Aaya",
K-I, p. 231)

This cchayavdi streak of establishing a lyrical communion with nature
does not last long because very soon the evolving consciousness of the
persona comes to realize the escapist element implicit in such a romantic
choice. The existential is forsaken in favour of the romantic; the romantic
too is forsaken further in favour of a revolutionary ideology which approximates
marxism not in terms of its scientific schemata but in terms of its spirit and
intention. The persona is not enamoured by vasant any more; rather now
vasant turns into a bug that bites him to his great discomfiture thus:

56
Flower-laden branch
holding which I used to strut
has swung back on me albatross-like, . . .
(Phir Vasant ne Mujhe Dasa", K-II, p.143)

Vasant is a romantic trap which he wants to liberate himself from: "Now you (vasant) stop besieging me" ("Vasant ke Naam Khula Patra", K-II, p.161). Clearly there is a remarkable shift (if not reversal) in the stand and the persona. Starting from the perception of life being inert, static and sterile, the persona re-discovers life on the wings of windy vasant in the intermediate period of his growth; however as the persona matures the gentle winds of vasant do not enchant him any longer, he wants these winds to turn into ferocious blizzards and life-shaking storms so that the fires of revolution could be stroked beyond control thus:

True, there is a road running down
and there is meaningless noise on it
the voice of the wind is choked,
it wanders in so many streets
and it collides against so many houses
that it becomes lifeless by the time it reaches me
A wind is not a wind
which though limited, cannot unlimit itself,
I shall now not roll in a storm
which cannot break (my window) by dashing against (it).
("Yeh Khirki, K-II, pp.91-92)

Dr. Krishndutt Paliwal, a known critic of new Hindi poetry, also observes a perceptible shift in stance in the later poetry of Sarveshwar: " A poet like Sarveshvar had created a romantic world in the beginning but very soon smoke could be seen rising from it. In place of "ice" and "vasant", symbols of "fire" and "war" start appearing in the poetry of Sarveshvar."

Despite this marxist tenor, the protagonist of Sarveshwar's poetry is different from the protagonist of progressive poetry in at least two respects. Firstly he gravitates towards aggressive socialism not because he is
ideologically indoctrinated in such a way, but because he has a first-hand experience of poverty and misery. His socialism is homespun in this sense. Those who swear by Marx or Mao happen to experience no poverty; such pseudo-marxists along with die-hard communals are held to ridicule in the following poem thus:

Hit by a bullet
one cried --
'Ram'.

The other shrieked --
'Mao'.

But the third said --
'Potato'.

The postmortem report says
the first two
had bellies full.

("Postmortem ki Report", Khoontiyon, p.37)

This protagonist does not import socialism from the West; the indigenous experience of a highly non-egalitarian social set up drives him towards the ideology of socialism.

Lohia emerges as an epitome of socialist struggle and revolution in the later poetry of Sarveshwar. Besides so many oblique references to Lohia, he has written an elegy on Lohia which implores Indian youth to carry forward the socialistic mission of Lohia to its logical conclusion. In this poem entitled "Lohia ke Na Rahene Par", the poet-persona while lamenting the early death of his hero pays tribute to his credo of revolution thus:

He kept warming
the wet woods lying in ice
by burning every bit of his self
and when the fire was all set to flare
his age came to an end.

(K-II, p.102)
More than Marx or Lenin, it is Lohia who as a live personification of socialist thought influences the intellectual bent of the persona most. It is important to observe that Lohia does not simply fire his youthful romantic imagination; he rather provides solid intellectual conviction to his ideological leanings:

Armless he passed through
not the hearts, but the heads
of forty crore people
like a red-hot iron bar.
History may or may not perform its duty
You will find his name
in your empty pockets. (p.104)

Lohia may not be a great thinker in the history of ideas, but he with his native brand of socialism, practised and preached, holds the centre-stage in the intellectual make up of the protagonist.

Not only Lohian ideology, even its rhetoric is retained by the persona of Sarveshwar’s poetry. At times it appears that Lohia with his characteristic socialist satire and native brashness completely overwhelms the artistic poet-persona. The subtle distinction between poetry and politics disappears. Lohia in his parliamentary debates used to make some scathing comments on Nehruvian polity and life style without any fear of backlash. Sarveshwar’s persona articulates his criticism of Nehruvian polity in overtly Lohian terms. In the passage quoted below he exposes the misuse of Gandhian legacy by the contemporary politicians for their political ends:

Your slippers?
They are being used
to beat blue the poor.
And your watch?
It has stopped like the pulse of this country?
("Panchdatu", K-II, pp. 109-110)

Lohia repeatedly implored the post-independent, post-Gandhi Congressmen"
not to mislead the illiterate and straving public in the name of Congress." He challenged them to fight elections with a new name.

The ever increasing gap between the poor and the rich, even after independence, consistently disturbed Lohia's faith in post-independence Indian governance. Nehru's aristocratic ways, in particular, enraged the socialist Lohia maximum. In his first speech in the Parliament, he mentioned, "I want that this should always be remembered that today twentyseven crore people are surviving on just three aana per day income, while three rupees per day are being spent on the Prime Minister's dog." Sarveshwar's protagonist, in the passage quoted below, exposes the indifference of elite Indian rulers towards the poor in typically Lohian idiom thus:

Fifty crore people
beating empty bellies
and rustling skeletons pass
before me ever moment.
Spectacles of hypocrisy and betrayal
are displayed . . .
("Yeh Khirki", K-II, p. 93)

Not only in the economic sphere, even in matters related to cultural identity of India, the new ruling elite continued to hanker after English models, values and even language. Lohian was a great champion of the mothertongue. Once he said, "We seem to have no language. This plan is being operated through English . . . . Anyone who has his mothertongue, if work is realized through that tongue productivity could be increased." Sarveshwar's protagonist echoing Lohian sentiment says," It is better to die/ than to make a statement/ in any wrong [alien] language* ("Chhinane Aaye Hain Ve", K-II, p. 107).

Lohia fought against caste and gender oppression. His socialism was not confined to mere economic equality, he sought social equality. Sarveshwar's "Chupai Maarao Dulhin" is a biting satire on caste and gender oppression in Indian society. The poem, true to Lohian spirit of nativity, is cast in the native dialect of Basti downtown, The poem reveals the continuity of the old
order:

Spinning charkha day long,  
why do you weep in the evening?  

Selling the yarn,  
he comes in the house drunk  
snatches even my loin cloth  
cuts me into pieces.  
My bad luck!  
Over and above this  
brahmin and nai ask for their  
customary presents!  

(K-II, p.145)

Lohia used to say that "Without the active support of women, the socialist movement is a marriage without bride". Sarveshwar's persona also fights for a society free from caste and gender hierarchies, where action, i.e., karma is much more important to considerations of sex and race. Like his political mentor, he is in war with himself to "enlarge earth/ and to beautify scenes/ to make aesthetics more comprehensive and faith vast like ocean." ("Yuddha-sthiti" K-II, p. 59)

Sarveshwar's protagonist at times outlives his aggressive socialist credo. In his later poetry, he cultivates the metaphysical capacity of owning the sorrow of entire humanity. In his sorrow he discovers the sorrow of mankind and vice versa. In the following poem entitled 'Dookha', the persona undergoes a Buddhist vision of discovering the infinite through sorrow thus:

My sorrow is  
clean like a white sheet  
I sleep on.

My sorrow  
burns bright  
like the sun  
I see all faces  
in its light.
My sorrow is
dynamic like the wind
I embrace everyone
in its arms.

My sorrow is
powerful like the fire
I am one with infinity
riding its flames.

(“Dookha”, Khoontiyon, p.77)

This search for the infinite is a logical extension of the persona’s socialist bias. The infinite is to be realized only by a selfless being, i.e., one who works for the collective good of mankind.

The approach of Sarveshwar’s persona shifts visibly. He grows from being a facile existentialist to an equally unrealistic romantic before he finally turns to the Lohian brand of aggressive socialism seeking social change through radical revolutions. His ultimate spill to metaphysics is rare and incomplete. As an unfinished being, this protagonist is always in a state of evolution. The alienated persona seeks a meaningful participation in life and evolves into a revolutionary socialist in his endeavour to transform his narrow subjectivity into an all-embracing objectivity. Lohian ideology seems to provide some sort of an ideological stay to an otherwise straying consciousness of the protagonist.

III

Unlike Sarveshwar’s the protagonist of Bhavani perceives human reality in simple human terms without ever slipping into the professional idiom of existentialists. As a man of pre-eminently Gandhian leanings, his poetic manner and matter are influenced by Gandhian aesthetics and native transparency of expression. He would ask the poet in him: “You write the way we speak,/ and then despite this/ you emerge greater than us”17. This commitment to simplicity in style does not in any way tamper with or vitiate the seriousness
and the sublimity of poetry as such. His seemingly ordinary diction retains all the subtle nuances of poetry lifting his verse away from the possible pitfall of sloganeering.\textsuperscript{18} such a pitfall is very common in poetry of ideological commitment. His words withstand the pressures of ideology, ethics and culture with effortless ease and grace " Let my words sing/everything, inner and outer/ but by holding together my morality/ neither should I irritate the banks/ when I am out of the lake/ nor should I pinch the lake when I take a dip in it."\textsuperscript{19}. His words spring from a highly reflective subjective soul entrenched deeply in the objective society and culture.

Nature is a perennial source of poetic sustenance for the protagonist of Bhavani's poetry. Man is seen as a product of nature only:

\begin{quote}
Unearth an ordinary man . . .
he is sun. he is water
he is flower, he is fruit
he is river, he is stream . . .
"("Saagar se Milker", \textit{Vyaktigat}, p. 94).
\end{quote}

Further it is through nature only that this man realizes his self:

\begin{quote}
I am surrounded by a strange abundance . . . sun rises in the morning wakes me up by giving me friendly knock . . . whatever winds sing they sing for my sake . . . dear runs on his four legs may be because my heart was quite still for some time"
\end{quote}
\textsuperscript{("Vyaktigat, pp. 9-10).}

The protagonist debunks the modern attitude of using and consuming nature for his narrow and ephemeral gains. He implores man to become one with the magnanimous nature thus:

\begin{quote}
We shall declare
\end{quote}
our deeds till now
were wrong.
We give them up
and connect ourselves with entire nature
and entire humanity. "20

The religious intensity with which Bhavani’s persona invokes nature is
remarkable for a number of ways. First it is not simply an outcome of any
romantic nostalgia; nor is it a manifestation of any escapist enterprise. His
constant communion with nature has deep cultural, ideological and philosophical
underpinnings. Anchored firmly in his Malwa region, the poet-persona naturally
is sustained, uplifted and invigorated by the natural vivacity of his region. "
The poet invariably keeps Narmada together with the forests of Satpura and
Vindhyanchal. Narmada flows in a direction opposite to Ganga. The history
of Narmada is associated with Parshuram, Karttvirya and Sahastrarjuna."21
Thus nature in Bhavani’s poetry is identifiable with his nativity, local culture
and, in this way, with his roots and total cultural make up.

Like Sarveshwar, Bhavani is politically very alert. If among the post
Gandhian phase of political leadership and ideology, Lohian ideology of
aggressive socialism magnetizes the revolutionary impulses of Sarveshwar’s
persona, Jai Prakash Narain’s ‘fight against political tyranny22 stirs the non-
violent persona of Bhavani’s poetry to rare aggression. In Trikal Sandhya, a
collection of poems written during emergency, J.P. almost replaces Gandhi23
as the political hero of Bhavani’s persona; as many as ten poems 24 bear
direct references to J.P.. The attitude of the persona turns quite belligerent
and militant; language spits fire and blood:

We and you have given names to things,
name blood as sandal
and consider prison as house-of-worship!
(‘Aapatkaal’, Trikaal, p. 20)

The war-imagery of Mahabharata is tapped to add punch to the idiom thus:

Wage war for eighteen days
to win this battle.

64
Eighteen days is not a long period to sustain any idea (of revolution).

('Aashvass-Vani', Trikaal, p. 48)

The eighteen months of emergency are compared to eighteen-day long war of Mahabharata.

In his otherwise very controlled and resolute voice, the simmerings of unrest bring in an element of fierce rabble-rousing. Bhavani's persona, very much like the persona of Sarveshwar, thinks in terms of inducing revolutionary storms

Not only the gust of winds but of sun-rays too will surface in my poetry. My voice would sing about those storms which have not come so far which have to rise any day -now . . .

('Parivartan ke Liye', Trikaal, p. 69)

The poet-persona, like a river in spate, wants to break free from the binds of systemic controls : "Once the rain and/ storm come / not its banks,/ the river would dictate its terms" ('Nadi Jeetegi', Trikaal, p. 68).

Committed to Gandhian ideology, Bhavani's protagonist drifts organically towards the metaphysical ideal of advait in his endeavour to realize the enormous possibilities of the self, Rising above the mundane criterion of distinction and differentiation, the protagonist discovers a unity in life. In his emancipated vision there "is neither/ day nor night/ nor darkness, not light,/ not yellow, not black/ not blue./ These are experiences merely of the surface. " ("Kavita Mein Hi", Vyaktigat, p. 18). The impersonality of shunya overwhelms him : "Once you become shunya,/ they [diverse outer experiences] also become shunya" (p.18). In such moments of mystical ecstasy his self becomes all-inclusive :"All things enter/ in and out/ of me" (p.19). This ever-expanding self belongs to everyone as much as everyone belongs to it :
It so appears
I am being crowned as an emperor
in a different way
I, one man is being celebrated
by every things individually.

("Vyaktigat", Vyaktigat, p. 11)

As a genuine Gandhian, the poet-persona identifies himself with the masses. This identification lifts his self to loftier level of consciousness where even "grass begins to beam moonlight"25 ("Do Anubhav", Parivartan Jiye, p. 114). The politics of isolation or exclusion is detrimental to the growth of the self. The persona contrasts his experience of exclusion and inclusion thus:

When
I sever myself
from others

I deject
myself and
others

When
I integrate myself
with others

from the barren lands
it so appears, greenery sprouts (p.114)

In advait philosophy there is no such binary of `the self' and `the other'. The persona seeks to free himself from all types of binary oppositions which reduce the external reality into a limited paradigm of `either-or'.

Even in the throes of his socialist revolution, he thinks of dissolution of his ego into some universal consciousness. His socialism attains a transcendental character in poems like "Nihsva":

who knows
our one particle
might become a cosmos
and one moment
an entire age.
(Trikaal, p. 141)

In fact in Indian context, socialism is not as much a scientific doctrine as it is propounded in the West. It is rather a social manifestation of the spiritual. Or Indian spiritualism with its central principle of *advait* entails socialism as a penultimate state of evolution. Therefore any socialist revolution must attain eternity as its ultimate end:

but when our ashes be sprinkled
the floating particles
would join eternity
because
we have never lived only for our sake. (pp. 141-142)

Thus the transition from Gandhian socialism to *advait* is inevitable.

Compared to Sarveshwar's protagonist, Bhavani's persona is stable and steady, but it does not imply that he is rigid and immune to any growth. Though Gandhian ethics govern his response, yet from these ethics only he evolves towards the metaphysical state of going beyond ethics. As a slightly higher being than Sarveshwar's persona, this persona grows from being a Gandhian to a Vedantist. The direction of growth is identical. Sarveshwar's persona passes mainly through three phases of immorality (i.e., existentialist and romantic), morality (socialism) and then metaphysics; Bhavani’s persona grows straight from being moral (Gandhian) to metaphysical (*advaitin*). Despite this evolution, Bhavani’s persona remains committed to Gandhian ideals except for a brief period when he shifts to J.P.’s ideology of aggressive socialism.

There is no fundamental dissimilarity between the approaches of the two personas. Both are socialist in their over-all perspectives. Their socialism is uncompromising as it stems from within and not from without. Local leaders with their homespun ideologies provide ideological stay to both the personas.
Both personas gravitate towards metaphysics confirming their commitment to the ideals of selflessness and non-duality. Mortal fears of system’s vindictiveness do not deviate them from their missionary zeal of transforming the society.

Naresh Mehta’s persona, unlike the earlier two personas, does not show any remarkable political leanings, but Gandhi as a *prarthana-purusha* continues to stir his moral and metaphysical vision. If the earlier two personas are inspired more by Gandhian politics, Mehta’s persona is animated by Gandhian metaphysics. Gandhi is almost elevated to the position of a deity, a divine presence free from the binds of space and time. From being a historical being, Gandhi is transmuted into a mythical being shaping our present eternally. The following passage from introduction to *Prarthana-Purusha* clearly establishes Gandhian credentials of Mehta’s persona thus:

Till yesterday Gandhi was marching along with us in history, today he is in our *smriti*. After some time this *smriti* would become *shruti* and then how much time *shruti* takes to attain the from of myth! This is the totality of mythicality. Gandhi would definitely become a myth, transcending the limited horizons of event, history, symbol, his daily routine work, his talent to elevate negligible into *virat*, he would become only *leela*, The festival taking place in the eternal profundity of time!! The way, Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Christ become an era every moment by happening in human beings, in that same manner Gandhi too would happen to men! 

Gandhi is seen as a descendental of Rama and Krishana, as an incarnation of the divine, and as a living presence among the pantheon of Gods.

The *prarthana-purasha* of Mehta’s poetry has the potentiality of becoming a god; he has the perception to locate the divine in the ordinary events of life around:
Have your touched the obscurest of the obscure leaf of grass?
Does that touch
not seem like touching the feet?
Recollect whose happy eyes-like does this
sparrow, flying as if writing verses in the sunshine,
resemble like?
Whether the rain-drop that has fallen on banana-leaf,
does remind you of panchamrit or not?  

The moment the seeds of prayer sprout in this persona, he discovers the entire cosmos working within him:

Give birth to a prayer within you,
you'll realize
you are performing a rajsuya-yajana
and the entire creation is present
before you with its gifits!

("Prarthana-purusha", Utsava, p.92)

Gandhi is one such potential divine, he is prayer personified. It is for this reason that Mehta's persona aspires to attain Gandhian self a self one with entire cosmos.

So alongwith Gandhi, it is nature with its divine impersonality that kindles the imagination of Mehta's persona continually. In fact all the three personas (i.e., of Sarveshwar, Bhavani and Mehta resp.) seek to realize eternity through identification with nature. This observation contradicts the much-assumed and much discussed so-called hostility of new Hindi poetry with nature. Nature superabounds the consciousness of new Hindi poetry greater than that of earlier poets because the threat of urbanization makes them doubly conscious of the importance of nature in human growth and survival. While the infinite sky enamours the persona of Bhavani's poetry, the impregnable forests, the fathomless sea, the majestic sun as natural manifestations of the impersonal self surcharge the poetic imagination of the persona of Mehta's poetry. In fact Gandhi is human manifestation of these vast and splendid objects of nature. To become Gandhi is to become sky, sea, sun, forest. It is to own, to internalize the entire cosmos. Man and
nature are not disparate:

Whenever
I write poetry on flower, river or sky
it happens to be a human affair
because whenever human eyes are filled with tears
I have seen flower, river, sky weeping.
Therefore to me nature is not, simply nature
nor man, simply a man.28

The persona discovers a perfect man-nature harmony in Gandhi.

In his endeavour to attain the ideal of prarthana-purusha, the persona seeks to delve deep into the dark forest along its uncharted labyrinthine anonymous lanes. In this process of exploring the virat, this persona understands the need of self-forgetfulness:

Do not argue
Nor have any curiosity.
Only keep walking on this anonymous path passing through the lonely forests.
Such paths never have names, they have only the destinations.
Here you have to hang your name on some tree outside the jungle because name is the biggest inconvenience between man and virat. ("Kamdhenu", Aranya, p.06)

The urge invariably is to strike harmony (samrasya) with nature. In the same poem, he wants to attain the transparency of rivers, the flow of winds along with the density of forests to be able to discover and respect the most ordinary blade of grass as a manifestation of the sublime and the divine:

If you can become --
mysterious like these mountains transparent like the rivers non-urbane like the original winds
then, this small desolation of this grassy land
will appear to you rare like the singing tribal women
with their hair unkept. (p.6)

The purusha of Mehta's poetry can realize himself fully only through prakriti. This is the cardinal principle of Sankhya philosophy. The greater the interaction with prakriti, the greater the purusha.

V

The protagonist of new Hindi poetry, as the study of the poetry of three new Hindi poets amply reveals, in his process of evolution, gravitates towards clear political, cultural and philosophical choices. As a responsible being, he does not stop at merely an intellectual analysis or critical scrutiny of reality around him, for such an evasive exercise lacks purpose and direction. Here criticism of life, without ethical imperatives does not constitute the end of his poetic enterprise; it could be the proper beginning of poetic speculation which must evolve towards some ideological alternative of social transformation. After an acute awareness of the complexities of contemporary life the protagonist opts for some indigenous cultural ideology/programme to streamline his creative responses along his preferred system of values. In this way he extends modernism towards a constructive purpose. If modern empiricism enables him to evaluate reality, the choice of ideology gives a constructive edge to this evaluation.

It is important to observe that ideological/cultural choices of the protagonist do not circumscribe his vision right from the beginning. He evolves towards such choices only at a later stage of his growth. These ideologies too have their in-built momentum and avenues of growth. If Lohian leanings of Sarveshwar's persona have inherent (r)evolutionary underpinnings, the Gandhian self of Bhavani and Mehta too is not a static; it evolves from moral to metaphysical. Mehta's cherished ideal of prarthana-purusha too is a product of the evolutionary dialectic of purusha and prakriti. The ideological commitments only streamline his creative responses, they do not stifle or choke the expansion of his consciousness. This protagonist consequently,
The urges and aspirations of the protagonist (i.e., the unfinished man) of modern Indian English poetry, however, are not as explosive or revolutionary or even metaphysical as those of the protagonist of new Hindi poetry. Of course, there are simmerings of discontent and unrest foreboding a radical change; but this radicalism does not last long. Most often the rationalist credo of the protagonist pulls him back to mundane pragmatic human consideration. The locus of the urges remains identical but whereas in new Hindi poetry the urge to break from the narrow material gains is almost full and irrevocable, in modern Indian English poetry this urge is checkmated and even muffled by the average human compulsions.

Nissim Ezekiel descends on the Indian literary scene with a poetic manifesto signalling 'A Time to Change'. No longer satisfied by the metaphysical and the transcendental moorings of his predecessors -- Tagore and Aurobindo, he seeks to put to test all hitherto cherished and imagined ideals of life with an apparently humanistic zeal thus:

The pure invention or the perfect poem,
Precise communication of a thought,
Love reciprocated to a quiver,
Flawless doctrines, certainty of God,
These are merely dreams; but I am human
And must testify to what they mean.

Clearly the poet-persona wants to liberate himself from the unrealistic and mystical resolutions of his poetic ancestors/ predecessors. This vision of change looks quite compatible with the experimental vision of the protagonist of new Hindi poetry for he too struggles against that culture of the status quo which legitimizes a tradition-based hierarchical model of society offering
little mobility.

In a number of poems the persona of Ezekiel's poetry articulates his evolutionary experimental predilections. In the opening poem of *Hymns in Darkness* he feels his ground is shaking:

That I was on the move, foresaw  
The fury of my inner law,  
Consolled me as I looked around  
And felt, for all, the shaking ground.

Not a stone in the edifice,  
Well-loves, is likely to suffice.  
Everything calls for a new place  
A different rage behind my face.

("Subject of Change", *CP*, p. 177)

This cataclysmic vision calls for "change (in) your style". In his "Advice to a Painter", the same urge propels him to create his own alternate world:

Do not be satisfied with the world  
that God created. Create your own,  
Be voracious with your eyes and appetites: (*CP*, p. 204)

This creative impulse is the driving force of the poet-persona's artistic progression.

In yet another poem 'Mind' the creative dynamics of mind have been blended with the reproductive powers of sex to press forward the persona's incessant desire to break new grounds thus:

In this then your way to oblivion?  
Sad artificer, clinging  
Too long to the same static vision  
For a timely springing.

Misled by norms, the light of reason,  
Your passionate waiting  
Crumbles, while the tough mad creators
Press forward in creating.  

Once again invoking an erotic metaphor of the lover's consummation, the poet persona, in one of the prayers, wants to explore the "hackneyed truths" from his own personal angle:

Freshen for me, Lord,
every hackneyed truth,
and make her open like a virgin
to a lover,
nervously, but with the first thrill
of making it at last.32

The urge to analyse this unquestioned perpetuation of stale wisdom in the name of tradition always enlivens his expanding consciousness.

Unlike Hindi poets, Ezekiel's vision of change is not fired or sustained by any compatible revolutionary impulse. The experimental urges of Ezekiel's persona give way to a pragmatic view of life that instead of uplifting and elevating his consciousness to great heights delimits his vision to ordinary human needs or in his own words "normal pursuits" (*Blessings*, CP, p. 280). Right from the very beginning he does not harbour any grand, serious or sublime designs to realize his self. Very modest in his requirements this protagonist does not ask for the moon:

A bit of land, a woman and child or too
Accommodated to their needs and changing moods.
Practising a singing and talking voice
Is all the creed a man of God requires.

("A Time to Change", CP, p.4)

The great men only make him realize his limitations as an ordinary being:

The great provide a pattern for our lives,
Illustrate the paradoxes of the real
To which we are exposed, alone.

("The Great:", CP, p.22)
Neither the metaphysical ideals nor the political power enchant the poet persona:

I do not want the yogi’s concentration,
I do not want the perfect charity
Of saints nor the tyrant’s endless power.
I want a human balance humanly
Acquired, fruitful in the common hour.

("A Poem of Dedication", CP, p. 39)

Clearly anything remote, abstract or extra-ordinary is given up as mere impractical and unrealistic. His ethics are the ethics of balance, compromise and bargaining. Very much conscious of the fruitfulness of his effort, he does not engage himself in any long drawn out war of attrition because such wars can only be carried our to their climax without any of those self-preserving interests which deter a prudent man to participate in any intense life-denying pursuit(s).

Ezekiel’s persona is not interested in any absolute option. Expedience and convenience govern his choices:

May your solitude
taste good,
and your company
taste good,
like food
when you’re hungry.
It’s the hunger that counts. ("Blessings-VIII," CP, p. 281)

Even in matters most romantic, he would bring in the anti-romantic element of pragmatism thus:

Bitten by the bugs in her friendly bed,
He sent her the next morning
Instead of a bouquet of flowers
A packet of the New Tik -- 20,
Which was the more practical gift
And less expensive.

("Ten Poems in the Greek Anthology Mode", CP, p.274)
Obviously such a persona does not aim very high. The ideals of meditation, renunciation or asceticism cannot be practiced in human life. Such outlandish and preposterous prepositions betray human living. Therefore the very act of staying still in front of a gyrating beauty is a fictional fallacy thus:

Only Shiva, meditating, could be immovable in her moving presence. As for me, I hardly meditate at all.

("Passion Poems -- VIII", CP, p.216)

The persona does not recommend controlling the passions unnecessarily. Such a control is not only non-human, it is anti-human too.

VII

Despite loud promises of breaking the pattern, Ezekiel's persona does not match the emotional vivacity and buoyancy of the protagonist of new Hindi poetry. His urges though qualified by such chosen adjectives as "mad", "voracious" and "passionate", appear rather calculated ones for they never touch the crescendo of Sarvešwar's revolutionary zeal; nor are they sustained by Bhavani's Gandhian Idealism; Naresh Mehta's Vedantic gusto is simply beyond their scope. The urges of Ramanujan's protagonist, it so seems, are so tamed by undefined fears and apprehensions that he hardly ventures to state them in a positive and affirmative manner. His poetry is basically a poetry influenced and informed by post-modern aesthetics of subversion. If Ezekiel's unfinished ego insists on re-creating a convenient personal world, Ramanujan's's ego insists on de-creating the world. But this ambition of re-creation and de-creation in modern Indian English poetry does not take off with any of those necessary denying spiritual convictions which lend strength and credibility to the entire enterprise. More often than not it ends up in being just a poetry of caricature.

Ramanujan is more a poet of fears than a poet of ambitions and urges.

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It is not that the new Hindi poets are not aware of the undefined dangers lurking insidiously in the environment; politically very alert as these poets are, a clash or an antagonism with the powerful establishment is inevitable. But these poets do not succumb to the pressures of political vindictiveness or system's backlash. Rather, these pressures strengthen their resolve to carry out the struggle even at the cost of their lives; Ramanujan's protagonist is so haunted by countless indefinite fears and apprehensions that invariably he retracts from active social life. By way of comparison the protagonist of Ezekiel's poetry is far more positive and assertive about his human identity than him. At least Ezekiel's protagonist has the smug satisfaction of being and safe and secure in his own private world.

All types of fear -- outer and inner -- stalk the inquisitive urges of Ramanujan's persona pre-empting any possibility of his being adventurous in any extraordinary way. The snakes, lizards, scorpions etc. crowd his mental landscape to spark off ghostly visions thus:

My night full of ghosts from a sadness
in a play, my left foot listens to my right footfall,
a clockwork clicking in the silence
within my walking.

    The clickshod heel suddenly strikes
and slushes on a snake: I see him turn,
the green white of his belly
measured by bluish nodes, a water-bleached lotus stalk
plucked by a landsman hand. Yet panic rushes
my body to my feet, my spasms wring
and drain fear and mine.

Such spasmodic convulsions re-visit the persona frequently. The snake with its "twirls of hisses" is an archetypal symbol of surreptitious fear. The "ritual cobra" imprint a "sibilant alphabet of panic" on his psyche. The awful sight of a frog struggling in the mouth of a snake who is "too old to swallow, too hungry to let go" induces among other fears "a terror of creepers and ropes" in the already fear-stricken consciousness of the persona. ("Dream in an Old Language", CP(R), p. 198)
Ramanujan's fears do not spring as much from the outer international or national incidents of violence or mass destruction as from tiny insects like lizards and scorpions revealing the mundane dimensions of his outlook. The "wound museums/ of Hiroshima,/ the smell of cooking/ in Dacca sewers,/ Madame Nhu's/ Buddhist barbecues;/ that well-known child in napalm flames/ with X-ray bones running " ("Fear", CP(R), p. 132) do not intimidate him to an extent to which " a tiny lizard,/ with its stare, desadnake/ mouth,/ and dinosaur toes," (p.133) does. The lizard is a symbol of numerous "small" (p.132) fears that hover around us. "Though the tall headlines* Ramanujan's hypersensitive persona "hears now and then/ the ambushed silence./ the pebbled ebb of evil in distant worlds,/ the narrowing spiral of reeling birds/ and bankrupt brood that hatch like lice/ in other men's sunday suns." ("One Reads", CP(R), p.48). The wildcats the reeling birds and lice collectively are invoked as animal images associated with fear.

"Vultures" ("Entries for Catalogue of Fears", CP(R), p.86), "red fire ants" ("Pleasure", CP(R), p.140) and "black hen" ("The Black Hen", CP(R), p. 195) occur in the poetry of Ramanujan as ominous creatures of death and violence. The poet-persona is terrified by "vultures/ and their unerring arts/ of picking/ on soft parts/ like testicles and coconut brains." (p.88). The "red, white, or black" ants "leave snake skeletons/ complete with fang and grin/ for a schoolgirl's picnic ("Old Indian Belief", CP(R), p.106). The black hen "with the red round eye" (p.195) is a sinister metaphor of persona's own poetry which scares the creator itself:

and when it's all there
the black hen stares
with its round red eye
and you're afraid (p. 195)

In another poem the metaphor of black hen is replaced by the metaphor of tigress which kills its own creators :

Poetry too is a tigress,
except there's no fifth

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man left on a tree
when she takes your breath
away. ("No Fifth Man", CP(R), p. 243)

In the sombre vision of Ramanujan's post-modern persona creation grows into a Frankenstein's monster till it consumes its own creator. This is a complete reversal of the accepted view that equates creation with freedom from all kinds of terrors and fears.

The fears of Ramanujan's persona though "more precise/ than any hope" (p.86), are not easy to sense. These fears cannot be apprehended by ordinary human senses. As "Eyes cannot follow/ a bird over the hill", or "Ears hear a whistle a wheel, but not the grass," the nose too has it limitations:

Noses know when anything burns
anywhere but cannot
learn the smell of fear. ("Blind Spots", CP(R), p. 218)

Obviously this fear is not conspicuous to the naked eye. It is never bold and belligerent. "Born-blind" such a fear can be spotted only by "skin listening" and "seeing ear" (p. 86). In fact in the entire range of modern Indian English poetry not only the protests, the fears too are understated (if not underplayed) for a clear and vocal articulation of such fears entails antagonism with the all pervading system. The Indian English poets, like their British counterparts don't have the audacity (or the bravado) to blare out their apprehensions because such an exercise involves risk. These poets are never unfriendly or may be they are too decent and urbane to abuse the system which thrives on terror.

In "Entries for a Catalogue of Fears", the persona enlists many subtle fears most of which owe their origin to societal aberrations and unavoidable family inheritances. Sometimes personal fears, both experienced and inherited, combine with social fears thus:

Add now, at thirty-nine, to the old fear
of depths and heights,
of father in the bedroom,
insects, iodine
in the eye,
sudden knives and urchin laughter
in the red light alley,
add now
the men in line
behind my daughter.  

The imminent possibility of becoming sexually inactive at the old age of seventy also disturbs his sense of manly dignity. The sexual helplessness at this stage amounts to "wiping out a whole difficult lifetime/ of dignity/ and earning only the satisfaction/ of passing/ old women. "  

Another rather strange fear that rocks the poet-persona so regularly is the fear of legacy that he would bequeath to future generations. He is always apprehensive about his role of a traditional father who tries to conduct family affairs without ever problematizing the staleness of his thinking thus:

I'll love my children
without end,
and do them infinite harm
staying on the roof,
a peeping-tom ghost
looking for all sorts of proof
for the presence of the past:

they’ll serve a sentence
without any term
and know it only dimly
long afterwards
through borrowed words
and wrong analyses.  

Not at all sure about the strength of his legacy to children, he does not want their birth; if they choose to be born it is their risk and destiny thus:

Poverty is not easy to bear.
The body is not easy to wear.
So beware, I say to my children
unborn, lest they choose to be born. (p.42)

The fear of his coming generations undergoing an eternal punishment of inheriting a poor and weak ancestry troubles him. There is clearly an element of fatalism or determinism in his fears. Such fears are insurmountable.

In Hindi poetry death is not feared; rather it is accepted as a pilgrimage; a journey into eternity. Rooted in Indian philosophy, new Hindi poets take death as a passing phase in the evolution of the immortal spirit. Bhavani’s persona pleads:

Bestow such grace on me, O Lord
that when the sun of my d-day
dawns on me
waving my hands
I may walk along with it as two friends depart
in a moment of farewell;
that I may lend such a strength to every follower
that it was just a pilgrimage!
Bestow such a grace on me, O Lord
that I could live upto
the excitement of a pilgrim;
that I may gauge the depth of
life’s profound ocean in moments of death.
("Teerth Yatri", Chakit Hai Dookh, p. 128).

Sarveshwar’s persona also believes death is a not a full stop to life. Paying tribute to his poetic mentor Muktibodh, he confirms his faith in the endlessness of life thus: "Those who refuse to tread on traditional lines/their life-journey does not come to a full stop." ("Kavi Muktibodh ke Nidhan par", K-II, p.51). The persona further believes that man after his death continues to live on:

and you are alive in all of us.
Where do these waves come from
that burst against our ribs
shaping us eternally in your fashion
in such a death
which is more divine than life? (p. 52)

The fear of death does not intimidate the enterprising Hindi poets; rather they plunge into it to unfathom the mysteries of life and death both. In Indian English poetry the fear of death paralyses the will of its protagonist, it stifles his growth and checkmates the evolution of his spirit.

The spectre of death bedevils the protagonist of Ramanujan's verse consistently. In "One More on a Deathless Theme"38, the persona while contemplating on mortality suggests that everybody is destined to die a dogs death:

This body I sometimes call me,
--------------------------------
will one day be short of breath, 
lose its thrust, 
turn cold, dehydrate and leave 
a jawbone with half grin
near a pond : just as this dog
I walk

Birthdays remind him of death anniversaries for "they come as often as death/anniversaries in all the families" ("Birthdays", CP(R), p. 206). The persona is perturbed by the suddenness of death: "Birth takes a long time/though death can be sudden" (p.206)

Possessed by fears of mortality, the protagonist of Ramanujan's poetry does not confront reality with any of those moral or metaphysical principles which re-assure the socialist persona of Sarveshwar and the Gandhian persona of Bhavani in their encounter(s) with the dreadful reality. If Ezekiel's persona chooses the practical path of material humanism, Ramanujan's persona adopts the strategy of 'reverse romanticism'39 to cope up with the pressures of living. This reversal of the romantic engenders an element of subversion in his poetry; romantic hierarchies are overturned with a clear intention of de-privileging and deflating the ideal and the supreme; The sublime is subslimed.
P. K. J. Kurup explicates on this process of reversal of the romantic thus:

If romanticism may be described as literary framework which compels the artistic self to transform the immediate data of experience into the remote, the unrecognizable, the sacred and the mystic, anti-romanticism is just the reverse in its process -- a frame of mind and the operational strategy which transforms the remote into immediate thus imposing a pseudo-realism on essentially romantic modalities of experience.

If Ezekiel's persona seeks a balance between the immediate and the remote, Ramanujan's persona relinquishes the remote almost totally in favour of the immediate.

VIII

Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry is poetry of silence invested with fear and dread. "Perhaps it is the stare of dead empress/ from the reign of terrors. "41. Obviously this poetry of meditative melancholy"42 does never lapse into any playful reversal of the religious and the sacred. Like Ezekiel, Mahapatra does not opt for any modern humanistic choice, nor like Ramanujan does he espouse post-modernist credo of subversion. Mahapatra's protagonist therefore is neither very casual nor very disruptive (in the postmodern sense of the word). His poetry is neither the poetry of creation nor the "poetry of decreation"43 for if creation is necessarily an attribute of dynamism and enterprise, decreation is an extreme nihilistic virtue.

Mahapatra's persona does not have the audacity to take any extreme stance "My fear receive no one; / like a flame which sings on alters of the dead,/ isn't it strong enough/ to shed the blood from the veins?"44. True it is that he perceives reality in existential terms of human loss and cultural deterioration, but never does he propose a mindless destruction of this hopeless world.45 His poetry is not poetry of total darkness; instead a grim dimness pervades throughout suggesting persona's rather subdued perception of reality.
thus:

Ruins everywhere
holding dim interiors of myth.\textsuperscript{46}
\hspace{1cm} x \hspace{1cm} x \hspace{1cm} x \hspace{1cm} x \hspace{1cm} x
And in her eyes
the dim flower of her days
glows
from the old earth at its roots.
\hspace{1cm} ("Old Earth", \textit{Waiting}, p. 43)
\hspace{1cm} x \hspace{1cm} x \hspace{1cm} x \hspace{1cm} x \hspace{1cm} x
In the dim oil light
a man looks at the girl he had once married.\textsuperscript{47}

This dimness is expressed sometimes as "sad light" ("Girl Shopping in a
Department Store", \textit{ARoR}, p. 33) sometimes in terms of "lump of shadow"
("A Monsoon Day Fable", \textit{SP}, p. 56) or sometimes as "blackening silhouettes"\textsuperscript{48}
etc..

This permeating dimness is compounded further by the subtle presence
of fog and mist:

My silence here gives off no light,
a slow mist still fights the eye
for life's persistent symmetry,
\hspace{1cm} ("Dead River", \textit{SP}, p. 65)

The silence of Mahapatra's persona is not transcendental like that of Mehta's
persona. It does not impart any vision, rather it generates a dimness blurring
vision. In fact dimness buttressed by mist or fog provides a congenial subterfuge
to the poet-persona's "stagnant silence" ("A Sailboat of Occasions", \textit{SP}, p.
35). In fact silence in Indian English poetry is invariably existential, where
as in new Hindi poetry it is identified with the metaphysical state of attainment.
The silence in Mahapatra's poetry is a metaphor of uncertainty and scepticism;
it is "a language of clogs over the cobbles, casting/ its uncertain spell, trembling

The "Crouching silence" ("A Monsoon Day Fable", \textit{SP}, p. 56) sulking
under the sullen darkness generates more smoke than fire. The smoke rising from the funeral pyres fills the quiet spaces of his consciousness thus:

Smoke lurks in the distance
on the river bank,
where a lone funeral pyre
breathes quietly in the peepuls.
("Events", SP, p. 75)

The "Frail early light . . . breaks out of my [his] hide/ into the smoky blaze of a sullen solitary pyre." ("Dawn at Puri", SP, p. 14). Ash is the obvious end product of this smoke. This ash therefore further enriches the semantics of silence squatting under dimness. Ash as a metaphor of burnt-out hopes casts its gloomy shadow on the consciousness of Mahapatra's persona so much so that he starts believing:

All the poetry there is in the world
appears to rise out of the ashes.
The ash sits between us
and puts its arms across our shoulders.
It makes the world so emptily quiet.
For there is nothing like the ashes
to remind us how little there is to say.
("All the Poetry There Is", AWoB, p. 9)

In Mahapatra's poetry silence breeds stillness, immobility and inertia. Nothing agitates the poet-persona into any feverish activity. Of course, there are winds and river-currents in his poetry, but they are too feeble and languid to forebode any radical upheaval in his poetic cosmos. This wind only "carries the ash, the smoke, the odour/ which finally settles on the skin/ like the rain on the funeral grounds of summer ("The Wind", SP, p. 73). This wind is invariably "dark" ("A Dark Wind", AWoB, p.7), "dumb" ("Afternoon", AWoB, p. 10), "kiteless" ("Nakedness", AWoB, p. 7) and "sullen" that "stalks out/ even the restful dead in this country/ like the bleat of a metal detector ("A Sullen Balance", AWoB, p. 57). The river too does not enliven the poet-persona. "The river/ lies/ with the sullen dignity of an abandoned doll,/ used

Obviously such a poetry of saturnine brooding, stillness and "dying silence" ("The Indian Way", SP, p. 24) does not offer any liberating option. It is a poetry of stalemate and impasse.49

We would return again and again to the movement that is neither forward nor backward, and let the sun and moon take over trailing their substances and shadows.

The poet-persona admits the limitations of his poetic undertaking thus:

No use explaining that my life has involved me in delicate situations for which solutions could not be found. ("Silent in the Valleys", AWoB, p. 01)

Poetry turns into an exercise of vanity:

All night words of mine drift, nearing meaning but never finding it.

And that is all there is: the skeleton of their vanity never surprises me. ("The Time Afterward", AWoB, p. 40)

It is only in his AWoB that the poet-persona realizes the necessity of breaking the stalemate. In moment of self-reflexivity he asks: "What if we stand here in the middle of nowhere?" ("Another Love Poem", AWoB, p. 63). In his poem "Of a Questionable Conviction", he realizes the futility of musing over pain:

This is a man who talks of pain as though it belonged to him alone. Maybe he has invented it himself and made a virtue of it.

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Maybe he is a poet. (p.36)

The poetry which does not answer problems is only a "harmless pastime [which] never ruined anybody's sleep" (p.36)

Despite this late awareness of a need of political activism in poetry Mahapatra's persona does not offer ideological alternatives to salvage the decaying and disintegrating life. This rather non-committal\textsuperscript{50}, evasive and tacit approach lends both strength and weakness to his poetic reflections. Viewing from the perspective of modern Western aesthetics, his tendency to withdraw from reality after brooding over it is in harmony with the principles of creative objectivity\textsuperscript{51}. Devinder Mohan in his introductory chapter to his book on Mahapatra makes almost an identical observation thus:

\ldots In this context he is \ldots \textit{at par} with those European poets who are obsessed with modernistic impulse for man's finitude: his physiology, economics and culture \ldots The alternatives thus remain unexplored, unexperienced, unnamed. \ldots Thus the poetic enactment of human longing in Mahapatra's poetry does not lead to a quest for some ideal of permanence either in forms of nature as William Wordsworth perceives, or of selfless love which Walt Whitman experiences in human fellow-ship, rather in its very act, it becomes an enunciation of "unmediated vision" of the separated self.\textsuperscript{52}

In terms of approach, "Jayanta Mahapatra seems closer to the modernist movement of the first-half of this century with its open-ended literary forms and reliance on recurring symbols to provide coherence to non-linear, fragmented structures. Mahapatra's persona is an estranged, distanced, sensitive artist rather than an invisible or playfully prominent poet-modernist author"\textsuperscript{53}.

IX

Studied in the perspective of new Hindi poetry, the protagonist of modern
Indian English poetry is relatively more, tentative and uncertain. Rarely does he articulate his choices in clear, positive and emphatic terms. Eliot’s Prufrock continues to be the arch-model of this persona. From the empirical ethics of balance, doubt and open-endedness he moves to the subvertive and playful poetics of post-modernism evincing little faith in history, culture, politics and metaphysics. Ezekiel’s mundane humanism, Mahapatra’s empiricism and Ramanujan’s reverse romanticism are mutually co-extensive with each other. Their approaches overlap a great deal in as much as they improvise, caricaturize, subvert and overturn the hierarchy of values in favour of the ordinary and the average human being. The facetious improvisation of Ezekiel turns more and more serious and nasty; with Ramanujan it stays as a permanent strategy in form of mischievous subversion; and in Mahapatra it operates in a rather grim manner, subduing and taming the bright and the bold.

The protagonist of Hindi poetry meandering through the mist of romanticism and existentialism emerges as an aggressive social being committed to social change. His poetry is “poetry of moral anguish, aspiring to freedom, equality, justice, beauty, a new relationship among man, nature and society. It negates the negative, a moral stance all too evident in the various phases of modernism and post-modernism”. By way of comparison, the protagonist of Indian English poetry does express his disenchantment with the present socio-cultural set up but his protest does not go beyond this mild and urbane exposure of the social anomalies and aberrations. There is a definite evasion of stance. Committed to the modern ideals of empiricism, his poetry does not reveal ideological leanings aimed at social transformation(s). He hardly offers any alternative cultural construct or ideological paradigm to lift his poetry beyond mere criticism of life. Hindi protagonist has clear ideological choices without any fear of sounding political or polemical. This protagonist opts for purely aggressive socialism to all-encompassing Indian mysticism whereas his English counter-part continues to hanker after the Western ideal of empiricism or at best modern humanism.

Despite these obvious divergences, the protagonists of the two streams
of poetry share the evolutionary credo of our 'unfinished man'. Both seek to outgrow their narrow subjectivities though one succeeds in a greater measure than the other in this 'process' of outgrowing. The protagonist of new Hindi poetry like the protagonist of English poetry does not stop at mere recognition and awareness of contradiction of life, he seeks to transcend it either through awareness of contradictions of life, he seeks to transcend it either through socialism, Gandhianism or mysticism. The protagonist of English poetry does not go beyond the level of empirical analyses or observation, he does not develop any self-transcending vision to resolve the crises. Ezekiel's persona sums up this delimiting vision of this protagonist thus:

All I want now
is the recognition
of dilemma
and the quickest means
of resolving it
within my limits.

("Transparently", CP, p. 150)

So this protagonist grows to a state of recognizing dilemmas, and if at all he tends towards resolution, it is at best convenience contrived. The protagonist of Hindi poetry grows a step further of resolving these dilemmas through some self-transcending programme or ideology.

The direction of growth of both the protagonists is identical pointing to some sort of a future emancipation of the protagonist of English poetry. Such is the momentum of this direction that this protagonist at times jumps beyond the pressing concerns of expedience into the infinite zone of soul. In poems like "Tribute to Upanishads", "Minority Poem", "In the Theatre", "London" etc. Ezekiel's persona does reveal a metaphysical inclination that goes beyond the mere human. "The secret locked within the seed/ becomes my [his] need." (p.205) There erupts a "will to pass/ through the eye of a needle/ to self-forgetfulness" (p.236). He seeks to "act, create/ the script of the universal theatre" (p. 152). In his "struggle/ for and against the same/ creative, self-destructive self" he wants to "leave . . the fus, the clutter,/ the whole bag of 89
tricks, go into something so public and anonymous" (p.199). This urge for anonymity, nothingness embedded in the seed, self-forgetfulness etc., though upanishadic in its intent and direction, however it is not consistently present in his poetry. It appears very rarely underlining poetry's compulsive climax in mysticism, which no poet can check or control too long at the risk of growth of his self.

As suggested earlier, Jayanta Mahapatra also realizes the futility of juxtaposing cultured past with a de-cultured present. In his latest *AWoB* the poet-persona shows signs of political activism threatening the poise of this poetry of intellectual stalemate:

> Oh I am a poet who barks like a dog.  
> Open the window, I say, so I can breathe.  
> Let not my memory be like a tiger in ambush.  
> But there is this dangerously alive body  
> and only a baton or knife can tear it apart.  
> ("Death in Orissa", *AWoB*, p.31)

These are sure signs of poetical as well as political unrest auguring well for future growth of this empirical persona. The poet-persona now wants to "pause on the edge of a word/ before it is stranded like a poem/ which has never gone past its voice." ("The Rage in Those Young Eyes", *AWoB*, p.32.) There is a growing awareness of the impotency of a poetic endeavour which does not upset the system with its facile invention of pain thus:

> They all say he was a poet.  
> His eyes saw the pain in the mirror  
> that occupied him.  
> they didn't grudge him that  
> such a harmless pastime never ruined anybody's sleep.  
> ("Of a Questionable Conviction", *AWoB*, p.36)

This frustration of being harmless is a welcome sign of growth.

A. K. Ramanujan despite his subversion of some of the cardinal concepts of Hinduism, does also reveal his growing faith in Hindu metaphysics in some of the poems. In "Elements of Composition" for instance, the poet-
persona "even as I [he] add[s],/ lose[s], decompose[s]/ into my [his] elements,/ into other forms, / past and passing, tenses/ without time/ [like] caterpillar on a leaf, eating, being eaten" (p.123). "The persona understands the eternal circle of life and death and then rebirth in other forms. The concept of zero with its connotations of a whole appears twice in his poems. In the zone of zero "the eye looks, cannot see anything/ but currents of vapor/ curling/ in the transparency: / the ear listens, cannot hear . . ." (*At Zero*, *CP(R)*, p. 200). These metaphysical spills are inevitable to a sustained poetic effort. No wonder, had Ramanujan survived for some more time, his poetry would have grown maturer and serious.

The protagonists of both the streams of poetry are unfinished men as both remain in the process of becoming. The only difference is that in this process, the protagonist of Hindi poetry stands at a higher pedestal than that of Indian English poetry who hovers more around the zone of rational against the supra-rational of the protagonist of Hindi poetry. So both the protagonists are converging towards the same destination of attainment, and self-realization however, one lags behind the other with back-runner revealing immense future possibilities of catching with the fore-runner. These possibilities are not remote or baseless, as already shown at times the trio of Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Mahapatra despite its clear empiricist leanings, does show signs of unrest and dissatisfaction pointing towards the future growth of its persona.
Notes


2. Ibid., p. 12.


6. "In Sarveshwar there is a conflict between existentialism and socialism, in the beginning this conflict is dormant, but gradually it becomes acute and it appears that finally socialism attains a revolutionary edge ending the influence of existentialism." — Nand Kishor Naval, Samkaleen Kavyayatra (New Delhi: Kitab Ghar, 1994), p.62.

7. “In Hindi, existentialism is an anarchic movement . . . . The existentialists of Hindi . . . have this fallacy that they are working towards the revolution of Hindi poetry. In this creative process of evolution, sometimes they rate themselves higher than Tulsi Das or Shakespeare, sometimes in moments of self-realization, they feel the futility of their efforts and they say. 'We all are dwarfed beings.'" — Ramvilas Sharma, Nai Kavita

8. "Near '50s, in the initial phase of new poetry, after my marriage, an encounter with the reality of life had begun and the problems had changed. To quite an extent romanticism had withered. The capability to link the frustrations and failures of personal life with the social contexts evolved gradually . . . " — Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena, "Interview" to Archana Sharma, Aajkal, Sept. 1980, p.13.

9. 'Storm(s)' is one of the major motifs of Sarveshwar's later poetry:

   i. Hanging from the peg
      for so long
      I too feel the urgency of
      a dark storm
      all-powerful earthquake.

      ("Coat", Khoontiyon, p.23)

   ii. Wrapped in dark storms
      one yellow face —
      my sorrow.

      (Epigraph to Sookha, K-II, p.122)

10. Here are two examples of Sarveshwar's attitude towards 'ice' in his later poems:

   i. One block of ice above me,
      one block of ice below me,
      one block of ice to my right,
      one block of ice to my left,
      but I don't know what type of fire it is
      that it is never extinguished.

      (An epigraph to Kuano Nadi)

   ii. I want to melt
      this river of ice.

      ("Pattiyon ki Dongiyan", K-II, p.11)

11. There are a number of poems on 'war'. The titles of some of them are:
   "O Yuddh Bhumi Mein Ladne Vale Sainik", "Sipahiyon Ka Geet", "Baby
ka Tank”, “Yuddh ke Naam Par” etc..


15. Dr. Rajendra Mohan Bhatnagar, Dr. Lohia: Vyaktitava aur Krititava, p.187.


18. "The poet had clear realization that poetry is a journey from inside to outside. Therefore tossing poetry as slogans and winning accolades is not the proper use of poetry. Poetry is put to right use when after knowing rightly about something, it connects it with the people at large" — Dr. Snehlata Pathak, "Sahaj Jeevan Ke Kavi: Bhavani Prasad Mishra", AajKal, Sept. 1992, p.27.


21. Dr. Krishandutt Paliwal, “Introduction” to Toos, not paginated.

22. Was I not able enough to become PM years before? — ask history.
But for a revolution-crazy man like me only some other options were meaningful,
paths of sacrifice, service and construction,
paths of struggle, of total revolution
were my chosen paths . . . . — Jai Prakash, “Mere Jeevan”
quoted in Sudhanshu Ranjan’s Jai

23. In the Yeatsian scheme the solar principle stands for total objectivity.
In the following poem, J. P. replaces the sun as the source of light thus:

This day
I have borrowed
more from you
than from the sun.
That’s why
I have given your light
to this night
and not of a lamp
till it’s day
And when morning dawned
your name came to my lips
with a gratefulness —
Jaiprakash. — Bhavani Prasad Mishra, “Smaran-shakti” in
Trikaal Sandhya (New Delhi: Rajpal & Sons,
1978), p.103. Hence-forth the collection is referred to as Trikaal.


25. Bhavani Prasad Mishra, “Do Anubhav” in Parivartan Jiye (Delhi: Sarla


27. Naresh Mehta, “Prarthana-purusha” in Utsava (Allahabad: Lokbharati
Prakashan, 1979), pp.91-92.


30. Neither Lohia, nor J. P. stimulates the political consciousness of Indian English poets. Even Gandhi is conspicuous by his absence in the mainstream Indian English poetry, except for two poems on Gandhi by Jayanta Mahapatra.


34. "We also observe an undue use of irony and satire (does this follow too from the British poets?) — the sly leer in the poem, which goes contrary to the Indian character and makes it simply effective caricature." — Jayanta Mahapatra, "The Inaudible Resonance in English Poetry in India", The Literary Criterion, Vol. XV, No. 1, 1980, pp.34-35.

35. What type of monotonous life it is
never does a cloud overcast it
nor does frost fall on it
nor does a thorn prick it!

You come
or send some great agony
such a joyless life bereft of either tragedy or comedy
is not desired! — Bhavani Prasad Mishra, “Nahin Chahiye” in
Chakit hai Dookh (Allahabad: Abhivyakti
Prakashan, 1968), pp.19-20. Hence-forth the
collection is referred to as Chakit.

36. I close the door and sit alone
in kinship with the world.
I am near everybody
being near myself alone. — Nissim Ezekiel, “Happening”,

CP, p.164.

p.5. Hence-forth the collection is referred to as CP(R).


Ramanujan’s The Striders” in Aspects of Indian Writing in English, ed.
M. K. Naik (Delhi: MacMillan, 1979), p.120.

40. P. K. J. Kurup, Contemporary Indian Poetry in English (New Delhi:
as CIPE.

41. Jayanta Mahapatra, “All the Poetry There is” in A Whiteness of Bone
(Viking India, 1992), p.9. Hence-forth the collection is referred to as
AWoB.

42. “His is a poetry of the isolated, rather than the alienated self, a poetry
of silence and solitudes, a poetry in which energy is not expended in
the narrative but in contemplation. As I have written elsewhere:
Mahapatra is a melancholic, ruminating modern day dervish, dancing almost in slow motion, his eye taking in every sombre tint, his mind focussed on memory . . . . " — Keki N. Daruwalla, "The Pain that Moves the Bell", *Poetry Review*, 83, No.1, Spring 1993.


This is a barren world that has been
prowling round my room, epidemics in the posioned air.
dusty streets, stretching away like disgruntled socialists —

Jayanta Mahapatra, "The Twentieth Anniversary of a


48. If a sorrow survives me,
it only blackens the silhouettes of other men. —

Jayanta Mahapatra, "In the Fields of Desolate Rice" in *Selected Poems* (Delhi: OUP, 1987), p.58. Hence-forth the collection is referred to as *SP*.

49. G. N. Devy Discovers "a landscape of return" in his poetry. He writes: "Mahapatra's poems often . . . turn in on themselves in such a
manner that their form becomes the meaning with which they are haunted. The circularity of Mahapatra’s poems mirrors, it seems, the confines of our ‘post-cultural’ existence, in which nothing happens that can outshine the past, nothing that can free us from the dark shadows of the past that secretly conspire against us.” — "The Landscape of Return", *PJM*, p.141.

50. “His is a poetry of non-comment, poetry that centres around silence.” — *Ibid*.

51. The poet, however, is not happy with this objectivity thus: “I feel the same way about my writing; my so-called objective language, only, pathetically reveals my very indifference. How has such an indifference crept in to my writing without my being aware of it? . . . . Perhaps I am unable to judge my own humanity; or if I am able to see it, it is only up to a point . . . .” — Jayanta Mahapatra, “The Inaudible Resonance in English Poetry in India”, p.29.


54. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes that these poets have come to "settle for 'small scale', the satiric, the ironic, the anti-romantic, the anti-spiritual, or opt for the Freudian fascination for the libdos, the diseased preoccupation with the putrid gutter of the dark unconscious, the fatefuly irresistible impulse to foul one's nest be it one's own country, one's village with its temples, tanks and river, or one's home and family and household gods, or the irrational urge to tarnish diminish destroy rather than to heighten, greaten and create" — "Indian Poetry in English: Yesterday — Today — Tomorrow", p.16.

56. J. Birje-Patil comments on the aesthetic and ethical mode of Ezekiel's poetry along the same lines thus: "Ezekiel's voice grows more ironic and detached as he develops, and one notices a distinct tilt toward social concern. Though never expressed stridently or programmatically . . . ." — "Interior Cadences: The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel", The Literary Criterion, Vol. XII, No. 2&3, 1976, p.199.