CHAPTER V

R.C. SHUKLA AS A POET

His Life and Works

R. C. Shukla was born on April 07, 1943 in a middle class family. His father Dr. Tulsi Ram, a renowned vocalist, was an author of various books on Indian classical music. His mother Premavati Shukla was a religious lady. Since Tulsi Ram Shukla was not interested in the ancestral occupation of agriculture, they settled at Aligarh where Tulsi Ram found his job as a music teacher in Aligarh Muslim University. But owing to the serious illness of his mother Premavati Shukla, the family shifted to Mooradabad where his maternal grandparents lived. R. C. Shukla graduated and also gained master degree in English literature from K.G.K. College, Moradabad.

Having served at various places as lecturer in English, R. C. Shukla joined English Department in same college. He retired as Head of Department in 2003. Shukla married to Bharti Shukla, the daughter of a freedom fighter and director of Gandhi Ashram, in 1966.

R. C. Shukla started writing poetry in Hindi in the year 1966. He has written about one hundred songs including a long verse of more than one thousand lines on Marignany and Mrigchhala. However, he has not published any collection of his Hindi poetry. R. C. Shukla switched over to English towards the end of the last century. Such a late start is not only surprising but meaningful also. His flair for poetry was inspired by the works of literary giants he savored as a teacher of English literature. He says about his creativity:
Since I have taught English literature for a very pretty long time, the language does not appear to me something alien so far as the creative idiom is concerned I am guided by my imagination which welcomes the English back ground as much it welcomes that of Hindi.¹

There is great impact of English literature on his writing since he has studied and taught for a very long time. In the beginning of the collection *A Belated Appearance* he says about ‘the author’:

The poet’s apprehensions about his flair for poetry were, to a great extent, allayed by the adumbration of Sir John Masefield and Edmund Blunden in the first half of the sixties.

The poet was influenced by William Shakespeare, John Milton, Thomas Hardy and Max Muller. In India he was most influenced by Sant Kabir, Gautan Budha, Sarat Chandra Chatterji and Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar.²

Seven collections of his poetic creation have been published so far – (i) *Darkness at Dawn* (1990); (ii) *Belated Appearance* (2000); (iii) *Depth and Despair* (2001); (iv) *My Poem Laugh* (2001); (v) *The Parrot Shrieks I* (2003); (vi) *The Parrot Shrieks II* (2005); (vii) *The Parrot Shrieks III* (2008).

The very first collection of his poetry *Darkness at Dawn* contains forty three poems. The poems in this collection reveal the harsh realities of man’s destiny, anxieties and agony that govern life. They have a feeling of estrangement, a haunting sense of inferiority and disappointment. They present dismaying picture of indifference and infidelity. The poems in this collection denote an agony of dying
consciousness, falling humanity and loss of human values etc. The poet calls them ‘Exploration of Reality’. According to his experience, there is no escape from grief and frustration.

Such disappointments as have been exemplified through my verses are caused by desertion by men we crave to consider our own. A good number of my poems dwell upon the subject of love which is bound to end in failure.

The initiation of his poetic career is a strong foundation on which R.C. Shukla has created the magnificent edifice of his poetry.

The second collection, A Belated Appearance published by Writer’s Workshop, Calcutta, consists of eighty three poems. The poems included in this volume were written between 1985-90. The poems chiefly reflect the agony caused by love as prevalent in the contemporary society. He finds that this love is not a source of human fulfillment, rather a mundane appeasement of senses consequently arousing a lot of desperation. The poems stimulate the reader to some serious thinking by showing acute realities of life. Predicament of man is that he plans his future and is quite unaware of elapsing the time. The central idea of poems in this collection is that the man, who has never wept, cannot understand the meaning of life.: Depth and Despair again published by Writer’s Workshop, Calcutta contains one hundred seventy seven poems. In the very beginning of this collection the poet talks about the evocative process of putting his thoughts into verbal mould. He says that his poems are neither a pure outlet of his fancy nor experience but they are divine benediction. He has deeply pondered over the problems of world, but the poetic influx
is completely God’s design. This collection shows the characteristic expression and thought of the poet. The blows from the society, the indifferences of the authority, the blocks of isolation in man have obsessed the poet’s mind.

*My Poems Laugh* published by Writers Forum Ranchi, contains one hundred poems. This collection is dedicated to Shri Gyanendra Sharma whom he reveres as an illustrious solicitor, a great moralist and nationalist and from whom he received affection, care and inspiration to get this collection published. It brings out as the preface itself shows, the shams and shackles of the society, the corruption and double standard of its people.

His famous trilogy on love *The Parrot Shrieks* published by Writers Workshop, Calcutta consists of more than three hundred fifty poems. It holds up the intricacies of man-woman relationship, the mood of frustration and desperation. The poems in these collections are scrupulous expression of what poet has seen and experienced around him. Hardly any other Indian poet has so far, written on the single theme of man-woman relationship which is both optimistically rewarding and also pathetically depressing. The prominent feature of this Trilogy is the complexity of this relationship. The poet thinks love as sublime activity which regularly helps in the growth of two personalities. In this regard R. C. Shukla scrutinises the very vein of man-woman relationship. He is very close to peep into the mental barriers of man and woman that consequently mar the bliss of life. The poet believes that love ennobles human life. He has observed the human life at different angles and expressed the intricacies of man-
woman relationship. He has also written on the subject of alienation. R. C. Shukla is a poet of deeper human aspects than what are perceived at casual glance. He has disclosed the harsh realities of life by peeping into the heart of the humanity around him.

The Themes of His Poetry

R. C. Shukla’s poetry is extremely reflective. He has laid emphasis on the degeneration of females, the obsession of men and corruption in contemporary society. He has revealed loneliness, dejection and frustration. His poetry is the outcry of his heart. Like any other poet he has a vision of life for vision is essential to create supreme imagination. It enables him to see the variegated forms of life and the poet in R. C. Shukla sees life from humanistic point of view. He is a poet who philosophies life and its nuances from various facets; it becomes evident in first volume *Darkness at Dawn*. A thorough browsing makes the reader feel that he regards poetry as the expression of deep emotions generated by experience and the poet has the capability to do that. Shukla’s approach is entirely human. The major themes that persistently haunt his poetry are man-woman relationship, death and despair. R. C. Shukla has thrown light on these aspects of life very minutely. He has disclosed the realities of contemporary society. In the Exegesis of his collection *Darkness at Dawn* he says:

The subject matter of my poetry, in general, is the harshness of man’s lot, the anxiety and the pain that lie at the heart of life.
Man-Woman Relationship

Writers from time immemorial have penned man-woman relationship from their own perspective. It is perhaps the most discussed yet most perplexed theme which renews itself each time. R. C. Shukla has observed the universal relationship from varied dimensions. Indeed, man-woman relationship is the unit of individual and social life, hence it has been one of the central themes of the poet’s world and occupies a dominant place in the poems.

The collection *The Parrot Shrieks* brings out the essential relationship between man and woman with all intricacy of the moods, joy and fulfillment, hate and rejection, frustration and desperation. The collection reflects the subtleties of most primary relationship, yet the sense of belongingness have been hinted with utmost delicacy in the poems. He replied very frankly on this:

I must say one thing more. My poems on man-woman relationship are different from what other poets have written. These poems are a great effort to understand the psychology of the woman. They are at the same time metaphysical in their meanings.\(^5\)

R. C. Shukla, undoubtedly is one of the greatest poets of love in Indian English literature. The treatment of love is his most original contribution. His love poems are rarely simple lyrical cry. He is not a poet of passionate feelings but of psychology of passions. His deep psychological interest leads him to the delineation of complexity of love. His love poetry deals with the physical and spiritual aspects of love. In his delineation he does not hesitate to represent love which defies conventions and customs. His poetry arouses the memory of
that moment of love when ordinary and small things acquire special significance and special glow. His love poetry exalts love as it is analysed. It combines the mystic exaltation with psychologist’s cool penetrating scrutiny. As he describes in the poem “It Was a Bolt of Chance”.

I love you
Not because you are ravishing
There are so many
Possessing fragrance
And shall be thankful
For the adjectives I have.6

Here poet has negative attitude towards love; he echoes the negative feeling as love always gives birth to pain and is never fulfilled. The romantic love is momentary and never reaches its summit. The poet says in the poem “The Sun Never Rises in the Sky of Love”.

The sun never rises in the sky of love
It is the glow worms
That casually blink
While the poor creature
Sustains or crumbs
On pity, on sympathy
On false tears
And meaningless, handsome assurances
That never grow young.7

It differs man to man. R. C. Shukla is a poet of individuals, particularly of women. He believes that individuals differ from one another by their environment, culture, nature, temperament and emotional balance etc. In spite of common feelings of love, hate, anger, desires to rise and grow; no two individuals are alike in love,
hate etc. The reactions of one are quite different from those of another as he says in the poem “You are not Different from them”.

But, but
You are not different from them
The persons who are confined to their wounds.
You have no time to walk into my hell
Nor the grit to embrace my anguish. 8

Not only human beings but animals also have instinctive feelings of love. The peacocks dance when sexual instinct arises in them. The leaves of trees also touch each other amorously. R. C. Shukla attaches overriding importance to love in all living beings. Love finds its own way and has spontaneity. As he expresses in his poem “Sex is Not Cohabitation Alone”.

The pigeon touch each other’s beak
And two penguins bathe in waters
Afterwards dance and chirp
This is sex. 9

According to R. C. Shukla love acts in enigmatic way. Love has become a riddle. The Parrot Shricks describes the ambiguity in love and its nature. In the poem, “Charity is Not the Name of Love”, the poet explicitly eulogises love and stresses the importance of soul which makes love complete. So also the poem “Romantic Love is not Different” shows poet’s cynical attitude to love, he scarcely believes in the very relationship.

Love
The dreamy deceptive relationship
Between a man and woman
Not living as spouses
Is a delusion
A hallucination. 10
Love is seen as hallucination, delusion, deception etc. There are number of poems which portray the enigmatic ambiguity of lovers. In this sense R. C. Shukla has an affinity with other English and Indian English poets. For most of the poets believe in the sense of indeterminacy because it is the rule of the world. Love is an illusion in extra-marital relationship. Love leads to havoc but a romantic dreamer is not aware of it.

Love, a man’s obsession for his woman,
Is an illusion blinking from heaven
About which
The romantic dreamer knows little.\(^{11}\)

The poet is fully aware that love is not an illusion nor an obsession. Love is a thing to be cherished with utmost care, a longing brought up with tolerance and patience. The irony of man-woman relationship is overt and it is quite straight-forward which brings out the essential sensibility and passion of the poet. The poet sometimes finds himself bewildered by the intricacy and hollowness of woman. In the age of indeterminacy the poet finds it difficult to avoid fluctuation. He is not certain about the exact words that can define a woman. Woman has become a riddle for him and the complexities of love can not be solved; sometime he believes in physicalism and sometime in spiritualism as he replies telling the reality of love and his faith:

I have no faith in Platonic love because love is based on some physical realities. It does not prosper through the vagaries of fancies.\(^{12}\)

But he can not defy its indomitable force. It is as fire, storm and has devastating power. He believes that power of love invests the soul
with main motivating force. Being affected with love, the human soul rises to height. In a selfish and sensual man, it raises a fire of misery. The fire may lead man to an action related to the sexual side of love. In a noble temper, love raises the soul to ideal heights. The passion of lover reigns supreme in all its intensity with all its sensual aspects. He says:

While talking of romantic love I keep in my mind the instinctive demands of a man and woman. Although ethically it is wrong to go for an extra-marital relationship it can not be denied that such a craving is present both in man and woman.\textsuperscript{13}

In the poem “Sex is Not Cohabitation Alone”, the poet focuses on sex that has become the central issue of man-woman relationship. It is not only cohabitation, rather it is a rare thing for those who know the art. It is proclivity, a symptom and the prologue but not exclusively the deed. The poet denounced the post modern concept of sex wherein partner weakly or so is a matter not to be reckoned. The concluding lines of poem demonstrate the artificiality of sex as purchased in this computer age.

\begin{quote}
Sex is proclivity, and symptom
An expression of mood, of intent
It is a prologue to the epic of love
Not exclusively the deed
Which is pure need.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

The poet has not denounced the sex but its motto must be comprehended by those who practise it. It is not only the deed but a prologue to the epic of love which generates the sex. Here satire is very overt and points to those people who have unlimited sex and for
whom sex becomes the only symbol of love. The poet has disclosed the harsh reality of it. Insistence on or deviation into sex is a sign of man’s chaotic mental state and a sign of decaying values. R. C. Shukla describes the acute genuineness of sex in man-woman relationship. As he says in his poem “You Poured Honey into my Days”.

You said
The pot of honey is it with you
You stole some for me
But would not replay the act
Between the owner of the pot and you
There’s a pact.  

There are highly sensuous descriptions of human body and love-making in the bed in his poems. His treatment of sex, love and charm of female body is characterised by extreme frankness. This has exposed him to the charge of being a poet of female organs wallowing in sex. The charge is superficial and unjust. He is neither Platonist nor romantic dreamer nor does he reject the claim of body. R. C. Shukla, constantly urges to transcend, rise and travel beyond merely physical gratification. Romantic love is passionate, intense, impatient and adventurous sometime to the extent of being reckless. Not only the psychological graph of human character but their externals are also described meticulously. Emotions are presented delicately. He describes what the woman of today wants. The poet has explored sexual love in all its myriad forms and varieties but always there is an attempt to transcend the physical act of sex and transform it into something nobler and higher. Love is not only an individual consideration but a great matter of social and ethical jurisdiction. The poet has taken into account a number of adjectives, in which love is
defined. The barriers of caste, community, poverty etc. have a decisive role to play in the fate of lovers. As he says in the poem “Romantic Love is not Different from an Illusion”.

Who has not seen
Romantic love is often slain
By the sword of caste
Assassinated by dagger of community?......
But we often see the example of senseless love
Restless love
Rootless love
Fatuous love
Idiotic love
And they all are bound to collapse.16

Few of his poems depict the frailty of woman, their role in extra-marital relationship and commercialisation of their charms. Moral corruption of the contemporary society worries him. He writes in the poem “Commerce”:

There are women
Not interested in husbands
They love only nights
And enter into contracts
That naturally expire.17

But his outlook is not partial, he considers the problem from humanistic point of view more from psychological presence rather than sheer sense of pleasure. He replied emphatically again in interview when he was asked about extra-marital relationship.

Although ethically it is wrong to go for an extra-marital relationship, it can not be denied that such craving is present both in man and woman.18
R. C. Shukla inscribes in the same vein the futility of extra-marital relationship as a type of tragic romance that overwhelms the so-called love. This tragic romance results only in hallucination and delusion. It is nothing but only the evocation of erotic desire. The fascination is proved only deceptive, dreamy and meaningless. The genuine speculation of the poet shows his maturity of observation and experience. He depicts every possible facet and variety of his experience in the relationship. There is deeper and deeper exploration of the instinct. It creates the tension between two poles of physical and spiritual, the respective claims of body and soul. The extra-marital love complicates and demoralises the instinct. Love is the prime source of inspiration and supreme joy of life but it is followed by frustration and disillusionment. Romance is soon replaced by harsh reality, the woman no longer remains a deity but soon transforms into a creature of flesh and blood with her own whims and caprices. The wife is different from beloved and bride. The so-called lovers are more carnal in their fulfillment. Wife cannot take the place of beloved. Lover hops from one beloved to another like beetle in search of nectar. The tone in the poem “All Women are Islands”, is awfully ironical:

I’m sorry  
Inspite of my love  
Inspite of my promise  
I can not confine myself to you  
You are important, no doubt  
But not the final end of life.  

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Both man and woman are in fact, deceiving each other consciously and intentionally. It happens simply in order to win the maximum possible response from woman while the woman does so because she does not want to disappoint the man who has gratified her vanity and her ego. Frustrations and disillusionments voiced with disarming frankness of the poet have therapeutic purpose.

R. C. Shukla has exposed the acute wants of modern woman in all its complexity but there is an attempt to transcend the physical act to transform it into something spiritual, something nobler and higher. The woman of today wants to have her own ends. She wants her physical and psychological urge to be satisfied. Physical gratification can easily be obtained; it is only emotional fulfillment that is difficult to find. As he says in his poem “The Woman Does Not like One Who Waits”:

A Woman employs her youth  
For advantages  
She desires to be won  
Also defeated by a man  
The woman does not like  
One who waits  
She aspires for the gallant  
Who can possess her pillar  
Lift her and take home  
One hesitant and shy is disdained. \(^{20}\)

The poet sometimes finds himself unable to ascertain what can appeal a woman or what can be delisted when she will surrender her complete self and when she will keep reserves.
No final word can be uttered about her
She is intricate like fate
Knotty, enigmatic
She is a woman
Nothing less, nothing more
An empty basket
A wholesome store.\textsuperscript{21}

The last two lines are paradoxical which show the nature of woman in modern terminology. The trauma through which he experiences life; its curve, vicissitude, the rare delicacy of the very relationship and its warmness and coolness give it infinite appeal.

Billowed bosoms and fleshy hips
Are the harbours it longs to touch
They are indiscreet
Who talks of soul
Fragrance of skin
Is man’s goal.\textsuperscript{22}

The image of ‘billowed bosom’ and ‘fleshy hips’ itself symbolises the glamour, the showiness of things where sanity, wisdom and health are missing. So also the predicament of woman, the futility of relationship, the paradox of human existence and sensibility have been hinted through satirical touch in the poem “The Enamouring You Are But Never Discreet”. It shows the tendency of the so called sophisticated ladies of the society.

Enamouring you are
But never discreet
You pamper people
Who approach you with designs
Insidious has been your style
For the person who pines.\textsuperscript{23}
R. C. Shukla’s vision of woman is largely paradoxical. At times she appears as a longing, passionate, moral creature, the vein of life and another time the feminine self becomes an instrument of treachery and deception. The poem discloses the real hypocrisy, sham and vanity of so called modern woman who believes in style:

    The woman in love offers words
    Sweet, honeyed words
    Brings sweet symptoms from
    Her purse
    Becomes sober
    Also ridicules
    Laugh thoughtlessly
    Curses the fate
    And closes.24

Literature is the mirror of the society. It reflects the social, political and economical conditions prevailing in the society. His chief concern is to highlight the instability of modern woman the way they rapidly shift and assume new postures, new attitude of defence, attack, explanation or celebration. The modern women are endowed with the feelings of alienation. His poems are situated neither in the act of sex nor in feelings of love, they are instead involved with the self and its varied, often conflicting emotions, ranging from the desire for security and intimacy to the assertion of the ego, self dramatisation and feelings of shame and depression. A woman seeks refuge from an uncaring husband. As he says in his poem “You Were Never Cordial to My Calls”.

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You were never cordial to my calls
Never attended my rituals
Never cooled my walls
Yet there was a hope
That a prolonged discipline
A trust worthy promise
Might break
The false nature of a covenant
But it all faltered.  

Endowed with psychological insight, he is regarded to be an inquisitive investigator of the nature and the by-ways of the human experience. He analyses the elements of his inner conflicts, desires, frustration etc. He has comprehended the psychology of woman. She safeguards her own self and never allows her to be swayed by this passion to the extent of total absorption. The poet is not perplexed by the argument of true or false, physical or spiritual and marital or extra-marital love. He has only focused on the experience of the various psychological aspects of love in the relationship. In the poem “When I Watch You from Distance”, he asserts.

Sitting face to face
You excite the sense
And turn fancy into a horse
That runs fast
And halts only when bridled
By the reality that laughs. 

R. C. Shukla is unconventional, realistic and philosophical in this delineation of love. There are great descriptions of physical as well as psychological and spiritual attractions in his love lyrics. They are the expressions of different moods that a contemporary lover experiences
in his life. For him love becomes lust when it is accomplished with physical urges only. His love lyrics reveal the ever-changing and vague nature of passion which is too ideal to be attained in real life. They are not so much addressed to a particular woman as to an ideal or vision. He tries to comprehend the nature of love with the analogy of wine. As he says in the prefatory notes of *The Parrot Shrieks-I*:

> Romantic love, as I have been able to conclude, is a cool river in which every man and woman is fervent to swim. This love is as much as nightmare as a reality. To indulge in romance, at any stage of life, is like sipping wine with an expectation of being transported to a more beautiful world but the same tempting wine may prove hazardous too and even a small quantity of only one beaker, on account of its bitterness, may be responsible for a very uncomfortable giddiness resulting in vomiting after which the parson may take a pledge never to taste the same again.\(^{27}\)

The poet has comprehended the instinctive demand of love. His poetry is filled with the portrayal of individualised pictures of persons with their idiosyncrasies and strongly marked exceptional traits. He is the poet of originality and remarkable vigour, a genius of astonishing fertility and capacity for invention and thought. His poems are spontaneous outbursts of a guttering intellect and spiritual hopefulness. He is a poet of contemporary era who exemplifies the tendencies of modern era. He does not only use ideal imagery but uses the grotesque and realistic details to express sublime emotion. He has thoroughly expressed the true essential, the insatiable instinctive demand of love and realism of passion.
Death and Despair

Another prominent thematic axis on which R. C. Shukla’s poetic wheel revolves is Death and Despair. He has disclosed the heart touching realities of life in the volume Depth and Despair. The title suggests the very theme of gloom that affected heart and mind of the poet. The devastating power of gloom and loneliness is evident in these poems. Poet’s own frustration in which he lived in his boyhood lies in the background of these poems. In the Exegesis of the volume Darkness at Dawn, he says:

The subject matter of my poetry, in general, is the harshness of man’s lot, the anxiety and the pain that lie at the heart of life.  

R. C. Shukla can be termed as a poet philosopher. He has investigated the nature of life, soul, God, death and despair. By means of his deep study in various philosophies both of the East and the West he has cultivated his notion of life and death. Death is inevitable truth of life. The poem “Death Every Day Knocks at Your Door” makes us feel the poet’s stark realism.

Death every day knocks at your door  
But goes to somebody else  
This is why  
You are at ease to see  
Your regularly beating pulse.

The poet has personified death here. It knocks but its detour makes us feel at ease. The beating pulse will be no more if the knocks end into entrance. It is symbolic because it presents life with the poet’s all
pervading gloom. It seems that death is the major thought which has preoccupied the poet’s mind. The poem expressively shows the sense of frustration, the pathos and the omnipotent power of death.

The same deceased sensibility of the poet is reflected when he says with deep sigh in the poem “Our Life is a Drama of Acts Five”.

We are all tragic heroes in our own way
Have our hamartia
For which we suffer
And cause a catharsis
With the sad end of a tale
The man, who was rosy and red
Is ultimately pale.  

The poet has analysed death in Aristotelian term. The predicament of ‘We’ culminates into ultimate end. Of course we have Hamartia, the error of judgement, but is the perspective through which the poet visualises the people around him is important. The prime youth will ultimately decay as the poet suggests by the words rosy, red, pale but ultimately it is the law of nature, the decorum of cosmos and its network, the inevitable truth to which we have to surrender. But to the poet it is frustrating, some what undesirable. Perhaps poet’s optimism has thrust him to utter gloom here and that is why the simple phenomena, the lacuna of man, becomes the be-all and end-all of his philosophy of death. These poems are heavily weighed down with the sense of inevitability of death which renders him to largely pessimistic.
In the debate between life and death, death is visualised as impetuous, haughty and arrogant against life which is pictured as patient and meek. The poet looks death from diverse angles. He sometime calls death the ‘mother’ of life. It has every right to snatch the child at her wish. One should be ready to leave this earthly stage anytime. In the poem “The Ritual”, he says:

    Hence,
    We should all keep our luggage ready
    Before the train is announced to come
    A journey back home
    Is a ritual we can not resist
    Beyond the duration can no man exist.31

The theme of death is prevailing throughout. He seems to expose his own frustration through the poems.

The poem “Death and Life” questions the very existence. It questions the worthiness of life and compares and contrasts the two eternal truths to which human being surrenders. It offers us to think what life and death actually are. Like Swami Vivekanand who lectured in Chicago in this context. We are in the midst of life and death. R. C. Shukla thinks that both life and death are the truth of nature. Through the metaphor of mother and daughter, he tries to suggest the relation between life and death in the poem “Death and Life”.

    If death is truth
    What is life?
    A fancy, a dream, an illusion ?
    No
    It’s not a question
    Of distinction between one and the other
Life is a daughter
While death her mother
The mother comes
And takes the daughter away
It’s a matter between the two
Why should we bother who is who?\(^{32}\)

Like Buddha he also says death is the cycle that will lead to the liberation of the soul. The poems in the volume *Depth and Despair* very explicitly speak of the influence of Buddhism. The very first stanza of the poem “Is Yearning the Only Feature of Life” illustrates thus:

> If, even for a day,
> We can ponder like Buddha
> Or ruminate like Kabir
> We shall very easily understand
> The futility of the truth that
> This life is all
> Nothing beyond this.\(^{33}\)

Nothingness of the world and its futility have been hinted out by the poet in the terminology of Buddha and Kabir. They have become the symbols to the poet to comprehend the materialistic world. And even a common reader will understand the motif of the poet behind these lines.

Death is the inevitable truth of life. No miracle can undo it. The elegiac note pervading throughout his works is personal. It was hinted by the poet himself during an interview. Despair is the most prominent feature and the root cause of burden, gloom, isolation and frustration in the later part of his life and career. This very phenomena
is the result of the unfavourable experiences at youth. Isolation made him the poet of despair. It is the condition when an individual feels separated from the main stream of life. *My Poems Laugh* and *Depth and Despair* show how the poet was actually shocked, grieved in his childhood when he had been thrust into adverse circumstances. He tells that his poems are not his fancy but his experience, observation and anxieties of life. He describes in the poem “How I Compose My Poems”:

I survey the entire scene of agony including my own
Beside the general drama of human predicament.
But I am not saint, no philosopher…
I’m simply a poet, a modest poet
Who undergoes anguish to see how distress and suffering
Have usurped our peace in a society
Overtaken by chaos.
My super-sensitivity is my instrument
With which I can visualize the pangs of others.\(^\text{34}\)

During the heavy shock at the very beginning of his young age from his father and the consequences there after are significant to be noted. It was the period when the poet was roaming in dejection and isolation and it was also the period of his writing. All the youthful experiences and adverse circumstances led the poet to write poetry of despair. In addition to this the poet witnessed the scenes of human despair and lacerating wounds on account of inhuman attitudes and the decline human values around him. The poem “Announcement” specially draws our attention for it portrays the true and naked experiences of his youth, the despair and isolation at its root.
Lost in conversation with my guardian
My own despair
I was writing a word on the wall
A word
To mortify loneliness
That a knock was heard at the door
Who is it that wants me at such an hour of night?\(^{35}\)

The sense of despair and futility is very clear in these lines which amply prove the actual state of the poet in his very youth. On being asked to tell any incident of his young age, the poet recollected personal humiliation and suppression by his own father.

When I was studying in M.A. (previous, English) I asked my father to arrange some private coaching for me. At this he gave me a beating I can never forget in my life.\(^{36}\)

R. C. Shukla was an obedient son, extremely industrious. It was the callousness of a father with his son. He was shocked by this incident; his youthful notions were shattered at large. His dreams were crushed. This incident also led the poet to be great introvert. He never commented afterwards whether it was a family lesson or any other issue related with life around him. The sense of introversion finds fine outlet later in the form of poetry.

Promised a prize, getting penance
He threw away his papers and the pen
When thought itself refuses the thing I need
What are to me these verses then?
And thus ended the story of his art
As this the world where the best is bad?
Then live not here to see your death
Leave your temptations and go away lad.\(^{37}\)
The poet finds the world intolerable due to rampant corruption and indifference. It is one side of the coin with which the poet’s mind is mostly pre-occupied. The climatic point of the frustration is revealed in the poem “A Tragic Tale”.

A tragic tale it is
Here with hands at your heart…
This unbearable life
I cannot live
From whom received
To him would give.38

To conclude Shukla is a poet of suffering consciousness. He hates the world which is devoid of true idea of liberty, tolerance, justice and love between man and woman. He has poured out his heart in his poetic exuberances.

**Philosophic Vision**

R. C. Shukla has observed life around him very minutely. Having cultivated abhorrence of the shams, the irrational conventions, the tyranny and the persecution prevalent in the contemporary society, he has vision of regenerating world. The vision grows out of his intense meditation probably. The word vision has multiple significances. Etymologically it denotes the power of seeing, to see from ascertain point and perspective, the ability, foresight and wisdom in planning etc. Every poet has a vision of life for vision is essential to create supreme imagination. It enables him to see things from different angles. He is a poet who philosophies life and its nuances from various facets. His poetry becomes philosophical when he touches the
reality of human predicament. The poet’s didactic vision emanates in the volumes *Darkness at Dawn, A Belated Appearance* and *Depth and Despair*. As he says in the poem “Life At so Many Stations is the Examination our Will”:

Those who are born
To celebrate the festival of life
Happy and hilarious they may be
But can not be called wise
By competition
They have never won a prize.39

Happy and hilarious people cannot be called wise. The word wise shows the poet’s philosophic attitude and here more is meant that what meets our eyes. It is the trait of poet’s deep sensibility. He points out the romantic or the passionate nature of man as a moral creature and also depicts the same human being as an instrument of treachery and villain.

Most of his poems present the gloomy view of life, indeed. Gloom is a part and parcel of life and to a poet, it is like a traumatic experience which he faces in life, it is an organic whole of a poet’s composition. It is a fact that without the bitter, dark days with toil and hardship, the pen of the poet would be static. Sometime gloomy view makes the poet pessimistic but the gloom itself is transformed into self realisation. It can clearly be felt in the poem “I Collect Hopes”:

Then
In a mood of despair
I look at my doubts
Apprehensions shapeless
As fog is in December
And am lost in the scene
That obdurately berates
With its laughter
With its teeth.\(^{40}\)

The stanza denotes the frustration, gloom of the poet. He is in the midst of chaos and disorder and finds no way out. Shukla is a critic of life not of personal character, not an observer of man in society but of human condition in the more philosophic sense.

**Poetic Techniques**

From the days of Plato and Aristotle to contemporary structuralists, it is undeniable that literature must have content and form, the theme and medium through which the message is conveyed. Poets have various forms to express their emotions and intellect which shape poetry altogether different from others. R. C. Shukla employed traditional and original traits in his poetic creation. His second volume *A Belated Appearance* is an example of a lucid, simple lyric in ballad tradition. His poetry abounds in popular forms as lyric, ballad and elegy. His rhyme is an indispensable part of poetic creation; so also in stanza pattern, he adheres to the musicality. He is lyrical poet par excellence. Lyricism permeates all his work but he is at his best in short lyrics which he has spawned with perfection where his genius fully blooms. His whole personality dissolves in his lyrical poem until he ceases to be a man and becomes a lyric incarnate. The five line stanza with uneven feet and rhythm shows the reality, the painstaking experience of the poet. *Darkness at Dawn* shows the
growing maturity of the poet in respect of form and style. Exquisite lyricism is clear in the poem “The Firmament in Your Eyes is Dear to me”, reminds the sugared melody of the Elizabethans.

Your love is like ether
All pervasive and serene
I urge upon you
To be sentient to my pain
During this night of rain.\(^{41}\)

The stanza has exact meter and rhythm fit to the occasion. The straightforward beginning also imparts variety into the lyrical stance of the poet. The lyric is noteworthy for simplicity along with its abrupt modern touch.

The collection *Depth and Despair* also shows the poet’s lyrical intensity. The poem “I was not Conversant with Art of Both” shows the lyrical strain of the poet.

I wish to be deer once more
Journey thirty years back
While away some golden hours
Harness the mellowness wandering around me
As does the fragrance
Around a rose.\(^{42}\)

The volume *The Parrot Shrieks* holds up the poet’s supreme form and caliber in respect of its theme and structure. The very first poem of this collection is adequate to express the high creativity of the poet and how the form and content become chief tool to express his thought. The dejected poet expresses his depression in a sudden gush. The count of syllables is uneven. It may be cited by the first stanza of the poem.
You may not believe
I was on the brink of depression
When, as the sun rises
After one month’s rains.
A queer purpose entered my life
And a lascivious elfin
Bathing in the river
Began to demur
When we encountered without any chance.\(^{43}\)

There are many poems that show the same trend in respect of form. Indeed in R. C. Shukla’s poems, the form is intrinsic.

Image is the most valuable, vital and instrumental force in the poetry. To the Elizabethans ‘Image’ is velvetic, to the Jacobeans and Metaphysicals it consists ‘heterogenous ideas, yoked by violence together’. It becomes conceit in the hands of John Donne. Imagery is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature whether by literal description by allusion or metaphor. In R. C. Shukla’s poetry, imagery functions as an active force in depicting the emotion and very thought of the poet.

The Collection *Darkness at Dawn* abounds with the imagery through which the feelings and passions have been expressed. The poem “Despair”, shows the poet’s use of fine images.

The lizard
Eating things on wall
After all
Retires to its rum.\(^{44}\)
The lizard is the symbol, rather the image through which the futility and dejection of the modern man are expressed. So also man is compared to bull, bear, who has horns within and hairs without – these altogether depict the predicament of the modern man and the surroundings in which he lives.

The repetitive use of the word picture which functions as an image in this volume like loneliness, sequestered, wounds, meaninglessness, isolation etc. is a pointer to the poet’s grim encounter with reality. The employ of certain macabre images is not very happy as in the two random samples. In the poem “A Tragic Tale”:

A razor he had
To cut his throat
A butcher within
Himself a goat.\(^{45}\)

In the poem “A Vomited Man”:

Lest some one else should steal
She swallowed me
Bone and flesh
And then vomited
Her bowls refusing to contain
The flatulent man that I am.\(^{46}\)

Of the numerous evils that have gripped the society, the human values have suffered irreparably on account of betrayal, faithlessness and selfish consideration. The poet’s concern is only with the individual values and interestingly enough, his images in this collection do not
partake in the scene of violence and destruction that have rocked the later half of this century.

In the same way the poem “The Firmament in Your Eyes is Dear to Me” strikes for its apt and fine images. The first stanza is loaded with heavy word picture making the poem a truly romantic one.

The firmament in your eyes is very dear to me
And also the moonlight of your smiles
You are quintessence of the depth
Which only sirens have
In your limpid, gratifying water
Am I keen to lave.\(^{47}\)

The poet sees firmament in the beloved’s eyes and the smiles become moonlight, the depth of the beloved’s passion is substituted with ‘sirens’ and the erotic image of water brings out the poet’s longing to fade away with his beloved in love. The poem “Love is a Bee” also depicts a fine image employed by the poet.

Love’s a bee
Intoxicated with smell
It sings among leaves
Your bosom heaves.\(^{48}\)

The poem “I Wish to Sweep My House Before I Go” draws attention, especially the opening stanza which carries proof of poet’s application of images.

I wish to sweep my house before I go
Repair its roof
Patch the different doors
Rectify errors
Narrate my experiences to the green

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Donate my Wisdom
And be sure that
Useless anxieties do not trouble
The soul abandoning its abode.\(^{49}\)

The image of the ‘house’ ‘roof’ ‘doors’ signifies poets personal situation of life, his dejection and hoplessness. These are fine images through which the poet has portrayed his personal life and its predicaments.

The poem “The Land of Despair” describes the futility and artificiality of man. The images of ‘billowed bosoms’ and ‘fleshy hips’ are striking in this context.

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\begin{align*}
\text{Billowed bosoms and fleshy hips} \\
\text{Are harbours it longs to touch} \\
\text{They are indiscreet} \\
\text{Who talk of the soul} \\
\text{Fragrance of the skin} \\
\text{Is man’s goal.}^{50}
\end{align*}
\]

The extended metaphor here shows the poet’s idea of sensuous love. That is why love is compared with a bee which is intoxicated with smell. The bosom symbolises the erotic image through which the poet visualises his extreme passion.

There are three important instruments without which poetry will lose its suggestiveness, its charm and magic. They are ambiguity, irony and satire. Every modern poet had developed the trend of ambiguity takes shape of indeterminacy, dissemination and plurality of text.

In R. C. Shukla’s poetry ambiguity looks large very much on every front. The poem “Dolphin” is an apt example of ambiguity.
My water is here
To me very dear
Stay, stay sailor
Stay
Why?\textsuperscript{51}

The word ‘water’ has multilayer meaning. It has close association with his beloved. Water also signifies the poet’s seeking for peace and comfort in this marshy world where he only wanders and roams. Ambiguity can be seen in another poem “It Is Like a Monkey Who Cohabits and Growls”.

The dark, rainy clouds
Are my mattresses
And the cool, comfortable wind my chamber
The birds bathing are happy
The terrible heat is dead.\textsuperscript{52}

The dark, rainy clouds give solace, comfort to the poet, so also the cool, comfortable wind is a sort of relief to the poet in the midst of hatred and revengeful attitude of the people around him. The word ‘wind’ may mean poet’s inspiration or the energy which provides liveliness and vitality to resist temptation of the external world.

Irony is another favourite device of R. C. Shukla’s creative skill. The word ‘irony’ is derived from Greek mythology. In Greek comedy the character called the Eiron was a dissembler who characteristically spoke in understatement and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he was, yet triumphed over the Alazon, the self-deceiving and stupid braggart. Irony is of various kinds verbal, structural, dramatic and romantic. Use of verbal irony in the poem “Guardian” is noticeable.
Throw away Christ
Give up your God
Be broad.\textsuperscript{53}

Here the opposite of what is said is intended. The mean and corrupt people neglect or throw Christ. The naked dance of corruption continues without any obstruction.

The same thought continues in the poem “The Poor”.

How complacent are the poor
The uneducated peaceful peasants
The lumbermen
The tribals
Who sit together
And partake one another’s grief, joy
They are the younger brothers of nature.\textsuperscript{54}

Indeed, the ‘poor’ are not content nor educated nor peaceful but this contrary statement emphasises the state of affairs through which the poet is undergoing. Corruption thereby is hidden in every nook and corner of life.

The poem “Green Wounds Dry up The Man” brings out the ironical statement of the poet. Irony has been amalgamated with soft satirical tone. The quite simple irony has been applied by the poet.

Green Wounds dry up the man
Hence I looked for a nurse
Who might dress them
Unmindful of my purse.\textsuperscript{55}

The strong objection has been made by the poet in ironical assertion in the poem “The Text of the Constitution is Not Their Sphere” shows
the real intention of the poet. The poor follow the rules made by the rich. He says:

The poor are expected to observe  
Laws made by the rich  
Patriotism is their duty.  

‘Satire’ makes a very strong presence in R. C. Shukla’s poetic creation. He asserts his viewpoint vehemently through the satirical tinge. ‘Satire’ is defined like this:

Satire is the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation or scorn. It defers from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself.

In the poem “The Bitter Taunts”, the poet satirically comments on the friendship of contemporary people. In this mundane world friendship has become a bitter taunt. The predicament of modern man as well as the futility of his journey on this earth has been displayed.

Since you seldom get the thing you give  
You live or not, let others live  
Repress yourself, your will, your want  
For friendship here is a bitter taunt.

The poet knows the harsh reality of friendship. It is only bitter taunt on this mundane world. The poet has ridiculed the treachery of modern man. His serpentine nature has been hinted in the poem “Our Tensions are Sharper than a Knife”.

Animals do not weave dreams  
Disloyalty is unknown to them  
They do not betray like men  
And so remain placid and at peace.
According to the poet animals are better than human beings they are not aware of treachery and guile as men do. Here the satire is quite explicit and emphatic and straight forward.

Figures of Speech or rhetorical figures are the basic ingredients of poetry. It is the stylistic feature of the poem, the embellishment barring which thought appears to be rough and rude. R. C. Shukla employs similes and metaphors imaginatively to enhance poetic beauty. The poem from *Darkness at Dawn* “Shall Future Win” proves the point:

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Life’s a competition
Between now and then
Wherein the latter invariable wins. 60
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The poet has beautifully compared life to competition voicing the competitive nature of the age. He compares life with light and dance and death with darkness and loneliness. In the poem “The One Goes While the Other Does not Come”:

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Life is light and death darkness
Life dance and death lameness. 61
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The poem “I Collect Hopes” is a specimen where the poet compares ‘apprehension shapeless’ with ‘fog in December’ and metaphor can be traced in the poem “Experience” where the poet compares ‘single experience’ with ‘mountain’, ‘ocean and fire’. It is long-extended metaphor which the poet loves to portray.

The poem “All Women are Islands” shows the dexterous use of metaphor.
All women are islands
And so you are.\textsuperscript{62}

Another poem is “I Shall Dispatch You to the Dark Corner” illustrates metaphor. He compares Love with an exercise metaphorically.

Love is an exercise in which
The much needed dissimulates
Many times.\textsuperscript{63}

The pains and pangs of love and affection have been compared with, fish in the sand in the poem “A Man’s Love for a Woman is a Chagrin”. Antithesis, paradox, climax etc. also find apt place to contribute sharpness to the expression. The instance of antithesis can be cited from the poem “The luckless Lad” where he has described the bad luck of a boy who was promised a prize but got penance. Antithesis is found in the poem “My Knowledge is Ignorance Indeed”.

The commonest device ‘Personification’ has wittily been used by the poet. In the poem “Nothingness of Me” he sees the legs of corruption. Death has been personified in the poem “Death Defined”. The same death has the human power of knocking shown in the poem “Death Everyday Knocks at Your Gate”. The poem “The Whole World Lives in My Room” shows that life has power to chide where death comes to his room regularly. R. C. Shukla is rich in the application of personification.

To conclude it can be asserted that Shukla has masterly used the poetic devices with remarkable imagination. Simplicity,
straightforwardness and organic compactness with a rare sensuous
touch and idiomatic tone are the qualities which differentiate him
from other contemporary poets.

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