CHAPTER - IV
JOURNEYING TOWARDS NOWHERE :
LOVE IN THE POETRY OF PRITISH NANDY

I have been freewheeling,
doubledeating for too long,
rambling, gambling, chasing a song:
it's been
long since I met myself,
after weeks and weeks
of hanging around: it's been long since I
paid my dues and headed homewards
searching for you. It's time you came and
took me back: a thousand songs
back again ...

- Pritish Nandy
Whereas Kamala Das's poetry exhibits the concentric circle of the self in relation to itself, in Pritish Nandy we return to "the self in relation to society", as was largely the case in Nissim Ezekiel. From poetry as the musing of agonised, individual grievances, we move to poetry avowedly for those "who cannot read what I write," as Pritish Nandy explicitly claims. Pritish Nandy appeared on the horizon of the Indo-Anglian poetry as a hurricane. He battered and shattered the set codes of writing poetry by letting out a torrent of words wherein his observations on love, on human existence and on mankind were given shape by his poetic vision. "The sixties was a critical decade for Indian poetry in English. The dynamics of a new sensibility which were released during the late fifties gathered force during these ten years and were finally shaped into a definite movement. This movement was not restricted by reference to any specific infrastructure of values, nor was it spearheaded by any ideological considerations. It was determined by a quest for roots."\(^1\)

The quest for roots made Pritish Nandy go beyond the chiselled diction of the continental and the British poets and the sterlised territory of Lal and Ezekiel, and
to resolve the conflict between his awareness of being the representative of a generation which is freak, rootless, often alienated from the mainstream of the Indian experience and his commitment to himself, his country and his countrymen. He knows, he writes for those "who cannot read what I write I use a language they do not know". Yet he knows that his voice is the "voice of my people for I speak of their loves and ambitions and secret shames." Pritish Nandy could write this because he found his unique personal voice which was the consequence of a wide frame of experiences. The quest for roots made Pritish Nandy go deep into the Indian tradition with all its greatness and complexity, and chaos. His voice can be harsh, violent urging people to bring about a total rebellion, if not revolution, against the enemies of inalienable rights of mankind. He, on the other hand, can sing sweet melodies in memory of the absent beloved, and can write about the sweet nothings of love with the same ease:

all the wildflowers smell of you
all the sunlight stirs up your dreams
all our nearness swirls in the magic midnight mist
For Pritish Nandy love is an important experience. He makes an attempt to define his self through the prism of love. Love-experience, through its multifaceted aspects, helps the poet not only in making him understand his milieu in a sharper focus, it also helps him in his quest for roots. Through his distinctive treatment of love in his poems Pritish Nandy comments upon and criticises what he does not approve of in the society. The experience of love allows him to make an attempt at forging bridges with the other individuals, thus paving way to his coming to terms with himself.

Pritish Nandy, with his varied experiences of the world passes through the torrid terrain of love in the violent social environment, is tempted by the female flesh and its ecstasies. His commitment to his milieu and himself seem to go wayward; he at the end, seems to be a lonely person nostalgically going back to the moments of shared joy which sharpen the pain in his tortured soul. Yet "in the love poetry of Pritish Nandy we approach a new frontier of freedom. His approach to love is uninhibited, dynamic and passionate. So powerful and confident is his conviction about his own approach that his style is organically moulded into a new shape."
The first collection of poems of Gods and Olives (1967) attracted bouquets and brick-bats; the book was called "original", "promising", "profoundly disturbing"; but the critics labelled Nandy as an "eccentric pseudo-erudite, over-smart, plagiarist and above all the trickster trying to deceive the readers by pointless visual effects, word-jugglery and irrelevant references." These contradictory reactions created a ruffle in the Indo-Anglian poetic scene because of the controversy sparked off regarding the intrinsic worth of the poems.

Pritish Nandy wanders from theme to theme and is not able to confine himself to one point of view. We find him, like a groping seeker, moving from the realm of love to religion, from religion to the milieu surrounding him and thus shuttling between different themes. The poet tries to find his singular voice. Unlike his contemporaries like P. Lal and Ezekiel, Nandy's poems, because of his inimitable style, bear the unmistakable Nandy stamp.

Love appears as an important theme, among others, like the religious themes and themes with a personal note where the poet strives to move from the microcosm to the macrocosm or the otherway round, to understand the nature of experience and the world around him. From the very beginning Pritish Nandy is aware of the shadow of death
and loneliness hovering over his empty world where there are

no houses
no birds
and no trees.\(^7\)

That is why he confesses: "We remain tight-roped between/insanity and truth."\(^8\) He is in search of a realm of harmony where benediction is showered on him and through him on humanity. He tries to achieve this benediction through love and exposes himself to various experiences involving the physical, the emotional and the spiritual. In the process, sometimes, he appears to be a "romantic" poet creating tender sensuous poems ruminating on the separation, nostalgia and the sweet agonies of love. In a host of other poems he indulges in the carnal; the body of the beloved seems to be his only quest. In the third category of poems his love seems to be tortured because of the ruthless social inequalities, injustice and exploitation.

Nature occupies an important part in Pritish Nandy's love poetry and seems to exhibit a negative characteristic well-synchronised with the soul-in-turmoil of the poet. On one hand, Pritish Nandy tries to reach out to the suffering humanity by forging bonds with the
beloved, on the other he seems to stand all alone in spite of his being in love and being loved, in the whirlpool of humanity around him. Pritish Nandy's poetry in this sense is full of contradictions, hard to resolve, as here we find a rare blending of the sacred and the profane in the theatre of the poet's mind who does not believe in treating love in the tame traditional manner of his predecessors and his contemporaries.

The first impression the reader forms after a cursory reading of Pritish Nandy's love poetry is that Pritish Nandy has a tendency to escape into a world of romance and imagination; he indulges in an excess of fancy where the distinction between the world of fact and imagination is obliterated: because I have not met you I shall call you the girl of my dreams because I have not met you... and

because I have not met you
I watch every face in the sunlight at every crossing every day
because I have not met you
I catch every dream by its hair at every turning every night

This is how Pritish Nandy builds up a dome of romantic love enveloped in the magic midnight mist of romance. He wants his beloved to be dark eyed caught in the furious moonlight: a powerful but traditional symbol of romance in the traditional love poetry. The wild flower imagery strengthens the fact that Pritish Nandy a true romantic
at heart, is in search of an ideal beauty, the woman of his dreams.

In poem after poem the reader gathers the impression that Pritish Nandy, the poet, is a true romantic at heart and is in love with the idea of being in love. Even when he is in consort with a real muscle-and-flesh woman his romantic temperament weaves the tapestry of silver satin dreams around her and his idea of love:

Ever since I met you, you've made me come alive
This mysterious tapestry of the skies weaves
the magic of our lives; you've made me come alive
With words you have not spoken, loves we have shared.¹¹

The same romantic strain is discernible in another poem:

Its happening again. Suzanne's on, and you are
looking out from the verandah at the distant train; and I suddenly realise that I am in love
with you. It happens all the time, and yet what
can I do? Perhaps you will understand, as the others have. Or perhaps you will turn around when
the disc runs out.¹²

The illustrations cited above can be used as the depiction of the tender romantic love the poet feels for the beloved and expresses it with the most simple images. The love-
struck poet realises the bliss of the company provided by the beloved. The effect of music heightens the feeling of all-pervasive love experienced by the poet. Almost the same feeling is expressed in the lines:

Today I watch the sunlight
trapped outside my window while you speak to me of love ...\textsuperscript{13}

Again the romantic strain in Pritish Nandy's imagination is clearly visible in a poem like this:

In
Your eyes I have watched fire flies light up the lost manuscripts of my poems...\textsuperscript{14}

This romantic quality of Nandy's poetry has elicited the following comment from Niranjan Mohanty:

Pritish Nandy is incorrigibly romantic. His romanticism anchors in a profound imaginative awareness of things and events\textsuperscript{15}

For Nandy love is seldom what it seems\textsuperscript{15} and is generally masked in colours of rain or the mysterious tapestry of the sky. He does not want to be caught unawares but, then, it happens again and again. The lightening and the storm, the flowers and the nodding trees, the flying birds and the wind all become a part of his psyche while he is
in the experience of love. His tender love lyrics find their sustenance in nature which becomes a part and parcel of the experience itself, helping him in defining his love for the beloved. This love, an abstract idea, the experience of being in love, again, something abstract, is concretised through the images of external nature:

Can love come any closer than this?
The autumn forest remains a sentimental relic; blue is the colour of the fugitive noon. We have often sought the endless trail, to listen to the echo of one vagrant footfalls. We have watched the sunrise smile through its cracked country lips ...

It may, however, be observed here that Pritish Nandy is not a romantic in the sense of words "romantic" is traditionally used. Nature acts as a friend occasionally, but not as a philosopher. "Nandy is romantic not as Wordsworth but as Keats. He is a poet of senses like Keats but without Keats' negative capability." Pritish Nandy's love poetry is conditioned in the matters of theme and tone by the metaphors of nature; his reactions to the feeling of love, and the beloved who sparks off this feeling, are reflected with the help of various phenomena of nature:
Your laughter
cross a hundred rivers. It echoes beyond this
Summer filigreed by shadow and sun...

Like his poetic ancestors Nandy regards nature as
the purest manifestation of beauty but he finds beauty not
merely in the serene aspect of nature only. For him all
the aspects of nature, serene and sombre, peaceful and
violent, gay and gloomy, form the part and parcel of
nature. This makes Pritish Nandy a poet with Wordsworth,
Keats and Byron rolled into one. Only a true romantic
can profess "our love shall be an open hand where forests
surrender in the intimacy of rain."

Like a true romantic, Pritish Nandy is fascinated
with the body of the beloved and is able to create
fascinating word-pictures of the beloved. Not only this,
he tries to reach out to the beloved through the act of
sexual union. He surrenders his self and becomes one with
the beloved: In The Nowhereman (1977) he confesses:

Tonight I surrender to the closing of
wings: the dark shall testify to this tremulous
rhyme: whenever you move under me,
my body celebrates this beautiful ceremony.
Pritish Nandy continues:

Your breasts contend against my
proud abscence, shipwrecked into expectancy
as your tongue turns hunter tonight.

The body of the beloved is his refuge which he
seeks recourse to when plagued by the insecurities and
uncertainties of life. The body of the beloved is as
important to him, in this sense, as the very idea of love.
Absorption in the body leads the poet to express his love
in rather bold expressions; the use of words like "breasts"
"thighs", "crevice between your legs", 'cunt', etc. are as
common as the use of words like 'semen', 'loins' and
"crotch":

and then I felt
: the alphabets of braille travelling all over
your body
: a slippery sunshine escaping inside the crevice
between your legs.

Through the physical union the poet tries to
interpret his love for the beloved but simultaneously "for
him the act of lust is in tune with the unfolding of
nature." He writes:
every road laughed when the rains came without
warning and you
approached me with your body's simplest lust and
in you I
traced the delirium of an unknown rain
arm in arm we climbed the stair case of sleep and
inside you was you
I found and when I entered you, day break shrieked 24

The sexual act to Pritish Nandy is not obscene or profane, it is an important human need as important as the need to be friends with others, to communicate. "The basic almost naive but stark simplicity of human lust is eulogised by Pritish Nandy almost in the tone of a rhapsody. To him lust presents a drama of violence, fantasy and creation." 25

The poet finds the physical union necessary not only to be one with the beloved but with his own self as well. It is a means to identify and define his own self:

Let me enter you tonight
: come
be what you will
' in me
: as I
would be in you. 26

It seems that without the body of the beloved the imagination of the poet cannot even take off. Hence his emphasis on the physical:
"Leg upon leg upon leg
face upon face upon face
my gentle member
hardens
in your swamp.27

From the foregoing discussion, the reader may form the impression that Prithish Nandy has a rather obsessive interest in the female body and the physical aspect of love. The body of the beloved holds a magnetic pull for him and he cannot but revert to the theme of physical union again and again. But "without celebrating the beauty of the body no love poem can be intensely absorbing. For the poet the body serves as the medium of transporting himself to the splendid land where body withers, its fragrance dies down. The poet tries to conquer the fleshless through the flesh, timeless through the time."28

In Prithish Nandy's poetry there is another strain which needs careful examination. His poetry—while it deals with the theme of love, the pursuance of the lover's and the beloved's endeavour on union in the physical sense—also deals with a wider theme where the poet tries to transcend from the world of the individual to the realm of the universal.
In this context the most interesting, perhaps, is the collection of poems *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (1979), co-authored by India's two leading lovepoets - Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy. The title, *Tonight, This Savage Rite* explains well the tone and the theme of the poems. These poems signify what Dr. I.N. Aggaral calls "a formal ceremonial act or procedure prescribed or customary in religious or other solemn use in an uncivilised or under-developed tribe or group." The poems begin marking a surrender to the primival force of sex which under the blanket of darkness is celebrated in this "tremulous rhyme." In the first poem itself, the poet speaks of his body celebrating "this beautiful ceremony"-sex-the ceremony of the two bodies, of the lover and the beloved, grating against each other in a rhythm. This ritual of undulating bodies is the part of the ancient religion of love, of which sex is an important ingredient. The poet emphasises this fact in the second poem of the collection also where he affirms:

Everything will happen, even as we were told; everything will remain to be done all over again.
The ritualistic aspect of love-making is again emphasised upon in the next poem:

our bodies come alive
in secret oneness: one spring ago, terrified to be touched, you draw me to-night, at last, deep within your frantic countryside.

Like the rituals of an intricate religious ceremony the poet goes step after step with the frenzied ritual of the sex act:

Tonight I draw your body to my lips: your hand, your mouth, your breasts, the small of your back. I draw blood to every secret nerve and gently kiss their tips, as you move under me, anchored to a rough sea. I cling to you, your music and your knees. I touch the secret vibes of your body. I fill my hands with the darkness of your hair.

This is a highly evocative poem; it moves in a slow and sensuous manner signalling to a ritual - love - making, taking place where the lover moves from one part of the body of the beloved to another till he is able to draw "blood to every secret nerve" and bring the ceremony of love to its natural culmination. The primival fire of sex blazes in another poem where the poet exclaims:
Never have I heard you promise an endless
not even when you chose to hurt me into poetry: miles
of mind journey across the dark skies as your body
responds to mine after lost century of shame.  

This collection stresses the simple fact that
love without its sexual aspect is sterile and barren,
though there is an opposite view as well. Dr. I.N. Aggarwal
stresses the point when he says, "The hiatus between the
ancient rites and modern situation has made it impossible
for him to retain the old rituals which had religious core.
Instead of Spencer's 'Epithalamion' and 'Prothalamion' we
have T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'

Dr. I.N. Aggarwal, while continuing the argument, calls Pritish
Nandy's poems of this genre "a kind of sentimental jelly
which does not congeal into an emotional pea-cock pie by
the time we have reached the end." The argument the
above-cited critic puts forward is that the love of the
modern man and woman is destructive and cannot help them
in defining themselves. The poems written by Pritish
Nandy in his opinion do not have sufficient intellectual
and creative resources or the emotional fervour to
transform the ritual into a constructive force which
could be used to define the self of the
involved lovers. "The overall impression of Nandy's
Love-poems is fantasy; of emotional masturbation,
without the final release of joy achieved through a sexual consummation.\textsuperscript{36}

One tends to disagree with I.N. Agrawal because he overlooks the vibrant rhythm of love that is seen woven in the fabric of these poems. The confessional quality enriches these poems and the emotion is well-presented, often, with the help of brilliant and apt imagery. Dr. Aggarwal compares and contrasts the love theme as found in Spencer's poems with the one projected in Pritish Nandy's poetry and mockingly compares it to the ironical love presented in the "Prufrock" poem. If we go by Dr. Aggarwal's argument, we will be forced into a conclusion that the modern man is neither eligible nor capable of loving and it was only the privilege of the aristocrats of the medieval period. The flawed argument notwithstanding, Pritish Nandy or his poetic self seems to be genuinely enveloped not only in the magical mist of romance but the forthright and simple business of love anchored on the solid rock of the human bodies.

The stark fact, however, is that Nandy's poetry uses love as a sinker to delve deep into the meaning of his existence as a human-being. In this sense, his poetry is not merely individualistic but humanistic in approach. No doubt, he is engrossed with the body, but body is not
the end for him. It is a means with the help of which he tries to communicate with a large mass of humanity. He identifies himself with the poor and the betrayed, the lacereted and the oppressed. His love-poems thus acquire a strange but powerful resonance against all kinds of exploitation. His love poems are the tortured songs of the self in a world where to love becomes a crime. Under such circumstances Nandy's love-poetry acquires the voice of protest and his social consciousness is discernible in a marked sense. In *Riding the Midnight River* (1975) he shows his concern for society as a lover:

```
do not ask for the bitter taste of the sea when the waves recede
from the lost dark evenings in your tresses
for murder stalks the land and solemn pledges
pillage the intellect
insidious night dark enchantress walks through the darkness of your breasts as I tried angle of wrath evoke
ancient memories
within the ruins of your eyes
```

His social consciousness makes the poet understand the curtailing of human rights in an all-inclusive sense including the freedom to love and sex. A large number of poems in the corpus of Prithish Nandy's poetry deal with the theme of shackles being put to humans believing in the credo of love in a world full of hunger, disease and death

not to speak of the marauders:

    each time the marauders changed their name
    but the sufferers each time were the same

In a world where the conditions are full of stress, the atmosphere is not congenial for love and love-making; the stress is duly mirrored in the poetry related to these delicate issues. The sensitive soul of the poet while giving expression to the theme of love and allied experiences is haunted by the images of death and misery. He either slips into a world of fantasy and dream or a world of nostalgia: In *The Poety of Prtitish Nandy* (1973), we become conscious of this strain:

    I shall meet you at the crossing of memories and
        your rustbrown thighs will
    remind me of the fire that will not burn again
        when the slender fingers of
    night tear through your loins

Alternatively, the poet, in a fit of despair, can respond to the state of lovelessness by seeking refuge in death, spiritual or physical:

    in that single act of vengeance you taught me how
    not to love and in our mutual death I discovered what despair could mean.
There is one more avenue open to the poet and that is the avenue of protest. Thus while the poet is concerned with his ties with the beloved presented through a criss-cross of contradictory shades, and with "opening of strange and private territories where the beloved is present but where the personal vision is more important than the facets of love;" he is possessed of "a passionate concern for fellow-mortals and the scarred surroundings." The themes sometimes blend themselves together, sometimes they float apart, yet they are always held together with a high voltage intensity of emotions, a frenzy of words supported by a vibrant diction.

Poetry, being a compact, and to an extent, subjective expression, can blend protest with literature more easily. Since poetry is a pure and passionate utterance, it has usually been found to be a natural vehicle for raising a voice against injustice and oppression of man by man. Under such circumstances love, a natural necessity for man, finds itself obstructed and curbed causing bitter currents of frustration and a sense of incapaciation in the heart of the poet. The anguish by the soul of the poet is reflected in his poetry and is an authentic index of the underlying social consciousness of the poet.
Pritish Nandy's poetry, at the first glance, seems to be replete with themes of love and sex. There is a streak of the confessional also in it. But as one delves deeper into it one realises that he is not a mere connoisseur of raw emotions and the flesh; there lies under these "very physical" poems a bleeding heart. In Nandy's poetry there is an under-current of pain generated by the plight of humanity being churned by the wheel of oppression and tyranny:

such were the hands
behind the barricades
: 1000 rounds a minute
: the primal love of man
  blood in the wind
  blood at night

Nandy has the required sensibility for the making of an authentic poet. Born in Calcutta he has seen children dying with hunger; he has witnessed people being gunned down "without hate or revenge." All these experiences take the shape of volatile reactions which cast their haunting shadows on the volcanic outbursts of emotions involving love. His love-poetry, therefore, is scarred and takes the shape of protest.

Encouraging the poet in his attitude of protest Mulk Raj Anand has rightly acknowledged, "you have
achieved in your poetry a break-through to the new consciousness"\(^45\) and "you have dared to do what most people are frightened to do, gone to the sources of love of our people, their agonies and exaltations."\(^46\) Terror, turbulence, cruelty, death, and an undying urge to conquer these negatives sustain violent tensions in the poems of Pritish Nandy, which make these poems something more than mere love poems:

Wind blood corpses screaming in the city of dreams
and silent
violence that will break through your loins
as the waves surround us in a final gesture of
withdrawal when
night comes and skeletal forests burn in the fury
of famine and
will you know the final answer to death's question\(^47\)

In another poem the poet wants the woman persona to wipe the smell of disaster from her breasts and be relaxed with the wild laughter of rain echoing in the skies of her mind. He desires her to let her passion overflow. The poet, however, cannot disengage from his mind the thought of disaster and death which haunt him like a bad dream:

and then if there is time I shall breathe the
fragrance of musk in
your sweat I shall watch your blood spattered on
the footpaths of
the city I shall smell the semen in the dust and find you spreadeagled\(^48\)
In many of the poems the personal theme of love and the general themes of social injustice are intertwined. These two themes in these poems are distinctly poised against each other; one reflects the imaginative perception of the world of emotions, the other the world of actuality, real and palpable. They, however, constitute a significant part of his tortured soul. The situations in the former are with a candidly political flavour and, though indirectly, point to us at which side of the border the poet wants to stay. The arbitrary treatment meted out to extremists evokes the reaction:

"the scars of silence reminded us that 7500 were still held without trial in the windswept cemeteries/we call jails and murder has become a familiar word".49

In another lyric no definite incident is stressed. On the contrary, a passionate concern for the rebels and the country is stressed:

child of my country
blind & violent
I returned among the exiles
in their haunted faces
I saw my country
out of their torn bodies
grew this night

of knowing
and listening50
Ultimately, all these rhymes culminate into the crucial question: should a man die ... should a man die ... 51

In these words which we come across more than once, the concern for humanity and a sense of helplessness at the sight of blind destruction are both emphasised. The baffling enquiry symbolises the dream of the human race assaulted by murderous forces.

Integrated with this world of reality is the scenario of nature where perennial elements - sun, sea, rain, night and sky - dwell. It echoes the despair of mankind, relates itself to the city and the protagonists, and extends the tragedy beyond the immediate to the entire macrocosm.

In fact, these three levels are closely mixed with one another to the extent that it is impossible to trace out the graphs from one to another. It should suffice to say that the restless soul of Nandy wanders from the broken home to the desolate city and then to the ruined nature in no set pattern. One reflects the other, even accommodates the other. All, in fact, embody the same tragedy.

In these poems the apparent paradox of the poet of personal love and unsparing critic of the established
social order seems at last to be intelligible. Both the strains pooled in his anarchic individualism and social commitment lead by different paths to the same point of disillusion and resignation.

In many of his individual poems we find Prithi Nandy using his beloved to portray the tortured landscape:

windblood corpses screaming in the city of dreams and a silent voice that will break through your loins

His singular vision, in striking metaphors, raises the reality to a supra-level and in this world of agony his beloved, like the counter principle of Beatrice, leaves her blood soaked footprints:

I see your footprints on lightning
wind blood corpses screaming in the city of dreams and a nebula dark and immense breaks through the deep seas of the night/when we move across a path of stone with unknown dreams in our eyes this is my country the smell of blood that I have known and the silence I would have/recognised

and further:

beyond the beauty of your dusky loins I shall watch famine ravage in green memory in the wild ocean of your tresses I shall watch rebellion raise its raging sky
In another poem 'Fold your wings of Darkness' Pritish Nandy addresses his dear one to fold her wings of darkness. Whenever he tries to make love to her, the memories of disaster come to his mind. Only when he is free from these dark memories he would be able to love her.

His memory fluctuates between the beloved and the disaster and the result is that the beloved and the disaster merge into each other:

close your eyes and sleep in the wilderness of our sorrows and do not speak of desire for such words shall wake the leopard in your groin where forests of silence unite your thighs
I shall not enter the strafed village even after the soldiers have left nor shall I watch the paper moon rise in the eyes of an orphaned child.

Pritish Nandy is aware of the violence around with the result that even when the desire haunts him he cannot concentrate merely on love and ignore the environment. He dreams of the day when the blind violence would be over and when their tangled bodies burn in the harvest of gold they would travel towards the shadows of the sun and their love shall be an open hand where forests surrender in the intimacy of rain.
This idealistic hope is the only support he is left with after his bitter disillusionment with society and with his actual love-experience.

The same strain is noticeable in another poem where he tells his beloved that their union would be possible only when the season of violence is over. He understands that "the grey branches" of time will encircle her waist but when the violence is over, he will claim the Krishnachura which flames in her loins. Till then he asks her to listen to the voice of cactus and to bathe naked in the blood of the full moon.

In another poem Pritish Nandy complains about the city he is living in; but very soon the city is identifiable with his dear one. Both have fallen in rut; both have lost their charm. Living in the city and loving the beloved both have turned into a ritual. He tells us about the city that it is no longer different; he has endured the city for a long time. Nothing exciting ever happens in it. Everything is forlorn and tired like the ageing whores in the anonymous lanes of the city:

and the tired whores
in forlorn lanes
remain
as we had known them
And he finds his beloved to be no better. Here too, the passionate relationship of love has tired. He realises the futility of love and desire. But this love has become, more or less, a necessity which they practice out of habit:

this ritual mouth to mouth
this hand between your thighs
I have known
the syllables
of stone

Pritish Nandy by juxtaposing the city and the beloved together comes to realise the futility of loving each of them. The city and beloved both are "syllables of stone which no fire of love or passion can ever arouse". Nandy comes to understand the futility of love in the modern times. He is not nostalgic about it like his long forgotten childhood. In the end, he finds that the image of the beloved merges into the city, thus making Nandy realise about the futility of loving them.

Through the extension of personal love to the scenerio of the city he makes the reader feel that this world—this is what the city in actuality means through enlargement—is devoid of love. Perhaps, no one can love in the modern times for long. The awareness of the tensions in the relations on the individual level transcends into the awareness of the futility of love at the universal level.
In another poem Nandy narrates how he, with his beloved, strayed into a slum where at burnt noon "I ripped off your innocence with my teeth." Here too the beloved does not remain a mere individual. She suddenly changes into "my country".

This is the time when Pritish Nandy's poems sing the song of rebellion and his love-poetry is peppered with the message of touching the rifle in retaliation against the misdeeds of the people who destroy the green pastures of love:

in a fierce denial of your absence
street lightsburn on
and a young man
touches his first rifle
with a hand that touched your cunt

Mulk Raj Anand insists that these poems are "the harbinger of the new Indian consciousness in revolt against the mocking bird of derivative poetry. They make a departure beyond the bourgeois conventionality into the domain of the unsayables, they attempt at penetration beyond perception." To express these unsayables Nandy "plunges into the deeper layers of his sensibility, surrenders to the urges beneath the skin, and through the burning and melting of the body-soul renders the near meaning of his vak, in new combinations, in fresh metaphors, in striking images which
transform the felt experience from the invisible to the visible. 61

Pritish Nandy's poetry not only uses the unsayables against the marauders and the looters, it also raises its voice against the dead-wood of the social custom. It is a kind of protest against the taboos of society. Pritish Nandy's poetry has been termed as obscene because of the vehemence of the metaphors and the sexual themes presented in it in a rather frank manner.

Normally, when the sexual act is depicted in detail in a work of literature it is labelled as obscene and if these sexual situations are handled a number of times in the same work, the work is immediately declared as pornography. But what is pertinent to note here is that the depiction of the details of the sexual act may be intentional on the part of the creative writer, he may have used them as a medium to exhibit his anger, frustration or disappointment with society. The vehemence with which a private act as the sexual intercourse is presented could serve the purpose of battering the barriers put up by society in an implicit manner. The poet through this demonstration of the unpresentable with the help of the unsayables may be indicating his yearning for a more free social system devoid of strait-jackets of hypocrisy in the expression and experience of love.
Love and sex being significant aspects of life, the creative writers cannot black them out and the depiction of love-in-sex and sex-in-love becomes a part of their experience of life and their creative endeavour. Such a writing cannot be and should not be termed as obscene. In India obscenity arises mainly from the frustration of desire. Desire has been conceived through our ancient tradition as the enemy of pure consciousness not only in the Upanishadic thoughts but also the thoughts of the Buddha. The sensual excitations were supposed to be a hinderance towards the realisation of the sublime.

Pritish Nandy's poetry depicts love in its various manifestations and in the process, the soft sentimental sign words, the vocabulary of flabbiness, the exotic trappings of the language of his predecessors is dropped and is replaced by a realistic imagery suitable for the tragic times in which the poet has been placed. With the help of the stark unsayable words the reader is jolted out of his sweet slumber of traditionality; he is made to feel uncomfortable and is compelled to think. In Nandy's poems, therefore, idealistic romantic love as presented by the practitioners of poetry in the pre-Independence era is replaced by honesty and candour and love is presented in more realistic terms registering the individual's real, as
against supposed, physical, emotional and spiritual needs. This typically modern attitude is reflected in the following poem:

Just as there's never been anyone
Like you for me, concede there's never
been anyone like me. Every song
I have sung for you, every whisper
we have shared, every poem I write
for you declares this simplest truth. Let the
future pass away, let tomorrow be gone:
the blossoms in one mind will cling
to the dawn...

Pritish Nandy hints that for the male persona the female persona is not the first woman he has loved and he perceives clearly that he too may not be the first man in her life. But this does not seem to create any hinderance for the modern and emancipated sensibility of the male persona. This view contrasted with the traditional romantic, idealistic concept of love seems to be a refreshing change because of its concentration only on the here and now. For the lover the future does not matter, nor does the past. What matters is the present moment. Love as a life-long passion is rejected in favour of the love celebrated in the present. Once the excitement and ecstasy of love is gone, the two lovers may conveniently
go their separate ways without even feeling the need to know the name of their partner. The new social forces operating upon the individual have moulded the modern human-being in discarding the life-long bondage of love in favour of a more immediate, yet frenzied excitement of love. He does not mind even if this idea and experience of love is skin-deep, only on the physical plane.

The same feeling is conveyed in another poem where the poet using the confessional mode concedes that he has shared with his beloved what only lovers could share:

When you first came, quiet as the rain
that never fell ...  
..., I whispered words I had never
known and now shall never forget

He continues:

We have known and loved, and
shared what only lovers can share in
lyric guilt

But in the concluding lines Nandy plainly confesses that this love between them is without emotional complexities; it is love based on the physical pull felt by the two lovers:
There can be nothing simpler
than this love of ours, nothing truer when
this darkness flowers.

What would happen when the act of love-making is
over is not contemplated, though there is a hint at the
guilt felt by the lovers. Nandy in this sense is living
in the present only, enjoying the moment to the core
where nothing else matters. He deals with the same
theme more explicitly in another poem where he seems
uninterested in any involvement of the heart. For him
the body of the female partner is the immediate reality:

As the rains do not scar the dark hills
My body shall leave no trace on yours.

Such poems reflect Pritish Nandy's unorthodox attitude
towards love relationships and sex. Exclusiveness in
love as professed by the traditional Indian society does
not mean much for him. This exclusiveness in love
desired by the traditional social and moral code puts a
rather heavy demand on the lovers requiring that body
should meet only when souls marry in love. This
pretence has been studiously maintained for years and it
takes an adventurous soul like Nandy to reject this
pretence without any uneasiness and self-consciousness:
When wind and wild hawk meet, we shall celebrate our distances. Till then do not ask me my name, nor the shipwrecked star which wave returns at dusk fall. 67

In a tender and beautiful poem cited below Pritish Nandy demonstrates how a casual and short sexual experience of love can be full of excitement and tenderness:

You were not
the first girl I loved
nor was I
your first man
yet when we first made love
our bodies stammered
on a guiltless landscape 68

Since ages love has been defined as something divine and lofty which will be defiled through sexual contact. Nandy demolishes this myth by showing how a one-hour-at-a-stand type of love can be as beautiful as any other kind of love. The poem continues:

Our limbs
were a tangled mess
your hair was caught
in my metal watch-strap
your offfocus lust
by my after-shave cologne 69
There is nothing to suggest that there is any feeling of guilt in the lovers in spite of the fact that they have had their experience in love through different partners. They revel in their physical union. The poet graphically recreates the scene:

Your black jeans
lay crumpled on the carpet...
...
beside my black snake belt

and goes on:

& you were all around me
moist and unafraid

A typical post-Independence attitude towards love and sex is reflected in the poem. The poet, a typical product of the modern industrial society where the contacts between the individuals of the opposite sex are sudden and brief and the person concerned visualises the possibility of never meeting again, enjoys every moment with his partner. The awareness on the part of both the lovers regarding the brief moments available to them makes their love-making all the more tender and precious for them. In this sense Nandy has the courage and honesty to give expression to
the "new consciousness" which rejects the traditional morality. Nandy, on one hand, implicitly exposes the hypocrisy of the society, and on the other, justifies the urge on the part of the individuals to reach out to others through any avenue, whether physical or emotional, open to them. The passion of love even if it is short-lived is beautiful and hence gets the nod of approval by the poet:

Love was: what we felt that night
When I reached you to your penthouse flat
the kiss we shared in a timeless eye:
before I caught the lift & said good bye. 72

The modern man is compelled by the very conditions of his existence to love in this manner. The socio-economic tensions operative on modern man are so acute, conditions so complex that to dream of full-time love is perhaps asking for the moon. The modern man lives in pieces, loves in piece-meal. British Nandy makes an assault on the outworn social norms regarding love and, in a way, advocates anarchic individualism. But it is to be remembered that he is a victim of a dismembered society; he is forced to live his life in fragments.
Pritish Nandy's search for his own self involves him in varied experiences related to love. He may get solace in the realm of beauty and love, yet somewhere in the heart of his heart he too recognises that love, sex, beauty are mere halts in a long and arduous journey to achieve peace of soul and harmony. Even when he is in the heart of the storm of love, he is aware of the truth that "he who loves is a loner always." In this sense he is a "nowhere man." The extract from a poem of John Lennon which Nandy has affixed as an epigraph to his collection The Nowhere Man highlights this predicament of the modern man:

He's a real nowhere man,  
sitting in his nowhere land,  
making all his nowhere plans for nobody.  
Doesn't have a point of view 
knows not where he is going to,  
isn't he a bit like you and me?  
Nowhere man, please listen,  
you don't know what you're missing;  
nowhere man the world is at your command. 73

Pritish Nandy thus with the help of the above-cited poem presents the dilemma and the strength of the modern man. The modern man, the nowhere man, is just sowing his wildoats for nobody. He is you and me. But this nowhere man is not without potential. Given the
right opportunity, and given the right medium, he can command the Kingdom of his own self. Love is one among the many mediums with the help of which he can attain his goal. Nandy too tries to seek support and shelter in love. He wants to go 'home' which may symbolise harmony and balance in life; it may mean death as well, or a state where the individual is able to face himself without shame. In poem no. 47 in _A Stranger called I_ (1976) Nandy yearns to go "home" after drifting for long:

> me homewards and I will tell you my laughter and my grief when the doors of the rivers open, and the wind ties knots in my hair I have drifted long and hard; it's time to drift me homewords...

In another poem he again confesses "wherever I go I find that I cannot/escape myself."75

Pritish Nandy wants love to fill his loneliness. The illusion of being loved, even if in the physical sense, is better than the reality of being lonely. That is why he insists in _A Stranger Called_ (1976)

> Love me again, even without love. Desire me. Let your tongue find mine. Surround me with the river in your embrace. Trap me with your primal nakedness when I drift me home to you at last..."76
He wants the company of the beloved at any rate. He cannot think of being alone because aloneness brings in its trail many embarrassing questions. Even if love is a ritual at the physical plane, he pleads with his beloved to 'love' him even if there is no love left. The sense of emptiness fills his soul, he craves for peace, wants to go 'homeward'.

The trees were bored. The sun in faded purple rags set beyond a tired river. The lone straggler turned home wards. But home is the troubled silence of the heart, a voice frantic with emptiness.  

Nandy wants to escape from the world of hard reality into the green pastures of dreams and fancy. That is why time and again we find him using the refrain of going, of withdrawing himself from the theatre of human drama of which he himself is an integral part. Love, soothing at one time, does not provide him any reprieve. It is merely the illusion of the soul. Disgusted, he writes:

At dusk I listen to the trembling of the trees. Love is seldom what it seems

... ... ...

... ... ...
For nobody waits for me
somewhere. Like a night wandering
restless in the forest, I must return again. 78

In yet another poem Nandy tells us that he has to wander
"more lonesong forests", "some more tired cities" and love
a "few more lonely women". He would see a few more dreams
before going back to himself. Thus the sense of
loneliness of the self makes him drift into a world of
dreams. He finds the present dark and gloomy, life for him
is difficult and that is why he declares "only our dreams
keep us alive." 79 These dreams engulf him even while he
is in the company of his beloved:

The wind disentangles itself from your
frenzied body as hurricanes of dreams
follow me: eternity is only a river reaching
towards the sea. 80

Commenting on this aspect of the poet's psychological
make-up Niranjan Mohanty writes, "Nandy calls himself a
dreamer in solitude. The poet through his aimless
wanderings tries to come to himself and to understand his
inner self and finally to bring a harmony between the
strange dreamer and the vital self within." 81

The poet exhibits a secret desire to attain a
primival innocence; always the dreamer seeks the soundless
bottoms of innocent moments:
You asked me nothing, bewildered by your own silence. I loved you, afraid of your innocence ...

Sometimes he is fortunate enough to have a glimpse into the heart of the primival innocence, sometimes it is merely a dream which remains but a dream:

Once there was a secret grief. And it wandered far and wide for years and years, in search of some solace. It went to the mountains. The mountains were silent, with the ageless wisdom of centuries.

A sense of emptiness engulfs the poet and, in consequence, he becomes conscious of death:

Yet no one will remember us for the waters of death have fractured our limbs.

This is the stage when all passion is maimed and a mouth ceases to speak. The consciousness of death and the futility of all human endeavour makes Pritih Nandy a truly modern poet. Through love he wants to achieve a sense of immortality. This seems to be only hope. He raises the philosophical questions regarding birth and death and finds that love is perhaps the only route open to him to bypass death:
Nandy is obsessed with the theme of death as he is with the theme of love and the twin themes intertwine in his poems. Starting from *Of Gods and Olives* in 1967 to the *Tonight, This Savage Rite* in 1979 Pritish Nandy's poetic journey has never been free from his preoccupation with death in one way or the other. Sometimes it is caused by marauders, on others it is the product of poverty, on still others it is the result of metaphysical, emotional or spiritual tensions. Still the poet hopes that love can triumph over death, and in this sense love for him becomes synonymous with "home-coming":

Each loving, he said, is a home coming. Look within your hear, where every sorrow leads towards greater togetherness. And each one of us is alone, just as each star in a constellation.

From where do we all come? and where do we go? we drink of the sea and the sea is endless. we suffer greif and yet grief is boundless. For we are all trapped within the circle of life.

And we turn to love because we fear death waits at the end of each faltering step.
Pritish Nandy, accepting love as homecoming, wants to create a new language of love so that new manuscripts of dreams could be woven:

Let there be laughter, let your hand create the new language of our love, so that fireflies may weave the manuscripts of our dreams.  

It is to be noted, however, that in spite of the poet's affirming repeatedly that loving is home-coming, that he would, in the company of his beloved, create a new language of love to realise the "tapestry of our dreams", he finds himself failing:

I have learnt the language of love. But where is my country? I am familiar with the seasons. Autumn befriends me as the months change colour. This wild inheritance hurts me. Whatever I touch turns to stone.

It is relevant to point out here that even in Pritish Nandy's early poems a sense of loneliness and a craving for love and silence is discerned. The poet in his early phase of creativity seems to be a man rejected in love, tired of love and still yearning for some sort of fulfilment. Poems like 'Iycanthrope', 'Impression-21', 'For the Patagonien' and 'Image-3' etc. in Of God and Olives bear ample testimony to this fact. He seems to be exasperated and wants to retire to a place.
where he can live with his beloved in the rain of silence:

I want a lonely world
of our own
(She and me)
far from the smell of people.

The poet's attempts to build a self-sufficient boudoir away from the world are thwarted, sharpening his frustrations. His dependence on love may be heavy on physical love but he seems to be inspired by the idea of an ideal magical love which does not give a burning forehead and a parching tongue; what he is after is emotional and spiritual harmony. This is a stage when love finds its extension in nature and in humanity at large.

The poet's experiments with love soon make him turn towards loneliness which is an essential part of modern life and consciousness, and the word "loneliness" acquires a great significance on his poetic canvas. He comes to learn the fact that one does not have to be alone to be lonely:

I have finally discarded the apocryphal alibi. I have confessed to being alone. In restless dreams I have watched the secret wildfires of your lust. Deciphering the familiar embrace. Perfect sundrift, mindblowing loneliness...
In poem after poem, Pritish Nandy tries to put an end to his isolation by going to the arms of the beloved, by getting into the ritual of the bodies. Sometimes under the illusion of having found true love he bursts into strange songs of love and we find he has "spurned my loneliness tonight/and sought oneness with the flaming sky." On such occasions he surrenders only to the rain. Rain and love become synonymous, both are symbols of life. Thus Pritish Nandy is able to correlate his love for the beloved with nature and through nature with love for man and love for life itself. This yearning to be one with the beloved exhibits a mystical strain because uniting with the beloved means obliterating one's own petty self and identifying himself with nature and humanity at large. According to Ashley E. Myles, "The Sufistic strain in the works of Nandy, where love for self grows into a passion for the beloved, moves forward to encompass love and concern for man in general and finally climbs upwards to become a universal force and divine blessing." Myles also asserts, "This is a state of consciousness where a man's search ends and he realises his self and merges his own identity with the cosmic identity. This is where the true voice of the poet emerges." The argument forwarded by A.E.Myles, however, is fragile because Nandy does not seem to achieve the cosmic identity
and is merely engaged in the process of self-examination. He, in a large number of his poems, is pre-occupied with physical love, and through it tries to comment upon society's moral, social, and political health. In a comparatively fewer number of poems love is achieved beyond the mechanical framework of man-woman relationship and is presented as a noble human emotion and as a universal process of life.

No doubt, in Pritish Nandy's poetry the presence of love is underlined through his craving for the consummation of the desires of the flesh, still it may be asserted that the fulfilment through the mere body does not seem to be the poet's concern. In the collections like Lonesong Street, The Nowhere Man, In Secret Anarchy, Pritish Nandy 30 and Tonight, This Savage Rite the poet presents an attitude of dissatisfaction, generally speaking, with the merely physical, merely mechanical game of the bodies. In these poems the theme of loneliness becomes highly significant. The poet regularly gives expression to the tortures of his private hell, the loss of premordial innocence. He feels unconnected, empty and lonely and craves for some support but what he gets is solitude and a loveless harvest of memories:
I am restless in solitude.
And yet I live alone, deep inside this whirlpool.
All around me is the faded sepia twilight that the
wind brings back, a loveless harvest of memories.

The sense of being a nowhere man torments him, his
volubility deserts him and he repeatedly falls back on
silence:

Wherever we start, we always return to
solitude: I know no longer where anything begins.
Silence follows the footsteps of men.

In another poem he confesses to himself, "For once, admit/
that there is nothing more to say." The volcanic quality
that is to be seen in the images used in the early
collections is substituted by an enigmatic speculation and
by calm, exploring words of enquiry in a volume like
Pritish Nandy. In this volume and other volumes like
The Nowhere Man and In Secret Anarchy, silence become the
synonym of love. The poet in a chance encounter meets the
all-wise "He" in the strange unfamiliar street of his
dreams and "asks him all the questions that had haunted me
since childhood."

He held the evening star in his right hand. There
were clouds drifting through his dark hair. He
looked at me, and I asked him why silence was
another name for love.
He also pleads with him to explain to him his loneliness. In the next poem too he speaks of a secret grief wandering far and wide in search of some solace. Nature did not help it in its search "The seas were passionately raising against all life's futilities". Even the life-giving sea was distant, unapproachable and refused to speak. Thus love, time and again, is presented in a philosophical manner. The power of silence seems to him to be more powerful than the power of words. The absence of the beloved has been accepted now, the rejection in love too gives him no pain. This is the state of balance the poet is finally able to achieve. Love is the other name of "home-coming" no doubt, but accepting that "home is the troubled silence of the heart, a voice/frantic with emptiness" is the final illumination he attains. "And so he realises like Keats that absolute truth or love is beyond the easy grasp of the mortals and this is how we are limited. If by chance anywhere permanence in any form is achieved, it is a mere fallacy because "human kind cannot bear very much reality." To conclude, Pritish Nandy starts as a quester in the realm of love by indulging in the carnal and the physical. The body of the beloved is a concrete reality for him which he is not in a position to bypass. A large number of poems in his different collections of poetry
indicate that the theme of bodily love is very important for the poet as through it he tries not only to communicate with his beloved by forging bridges through the body, but also tries to define himself as an individual. Through love he also tries to empathise with other members of the society and shares their aspirations, ambitions, their secret griefs and agonies. He exploits the theme of love to comment upon the apathy, hypocrisy and social injustice of the society by writing "for those who can never read the language I use" and promises them "a defiant sun which would break through the shadows that now gather in the tired eye of night." 102

In spite of this the general impression that we form about Pritish Nandy is that he is a true romantic at heart, a defiant dreamer, one who lapses into the mood of nostalgia when the beloved is absent. A superb creator of images, Pritish Nandy floats with diverse moods of ecstasy and agony, tries to reach a stage of consciousness where he can identify himself with the whole cosmos, yet the only thing that he is able to realise is the futility of all desire. Love proves to be a chimera, a mirage and he accepts his position as a lonely man in all sincerity.

"The much-worried nowhere man seems to have reached the shore of poise; he is no longer desirous of getting nearer
to the lady love. He celebrates his distance from her, of late realising that the essential condition of man is solitude, where suffering is the only ritual." He now realises well:

I know no longer where anything begins.
Silence follows the footsteps of men.

Pritish Nandy's frenzied wings have criss-crossed the tattered skyline to attain the silence that quells the storm within. He has traversed the whole universe, has loved in order to attain solace and peace. It has been a "war with destiny" for him. The poet of the passion and the storm, violent whimsy and romance, in the end finds solace and peace only in the loneliness and the silence of his heart. He has realised himself only in the acceptance that:

Loving and unloving are one, even as the fragments of the sea swirl in bewitching agony.
REFERENCES


3 Ibid., p.63.

4 Pritish Nandy, "Because I Have not Met You," Riding the Midnight River, p.16.


6 Subhoranjan Dasgupta, Pritish Nandy, pp. 32-33.


8 Pritish Nandy, "Image 4," The Poetry of Pritish Nandy, p.25.

9 Pritish Nandy, "Because I Have Not Met You," Riding The Midnight River, p.16.

10 Ibid.


17 Niranjan Mohanty, op.cit., p.187.


19 Pritish Nandy, "Against the Canvas of the Night," *Riding the Midnight River*, p.57.


21 Ibid.


24 Pritish Nandy, "Riding the Midnight River," Riding the Midnight River, p.15.
28 Niranjan Mohanty, op.cit., p.188.
31 Pritish Nandy, "Poem:4," Tonight, This Savage Rite, p.36.
32 Pritish Nandy, "Poem:5," Tonight, This Savage Rite, p.37.
33 Pritish Nandy, "Poem:27," Tonight, This Savage Rite, p.48.
34 I.N. Agrawal, op.cit., p.256.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.

38 Pritish Nandy, "Though I Have Never Seen the Mountains," *Riding the Midnight River*, p.74.


42 Ibid.

43 Pritish Nandy, "1000 Rounds a Minute," *Riding the Midnight River*, p.102.


45 Quoted by Rina Pritish Nandy in *The Poetry of Pritish Nandy*, p.11.

46 Ibid.

47 Pritish Nandy, "You cannot Escape the Waters that Cradle You," *Riding the Midnight River*, p.91.


51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Pritish Nandy, "Against the Canvas of the Night," *Riding the Midnight River*, p.57.
59 Pritish Nandy, "1000 Rounds a Minute," *Riding the Midnight River*, p.102.
60 Quoted by Rina Pritish Nandy in *The Poetry of Pritish Nandy*, p.11.
61 Ibid., p.10.
62 Pritish Nandy," Poem:29," *Tonight, This Savage Rite*, p.49.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

John Lennon, Quoted by Pritish Nandy in *The Nowhere Man*, p.1.


Ibid.


84 Pritish Nandy, "This is my Covenant With Death," Riding the Midnight River, p.86.
85 Pritish Nandy, "Time," Pritish Nandy, 30, p.60.
90 Quoted by Subhoranjan Dasgupta in Pritish Nandy, p.51.
94 Ibid.

Pritish Nandy, "Poem:8," *Tonight, This Savage Rite*, p. 38.


*************