India and Indian Ethos in the Poems of Paz

Reji Paikkattu “Octavio paz vis-a-vis India Octavio paz's objective assessment of Indian culture with special reference to A tale of two gardens and In light of India ” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 2001
Chapter 4
India and Indian Ethos in the Poems of Paz

Though *In Light of India*, a treatise on the peoples, places, philosophies, art, history and literature of India, bears ample testimony to the solid scholarship of Paz and is widely acclaimed as a major work, Paz regards it as 'nothing more than a long footnote to the poems of *East Slope*’ (*In Light* 32). The poet explains that *In Light of India* provides the intellectual context of the poems.

Octavio Paz wanted to be remembered primarily as a poet and so he regarded *In Light of India* as a long footnote to the poems collected in *East Slope*. What is the significance of a book of poems in the life of a poet? It is, according to Paz, "a sort of diary in which the author tries to preserve certain exceptional moments, whether joyful or unfortunate" (32).

In his interview with Claude Fell, a University Professor in France, which took place in 1970, Paz spoke about his difference of opinion with Levi-Strauss who believed that myth can be translated whereas poetry is untranslatable. Paz said:

I believe that myth and poetry are translatable, though translation implies transmutation or resurrection. A
poem by Baudelaire, translated into Spanish, is another poem and it is the same poem ('Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude' *The Labyrinth of Solitude* 334).


Paz's various commitments to India as Mexican ambassador, student of Indian heritage and as a poet, inspired poems of scintillating power and sensual charm of a rare order in world poetry.

Readers of *East Slope*, *Toward the Beginning* and 'Mutra' get a poet's experience of the vast reality called India in all its complexity as it is 'resurrected' in English translation. Paz wrote in the Spanish language
which was translated into English by eminent translators like Mariel Rukeyser, Elizabeth Bishop, Paul Blakburn, Lysander Kemp and Charles Tomlinson. As a translator, Eliot Weinberger's commitment to the poetry of Paz was lifelong and deep. When those poems have been translated or 'resurrected' in English language, they retain the same source of inspiration expressed in another language. Is the picture of India in *Ladera este* different from the picture in *East Slope*? Whatever be that, Paz was deeply committed to India and to poetry.

Paz's first contact with India was in 1951 when he came as a minor official in the Mexican embassy in India. The new experience evoked mixed emotions in him: "dizziness, horror, stupor, astonishment, joy, enthusiasm, nausea, inescapable attraction. What had attracted me? It was difficult to say" (*In Light 12*). The excess of reality is transformed into an unreality which becomes a balcony for him to peer into that 'which is beyond and still has no name'.

Paz's first poetic response to India was guarded. He visited Mathura in the summer of 1952 shortly after his arrival in India and wrote a long poem based on that experience – 'Mutra'. Later, in a letter to Alfonso Reyes Paz confessed about the intention of the poem: "I wrote it to defend myself against the metaphysical temptation of India" (*A Tale 100*).
As Paz records in the notes written for 'Mutra', "the subject of the poem is the arrival of summer in the city and the fevers it generates on the earth and in the mind. A subject associated with Hinduism and its search for unity in the plurality of the forms of life" (100). The poet pictures the arrival of the spring in the following manner:

Like a too-loving mother, a terrible mother of suffocation,
like a silent lioness of sunlight
a single wave the size of the sea
it has arrived noiselessly and in each of us has taken its place
like a king
............
Summer, enormous mouth, vowel made of fumes and panting!

(A Tale 15)

The expression 'a too loving mother' contrasts sharply with 'a terrible mother of suffocation' both of which are applied to the effects of summer and, by extension, effect of India (at least initially) on Paz. The poet presents various images associated with India in the succeeding lines: 'afternoon rich in birds,' 'night with its bright stars armed and in
full regalia', 'the beggar rising himself like a feeble prayer,' 'women bricklayers carrying stones on their heads as if they carried extinguished suns', 'the man covered with ashes who worship the phallus, dung and water', 'musicians who tear sparks out of daybreak and make the airy tempest of the dance come down to earth'.

Obviously the poet was overwhelmed and suffocated by the experience, a response which is clear from the following lines,

all this long day with its frightful cargo of beings and things slowly being stranded on suspended time

(A Tale 16).

Paz is intensely conscious of the all pervasive presence of death and annihilation that surrounds everything:

We all go declining with the day, we all enter the tunnel, we cross through endless galleries whose walls of solid air close behind us . . . (16).

Against this illusory nature of things in the light of transience and annihilation, the poet takes a courageous stand:

No, take hold of the ancient image: anchor existence and plant it in the stone, base of the lighting
Some stones never give away, stones made of time, time
made of stone, centuries that are columns. (A
Tale 17)

But ultimately nothing is permanent, everything, including the being of
the poet, is transcient. So the poet continues:

Stones also lose their footing, stones too are images,
and they fall and they scatter and mix and flow with
the flowing river

The stones also are the river (17).

Here Paz, who was deeply interested in Buddhism, consciously or
unconsciously uses an idea that recurs in Buddhist discourse to denote the
transient or impermanent nature of things – that of the stream of water.
'The flowing river' into which stones fall is strongly reminiscent of the
nairatmyavada (doctrine of no-self) in Buddhism. It is explained in the
'Questions of King Milinda' (which was written in the beginning of the
Christian era) where, in the form of a dialogue between the Greek King
Menander and a Buddhist sage Nagasena, the doctrine of no-self is
elaborated using the example of a chariot. When asked to define a
chariot, the king realizes that the pole or the axle is not a chariot, but the
word 'chariot' is a mere symbol for those parts assembled in a particular
way. As the sage says, 'the self is only a label for the aggregate of certain physical and psychical factors'. When we look at the reality of things taking the element of time,

this aggregate, according to Buddhism, does not continue the same for even two moments, but is constantly changing. So the self and the material world are each a flux (Samtana). The symbols are generally used to illustrate this conception – the stream of water and 'the self-producing and self-consuming flame . . . . It will be seen thus that every one of our so called things is only a series (vithi) – a succession of similar things or happenings, and the motion of fixity which we have of them is wholly fictious (Hiriyanna 141).

Among various schools of thought in Indian philosophy, Paz had a special fascination for Buddhism. Even in this early poem on India, Paz seems to reflect the world view of Buddhism.

Paz presents a family in Mathura in the following lines:

The sleepless children picking fleas by moonlight
fathers and mothers with their family flocks and their
beasts alseep and their gods petrified a thousand years ago

(A Tale 16)

Paz in his treatise *In Light of India* observed that Hinduism had not experienced anything similar to the Renaissance or the Reformation. Consequently the Hindu religion was deprived of reinvigorating changes and the Indian culture was petrified owing to the static nature of the institution of caste. Later in the same poem the poet asks,

Where is the man who gives life to the stones of the dead, the man who makes the stones and the dead speak? (17)

The above mentioned lines must be a search for the man who gives life to the stones of the dead. Paz feels that there is nothing to revive the petrified culture in Mathura. The man alluded to in this context is suggestive of Jesus Christ.

In Mathura the poet sees vast images belonging to the past-sculptures, idols and contemplates that god-realization must have been what prompted the unknown people to undertake such stupendous tasks of image building. But the poet doesn't feel one with the people who carved out those statues and who celebrated festivals in their pursuit of God realization/self realization.
... I do not want to be
God, I do not want to grope in the dark, I will not return
I am a man and man is
man, he who leapt to the void and since
then nothing has sustained him but his own wing

(A Tale 18)

Against the all consuming desire to annihilate ego in pursuit of god realization so characteristic of oriental tradition, Paz poses the typical western attitude towards life as action and heroism. Paz views his predicament in the central tradition of the West stemming from the Greeks as represented in their twin epics, The Iliad and The Odyssey. Western activism is highlighted using his own solitary but heroic condition: He is an exile in India

the one who let go of his mother, the exiled, rootless,
with neither heaven or earth, a bridge, a bow
stretched over nothing, in himself unified, made whole
and nevertheless split from the moment of his birth
struggling
against his shadows . . . .
As the poet views human condition, man is reduced to a position where he has to find meaning for his existence in his humanity. Man is seen as shorn of religious consolation as represented by idols and festivals. The poet felt a strong reaction against that mode of life and at the same time he is conscious of the dead end to which unthinking activism would lead.

In order not to fall into despair Paz projects a via media to save him from black despair:

The ultimate images overthrown, the black river drowns

Consciousness,

night doubles over, the soul gives way (19)

Paz has something precious to preserve in memory.

But in my head keep vigil adolescence and its images, the only treasure not ravaged:

Ships afire on seas still unnamed and each

wave striking memory in a storm of reminders

and the high-walled city that on the plain glitters like a
jewel in pain
and domolished watch-towers and the champion
defeated and in the smoking chambers the treasure of
women
and the poem rising and covering with its
wings the embrace of day and night
and the straight line of discourse planted in potency
in the middle of the city (A Tale 19-20).

In the notes appended to A Tale of Two Gardens, Paz wrote that he had just read some fragments of the translation of the Iliad by Alfonso Reyes. In this last stanza, oblique allusions to classical Greece, Troy, Trojan war, sacking of the city of Troy abound which cannot be ignored in any perceptive reading. The 'goddess of green eyes' must be an allusion to the story involving Hera, Athena and Aphrodite into whose possession the Apple of Discord came as a present by Eris, the goddess of Strife – the incident which culminated in Trojan war and the sacking of Troy: 'demolished watch-towers', 'smoking chamber' and 'the treasure of women' point to the destruction of the city of Troy.

This reading of the poem is warranted in the light of the words written by Paz in the notes. He says:
The end of the poem sets against this metahistorical absolute (i.e., 'unity in the plurality of the forms of life'), the idea of life as action and heroism which we have inherited from the Greeks (A Tale 100).

Against this tremendous waste and destruction which indirectly points to human vitality and adventure, however misguided, the poet highlights the powers of poetry and creative process: "the poem rising and covering with its wings the embrace of day and night" (p.20). Poetry is viewed as something resembling 'forbidden fruit' which is the produce of the tree of knowledge of good and evil:

the straight tree of discourse
planted in potency in the middle of the city. (20)

It is clear that poetry effects salvation against the senseless and illusory acceleration of phenomenal existence.

The entry on Paz in Encyclopaedia Britannica notes that the poet's "most prominent theme was man's ability to overcome his existential solitude through erotic love and artistic creativity" (9: 20). Here in this poem, Paz sings of 'acts, the high pyres burnt by history'.
The poet doesn't aspire the divine stature; on the contrary he is perfectly content with his humanity. He says:

Under these black remains asleep, truth,
who roused the works: man is

only man among men (A Tale 20)

For Paz poetry is a gift which enables him to appreciate and express what it means to be a human being. He receives that gift with deep commitment and responsibility. For Paz poetry is also a means of salvation. As he says,

And I reach down and grasp the incandescent

grain and

Plant it in my being: it must grow one day (20)

For Paz, poetry is his religion and the very essence of his existence. He was committed to poetry as to nothing else and as no one else was.

From this lengthy analysis of the poem, it is clear that Paz was on the defensive when he confronted Indian reality. He defended himself against the metaphysical temptation of India as is obvious from the thematic evolution of 'Mutra'. Instinctively he felt that 'the idea of life as action and heroism' perpetrated by modern western activism is superior to
oriental attitude to life, which he perceived to be a negation. Paz writes in the notes: "A somewhat more balanced and just position is taken in the final chapter of In Light of India" (A Tale 100-1). In his poems dealing with India collected in East Slope and Toward the Beginning we see a similar evolution of attitudinal change.

East Slope collects together some fifty poems and Toward the Beginning contains fifteen poems. A brief analysis of some important poems in these collections will reveal how Indian heritage – its art, culture, philosophy and history – influenced Paz in his evolution as a world-poet.

Among the different religious traditions in India, Buddhism held strongest fascination for Paz. He believed that Western civilization lost its unifying centre when it opted for unlimited progress with the help of science and technology creating 'air conditioned hells' in metropolitan cities. Also in dealing with problems of existence, Paz found the philosophy of Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism, as a system of belief at once modern and convincing. Paz was interested in the interpretation of Buddhism by Nagarjuna and many poems contain allusions to Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti, a Buddhist logician and poet. Also poems abound in clear and direct allusions to
central concepts in Buddhism like sunyata, nirvana, prajna, karuna, Boddhisattva, Prajnaparamita. There is a poem with the title 'Sunyata' and another 'Maithuna' that deals with the path of illumination followed in Tantric Buddhism and Hinduism. 'Shiva' and 'Parvati' appear in 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta'.

In the notes written for the poem 'Sunyata', Paz explains the concept of absolute void and proves how 'samsara is nirvana because all is sunyata'. Paz refers to *Buddhist Logic*, a monumental modern study of Buddhist philosophy by Stcherbatsky and the commentary by Chandrakirti on Nagarjuna, *Prasanapada*, in the French translation by Jacques May. All these prove that Paz had tremendous fascination for Indian thought which he studied in detail using authoritative works in English and French translations.

'Balcony', a dense poem with philosophic undertones with which the collection *East Slope* begins, can be taken as embodying an image that reveals Paz's special relationship with India. Eversince he came to India, especially after 1962, Paz began to regard India as his second garden, the first being his native Mexico. His days as an 'exile' in India in the official role as Mexican ambassador afforded him with a vantage point, just as a balcony gives one who stands on it viewing the panorama below. From
that vantage point, he saw and lived the vast Indian reality. Apparently, the poem is about

Delhi

Two tall syllables

surrounded by insomnia and sand (A Tale 23)

The poem cannot be regarded as an ordinary one celebrating a historic city. On the contrary it is a poem that fuses together the history of the city and the destiny of the poet in time. In order to understand it, a consideration of some central concepts in Mahayana Buddhism is essential. Paz had a peculiar fascination for this school of philosophy which is evident in many poems.

According to Mahayana Buddhism, as interpreted by Nagarjuna, truth is void or 'Sunyata' and so attributes of things are illusory in nature. Nagarjuna's important treatise is *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (Middle stanzas). Nagarjuna believes in no reality whatsoever and his philosophy is therefore known as 'Sunyavada'. Its distinctive quality is explained in the following manner by Hiriyanna:

The other Buddhist schools believe in things originating, though their view of causation is quite singular. The
Madhyamika denies the possibility of origination itself. The very first verse of Nagarjuna's *Karika* tries to unsettle the notion by subjecting it to the test of a negative logic. 'Nothing exists anywhere whether we conceive of it as born of itself or of others, or of both or of no cause whatsoever'. It means that the notion of causation is an illusion; and, since the doctrine of Buddha admits nothing that is uncaused, the whole universe must be illusory. All experience is a delusion; 'Anubhava esa mrsa' (Nagarjuna's *Karika*); and the world, a tissue of false things falsely related (220).

In other words, according to Nagarjuna, truth is void or sunyata; objects have no intrinsic character (Nissvabhava); vijnana is devoid of self-essence – it is a thing which is not in itself. One who follows this line of argument concludes that though knowledge may serve the purpose of empirical life, it is impossible to attach any metaphysical significance to it. Such a person can believe neither in outer reality nor in the inner reality. This doctrine is 'sunya vada' because it holds that everything is void.
The Mahayana Buddhism as interpreted by Nagarjuna deeply influenced Paz which is evident in his career as a poet. Paz wrote a poem entitled 'Sunyata' in which he speaks about 'tinder / of charred space' and also

the day

now nothing

but a stalk of scattering vibrations.

For the poet 'sunyata' is

presence consumed

in a weightless glory (A Tale 59).

which makes the day 'a stalk / of scattering vibrations'. In the poem 'Sunyata' Paz writes about the illusory nature of space ('charred space') and time ('the day . . . a stalk of scattering vibrations') which is in tune with the philosophy of Buddhism as interpreted by Nagarjuna. Empirical change is the attribute of time. But, if experience itself is illusory in nature, time also must be illusory or maya. This philosophic concept of time is woven into the texture of many poems of Paz including 'Balcony' where the philosophy of Buddhism exerts a subtle and highly complex
influence in the theme and structure making its analysis so important in the context of Paz's relationship with Indian ethos.

In the poem 'Balcony', a poem about Paz's experience in Delhi, the city undergoes change but the poet is unsure whether the city or himself passes through time. Time has got 'empty hands' in which it holds him ('time / holds me in its empty hands'). The poet writes:

Stillness
in the middle of the night
not adrift with centuries
not spreading out nailed
like a fixed idea
to the center of incandescence
Delhi
   Two tall syllables
surrounded by insomnia and sand
I say them in a low voice
   Nothing moves
the hour grows
stretching out (A Tale 23)
What is nailed to the center of incandescence must be time which is illusory in its acceleration. Then the poet alludes to the city of Delhi that had undergone changes – Delhi in history:

Old Delhi; fetid Delhi
alleys and little squares and mosques
like a stabbéd body
like a buried garden
For centuries it has rained dust
your veil is a dust-cloud
your pillow a broken brick
on a fig leaf
you eat the leftovers of your gods
your temples are bordellos of the incurable
you are covered with ants
abandoned lot
ruined mansoleum
you are naked
like a violated corpse
they stole your jewels and your burial clothes (A Tale 26)
The above stanza is a quick, random glance at the history of Delhi with its countless wars, acts of wanton destruction and cruelty; but still, a place brimming with human activity and sometimes depravity. In the end what the poet remembers is 'not height' 'nor the night' 'and its moon' or 'the infinities', 'but memory and its vertigoes' (24). Paz realizes that 'this spinning / is the tricks and traps' / behind it there is nothing / it is the whirwind of days'. The poet gets an overwhelming awareness of the illusory nature of things and says: "What you have lived you will unlive today" (25). 'Leaning over the balcony / I see / this distance that is so close' – the distance that is so close is not contradictory in the light of the illusory nature of things. Then Paz moves toward a vision that is in tune with the ephemeral nature of things:

I saw for an instant true life
It had the face of death
the same face
dissolved
in the same sparkling sea" (A Tale 24).

Again Paz muses

"Delhi / two towers / planted on the plains"
Who is the poet, then?

I was there

I don't know where

I am here

I don't know is where (25).

Then the poet realizes: 'Not the earth / time / holds me in its empty hands'. He is a plaything of time which is illusory in nature. He sees night and moon and movement of clouds; violence in the air and furious dust that wakes, observes that the lights are on at the air port and listens to the murmur of song from the Red Fort. Then he remembers a line by Gongora,

:a pilgrim's steps are vagabond music'

Paz is also a pilgrim in India. He looks to a beyond and sees:

On this fragile bridge of words

The hour lifts me

time hungers for incarnation

Beyond myself

somewhere

I wait for my arrival (A Tale 27).
In the words of Paz, poetry is

the bridge suspended between history and truth

'On this fragile bridge of words' which is poetry, Paz has a vision similar to enlightenment. For Paz poetry is more important than anything else and so he has the vision 'on this fragile bridge of words'.

Earlier in the poem Paz spoke about 'a sparking sea' which must be the transcending of life and death leading to 'nirvana' mentioned in Buddhism. There, the distinction of time as present, past and future melts away and emerge as one, eternal continuum of presence.

'Vrindaban', a long and interesting poem in *East Slope* presents Paz as a traveller (or a pilgrim) to the holy city. There, enveloped in the dark, the poet imagines himself to be 'a tree and spoke' and raced to follow his thoughts and reminiscences.

The remains of sparks

the laughter of the late parties

the dance of the hours (*A Tale* 52).

The he asks

"Do I believe in man or in the stars?"
and answers:

"I believe (with here a series of dots)

I see"

What is the significance of this 'series of dots' in parenthesis? Perhaps it points to the illusory nature of seeing and believing.

In Vrindaban, Paz observes 'putrefaction / fever of forms / fever of time / ecstatic in its combinations' and realizes that 'everything was flaming – stones, women, water.

It is significant to note that in Buddhism 'flame' is one of the two symbols (the other being stream of water) used to illustrate the conception of the constantly changing nature of things.

Everything sculptured from color to form
from form to fire

Everything was vanishing (A Tale 54)

Here Paz pictures everything – color, form – as changing and eventually vanishing. The line reminds the readers of a concept in Mahayana Buddhism. This school of thought propounded the non-reality of the world using an original and apparently startling argument. About this, Musashi Tachikawa, an authority on Mahayana Buddhism writes:
The Mahayanists' methods of arguments were quite startling, for they began saying things that ran directly counter to everyday logic. One of their favourite such expressions was "form is emptiness" (rupam sunyata). 'Form' signifies anything with colour or shape, but here it further refers to the world of delusion or the profane world, while "emptiness" refers to enlightenment or the sacred. The existence of any third possibility other than delusion or enlightenment is not recognized, and the sum of these two constitutes everything (2).

The lines are also reminiscent of the ksanika-vada or the doctrine of momentariness that asserts that everything changes from moment to moment – a central concept of Buddhism.

Then, there is the sight of a saddhu

covered with pale ashes

a saddhu looked at me and laughed

watching me from the other shore (A Tale 54)

The poet think that perhaps he saw Krishna in the form of a sparkling blue tree, or as Paz says,
Perhaps in a cleft stone
he grasped the form of woman
its rent
the formless dizziness (A Tale 55).

Paz is fond of celebrating sensual beauty which is clear from these lines having strong sexual connotations. About the same sadhu, Paz writes

Gone gone
He watched me from the other shore (56).

In the notes, Paz explains that the expression 'Gone, gone to the other spore' occurs frequently in the Prajnaparamita sutra. It means: 'the sage has crossed over from this bank, the phenomenal world, to the other, perfect wisdom' (p. 106). Then the poet’s testament of faith is expressed

The absolutes the eternities
their outlying districts
are not my theme
I am hungry for life and for death also
I know what I know and I write it (56).

Paz is a poet who sings in praise of fullblooded life and he is not fond of philosophizing in a cold vein. His commitment to poetry and the
realization that his vocation is that of an authentic poet rings true in these lines.

'Vrindaban' ends with the poet's proclamation that he is history.

I am a history
    a memory inventing itself
I am never alone
I speak with you always
    you speak with me, always
I move in the dark
    I plant signs (A Tale 56-57)

For Paz, "history is knowledge situated between science properly so-called and poetry" (The Labyrinth of Solitude 333). In In Light of India, Paz wrote: "... a poet, before speaking, must hear others – that is to say, the language, which belongs to everyone and to no one" (118). Paz recognizes himself as history that reclaims memory from the past. Its language cannot be a monologue; it is in the form of a dialogue. The poet reconciles poetry and history by being intensely truthful to his medium, which is language. The poetry can reconcile mutually antithetical attributes by employing images that effect moments of illumination in the darkness of banal speech. "I move in the dark / I plant signs", says Paz.
'Wind from All Compass Points', the poem with which the collection *Toward the Beginning* begins, is a scintillating recollection of various moments in his life and also a poetic evocation of places visited by him – bazar in Kabul and the river that crosses the city, many places in northern India, Western Pakistan and Afghanistan, Datia, the palace castle built by Raja Bir Singh Deo in 17th century in Madhya Pradesh, Salang Pass in the mountains of Hindu Kush. Paz effects a superb poetic synthesis of significant moments, persons and places from his past into a mode of discourse that comes alive in this long dense poem with the refrain.

"The present is motionless".

In this motionless or eternal present, the poet and his wife become divine couples or the divine couple – Shiva and Parvathi – descends into the phenomenal world as the poet and his wife.

In course of the poem, Paz brings together past and present. The poem was written during American intervention in Dominican Republic and Paz remembers the words believed to be uttered by General Anaya in 1847 when he surrendered the Plaza de Churrubusco to General Scott, the head of the U.S. troops that attacked Mexico.
Our brothers are dying in Santo Domingo
If we had the munitions
You people would not be here (A Tale 68)

The first line alluding to the condition of the people (for Paz 'our brothers') in Dominican Republic is juxtaposed with an utterance by a Mexican hero in the nineteenth century in the succeeding line. It is followed by the ironic depiction of their present response to the challenge in the present – that of cowardice and inaction:

We chew our nails down to the elbow (68).

Effecting a transcontinental shift, Paz's poetic memory comes to South India where 'Tipu Sultan planted the Jacobin tree' (69).

Paz is a poet of sensual emotions who is always fond of presenting imagery of overt sexual connotation. It is obvious in the following stanza:

Down there
the hot canyon
the wave that stretches and breaks your legs apart
the plunging whiteness
the form of our bodies abandoned (70).
In the country where wind from all compass points meet, there are 'Russian cottages on the other bank of the Amu-Darya', 'sound of an Usbek flute – another river invisible clearer', Bactria, a shattered stature'. The refrain – 'The present is motionless' – accompanies shifts of places and memories. In this motionless present, the poet and his wife become divine couple:

At the top of the world

Shiva and Parvati caress

Each caress lasts a century

for the god and for the man

an identical time (72).

Here the phenomenal world and the transcendental world fuse together in the world created by the poet. In this country of the mind, silent spaces of transcendence exist along with the noise in the market in Peshawar; fire, water, earth and air interact

If fire is water

you are a diaphanous drop

the real girl

the transparency of the world (70)
and is transformed into a transcendental reality which is illusory – 'Sunyata'.

The mountains are of bone and of snow
they have been here since the beginning
The mind has just been born ageless
as the light and the dust (67).

Which is the world where there are mountains of bone and of snow? In the transcendental world evoked in the poem, 'they have been here since the beginning'. There the wind has just been born; still it is ageless.

Using a series of images that mutually negate one another which is a characteristic of surrealistic poetic discourse, Paz reconciles phenomenal world and the transcendental world and create a unique country of the mind – a world that exists in language and in the mind of the poet.

'A Tale of Two Gardens', a long poem with which the collection Toward the Beginning and the anthology A Tale of Two Gardens ends, brings together two 'gardens' or formative influences in Paz's intellectual and artistic life – Mexico and India. The poem traces significant moments, places, people and experience in the life of the poet. Paz visualizes Mixcoac, his childhood village in Mexico as one garden or
starting point in his life. The second garden implied by Paz is India itself. The long poem alludes to various obsessions, likes, fascinations, philosophical quests and poetic explorations in the many lives of Paz as a Mexican, a poet, a diplomat in India and a human being sensitive to various issues in the society.

Paz is a poet who is deeply conscious of the transience or impermanence of things in this world. For him

A house, a garden

are not places:

they spin, they come and go (A Tale 86).

As human beings, 'we are condemned to kill time': so we die, little by little'. While he was a boy, Paz remembers, he had a garden in Mixcoac, which was 'like a grandfather'. The fig tree was a goddess, the Mother. There in the garden he had an encounter with 'the cleft in the trunk, the feminine void, the fixed featureless splendor. Paz confronted 'the stuff of time and its inventions'. Also the pines taught him to talk to himself. One day he reached a clarity as if he had returned to the 'beginning of the Beginning'.

N85631
The view that human beings are creations of time and so 'condemned to kill time' and that fig tree was a goddess or the Mother and the perception of a cleft in the trunk of a tree as symbolising the feminine void thereby indicating the unity between nature and feminity ('Prakriti' is feminine principle in Indian philosophy) are deeply in tune with the spirit and ethos of Indian tradition.

Paz poetically alludes to his meeting and union with Marie-Jose and its power to transform his being. He realizes that 'the other is contained in the one, the one is another; we are constellations'. Perhaps it is not far fetched to observe that this oneness of 'the one' and 'the other' is not unlike the world view of the Advaita school of philosophy in India.

Paz realizes that a garden is not a place: 'it is a passage, a passion'. The depiction of a geographical space as passage is to be understood in the impermanence of things as understood in Buddhist philosophy. Later Paz realizes that 'passion is passage' (94). The poet's next insight is all encompassing and involves a unitive understanding of the nature of the universe. The essential mystery of the universe – the creation – is not something esoteric and arcane. It is to be realized in a mundane, down to earth and physical level using body as an agent and eroticism as a means. For Paz 'the other bank is here'. Consequently the consummation of his
erotic relationship with Marie Jose makes her Prajnaparamita (perfect wisdom) a female deity of Mahayana Buddhism, who is at one with 'Our lady of the other Bank'. In Tantric Buddhism ('Vajrayana') physical union of the couple is the way to Prajnaparamita or perfect wisdom, as Paz observes in the notes written for *East Slope*.

For Paz also physical union of the couple leads to perfect wisdom; erotic experience moves him to 'the other bank'.

I forgot Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti

in your breasts

I found them in your cry

Maithuna,

two in one

one in all,

all in nothing,

Sunyata,

the empty plenitude

emptiness round as your hips (*A Tale 94*).

In this poem Marie Jose alternatively becomes Almendrita, a little girl in a fairy tale in Mexico, yakshi, graceful deity of trees and plants and prajnaparamita, a female deity of Mahayana Buddhism. Locked in love's
battle, both of them together transcend time and return to 'the beginning of the Beginning'.

Towards the end of the poem Paz writes about the scattering of memories and images as maya, illusion. Places and experiences transform into 'weightless structures' and 'the garden sinks' and becomes 'a name with no substance'. Such a treatment of places and experiences is deeply influenced by the philosophy that sees everything as impermanent or illusory in nature. The central aspect of Buddhism is the impermanence of the world; Buddhism is even known as Ksanika-vada or the doctrine of momentariness which holds that everything changes from moment to moment. The vision of the poet regarding what subsists inspite of the change is 'clarity' which may be a perception of the world as 'Sunyata', empty plenitude.

Return to the beginning and the total extinction of the flow of time into eternal present are recurrent themes in the poetry of Paz from 'Sunstone' onwards. It is associated with the consummation of two beings in erotic act:

two bodies, naked and entwined
leap over time, they are invulnerable
nothing can touch them, they return to the source
there is no you, no I, no tomorrow
no yesterday, no names, the truth of two
in a single body, a single soul,

Oh total being (The Collected Poems 19).

Commenting on classical Sanskrit poetry that celebrates sex and eroticism, Paz wrote that it is "quite modern in its uninhibited praise of physical pleasure" (In Light, 144). For Paz physical union is the road leading to Prajnaparamita – Perfect Wisdom. Just like the classical Sanskrit poets who celebrated physical pleasure, Paz also sings in praise of physical pleasure derived through love and eroticism involving man and woman.

India appears in many other poems of Paz. 'The Religious fig' presents the pipal tree, first cousin to the banyan. The Buddhists regard the pipal as sacred and depict them in sculpture, paintings and poems as Gautama was enlightened and became the Buddha under its shade. The tree is associated with the 'Krishna cult' and so for the Hindus also the pipal tree is sacred. Paz writes: "The pipal and the banyan are central elements of the Indian landscape" (A Tale 102). In the poem 'The Religious Fig', Paz presents 'the great tree' as,
Green, humming,

its entrails in the air,

it is a huge overflowing cup

where the suns drink (28).

Nizam-Ud-din, a Sufi theologian and mystic of the 14th century and
Amir Khusrau, friend and disciple of the former, appear in 'The Thomb of
Amir Khusru', where Paz defines poems: "each poem is time, and it
burns". 'The Mausolem of Humayun' visualises the historic monument as
'hight flame of rose/ formed out of stone and air' (30). The poem 'The Day
in Udaipur' alludes to the palaces of Udaipur in Rajasthan and against
this backdrop sees the erotic union of the poet and his wife as 'bodies
extwined over the void' (34). The poem contains an allusion to the
sacrifice in the Kali temple ('Flies and blood / A small goat skips / in Kali's
court, 33) and also to Black Kali dancing on the prone body of the ascetic
Shiva and decapitating herself ('over the pale god / the black goddess
dances / decapitated', 33).

'On the Roads of Mysore' presents Tipu Sultan, the Tiger of Mysore,
who fought against the British in South India. Paz writes that he is
'worth as much as Nayarist and its Tiger of Alica' who was Antonio
Losada, the Mexican guerrilla of the 19th century. Mysore strikes Paz as 'a land good for dreaming and riding horses' (37).

Innumerable Indian birds (crows, parrots . . .) also figure in the poems of Paz. 'Ootacamund' depicts the Todas, who 'guard a secret from Sumeria' and 'worship Ishtar, the cruel goddess' and pictures Miss Penelope who, sitting on the verandah of the Cecil Hotel, regards India as a 'country of missed opportunities'.

In the poem 'Cochin', we find the Portuguese church and the people who go to six O' clock mass. 'Madurai' satirizes 'Sri K.J. Chidambaram, Director of the Great Lingam Inc. / a bus company specializing in tourists'. Paz met him at the British Club and he introduced the temple in the city as the largest temple in India and the T.S.V. Garage as the biggest in the subcontinent.

The long, complicated poem 'Blanco' begins with the quotation "By passion the world is bound / by passion too it is released" from The Hevajra Tantra, a central text in Tantric Buddhism in which Paz had profound interest. Paz remarks that 'Blanco' can mean white or blank or an unmarked space. It also means emptiness, void. The poem offers variant readings.
Allusions to places in India and Indian tradition recur in many other poems – 'Himachal Pradesh', 'Concert in the Garden', 'Epitaph for an Old Woman', 'The Effect of Baptism', 'Nightfall', 'The arms of Summer'. The poem 'Altar' is arranged in the form of a 'lingam' placed on 'Yoni', an emblem that reminds one of the path of self realization in Tantric Buddhism and Saktism. The poem begins with 'a name and its shadows' and passes through mutually antithetical and parallel succession of images and finally reach the realization: 'one in the other / unnamed' (The Collected Poems 289).

In addition to East Slope and Toward the Beginning, the collection A Tree Within also contain poems where allusions to Indian ethos appear. The poem with the title 'A True Within' begins as follows:

A tree grew inside my head.

A tree grew in.

Its roots are veins,
its branches nerves

thoughts its tangled foliage. (The Collected Poems 595)

The fifteenth chapter of The Bhagavad Gita begins with the description of 'The Tree of Samsara'. 
"They speak of the indestructible Asvatha having its root above and branches below, whose leaves are the metres. He who knows it knows the Vedas" (397).

The asvattha spoken of in this is man himself. Katha-Upanishad also speaks of an Asvattha which has roots above and branches below and which is eternal (3.2-1).

In his composition of the poem 'A Tree Within' Paz might have been influenced by the Gita which became, in his own words, his 'spiritual guide' to the world of India. Though this may be an instance of the influence of Indian philosophy on Paz, there is a seminal difference between the transcendental sense in which the Gita treats man as Asvattha and the down to earth and materialistic sense in which Paz finds the man as embodying a tree.

For Paz it is your glance that sets it on fire / and its fruits of shade are blood oranges / and pomegranates of flame (595). Here Paz alludes to the encounter between feminine principle and masculine principle as a means for fulfilment of life. The outcome of the erotic encounter is physical pleasure. Then,
Day breaks

in the body's night. (The Collected Poems 595)

'Kostas Papaioannou' (1925-1981), a poem dedicated to Nitsa and Reia, begins with the dedicatory words Milton used for Lycidas. The identity of the poet in the locale of the poem is as a young man of 30 who 'came from America, and was searching in the ashes of 1946 for the phoenix' egg' and Kostas at that time was a youth of mere 20, who 'came from Greece, from the uprising, from jail'. They met in a café, full of smoke and voices and literature and 'talked of Zapata and his horse' and remembered 'the beautiful sorceress of Thessaly who turned Lucius into an ass and a philosopher (539). The poem is written in the vein of the poet's reminiscences of Kostas 'a universal Greek form Paris, with one foot in Bactriana and the other in Delphi' (539).

In his ratiocination, Kostas follows a path carved out by his reasoning which comes to a dead end. Then he transcends it and enters a new path. At this juncture Paz realizes a deep philosophical truth:

... you neither enter nor leave, there is no inside

or out, there is only time with no exists.
Here Paz seems to be influenced by the philosophy of Buddhism according to which the world is a void ('sunyata') and so 'you neither enter nor leave'. The entities also change from moment to moment in time and so 'there is only time with no exits' (541).

The impression that deep philosophical truths of Buddhism seem to be present as a undercurrent of the poem is reinforced in the following stanza where Paz writes:

You went to India, where Dionysius came from, and
where the general Meander was king
and was known there as Milinda,
and like the king you marveled to find that the
difference between the One and the Void
resolves in their identicalness.

(The Collected Poems 541)

According to the philosophy of the Upanishads, the ultimate reality is one; but Buddhism holds that the ultimate reality is void or 'sunyata'. Or Buddhism does not recognise the existence of any ultimate reality. The cardinal difference between these two schools of thought in Indian tradition is masterly articulated by Paz in the above mentioned lines.
depicting Kostas Papaioannou as the person who muses on the identicalness of the One and the Void.

Paz deeply studied classics in Indian tradition. This fact is clear from the following lines where Paz presents the way in which his friend responded when he saw in Mahabalipuram 'a girl walking barefoot over the black earth, her dress a bolt of lightning'.

and you said: Ah beauty as in the time
of Pericles! and you laughed
and Marie Jose and I laughed with you,
and with us three laughed all the gods and
heroes of the Mahabharatha and all
the Bodhisttvas of the Sutras. (541)

The gods and heroes of the Mahabharata believed in the One whereas the Bodhisttvas perceived the world as the Void. Does Paz imply that in the appreciation of beauty, they are of one mind?

In the poem Paz says about his friend: "your genius drank not only the light of ideas but also from the fountain of forms" (541). This is equally true in the case of Paz too. Paz was in his element in the world of
ideas and 'drank' the light of ideas with relish. As a poet, he wove them into the texture of his poems with the craftsmanship of a master-artist.

A close reading of the poems of Paz reveals the impact of Indian experience in the evolution of the poet. Allusions to Indian places and abstruse philosophical ideas abound in Paz's poems, especially in the following collections – *East Slope*, *Toward the Beginning* and *A Tree Within*.

The school of thought that had a perennial fascination for Paz was Buddhism, mainly Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism. The world view of Buddhism and its emphasis on the impermanence of every form had a familiar echo in the soul of Paz. Many poems including 'Sunyata' point to this preoccupation with the world as void.

Paz celebrates sensual beauty and eroticism in his poems with an openness that may startle some readers. Consequently, there is nothing surprising in that Tantric Buddhism, which regards eroticism as a means to enlightenment, struck a responsive chord in the heart of the poet. He wrote a poem – 'Maithuna' – highlighting erotic love as leading the couple to self-realization. Indian tradition is noted for the central place it accords to love and eroticism in human life and also in the working of the universe. Erotic love – 'kama' – is one of the four aims in human life.
Desire or 'kama' is seen as the force behind the projection of the One as this phenomenal world of multiplicity and diverse forms. Paz's perception is in tune with this philosophy: he treats love and eroticism with total involvement and accords it a prominence enjoined in Indian ethos.