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
Conclusion

The unique feature that is self-evident to any objective student of Octavio Paz is that he is, without undue exaggeration, as much an Indian writer as he is a Mexican litterateur. This fact is obvious to any reader of, among other works, *A Tale of Two Gardens* and *In Light of India*. Paz's sympathy for 'Indianness' and his empathy with the ethos of India led to the flowering of his creative career which is a 'second spring' with India as distinct background and unambiguous inspiration.

Readers of *In Light of India* and collection of poems like *East slope*, *Toward the Beginning* and *A Tree Within* will be invariably impressed by the sympathy for and empathy with Indian ethos shown by Paz throughout his creative life. His affinity with Indian ethos reaches its zenith in a significant poem - 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta' where Paz writes:

"Shiva:

Your four arms are four rivers
four jets of water.

Your whole being is a fountain
Where the lovely Parvathi bathes,

where she rocks like a graceful boat" (*A Tale* 85)
The poet and his wife worship Shiva and Parvati 'not as gods but as images of the divinity of man'. In his perception Shiva transforms and his four arms become four rivers. In fact Shiva's whole being becomes a fountain 'where the lovely Parvati bathes'. Here Shiva is inseperable from Parvati; Parvati bathes in the fountain that is Shiva, It is not a question of two beings; rather Shiva and Parvati are one being. 'Your whole being is fountain where the lovely Parvati bathes'). This unity of Shiva and Parvati is amplified in these lines:

"The sea beats beneath the sun:

It is the great lips of Shiva laughing;

the sea is abalze

it is the steps of Parvati on the waters" (A Tale 85)

The 'beats' of the sea are the lips of Shiva and when the 'sea is ablaze', it is the steps of Parvati. The unity of Shiva and Parvati is accentuated here also.

Clearly, here Paz is inclined to write like this because he imbibed the concept of Shiva and Parvati as Ardha-Narishwara in Indian philosophical tradition. In Indian philosophy the spirit is called the self (Atman) and also the Male (Purusha). The Purusha became a separate
male god and the eternal productive force (Maya or Prakriti) became a separate female god. Commenting on this concept Monier Williams says:

The union of the two was expressed in the later mythology by the Ardha-nari or androgynous form of Siva - in which one half or the right side of the god's person is represented as male and the other half of left side as female" (183).

The poem 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta' is striking for the unique way in which Paz presents Shiva and Parvati, the divine couple in Indian mythology.

In fact, various facets of India exercised abiding influence on Octavio Paz. As a tribute to this lasting influence on him, Paz wrote In Light of India combing autobiographical reminiscences of his Indian days, intellectual analysis of the cultural and historical aspects of India and a brief but poetic survey of the polyglot society. The treatise includes a forthright review of modern Indian politics and an insightful exploration of the soul of India, i.e., its arts, literature, music, religions and philosophy. Paz's comments and observations retain astonishing clarity and abiding relevance. Implied throughout the book as a strong undercurrent is the forthright indictment of the self-centred materialism of modern western society. The long essay "The Contraptions of Time"
brings to focus the present day necessity of a new politics based on the present with the help of a reflection on time. In this section Paz argues that we have to take hold of the concrete reality of everyday. In a long note written on 10th July 1995 for *A Tale of Two Gardens*, Paz wrote:

What the moderns have failed to undertake - a centuries of Indian thought once did - is a critique of time and of its senseless and ultimately illusory acceleration. We must make this critique on our own account, and form our own suppositions. We need to relearn the ancient and forgotten art of contemplation (101).

In the insightful section entitled 'The contraptions of Time' in *In Light of India*, Paz observes that the European expansion with the help of science and technology has given us the 'power over the material world and the freedom that power gives us' (193). The Europeans believe in endless progress and they are trying to create technical marvels. For the moderns, 'time is a permanent beyond' and their belief in progress as a historical law has made them idolators of change. But now these ideas have begun to crumble on account of 'two world wars and the establishment of totalitarian tyrannies' which have undermined out faith in progress. Moreover, technological civilization has given ample evidence
for its destructive power: "poisoned rivers, forests turned to wastelands, contaminated cities, uninhabited souls" (194). Democratic liberal societies are also not a model as they are 'ruled by the demon of money'. Modern media, especially television, will 'anaesthetize the human race'. In short, future is not a radiant promise but a grim question. Paz tackled the same problem in his masterly analysis of Mexican psyche - *The Labyrinth of Solitude* where he noted:

> Progress has peopled history with the marvels and monsters of technology but it has depopulated the life of man. It has given us more things but not more being (225).

As a way out of this deadlock, Paz argues that we should concentrate our attention 'at the center of the triad of time' - the present. We should take hold of the concrete reality of everyday" (*In Light* 194). In these words Paz enunciates his suggestion for solving the problem: "I believe that the reformation of our civilization must begin with a reflection on time. A new politics must be based on the present" (194-95). What is to be especially noted in this context is that the modus operandi for solving today's ills - reflection on time - is deeply related to Indian philosophical and religious tradition. Paz is categorical in this context:
"We need to relearn the ancient and forgotten art of contemplation" (A Tale 101).

Octavio Paz strongly believes that people of this age can learn a valuable lesson from Indian heritage as Indian tradition involves 'a critique of time and of its senseless and ultimately illusory acceleration" (101). According to Paz, this will help us to 'relearn the ancient and forgotten art of contemplation'. Obviously Paz views this as an antidote against both totalitarian ideologies and blind faith in limitless progress which is totalitarian in its power to stifle the harmonious nature of life.

Now a days ecological imbalance in nature has grown into alarming proportions that threaten the very existence of humanity on earth. The hole in ozone layer and the poisoned rivers are signs of an impending break down of the grand harmony of nature. Here, Paz's recommendation 'the ancient and forgotten art of contemplation" which is inspired by Indian tradition, is a path leading to a viable solution. This shows that Paz was not only a supremely gifted poet who is inspired by Indian ethos and tradition, but also a superbly insightful thinker who could arrive at solutions for the ills of today's world and humanity. The fact that his eastern experience inspired him to find a way out of the problems created by the blind faith in limitless progress is to be noted by an Indian reader.
The *Indian Review of Books* (Vol. 17, Number 8, 16 May 1998 - 15 June 1998) remarked on the death of Paz in its editorial entitled 'India Loses a Dear Friend' with the following words:

Controversial in his criticism of religion and the caste system, Paz was a frank and fearless commentator whose thoughts on India are best elucidated in the book, *In Light of India*, published last year. In his death literature has truly lost one of its greatest monarchs, and India, a dear friend (3).

The creativity of Paz was refined in and tempered by his wide and expansive sympathy for humanity which enabled him to evolve as the intellectual conscience of the 20th century. He was Mexico's greatest writer in the 20th century. Deeply anchored in the tradition of his country, Paz grew up to be a devotee of Indian cultural heritage, especially Indian philosophy and art. Drawing inspiration from the region, religion, landscape, philosophy and art of India, Paz wrote more than fifty poems each reflecting several aspects of his complex Indian experience. Deeply read in Indian religion, Paz wrote a masterly study of India, which was last work – *In Light of India* (1995). According to Paz the book is "the child not of knowledge but of love". The observation
shows the fascination and love that India had on the psyche of Paz, throughout his life. In spite of the modest claims made by Paz for *In Light of India*, pages after pages of the book bear ample evidence for Paz's close familiarity with Indian heritage. According to Paz, the book is part of Paz's attempt to answer the question. "How does a Mexican writer, at the end of the 20th century, view the immense reality of India?" (*In Light* 32).

Paz was immensely qualified for that job. As he says: "my education India lasted for years and was not confined to books . . . It has marked me deeply . . . Its influence can be seen in may poems, my prose writings and in my life itself" (32).

What is to be especially noted in the connection between Paz and India is that he never fell in the trap of so called orientalism with its hallmark of uncritical admiration for everything eastern. Though the poet in Paz was deeply attracted by the vast and complex reality of India, the thinker in him was frank, fearless and quite impartial. While analysing the phenomenon of caste in India, Paz recognized that its existence cannot make India a nation. Also he recognized that the static nature of caste-ridden society petrified Indian culture and hindered the development of a life giving Renaissance and reinvigorating Reformation. Thus Paz impresses his readers as an utterly honest thinker who is never afraid to
call a spade a spade. In his analysis of the complex nature of Indian culture and elucidation of crystal clear views, fearlessness and impartiality are his hallmarks. Though Paz is fascinated by the complexity and richness of India, he is never blind in his love for India.

Octavio Paz is not a mere foreign writer in India. Paz has a special place in Kerala's literary firmament also. Years before he got Nobel Prize, in 1983 itself, his major poetic achievement 'Sun Stone' was translated into Malayalam by the celebrated Malayalam poet Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan and published in an anthology of translations from the Spanish language entitled Latin American Kavitha edited by another illustrious Malayalam poet K. Sachidanandan. A selection of the translation in Hindi of the poems of Paz has been brought out by the Sahitya Academy, New Delhi.

Primarily Paz was a poet and he was one of the most authentic poetic voices in 20th century literature. He was true to his Mexican identity; at the same time he was the ultimate cosmopolitan in his attitude. He wrote that the fact of being a Mexican helped him to understand India.

His connection with India was deep and intimate in his personal and creative life. India became the background of the poems in East Slope
and Toward the Beginning. Many illustrious place and historically important monuments became sources of inspiration for his poems – Witness, 'Vrindaban', 'The Tomb of Amira Khusru', 'One Day in Udaipur', 'On the Roads of Mysore', 'The Musoleum of Humayun', 'Madurai' and 'Sunday on the island of Elephanta'. Deeply attracted by Indian philosophy and mysticism, Paz frequently alluded to such concepts 'Sunyata' 'Prajnaparamita' and wrote poems on themes like 'Maithuna' which is, in Tantrism, 'a ritual for reaching enlightenment" (In Light 126).

His complex and dense poems weave into its texture allusions from humanistic tradition of the west, religious and mystic tradition of the East and the democratic, liberal aspirations of the modern man. In his examination of modern Mexica in The Labyrinth of solitude he was careful to analyse how it was formed and critically reminded the readers of the Meso American culture and the conquest of it by the Spanish in the sixteenth century and its aftermath is all its complexity. His treatment of Modern Indian culture in In Light of India follows the same mode of analysis where he critically examines various factors and historical processes which are behind the formation of Indian reality.

In Mexico, Paz is regarded as the national poet. It is a rare credit for the poet that in India, he is not regarded as a foreign writer but
deemed as a writer who has become the adopted son of India. On his death, all major newspapers, both in English and in Indian languages, covered the news in front page itself and wrote sketches of his life and creative career. The Indian Express, a prominent newspaper in English and Mathrubhoomi 'the national daily in Malayalam', wrote sub editorials highlighting Paz's importance and pointed out his connection with India. The prominent literary journal The Indian Review of Books remarked that in the death of the poet, India lost a dear friend. In the same journal Paz was described as one of the greatest monarchs of literature. The description was adequate and suitable as Paz was equally a master of poetry and prose.

Paz showed wonderful acumen in analysing complex aspect of national cultures, both Mexican and Indian. His analysis of the world situation and contemporary international politics entitled One Earth, Four or Five Worlds, is masterly and acute; his formulation of aesthetic in The Bow and the Lyre is original and comprehensive; his authentic translations of foreign writers like Donne and Eliot introduced them to Spanish reading public; the anthologies he edited like An Anthology of Mexican Poetry and New Poetry of Mexico introduced Mexican writers to an international audience. True, Paz strode the literary world like a
colossus. Like his name sake Ocatvious Caesar who effected a 'sea change' in Imperial Rome in 1st century B.C., Paz, with his unique achievement as a poet and thinker, divided Mexican literature into Pre-Paz phase and Post-Paz period. This fact was acknowledged and proclaimed by Carlos Fuentes, the distinguished Mexican writer when he said that Paz had forever changed the face of Mexican literature. Similarly, with his masterwork, *In Light of India* Paz has forever changed the way in which Indians look at themselves and the vast reality called India.

By birth, Paz is a westerner; as a creative writer, he is solidly grounded in the central Western tradition. In his native Mexico, Paz is esteemed as the national poet; in the world literature, he is regarded as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century; the official recognition came in the form of Nobel Prize in 1990. In the liberal, humanistic tradition of the world, he is accorded the unofficial recognition as the intellectual conscience of the 20th century.

Besides all these, Paz has the rare credit of being recognised and esteemed, apart from his native Mexico, in another country as one of their own writers. It is not often that a writer gets 'acclimatized' to the culture and ethos of a foreign nation. It is rare, but not impossible. In the case of Paz India had been 'the other' for over forty years to his self-described
otherness as a Mexican; in turn, for Paz, India accorded the unofficial
status and unsparing esteem that is usually granted for an Indian writer
of very great eminence.

With his poems and prose works dealing with India, Paz became as
much an Indian writer as any one who writes in Indian languages. He
belongs to Mexico, a country in the western hemisphere; equally he
belongs to India, a country in the central tradition of the East.

Rudyard Kipling who got Nobel Prize for literature is 1907 wrote
that 'East is East' and 'West is West' and 'The twine shall never meet'.
Octavio Paz, another Nobel Laureate, with his literary career and
philosophical evolution, points in the opposite direction.