CHAPTER IV

GOKAK AND HIS POETIC CRAFT

To understand the poetic craft of a poet, it is essential that one must go through his verses and discover him in his poems. An attempt is made here with the like intention, excluding the ‘Siva poems’ of Gokak. The term ‘Siva Poems’ is used here to refer to those poems which are written on Lord Siva or even about temples dedicated to Siva and also places which had become famous in association with the lord’s name. Though a poet cannot be studied apart from his basic religion especially in India, Indian writers of English reveal themselves even otherwise. Gokak was not different. In fact, he stands revealed through his poems rather than through his prose writings which are more public or objective as opposed to the subjective nature of his verse.

A man of many parts, Gokak’s personality is extremely difficult to assess through one or two poems. It is here that he resembles Auden most. Sometimes extremely serious, sometimes deliberately provoking, at odd times thoughtful, in fact the infinite variety of Gokak the poet is revealed through his poems. G.N. Devy in his book In Another Tongue has included an essay “The Post-Colonial Period.” In this essay, Mr. Devy assesses the Indian situation before and after the colonial days. A discussion of Indian Writing in English that seemed to be slowly
gathering momentum, takes him to the genres like poetry, fiction, criticism etc., He comes to the conclusion that

Indian English literature of the post-colonial phase has three distinguishing features, which are inevitable results of the sociology of this literature. Its first distinguishing feature is the attitude of the writers towards language, not just the English language but language in general. The more typical among them seem to talk about language more than talking with its help. The second distinguishing feature of the new generation of Indian English writers is their interest in history. [...] It is as if the post-colonial versions of history have all the alphabets of historical episodes, but the sense of order which turns alphabets into a script and writing is left behind [...] The third distinguishing feature of the post colonial Indian writing in English is that these writers show signs of being compulsive talkers. (113-115)

The assessment of Devy seems to be true to some extent but then, there are exceptions to every rule. Gokak's pre-colonial writings and post-colonial writings definitely differ. But one cannot pass judgement on them as good and bad but only in terms of better and best. Definitely disagreeing with Mr. Devy in his assessment that all that was written during imperial reign was good and that all literature of the post-colonial
period are not up to the mark, one must point out the fact that English is still a foreign language to the people of India though it has risen to the level of an alternative national language. The nuances of the language take time to be mastered and once mastered the writer can become prolific in his writing. The situation was no different with Gokak. When he was sent to England, the Victorian age had given way to modernism, while in colonial India, the lingerings of the Romanticism of Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth were still prevailing. This transition from Romanticism to Modernism overstepping Victorianism, was something that the students of the colonial countries had to adjust with. If they were writers, as in the case of Gokak, they had to depend on their reading capacity to make up and adjust. And adjust Gokak did while still retaining the features of Romanticism in his writings.

A Young Poet

Two poems written in 1927 show such opposing characteristics. That is "The Song of the Gandharva Lovers" and "songs". "The Song of the Gandharva Lovers" portrays a Keatsean imagery. The poem begins with an ethereal setting suitable for Gandharva Lovers. Gandharvas are beings who are less than Gods but above human beings. Their dwelling is above the Himalayas.
Beneath the self- same tree we stood,

I, king, you, queen, of the old dim world.

The well- shaped tree with bell- flowers,

for good,

Had hidden us from the eyes of the

Old dim world:

But the morn came laughing like a

silver nymph

And moved on her primaeval feet

into our world. (SEP 11)

"Songs" is a very short and simple poem

[. . .] For there are songs that come and twitter

To the heart that has grown bitter,

Songs that fall like love on hate,

Like heavenly tears on human fate,

Songs that fall like first love’s dreams

Upon lifes dark and turbid streams:
Tis we that, to these songs unknown,
Live and weep and move alone. (SEP 25)

A few steps ahead in 1935, Gokak wrote the poem “Life the Lily Maiden” revealing the Aurobindovian influence on him. He speaks about the truth of life being revealed through meditation.

The goldsmith knows his metal and designs

Out of the same a hundred patterns of gold.

The wind makes branches meet in many curves.

And one who knows the springs of being can fashion

Things wondrous wise. (SEP 6)

After a poem dated 1945, though the collection of poems range from 1927 to 1991, it is worth noting that there is not a single poem during the most turbulent period of Indian history, i.e., Independence. There is one poem from 1950 and another poem named “15th August, 1947” from Higgu, 1948 is the one poem that was missing from Selected English Poems. The poet greets independent India, Bharat Mata, joyfully, with all the fervour of the youth that he had at that time. But the admonishings of Bharat Mata are simulative of one who foresees the gloomy dark days ahead and also the poverty, the factual reality of the day.
Extending Horizons

Gokak’s vision stretches from India to Europe and from there to encompass the whole world. His wide readings and travelling had instilled in him the idea of a global village or a Universal Citizenship as he calls it. “India and Europe” is a very realistic poem clothed in allegory, speaking of the two sisters Bharati (India) and Europa (Europe) sharing their sorrows and concluding with a solution typical of Gokak.

Sweet is the concord of sisters.

Bharati will give her lore of immortality

To Europa, her younger sister,

And take from her Indra Vidya,

The science of world-mastery.

Then will there be one world,

One culture and one song. (CRP, 155)

This inordinate craving for ‘one world, one culture’ is seen throughout his poems. It appears that the poet’s preoccupation is with Universal Integration of man, and that whichever be the poem that he wrote, it will have either an implied reference or an explicit presentation of the same idea. “Thoughts On Independence Day (1959)” is the warning of a bard
about the ruin that is to befall the country if its citizens 'insist on rights' and 'desist from duties.' The beginning of the stanzas is either 'Let this be,' 'Let us not'or 'Let not' implying that the writer is emphasizing the warning tone repeatedly. Gokak was really and truly pained by the attitude of his countrymen. Either because he had been to the western countries and seen the diligence of the people there or because the Marxist ideals, which he had adhered to for a time, had been thrown away. A country which is still young in its independence after going through the ravages of colonization, needs careful and sensitive handling. The people also should join the rule and not try to thwart it by indulging in anti-patriotic and anti-national works. Almost the same idea is continued in "The Song of India (1960)" which resembles "The Shield of Achilles" of Auden, written years before. Being contemporaries, both must have felt the aftermath of the two World Wars and the havoc it caused to people, nations and cultures. Mother India of the "Song" and Achilles' mother Thetis are portrayed as pained and heartbroken women seeing the ravages time and technology had wrought on the land, and for their children. The future holds no relief. Utter destruction is the prospect the two mothers are faced with. The devastation caused by the war rends the heart with sorrow and despair.

The following poems "Bharat Mata (1961)" and "The Avatar and India (1962)," which follow closely after the other 'India Poems' of
Gokak, picture deliverance for the country. The country is still ‘Mata’ or mother to him and though the exigencies of the situation may demand an ‘Avatar,’ the ‘Sakthi’ is still the woman, and she is the saviour. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh was regarded as an ‘Avatar’ by some people, when he retreated from the world and established an Ashram in Pondicherry. Gokak’s inordinate admiration and respect made him regard Aurobindo as yet another ‘Avatar’ or re-incarnation of God, coming to deliver the world, here India, when it is in dire straits. Another recurring image of his poems is in the line ‘She Who Rides The Lion’ or ‘The Lion-Borne Goddess’ of the poem with the same title (1957). They are one and the same goddess, Chamundeswari. For a Kannadiga, Chamundeswari temple on Chamundi hills is a place of pilgrimage as well as a popular tourist centre. The goddess Chamundi in the puranas is a consort of Gods courageous enough to make a lion her vehicle. The cultural milieu of the poet finds utterance through these poems.

The poems of Collected and Recollected Poems 1930-1990, published under New World Literature Series, are arranged systematically and with the correct sense for priority. In his impressive introduction, Gokak acknowledges his gratitude to those people who had translated his Kannada poems to English. These translated poems also come under the title Indian Writing in English. This enables a lot of readers to read and appreciate them. While advocating the necessity for
translation, Gokak, without deriding scientific and literary translation, craves for creative translation. This opinion of a bi-lingual writer could be taken as a valuable definition of translation. At a time when translation studies have become the vogue of the day, Gokak’s works carry immense weight. In this context, the far-sightedness of Gokak in visualizing the scope of translation studies along with Indian Writing in English should be admired. This may be a first step towards the integration of the different regions of India and also an attempt at the exchange of culture through the medium of a common language.

During his sojourn in England Gokak was admitted to the Infirmary in Scotland and had an operation for appendicitis. For a time he hovered between life and death. This unforgettable experience was a great turning point in his life. After this incident life took a new meaning and Gokak realized the real importance of having a universality for each individual. By confining oneself to either one country, one maxim or even one philosophy, disregarding all the others, one is losing out on all that is good. The far sightedness of the sages and the spirituality of the rishis, are not only for India but also for the world. What India lacks, the others can supply, taking along what India has to offer. A give and take of all that is good will result in the creation of one culture for the whole of humanity. When he died in 1992 his dream of a universality was on the way to be realized. When one talks of universality today in the new
millennium, we think only about information technology and globalization. Both has negative connotation in the sense that there is too much of commercialization. Gokak’s vision was based on culture and spirituality rather than materialism. Both spirituality and culture have been degraded to mere consumer products. In order to get to the real sense of what Gokak meant by Universal Citizenship, a thorough study of his poems is necessary.

The universe is taken as the palm of the Divine entity in the poem “The Million-armed Person.”

One of these palms is Earth.

Watch its palmistry of curve and line

its mounts of Venus and Mars

and its hieroglyphs of ensign, conch and disc!

Be palmist to that palm

And hold the key to the mystery of God

and the prism of the sky. (KBM 35)

The meaning of this imagery is extended further in the next stanza where the palm is taken to mean the ‘battle field of Desire’ through which man
inches forward to his destiny. It is also taken to mean the 'cosmic palm,' 'the academy of evolving souls,' shaped by the five fingers. The five fingers also mean the five senses which shape man, 'the bead,' after which he is dropped by the senses to join the rest of the souls.

Gokak's spirituality is part of his nature. His religion plays a very important role in shaping his philosophic views along with spirituality. In "The Brass Gods" (KBM 23) Gokak traces the origin of organized religious worship from the dominance of the people of the north when they made the idols of gods with brass and bronze. The discovery of 'copper and ore' and 'silver' mentioned in the poem shows the gradual civilization of human race. The priest was 'god-preserver' and then later he was 'ranked with the sages!' The coming of the 'Asian horde' put an end to the brass gods when they looted everything. The people took solace in the fact that 'the gods could be reborn.' Religiosity, irreverence and a lot more emotions pass through this single poem making the readers aware of the historical background of religion. Very subtly Gokak makes his point here that idol worship is not religion nor is it the right spirituality. The 'priests and witches' are here 'for frauds and the singing of lauds.' The discerning nature of Gokak had seen right through the heart of the matter, the hypocrisy of the priestly class named 'god-preserver' and the ignorance of the ambitious 'mad men.' It is evident that Gokak aspires for a religious renovation based on personal
approach to God without the mediator, the priest. It is here that the spirit of his ancestors, the vacanacaras, finds significance. They too had tried to free the gods from these ‘god-preservers’ who prevented the common man from approaching god directly. The revolutionary ways of these vacanacaras and their equally powerful vacanas achieved their aim in the eleventh century.

The more earthly poems of Gokak portray a genuine enjoyment of beauty and the aesthetic sense in him revels at the sight of natural beauty. This enjoyment of beauty is taken as a vehicle for further deeper thoughts which are more philosophical in nature. The poet cannot keep himself away from a philosophical conclusion in whatever he writes. The poem “The Snake” (CRP 90) recreates the beauty as well as the danger that is a snake; the fear makes a person violent and this violence is destructive in nature. It is only after killing the snake and seeing the lifeless body that the poet comes to his senses. The impulsiveness and the inherent fear of the creature had made the poet kill a creature which had the divine, ‘animating spark’in it. This ‘animating spark’is common to man and all living creatures. The realization hits the poet as a great blow:

We did not know each other, God, O God!

How I wish we knew!
I would have hugged the animating spark

Through the sinuous folds I slew. (90)

The slow dawning of realization is felt on reading the poem which begins in a Lawrencean fashion, celebrating the beauty of the snake, after the outright confession ‘I killed a snake’ (90). Even though he knows fully well that it is ‘A lovely thing of god,’ still he just couldn’t help himself the impulse which made him commit such a deed. The enormity of the deed hits him only later. To an Indian, the snake is a divine creature especially since it is the adornment of Lord Siva. Born and brought up in a culture where snakes are revered, the fear of snakes still dominates his mind like all human beings overcoming the divine teachings, forgetful of the courageous spark. His bhakti is not firm enough to abandon himself to his lord even when a poisonous snake is confronting him. It is this lack of faith that makes fear the dominant emotion which can even overcome years of training and restraint. The Self has not yet fully abandoned the world and the worldly impulses are evident in this action of the poet.

Music and Poetry

Godak had also written pure poetry that expresses the emotions of the moment “Songs (1927)” (CRP 25) and “Great Music” (CRP 82) portray the effect of songs and music on human beings. While “Songs”
excel in rhyming couplets, "Great Music" is more thematic and philosophical. With only ten lines each, the poems exhibit Gokak’s skill as a poet and present ideas concisely. The pathway of music can be traced from time to eternity. "The seven-fold symphony / Commenced with time / And ended in Eternity". (SP 82)

Passing through the 'red sea of time' and 'the red lattice of the heart,' music flows on taking the readers to Eternity. Similar poems can also be seen in other collections of Gokak. He is a poet most like Auden, voluminous sometimes and precise or concise next, and midway at other times. The impulses of the moment had influenced both Gokak and Auden. Poems dedicated to persons and places are their speciality. They just cannot keep themselves from expressing their gratitude or emotion. Mostly, these expressions are in poetic form like "In Memory of W.B.Yeats," "Rim Baud," "A.E.Housman," "Mathew Arnold," etc., of Auden and "The Master of Integral Yoga" (CRP 73), "The Man of Wisdom" (CRP 63) where Prof. C.L. Wrenn of Oxford, Shri Rajapurohit and Shri Govind Pai are remembered by a grateful Gokak. "The Man of Noble Living" (CRP 58) on Masti Venkatesa Iyengar and the poem "Poet’s Poet" on D.R. Bendre (CRP 56) whom Gokak regarded as his Kavyaguru are also similar poems. In "Kailasam, The Playwright-Witness" (CRP 51) he celebrates the memory of T.P. Kailasam. The
poem is in prose almost like the prose poem of Auden thus affirming
another similarity of technique of like minds.

Speaking of the craft of T.P. Kailasam, Gokak wrote:

Steeped in the dazzling light of inspiration, the words of your
characters are mantra, incantation. Their portraiture is itself a
psychic revelation. The movement in your plays is flawless;
That is how your art is a transforming experience. (53).

This summing up makes the poet conclude that

You have the third eye of Siva in your forehead. The vision it
gives is, for you, the essence of life. How else are the vast
expanse of Time and the theatre of the world justified but as
enabling the soul to build up this infinite progression of
vision? (54)

"The Poet and the Mystic" has Gokak as the poet and Madhura Chenna
as mystic. The contrast as well as the similarity between the two
pathways leading to the same goal is clearly marked here. It is the
difference between the globe-trotter and the villager, but the villager
proved to be a mystic who reached out to 'the Power that
transcends' every thing. Revealing thoughts were contributed by this
mystic to the poet's learning process as when the poet considered
Poetry was my religion.

For I thought that the religions of the world

End in irreligion

But you grasped the poetry of religion itself.

You said that poetry could become mere ritual and form

As religion often did. (CRP 49)

Pacified at last, the poet was able to recognize the similarity of their goals, though the approach differed drastically. Gokak was able to recognize the spark of divinity that has made Madhura Chenna what he was, a mystic.

Like "The Poet and the Mystic," Gokak construes another dialogue with Hitler in the poem "The Demon (Hitler) and the Poet" (CRP, 35). Only Gokak would find an excuse to defend someone like Hitler as he does in the poem. The open defence of the killer and his response to the queries of the poet are something to be marvelled at as Hitler would like to know what a poet thought about him. And sum up, the poet did; as a demon who can do only evil or rather, made for evil, but as the poet says 'You'll be remembered / As the sole paradigm of your century.' The truth is very near the mark. But Hitler in the poem has something for the poet also. He sums up the role of a poet:
It is my belief

That a poet is a leader of the people.

In his light is the people’s verdict reflected.

The eyes of the people of all times

Are fixed on him. This is the role

Assigned to him in the drama of the world. (CRP, 40)

In an appreciative biography of Bendre named *Bendre: Poet and Seer*, Gokak concludes a chapter with a poem on Bandre. The personal appreciation moves on to regard Bendre as a prophet or seer. This is followed by a translation of some of the poems of Bendre by Gokak himself. In whatever he wrote, whether a personal portrait of a person or a dialogue with another person or even a biography of a poet, Gokak proved his excellence. At the same time unconsciously or even consciously, his reasoning takes him to philosophy and even spirituality based on Indian texts like the Vedas much more than the Puranas. Aurobindovian influence is evident in most of his poems. The few that escapes this influence is steeped in religion of a different nature. Traces of Shaivism apparent in most of his poems are in the form of Soul and Self. To attain oneness with the lord, a total surrendering of the Self is absolutely necessary.
The three Visnagar poems portray the sensuous fulfilment, the place Visnagar in North Gujarat, had given the poet. Though the place lacked urban facilities, in spite of being a town, the people with their enthusiastic and affectionate nature redeemed the time spent there. The desperation, the realization and the Wordsworthian passages of poetry, in “Visnagar A retrospect” (CRP 110) a poem in six parts make it a memorable one among the three Visnagar poems. The impression that Visnagar made on him was such that in retrospect, he could revive them without much effort recreating the joys and sorrows of the time spent there.

“The Road Unending” (CRP 128) is reminiscent of the poem “Road Not Taken” of the American poet Robert Frost. Once again the semblance to Auden is undeniable; Auden had written a poem called “Dover” after Matthew Arnold’s famous poem “Dover Beach.” While Auden’s is highly realistic, Matthew Arnold’s is highly philosophical. Here also Frost’s poem is highly philosophical while that of Gokak’s is positive thinking and an encouragement to a heart dispirited and worn out by various obstacles. His advice is

Attune yourself to the world around you,

Forget the pomp and pride that lie writhing in the dust.

Put your trust in the beauty that is to come

And pursue it for ever and ever and ever! (CRP, 128)
What is to come is still better than what is. The dream that you have set your heart on is ‘transfiguring your life.’ So it is always better to pursue it even if it takes one forever and ever to achieve it. This kind of positive philosophy is found throughout the poems of Gokak.

Emerging Philosopher

The poet awaiting his destiny is compared to a land ploughed with turned-up soil ready for sowing or receiving the seed that the wind brings in. In “The Damozel Of Destiny” (CRP 131) the imagery of ever continuing cycle of seed, fruit and flower retraced in flower, fruit and seed is presented.

Man mellows into fruit or yellows like leaf.

It is the sovereign seed that makes or mars him.

The word of the seed is my gospel.

I wither if it weeds me;

I hang out like a fruit if it needs me

But I wait day and might like turned-up soil

For the seed that the blowing wind may bring. (CRP 131)
Echoes of the biblical parable of the sower and the seed can be found here. The ‘seed’in the parable is the word of god. The term ‘gospel’ means ‘good news.’ In the poem also the same meaning is implied by the terms ‘seed’ and ‘gospel.’ The idea of a ‘sovereign seed’can be taken to mean the Self which is responsible for the making or destroying of an individual. The choice given to human beings, to be the master of their destiny is that which makes or breaks them. This power of the Self, the vested interest of the Self, is given importance to in the poem. But the poet moves further deep to await the ‘seed’ which the blowing wind may bring. There is yet another force, a greater entity that endows human beings with Self. *Atman* or ‘self’ is part of the Greater entity which forms the basis of Hinduism. This self is the divine self since it is from Brahman. It is also meant to be the human Will which is responsible for the making or breaking of a human being. Endowed with such a powerful weapon, the human beings are in the unique position of becoming creators. Unless this human will is cultivated and strengthened, human life becomes worthless like a yellow leaf merely existing and destined to be doomed without the ‘seed’ in it. The choice is to mellow into fruit or yellow like a leaf. Given such an ultimatum, man who can control his Self or Will can make an apt choice, to be useful to the rest of the world like a flower with colour and fragrance or to waste away. Dhammapada also admonishes human beings to strengthen and cultivate human will.
By surrendering even one’s own self to the ultimate self, the poet here acknowledges his dependency on the creator or Brahman.

By oneself is evil done; by oneself one is injured.

Do not do evil, and suffering will not come.

Every one has the choice to be pure or

Impure. No one can purify another.

(The Dhammapada 165)

By surrendering even one’s own Self to the ultimate Self, the poet here acknowledges his dependence on the creator or Brahman. The tremendous responsibility that rests on human will is emphasised by the Buddha when he spoke of Self. Gokak emphasizes this responsibility first and foremost in his poem. From this, his thoughts move further forward to the ultimate entity, that is Brahman.

“The Real Vision (1928)” is again all about Self. Life and Self find it difficult to co-exist peacefully at the same pace. The struggle between the two to keep up the same pace to reach the ‘goal’ is what life is all about. Circumstances and the Will rear to leap forward and the curb is intolerable. The real vision comes only after endless waiting, after a testing of one’s patience, waiting ‘for the soul to find its way;’ and wait for Him to clear your gloom, ‘And for the coming of that Day.’ They are
only the ripe fruits that are plucked and only when the time comes that one will be granted the Real Vision. But the endless intolerable waiting tests the patience of the Bhakta. The philosophical logic of the poet is the right answer to the impatient Bhakta.

The green young creeper of this life

Upon the blood-red stream of Time

Has yet to float till, from this strife,

Some Hand picks it in its prime.

These eyes have yet to gaze and gaze

Against the blood-red evening sky,

Till, from eternal life, a phase

Will to their vision open lie.

These dainty dreams, as light as air,

Their frail aerial mansions build

Before the young soul, unaware

Of darkness, waiting in the field! (SEP 14)
One is asked to await His time to enlighten the gloom. The spiritual destiny of man is God. Even the surrendering of one’s Will to that of the Supreme Being is a relief. No desire for a separate ego will remain in the final stages of Bhakti. A devotee will await till it is time for his God to illumine his path. The emotional intensity of the devotee should be curbed like the controlling of the five senses. It is for this that a human being is endowed with a Will or Self or Atman. This will help him conquer the senses and go beyond pleasure and pain. Only then, a human being will be able to wait out his time unharassed by worldly worries. Gokak combines the teachings of the Buddha and the wisdom of the Vedas and the Upanidashads to convey his ideas through his poems. Poems which are more prayers than verses of aesthetic sense appear often in his collections. “A Prayer To The Master (1970),” “A Child’s Prayer (1959),” “The Avatar (1957)” and “Sporting with the Divine (1960)” from SEP are prayers of the moment. The habit of remembering one’s God as often and as varied in form, is the duty of the Bhakta. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, Gokak pens a few lines combining worldly wisdom and cultural heritage. These poems appear before us as forms and lights enlightening and appealing to the aesthetic sense of the Sahrdaya. The emotional upheaval the poet must have gone through is hinted at in some of these poems like “Sporting With The Divine (1960).” The query that comes from the mind is real enough, ‘Is this how
you break intellects / and pound human hearts / that souls may emerge from slime / like lotuses in a pool? (SEP 97). The humbling of the human spirit is the joke that the Divine plays, breaking the intellect, pounding the heart so that nothing of the former Self remains and everything is put into the dirty slime, to be mocked, to be loathed. The purification process is degrading as well as painful to an intellectual mind that had become too proud without fully realizing the meaning of Self. Such an intellect needs humbling and the one to bring about the purification is none other than the Divine. After the painful degradation, that which emerges is the Soul and it is like a lotus that emerges purified and beautiful from the slime in the pool. The poet’s aim is to be perfect. Perfection is achieved only through a painful process which involves hard work. The Divine always appreciates the craving of human beings to be perfect. But the enduring capacity of the intellectual influences the end result. Once again it is the Will of the human beings that ought to be shaped and remoulded. If the Will is strong enough, it will withstand the purifying process. The other extreme is the breaking of this human Will. This again is the individual choice. The free will that human beings are endowed with comes to play here. The poet, very much conscious of this aspect of divinity accepts divine intervention for good, affirming all that had been imbibed from the Upanishads and the Vedas about Self:
I shall begin my life

of the becoming

and of fashioning perfection

only when I evolve

into what I already am

in the centre of my being. (SEP 97)

'The centre of my being' and the Self are one and the same and it is that part of the divine present in man. This recognition is the main aim of human beings. Understanding the Divine as 'Master of Illusion!' the poet tries to envision the Reality of *Aum*, that sound from which everything was first created. The Divine, is again envisaged as 'The Ray Supreme' that pierced and melted all attitude, all certitude, / All creed, all cult,' and which is responsible for making a mortal, immortal. (SEP 102) Modernist lyrics of *Collected and Recollected Poems* include nine poems which have the glow of nine gems or *navaratnas*. Translated from Kannada, Gokak himself had admitted the 'elemental sense of liberty and freedom' that had been acceded to him by free verse. The waves of the sea defy any man-made constraints with their immense power and unexpectedness. Gokak's poem "The Wild Roar of the Sea-Waves," the first of the nine poems of the collection exhibit the trough and crust that
mark a wave along with the vast expanse of the boundless sea with its
deepest depths. Admonishing the poet to ‘be the Ocean!’ and ‘Meet and
mingle contraries / Multitude and Altitude,’ Gokak suddenly shifts to the
cultural context by mentioning Samudra Gupta, the ancient emperor who
ruled over India centuries ago and whose rule was considered to be the
golden age of the Gupta dynasty, and at whose time navaratnas lived.
The poet is also asked to be like Samudra Gupta, the ‘King-Emperor of
poets!’

Names of ‘Hitler’ and ‘God Yama’ make the poem “Afternoon”
assume memories of suffering caused by Hitler and the loss inflicted to
dear ones by God Yama when he comes to take away life. Both cause
pain to human beings by their actions whether they be deliberate or as
part of duty. The intense heat of the sun in the afternoon leaves one
soulless. So the sun can only be ‘the ancestor of Hitler’ and the one thing
that had the courage to defy Hitler or any ancestor of Hitler’s is ‘An old
kestel’ which is compared to the black flag of God Yama. The
symbolism of death which follows soon after a heat wave is indicated
here by the personification.

“A Leafless Tree” in five sections traces the thought from a
barren, leafless tree to the depths to which the roots can dig in search of
grace which had transformed rain to ‘a subterranean stream.’ Love can
transform the tree to beauty with sprouting leaves, buds and fruits, thus
fructifying the Void!’ Yet the leafless – tree awaits the arrival of the magician west wind for the rain of mercy. The tree is symbolic of all that is mechanical, which does not need either colours nor leaves. By existing as such with its bare form, the tree projects the entire series of ‘Euclid’s theorems: / triangle, radius, square, circumference, / diameter, diagonal,’ whereas Euclid, the Greek geometrician postulates that only one line may be drawn through a given point parallel to a given line. Is there any need of a tree with its colourful leaves and fruits in the present world? The question is also the question of science and arts. If all the needs are fulfilled by science and technology is there any need for arts? Or poetry? This is not a mere repetition of a dilemma from The Masters of C.P Snow. It has now become a question of the necessity of the existence of arts. The third section of the poem transforms the leafless tree to a colourful tree with the arrival of the much needed water of love. The poet’s philosophical view is that rather than wait for the spring rain, it is better to stretch out the roots deeper in search of the subterranean stream that will nourish the tree. Then, the next day ‘the Spring rain might come down, / like Dharma, to protect and bless!’ A native of India cannot read this poem and take it at face value. To him the subterranean stream is the ‘rain of grace’ which had been transformed, and it could only mean the sacred texts the country had produced, like the Vedas and the Upanishads, in answer to the problem of barrenness, lack of life etc., the
mechanical age had produced. Returning to one's heritage, will find meaning to one's existential problems and dilemmas.

From Darkness to Light

Criticized by some for his English translation of Kannada poems, Gokak has explained the difficulty of a bilingual poet as clearly as he could; its advantages, opportunities and its uniqueness. Mr. Shankar Mokashi Punekar, assesses him in his Prof. V.K. Gokak as a Bilingual Poet and comes to the conclusion that with his ability, Gokak could have been efficiently bilingual, provided he follow certain norms for being bilingual. Of the four criteria put forth by Mr. Punekar, the last seems to be the best of the lot: "Attempt translating the best and achieve major break-through at the risk of some outlandishness. Success, even partial success, here, would mean a revolution in reader sensibility" (143). This advice from a critic who has gone through both Kannada and English poems of Gokak seems sincere in that he considers all aspects of Gokak extensively. Gokak seems to have taken this advice to heart as his later poems reveal. The publication of the best of his poems in various journals had given them the attention they deserved. Moreover the readers were able to get the right perspective of his English poems. The four poems "Spring," "A New Birth," "Child of Ocean" and "A Piece of Stone" translated by the poet himself from his sequence titled Septule Signature for the Kannada section of Indian Literature (211-215), have
a separate message each for the readers. While “Spring” commemorates his English days and shows juvenile thoughts and dreams, “Child of Ocean” and “A Piece of Stone” portray deep thoughts tangled with the Self and a re-assessment of the same self in terms of philosophy and mythology. The transformation of an ordinary festival of northern India is taken as a vehicle for carrying thoughts through mythology to philosophy and then to spirituality and presented in “A New Birth” which is given the title “Holi” in CRP. By surrendering the Self or will with all its infirmities to the symbolic pyre lighted on the night of Holi burning away Kama or Lust on a night of full moon, with songs and dances, God’s Will is given priority and man attains communion with God. If only God wills, one will be given a second chance or a second birth, to usher in a soul-awakening. Almost the same thoughts dominate the poem “A Piece of Stone.” A pliable will to be shaped by the Supreme is the theme of the poem. Aditi, the god-mother, Vayu, the god of wind and Indra, the god of rain and thunder bolt, represent the elemental nature in mythology. The stone, the poet feels, aspires to be a ‘Kinsman of the gods on earth.’ For this he is willing to suffer the process of being shaped by Aditi, Sun, Vayu and Indra. When the process is complete, both the insignificant stone and the significant image will be one; as the poet reasons ‘the stone’ll be lost in the sculpture.’ The craving to be one with the elements and present one’s self as part of the Creator to one’s
fellow human beings, dominates the thoughts of the poet. Whereas the poem "Child of Ocean" deals with comparisons, the three other poems of the group are solitary examples of his transformation from a very young poet to a mature, unified person who has attained Self-realization. Thus it is in the poem "Child of Ocean" that the poet traces his spiritual journey from Darkness to Light always keeping the comparison of the mighty ocean with the diminutive humanity that he is, - a mere child. The alliterative words which describe the life on earth, 'Pretence and Pain and slow Poison' ending in Death seem futile to the confused poet. That part of the poet which makes him an Indian is revealed through the mythological story of Rahu, swallowing the moon, which results in lunar eclipse and Ketu seizing the sun, causing solar eclipse, which in turn causes total darkness. And the ‘blind Night showing the way to one with open eyes’ creates the impression of the darkness of the Soul and ‘the blind being led by the blind’ reveals the darkness of the Spirit. The comfort of a child being cradled by the ocean waves is the comfort the poet had experienced during the turbulent days of his youth. The ocean of humanity with its Wordsworthian likeness, changes its attitude by pushing the poet in to the sea. ‘Inflated praise, inflicted pain, / Censure, fame, ignoring / pricked and prodded’ the already inflated ego of the poet which can raise heaven or hell as the time demanded. Again, the poet placed as a child near the mighty ocean is aware of the comparison.
Out of the total darkness occasional glimpse of light in the form of sparkling gems which pave the way as well as light up the path, relieve the totality of the night. The 'rubies and diamonds' that light up the path stand for the seers and learned men who had tried to show the path in the Spiritual Darkness. The revelation towards the end that 'Night is the mask that Light puts on. / To play with its own children' is not a mere summing up. To arrive at such a conclusion, the mind must have travelled long distances in the realm of spirituality through meditation. Only then such a philosophical conclusion would be possible. Gokak, the young poet and dreamer had come a long distance to scale the heights of mythology and philosophy and use it effectively in this poem. The irregular lines of the four equally irregular stanzas are just what they are, i.e., that which gives form to his ideas; nothing more. The free reign it gives to the poet to express his thoughts is advantageous since it has brought about the best in the poet. The content is not sacrificed to maintain the form. The flexibility of the metres has given the idea the ability to take its natural course keeping to the forefront the comparison with Infinity.

About Women

Starting from mythology, going through the modern world, Gokak reaches the spiritual realms in his poem "On Womanhood" (SP 262-64). The poem is not a mere assessment of womanhood from a male point of
A poem of three stanzas, the words are spoken by three different persons. The first stanza is an introduction to womanhood through mythology and history seeing only the degradation woman had to suffer. The narration is that which suits an introduction. The second stanza is narrated by a woman, very modern and outspoken speaking of the injustices done to womanhood by both gods and men. The third and the longest the last stanza is a consolation which is comforting and at the same time acknowledging all that had gone before. Such a consolation can be spoken only by a learned, wise person who had aged beyond years. Translated from the original Kannada version by the author himself, the poem keeps its beauty and depth.

The ease with which the Pandavas divided Droupadi forms the beginning lines of the poem which shocks a reader who expects to hear more on the same vein, 'The Pandavas divided Droupadi / As children would a guava.' Both Helen of Troy and Padmini of Chittor found their beauty a curse since it was the cause of a war which destroyed not only a lot of men but kith and kin as well. If men were guilty of crimes against women, the Gods were no different with their lust and incest as in the case of Indra and Brahma. To the great gods, women were chattels to be had and thrown away at their whim. The second stanza of the poem is spoken by a modern woman who is forthright in her opinions about the attitude of the world towards women. The disappointment with which the
second stanza begins, gives a clue to the nature of the speaker who expected at least sensitive people like the poets to present them in a better manner, ‘One thought the poets would at least have sense’ (262). The process of self destruction for a woman is made possible by Gods and men and they are no better than demons is this aspect. The soul of a woman is of no importance to the world and if so why should she care to keep the one that she had? The answer to this question is found in the third stanza which begins with a vindication of the beauty of women which had turned out to be a curse for them as well as their family and country. The man - woman relationship put so beautifully here, forms the basis for existence. The line ‘Man is something of Woman, Woman of Man’ points out a great truth exemplified in Lord Siva, who is an androgynic God. The gender division is the ‘clay’ or that which is worthless. The god who created human beings and the soul of the human beings genderless. The admonition to bring in a ‘new world, the new life / That has use for woman’s soul.’ and not just her body is heard through the last stanza. The clarion call of a new era for women forms the theme of the last lines of the poem. It is evident that the poet, aware of the grave injustice done to womanhood throughout the ages, hopes for a better future for them based on a ‘soul awakening.’ Various aspects of the woman as ‘Holy Mother, / Beloved, Redeemer, Mercy Infinite’ are referred to in the poem. The body of a human being is the dwelling place
of the soul and it is mortal. The eternal is the soul and when we consider the human being, whether it be man or woman we must be able to see beyond, into the soul, than be entrapped by the physical aspect.

Translating the poem from its original Kannada version to English requires notes, the poet has carefully prepared the required notes specially for the English reader. The notes are on Indian characters and not on the Western characters referred to in the poem. The far sightedness of the poet is evident in the composition of the poem. Acknowledging the real worth of a woman in a male-oriented society requires courage. But for Gokak, this is also a step forward, a step into the future, towards an Integrated Man. Only by considering other fellow human beings as one’s equal, can one be a whole man. That part of him that craves satisfaction, when united with an ideal partner, a woman, gets fulfilled. What he gets is a soul mate, a companion to eternity and not just for the physical world.

A mingling of the ‘Soul and body’ is possible in this world itself. Gokak’s poem “The Sharavati Remade” (CRP 167-178), speaks of the integration of ‘soul and body’ necessary for an intellectual. Gokak himself speaks of this in his autobiographical speech in the series, ‘Meet the Author’ programme by the Sahitya Akademi, in collaboration with the India International Centre, New Delhi. He was given the honour to be the first speaker of the series. The speech was entitled “Towards the
Integrated Man as the Ideal” and was published in Indian Literature, as an abridged version (87-102). The autobiographical element of the speech starred here and there with poems on memorable occasions makes it interesting. Referring to his time in the west, Gokak speaks on how he became a Marxist. During a brief visit to the Jog Falls, after his return from England, he saw River Sharavati and its course to the sea after plunging into a chasm. He was shocked to discover that his own life, during his time in the west was like the Falls; there was no river, and there was no self.

I felt that my life in England for the years that I was there was like the life of this river from the edge of this point to the ground which it reached. Just as there was no river at all, I too was not there at all. My own personality had been shattered to pieces. Because, for the first time, I realized the impact of the western civilization. It was totally different, so powerful that it had crushed us and made us slaves there. And I saw this crushing power and this great contrast between the stricken country that was mine and this country. I was boiling with grief and rage. I, who was a dreamer, a God-lover to begin with, became a Marxist (96).

The river changing its shape from a sluggish river to a water fall, and then continuing rapidly again as river to join the sea, is like the change
of personality that Gokak underwent in his life time. Auden, in a different context, had gone through personality changes similar to the one mentioned by Gokak in his younger, turbulent days. “The Sharavati Remade” assumes significance with the personal background of the poet as gleaned from the autobiographical speech. The Sharavati symbolizes the river of life that flows sluggishly at first and moves on rapidly, after a gap, to its destination, the ocean. The gap is when it changes its shape from a river to a waterfall and it is this interim rather than the river that attracts people. But this is also part of the process that is the flowing river. The waterfall and the river are only twin aspects of the same, the flowing water. The life in England and the life in India are part of the life of the poet and they stand in direct contrast to each other. The man who comes to this realization is the one who has realized the self. According to the Kathopanishad, which is a part of the Upanishads,

This Self cannot be gained by the Veda, nor by intellectual power, nor by much learning. He is to be gained only by the one whom He chooses. To such a one the Self reveals His own nature. (Kathopanishad 52.)

Gokak’s collection of poems named Kashmir and the Blind Man has several poems which celebrate the beauty of nature, and a Wordsworthian pantheism is followed in most of them. “The Rhythm and Beauty of Earth” one of the poems of this collection reveals the
rejoicing spirit of the poet in the beauty of the earth; the earth with its rhythm and beauty, the infinite riches in the 'cresting hills', and 'the dipping valleys!' all on one stem. The water sources of the earth, the rain, the stream, the brook, the waterfall and the rivers celebrate the earth’s beauty. ‘The sleeping hamlet’ blanketed by clouds and the green valley form layer upon layer of loveliness. The poet feels that, plunging into this infinite beauty, one can gather the grains of truth Gokak’s use of short, concise, rhyming verse celebrating the vastness of the great Himalayas in the poem “The Himalayas” (KBN) the abode of the Gods, makes one think of the Bacon maxim some books are to be chewed and digested. This is an improvement on the rambling style that he uses for other poems and a welcome departure from his usual style since the concise writing gives strength to the poem. “Autumnal Mood” in KBN is a direct contrast to Keats’s “Ode to Autumn,” Whereas Keats’Ode is a picturesque poem with its lush, colourful images, Gokak’s poem expresses his distress at the stripping of the hillside during the season and he feels that it has “Only the wind god’s livery / the winding sheet of snow” (KBN 31) as the only garment for the oncoming winter season. “Autumnal Mood” has the despair of the poet depicted through and a totally opposing character of the autumn season is presented. If Keats presents the very beginning of the season with its harvesting of the fruits and grains and the busy preparation for the coming winter in joyful
abandon, Gokak moves forward and presents the close of the autumn season. Both poems present the different moods of the two poets, one optimistic and the other desperate.

"Visnagar in Monsoon" (KBN 21) is a typical Indian poem, celebrating the monsoon season with its rains bringing nostalgia for his home land, Darwar. After a drought-filled summer, people in India welcome the monsoon rains with gratitude. The earth, parched and dusty absorbs rain thirstily. The rural folk start sowing seeds in the fields to the accompaniment of the music of a number of common birds like sparrows, pigeon and even peacock at Visnagar. This rustic scene brings to mind the nostalgia of the poet for his own place Darwar and the fields around there. Gokak’s tribute to Mother Earth is the poem “The Song of Earth” (KBN 25). It celebrates Gokak’s enchantment with the solid earth. He is not a person ignorant of the beauty and mystery of either the sea or the sky. To him the sky, the sea and the earth are known places. Still he prefers the earth. As to the reason, there is the refrain of the three stanzas: ‘... the only Rock of Ages. / Earth, Mother Earth.’ To an Indian, Earth is the Mother, the dwelling place for all living beings. The life on this earth is the only reality, the “touchstone of the immortal.”

“Kashmir and the Blind Man”, the poem included in the collection with the same name, is a celebration of beauty both of nature and the nature-endowed beauty of human beings. The aesthetic sense of Gokak is on the
alert in the poem when the beauty of Kashmir, the Paradise on earth, is described by the blind man’s wife. While the blind man appreciates her description, he forestalls her saying

You are felt in the blood, unseen

If Kashmir is like you, I well can say

It’s lovely and green (KBN 30)

This faith of the husband reveals his beauty to the wife who is in tears, realizing the real worth of her husband:

... You’re Kashmir, my love!

‘T is blind to its own beauty like you

Its blind affinity to you has brought

Its beauty to my view. (KBN 30)

The mutual recognition of two souls stands revealed in the poem. With deft strokes Gokak places three characters -- the blind man, his wife and Kashmir on the same level to be appreciated for their beauty. He emphasizes the point that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. The love shining forth from the sightless eyes of the man and the chattering of the woman are placed, with Kashmir as the back ground, for readers to admire and enjoy. The loving couple, inspite of the man’s physical
deformity, is a sight to behold. The poet narrates the poem as if he had chanced across such a couple either in reality or in his imagination.

It is proved once again that Gokak starts a poem very innocuously and takes it through self appraisal to end in wisdom. The poet just cannot restrain himself from this trait which dominates most of his poems. The dualism of the poet as a writer and a preacher is evident throughout, whether it be the original English poems or the poems translated from Kannada. In both, this dominant feature can be detected. Even though it is rather an automatic conclusion, the poem is enhanced by this philosophical ending.