Wit' as a Tool of Poetic Communication

A Comparative Study of I.K. Sharma and Maha Nand Sharma

Ram Kulesh Thakur and R.K. Singh

The paper discusses the concept of 'wit' as it developed through the past few centuries. It takes into consideration both Western and Indian Poetics to reach a consensus on how 'wit' works in poetry. The fact cannot be denied that 'wit' has been one of the most prominent tools of poetic communication since antiquity. Poets like Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Crashaw used wit as a style. The metaphysical poets' wit is characterised by ingenuity in metaphor, pun, and paradoxical conceit. Authors such as Mark Twain, Winston Churchill, and Oscar Wilde perfected the use of wit with intellectual understanding and sharp and cutting wisdom.

Although one finds the features of wit mentioned in Sanskrit Poetics, it does not lay down any particular theory concerning 'wit'. On the other hand, the Western critics find 'wit' as intellectual power of all types which is worthy of specialised study, and therefore they proposed different definitions of 'wit' from time to time.

The present paper discusses the poems of two recent Indian English poets, Maha Nand Sharma and I.K. Sharma, in the light of the common understanding of the concept of 'wit'. The paper discusses such features of 'wit' as common sense, quick reasoning, word play (without being funny), amusing expression, and insightful remarks which show the poet's power of the mind and seeks to establish it as the most prominent tool of poetic communication. It is 'wit' that creates irony; and the interplay of wit and irony produces satire, sarcasm, or even humour. In fact the two poets use 'wit' as a thin disguise for communicating their more poignant feelings with striking expression.

Though 'wit' is often thought to be synonymous with the sense of humour, it is a technical term of some exactness. It is more than just a mastery of language. With the aid of wit and intellect, a poet crosses over the barriers of language, and thus, creates a suitable vehicle to communicate his intense feelings that are hardly devoid of ethical undercurrents. From time to time, the concept of 'wit' and 'humour' has undergone a great change. More often it is found that wit and humour are discussed or treated on the same level, as both seem complimentary to each other even as it is hard to draw a boundary, which could clearly distinguish them from each other.

Wit is derived from an old English word 'witan', meaning 'to know'; hence comes the definition of wit as primarily a matter of sense and understanding. In comparison with humour, wit is an intellectual display of cleverness and quickness of perfection, while humour is less obviously mental in its approach to the weaknesses, foibles, absurd ideas, and actions of people. Wit is wholly dependent upon apt phrasing, whereas humour rises from situations and incidents and does not rely only on the sharpness or felicity of expression. Wit plays with words, develops startling contrasts, and appears often in epigrams and paradoxes. Samuel Johnson states that the original meaning of wit is "the powers of mind; the mental faculties; the intellect" (Bruce 8). The longest citation that Johnson offers for wit comes from Locke: "wit lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance, or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures in the fancy" (Bruce 9).

Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms explains wit as "acute perception and cleverly appropriate expression of ideas providing amusement and pleasure" (Bruce 11). Webster's Dictionary of the English Language closes its entry on wit with a moralizing paragraph: "wit formerly meant genius, and now denotes the power of seizing on some thought or occurrence, and by a sudden turn, presenting it under aspects wholly new and unexpected - apparently natural and admissible, if not perfectly just, and bearing on the subject, or the parties concerned, with a laughable keenness and force... The pleasure we find in wit arises from the ingenuity of the turn, the sudden surprise it brings, and the aptness of its application to the case, in the new and ludicrous relations thus flashed upon the view" (Bruce 14).

Originally, 'wit' signified 'wisdom'; and a man of wit was a wise man. In the Elizabethan age, a man of pregnant wit, or of great wit, was a man of vast judgement. In the reign of James I, 'wit' was used to signify the intellectual faculties or mental powers collectively. In the time of Cowley, it came to signify a superior understanding, and more particularly a quick and brilliant reason. By Dryden's time, it was used as nearly synonymous with talent or ability. According to Locke, it consists in quickness of fancy or imagination. Pope defined 'wit' to be a quick conception and an easy delivery; according to which a man of wit is a man of brilliant fancy; a man of genius. We use, 'wit' to designate a peculiar faculty of the mind, connected with the more comprehensive faculty of the imagination; and also the effect produced by this faculty, which consists in the display of remote resemblances between dissimilar objects, or an unexpected combination of remote resemblances. 'Wit' excites in the mind an agreeable surprise; and it arises not from anything marvellous in the subject, but from the imagery employed, or the strange assemblage of related ideas. Poets display 'wit' either by debasing things pompous or seemingly grave; or, by aggrandizing things little and frivolous; or, by setting ordinary objects in a particular and uncommon point of view, by means not only remote, but also apparently contrary.

Babette Deutsch in her Poetry Handbook explains 'wit' in a better way. It unfolds from an assumption that the discourse of poetry and discourses about poetry are not interchangeable with vocabularies pertaining to other literary
genres and modes. On wit, Deutsch is historically grounded, succinct, and distinct, there is no cross references here to humour, fancy, imagination, or anything else. He describes wit as, the “faculty that makes for metaphor by the perception of likeness in unlike things” (Bruce 11).

To Dryden, ‘wit’ is synonymous with imagination, a term that was to have a far narrower meaning in the eighteenth century, with its emphasis on reason and common sense. Tentatively, but illuminatingly, Elliot defines the wit of certain seventeenth-century poets as “a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace” (Bruce 11).

When one talks of wit, intellect, humour, irony, satire, sarcasm, and other aspects of poetic communication, or even general communication, one cannot ignore the rasa theory. Rasa is the ultimate criterion of literariness according to which ‘wit’ is in action from the generation of an idea in the poet’s mind to the evolution of poetic emotion in the readers. The effectiveness with which a poet nurtures his abstract idea into a concrete presentation displays the wit of the poet. All the western philosophies related to wit from the ancient time to the contemporary age deal with it in one way or the other.

The Vakrokti theory, another very important theory of Indian Poetics, propounded by Kuntaka (10th – 11th century), states that vakrokti is the underlying principle of all figures of speech. Vakrokti lies in the strictness of expression. This strictness of expression distinguishes poetry from other forms of literature and is the result of unusual poetic activity. Thus, one finds vakrokti linked with poetic imagination on the one hand, and aesthetic delight of the reader on the other. A notable point is that strictness of expression merely does not constitute vakrokti; the aesthetic enjoyment derived from perusal of a composition is also equally important. Thus, one finds the wide domain of vakrokti encompassing both linguistic and extra-linguistic features of a composition. The linguistic category includes phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and sentential deviations whereas the extra-linguistic category includes the variations in the context or entire composition (Kushwaha). Therefore, in a way one finds vakrokti closer to and associated with the western critics’ concept of wit.

The theory of auchiya (propriety) (Kushwaha), propounded by Ksemendra (11th Century), has a closer affinity with the modern concept of wit. According to this theory, the propriety or the impropriety of something is determined by the context and not by a set of rules. Something that is proper at one place becomes improper at another. Thus, in all the parts of a composition, from phoneme to the entire work, the rule of propriety is to be strictly observed. The figures of speech, if improperly used, may lead to distortion and disfigurement. Similarly, the contemporary or the modern concept of wit uses the depiction of incongruities, but even the incongruities are selected in an appropriate manner, abiding the theory of auchiya.

The poems of Maha Nand Sharma and I.K. Sharma, are rich in the usage of wit. Wit helps them achieve wonderful intensity, complexity, and resonance, either via depiction of imagery, tone, rhythm, setting, exposure of culture and society, dialogue, or form. Both of them create unfamiliar connections between words and ideas in a manner often surprising and amusing. The unique feature that one finds in their poetry is that the surprise is not always stunning, nor is the humour hilarious.

To get a better understanding of the poetic wit used by the two poets, the conventional descriptions of ‘wit’ may be extended, refreshed, and qualified. Their poetic wit is distinguished by brevity, eloquence, and surprise. It favours incongruous congruity and fosters pleasurable psychological effects in its sense of ‘amusement’. It also plays a role in the formulation, transmission, and conservation of their cultural wisdom.

Now let us view a few poems of Maha Nand Sharma and I.K. Sharma in terms of their unique style, which uses ‘wit’ for poetic communication.

First “The Telling Silence” by Maha Nand Sharma:

Though speaking not one word, the girl
With radiant smiles beamed.
Her playful eyes, her lustrous curls
With a thrilling life teemed.

She, with her telling silence, was
A poem of loveliness
To me, her silence lent, alas 1,
A poet’s restlessness. (Mahanand SL 3)

The speaker introduces a girl who did not speak a word to him but made him restless by her gestures. The ‘speech’ mentioned in the first stanza of the poem is made by the girl’s bodily gestures, i.e., her ‘radiant smiles’, ‘playful eyes’, and ‘lustrous curls’ make up “a thrilling life”. The use of the phrases such as ‘radiant smiles’, ‘playful eyes’, and ‘lustrous curls’ displays poetic wit. These phrases can be clubbed under the ‘shringara rasa’ of Indian Poetics. The shringara rasa evokes the feeling of love in the heart of the reader. In the second stanza of the poem, the poet displays wit with the use of the very communicative ‘telling silence’ juxtaposed with the “poet’s restlessness.” The humorously or (even ironically) loaded “a poem of loveliness” provides a subtle and witty contrast to “a poet’s restlessness.” The entire poem turns out to be an image of wit.

In the poem “To a Professor Guide,” Maha Nand Sharma infuses wit in the first two lines of the poem where he uses killing of ‘blooming roses’ and clearing of ‘paper roses’ with a deep connotation. He reflects on the prevailing academic corruption in universities in the name of research as intellectual pursuit:

How many blooming roses have you killed?
How many paper roses have you passed
As genuine ones? How many hearts you chilled
With academic thefts so mean, so gross? (Mahanand GS 25)

The ‘blooming roses’ is used for genuine research theses which were produced after strenuous research work. The poet draws a fine parallelism between a blooming rose and a thesis produced after sheer hard work on the basis that as a blooming rose is destined to spread its fragrance, an authentic research work would definitely spread knowledge all around. Similarly, in the second line of the stanza, the poet uses ‘paper roses’ for the unreasonable research dissertations or theses which do not have anything to contribute to the academic world. One also finds a display of witty irony in the use of the phrase ‘hearts you chilled’, ‘chilled’ denoting the great shock or surprise caused by plagiarism.

One again finds in the third stanza of the poem a reflection on corrupt intentions/ practices of academicians:

   How many lovely fish by you were netted
   With baits of Ph.D. and high degrees?
   How many pampered dogs you instigated
   To bite your shining ‘friends’ with jealous glee?

(Mahanand GS 25)

The use of the phrase ‘lovely fish’ is comitative and it also suggests multiple meanings in the same given context. The phrase ‘lovely fish’ appears a translation, or equivalent of the regional idiomatic expression of the poet’s mother tongue to mean ‘research students’ trapped in their net. The phrase denotes the number of people whom the professors have exploited physically, mentally, and economically on account of awarding them high research degrees. As the poet uses the word ‘lovely’ to modify the word ‘fish’, the phrase may also connote to the female research scholars who were selected by the corrupt professors for making their time measurable. Again, the use of the phrase ‘baits of Ph.D.’ in the second line of the stanza also reflects wit. The use of the word ‘bait’ highlights the corrupt intentions of the professors as ‘bait’ is a tool used for clever enticement of any prey. The stanza displays a witty humour when the poet suggests that the Ph.D.’s and other high degrees are used as bait by the senior faculty of the universities to lure students, to make profit through corrupt means. In the third line of the stanza too, ‘pampered dogs,’ is used to connote the closely associated pupils, or academicians who criticise the other persons only for the sake of pleasing their master. In the last line of the stanza, the use of the word ‘shining’ to modify ‘friends’ is witty. Here, the word ‘shining’ connotes ‘gaining fame and popularity,’ and the word ‘friends’ connotes the arch rivals or colleagues. One finds that the wit reflected in the stanza is responsible for the evolution of humour as well as gentle satire, with a moral intent.

In the poem “Encashment,” the poet talks about the attitude of people in our time. He uses wit remarkably well to create humour in the poem. The poet is also successful in creating a gentle satire by mocking at materialistic attitude of the people around. In the first stanza, he deals with ‘encashment’ of leave at the end of one’s service, “We did not use our leave; therefore / We’ll get our leave encashed” (Mahanand GS 9). Ironically, in similar vein, playing on the word ‘encash,’ he makes the clerks (babus) display their intention of getting their ‘fairness’ also encashed by means of a reward for their labour of calculating ‘fairly’ the leaves. In the second stanza, the poet projects a political leader encashing his image through his followers’, “money-grabbing rash.” In the third stanza,

   The freedom-fighters say, “We will
   Our struggle get encashed,”
   While nation, bleeding fast, is chilled
   To penury sin-enmeshed. (Mahanand GS 9)

The freedom fighters want to encash their struggle for the sake of the motherland by demanding pension (or such reward) as freedom fighters. They are blind to the tough situation in which the country is enmeshed. The last line of the stanza, ‘To penury sin-enmeshed’ is very witty as the poet depicts that the country has lost all its riches due to the materialistic and corrupt attitude of leaders, bureaucrats, government employees, and others. The phrase ‘sin-enmeshed’ is a loaded expression, which suggests that the politicians have created all sorts of complications by their sins. It is these sins that have caused penury to the country. The poet is so disappointed that he says:

   When invaluable traits of soul
   Are bartered for such trash,
   Why not this greedy nation whole
   May grope in the dark and crash? (Mahanand GS 9)

In the poem “To My Old Self”, Maha Nand Sharma draws a similarity between the ‘griefs’ and hopes of an old person with the variegated hues of a fine mosaic:

   Of fret not, fool, your griefs and hopes which prod
   Are variegated hues of a fine mosaic (Mahanand GS 12)

His ‘fool’ smacks of the Shakespearean fool, who may be self-depreciating but is intelligent. The poet draws a parallelism between a mosaic and life to suggest that life is a whole with multitude of shades; hope and grief being one of them. Such a display of pregnant thoughts with rich imagery is thoughtful, and thus witty.

In sum, it can be confidently stated that Maha Nand Sharma’s poetic communication is characterised with humour, irony, and satire. The use of wit is such that it juxtaposes dissimilar ideas for some lively purpose, either assimilation or contrast, generally of both. The style in which Maha Nand Sharma uses wit affirms that juxtapositions of culturally ordered dissimilarities ought to cause nothing of more consequence than a moment of amusement. He overcomes the conventional, staid, and simplistic definition of wit. He
uses wit not only as a verbal joust but as a strategy for interpreting the complexities of the world. Through the medium of wit, Maha Nand Sharma integrates thinking about the seriousness, the worries, and challenges of life. It can be inferred that Maha Nand Sharma displays the use of wit more through his ideas and for the purpose moulds the language accordingly.

An analysis of a few poems by I.K. Sharma would bring to the forefront the different ways in which two different poets use the same tool for the same purpose, i.e., poetic communication. I.K. Sharma as a poet is a very subtle user of wit. He displays wit more at the level of language than at the depiction of incongruous situations and complexities of life.

The poem ‘If I Die Tonight’ by I.K. Sharma is a very lively example of depiction of wit in creating a situation that is amusing, and the depiction is a result of ‘poetic imagination’. In the poem, the persona thinks of and narrates the incidents that would follow his immediate death. One finds that wit is injected into the poem by the subject of one’s response to someone dead:

If I die tonight
messages I come from far and wide
unearthing virtues not smell so far
will pile high to the sky above.

Faces folded in grief
will drift into the widow’s house
where my body lie cold an’ bare.
and join me in my last journey
--- a procession of specks to the eternal house—
lead me to its final end.

Once pyre on fire, the work is done,
souls scatter on surrounding sands,
matter living burns with matter dead,
upkicking flames mock glorious trends.
The runaway rise in prices, petrol,
grade running, permit, control,
all hike high with hungry flames
to oracle, miracle, poll debacle.

Oh, that’s over,
let’s honour the dead:
give him the sweet parting kiss—
fuel his last fainting fire.

All memories of sweet days so cheaply dusted!
Splinters beyond translation
then ply on the walking lips:
‘he was a good soul’,
stanza sparkles with wit as it has a deep connotational meaning which suggests that when human beings are alive, they secrete a number of desires, urges, dreams, and ambitions which keep on shooting up from time to time. There is no point at which a person feels content and satisfied with his achievements, and stops striving for more. The parallelism drawn between the shooting desires and up-kicking flames is remarkably witty. The sentence also connotes that whatever may be the achievements of a person, he is destined to end his journey on a funeral pyre where the up-kicking flames would sing the saga of his achievements.

The word ‘Oh’ at the beginning of the first line of the fifth stanza displays wit, as it indicates that the people around were so engrossed in their talks and gossips that they even did not care to pay any attention to the burning pyre. They realise it at once that the dead body has burnt. This attitude of the people is both casual and ironical. The fourth line, ‘fuel his last fainting fire,’ also reflects wit as it is mentioned as a sort of parting kiss for the dead.

Then again in the phrase, ‘ply on the walking lips,’ the use of the word ‘walking’ as a modifier to ‘lips’ infuses wit into the stanza as it suggests that the opinions uttered by the mourners are only made for the sake of formality to maintain the decorum of the occasion, and it does not represent any emotion.

In the poem “The Leader,” the poet displays a subtle use of wit in the first two lines of the poem:

He gave them a loud call
like a cock in a lane
announced on the air:
dawn is not far-off.
The early risers followed him
stumbled, and found:
he walks with his back towards them
hides the rising sun (I.K. Sharma Shifting 10).

The use of simile in the second line to draw a comparison between a political leader (human-being) and a cock (bird) because of their call displays wit. As a ‘cock’ is the first creature, which announces the morning, a political leader takes pride in addressing a congregation and assures that he is a special being who is destined to bring all good things to their lives. In the second stanza, the wit emerges from the depiction of the situation itself in which lies an incongruity between what is expected by the general masses, and what the actuality is. The followers blindly follow their leader expecting that he is leading them on the right path and would help them in achieving their goals. But, the fact is in total juxtaposition with the expectations of the people. In actuality, the leader is misleading the people to attain his personal base motives. Such a depiction arouses pity in the heart of the reader for the followers and anger for the leader.

One may finally conclude that the poems of I.K. Sharma sparkle with wit and the style of using wit varies from one poem to the other. He uses wit more at the level of language, i.e., in word play, than in the depiction of ideas and thoughts. The selection and the placement of the words evoke wit and humour in his poems and the context plays a helping role. The use of wit in his poetry resembles the style in which the poets of the 18th century used wit. The use of wit is so subtle that it makes the poems deceptive.

When one makes a comparative study between Maha Nand Sharma and I.K. Sharma on the basis of the use of wit in their poetry, one finds that both the poets overthrow the impositions laid down by the conventional descriptions of poetic wit. A thorough examination and analysis of their poems confirms that wit can also be displayed in poetry through other mediums and not only via the subtneness of expression. The poetic wit displayed by both the poets achieves vividness, complexity, and sonority in the depiction of thoughts, imagery, tone, rhythm, setting, dialogue, and exposure of culture and society. The fact cannot be denied that each poem of the two poets, no matter how obliquely, communicates an idea or argument. Maha Nand Sharma uses wit to develop and depict his thoughts and ideas, evoke images, inform and instruct, generate satire, and develop the whole context of the poem. On the other hand, I.K. Sharma uses wit only as a tool to create amusement, through the generation of humour, irony, or surprise.

Finally, it may be concluded that the two poets have their own individual style, which is unique in itself, with use of wit as a tool to communicate meaningfully. It is the exercise of the poetic wit that allows the poets to create the extraordinary. They use language in such a way that it overcomes the inadequacy of language to communicate their experiences, and even poignant feelings. Both the poets infuse language with ‘wit’ to make it a perfect vehicle for poetic communication.

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Decoding the Poetry of I.K. Sharma: A New Perspective

A POEM itself functions as 'message' between the poet and a reader. It is usually created for an audience, and by the same token poems only come to life when they are actually received by a reader. The problem arises in the communication process when a reader attempts to decode the poem exactly as per a set convention, particularly as the poet and the reader are spatially and temporally deferred from one another in most cases.

Generally, poets abide by certain poetic conventions when they create a piece of literature, but sometimes they intentionally defy the set conventions to create something new and innovative. However, there always exists some reference to what one might call the 'code' of literary production and reception, i.e., rules for writing and reading the text. The most important fact that needs a mention here is that the poet and the reader must share a language for communication. Another important aspect of literary communication that needs to be realized is that the literary codes can change over time, as languages and cultures generally do, and that different periods use different classificatory systems. This is also one of the reasons for the poetic texts reinventing themselves over periods.

The context of literary production and reception thus becomes very important. Both readers and authors are situated in a specific place, historical time, and cultural context, which, of course, influence the way they read and write. At the same time, the literary text also refers to the external world, either by imitating what can be found there, or by creating an alternative world. Thus, while investigating the relationship between the author and the text, or the reader and the text, one can focus on the text itself, or on how it is embedded in its socio-historical and cultural contexts.

One needs to understand that poetic language is not a brand of standard language. The violation of the norms of the standard, its systematic violation, is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language, without which there would be no poetry. One also needs to understand how the poetic language deviates from being a brand of the standard, or scientific, or common language. The function of poetic language consists in the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance, whereas the standard language avoids foregrounding. The devices by which poetic language achieves its maximum of foregrounding must therefore be explored. Poets use varied rhetoric devices and figures of speech to achieve their objective. Their figures of speech become the most effective tool to transport the meaning from the text to the reader, and thus play a very vital role in establishing the channel of poetic communication between them and their readers.

Poetry is generally regarded as the most suitable form for describing emotions and thoughts. It is highly 'compressed' writing, often using figures of speech to talk about one thing in terms of another, such as metaphor and simile, that allows the reader to interpret and explore the poem's meaning for itself. This
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physically to take control. The interpretation is very well supported by the succeeding phrase 'night walks in', as 'walk' indicates movement. The use of the word 'grabs' in the eighth line of the poem may be interpreted as an act of hugging which seems to evolve from the denotative interpretation of the lexical items, whereas it may be treated as an act of forceful and passionate smooch between the two lovers, in the other context.

The next line of the poem uses three key words: coos, converses, and descends. In the denotative context and its associated discourse, the words suggest that the beloved makes her presence felt, talks to her lover, and finally departs. Whereas in the other context, it reflects the act of love-making: the word 'coos' sounds synonymous with 'woos', suggesting that the lovers come too close (physically) to each other; the word 'converses' suggests merging into each other, i.e., the communion; and 'descends' indicates the end of the fiery sexual desires, and at the same time depicts a sense of movement, but this time it is in the opposite direction, indicating that the beloved leaves the possession of her lover.

The tenth line of the poem reflects the parting of the lovers in both the discourses generated. In the succeeding line, the poet mentions two types of tears: visible and invisible. The use of such classification intensifies the suggestiveness of the poem, and thus, reflects the wit and intellect of the poet. In the discussed contexts, the word 'invisible' refers to the tears of the beloved, who is actually not present and is an imaginary character in the poem. It may also be interpreted as being suggestive of the groaning of the heart, which is not witnessed by every eye. The use of the word 'wrappings' in the last line of the poem is, again, pregnant with meaning; it has two different meanings for the two different contexts in which the poem has been decoded. In the first context, the word 'wrappings' refer to the covers of the gifts that the beloved gave to her lover, or even anything associated with her that the lover has kept with utmost care till date, and the persona unwraps those precious possessions to cherish the memories of his beloved. Whereas in the other context derived from the connotative interpretation of the lexical items, the same word may refer to the clothes that the persona was wearing when he retired to his bed, and undressed himself during the act of love-making (imaginary). The last few words, "...til half light..."of the poem is suggestive and indicates the dawn, i.e., the persona has spent the whole night thinking of his beloved and couldn't sleep at all. The use of ellipsis to end the poem, instead of a full stop, is intentionally done to suggest that it is the story of each night and never comes to an end.

Thus, one observes that a poem is open to different interpretations. It depends on the reader what sort of a context one weaves with the given lexical items and syntactic elements, and how one patterns the given phrases to produce a semantic unit that supports the context built. Once a logical context is generated, the decoding of the poem in concert with the generated context gives a suitable interpretation of the text of the poem. Therefore, it may be claimed that a poetic text has multiplicity of meanings as its inherent feature, depending on the number of contexts that may be weaved around the same text, each leading to a different discourse. One also experiences that the number of contexts and their related discourse may be conceived from a text is directly dependent upon the intensity of suggestiveness of the lexical items building up the given text. And finally, the greater the factor of multiplicity of meaning of a text, the worthier

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factor leads to the different interpretations of a poem in different times and places. The use of the figures of speech, rhetorical devices, and ungrammaticalities makes the language richer and more appealing to the senses and intellect of the reader. The use of comparative language and elevated or uncommon word choice or diction contributes to poetry's ability to make a familiar world seem strange and new again.

The paper attempts to analyse and study a poem of I.K. Sharma in the light of the above discussion and comment on his poetic abilities. I.K. Sharma, who is generally referred as a socio-political realist, has also composed a number of poems that are semi-autobiographical, introspective, philosophically, and also such that entertain small and common things on a large canvas. The poem selected for an analysis belongs to this group of poems, and is titled 'How Untrue...'

How untrue, faithless is the saying:
out of sight, out of mind.
Truth lies elsewhere. Absence
impregnates the very air you live in,
though in a new way. The face
lost becomes palpable- the beloved
climbs the stairs as night walks in,
grabs you with shadowy hands.
coos, converses, and suddenly descends
into unanswerable silence,
and tears, visible, invisible,
fall on wrappings till half light... (End to End 37)

The poem directly leads a reader to develop a context in which a couple is separated and the whole poem seems to be a narration of the pain of estrangement experienced by the persona. The said context is suggested by the lines, "...The face / lost becomes palpable- the beloved." The use of the word 'impregnates' and 'new' in the fourth and fifth lines of the poem provides structure to the concept, as it suggests the characteristic and the intensity of the experience that the persona is referring to. The word 'impregnates' may be taken to suggest a 'lively experience that is multiple times stronger than a mere imaginary exercise, whereas the word 'new' broadens the scope for different possible interpretations sprouting from the same context. Thus, one observes that the first half of the poem provides a basic supporting structure, i.e., context for the poem, on the basis of which the rest of the poem is to be interpreted.

The poet personifies 'night' in the seventh line of the poem, "...night walks in." It is also mentioned in the same line that as the night walks in, the beloved 'climbs the stairs'. Here, a reader may interpret 'night' as a symbol of mourning or something dreadful or evil on the one hand, and also as a symbol of silence, time for love-making, lustful urges and desires, on the other. The sort of an interpretation a reader makes here decides the progress of the discourse of the poem. The different interpretations of the lexical items lead to the evolution of different contexts, which further leads to different discourses for the same text.

Again, the word 'climbing' may be decoded either denotatively or connotatively, each leading to different discourses. If the word is interpreted denotatively, the phrase simply suggests that the persona lives on the top floor rather than the ground floor, and the beloved makes her way to his room. But if the same phrase is interpreted in a connotative sense, it has much more to depict. It suggests a sense of movement, something charging and coming over
the literary art.
When one tries to evaluate the poetic magnificence and talent of I.K. Sharma, one feels confident enough to label him as one of the most representative poets of the contemporary Indian English Poetry. He has a remarkable sense of the use of the language, and he is quite successful in overcoming the 'inadequacy' of the language as a medium to communicate emotions and intense feelings. He uses the language in a very subtle way to make the most of the inherent suggestive capabilities of a word, and also to generate an ironic, witty, satiric, and humorous effect on the reader. His poems are pregnant with meaning and they even make a common thing appear grand. He is much trained in the use of rhetorical devices, and especially, in the use of similes, metaphor, personification, and imagery. If multiplicity of meaning of a poem be the judging criteria to remark a verdict on the literary talent of a poet, then one may unhesitatingly acclaim him as one of the best poets today.

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The Master and the Disciple:
Jayanta Mahapatra and Niranjan Mohanty

Sudhir K. Arora

WHENEVER, Mahapatra volumes were being published I was lucky enough to get a copy either from the poet or from the market. In fact, I saw the growth of the poet in him and the growth of his poetic vision. The trajectory of a poet's vision in Mahapatra enabled me to write so many articles on Mahapatra's poetry... The other reason that propelled me to read Mahapatra is the way he establishes a deep-rooted relationship with the place he is born, to the cultural tradition he belongs to, the system of values he adheres to and the fabric of his relationship with the past... If you think that I differ it is rightly so, because my perception about the world, about myself and about the use of the creative medium are different from him. (Contemporary Vibes 27-28)

The excerpt from the interview is a clear proof of the relationship of the master Jayanta Mahapatra and the disciple Niranjan Mohanty. Mohanty learnt Mahapatra's poetic mantra, imbued it in his heart, reflected over it and, then, articulated his silences in an idiom, different from that of his master. The master plays on the poetic flute; the disciple hears it in amazement and, then, offers his comments. Subsequently, he himself takes the flute, plays on it and produces sweeter tunes than his master who feels proud of having such a disciple.

The master shares this fact but the disciple, who realizes the reality of life, makes Duryodhan declare: "Come death, oh my dear death, / burn away my boiling body, and freeze my breath! / What am I to do here when all is lost." (Tiger 80).

Mahapatra often talks of death and, sometimes, seems to be in love with it. Death becomes "a handcart" that one pushes "through a dayful of moonlight" (False 78). He is surprised why a man does not realize that he is "meaningless / that one is not even living for one's own sake" (Shadow 25). This irrelevance of life makes not only Mahapatra ponder but also Mohanty, who admits: "It's not death that I fear most / but my own irrelevance, my own / absence" (House 64). He philosophizes over life and death saying: "One merely breathes and whispers, / and exists / because death delays" (Touching 14). Mohanty bids farewell to the world and the master wonders how his disciple translated death into reality.

R. C. Shukla considers Mahapatra "a silken poet with very thin threads" and finds him "to gentle to thunder" ('Discovery' 115) because of his subdued lamentation. But, Mohanty is bold in articulation to the point of thunder. He never makes a subdued cry rather cries in such a forceful way which makes others cry too. The learned critic finds Mahapatra successful in giving the pictures of the land but unsuccessful in "giving the pictures of men and women"