CHAPTER – III

COMMUNICATION: IRONY

3.1. Irony: An Introduction

Most modern theories of rhetoric distinguish among three types of irony: verbal, dramatic, and situational. Verbal irony is a disparity of expression and intention, i.e. when a speaker says one thing but means another, or when a literal meaning is contrary to its intended effect. Dramatic irony is a disparity of expression and awareness, i.e. when words and actions possess significance that the listener or audience understands, but the speaker and character do not. Situational irony is the disparity of intention and result, i.e. when the result of an action is contrary to the desired or the expected effect. Apart from these major groups, there are a number of specific groups such as irony of fate or cosmic irony, i.e. the disparity between desires and the harsh realities of the outside world; irony of character, i.e. when an individual’s true character is discovered to be in contrast with his appearance or manner; irony of consolation, i.e. when a statement implied to be consolation is in real terms no consolation at all, or a grim sort of false consolation; and a few others, which would be revealed later in the chapter.

3.1.1. Irony and Ambiguity

In the poetic domain, one finds that irony is closely related to ambiguity. Indeed, irony may be claimed to be a special instance of ambiguity, the expression in a single term of more than one meaning. In ambiguity, the different meanings are equally allowed by the literal level of meaning, whereas irony is a tension between the two levels of meaning. In fact, it is integral to the poet’s discourse. One may also notice it as underlying the discourse of
humour, satire, or wit along with figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, paradox, antithesis, understatement, and even apostrophe.

3.1.2. Irony: Social and Political Awareness

The often “cutting” edge of irony, says Linda Hutcheon, is always a social and political edge. The statement may be interpreted to convey that a poet communicates one’s social and political awareness with irony. Both Maha Nand Sharma and I.K. Sharma are ironic in communication of their social and political awareness. It “happens” in the tricky, unpredictable space between expression and understanding, as Linda points out: it is a pragmatic phenomenon whose processing involves complex interaction between linguistic style and contextual information.¹

3.2. Irony in the Poetry of Maha Nand Sharma

Maha Nand Sharma believes in the dictum that a writer is the conscience keeper of his age and one should be committed to bring about social regeneration, create mutual understanding among people and keep them united. As a humanist, M.N. Sharma writes with the objective of exploiting man’s potential growth, and seeks to identify all those anti-human forces that obstruct man’s progress towards being civilized. In a major lot of his poems, he focuses on the evils which tend to divide mankind and create a state of perpetual conflict. It is in such poems that Sharma communicates with irony as the core of his expression, even as it may have a tinge of satire/sarcasm here and there. The choice of metrical pattern – heroic quatrains, alternations of iambic tetrameter with iambic trimeter, and alternations of iambic pentameter with iambic trimeter – facilitates creation of the desired tone, including wit, humour, satire, sarcasm, and irony.

3.2.1. ‘The Price of Life’

The poem ‘The Price of Life’ composed in iambic pentameter alternating with iambic trimeter, sometimes with an extra stressed or unstressed syllable, deals with the issue of terrorism and complex law and order machinery which is more terroristic than the actual terrorism. The narrative contextualizes an innocent killing of a common man by a couple of
terrorists who fire their bullets and flee. The question he asks them “Why kill me?” is ironic in view of the narrator’s searching questions such as “Why innocence lies in mud?” “Have we no human rights?” “Why rulers talk with terrorists while we die?” “Why leaders win elections with their aid” “Why gov’ments don’t govern?” etc. Such questions become significant and integrate irony to the narrative. While the terrorists after firing their bullets escape on scooters, the police swoop upon the victim with “bayonets raised” in a van. The victim’s body suffers further humiliation in the name of post-mortem:

Then swooped police upon this gory scene.
Since death was less than his due,
His corpse for post-mortem with knives keen
Was sent for tortures new.

The criminals in uniform prove worse than the terrorists when they drag the womenfolk and other helpless members, and beat them all:

Now, right and left, they beat the inmates all.
The children, girls and men
Who cried and wept and sobbed, so badly mauld,
Were put into waiting van.

The helpless people suffering the police atrocity also ask the same question as the deceased had asked the terrorist:

“O ! where’s our fault? O ! where’s our fault?” they asked.
“O ruffians ! ask your fault ?
In lock-up, fools, your fault will be unmasked.
Where did those terrorists bolt?”

The irony is that those who are responsible to save the common citizens from the terrorists, torture them and ask them the address of the terrorists:

“We do not know,” with folded hands they said.
The cops them heeded not.
Ah ! why should they ? The cops, for bribes mad,
The men to lock-up led.
Those who need help are branded as criminal by the law and order machinery, and they are all beaten up for their loss at the hands of the terrorists. The poet reaches the climax of irony in the penultimate stanza where the political leadership tries to assuage the family of the deceased by offering a cheque as compensation for the death of their family member:

“The past is past. For future hold this cheque.”
The silence, keen as a knife,  
Of kid this query seemed to be shooting back:  
“Is this the price of life?”  

The narrator’s bitterness is conveyed with expressions like “A white-capped man” (for politician/leader), “ruffians” (for common man), “tortures” (post-mortem), “smaller-fry” (ordinary citizen), “rogues” (for terrorists), “swelling breasts” (for the pride in killing an innocent), and “bony heap” and “lifeless heap” (for the deceased). The narrative of the murder and its aftermath is not only steeped in irony, but also raises questions of governance, especially the functioning of law and order machinery which plays down the dignity of the living and the dead alike. The narrative also evokes karuna (pity), raudra (wrath), and bhayanak (anxiety) rasas alongside a feeling disgust (Vibhatsa).

3.2.2. ‘To Our Political Heroes’

The poem ‘To Our Political Heroes’ is also composed in the same vein. The narrator questions the very morality of politicians from the days of independence and feels disappointed. In fact, the very title of the poem is fraught with irony as the contents of the five stanzas, composed in heroic quatrains, present politicians as most unheroic:

While innocent children, men and women lost  
Their hearths and homes for freedom fraught with fears,  
Did you not then to the heights of power tossed  
Dismember all our country plunged in tears?  

When hundreds burnt themselves to death deprived  
Of bread and justice bare by reservation,
Did not your rank indifference, keen as knives,
Then mock their lives’ helpless mute extinction? 22

The quatrains point to the most unheroic action and behavior. The narrator appears to recall
the traumas of the people who lost their “hearths and homes” during the partition for
“freedom”. Not only that the country was divided into two nations, but it also engendered in
them fears and plunged the country in tears. The memories of partition have been bloody
and fearsome as it forced a large population to start from scratches. The narrator blames this
all to the politicians who had only their own ego to serve rather than the people. The
question in the last two lines presumes the answer in the positive and there is a continuation
of the same fears of division of the country as at the time of independence. The use of the
word “freedom” is loaded with meaning. At one level, freedom is individual, or personal,
which is challenged, i.e. “fraught with fears”. Freedom also stands for democracy which
allows politicians to speak on behalf of the common people and take decisions which are
often to benefit them personally, even at the cost of ruining the very institution of
democracy, which too, is thus “fraught with fears”.

The narrator’s ironical tone is harsh enough to be sarcastic in the second quatrain where he
refers to the politics of “reservation” in the name of social justice. Again, he hits at the
politicians’ “rank indifference” to thousands of young men and women self-immolating for
or against the policy of reservation. He finds them almost murdering youth in the name of
providing equal opportunities, or jobs, to the poor and deprived. Expressions such as “keen
as knives” and “helpless mute extinction” convey the deep-seated anger in the mind of the
narrator.

With the same intention of communicating ‘less is more’, the narrator questions the
politicians’ “frolicking cultural functions” and points to their deliberate strategy to “mock
the poor” and create new fetters for the country to go downwards:

You sleep; the enemies knock at nation’s door.
While you your pockets swell, the nation begs.
Your frolicking cultural functions mock the poor.
In fetters new, the country downward drags. 23
While the poet is socially conscious and seeks to awaken the conscience of the politicians, he is equally concerned about corrupt practices that the politicians indulge in, and ironically, swell their pockets so much so that they compromise the nation’s security and get elected with help from the very terrorists that kill innocent folks. The irony, almost on the verge of satire, is that they become rich in the name of removing poverty: “Your pockets burst at the seams with ill-got notes / While poverty with inflation stalks the land.”

The sad reality is that the politicians spread falsehood in the name of truth and justice; they divide the nation in the name of national unity; they do the very things they ask the people not to do; and they make promises that they know they can never fulfill. The creation of such a context in itself makes the poet bold to communicate what requires tremendous courage and self-honesty. For developing in brief the narrative of political villainy, the poem’s argument is re-enforced and its reading is made smooth by the end rhyme pattern ‘a b a b’ and the internal rhyming that constitute the repetition of the vowel sounds. The tone of the poem—irony or satire—is tied to the rhythm and rhyming pattern of the quatrains, just as semantically the discourse is upheld by verbal juxtaposition of two ideas, thoughts, observations, or entities; or semantically/verbally contrasting expressions such as “pockets swell / nation begs”, “in justice / injustice”25, “unity / divide”26, and “sermons / falsehood”27. The contrasting parallel expressions lead to an ironic tone. The poet’s pragmatic excellence lies in the choice of the metrical form, i.e. heroic quatrain to reinforce the ‘unheroic’. The normal order of sentences is changed to create emphasis and tone which proves the poet’s strategic competence to achieve irony, humour, satire, or sarcasm. His grammar of communication turns even a prosaic subject poetic.

3.2.3. ‘The Indian Hero-Worshippers’

In yet another poem ‘The Indian Hero-Worshippers’, Maha Nand Sharma follows the same strategy as in the poem ‘To Our Political Heroes’ to criticize politicians who are “ruthless knaves”, perpetuating slavery:
What comfort have you in their lawless rule?
These all-enslaving reckless, ruthless knaves
Have made you all their interest-serving tool
The laiety, law, e’en letters are their slaves.  

The narrator’s harsh tone helps in exposing the politicians’ hypocrisy and villainy which appears ironically sarcastic in view of democracy and its institutions which let them work for their own welfare, rather than public welfare. The form of the poem enhances the effect of the content.

### 3.2.4. ‘Grains of Truth’

The next poem ‘Grains of Truth’ communicates that the world is not the same place as one assumes it to be on the basis of one’s learning, assumptions, and childhood experiences. As one grows and gets mature, one comes to witness the real face (naked truth) of the world, i.e. the hard ways of the world.

Me, late in life, this lesson could impress
That life’s book defies the books of schools,
That law’s a mask for endless lawlessness,
And discipline’s meant for none but faithful fools,

That pearly smiles are ’brodered cloaks for wiles,
And loveliest features hide the darkest heart,
That love demands not sacrifice but smiles,
And honeyed words conceal designs dark.

But both unlearnt and learnt I soon unlearnt
When God Almighty plucked the passion’s weeds,
When fire of purity all impurities burnt
And cool contentment quenched the thirst of greed.

Illusion’s husks removed, the grains of truth
Emerged intact and ripe, my soul to soothe.  


The didactic purpose of enlightening one about truth is achieved by using the mode of irony in the syntactic pattern of the lines of the poem. The selfsame irony is understandable in the narrator’s realization “late in life” that “life’s book defies the books of schools”, i.e. the lessons of life are learnt by actual living rather than by reading the lessons in books. There is a sense of acceptance of the reality of actual living that “law’s a mask for endless lawlessness / And discipline’s meant for none but faithful fools.” The poet follows his preferred style of contrasting, “life’s books / books of schools”, “law’s mask / endless lawlessness”, and “discipline / fools” to communicate his academic enlightenment ironically. One notices his wit, too, in the use of the expression “faithful fools”, which is observable in the academic departments in every university and college. In his foolishness, “late in life”, he recognizes crooks, whose characteristics he describes with a tinge of wit as exposed in his choice of expressions “pearly smiles”, “loveliest features”, and “honeyed words”, which turn ironic in contrast with “broidered cloaks for wiles”, “darkest heart”, and “designs dark” respectively.

In the last six lines, the poet-narrator turns spiritual, and as a result, he attributes his ‘enlightenment’ to God because He made him pluck the “passion’s weeds”, i.e. ego and sensual urges, and he could overcome his temptations of various kinds and shed the veil of illusions to learn the grains of truth. The irony is that one learns things ‘late’, when time is already lost.

3.2.5. Irony in Long-Narrative (Epic) poems

Maha Nand Sharma not only uses his short poems to present, project, and propagate social awareness, but he also writes long narrative poems in the style of an epic to communicate his social consciousness. He reinterprets the past in the context of the present with an objective to create a better future. A Rudraksha Rosary (1987), A Spiritual Warrior (1991), and Flowering of a Lotus (1998) are Maha Nand Sharma’s rediscovery of the useful past. The narratives composed with an understanding of the vision of the past against the background of the profound changes that have occurred with the tide of globalization, and change in temperament of the people and their lifestyle now. They reflect a change in all
spheres of human activity, both in India and abroad. The poet is interpretative and his genius lies in the inward turn of action and experience that impart novelty, individuality, and particularity to the narratives.

Maha Nand Sharma envisions and interprets experiences drawing an analogy with the mythical tales, or presents the myths in such a way that they generate an external association with the contemporary events with an internal effect. Such an attempt goes well with what T.S.Eliot has termed in his essay on ‘Tradition’, the historical sense, a perception which is universal in essence uplifting the “vital force in a poet”, for poetic appeal. In Eliot’s concept the “past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.” Sharma makes a creative interpretative use of myths, legends, and symbols to open up ‘new’ realms of vision, and not merely portray the crude actuality of life. He uses myths to manipulate a relationship between antiquity and contemporaneity.

Maha Nand Sharma’s epics are a blending of the ancient and the modern. The narrative art in them demands examination not only in terms of the narrative art in ancient / classical epics but also, and largely, according to the technique of the narrative art of modern novels and short stories. He employs epic medium to express modern sensibility in modern idiom, but without forgetting the past, including religion, history and tradition. To that extent, his epics are noticeable for universality of appeal and spiritual consciousness.

In Sharma’s worldview, family is basic to the making of society and country. He draws on the well-known Hindu myths and legends, and explores the characters and situations from the celebrated Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, relating them to current situations and leading figures that influence life and mind of people everywhere. If he offers his evaluation of the present political situation or villainy of politicians, he makes mythical/legendary characters to say things which the narrators of his short poems have already said:

Said Vishnu, climbing down the column bright,
To the lion-shaped but human-voiced guard
Of dungeons, “Who are denizens these so dark ?”
The guard replied, “The rogues are from the planets
Where secret sin’s the price of progress fast.
In different walks they showed their skills. They are
The politicians talking day and night
Of unity, yet dividing caste from caste;
The teachers who awarded heaps of marks
To sons of rich and reaped the bribes fat,
Who watered fields at night and snored in the class;
Professors smartly dressed and looking stern
Who bartered Ph.D’s for Ph.D’s,
Who dangled dextrously the sword of marks
O’er heads of pupils frightened like the sheep,
Whose motto was “Oblige and be obliged”  

To add further:

When such as you, O Vishnu, fight as dogs
On earth which has been just created new
And which has seen as yet, but few men born,
No distant is the day when all such scenes
Will be transported to the heav’n-chained Earth
Where men will breed and multiply like rabbits.  

The poet envisions the ‘politics’ of gods and goddesses to sound relevant to the present day readership. He effectively demonstrates via mythical characters how people continue to think, act, and behave in the same fashion as in the ancient past, and thus, tries to construct an archetypal situation and imagery.

The primeval mythical belief suggests that the act of creation is the process of developing order out of chaos, and therefore, ‘chaos’ has its own importance. As, in the characteristic of myths, there has been two contrasting forces in Nature since the very beginning, i.e. gods and demons, truth and falsehood, light and darkness, victory and defeat, creative and destructive, etc. These oppositional pairs participate in creative conflict, and ultimately, gods, truth, light, victory (of the virtuous), and creative forces prevail. Thus, every action, each living as well as non-living being, mortals and immortals, natural / cosmic occurrences, all have an ordained function to perform with either of the two objectives: bringing order out of chaos, or, things falling apart to lend to chaos.
The poet exploits myths to narrate experiences and dilemmas of the modern human besides drawing a close analogy between the ‘divine’ and the ‘base’. It is from the context that one interprets the meaning and tone, which includes irony, humour, satire, and sarcasm. Needless to point out that both the gods and humans fall prey to certain sensual urges, extravagant desires of pelf and power, materialistic pursuits, etc.; they indulge in all sorts of politics, even take the help of ‘unfair’ to accomplish their goals. Maha Nand Sharma exploits the contexts of the mythical tales and legends to depict the contemporary ‘chaos’, and ultimately cause a change in the societal order by victory of the virtuous and defeat of the unrighteous. Shashi Sharma remarks, “… An age-old Indian myth has been narrated with some significant lessons for the modern civilization. It provides spiritual light to the people groping in the darkness of materialism.” 32 R.K.Singh is of the opinion: “Maha Nand Sharma is perhaps the only recent poet who is visionary and offers a blend of fancy, feelings, philosophy, scriptures, myths, legends and literatures.” 33

A Rudraksha Rosary narrates an age old Indian myth about the exploits of Lord Shiva with some significant didactic and moral lessons for the present generation. Each ‘book’ of the twelve books narrative implicitly leaves a moral message for the reader. The readers may explore didactic messages such as: Book I, End of the Endless, suggests that people should not strive or fight for materialistic ends and gaining power; especially never resort to falsehood or unfair means in order to climb the ladder of success, but instead rest one’s faith in God and be content with what He has blessed one with. The second book, Fire and Light, leaves the message that one should never forget the Supreme (God, Almighty) in the pride of one’s materialistic achievements; should never insult one’s guests; and never boast off of one’s worldly position. The third book, Shock and Peace, teaches one to control one’s outburst, lament, anger, but strive for peace. Book IV, Dawn, suggests that one should not allow kama (sexual desires and sexual urges) to conquer one’s body and guide its activities, as it takes one away from the path of righteousness; one should rather make use of sex for elevating oneself and fulfilling the laws of Nature. The next book, Night and Morning, implicitly carries the message that one should continuously keep striving for one’s noble objective, or final goal, despite of all the difficulties and odds that one faces. Similarly, all the other books, each describing and presenting an episode of Lord Shiva’s lila (acts), contains an inbuilt moral/spiritual lesson. Rachna Malhotra finds in A Rudraksha Rosary, “the spiritual and mystical treatment of Shiva-Parvati legend.” 34 Maha Nand Sharma, himself,
mentions in his preface to *Flowering of a Lotus*: “My divinity or spirituality is not the spirituality of caves and mountains. It blooms in the mire of life. In *A Rudraksha Rosary*, Lord Shiva descends from Heaven to Earth and plays his *lila* here till at last, in the last book, he associates himself with Arjuna, a man who belongs to history and not to mythology.”

Dr. Satish Kumar remarks, “Sharma’s poetry is suffused with mysticism and spirituality, but his is the mysticism not of a visionary living in complete isolation from the realities of the world. His is the mysticism of a realist…”

### 3.2.5.1. *A Rudraksha Rosary*

The first book of *A Rudraksha Rosary*, ‘End of the Endless?’, opens *in medias res* with the recreation of the myth of Brahma and Vishnu engaged in a fight over the lordship of the worlds, i.e., for power and authority:

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Now Brahma rained his blows with arms full length—
The blows which Vishnu checked on arms athwart.
While Brahma aimed a quick and telling blow—
His fist closed tight, his full-length arm in swing—
He missed the frame of Vishnu; and his frame
In circular motion, ‘gainst his wish so turned
About, that now his back was facing straight
The eyes of Vishnu who embraced it tight.
But Brahma wriggled out with force and stood
Full face to face with Vishnu stunned awhile. 37
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Brahma and Vishnu fight like ruffians in the street. The poet verbally paints a picture of the fight as if it is taking place right before the readers’ eyes. Ironically, the gods present on the scene enjoy it, and even, add fuel to the brawl: “Inflamed by fun by subtly mischievous gods / The two now came to severe bloody blows.” The narrator says it all in the two lines with which the first book opens: “When quarrels break out ‘mong the great, the small / Enjoy the fun- the clever ones, the more.” The gods are, ironically, painted as ruffians, who engage in a severe brawl, being inflamed by their materialistic pursuits. The fight begins with an exchange of verbal abuses: “Can one as mad as you who sleeps on snakes, / On ever-moving fragile floor of sea / Of milk which one should deink, not use as floor, / Be fit to rule the endless worlds?” said Brahma. In reply, Vishnu roars:
O Nature’s freak with faces five deformed,
To sleep on snakes is bravery unsurpassed;
To use the milk as floor displays my wealth
And skill which rule the persons, big and small.
But how can five-faced ugly fools like you
Control the vast expanse of endless worlds? 40

The abuses uttered by the two bring them down to the plane of hooligans, and reflects clearly that how is a brawl initiated? It echoes the contemporary political scene, where two politicians (may be head of two big political parties) clash in order to ascend to power. On the one hand, gods namely Indra, Kuber, Varun, Naarad, etc., secretly enjoy the fight, and on the other, the narrator as participant points out: “So terrible scene the gods expected not. / They tried their best to pacify the two.” 41 The very gods who earlier fuelled the fight, now approach Lord Mahesh (Shiva) as they find the battle getting more fierce, and request him to intervene. In order to put an end to the battle of the two, Lord Mahesh assumes a gold-made column’s shape: “A luminous column standing ’twixt the two / And piercing Seventh Heaven high above / And reaching down beyond the farthest hell.” 42 The two gods being unable to exchange blows, because of the column between them, they decide to settle the issue by reaching the end of the ‘endless’ column. The very idea of exploring the ‘end’ of the ‘endless’ is ironical. Vishnu goes downward, whereas Brahma upwards. Neither of them succeeds in finding the end of the column, to be able to gain the lordship of all the worlds. It is indeed ironical that the two gods decide to travel in entirely different and opposite directions to find their prime objective, which was the same. It symbolically suggests that even gods, like humans, make efforts in all directions to satiate their materialistic urges, but ultimately fail. Vishnu returns disappointed and confesses his failure; whereas Brahma seize a peepal leaf floating in the air, comes down, and boasts that the leaf was at the top of the column:

Declared Brahma, “Here’s the peepal leaf
I saw at the top of the column. I have found
The end of the endless. Now I’m lord supreme
Of all the worlds.” The gods were struck at once
So dumb by Brahma’s success that they could,
For seconds few, not find their tongue, then sang
Full-throated, Brahma’s praises. Vishnu owned
His failure, fell on Brahma’s feet, acknowledged
Him Lord of all the universes, straight. 43

Brahma, blinded by his materialistic urge, bluffs; he speaks a lie with such confidence that even gods are unable to trace his falsehood, and ironically, they start singing his praises.

A peepal leaf, mythically, a symbol of truth and life is caricatured like swearing an oath with the sacred book in hand to tell truth, but telling lies. The “veinous heart-shaped pointed cruel leaf” implicitly and ironically unveils the status of Brahma’s heart that is completely exhausted, and has almost assumed the position of a crusty leaf. The mention of the peepal leaf as held by Brahma, mythically speaking, is holding life itself, or regaining consciousness, or realising Truth, which is Vishnu Himsef because peepal stands for a form of Vishnu, just as peepal tree is considered as tree of knowledge, tree of eternal life, and tree of creation. Mythically, it is believed that this tree is associated with the trinity-Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh (Shiva). To add to the irony, Brahma comes “Down to Earth” 44, i.e. he comes to realize that by holding the peepal leaf, he has held Lord Vishnu Himself; and thus, has found the “end of the endless” that Vishnu essentially is. The irony is that he holds Vishnu to regain his strength and power, and unknowingly, tries to befool Him at the same time. Brahma speaks a lie, but mythically, his lie is the ‘Truth’.

The narrative exposes the contemporary society in which a liar is praised and respected, whereas the honest falls at the feet of the liar:

The hollow braggarts rise to peaks of pow’r;
The honest men who own their failures fall;
The rank and shameless Falsehood bears the palm
While Truth—too simple, artless—lies low 45

Brahma thinks that he has befooled everyone around him quite successfully, but is unaware of the fact that the Supreme (Lord Shiva) has appeared in the form of the endless column, and has witnessed his mischief: “The ever-wakeful Shiv witnessed this all” 46, and therefore, his lie gets exposed. It is quite ironical that Brahma, who stands as a symbol (or metaphor) of ‘Truth’ is caught telling a lie. The narrative finds an echo in the activities, behaviour, and temperament of the present-day politicians who overrule all the ethical principles and code of conduct in their lust for authoritative / administrative
power. These politicians, who pose themselves as incarnation/embodiment of ‘truth’ and ‘honesty’, are immersed in ‘falsehood’, ‘hypocrisy’, and ‘corruption’ of all varied sorts.

The narrator communicates that incompetent people rise to power and recognition by displaying a pretence of being wise and capable; whereas the worthy, deserving, sincere, and honest men receive dejection and declination. The use of the phrase “hollow braggarts” to refer to such people who rise to power, and “honest men” for those “who own their failures” reveals the ironical situation. Amidst all the turmoil, “Truth”, which is “too simple” and “artless”, “lies low” and stands defeated.

Lord Shiva is annoyed at Brahma’s falsehood, and therefore, pronounces a curse on him that he would not be worshipped except in a temple or two; and on the other hand, being happy with Vishnu at his truthfulness, announces that he would be worshipped in numerous temples. Thus, Book-I of the narrative ends with the restoration of ‘Truth’ and the victory of the virtuous. It implicitly communicates that the success, or praises, won on unfair grounds does not last long, and ultimately, it is the ‘Truth’ that prevails.

In another episode, ‘Dawn’ (Book-IV), of A Rudraksha Rosary, Kama (god of sensual love) makes all efforts to disturb the samaadhi of Lord Shiva. He tries his best to appeal to Shiva’s senses but fails. Although Kama knows that Lord Shiva has a complete command over His senses, he makes multiple efforts to conquer the One who is unconquerable, and this evokes irony: “Beyond this Kama’s reach was Lord Mahesh / Concentrated in deep Samaadhi calm.” 47 When all his efforts bear no fruit, he seeks the help of Spring which, by the same device of arousing his senses, succeeds in creating erotic feelings in Lord Shiva. Agitated, Lord Shiva opens his third eye to trace the source of mischief, Spring runs away and only Kama is left standing before Shiva in arrogance and triumph:

…Flames of wrath
Burst forth in Shiva’s deadly eye, and straight
They streamed at Kama’s body all erect
Which, just in seconds, fell—a heap of ash!

Thus Kama’s swelling pride was laid to dust
And he who burned all hearts was himself burnt;
An all-enslaving fleshly beauty died;
A wrestler with our souls was knocked to dust; 48
It is found that Kama, who wanted to ignite the fire of sensual urges in Shiva, is himself burnt to ashes. The narrativised message is: one should not fall prey to the extravagant sensual urges, as Kama is a “mischief-monger” and a “youth-deceiver”, and for the purpose, one should practice meditation, self-control, and yoga.

The atrocities of the demon ‘Tarak’ are presented in the same book, i.e. ‘Dawn’, and it reflects the contemporary society with its sprawling lawlessness. It is quite ironical that the demons worship for a time being in comparison to the rishis and saints, who are ever lost in their worship, and become more powerful than the rishis by being blessed with a boon. Thereafter, they start threatening the rishis and saints, who (ironically) find themselves helpless, and even challenge the authority of the gods:

The demon Tarak tortures all the gods
While every devil helps him, has his fill
Of joy and pelf and pow’r—ill-gotten all.
The sins are multiplying day by day.
The robbers loot the homes in broad daylight.
The girls are raped in presence of their sires.
The noble suffer, and the wicked flourish.
The learning’s chained by pelf and pow’r and pomp.
Imbedded in the laws, injustice rules.
In poor people’s name, the poor are crushed.
The men are no more men, but politic beasts.
The purity’s hue, the white, conceals misdeeds.
They say, the king should charge one-tenth as tithe
But taxes eat the most of income earned.
The grapes are cheaper far than cereals coarse
Whose prices soar beyond the poor man’s reach.
The men who follow one of sacred three—
Mahesh, Prajapati, Vishnu—fight as dogs
O’er size and shape of forehead’s sandal marks
Or o’er the knots in sacred threads they wear
Or o’er the sites of temples built by sects.

The saints and rishis approach Lord Mahesh for help as they find, quite ironically, Tarak torturing “all the gods.” They inform Shiva that “The times are hard” as: “The robbers”, who used to commit
robbery during night, now ironically, dare to “loot the homes in broad daylight”; “The girls”, who felt secure in the presence of their sires, now ironically, are “raped in presence of their sires.” In the present times, “The noble suffer, and the wicked flourish”; “Imbedded in the laws, injustice rules”, i.e. law breeds injustice; poor people are made to suffer more (become poorer) in the name of their welfare and development, as the policies implemented to eradicate poverty and help the poor are so designed that they benefit the rich and business class, thus, making them richer, and as a result, causing inflation; men have become “politic beasts”; on account of income tax, one’s whole income is gulped by the government / king; most ironically, the prices of comfort and luxurious goods are cheaper than the necessary (vital requirements) goods; and people design, or explore, illogical (base) petty issues to fight with each other, i.e. in the name of caste, creed, and colour, irrespective of knowing the fact that God created all humans alike.

Lord Shiva tries to convince Parvati to send their son Kartikey to end the “darkest night” 54 of “Illusion-breeding Tarak’s maya’s spell.” 55 Parvati, like any common mother, is not willing to expose her son to the dreadful onslaughts of the demon, and replies: “…Idealist fools / In struggles, battles die for noble causes / While victories gained by them prepare the ground / For politicians’ pow’r and ill got gains.” 56 Parvati argues why she should endanger the life of her son for a noble cause, which would later turn into a breeding ground of all ills of the politicians. She argues that idealists fight for a noble cause and gain victories to do good to the (common) people, but their victory “prepares the ground”, i.e. provides a suitable atmosphere, for the dirty tricks of the politicians and other bureaucrats; and thus, ironically, their struggles yield to further deterioration and degradation.

One comes across another remarkable instance of irony when Himraj, father of Parvati, offers dowry to the Lord of the lords, Mahesh, at the time of the marriage of his daughter:

Then rose the king, and said persuasively,
While offering dishes large of diamonds, pearls,
And blue sapphires, rubies, emeralds bright
And every precious stone in mountains found:
“Here are some presents, Shiv, to help you both
Through thick and thin of oft uncertain life.” 57
The quoted lines generate irony as Lord Shiv is believed to be the Lord of the entire universe, and He is offered some precious gems to add His wealth and help Himself during His bad times.

One comes across a magnificent display of verbal irony in Book-XII of the long narrative, where the narrator comments on the hunting expedition of Arjun and Kiraat:

The world is for the strongest, not the weak;  
For vocal human beings, not creatures dumb;  
For shouting mobs, not silent sincere men;  
For thundering clever leaders, not the led;  
For grabbers, robbers, poachers masked, unmasked
Upon His life as if that were their gift. 58

The tone of the quoted lines unveils the inherent irony in it, and presents a gloomy and sad picture of the contemporary world. As the lines depict, the narrator does not intend to communicate that the world is only meant and is suitable for vicious people. The inherent irony in the lines produces a satiric effect on such people who misuse their might to exploit the honest, sincere, weak, or poor people.

3.2.5.2. A Spiritual Warrior

In the similar vein, the fifteen books of A Spiritual Warrior, written in blank verse, unfold the inner struggle between Bhisma’s soul on the one hand, and the temptations of sex, power, pelf, and near and dear ones on the other. It narrates in a highly dramatic fashion; the succession of victories won by the legendary hero in his struggles to keep his vow of asceticism at all cost, and each victory won leaves a moral for the readers. Robert A Hall Jr. celebrates A Spiritual Warrior by saying: “This work should be a major aid in the cultural drive towards multicultural education and mutual understanding.” 59 D.P.S.Chauhan puts across his impressions in the following words: “He has rendered valuable service by poeticising these myths in English. The poems are characterised by universality and show the relevance of the ancient legends to the modern times and places … Here is great and enduring poetry, and poetry that at once exalts and exhilarates.” 60

The long narrative starts with the hunting expedition of Shantanu, the king of Hastinapur. Shantanu meets Ganga in the jungle and is infatuated towards her. His infatuation is so intense that he could not
resist the temptation of approaching her with a request of spending the whole night with her. Ganga, being a virtuous girl, declines his offer. Shantanu, passion-blinded, tries to convince her with the following words:

… There’s no sin in sin,
But in our being detected sinning, love.
The pow’rful men go Scot-free e’en with that
For laws can harm the poor, not the rich.  

Shantanu, himself being a king, is expected to maintain law and order, and exhibit high moral and ethical standards instead of such base thoughts. The lines also communicate ironically that the laws are violated by those who should preserve it, and powerful men are beyond the reach of judiciary. The second line communicates the degradation of moral values in the contemporary society.

Book IV, ‘An Interlude of Night’, describes another similar hunting expedition of King Shantanu, who is infatuated towards Satyavati, daughter of a fisherman (considered to be low by birth) living on the Yamuna’s bank. Ironically, Satyavati is not even half the age of the king, i.e. very young to him, but still he craves to have a physical union with her. Satyavati asks him to approach her father in order to get his consent, and only then, she would marry him. The fisherman does not readily agree to the king’s request as he wants to negotiate the best deal for his daughter. Satyavati’s father wants the king to assure that Bhisma would not inherit the throne, and instead the next king would be the offspring of Satyavati. The king is very depressed at this new development, and is caught in a conflict between his sexual yearnings and his mind.

When Bhisma, the great son of Shantanu, comes to know of his father’s dilemma, he approaches the fisherman with the following request: “… you can favour me with willingness / To give away your daughter to my father / In marriage. ’Tis my prayer most earnest.” The situation is ironical as it depicts a son, who is a mature young man, asking someone to give his daughter (of his own age) as a wife to his father. Generally, it is observed that a father looks for a suitable bride for his son, but here it is just the other way round.
In Book IX of the narrative, it is depicted that Bhism receives a message, “Come to Kurukshetra” 63, from his guru, the great Parshuram. Bhism is elated to hear from his guru and expects that he would have a very warm meeting with him, but future has something else in store for him:

As, buoyant with the hopes of welcome, Bhism
Arrived at Kurukshetra, he beheld
His teacher Parshuram aflame with wrath—
His face as red as a burning pan, his lips
Full quivering, body trembling, hair on end
And eyes aglow like bits of charcoal burning. 64

The reader is already aware of the reason behind Parshuram’s instruction to his pupil to see him at Kurukshetra, but Bhism is unaware of the same. Actually, it is Amba’s poignant tale of deep heart-rending woes that incites Parshuram to order Bhism to report to him immediately, as he thinks that it is the great Bhism responsible for her miseries. Later, Parshuram instructs him to marry Amba, although he is aware of Bhism’s pledge of celibacy: “O ! damn your fault. In distress is this girl, / And there’s no alternative, but that you / Must marry her to save her sacred honour.” 65 Such a command from Parshuram is another instance of dramatic irony as it is known to everyone that Bhism has pledged to remain a bachelor throughout his life, but the great Parshuram feigns ignorance in the matter: “But what prevents you marrying her, O fool ?” 66 Bhism humbly informs Parshuram of his pledge, and ironically, it infuriates Parshuram further: “To hell with pledges. Either wed this girl / Or fight and pay with life for such a sin.” 67 It is never expected that Parshuram would ask someone and that too, his pupil to forget his pledge. Thus, with the help of irony in the said context, the poet communicates the message that anger binds a person in such a way that one forgets one’s status, and gets devoid of one’s wisdom and intellect completely.

One comes across another remarkable instance of irony in Book XI, ‘A Lotus in Marshes’, where the two beautiful widows of Vichitravirya, named Ambika and Ambalika, are left with no other option than copulating with rishi Vedavyasa, who had a frightening appearance, to produce a heir to the kingdom of Hastinapur. It is a play of their fate that they could not offer a heir to Hastinapur in a period of eight years of their married life, and then, they were stormed by the death of their husband, and to add to the plight, they were instructed by their mother-in-law, Satyavati, to copulate with Vedavyasa to give birth
to a child through the process of *niyog*. The situation is further worsened when they confront Vedavyasa:

```
But lo! a Vyas, opposed as black to white
To fancies surging in her lustful mind,
Appeared before her eager, waiting eyes—
His body black as coal from tip to toe.
And naked stark above the corpulent waist;
His beard dark o’erflowing, pointed, long;
... 
His belly bulging like a football tight;
His loud belches emitted in succession. 68
```

As the quoted lines suggest, the appearance of Vedavyasa is horrendous, and therefore, none of the two widows, Ambika or Ambalika, is interested in the process of *niyog*. But in spite of their disinclination, they had to surrender to their fate:

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To wriggle out of this predicament
Was far beyond the wit of Ambiks.
With eyes closed, against her wish she bore
The ugly *muni’s* coital onslaughts wild. 69
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And again,

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No sooner Vedavyasa’s frightening form
Appeared, Ambalika turned, with freezing fear
As pale as a leaf in autumn or the moon
Towards the end of night or sky at sunset. 70
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The quoted lines depict the irony of fate of the two widows of Vichitravirya, Ambika and Ambalika.

In Book XII of *A Spiritual Warrior*, the great Bhisma is depicted musing over his circumstances and fate:

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Though elder than Dhratrastr, the Kauravs’ sire,
And maker of this family as it is,
And serving him as counsellor too, I am
His poor dependent subject. He’s the king.
If I exceed the limits I have reached,
He well may take the bread out of my mouth.
O! what a strange dilemma I am in;
My conscience and my stomach are at war!
```
Accursed be stomach, mothering all the sins,
Misleading all from virtue’s path, and yet
Demanding food on penalty of death.  

The thoughts expressed through the lines quoted above bring to surface the irony of circumstance/situation as Bhima is, undoubtedly, one of the greatest warriors of all times, and such thoughts on his part expressing hopelessness and helplessness induce irony into the narrative. Bhima is insecure and feels that he would be snatched away from his bread and livelihood, if he does anything against the wishes of the Kauravas. In actuality, it is known to the reader that Bhima himself is responsible for all the prevailing situations as he had taken the pledge to remain a bachelor, and faithful to the throne, i.e. the King of Hastinapur, as long as he lives. The said knowledge of the reader intensifies the effect of irony.

One comes across another magnificent example of situational cum dramatic irony in Book XIV, where the real sex of Shikhandi is discovered by his wife. Actually, Shikhandi is born as a girl and on the request of Drupad (Shikhandi’s father), who desired a male child, Mahesh (Lord Shiva) assures him that his daughter would become a man in years to come. Therefore, Shikhandi’s parents married her off to a girl, the daughter of King Hiranyaverma:

The girl dejected told her mother old
About Shikhandi’s female sex. The mother
Complained to king who, furious at the hoax,
Conveyed to Drupad, warning of attack.
The frightened monarch Drupad then approached
The Yaksha, Sthoonarkar, who straight exchanged
His manhood for Shikhandi’s womanhood.  

The ironical situation also arouses dramatic irony as the fact behind Shikhandi’s sex is known to the reader, but not to the daughter of king Hiranyaverma or her entire family. Again, the act of concealing the present sex of Shikhandi and getting her married to another girl by Drupad and his wife is quite ironical, and has an undercurrent of humour.

One finds similar issues discussed in the similar style in the third epic narrative The Flowering of a Lotus, which is composed in Spenserian stanzas, as well. Therefore, it may be claimed that Maha Nand
Sharma uses epic narratives as a medium to make men better and nobler, and it does so not through direct teaching, or by appealing to reason like science, but by appealing to the soul, and thus, to the whole of man.

3.2.6. Role of Irony in the Poetry of Maha Nand Sharma

Thus, one observes Maha Nand Sharma resorting to the technique of irony for the sake of driving home his viewpoints or observations in a subtle manner. By exposing the hidden designs of the fellow gods against each other; temperament and behaviour of the legendary characters, especially the kings and monarchs; social vices that have become archetypal in nature or pattern; harsh realities of life, etc. the poet exposes the society and its value system now. In his attempt to connect to the past and the dramatic changes that he narrativises in a context, the poet interprets in modern terms the malaise that haunt people everywhere. The poet’s ironic vision becomes his social and spiritual vision. Irony plays a vital role in his communication process as it bridges the gulf between the past and the present, and thus, contemporarizes the past and tries to historicise the present. The subtleness of the language along with the subtlety of thoughts, observations, and experiences glues the past with the present to form a unified whole, and this stands as a characteristic trait of the poetry of Maha Nand Sharma.

3.3. Irony in the Poetry of I.K. Sharma

I.K. Sharma is another contemporary Indian English Poet whose contexts and situations image his ironic vision, mode of communication, and suggestiveness. Distinct from most of his counterparts, he never forces irony as a foreign element into his poems; but it evolves out of the flux of the texture, tone, mood, rhyme and rhythm, stress pattern, and word-play of his poems. He is easily distinguishable for the blending of wit and irony, where each compliment the other, as it has the hidden potential of liberating boisterous laughter on the one hand, and pungent sarcasm on the other. Like a surgeon he sterilizes his hands and neatly prepares the area to be operated upon, with his verbal weapon. His words are not only poured out in the white heat of excitement, but these also reflect the major elements in contemporary consciousness. Irony oozes out not only with his play of words, but also by the juxtaposition of two opposing ideas/thoughts/situations in a particular context. He claims in an interview with B.K. Dubey that subtlety, sophistication, contrast, anti-thesis, paradox, pretence, and
surprise are the ingredients of the (his) ironic mode. He adds further that it is a curved statement, a *vakrokti*, where fair is foul and foul is fair. Often, it works in ‘reverse’ gear. To quote R.K. Singh and Mitali De Sarkar, “In his apparent simplicity there is a sophistication- both in tone and rhythm- just as he seems to be revolting against everything that may sound phoney or highbrow.” Rita Nath Keshari observes: “Sharma’s humility borders almost on self-effacement. This is best reflected in the way his use of irony- generally mild, sometimes incisive- exposes evil with the deftness of surgeon’s scalpel and never with butcher-like brutality.”

3.3.1. ‘Gangu Teli’

One of his most ambitious poems, ‘Gangu Teli’, is built around a common man, who lives on the hope that his fate would change one day. The character of Gangu Teli is epitomized as a representative of all people living below the so called ‘poverty line’. The narrator remains in the background and probes several aspects of the state of affairs in the democracy of India. He ironically finds Gangu Teli synonymous with the discovery of India.

GANGU TELI is not dead,
he is not alive either.
For ages he has pressed the seeds for oil
with a dream to oil his own wiry hair.
The pundit always consoled him :
‘Your fate line is devious,
Saturn looks crooked at you.
Wait a few years.’

The first two lines of the poem itself evoke irony as it shows a clash between two contrasting ideas, both equally correct. It communicates the deplorable and pathetic condition of millions like Gangu Teli. His desire “to oil his own wiry hair” has remained a dream for ages, although he deals in oil the whole day. The fact cannot be denied that the section of society from which Gangu Teli hails is very hard working, and ironically, in spite of putting in all their efforts day and night, they are hardly able to manage their sustenance. The use of the litotes “is not dead” suggests that the character continues to bear the pangs of sufferings; and “not alive either” suggests that the living conditions are so pathetic, pitiable, and harsh that the character is being smothered by them every day, bit by bit. The pundit tries
to console Gangu that his bad luck is only a matter of few more years, and ironically, ‘few’ seems to be an unending tale in his case. He had spent the whole of his life in utter poverty and challenging conditions, expecting it to end within “a few years.” The consolation of the pundit adds spice to his injury, or tests his tolerance further, instead of providing a relief, and his agony increases thinking that he will have to bear the same evil for a few more years. Saturn has looked crooked at him forever, as the lines on his palm or horoscope reveal.

The second stanza depicts signs of development in the state, but instead of being benefited by it, Gangu pays a heavy price for this urbanisation and development:

When Raja Bhoj had tryst with destiny
he dreamt of sunny days ahead.
A railway line soon crossed the countryside
and lapped up his hut with speed;
he only gathered embers for his breakfast
and his broken family, clouds of smoke. 76

The poet uses “railway line” as a symbol to suggest development and modernisation. Gangu even loses his small hut, because it comes in the way of the railway track as an obstruction. The use of the word “speed” at the end of the fourth line displays an acceleration in the rate of miseries that Gangu has been confronting, and this all happens, with the so called “sunny days” (good days) ahead. The last two lines communicate that instead of receiving any compensation for his loss, the reward that he receives is “embers for his breakfast” and “clouds of smoke.” The expression “clouds of smoke” intensifies the effect of irony as it suggests that the cloud is impotent and would never shower any rain, i.e. benefit, and thus, the reward that Gangu gets is ‘nothingness’. The stanza reveals Gangu to be a poor victim of treacherous fate. The use of the expressions such as “lapped up”, “broken family”, “gathered embers”, and “clouds of smoke” impregnates the poem with irony. The stanza, thus, communicates that it is always the impoverished Gangu Teli who is victimised. A railway line, which ironically stands for progress, “lapped up” Gangu Teli’s home. He is not at all benefitted by the country’s development; on the contrary, his family is transformed into “clouds of smoke” and he is obliged to gather “embers for breakfast”, i.e. end up in acute poverty.
It is expected that Gangu, being a poor common man, would lose his faith in the government and give up his hopes; but he defies his character and stature by remaining hopeful and optimistic. One is surprised to find that in spite of all the adversities, Gangu’s faith and hopes are still intact and does not waver at all:

His faith in socialism however did not wane.
The old hat tossed and tumbled in many ways
and newer and newer lines came to sight:
bearded, muscular, snow-capped, red-clawed,
bright-eyed and what not.
All abracadabra.
Without a pail of water Gangu broke his crown!

Yet he had faith in his local lord
who instead of a branch line of the Ganga
brought a full dam
(to stem the unseen tide ?)
that engulfed his only child
Others he had offered to the grim-faced god. 77

There are millions of Gangu Telis who are gullible. Politicians use them for garnering votes and staying in power with periodic promises that can keep a Gangu Teli in good humour. The irony is that in their simple trust and faith in the promises of development made by the politicians, the likes of Gangu Teli perpetually live in greater poverty and are unable to do anything to improve their lot. Year after year, they see the decline they suffer for believing in the empty promises politicians make to stay in power. The poem is a sad commentary on the politics of development and votes ever since the independence. The images of the railway line vis-a-way the fate line of Gangu Teli haunts. Gangu Teli, expecting better days ahead, loses his small piece of land and the little hut on it, yet his faith in socialism remains intact. The flow of the development has already broken his family and now, with the construction of a dam, he loses his only child, “Others he had offered to the grim-faced god.” The use of the expression “old hat” to connote to the form of government, and further, “bearded”, “muscular”, “snow-capped”, “red-clawed”, and “bright-eyed” to refer to the different heads (leaders) of the different political party’s governments adds to the ironical effect of the poem. The word “abracadabra” suggests a complete state of confusion and turmoil intensifies the irony as in a large country such as
India, where there are a number of political parties and huge number of politicians, none of the party has been able to form a government that could ease the prevailing turmoil, and hence, display ‘real’ progress and development. The poet makes the narrator echo the famous nursery rhyme, “... Jack fell down and broke his crown / and Jill came tumbling after”, and the discovery relates to: “Without a pail of water Gangu broke his crown !” Ironically, Gangu has faith in socialism and in politicians of all ilks just as he has faith in the farce of sadhus and spiritual messiahs who can promise golden dreams and sell newer superstitions. The poet uses the phrase “pail of water” as a metaphor for anything good, worthy, and useful. It is suggested that Gangu breaks his crown for nothing useful, and this exposes the harsh reality of his existence.

The very idea of building a dam at a place which hardly manages water for cultivation, as there is no river flowing through the place, is indeed surprising, and ironically, exposes the corrupt nature and attitude of the political leaders and bureaucrats. The politicians and bureaucrats get such projects approved that has nothing to do with the welfare of the general masses, but prove to be a waste of national resources. The construction of a “full dam” adds to the woes of Gangu on the one hand, as he loses his only child in the process of construction, whereas benefits the politicians and others involved in the process (as they make money out of the project). Thus, whatever be the circumstances or new developments, it is always Gangu Teli who is inflicted by them in some way or the other.

The crooked look of Saturn makes Gangu wait unendingly just as his “fate line” merges with, what a new concept of economic well-being is termed as “poverty line”:

Then the messiahs appeared on the scene.  
They filled his sooty basket with primrose promises.  
Poverty line surfaced  
and he thought : correct diagnosis is half cure.  
Only when a messiah died  
Gangu came to know  
his poverty line had risen much beyond his sight  
and his fate line sunk far below.  

The use of the word “messiahs” for the corrupt and hypocritical politicians is a magnificent example of verbal irony, as the word means a messenger of the Almighty, and is used for someone on a noble
mission. A *messiah* is someone who comes among the masses to show them the path of virtue and heal their injuries, but the *messiah* (political leader) in the poem is a pretender, who himself is corrupt, and has nothing more to offer than the unreliable “primrose promises.” The depicted scene yields to dramatic irony as the reader is quite aware of the futile result or the consequences that would follow the *messiah’s* visit, but Gangu is still hopeful and expects some good and fruitful result out of the visit. The last four lines communicate that Gangu Teli has further deteriorated in economic as well as social status, instead of being benefitted by the wave of development all around him. The deterioration in economic status of Gangu is suggested by the rising “poverty line”, whereas the deterioration in social status is suggested by the sinking “fate line.” The contrast in the nature of the two most vital lines, which conjoin to reflect the life line of Gangu, evokes irony.

The narrator adds to the pangs of Gangu Teli by saying that whatever promises his (Gangu’s) *messiah’s* made “…are fresh as ever / and they come and go, fitfully / like the Saraswati / at sangam in Prayag.”

The image is ironic in the sense that though the Saraswati river is said to merge with the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, it is never seen “at sangam in Prayag.” It is only a belief that the Saraswati existed. Like the river, the politicians’ promises to the *Harizans, Kisans*, and *Jawans* remain mere promises even now. Gangu Teli, still dead and alive, keeps falling prey to politicians who keep playing on his dreams and flourish: “His dream / like the interminable sari of Dropadi / goes on and on and on.”

The poem bears witness to I.K. Sharma’s socio-economic concerns, expressing his disappointment at the neglect of the millions of people living below the poverty line. The poem also criticises their exploitation in the name of development and politics of vote that renders them poorer with passage of time. The new historicist in him makes the discourse bitter. The image of Dropadi’s *cheerharan* in respect of the poor man’s dream as against the designs of the politicians is shocking. The political *messiahs* add insult to injury by repeating their promises. In fact, the narrator denudes the dreams of Gangu Teli like the “interminable sari of Dropadi.” The legendary character had five husbands and yet none could save her from her adversary, i.e. Druyodhan’s attempt to rip off her sari and dishonour her. It’s only Krishna who could help her keep her body wrapped in sari. Gangu Teli, synonymous with the poor man’s dream for the bare minimum in a democracy is neither dead nor alive because his dream still sells, and ironically, keeps the democracy going.

3.3.2. ‘Happy Home’

‘Happy Home’ makes fun of family planning slogans and measures promoted by the government and other social organisations. The celebrated “red triangle”\(^{81}\), symbolic of family planning, contraception, and the slogan “One or two / but never beyond three”\(^{82}\) makes little sense in the desert where life “...does not end with each half decade / as it does in the narrowing vision of expanding cities.”\(^{83}\) The “red triangle” is viewed by the desert-dwellers as “...the greatest dupe / scooped out of town.”\(^{84}\) This does not lead to happy home in the context of the desert “where water means / depth, distance, and dream / of generations, / where goats, camels, sheep, / sit down together with their tender / and muse over their collective fate”\(^{85}\). People “pooh-pooh” the family planning slogan because “life-long they believe in a free-spree / not without reason, not without a plan.”\(^{86}\) The narrator seems sympathetic to the people’s expectation because more number of children alone ensures more comfortable life in a desert:

A new mouth here is a paradise, not a parasite:
a little courier, a carrier of water,
a builder of little fires, a collector of scattered grains,
a caretaker of animals, a crutch of the age,
a sentry of cattle-yards,
and also a play-mate of the sun-tanned mother
who outside her sand-scoured hut
greets the day-worn man
not like an air-hostess
with a pre-fabricated smile. \(^{87}\)

The equational phrases not only provide the desired lyrical tone and brevity to the poem, but also help in countering the arguments of the supporters of family planning for a happy home. The irony lies in the inverted argument of the narrator vis-a-way the inverted red triangle.
3.3.3. ‘Seth Maganlal on the Train’

The poem ‘Seth Maganlal on the Train’ shows the poet’s keen eye and keen sense. He observes very minutely the Seth on the train and each stanza offers its moments of humour and irony. The choice of the name, “Seth Maganlal”, itself hints at the irony as it projects an image of a person lost in his own acts without bothering for the people around him or taking the surroundings into consideration. It also suggests the image of a person with heavy built-up and protruding belly, living in comfort. His body and behaviour, too, justifies his name. The speaker narrates that the Seth stretches himself on his berth immediately after having his dinner, and soon starts snoring. The snore is loud enough to disturb all the fellow-passengers including the speaker:

He begins by low breathing
and quickly builds rhythm with the speeding train.
His big arm falls out into the aisle,
his belly, brimful, begins to rise and sink
as if that has a spring-board beneath.

The use of the phrase “quickly builds rhythm” to refer to the act of snoring, and then, the comparison drawn between the Seth’s snoring, the speed of the train, and the “rise and sink” of the “belly” makes the character unique; and puts it in tune with the rhythm of the moving train. The “rise and sink” of the belly as if that has a “spring-board beneath” is not only humorous, but also suits the literal meaning and image of Maganlal.

The fourth stanza of the poem presents a more ironical scene with the projection of ‘Seth Maganlal’ as symbolic of eating, snoring, farting, and causing discomfort to everyone:

His mouth opens and shuts
as the wind blows in and out.
Sound chokes,
he coughs.
Then the mighty Great Wind trapped
and nursed allday long
finds its subterranean way out,
runs soon beyond its territory
and salutes us at our nose
irreverently,
‘Uneasy lies the belly that bears the wind’
I said to myself.
A passenger strikes a match
and springs out for the fan:
it does not revolve.
He risks even open the freezing window. 89

Maganlal after eating sumptuous meal, snores, coughs, and also farts. The noise and foul smell makes everyone uneasy, but ironically, he is unmindful of it and comfortably lodged on his berth. The verbal irony behind the use of the phrase “mighty Great Wind”, and then, the mention that it was “nursed allday long”, i.e. the foul smelling gases were well preserved by the Seth throughout the day, makes the entire description ironic. The expression “subterranean way out” to describe the release of these gases adds to the humorous impulse of the poem. The released gases make the most of their independence and spread all around evenly, and “salutes” the fellow-passengers at their nose “irreverently.” The use of the word “salutes” to refer to the act of causing uneasiness and suffocation displays verbal irony. The stanza, thus, communicates irony as it depicts an easy Seth with an uneasy belly, and the easy state of the Seth causing uneasiness to all the people around him. The uneasy state of the fellow passengers is well communicated through their attempts of getting rid of the foul smell by burning a match (probably to light a cigarette); switching on the fan, which “does not revolve”; and opening the “freezing window.” The fellow passengers suffer because of the uncivil and unmindful behaviour of the Seth, and no doubt, such behaviour is ironical. Thus, Seth Maganlal itself becomes a figure, or image, of irony.

Again, the use of the words and expressions such as: “celestial”, “lowers”, “world’s curiosity shop”, and “nothingness” in the fifth stanza of the poem exhibits verbal irony:

At dawn
the Seth changes his celestial pose,
lifts his right leg and lowers:
lo, the world’s curiosity shop
emerges and falls
into nothingness. 90
The expression “celestial pose” hyperbolically refers to the unconscious pose of the Seth while sleeping, and “world’s curiosity shop” hints at the most private parts of the Seth that gets exposed in public. The fellow passengers “do not probe” into the “curiosity shop” as it “emerges and falls / into nothingness.”

The last two stanzas of the poem adds a new impetus to the underlying irony and takes it to the peak, as the Seth, who had a very comfortable night, “coolly murmurs” at “bed-tea”: “Very poor sleep I had tonight.” In actuality, it was the Seth’s sound sleep that had caused no sleep at all, or utter discomfort and restlessness, to the fellow passengers. Ironically, the fellow passengers “readily agree” to the Seth’s statement: “Very poor sleep I had tonight.”

The poem adds strength to R.K. Singh’s observation: “Sharma recreates ordinary experiences and observations into poetry, sometimes with seriousness and sometimes with simplicity, but not without irony.” The irony in the poem ‘Seth Maganlal on the Train’ takes a humorous shade instead of being satiric or sarcastic, as it would been in the case of Maha Nand Sharma, and Kalpana Rajput is of a similar opinion: “Farcical a bit though the poem is, it hurt’s nobody’s feelings. Even the character of the Seth as drawn in the poem simply amuses us. There is no sting anywhere.” Dr. G.D. Barche finds: “The sight of this pot-bellied man, his way of sleeping, etc, fills the small girl with the mixed feelings of wonder, puzzle, fear, etc.” Another scholar cum critic, Ms. M. Prabha finds the poem to be “… a neat thumb-nail sketch of a member from the Marwari trading community. His lurching form on the lower berth of a railway compartment invites gentle ridicule.”

3.3.4. ‘My Holy Land’

The poem ‘My Holy Land’ presents the superstitious, religious, cultural, and traditional beliefs of Indians, which make everything ‘holy’ in nature, either it be a place, animal, or water body, as they have a strong mythical association with each and every thing around them. The irony evolves from the fact that in spite of displaying such high standards of religious, cultural, and traditional beliefs, one continues to commit ethical and moral misdoings and degenerate to what is ‘unholiness’: 
My land is holy
from north to south;
her people are holy
from scalp to sole;
her animals are holy
from ant to elephant;
her plants are holy
from banana to banyan;
her waters are holy
from lakes to seas.

In the holy hours of morning
I often see the holy cow
standing on a heap of garbage
in search of holy food
baptized by holy water
in corners of holy streets
hallowed by holy men.

The play on the word “holy” is ironic in that what is ‘unholy’ has become ‘holy’, or what used to be treated as ‘holy’ is no longer holy. The repetition of the word “holy” for eleven times (in a poem of seventeen lines) sets the tone of irony. The irony evolves as the speaker labels each and everything found in India to be “holy” in nature. It claims the entire land, all its people, animals, plants, and even all the sources of water to be holy as each one of them in some way, or the other, has a religious association.

The second stanza depicts the “holy cow”, as cow is considered to be a holy animal by Hindus, looking for “holy food”, ironically, on a “heap of garbage.” The terms “holy food”, “holy water”, “holy streets”, and “holy men” ironically refers to ‘dirt and filth’, ‘drain water’, ‘polluted and stinking places’, and ‘corrupt and uncivil people’ respectively.

3.3.5. ‘The Cats and the Priest’

The poem ‘The Cats and the Priest’ presents two cats undertaking a long journey to mark their attendance in the court of goddess Kali. The noteworthy feature is that ‘cats’ are always associated
with ‘cunningness’ and ‘deceptiveness’, but never with ‘devotion’ and ‘spirituality’. The journey of the two cats to a holy shrine marks their spiritual transformation, which seems to be very unlikely, doubtful, and ironical, especially in Indian cultural and traditional context. The depiction of such a journey finds its root, or an association, with an age old Indian proverb: *Sau Sau Chuhein kha kar, Billi Haj ko chali*, meaning that ‘after eating innumerable rats, the cat decides to go on a pilgrimage’. The repetition of the consonant sound ‘k’ in the very first line of the poem lends harshness to the tone and makes it ironical: “Two cats of Calicut repaired to Calcutta / to have a close-up view of goddess Kali. / The destination was far. The journey was smooth.” 99 The cats in the poem connotatively refer to all such people who have spent the whole of their life in a corrupt manner, i.e. doing evil deeds, and then at last, they feign spiritual transformation.

The irony also evolves from the fact that the cats select goddess Kali for their worship as she is associated with bloodshed, and therefore, they think that it would be easier for them to gain her blessings. They are not wise enough to understand that ‘Kali’ kills demons, and thus, sheds blood for a good cause, i.e. betterment of the human race; whereas they (cats) had their onslaughts on innocent creatures for their personal motifs. Ironically, the cats are not wise enough to realise this fact, although they have unparalleled mastery in cunning ways. The cats (corrupt people) strive for their sanctification and expect to shoot up immediately even in their spiritual attainment, as they had acquired immediate material prosperity by resorting to corrupt means: “They take their positions not far from the priest, / he was moved, cautiously, by their new-born bhakti./ Impatient, they prayed for inside view of the shrine.” 100 They are blinded by their material prosperity and position to such an extent that they are unable to judge their actual position, or status/place, in respect to the priest.

The cats lack perseverance and patience, or may be because they are just feigning spiritual transformation, their hearts soon fill with “divine disquiet.” 101 They “find each dawn to be a myth” 102 as they keep waiting at the same place, day after day, without even having a glimpse of the goddess. They resort to all their cunning ways in order to have a view of the goddess, but all in vain: “The animals in their fine coats, with firm legs / find each door of the Sanctum firmly closed. / They leap and leap only to see: vents tightly hold.” 103
The irony is that even if the cats had really undergone a spiritual transformation, although very unlikely, and have made the pilgrimage to purge themselves of all their sins, no one is ready to trust them, and especially the priest who “appeared Doom” to them. The irony is that when they were corrupt and evil in nature, they had an easy access to all their desires; but now reformed, they find their yearnings unattainable: “Their coats lost hair; their prayers not heard, / at last they uncoagulated their fear and mewed: / ‘Shall we wait here till the Deluge?’”

Although the cats try their best to convince the “ageing priest” that they have really mended their ways and now seek to purge themselves, the priest is not deceived by their hypocrisy as he is successful in looking through their disguise, and he ironically suggests: “Bhakti is not piracy, dear./ One stays long in Purgatory before getting in Paradise.” The irony also germinates from the fact that when the cats were corrupt, they could easily get whatever they desired for; but now, when they intend to reform their ways and possess good intentions, they suffer and endure pain.

3.3.6. ‘Just Like That’

The poem ‘Just Like That’, which is a short poem of only eight lines, is pregnant with multiple meanings, but each one of them leads to an ironic impulse/effect. The poem is another magnificent display of the use of metaphorical and connotative language. It depicts the approach/attitude of big giants, i.e. established and renowned personalities (celebrities), in their day to day affairs:

Two birds with mighty wings
fly high, swing,
alternating their rhythm,
swoop to catch a rat,
clash in mid-air,
lose one wing each
and cry.

The rat smiles.

108 The speaker uses “Two birds” as a metaphor to refer to two eminent and renowned personalities, and the phrases and words such as “mighty wings”, “fly high”, “swing”, and “rhythm” describes their
stature in the similar vein. The speaker implicitly mocks at the attitude of such people to engage themselves in dispute over trivial subjects or matters, which does not deserve their interest and attention, and are not worthy to match their grand stature. These people even have the tendency of creating unnecessary trouble or friction with their competitors/arch rivals over petty issues, and as a result, incur or suffer a huge loss. Ironically, most of the times, these unwanted clash or strife with their partners or competitors leads to their downfall. The word “swoop” indicates the downswing that they are to meet. The poem, thus, communicates in an ironic vein that the snobbish behaviour or temperament of the celebrated personalities leads to their ultimate downfall. The message is successfully communicated by the use of metaphorical language, which is quite evident from the use of the words and phrases such as: “Two birds” referring to the two celebrated personalities; “mighty wings” suggestive of their power and reach (contacts); “fly high” depicting their materialistic achievements; “swing” displaying the strategy, both business and personal; “alternating” indicating the time to time change or adjustments made; “rhythm” showing the continuous efforts; “swoop” hinting at the over-ambitious risky acts/moves; “rat” referring to the trivial subject or petty issue/concern; “clash” connoting conflict; “mid-air” suggesting the baseless reasons/grounds; “lose one wing” meaning terrible and irreparable loss; and again, “rat” symbolically representing all common people in the last line of the poem. Thus, one finds the poem standing as a perfect example to display the metaphorical use of the language to communicate ‘what is unsaid’ in the text of the poem, and the use of the language in such a mode constructs the discourse of irony.

3.3.7. ‘Theatre’

The poem ‘Theatre’ depicts the hypocrisy prevalent in the contemporary society. The poet uses “stage” as a metonymy for the entire world; the verb “play” to display the hypocritical behaviour or attitude of the people; and the term “greenroom activities” to refer to the real temperament, attitude, and personality of the contemporary people. The speaker is shocked to discover the disparity between the characters’ appearance on the stage, and the real life:

lovers on the stage
were hurling abuses at each other,
bosom friends were sworn enemies,
the most mighty man was a handsome eunuch.
The lines depict whatever the speaker witnesses in the greenroom of the theatre, and this surprises him, as it is a scene much unexpected, after he had seen the same actors perform entirely opposite to their real characters, and that too, with perfection. They even displayed good co-ordination and compatibility among themselves on stage. The speaker finds the couple that pretended to be very sincere to each other on the stage, ironically, hurling abuses at each other in real life situation; the people who enacted to be close friends on stage were sworn enemies in actuality; and the person who appeared to be the mightiest character is, ironically, a eunuch in reality. The irony also leads to an undercurrent of humour in the given context as the reader finds oneself at the place of the speaker and is surprised at the revelations made. Implicitly, the lines communicate the prevalent hypocrisy in the society, and mocks at the attitude of contemporary men and women who lead a dual life: one in front of the society, and the other in privacy.

The following stanza projects humans as animals on the basis of their behaviour:

As they smelt me  
they rushed towards me  
blood surging in their temples,  
and like a pack of hounds  
pounced on me in their exalted style

The speaker portrays humans as dogs, and that too, hunting dogs on the basis of their displayed behaviour and temperament. The poet uses hyperbole and simile to eliminate the distinction between humans and dogs, and such a projection is indeed ironical and satirical at the same time. The attribution of the extraordinary and sharp sense of smell, blood surging in temples instead of head, and the act of pouncing instead of leaping to qualify the human characters leads to a discourse of irony.

The final stanza of the poem intensifies the ironical effect as it describes “truth” in terms of “lies”:

Friends, I said,  
to see the truth without layers of lies  
without flamboyance  
I have come over to this place;  
there, a pitted face looks comely
here, a comely face, ugly.
Don’t compel me love the whore
my vessel lies on the other shore. 111

The second line of the quoted stanza raises a doubt over the purity of ‘truth’ itself in the contemporary age. Ironically, it suggests that even a few traces of lie are readily accepted in the constitution of truth in the present times. The fifth and the sixth line of the stanza suggests that the characters (contemporary people) are in utter contrast to what they appear on stage (publicly), and the analogy drawn between a pitted face, comely face, and an ugly face evokes humour as well. The characters on the stage also stand as a metaphor for all such celebrated and popular people who project themselves something else in public to gain their attention, but are great hypocrites in their real life. The poem, thus, communicates the social awareness of the poet.

3.3.8 ‘Conscription’

Irony stands out to be the vehement medium of communication, and the effect left over a reader, in yet another poem titled ‘Conscription’. In the poem, the speaker suggests a remedial measure, or method, which may be adopted by the society in order to avoid the bride from crying at the time of departing from her parent’s house. The suggested measure leads to an ironical effect as the speaker has no intention of seeing (in action) whatever he suggests. Here, the speaker protests, or ridicules, the institution of child-marriage. The poem begins on a tense note with the use of an interrogative statement:

Why should a bride weep at parting?
There are desert ways at hand
for a try. Give your daughter to a tadpole
before she loses her milkteeth
lining her head with gold, in veil,
in the presence of fire, grandsire,
on the day of teej. Womenfolk
will bless her with their hearts inside out:

May she bear him eight stalwart sons! 112
The speaker suggests to give in marriage one’s “daughter to a tadpole / before she loses her milkteeth”, i.e. get her married in her early childhood itself. At the marriage of the child-girl, “Womenfolk / will bless her with their hearts inside out”, and the blessing would be of bearing “eight stalwart sons!”

The speaker ascertains that “the wise act” of getting the daughters married at a very early age “will save her / from fainting.” She would hardly understand what is happening with her, and therefore, “No maiden will she need to console.” The speaker praises her parents, and ironically, even assures that “each tongue will discreetly say: / her parents have a farseeing soul.” The expressions such as “the wise act”, “discreetly say”, and “farseeing soul” construct the discourse of irony.

Again, the last stanza of the poem adds impetus to the discourse of irony as the speaker tries to justify “the wise act” by claiming that it would save the girl-child’s “highest treasure: / her wallet of tears?” The use of an interrogation mark to end the poem intensifies the prevalent irony. The two question marks: one at the end of the first line of the poem; and the other, at the end of the last line, reveals the ironic impulse and tense tone of the poem: “Thus logically she / saves her highest treasure: / her wallet of tears?”

3.3.9. ‘Good Morning, Sir’

I.K. Sharma communicates his concern for the Nature and environment in a number of his poems such as ‘On Revisiting Shimla’, ‘Dharamsala 1’, ‘Dharamsala 2’, ‘At Kanak Brindavan’, ‘The Pink City’, ‘The Saviour’, ‘Good Morning, Sir’, and others. In most of these poems, Sharma displays his ironic vision, i.e. treats the subject in an ironic vein. For example, in the poem ‘Good Morning, Sir’, the persona encounters a lot of difficulties, early morning, while reaching his office, because of the widespread air pollution and heavy traffic: “… come to a flyover / where trucks, trollies, tempos, / marutis, vikrams, autos, / and scooters press upon each other”. The poet catalogues the various types of vehicles, as if he were writing an epic rather than a short poem. This heavy traffic leaves behind “their common gift”, i.e. “smoke.” The speaker finds himself all surrounded by the smoke and is scared of the vehicular pollution that “rises continually in stature.” The smoke is personified as someone very big, significant, and powerful; the more the smoke, the bigger the stature. The irony is that instead of fighting the giant, the speaker takes recourse to prayer: “I approach it / with
prayer on my lips.” The speaker finds himself surrounded by the smoke as “the white-clad masters” (politicians) are surrounded by “scams.” While scams overwhelms the white-clad leaders, smoke overwhelms the ordinary (common) humans who have to negotiate vehicular pollution on roads and flyovers every day in order to earn their livelihood. The speaker prays: “make way for me, please.”; but the prayer goes in vain as the smoke “does not budge.” Ironically, even Lord Hanuman, “who lifted a mountain,” and rishi Agastya, “who swallowed the sea,” do not come to his rescue “against the Black Sea.” The use of the term “Black Sea” as a metaphor to refer to the dense smoke is, no doubt, an exaggeration and helps in building the discourse of irony. The speaker finds the smoke “untamable,” and as a result, he is forced to carry it:

At last I carry the untamable
on my shoulders,
in my pockets,
and through nose, eyes, and ears,
bury it in my breast.

The speaker suffers the allergens and it is all visible from his running nose, red and inflamed eyes, itching, and inability to hear, and possibly, he turns asthmatic too. After facing all the odds, by the time the speaker reaches the office gate, the black suit resting on his person appears to suggest that it is no more morning; and yet, he is greeted with “GOOD MORNING, SIR.” The irony lies in the fact that nothing has been good for the persona since morning, as he had a struggling time, but he is greeted with “GOOD MORNING, SIR.”

3.3.10. ‘The Saviour’

In another poem titled ‘The Saviour’, the speaker narrates the incident of an accident, which a baarat party met, with their hired jeep. The jeep “sings its own song” and “sweeps past those who had left before” on the highway. But soon a “new song rattles in its throat / when the road dips into the valley.” The jeep loses its control and “trips, nosedives, and / hits savagely against a tree.” It is the tree that saves their life by taking “all in its embrace” like a “big-bosomed granny.” It “keeps the fated jeep poised aloft.” The speaker and his companions try to release the jeep from the tight hold of the tree, “but the tree does not let it go.” Finally, they take the help of a woodcutter who:
… chops its widening arms,
levels its promising head,
finally, he settles in for the middle:
a few splinters and it is done in two. 142

Thus, the jeep is released from the “loving grip” of the tree, and as a consequence, “The tree dies.” 144 The irony evolves from the fact that the tree, which saved the lives of the passengers in the jeep, meets its death because of its good deed and service. The speaker, then, experiences:

Its death gives birth
to many a voice within.
Here is one for us to celebrate:
One who saves others soon meets the axe. 145

The last line of the stanza unveils the irony of the present world where one, who does good to others, suffers terribly, and that too, because of its good nature. The line is italicised to emphasize the irony.

3.3.11. ‘Bombay’

In yet another poem, titled ‘Bombay’, one finds irony oozing out of the discourse of the poem. The poem seems to be a brief lyric divided into three sections. In each of the three sections of the poem, a certain aspect of metro-life, especially Bombay, is reflected. It is a challenge to be acceptable in a city like Bombay. The city is so crowded with the followers of “Sai, Sachin, and Stocks” 146 that one is forced to live in “vertical cages” 147 with their “horizontal dreams” 148, as it is most of the people “fighting for space” 149, and not able to have enough room to lie down horizontally. The first section suggests the tragedy people suffer living in very small space in a sky-rise building and not being able to realise their simple dreams. The antithesis of the “vertical” and the “horizontal” is loaded with wit. It is also ironical that those who come to Bombay to fulfil their dreams, virtually end up selling “their sweat / for thirty years / in crowded trains.” 150 The city known for “Sai, Sachin, and Stocks” becomes a chimera, or the ‘unreal city’ of T.S. Eliot.

In the second part of the lyric, the city is viewed as remarkable for “Speed, smoke, and cinema” 151 which wittily points to speeding vehicles, constant movement, industrial and vehicular pollution, and ‘bollywood’ (hindi film industry) and entertainment. For the toiling masses and the dreaming middle
class, one week is not only history, but virtually barren. When Sunday comes, it brings some relief to the mind and senses. It is on a holiday like Sunday “when love is renewed / and father cherished at home / like a prize long overdue” 152 because children can “toddle out of the cage / for some forgotten god or café.” 153

But it is pathetic to find the city environmentally so degraded and polluted. The city is also synonymous with “paints, plastics, and parlours” 154 that are dominated by crows. As one moves out to spend some free time on a holiday, one regrets to view “trees in a cancer ward, / cows on the unholy job, / only crows guard the island.” 155 From Gateway of India to Ghatkopar, and from the Marine Lines to Mira Road, the dumps of plastics and paints are haunted by the crows. The dehumanization of the mega-city narrativises the decline in the men and mind it shelters.

3.3.12. Role of Irony in the Poetry of I.K. Sharma

On the basis of the study made, one finds that Sharma’s irony is both unified and rich with variety of form. A unifying thread of discovery and initiation winds through his poems and gives his ironic revelations the power and subtle ability to remove the reader from the world of the uninitiated and provide him with an awareness of the shocking inconsistencies and misfortunes of the human condition. At the same time, the wide variety of ironic types and rhetorical devices which he uses for ironic effect give his poems a varied texture. The use of certain rhetorical devices, selected words, tone of the poem, and a few other similar distinctive poetic aspects enriches his poetry and brings out the irony in an effective manner. It is with the subtle use of irony that I.K. Sharma creates a harmonious effect in his poems. The notable feature here is that the irony employed is successful in arousing the emotion of the reader, and as transfusion of emotion is the demand of true poetry, it establishes him as a true and successful poet. R.K. Singh rightly observes: “Between the shifting mode lie his forte—irony, which stimulates one to think.” 156

3.4. A Comparison of the Two Poets
The comparative study between the two poets on the basis of their use of irony suggests that both the poets lean heavily upon irony to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and experiences, especially social and political awareness. Their poetry is saturated with irony as if they consider it to be the supreme poetic faith. Both the poets display irony in operation at various levels in their poetry, and they also exhibit different types of irony at work in the same poem, and sometimes, even in the same phrase or expression simultaneously. They use irony neither as a fashion nor as a fad, but as a philosophy that depicts their approach to the cosmos. Irony finds a place as an integral ingredient in their poetry.

Although similar on a number of planes, the two poets may be easily differentiated on the style of the discourse of irony in the process of their poetic communication. I.K. Sharma never evokes irony to take a dig but to reveal the essential nature of human lot, and his discourse handles irony in a humorous light-hearted manner; whereas Maha Nand Sharma’s discourse handles irony in a serious manner as a mode of refinement of visions, and considers it to be a kind of truth one arrives at from perceptions made and experience shared in human predicament. Irony in Maha Nand Sharma owes its inception to an unprecedented collapse of ideals and values leading to an utter disillusionment. The sort of irony that one finds in Maha Nand Sharma may be called ‘active irony’ as it is capable of stirring people to indignation and to protest against exploitation at various levels. On the other hand, irony in I.K. Sharma merely projects or displays the incongruities of life, and depicts how a person manages one’s equilibrium on a stage which itself is in a state of turbulence. Maha Nand Sharma’s outlook is so intimately geared to his ironic vision that he perceives the essential nature of things in terms of paradoxes, antitheses, and oxymoron; whereas I.K. Sharma does not rely that heavily on the use of such rhetorical devices to construct the discourse of irony. Maha Nand Sharma’s choice of words, particularly in the long narratives, is conditioned by a search for words to control the tempo of the poetic line. The linguistic and poetic methods adopted by Maha Nand Sharma are basically the ways of dealing with and manipulating time, or creating a fusion between the past and the present, and this generates irony. Maha Nand Sharma’s persistent poetic attempts to integrate the “contrarieties” of a sincere and philosophical concern with mutability, a basic element of human suffering, and the essential elements of temporal human happiness infuses irony into his poems. On the other hand, I.K. Sharma derives irony with his employment of wit throughout, in unorthodox verbal usages and puns both in playful and more serious contexts, founded on the disparity between expectation and reality, or
the ideal and the real. I.K. Sharma steps into the role of a common observer while depicting the tragic realities and incongruities of life, sometimes in a humorous vein, and generates irony through the exploitation of the connotative potential of the lexical items, or verbal ambiguity. The most striking feature of I.K. Sharma’s discourse of irony is his unusual blending of irony with moral imagination making it more subtle. Unlike Maha Nand Sharma, his primary business as a poet is to create an aesthetic longingness into the heart of the readers rather than to teach or preach them. On the basis of the study made in the chapter, it may be concluded that Maha Nand Sharma’s irony is a bit rough, harsh or rugged in nature; whereas that of I.K. Sharma’s is genial, jovial, mild and pure.

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