CHAPTER VII

ASPECTS OF POETIC TECHNIQUE

In terms of technique Indian poetry in English marked a new beginning after the independence. Poems written before independence may be categorised under ‘Direct Poetry’ in which the meaning is explicitly stated and strictly followed the rules and regulations without deviating from the traditional verse pattern. The poets of the post-independent period, however, have generally preferred writing more freely. They do not stick to strict verse patterns and write what may be called ‘Oblique Poetry’ in which the poet makes use of more and more images and symbols and leaves the poem to the readers to draw the implicit meaning on their own. These new poets not only present new ideas but they present them in the manner which is different from that of their predecessors. The dawn of independence provided them much confidence. They brought about innovations in form, imagery, style, structures and used the idiom which was closer to colloquial language and rhythm.

Bhatnagar, however, does not favour an artificial technique. With the passage of time he has acquired a style of his own. He is completely against the imposition a particular technique while writing a poem. Expressing his views on technique he maintains in one of his interviews:

*I feel that the technique is implicit in the poem and
hence one need not cultivate a technique to be poetic.*

*Technique is natural; it cannot be deliberately cultivated.*
The ease with which you can contemplate makes for the technique. If you have the involvement, technique takes care of itself.¹

‘Style’, as defined by T. Vasudeva Reddy ‘is a way of communication’.² language plays a vital role in communicating the poet’s thoughts and feelings. A poem is a complex literary product. Realising this significance Bhatnagar writes in his article “Language as a Martyr”: “If dying is an art, Language is a technique of contending it in literature”.³ The poet’s experiences are first realised and then expressed in language. “The very act of expression”, according to Bhatnagar, “illumines, clarifies and crystallizes experience into a metaphor, inner imagery or form”.⁴

Bhatnagar does not approve of rhetoric or silence in his work. He blames the poet rather than his language for not rising to the occasion. Rhetoric and silence to him exemplify a “disuse and misuse of language” and reflect literary squeamishness”.⁵ Language has a quality to mould itself to any trying situation involving experience and expression in literature giving a proof of its most pliable and revealing nature. The selection of appropriate words by the poet would ensure his success. Highlighting the significance of words Bhatnagar in his interview to Atma Ram remarks:

Since words are man’s own creation he loves them like his family. The poet has a great affinity and intimacy with words and he mothers them with tenderness and gives him personality unique enough to be engaging. This tenderness is the strength of poetry. Whenever poetry fails it is due to ineffectual use of words. For me poetry is not vision but words with visionary values.⁶
Bhatnagar also does not approve of an excessive emphasis on form. To him, sensibility in poetry is more important than form. He prefers 'an open form' in poetry. He likens poetry to 'a framed sand dune' which one can make and remake until it is found and lost. The form of any poem is determined by the poet's response to his environment and his involvement. He says, "It is not metre or rhyme which provide forms but thought, emotions and vision that determine the form".7

Poetry, according to Bhatnagar, "is not magic, the manoeuvring of which acquired by small tricks. It has to be worked on and worked after for sweating makes poetry more organic and less abstract and obtuse".8 Poetry should be multilayered and multidimensional reflecting the sensitive understanding of life on the part of poet through intellectual reflection. It should deal with the issues pertaining to our times in a style nearer home, "which projects the writer in image or in selection or arrangement of words like adopting values of conduct".9 Style thus is not stagnant and keeps on changing from time to time. The best style, according to Bhatnagar, is one which comes naturally. Poetry makes a search for truth and truth can easily be told in a simple and natural style, for "All truths are plain. It is only lies that are complex complicated. Poetry which is complex or obscure or involved is proportionately far from the truth".10

Of various formal means of poetry irony is a dominant mode in Bhatnagar’s poetry. The term 'irony' has been variously defined. Robert Penn Warren defines irony as a "guarded understatement". It is to him, a positive state of mind, submitting one's vision "to the fire of irony - the drama of his structure - in the hope that fire will refine it".11 Ransom calls irony 'the rarest of the state of mind'.12 Irony often arises out of contradiction in life:

_Irony is based on the sense of some difference; things
are not as they seem; they do not turn out as they should,
or there is discrepancy between intention and effect._13
Irony serves an integral purpose in Bhatnagar's poetry. In his interview to G.P. Baghmar he says:

*Irony is my vision, not a stance,
a pose or a distant smile. It is
the attitude of my mind. I have
not adopted it, but it is the
result of contemplation at three
levels viz. personal, national
and universal.14*

He comes out to be sophisticated ironist presenting his vision of playful and ugly reality that is plaguing the contemporary world.

There are various reasons which led to Bhatnagar's taking up to irony in his poetry. First of all, irony frees an individual from sentimentality and helps the person project reality. Secondly, it deepens the insight and expands the dimension of reflection. While comparing irony with satire Bhatnagar views irony to be of a higher level:

*I do not regard satirical poetry as good poetry
because I do not look upon the poet's role as that
of Messiah. If my poetry has that weakness I am not
shy of accepting it. If poetry is just satire, it will not
be poetry; it will be a prose of poetry.15*

The fascination for Irony has been so strong that he told in one of his interview that "little ironies of life attract me most".16 Bhatnagar use of irony is different from that
of his contemporaries. He uses irony in a serious way, “different from the humorous light – heartedness in Indian poetry in English so far”. The use of irony arises out of the contraries dominating the Indian scene and the gap between expectations before independence and the pathetic situation that trailed afterwards. As Bhatnagar himself writes: “The tragedy is not that the ideals that once were of value have run to insignificance but the way they are being mocked at openly as incongruous and misplaced by the persons of dubious character”. An ironic approach to Indian situations is necessary because it alone can refine perception.

In his poem ‘Of Beauty and Truth’, for example, the poet’s sharp penetrating eyes do not fail to discover the skull beneath the skin. He observes the beauty of the Taj and sees not the ‘presumptuous’ ego of Shahjahan but the sweat of the common artisans carried in it.:

\begin{verbatim}
The beauty of the marbled sorrow
Was not all truth
Nor the truth of it all beauty
For the sculptors has defied both.
(Thought Poems, p.13)
\end{verbatim}

He further says:

\begin{verbatim}
What remains in the white flame
Of their sweat carved in marble
Not the entombed vanity
Of a royal romance.
(Thought Poems, p.13)
\end{verbatim}
Romance, to Bhatnagar, is momentary: it ‘keeps us afloat in dreams for a moment’, but soon disappears we get acquainted with hard realities of life. As R. Sundaresan aptly suggests, in this poem “The fine contrast between contentment and fulfillment has been created in the most artistic way by mingling pathos with irony in this poem”.

The impact of technological triumphs is depicted through subtle irony in the poem ‘Moon Olympics’. The common man glorified the conquest on space while Aldrin, who was always first in his life, turned atheist for not being the first person to land on the moon:

\[
\text{It took him the moon} \\
\text{To be second in life} \\
\text{And he turned an atheist} \\
\text{Like Callisto of the Jovian moons.} \\
(\text{Oneiric Vision, p.32})
\]

And then there was Collins, who, though was the part of the expedition, only circled the moon, developed a new faith:

\[
\text{Collins, who circled the moon} \\
\text{Like Ama I thea watching with pride} \\
\text{The achievement of science} \\
\text{Yet wondered at enchanting vastness} \\
\text{And the defeating grandeur of space} \\
\text{Quietly turned a theist} \\
\text{Walking round his soul.} \\
(\text{Oneiric Vision, p.32})
\]
We can observe here how many same incident leaves different impacts on different persons.

Irony in Bhatnagar’s poetry never aims at puzzling his readers. Rather it aims at clarifying perceptions related to social, moral and political issues prevalent in the contemporary society. For example, ‘Sex is not a baby food’, ironically presents a narrow view of sex:

\begin{quote}
That sex is not a baby food
To stick to only one brand
Lest it may cause indigestion
To one’s delicate system in growth.
\end{quote}

(Angles of Retreat, p.25)

P.D. Chaturvedi aptly comments, “This poem is not an apology of permissiveness or promiscuity in sex. It is criticism of conventional morality which Bhatnagar identifies with prudish “middle class” morality of the victorian era and with the insensitiveness to the vital hunger of man’s body and soul for the good and beautiful. The poem urges instead the free cultivation of the individual personality. It is an affirmation of Bhatnagar’s faith in moral values as that which is biologically and socially advantageous to the species”.

Bhatnagar makes an effective use of paradox for presenting the ironical human situation. In ‘Dying a Century’, the poet presents the paradox of life and
death. Irony in the poem reaches its culminating point with the pathetic proclamation of the suffering protagonist at the end of the poem:

"What use is dying a century
When I have not lived a day?"
(Feeling Fossils, p.8)

Further more, his short poems ‘Boundaries’ and ‘Courage of Being Free’ also presents the irony of human situation through paradoxical juxtaposition. In Boundaries the poet tell us:

When he was young
He sat up boundaries
To define what he possessed.

Now that he is old
With gout down his knees
He dream demolishes divisions
To walk through the fences
To share his miseries
With the neighbour
In his fields.
(Feeling Fossils, p.10)

Similarly, in ‘Courage of Being Free’ he advises us not to seek the security of bondage, but opt for the singularity of being free:

Bondage leases security
Free is being alone
We are friends of ourselves
Like pale ghosts
Shying away from homes.
(Feeling Fossils, p.11)

There are various instances where we notice that the irony is reinforced by a force of wit. An excellent example of this combination can be found in 'Who is Afraid of Fear'. The poet makes use of various historical and mythological figures to present the universal human situation:

We must have the guarding Argos
Or else our freedom will be a Dido:
Or do we need a Rama or a Buddha
For tasting philosophical confectionery
Or petrol - cool men ready to go a flame
At the slightest violation of their preserve
To wrench from the sun
The glory they rightly deserve?
(Oneiric Vision, p.21)

In another poem 'From Puri Temple' the poet employs irony to depict the loss of spiritual significance in the contemporary world. Greedy pandals have vitiated the real significance of holy places. Mocking ironically at the situation the poet says:

Man made temples
for gods
not for human beings
let stars tell the truth
If dark can be
Generated by light.
(Oneiric Vision, p.29)
The irony is further intensified when the poet proclaims:

"Holy vision do not make / all Shankaracharya".

*(Oneiric Vision, p.29)*

The hypocrisy of modern men is ironically depicted in his poem ‘Saint’. The person was respected by everyone in the society as a saint for “He preached abstinence / All his life / keeping woman away”, but to the surprise of the poet,

*When he died*

*More prostitutes came*

*To mourn the loss.*

*(Oneiric Vision, p.49)*

The inconsistencies of life and duplicities present in the contemporary world and loss of values are, according to Bhatnagar, the main cause of the deep – rooted melody. He employs pungent irony to reveal the scale of values:

*Put away in an isolation ward*

*Consuming himself ideal by ideal*

*Writing in helpless pity*

*His own epitaph.*

*(Thought Poem, p.18)*

The irony of situation is that even “the poet does know on which scale these two ends meet and how the disturbed balance be normalised”.

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Such inconsistencies of our value system are ironically presented in Bhatnagar another poem 'A Woe of Wonder'. He writes:

Ours is the multi-headed country
Looking in no particular direction
Trimurti is an all inclusive vision
From here to eternity risen
Telling the tale of our frivolity.
(Thought Poems, p.24)

'AC Trains' reveals the poet's anguish at the sight of an A.C. train that represents the life of luxury and 'show of affluence'. The irony got more intense as it is presented in contradiction with the fish floating in the glass aquarium:

I like fishes that float or swim
Behind cool green glass
Radiating  ironic iridescence
But AC trains make me angry
To see money – green bodies.
(Angles of Retreat, p.18)

As Narsingh Shrivastava remarks, "The irony, implicit in such word as 'many green bodies', glazed nabobs', 'conscious indifference' and 'Cathedral Cold' lend ample power and beauty to this silent lyric".

Thus we see that irony serves as an integral purpose in Bhatnagar's poetry. Irony is all pervasive in all the volumes of his poetry. He is a sophisticated ironist
who is aware of social ills "plaguing India in particular and the world at large caused by the perversion, corrosion, emasculation and erosion of the age – old ethical and emotional culture".\textsuperscript{24} In the poems discussed above we find that Bhatnagar use irony of various kinds. At some places it is direct while at other places it is implicit, intense and deep. We also note shades of wit and irony coming together at some points.

Apparantly, Bhatnagar does not seem to like the use of myth in the poetry. He says: "Myth are a nature of snakes that devour all that proves imaginatively diminutive".\textsuperscript{25} In one of his interviews, however he declares: "I am not against use of measured myths but profession. For myth by nature are inhibitive".\textsuperscript{26} He recommends therefore creation of new myths in Indian Poetry in English simply because "Our myths are mostly religious than secular". He further writes:

\begin{quote}
We have travelled so far that these myths have become inoperative and, thus, are not able to meet the new challenges.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Bhatnagar seriously examines myths and accepts only those that are relevant in the context of the contemporary world. Myths in general "are the heredity stories about supernatural heroes and they are only once believed to be true by a given particular cultural group".\textsuperscript{28} Bhatnagar, however, feels that, "when facts are dehumanised they become myths".\textsuperscript{29} Since old myths are inoperative and are unable to meet the new challenges, Bhatnagar would create out of the existing ones that could satisfactorily serve his purpose. Some of the principal myths employed by the poet are those of the Ulysses, Prometheus, Orpheus, Christ and also of Rama and Buddha.
Democratic progress, freedom, socialism, revolution and science have also been used as myths.

In ‘Don Quixote’ the poet refers to Sancho Panza and Don Quixote to highlight our way of looking at things. He identifies himself with the realist Sancho:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Man must act a Sancho Panza} \\
&\text{To his unending dreams} \\
&\text{Of visionary valour} \\
&\text{Fighting fluid bottles} \\
&\text{On cotton thick flakes} \\
&\text{We are indeed brave} \\
&\text{To seek reality.} \\
&(\text{Oneiric Vision, p.22})
\end{align*}
\]

As P.S. Kasture remarks, “This unequivocal acceptance of suffering coupled with the sense of life gives Bhatnagar his identity. This song of the reflective, sensitive conscious self captured through his creative symbols is the landmark of Bhatnagar’s poetic success”.\(^{30}\)

Realising the truth of life through the vision of Sancho Panza, the poet tries to accept the suffering around him but still he is not ready to give up completely and wants to end his life “laying skyways of new hopes”. He wishes to move like Ulysses:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Who took life to be a road} \\
&\text{Viewing right for future} \\
&\text{And for post on the left}
\end{align*}
\]

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He never looked back to see 
How much he had made 
But always ahead 
With the vision 
That he had so much more 
To make. 

(Oneiric Vision, p.11)

Pointing out the similarity between Bhatnagar and Ulysses, Suresh Nath writes: “Though he [Bhatnagar] is pre-eminently occupied with broken man with his values under fire, his alienation from society and from himself, his inner disorders, etc., yet the poet is there, like Ulysses, to explore, to brave and drink life to the last drop”. But Kasture feels that the poet cannot be completely identified with Ulysses. She considered his vision to be more balanced that represents the whole truth. She writes:

Bhatnagar’s quest cannot be totally identified with that of Ulysses. Homeric hero represent thoroughly optimistic and affirmative spirit, but Bhatnagar’s vision is neither positive nor negative, balance is the key of his view.32

In ‘Who is Afraid of Fear?’, the poet employs the myth of Caesar who refuses to give ear to his wife’s advice and moves towards the Capital, where he is assassinated by his own friend Brutus:

Though Caesar was warned of the ides of march 
He left Calpurnia fear her dreams
And himself rode to the Capital
On an ambitious career embark.

(Oneiric Vision, p.19)

We burn effigies in Dussehra to show the victory of good over evil but it is 'hollow victory' and as futile as the half - regained Eurydice of Orpheus. Though we have glorious past and proud moments in history like patriotic Porus braving and repulsing Alexander's invasion, we make a ridiculous imitation of it in the present day practice:

We all can cock -- crow our ideals
To mystify our failure and falls
Against the rainbows of trails.

(Oneiric Vision, p.19)

Our present is replete with anti -- national and anti -- social activities. We are "Dragging mock Trojan horses / Across the yet wet foundations / of our thin freedom walls". Such condition of our nation is aptly symbolised by the poet with Janus, the double-faced god. We bask in the glory of the past but have a repulsive present. Bhatnagar is disturbed to observe the development of a Shikhandi like attitude and presents it in ironic contrast with the courageous deeds of Porous, Palamedes, Abhimanyu and Prometheus. He expects his countrymen to develop valour like Abhimanyu keeping aside the attitude of compromise and silent suffering.
In the poem ‘To Wear Images’ the poet ridicules those persons who in a fit of idolatrous fervour wear images of great personalities, portraying themselves as solely responsible for eliminating all miseries from human life:

Who is in fashion?
Marx, Mao, Marcuse?
Harrism, Ho Chiminh
Or Rajnesh?
(Thought Poem, p.17)

In the poem ‘Like Phoenix Risen from the Ashes’ the poet describes his one-day visit to Korea. Highly impressed with the Korean people “he returns home with a beneficent vision of the urgent and effective values which have enabled Koreans to translate their ancestral dreams into a tangible reality”. Very aptly he makes use of the mythical bird Phoenix of which it is said that it burns itself and resurrects a new from the ashes:

Watching the sons of this ancient soil
In labour, courage and devotion rise
Like phoenix risen from the ashes.
(Oneiric Vision, p.19)

The poet urges our countrymen also to rise like phoenix from the ashes and regain their lost glory.
In "A Manchurian Candidate" Bhatnagar portrays himself as a fallen hero like Prometheus, the mythical hero who became martyr for the welfare of the mankind:

I gnaw at my entrails in miasmaic remorse
Ever to have created man
But since repentance too seems
Unsatisfactory in an inspiring way
I am easy willing to act
A Manchurian Candidate.
(Oneiric Vision, p.56)

Thus we see that Bhatnagar is an ironist who has come out with new myths that serve his purpose for an exposition of modern times.

Imagery is one of the most significant stylistic devices used in Bhatnagar’s poetry. It has been variously defined by the critics. To C. Day Lewis, “It is a picture made out of words”. To Fogle imagery is “the sensuous element in the poetry”. As far as Bhatnagar’s poetry is concerned imagery which means figurative illustration34, maintains its relationship with thought which very often enters into the images.35

Bhatnagar uses this device very successfully. Image making according to him, is an essential feature of poetic expression. It is directly related to the culture, tradition and traditional modes of conveying experiences. Bhatnagar does not prefer using alien images. He rejects art as imitations and prefers a new creation in which poetic image would reveal an entirely new world through poetic expression. Alien
images cannot be emotive in our context and would fail to evoke poetic responses relevant to our experience. Thus Bhatnagar advises us to bend towards Indian aesthetics and image making. Indian images are often being charged to be quaint. Answering the charge Bhatnagar says:

*Why should we bother so much about quaintness as about effect. All languages that come into close contact with other cultures go quaint. The only other alternative in the complete naturalisation of imagery and image making to Indian modes, patterns and traditions, which alone is going to make Indian poetry in English a viable force in Indian literature.*

But sometimes we may notice that knowingly or unknowingly Bhatnagar too makes use of unfamiliar images. He himself admits:

*I admit that some of my poems abound in what one may call unfamiliar images and the reason is not for to seek. My readings of English literature and the exposure which the travel provides are all responsible for it. To condemn them as alien is not fair. Why condemn them which the same situation prevails in India? There are many languages in India and the image of our language is quiet alien to the other language. When a group of people comes in contact with other group, this intermingling affects each group*
culturally. In the process language is also affected. However what you label as alien image comes naturally to me.  

Bhatnagar is of the view that “any deliberate search for images would ambiguously communicate and the image should be condemned if it is out of place in the poem and hampers poems enjoyment”. Commenting on Ezra Pound’s opinion that image presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time, Bhatnagar remarks:

I don’t agree that image presents an intellectual and emotional complex. To me it is a fusion of the intellectual and emotional content and it emerges only when there is a union of the intellect and the emotion. ‘Complex’ denote ‘confusion’ but to my mind image is a ‘fusion’ not ‘confusion’.  

Poetry to Bhatnagar is not different from life. “What people call pure poetry”, according to him, “is a misnomer sound in painting and colour in music. Poetry has to have human content, context and relevance. Poetry without these aspects is an embellishment of a wasteful kind, a lifeless curio in an antique shop”. Bhatnagar’s main concentration while composing a poem is therefore on theme. Thought is the basic content of his poetry and imager is a poetic device to express his thought. His imagery deserves appreciation for its thematic aspect.
Death looms large in Bhatnagar’s poetry. ‘Desire On Death’, the first poem by Bhatnagar is on theme of death. It is a lyrical poem which goes like this:

*Desire on death*

*Sit in quiet evening arrays*

*Like amused sparrows*

*On naked electric wires*

*Watching with muted wonder*

*The fading glory of the dying sun.*

*(Thought Poem, p.7)*

The semantic dimension of the poem is expanded by the poet by using two techniques:

1) The use of parallelistic patterns, and

2) The use of deviation.

The poet presents parallels and contrasts between ‘desires’ and ‘sparrows’ and ‘death’ and ‘electric wires’. ‘Desire’ are human abstract whereas ‘sparrows’ are non-human and concrete and again ‘death’ is abstract and unintelligible while ‘electric wires’ is concrete and intelligible. The use of word ‘like’ interfuses the two and enhances the meaning and beauty of the poem. ‘Sparrow’ being small in size are known for their lust for love – making. They are full of life, small, light – winged and chirping at their sweet will. The electric wires bear the electric current and can cause death at any time. The juxtaposition of ‘death’ and ‘electric wires’ provides a concrete form to the abstract idea of death. Thus the birds sitting on electric wires is
like sitting on death itself. The poet's impression of the desire of death is apparent as he "Sit in quiet evening arrays / like amused sparrows / on electric wires", "Watching with muted wonder" the glory of dying sun" (Thought Poems, p.7).

'Dying a Century’ also depicts Bhatnagar’s tragic awareness. The protagonist’s mother becomes widow at the prime of her age. Lack of awareness of this deep sorrow by the innocent children is suggested through the word ‘sunshine’ while the deep sorrow of the mother is conveyed in contrast, by ‘dark’. The mother’s being “wrapped in moss of time” signals her anguish and loneliness. The image of a ‘slow dying up of a pool’ suggests an approaching death not of an individual but of many lives. The tone of the poem changes from personal to universal and the suffering of the individual becomes the suffering of the humanity in general.

Bhatnagar gives a new treatment to death in a poem called ‘Of Death and Life’:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Death is not empty} \\
\text{It only empties itself} \\
\text{Out of life} \\
\text{Like a shadow} \\
\text{Thinning itself out} \\
\text{Of light} \\
\text{Without a mark.} \\
\text{(Oneiric Vision, p.8)}
\end{align*}
\]

With the help of a simile the poet conceives of life as ‘light’ and death as ‘shadow’. The comparison is quite appropriate in this context.
In ‘Death Must Belong’ the poet presents another beautiful image. He feels pity on death and treats it as an abandoned child liked by no one. He writes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Death adding unyears} \\
\text{May yet be treated} \\
\text{As an abandoned child} \\
\text{Conecting fancies of after joys.} \\
\text{In a run away dawn of a dark.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Thought Poems, p.14)

The poem ‘Death by law’ also uses appropriate simile to highlight the unattainable desire:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{But he was amused at this mocking ritual} \\
\text{And like moonlight dreaming of sunshine} \\
\text{He asked if it wouldn’t be easy done} \\
\text{By shooting him with gun?}
\end{align*}
\]

(Angles of Retreat, p.14)

‘Of Death and Suicide’ personifies suicide and compares death to a beautician, ‘Threading and manicuring the image / of the unfinished man’.(Oneiric Vision, p.36).

Bhatnagar uses metaphors and similes in his imagery. He does not consider them as separate entities. While similes involve explicit comparison, in metaphor
With the help of the simile the poet conveys the death of conscience and atrophy of emotions which make him chop off human bodies easily as tree trunks. The use of the word ‘butchered’ is very appropriate here.

Similarly, in ‘Indian widows’ the pathetic condition of Indian widows is conveyed through apt images:

Widows are windows: To shut the past
from the present.

Also:

They are like strangers
Not feeling at home
Forever peeping out of the window
In an indistinct anxiety to go
Their feelings grow like caterpillars.

The poet compares Indian widows to bats:

Or like bats hung upside down
To see the world in right perspective
Making endless flights in the room
In a confused hurry missing all windows.
(Thought Poems, p.16)

In their helplessness the widows are like the strangers who does not feel at home and always keeps on peeping out of window in ‘anxiety to go’. They are also not different from the bats who makes a number of flights in a darkroom and hung themselves upside down. Their feelings grow like caterpillars which are of no use.
Bhatnagar’s mastery in image – making can be best observed in his ‘A Poem for the Pantheists’, which depicts the devastation’s caused by the cyclones in Andhra Pradesh. The poet makes use of transferred epithet when he writes ‘just look around with liquid vision’. By using a series of similes the poet creates a pictorial effect:

Like rice spluttered by an angry infant
And coconut trees fallen like match sticks
And dwellings like houses of cards
Perishing some fifty thousand faith – struck
Like fishes drawn into a net
Thrown by a desperate fisherman
To lay his last lucky chance.

(Feeling Fossils, p25)

The floating dead bodies on water are like dead fishes caught in the net of fisherman. The poem stands out for the poet’s superb imagery.

Coming to Bhatnagar’s nature poems, we find that the poet is fond of autumn images. Out of all the seasons it seems, it is autumn that fascinates the poet most. His autumnal images are indicators of ‘self – abnegation, acclimatization, renunciation and endurance’.41

In ‘Trees in Autumn’ this self – denudation of leaves by the trees is thought of as Rajput maidens performing sati:

Like proud Rajput maidens
Plunging down the flames of fire
To escape an outrage on their modesty
Perform sati leaf by leaf.

(Angles of Retreat, p.22)
Then he likens the fall of the leaves from the trees to the fall of Napoleon in Autumn:

*Trees in Autumn go bereft of leaves
As if by a grand strategy of retreat
To defeat the Napoleonic design of snow
They lure the marauder away to jeering desolation.*

*(Angles of Retreat, p.22)*

And the last image is of a sanyasi who renounces the world by sudden enlightenment:

*Trees in autumn go bereft of leaves
Of a Sanyasi come to sparkling window
As if by a sudden awakening
Renounce all the snares elusive Maya weaves
To enter a trance of blissful Samadhi.*

*(Angles of Retreat, p.22)*

Autumn in ‘Kashmir Autumn Scene’ contrast the renunciation of trees with the lust of man for storage which blinds his vision and makes him an economic offender:

*Like
a
a tree
trek
ker
through
the
snows.*

*(Angles of Retreat, p.13)*
In ‘To Discover Truth’ the poet compares the human ambition of pursuing truth with the behaviour of fire flies which twinkle in the dark:

Like dying stars
Men pursue truth
Nagging life on earth—
Like fire flies lightning up
Only in the dark.
(Angles of Retreat, p.12)

Although Bhatnagar’s poems are strewn with similes, they are not long-trailed or Homeric in nature. He makes use of the similes for short comparisions. Through this device he presents his emotions such as anguish, protest, love, malice and so on to his readers. For example ‘The Territory and the Road’ deplores the lust of imperialists for territories with the help of similes:

Groaning like fired volcanoes
Colour rose in the eyes of the mulatto
And he lept like a panther
Clawing and mauling the tyrant
To a choke.
(Oneiric Vision, p.30)

The modern mania for wealth is suggested by the poet through various images in ‘Pyramids’:

Stoned in the lust for gold
We are all pyramids
Like unseemly boils risen
On the delicate flesh of stands.
(Angles of Retreat, p.16)

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A greedy person’s vision is blurred and they cannot see the daylight of common weal:

His yellow illusions
Formed like mirages
Must have blinded his vision
To see things visible
Like the owls unseeing eye
In the day light’s tangible.

(Angles of Retreat, p.16)

Commenting on Bhatnagar’s visual image B.P. Parashar writes:

The owl, being a nocturnal and ominous bird, represents both a blurred vision and death. The dazzle of the sun blinds the owl, so the glitter of gold benights the greedy man. As gold is deceptive, he fails to see clearly and neatly in the day and becomes an equivalent of owl who has eyes but cannot see, who has mind but cannot distinguish between good and bad.¹²

In ‘The Bonds of Country Care’ immigrants visit their country “to choose a bride like a prince / or buy of one’s country a jewel of land” (Thought Poems, p.25).

In the poem ‘Peacock’ the poet criticizes the men who were once known for their patriotism but have now sterilize this conscience with political exorcism:

The total is more than illusion
And rainbow feathers hide
The ugly peacock feet
He now arranges lobbies
Against labour strikes
In dubious discordant roles.
(Oneiric Vision, p.42)

The poet compares the politicians with a peacock and their degraded mind is indicated by the ugly feet of the peacock.

Thus we see that Bhatnagar’s imagery helps the poet convey his social vision and his personal experience. His imagery is neither exclusively emotional nor totally intellectual. It is the combination of the two. It is for fear this reason that his imagery cannot be studied in isolation from his themes. As S.N. Rath remarks, “One cannot understand the spirit of his poetry if his images are studied in isolation since they exist in one chain of thought and illustrate one whole picture of life”.

Bhatnagar has also considered in some detail the nature and relevance of symbols in poetry. In one of his interviews he tells us that “A meaningful symbol is the but medium to represent the complexity of human experience”. It may, however, be noted that he is not in favour of an excessive use of deliberately obscure symbols. He believes that developing of a deliberate aesthetic would be telling lies and misleading and writing only in symbols would mean evading issues of life and truth and isolating poetry from life. A poem, according to Bhatnagar, is a ‘symbol of symbol’, that is one whole experience or vision symbolised. He regards creating symbols more creative more creative than using symbols. But he is never attracted towards ready – made symbols. R.S. Pathak aptly remarks that if a poet fails to convey through his symbols his vision or experience faithfully its very purpose is defeated.
Bhatnagar’s poetry has meaningful symbols. For example, Indian women are a symbol of age – old suffering and subjugation. They only proclaims:

Flood of tears are enough
God need not threaten us with more.
(Feeling Fossils, p.15)

Temples and holy places become symbols of moral degeneration. Douts even the devine justice, the poet poses a question:

Is God a sufficient cause
To fight and die for?
(Oneiric Vision, p.39)

Beauty of nature is symbolized by the poet in Chinar:

For all beautiful things
In the world, Are Chinar.
(Angles of Retreat, p.11)

Bhatnagar is aware of the importance of love in human life, but he does not spiritualize it. Sensual love is symbolized by Adam who “Eved” and “brought forth a race of men / who frolicked with women / even in their dreams”. (Angles of Retreat, p.20)

Meaninglessness of death is symbolized by a widow. In ‘Dying a Century’, the protagonist’s mother becomes widow at the age of twenty – five, cancer takes away

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the life of her daughter, that makes her even more lonely. She finds a long span of her life meaningless. She asks:

"What use is dying a century
when I have not lived a day?"
(Feeling Fossils, p.8)

Thus we see that Bhatnagar’s poetry uses forceful symbols. To maintain the simplicity in style he avoided a recurrence of symbols.

Yet another important feature of Bhatnagar’s poetry is his repeated use of allusions to Greek and Roman mythology, philosophy and literature. This is rather unusual feature in Indian English poetical tradition and sometimes makes his poems obscure. In the very first volume we have a poem called ‘Of Copy and the Original’ which deliberately refers to Plato’s philosophy. The painter Gainsborough who sat for eleven days making the portrait of Miss Burr, prefers his copy to the original:

He thought of Plato’s idea
Of the original in heaven
Brought so within his reach
But as an artist
He chose to keep
The copy for himself.
(Thought Poems, p.20)

In many poems the poet alludes to the Greek hero Ulysses. ‘Ulysses’ is a very celebrated poem. As we have already seen references to Ulysses are also found
in ‘Like Phoenix Risen from the Ashes’. The reference to Ulysses enters at the point of the completion of poem:

As I left Chosun  
By an evening flight  
Feathering my wonder roam  
If this was the country from where  
The adventure Ulysses turned back home!  
(Oneiric Vision, p.45)

In his poem ‘Look Homeward Angel’ the poet criticizes the Indian settled abroad for being “lost in the island of Greece”. He writes:

Even Greece had its Ulysses  
Who brought his ship back home  
But our Heroes make no myths  
And our imagination no Homer.

But sometimes the use of allusions from Greco – Roman sources makes his poem obscure. They tend to confuse the reader rather than clarify the theme of the poem. For example, the poet makes use of a number of allusions in ‘Who is Afraid of Fear’? These allusions are unfamiliar to the common readers and would make a proper understanding of the poem difficult.
References:


4. Ibid., p.13.


9. Ibid., p.15.

10. Ibid.


12. Ibid.


16. Ibid., p.10.


19. Ibid., p.43.


21. Ibid., p.56.

22. Ibid., p.110.

23. Ibid., p.65.


25. *Perspective on Indian Poetry in English*, p.16.


27. Ibid., p.33.


29. Ibid., Vol.1, p.27.


31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., p.126.


36. *Perspective on Indian Poetry in English*, p.3.


42. Ibid., pp.75 – 76.

43. Ibid., Vol.2, p.56.

44. Ibid., Vol.1, p.27.

45. Perspective on Indian Poetry in English, p.16.

46. The Vision and the Voice, Vol.1, p.27.