

Arbind Kumar Choudhary - A Modern Indian English Poet *Par Excellence*

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Abstract: Arbind Kumar Choudhary is a multisided genius and his contribution to Indo-Anglican poetry is commendable and praiseworthy. His poetry has a great variety of themes like nature, love, death, sorrow etc. He is a master of irony, satire, humour and pathos. He is a superb artist and in his poems each word is used attentively and accurately. His poetry is the expression not only of the actual and the ideal but also of the real which blends and transcends them both.

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Arbind Kumar Choudhary occupies a prominent, distinctive and commanding place in the cosmos of Indo-English poetry and his contribution to poetry is significant, substantial, weighty and valuable. He has earned name and fame all over the world after the publication of three well known poetic works—'My Songs', 'Eternal Voices' and 'Universal Voices'. Choudhary justifiably a safe place along with other remarkable and towering personalities of Indo English literature like *Kamla Das, Keki Daruwala, Jayanta Mahapatra, Manohar Shetty, Aurobindo Ghose, Adil Jassawala, Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Bijay Kant Dubey, Nissim Ezekiel and R. Parthasarthy*. The themes of his poems are widely varied i.e. nature, love, birds, injustice, death, sorrow, society and life etc. and the most significant thing is that he has given a very realistic, graphic and crystal clear description of life in his poems. The poetry of Arbind Kumar Choudhary has the realism of Chaucer, the dulcet dreaminess of Spenser, the universality of Shakespeare, the sublimity of Milton, the energy of Dryden and the polish of Pope. He has the naturalism of Wordsworth, the romanticism of Coleridge, the force of Byron, the lyric loveliness and the ethereal imagination of Shelley, and the seriousness of Keats. He has the consummate art of Tennyson, the robust optimism of Browning, the Classic repose of Arnold and the mysticism of Francis Thompson.

Arbind Kumar Choudhary is a genius of extraordinary vitality, fecundity and versatility. His genius is not only lyrical but also dramatic and epical. He is not only a subjective idealist but an objective realist. He is not only a superb artist with unlimited poetical and technical art but also one of the most inspired poets. Choudhary is a master alike of irony and satire, of humour and pathos and horror of 'thrilling fears' and 'sympathetic tears'. He is in short, one of the most perfect men of letters the world has yet seen. Infact he is not only a man of letters but he is also a painter, a composer, a musician, and a histrionic artist of superb skill and exquisite

grace. He is a man of affairs too. Choudhary is a pragmatic genius of extraordinary talent who is also a great social reformer.

In the poetry of Arbind Kumar Choudhary, the most important qualities of poetic expression are imagery and harmony. It appeals to our eyes with its vivid and appropriate pictures. That is why Dr. Bijay Kant Dubey, a well known modern Indo-English poet has defined the poetry of Choudhary as "the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by means of colours." (Dubey, 21) Even when Choudhary deals with the most impalpable and abstract ideas, he gives them a concrete and sensuous expression. Moreover, his poetical expression is musical and it delights the ears with its melody. For this reason, Choudhary's poetry is often spoken of as "music in words" and music as "poetry in sound". Coleridge says that the man that hath not music in his soul can never be a genuine poet. But music which is merely confined to the soul will not suffice. Almost all of us have plenty of music in our souls, but we are not poets, all of us.

"We too make music but our tones/ Scape not the barrier of our bones."

The poet is the man who is able to express the music in his soul through the medium of words. Another indispensable quality of Arbind Kumar Choudhary's poetic expression is that it is vital and not mechanical. It is an overflow of the poet's abounding creative energy. His poetic expression is no mere super-addition or super-imposition. It is not something imposed from without but something which is essentially evolved from within. It is not something external which, like a garment, the poet can put on and off at will. It is not the dress but the vital skin of Choudhary's poetic thought. It grows from within the poet's soul and is the inevitable incarnation of his innermost personality. His poetic thought engenders poetic his poetic expression as the tortoise or the oyster engenders the materials of its shell. Moreover, his poetic expression is not merely good or sufficient for its limited immediate purpose. It is supreme, incapable of change, modification, or improvement, incapable of translation not only into a foreign language but also into words of the same language. It is final and flawless, so lively that it has become in itself an object of aesthetic contemplation.

Arbind Kumar Choudhary's poetry is an expression of the poet's mind not an ordinary mind which is endowed with uncommon powers of observation, sensibility, reflection, fancy and imagination, invention and judgement, all working at their highest and in harmony, under the control of Intuition or Divine Reason. His poetic mind is exceptionally rich and opulent, original and independent, powerful and penetrative, organic and dynamic. Here it is important to bear in mind that the poetry of Choudhary is the expression of such a mind, not in isolation but in active commerce with its environment, physical, vital, and social, in commerce with its own self, conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious; and above all, in commerce with that Divine Intelligence or Cosmic Reality which lies in and behind both matter and mind. His poetry is thus, the offspring of the marriage of mind and matter, of the union of the temporal and the eternal, of the fusion of the subjective and the objective,

a fusion which is brought about by the poet's emotional fire and imaginative energy working under the control of Divine Reason, so that emotion and imagination are the two most important attributes of Choudhary's poetry. Undoubtedly, it is the form of the expression that gives a work of art a concrete shape. Alexander Pope, a distinguished critic remarks, "True wit is nature to advantage dressed what oft was thought but never so well expressed." (Pope, 65) Moreover the purpose of a poet is "To give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." (Chandra, 28)

Thus the poetic process involves the use of different elements so that the common tends to be uncommon and the prosaic poetic. The verbal devices that the poet uses become more effective in their ability to relate to the language community that the poet addresses. His job is then to explore the startling potential of words to generate responses in the members of the community who share a common language and culture. In the words of M. Sivaramakrishna, "To be true to itself, the poem has to be the community's sharing of the startling potential of words to explode into triggers of consciousness." (Sivaramakrishna, 24)

The use of images related to nature in Choudhary's poems forms one of the major poetic devices. The cluster of images that one finds in these poems tend to make his poetry thinking in images. Their recurrence and the ease with which they appear in his poems mark a constant flow of thought. Choudhary's poetry is so image oriented that some of his poems form sequences of images and their interaction that form a particular structural pattern of his poems. In spite of their micro level significances that tend to make them independent units these images serve to create a particular context. For example, in his poem 'Nature' there are different images that have been used to give an indication of the spectrum of nature:

The glen of the peahen / sunkens the den
of the hymen / in the seventh heaven.

.....

The cerulean Aegean / fires the tatsan
of the good Samaritan / to make Rabelaisian.

These images turn out to be the signposts that present decontextualized nature of the reality. This feature of Choudhary's poetry informs the difference between 'scientific' and 'emotive use of language. Commenting on the different use of languages in poetry, I.A. Richards remarks, "A statement may be used for the sake of references, true or false, which it causes. This is the scientific use of language. But it may also be used for the same kind of effect in emotion and attitude ... This is the emotive use of language." (Richards, 60) Choudhary's poetry is the conscience of mankind as he is a reliable custodian of social morality and happiness. In one of his poems, Alexander Pope has rightly said about the poet that:

He from the taste obscene reclaims our youth,

And sets the passions on the side of Truth;
 Forms the soft bosom with the gentle start,
 And pours each human virtue in the heart."

Arbind Kumar Choudhary's poetry is not something static, unalterably fixed in nature, but a process which undergoes incessant change. It is profoundly influenced by the kind of culture in which it is produced, so that every civilization has its own peculiar poetry. His poetry is at once a faithful reflection, a critical interpretation, and a creative revelation in regard to the civilization which produces it. In its representative character, it crystallizes the characteristic beauty, the inmost spirit, and the top-most excellence which civilization may have achieved at any particular stage of its career. In its critical character, it indicates explicitly or by implication the peculiar limitations of that civilization. And in its creative capacity, it reveals the ideal and eternal beauty. Choudhary's poetry is an expression, a communication, a representation, an interpretation, and a revelation, but never a mere imitation. His poetry is an expression not only of the poet's meaning but also of his whole personality in active commerce with the multifarious phenomena of life and life's processes and with what is both immanent and transcendent in regard to those phenomena and processes, objective and subjective alike. His poetry is the expression not only of the actual and the ideal but also of the real which blends and transcends them both.

In the poems of Arbind Kumar Choudhary, different forms are organized in such a way that they form an inherent feature of his poetry instead of serving some ornamental purpose. The different images used by Choudhary form objective correlatives for different states of mind. These images tend to become the 'objects of thought' for the expression of different feelings, ideas and emotions. This aspect of the poetic process that marks the nature of Choudhary's poetic use of images can be explained in these words: "There is no emotion as such in the poem itself, but the reader, in apprehending the concrete images in the poem, will feel with full force of the identical emotion originally felt by the poet. The poem then is to be objective bridge between the similar emotions, of the poet and his audience." (Brooks, 96) Thus the metaphoric quality of the images used in Choudhary's poetry tends to make the utterances highly poetic. An important aspect of Choudhary's poetic art is its proximity to different art forms used to convey multiple meanings in a quick succession of images and sounds. In his poetry, message is flashed through a series of images, narratives, anecdotes, literary and mythological allusions and symbols. The reflections of this thought we find in the following lines of his admirable poem 'Love':

Love-conscience/ Is at variance/ With the misalliance/ For dalliance.
 and.. O Cupid!/ Embrace the flaccid/ Is a saving grace/ Of the fiancé.

Arbind Kumar Choudhary also writes about Death and calls it "a true communist" as it is equal to all. Here we are reminded of Alexander Pope's poem 'From Essay on Man' where he calls Death as a great teacher. Choudhary's profound knowledge about the philosophical subject 'death' reminds us of Emily Dickinson who has written numberless poems on the theme and subject of death. In his

praiseworthy poem 'The Rich', the poet depicts love and friendship but he also opines very convincingly that love and friendship are useless in this worldly world because everyone is selfish and disloyal, again reminds the readers Goldsmith's poem 'Edwin and Angelina.' Thus Arbind Kumar Choudhary can be rightly and justifiably compared with the distinguished and eminent poets of English Literature like *Dickinson, Donne, Marvel, Pope, Eliot, Tennyson, Burns, Emerson and Swinburne*.

The poetry of Arbind Kumar Choudhary is an emotional discipline as it cures us of barren levity and the plague of apathy. It refines our feelings and purifies our passions and volitions. His poetry is a moral discipline because it makes us better, nobler and wiser. Consider for a moment the profound effect which the perusal of a book like *the Ramayana* or *the Paradise Lost*, for instance, is bound to produce on human character. Edger Allen Poe says, "Poetry aims at spiritual elevation." This is quite true as far as the poetry of Arbind Choudhary is concerned as his poetry is an imaginative discipline; it emancipates, invigorates, and uplifts the imaginative faculty of the mind. It widens our sympathy and fills the soul with noble aspirations. His poetry appeals, in short, to the whole of our personality, to the senses, to the intellect, to the feelings, to the imagination, to our moral and spiritual being. His poetry is original and independent. The poetry of Choudhary is also very sensuous as it delights the ears with music. It pleased the eyes with a throng of delightful images drawn with the ready simplicity and skill of consummate art. It is very important to bear in mind that his poetry is from egotism, vanity, bigotry, showiness and gaudiness. His poetry is the rhythmic creation of beauty because it communicates an emotional and imaginative mood. It appeals to the whole of our personality and it presents meaning in music and ideas in imagery. It purifies the emotions, exalts the imagination, enlightens the understanding and illumines the soul. It reflects a touch of humanity, Indian ethos and pertinence of life.

The themes of Choudhary's poems are inevitably influenced by the circumstances he faces. His poetry in the process becomes the arena where the need for relating oneself to history through tradition confronts the reality and immediacy of the contemporary milieu. The face-to-face encounter often results in a combination of the sensibility peculiar to the Indian spirit and the sharply ironic and skeptical perception of the harsh realities of life. There is no doubt that Arbind Kumar Choudhary has a mastery of words and in his poems each word is used adroitly, attentively, accurately and economically. He seems to be very fond of dialectical words or of words which look like dialect. He is also an optimist and his optimism is not the outcome of any lack of experience. He has known the seamy side of life and above all his optimism is born of his ardent faith in God and God's never-failing love of humanity. Choudhary has effectively demonstrated to his contemporaries the supreme significance of having roots and has also shown glimpses of the vitality the work of a poet acquires when he succeeds even partly in his attempt. Choudhary's technical accomplishment is incontestable and his thematic strategy is precisely the right one for a poet in his position. He has completely and

accurately exploited the opportunities his material offers him. As a sensitive poet, Choudhary responds to the social problems and issues and his poetry reflects his social concern. A touch of humanity is the hallmark of his poetry. Listening to the “still, sad music of humanity,” he chimes his poems to echo the social problems of modern era. That is why he has always been known as a poet who has kept his eyes open to see what goes around him. At the thematic level his poetry certainly shares modern Indian poets' concern for existential and contemporary issues expressing a heightened sense of angst at the fall out of the ideals earlier cherished by the founding fathers of our nation. Moreover, he is one of the very few poets who have made a great mark in the academic field as well.

Now I arrive at the conclusion that Arbind Kumar Choudhary has established his position as a unique poet in the annals of contemporary Indian poetry in English. He has earned unequivocal recognition from fellow poets and literary critics. Dr. Bijay Kant Dubey, a celebrated modern Indo-English poet opines very convincingly that Choudhary has enriched the Indo-Anglican tradition of poetry and he occupies a prominent and foremost place by virtue of his intellectual stamina, his ability to depict the inner struggle, and his gift of ineluctable linguistic excellence. Unquestionably, as a poet, Arbind Kumar Choudhary showers a dynamic and sophisticated ultra-modern sensibility in his poetic art. He intertwines and relates each experience into a formation of cohesive whole. Choudhary's poems are known for their unforgettable images, innovations on language, familial relations, ironic descriptions, Hindu themes, Indianness, death, fear and anxiety, love, life and a host of other things. His craftsmanship of language and imagery will never be unnoticed. The images are particularly unique in the sense that they carry within themselves the exact figures with a vivid sense of their distinctive quality. His poetry and polyglottic genius cannot be tethered down to any age or any flux of time, but in him Indian sensibility gets its most genuine and potent expression. He observes the inalienable link between life and art and tries to touch the life into art. Indeed, Arbind Kumar Choudhary is a versatile genius, erudite scholar, renowned literary figure and an illustrious star in the firmament of Indo-English poetry who is ascending the steps of glory incessantly.

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