

eggshell. At the end of the twentieth century, political, economic and cultural elites behave as if the gravity of the situation eluded them. [...] Those who profess to be progressive clearly no longer know what a culture is; they no longer even realize that a society can continue to function more or less normally even as it has lost its soul. [...] In their eyes, a society is dead only when it is physically destroyed; they do not realize that the decay of a civilization is inner before anything else. (15–16)

On his return from his first journey to the West, Swami Vivekananda observed in one of his lectures:

Europe is restless, does not know where to turn. The material tyranny is tremendous. The wealth and power of a country are in the hands of a few men who do not work but manipulate the work of millions of human beings... The Western world is governed by a handful of Shylocks. All those things that you hear about-constitutional government, freedom, liberty, and parliaments - are but jokes. [...] The West is groaning under the tyranny of the Shylocks [...], The whole of Western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation. (*Complete Works* 3:158–59)

Here is Rabindranath Tagore on his own disillusionment with the West:

The spirit of violence which perhaps lay dormant in the psychology of the West has at last roused itself and desecrates the Spirit of Man... I had at one time believed that the springs of civilization would issue out of the heart of Europe. But today when I am about to quit the world that faith has gone bankrupt altogether... (*Crisis in Civilization* 22–23)

But all these sensible warnings have fallen on deaf ears because of the crude spirit of Indians adoring and accepting everything about the West and the much cruder spirit of condemning and rejecting everything about India and its past, which speak volumes for the colonial stranglehold on their very psyche. It is only due to this emasculating force that the rulers and policy makers of India did not even feel the need to formulate and implement a truly Indian education even after independence. They were so thoughtlessly and shamelessly content with Macaulay's brainchild devised by the British for their political convenience – to run their administration smoothly, keeping the Indians forever in subordination and making them subservient to their own interests. A system of education, which has nothing Indian about it, is embraced as the panacea of all social evils in India and pursued with so much of madness! What could be more tragic than this? May be, an Indian being an Indian is itself a very big social evil, and so every Indian necessarily needs to have this panacea – this *Sarvaroga Nivarani*. Just as Arnold called the British Constitution a colossal machine for the manufacture of philistines, one could call the modern Indian education a colossal industry which churns out large numbers of de-Indianised and westernized money making machines and soulless creatures in human form. The result of all this fashionable madness is that Indians have deprived themselves of the greatest achievements of their past, which

alone would help them live a fuller and richer life. It means that they are totally cut off from their deeper roots. Nothing of their past is taught to their children – not even the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It is certainly a tragedy, but what is still more tragic is that it does not even strike anyone of them as a tragedy. The colonial stranglehold is at work here also, preventing them from reflecting on their past classics with a feeling for them. Do they ever bother about the values of life that could only be realized by living in a vital contact with the achievements of their own past? If confronted with such a question, 'the educated Indian' would pompously say: "What a nonsensical question! Why waste time on such useless things? You see, I am an ultra-modern man – your past or ancient culture cannot be of any use to me." But Danino, the Frenchman feels indignant about their insensibility and indifference to their own past and says:

That the greatest epics of mankind should be thrown away on the absurd and erroneous pretext that they are "religious" is beyond the comprehension of an impartial observer. A German or French or English child will be taught something of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, because they are regarded as the root of European culture, and somehow present in the European consciousness. He will not be asked to worship Zeus or Athena, but will be shown how the ancients saw and experienced the world and the human being. But Indian epics, a hundred times richer and vaster in human experience, a thousand times more present in the Indian consciousness, will not be taught to an Indian child. Not to speak of other important texts such as the beautiful Tamil epics, *Shilappadikaram* and *Manimekhalai*. (*Sri Aurobindo and Indian Civilization* 28)

Sri Aurobindo commented most intelligently on this fatal process of de-Indianisation as early as the beginning of the 20th century itself:

But our educated class has become so unfamiliar with the deeper knowledge of their forefathers that it has to be translated into modern European terms before they can understand it. For it is the European ideas alone that are real to them and the great truths of Indian thought seem to them mere metaphors, allegories and mystic parables. So well has British education done its fatal denationalizing work in India. (*Karmayogin* 12)

All these arguments inevitably lead to the question: Are Indians really independent? Of course, yes, politically. They have attained political independence by which they elect their own government. Time and again, they pride themselves on their country being the greatest democracy in the world. But what have they achieved? Have they achieved independence in the field of thought? Have they liberated themselves from the colonial stranglehold? Do they ever feel the need for it? Do they or can they think for themselves? Aren't they still under the hypnotic spell cast on them by the West? How long ago and how often Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo gave them a call to de-hypnotise themselves! With all their admiration for these great men, have they ever paid heed to their words? Have they at least tried? The answer for all these questions is a big 'NO'. The reason is that the Western impact has

proved too much for them— the attraction of its 'fair front' was so very irresistible that they willingly succumbed to it without even a show of resistance. Dominance always meets with resistance, leading to opposition. Wherever dominance has been, there has always been resistance to it in some form or other. This is the natural law of things. Innumerable instances are there in history to prove it - Hitler's Nazism proves it, Fascism which does not allow opposition also proves it by creating opposition (its very oppressions and suppressions create opposition), Marx's class-struggle, Freud's psycho-analytical theory, physical science – everything proves it unquestionably. Isn't this what Newton meant when he said, "Each and every action has an equal and opposite reaction"? But Indians are unique in that they have, as if in defiance of all these scientific theories and natural law of things, prostrated themselves at their colonial masters' habits of feeling and thinking and their ways of living. Of course, they did oppose their rule, but without opposing their ideology. Imperialism always finds justifications for whatever it does, for whatever atrocities it indulges in – justifications which are unquestioningly accepted also by others, and its modern jargon for its too subtle dominance and the shameless prostration of others before it is globalization, in the name of which it is converting again countries like India into its colonies, but without occupying them physically, and thereby allowing them to feel that they are free and independent. There has thus hardly been any resistance in the independent India to the western dominance and its stranglehold on their psyche. This is a very serious tragedy, but in the face of hostile forces and in the absence of the will to resist and fight them, one can only laugh it away by reminding oneself of Oscar Wilde's humorous saying: "The best way to resist temptation is to yield to it", which is what Indians have precisely done.

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PCK Prem's *Enigmas of Identity*: Poems of Beauty and Hope

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Abstract: PCK Prem has emerged as a major poet writing in the contemporary world of Indian English poetry. It is needless to say that he has secured his place not only as a contemporary poet but also as a contemporary critic. His book, *English Poetry in India: A Comprehensive Survey of Trends and Thought Patterns* (2011), from AuthorsPress, New Delhi has found favour with the critics and students of Indian English poetry. Though his latest book of poems is *Rainbow at Sixty* (2010), but in the present paper I attempt an exploration of his book, *Enigmas of Identity*, published about 21 years back in 1990, for the study of hope and beauty as manifest in it.

Keywords: Indian English Poetry, PCK Prem, *Enigmas of Identity*.

Prem is not a simple poet: whatever he writes has so many layers of meanings and in this overlapping of meanings his poems become somewhat ambiguous to comprehend. Let's see 'An Attempt' (66) first. The poem is built on the edifice of "love and hate". The protagonist hints at someone who remains unnoticeable throughout the poem. He, according to the protagonist, "alone can empty the sky" by "Smelling the clouds / in small pieces" that are "flying without wings." And then "in confusion / he uncovers many a secret of unremitted [unrequited] love and hate." Who is "he"? It always remains a mystery; he endeavors to uncover many a secret that has remained unknown. He can smell the clouds for the meaning hidden in them; and has strength to drain them of their secret meanings. However, the protagonist hints at the confusion that is in his mind. He flaps his thoughts like the wings of birds: the birds flap their wings in order to fly, to reach their destination; similarly, the unknown person, "he", of the poem, flaps his thoughts to come out with something very concrete and tangible from the mysteries that lie concealed and unknown in the clouds. Life on this planet, called Earth, is susceptible - "vulnerable" - to many dangers of the world. Nonetheless the implied person is not in stasis, but in flux- "gradually moving / in a hasty pursuit"- to consummate salvation- "redemption"- of an unknown life that he has "never wished". This living becomes exposed to the dangers due to its "hasty pursuit" but, at the same time "moving gradually". Now the problem of "hasty pursuit" haunts the mind. What is this quick chase and what for? That remains an unanswered question with the reader and the critic, alike. This hunt is for, as it becomes manifest in the next line, "impetuously wishing a redemption". This "redemption", that he seeks, is not well-thought, but reckless and hasty - the outcome of his hotheaded and unthinking mind. The confusion that

he harbors in his mind is of unknown thoughts, himself not clear, and that, too, for a "life never wished." Thus, the second stanza makes everything confused for the protagonist, who is unable to construe in right perspective why this living on the Earth is at risk and why the unknown persona is in such haste for liberation of unknown thoughts about life "never wished." The protagonist's confusion becomes apparent in his impulsive movements; the unidentified persona is doubtful about his thoughts and also what exactly he wants. The statements remain paradoxical in content.

The protagonist continues to tell that "there is never an occasion / and a moment to take chances" to take decisions. The decision about this love and hate remains inconclusive and hangs fire. The persona exists in "such an irritation" when it continues. The mind experiences "perpetual command and pain" that prevail without any hint to "recollect secrets / of hate and love / that were said in prayers." What kinds of prayers are these that say about love and hate? The only explication that comes home is that persona does not remember anything that he/she has been contemplating since the beginning of the poem. This remains only an attempt in woolgathering. However, the poet succeeds in culling a poem out of the wavering and indecisive attitude of the persona at explicating the mystery of "love and hate" that still remains unrealized. What these "love and hate" are and directed towards whom? is also unidentified. Thus, the poem in its entirety remains only an attempt, on the part of the poet as well as the protagonist and the person, who smells clouds and always remains perplexed to reveal the secrets in his haste seeking liberty from his present state of mind. This poem, in its sum, exhibits the confused state of the modern man who is always engaged in pursuits that he himself fails to know and interpret clearly. In 'Optimism' (61), the poet ventures to establish "beauty / and hope in life." The poem begins with the dawn of the day: "Early morning is peeping out / to file on exit that is due". The sun is rising and heralding the coming of day: the peeping morning tells that it is due to arrive. At the same time, there is something that is collapsing and dying. It is nothing else than the night; the night of darkness and ignorance. With the light of the day and knowledge all darkness of the night and ignorance fades away. The attempt of the early morning to file on the due exit "outside the world of collapse and death" remains unsuccessful; for, it fails to pull off its objective.

From this failure arises the need of an effort "to enter into a life / of growth and survival" of human life. Man, due to his indefatigable endeavors, tries to grow and survive in this world of antagonism and challenges. His all efforts are directed "towards flowery worlds of beauty and peace". He attempts to create a beautiful world of his choice to live in peace, free from tension and irritation that sit heavy on his mind. He longs for a relaxed life that might establish harmony with the inner and outer being of his existence. Yet "an influx and an avalanche / of human desires and hopes" grips his mind. He cannot get the kind of peace and beauty he longs for. New desires overpower him in moments of such thoughts. These desires and hopes are not futile but "necessity of mankind." If there are no wishes and expectations in human life, man

will not try to achieve anything new. The world will come to a standstill: no growth and no development will be recorded. A life without struggle amounts to death. While stasis is death, flux is life. Thus, “human desires and hopes” become the imminent rudiments of human progress. Aspirations and expectations are the essential attributes of human mind for the world to progress and transform it into a new one. It is these longings and wishes that help to change the established order for a better one. As Tennyson, very wisely, writes down in his poem 'Morte d' Arthur': “The old order changeth, yielding place to new, / And God fulfils Himself in many ways, / Lest one good custom should corrupt the world” (II.). It is the law of nature that old things and systems must change with the passage of time: this won't happen if there is no desire for new things and hope for a better order than the present one. This impression becomes apparent in the last stanza of the poem under study:

A man of hope and faith / with a life of resurgence / not languishing /
but marching ahead creates an existence / to strengthen belief in man
/ that world has beauty / and hope in life. (61)

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast”, sings Pope in *Essay on Man*. And Barrie writes in *The Little White Bird*: “... to have faith is to have wings” to reach new heights in time and space. Thus, a man with renewed zeal in life and one, who always looks beyond the present time and space, “creates an existence” for humanity and reinforces conviction in man that this world is not without beauty and hope which provide sustenance and purpose to man to live in full. Hope and desire emerge as the essential ingredients of human existence and continuous growth and development of life: physically, ethically, and philosophically. 'Poem I' (58) is a beautiful little poem in thirteen lines about the protagonist's future plan, his desire to reach top of “life full of greatness”, and to be born again to experience jubilation of the waves of the sea of life. The poem begins with the protagonist's reflection on his future years: “Many years ago / I thought / of my future years”. It was the time when he wasn't a grown up, but still “in the lap of expectant mother”. The adjective, “expectant”, is the key word and takes the readers back to pre-natal time, when the protagonist wasn't born yet. He had begun to imagine his post-natal life, and had nurtured some desires and hopes about it. He was “filled with hopes” that were “indescribable” at that stage of life, yet “full” in their meaning and content of contemplation. At that early state, in time and space, he “thought to experience / a life full of greatness”. The desire to achieve greatness is very much there in the psyche, but the course of life has not been spelt out yet that was to follow in life-after-childhood. It is, however, very clear that greatness, the prominence of this world through deeds, is written large on the canvas of the protagonist's mind. The vocation is certainly carved on his mind and for that, he knew, he had to make efforts – both academic and professional. With the efforts, the success was sure to lick his feet; it seems a providential urge coaxed in the mind of the protagonist for which one has to strive and accomplish. The protagonist knows well that it can't be accomplished with the wink of an eye, but will take a lifetime to achieve that goal. By the time it is done, there won't be much time left to do,

aspire, and carry out, and realize for him in this life: he will be an old man with senility consuming him, his strength and vitality. The last part, though, is a single sentence, articulates the protagonist's wish for the next life: no *moksha* or salvation from this cycle of birth-death-birth, but a desire to be reborn consistent with the Hindu and Buddhist philosophies – “to be born”. Then the poet uses a simile – “like a wave” – to accentuate and call attention to his wish for rebirth. The waves of the ocean have the attribute of ebb and tide suggesting birth and death in the vast ocean of life in physical and metaphysical existence. The protagonist longs to be born and die again and again to experience and enjoy the beauty of this world with a new hope for this and the other life. This wish, “again / to merge with the ocean”, takes the poem to its culmination. The “ocean”, in its connotation, is a vast conglomerate of conscious and unconscious life wherein lilt the souls here and hereinafter existence. 'Beloved' (56) is a short poem, in two parts: first part only one line, and the rest, eleven lines, constitute the second part. It also reminds one of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. The very first line tells about the presence of two persons: the narrator and the listener: “Let us relive the old story”. The very use of pronoun “us” is strong enough to suggest the presence of more than one person there. At the same time, the narrator wishes to “relive the old story”: “relive” and “old story” are the key words merging the past and present. While the “old” refers to some happening in the past and the verb “relive” gives it a present life. The adjective “old” qualifies the noun “story” that makes the readers think about some happening in the past that the protagonist/narrator wants to experience again in the present. However, one should know that the entire drama had taken place in the past that cannot be re-enacted *in toto*, but it implies the retelling/relating/rememembering that incidence again to refresh memory in the company of the listener, who serves only to be the audience of the protagonist in the poem. In the second part, the narrator/protagonist tells the listener:

When you died last year / telling everyone my friend / sniggling across
the riverside / perspiring in old fear / of meeting your beloved / who
died in pledge / to make you live / and now like the desolation / in
dead hours / you try to relate / an experience unknown.

This part is about the listener/audience who happens to be the protagonist's friend: this address is not in person to person, but the narrator talking to the soul or ghost appearance of the friend “who died last year / telling everyone” about “your beloved / who died in pledge / to make you live”. The weird thing is that both, the friend and his beloved, are dead: one died in making the other to live and the other in telling all about her. At the same time the protagonist also reminds his audience how he waited “across the riverside / perspiring in old fear / of meeting” his beloved. This information unveils the site of meeting and the fear that haunts his mind. But, what is the fear about? Is it about their secret meeting that the society did not cherish? Or was there something associated with the morality of the act that the society did not sanction? The immensity of the thought is well articulated in the expression: “like the desolation / in dead hours”. This experience remains “unknown” *sine die*. The reader remains in the dark about it and continues to guess about

it indefinitely without reaching any conclusion; and, this quality of the poem keeps up the suspense and curiosity sustained ad infinitum. The effort to reach an answer lingers on and on. The answer eludes like the mirage in the desert. When the answer is found, curiosity ends. It leads to satisfaction or contentment and contentment is the synonym of death. Here lies the beauty of any work of art that makes it immortal. Keats has well said: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter; ..." (Garrod 209). From the eternal quest of life, let's move on to corruption. 'On the Roadside' (55) is about some person referred as "he" in the second line of the poem, and his "moaning path" lingers as anonymity. The narrator of the poem introduces this person as crying aloud the "words of [his] long treaded path" – long experience, but that makes "no sense". His "words renting the dust / piercing into the life / of every particle" were disordered and "had no sense". In spite of it, he gives life to "roadside talk / of highness and corruption / and confused indecisiveness." Though, as per narrator, he talks of corruption in high places, yet he, himself, remains bewildered and irresolute. It is the inherent trait – the dilemma – of his personality. This mixing of highness, vice and dithering to make some impression remains "a timid prelude to destroy itself", which is a disgusting act, "of loving on the roadside", and to make sense of it on the part of the person under observation and the beloved. As nothing comes out of it, so, it remains "a story of moaning path", because none has found any meaning or sense by walking on this path. While others have "walked / without a noise" – gone without making any ado about themselves – the person, under reference, quite contrary to others, "cried aloud" about his path unlike Robert Frost's 'The Road Not Taken' and his choice. The person, in the poem, had no choice; he walked on it and "cried aloud" senselessly about his encounters and experiences on the path/road he had taken. All his oeuvres stay futile: it remains a mystery for the person in the poem and the reader alike. However, it throws some hint at the corruption at high places that has forced common man to come out openly against it. Corruption, in the previous poem, leads to man's struggle for existence. 'Word' (53) and 'Last Word' (54) impart verve to the discussion at hand. The poem, entitled 'Word', is about man's battle for subsistence that is being fought every moment and at every place on this Earth. It is an address to the "feeling heart" from the "I" or the thinking mind and spiritual consciousness. This protagonist of the poem, "I", gives a "word" to the man, who feels for incantation to improve his spiritual status. This word comes from "the incantation / of Holy Gita and Om". These are not ordinary words but very significant ones for the existence of Man. These probe into the extraterrestrial, metaphysical mystery that envelops this mundane life. The protagonist further tells that "action and thought shall remain / what they were for ages" without registering any change. Reminiscences of this life would always remain "kind and gentle". The poet uses the poetic devices of oxymoron and personification and tries to concretize the abstract philosophy of the "word":

... silence of flowing water / would speak / and prowess of mountains
/ shall lend voice / sky will bow to bless / making hopeful airy balloon /