

Volume-I, Issue-II, January 2014

ISSN 2230-8466

# *Writing Todayz*

**International Journal  
of Studies in English**

**Editor  
Intekhab Hameed Khan**

Volume - I Issue - II January 2014

# Writing Today

International Journal of Studies in English

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- Published & Printed** : NewVoices Publication, Block No. 8, "Gulmohar Apartment" Opp. Head Post Office, Aurangabad -431001 (M.S.) India.  
e-mail: drhameed.khan@gmail.com  
e-mail : modparvez@rediffmail.com
- D.T.P.** : **Well Done Graphics**, Aurangabad - 431001 (MS) India
- Subscription Rates** : Institution US \$ 30 overseas; Rs. 600/- India  
Individual US \$ 20 overseas; Rs. 300/- India
- Paintings at the cover page:** Jayant Parmar

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## Editor's Note

*WritingToday* is an International bi-annual journal published at Aurangabad, (MS) India. It is a peer-reviewed refereed and registered journal supported by rigorous processes of criterion-referenced article ranking and qualitative commentary ensuring that only intellectual work of the substance and significance is published. *WritingToday* aims at providing a comprehensive approximation of literature produced in English today. The journal is committed to register the responses of the young and the senior scholars who approach a text as a discourse across cultures, literatures, themes, concepts and genres. It focuses on the excellences of literature and language as viewed in different critical contexts, promoting a fresh and insightful appreciation of the text. The basic target of the journal is to publish a rich collection of selected articles on issues that deal with studies in Indian writing in English, diasporic, colonial and post colonial literature, critical theory and translations. Articles may include studies that address multidimensional impact of the recent intellectual and critical discourses. *WritingToday* invites scholars and writers to submit works on critical writings, literary and linguistic studies, creative writings that include works of prose, drama, fiction and poetry, reviews and review articles on books of academic, literary, cultural and theoretical orientation. The *Journal* embraces internationalism and indicates an attempt to engage in the concerns of teachers, researchers and scholars around the world with the critical or creative contextualization of the issues that signify the intellectual endeavour within and outside academia.

Recent occurrences and the historico-political, ideological and other allied disciplines that have a direct impact on the generic, linguistic or contextual transformations are especially taken care of. This issue, therefore, has articles on sociological nuances, minority discourses, women's voices both within and outside the country. Translation as we know, remains an authentic cultural transaction. The Journal, therefore, intends, as a regular feature, to publish translations from indigenous Indian and other languages so as to have a holistic view of the creative and critical directions. Another regular feature of the journal is *A Shriek in the Desert* which exclusively presents English translations of/or creative and critical writings about the writers from marginality; writers who deserve attention especially in the recent ideological context. Jayant Parmar, a recognised Dalit - Urdu poet features the landscape in this issue.

The editorial board believes in authorial freedom; readers' responses will be published to promote a healthy and productive debate. *Writing Today* has also planned to initiate debates and provide platform for discussions on the current issues that keep coming up and reverberate the intellectual, cultural and academic institutions. We humbly seek suggestions of the readers in this regard.

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# ***Flesh and Fish Blood: Postcolonialism, Translation and The Vernacular***

**(Interview with Subramanian Shankar)**

**by : Intekhab Hameed and Deepa Mishra**

*Postcolonialism, ever since its inception, has been continually redefined and contested in terms of its inherent inadequacies, its lack of streamlining the internal dichotomies of the world it basically addresses and also in terms of its cosmopolitanism. What is important to note is that despite political transformations and interrogations the term postcolonialism not only persists but also occupies a prominent place in academics and pedagogical programmes. Metaphorical aura makes its interpretative and creative engagement all the while more called for. Subramanian Shankar's recent book **Flesh and Fish Blood: Postcolonialism, Translation and The Vernacular** is a noticeable step in the direction of redefining the basic premises of postcolonialism, its theory and practice. There are innumerable books written on postcolonialism and postcoloniality. Many of them, however, appear to be repetitive in their assumptions, elucidations and interpretations of literary and intellectual productions. They seem to be an extension of earlier or contemporary corpus. Serious readers, it is believed, would not find **Flesh and Fish Blood** just one amongst them; it is an addition to the cavalcade of the writings on postcolonialism. S. Shankar picks up a debate with Salman Rushdie's notion of Indian Writing as an outcome of Independence and his relegation of the vernacular literature, branding it as parochial against the internationalism of Indian English Writing. Transcending the rigid categorization of Transnationalism and Parochialism, Shankar strongly argues the case for the vernacular and its English translations beyond the politics of canonisation. He comes out with scintillating examples from indigenous Indian Languages. Intekhab Hameed and Deepa Mishra have interviewed S. Shankar with a focus on **Flesh and Fish Blood**, a book frequently discussed in the academic circles across the globe.*

*Interview with Subramanian Shankar .....*

*Postcolonialism, even after decades of independence in different countries around the world, continues to be a staple topic for intellectual engagement. Do you really think that the term postcolonialism should deserve the kind of critical and creative weightage it is enjoying today?*

**S.S.:** The question is well formulated. When must we cease viewing formerly colonized countries primarily through the prism of colonization? When has enough time passed that colonization can no longer be adequate as explanation for what used to be called the Third World? In this context, what is the status of *postcolonialism* as a term? The answer to these questions I am afraid must be multifold. In one sense—that is, in a historical sense *postcolonialism* will never become outdated any more than, say, *the Age of Romanticism* will in the study of European literature. Modern European colonialism lasted long enough and was an important enough phenomenon that it will and should continue to be an object of study, as should the historical period that succeeded it postcolonialism. In another sense *postcolonialism* understood as a theory or method of academic study the matter is rather more unclear. My own feeling is that in this latter sense postcolonialism will be relevant as long as it continues to have the ability to generate debates and explanatory frameworks for what we call the postcolonial world.

*Flesh and Fish Blood is a condensed title for your most recent book. Could you please elucidate it?*

**S.S.:** “Flesh and Fish Blood” is a quotation from a poem entitled “Situation” by the mainly Tamil poet Ka Na Su. In my book, I read this well-known poem as a meditation on the ways in which the postcolonial intellectual is alienated from his cultural inheritance he is for Ka Na Su neither flesh nor fish blood. He is lost in between cultures. Simultaneously, I read “Situation” as an invitation to think comparatively to *compare* flesh and fish blood. To think comparatively is to provide a systematic account of identity and difference between two entities made comparable by way of carefully specified grounds for comparison. Read carefully, I think Ka Na Su’s poem invites the postcolonial intellectual to value such a project and that is also an invitation I make to the reader in my book through that title.

*The subtitle takes up three big issues that deserve critical attention. We have discussed postcolonialism. How do you think theoreticians look at translation? And how should we as teachers and scholars look at it today?*

**S.S.:** Translation studies is making a kind of comeback and I very much applaud the renewed attention to translation. Especially with regard to postcolonialism, much valuable work remains to be done on translation, not only theoretically but also practically, by which I mean through an attention to the proper protocols of translation as a *practice*. To take just one example: we have not yet engaged with sufficient seriousness the fact that India is, as I say in the preface to the India edition of *Flesh and Fish Blood*, “a nation in translation.” In a very precise sense, there would be no India without translation. What does that imply theoretically as well as practically? There have been a number of important books in this regard but we have yet only scratched the surface of the discussion that needs to happen. As teachers and scholars of literature and culture, I think we should look at translation in all its guises as an opportunity as well as a challenge.



*Interview with Subramanian Shankar .....*

*Dr. Shankar, so much has already been written on postcolonialism, both with and without a hyphen, and more often than not we find arguments being repetitive. You, however, seem to be adding a fresh touch through your arguments regarding translation and the vernacular. Can you please elaborate upon the idea of the vernacular, the third term in your subtitle, as there can be some confusion or misconception here?*

**S.S.:** I'm glad you found something fresh in my arguments! And you are right to query me on the vernacular. I have often been challenged for my recourse to the vernacular as a term mostly by scholars who like to point out that the vernacular is often a term of denigration. Nevertheless, I persist in using the term because I find it invaluable for a particular kind of work I want to do. I want a term that both indexes (points to) differences in power *and* suggests an alternative to the transnational perspective; I want a term that suggests practice rather than identity; I want a term that can indicate dissent from the perspectives of the transnational, the hybrid, and similar categories through its evocation of the rooted and the autonomous. All these things, I think, *vernacular* is able to do effectively. I should also note however that my interest in terms is always in the work they let us do if I wanted to make a different kind of argument, for example, I might have recourse to the term *indigenous* rather than the *vernacular*. My use of *vernacular* is purely to draw attention to neglected aspects of postcolonial societies it is not a moral claim on behalf of the vernacular. I don't think things vernacular are somehow superior to the transnational.

*Dr. Shankar, you certainly have a point when you make an argument in *Flesh and Fish Blood* about translation resolving to some or, should we say, to a great extent the problem of access and even equity. What do you think should be the role of translation in the comparative analysis of literary discourses produced around the world? And would you say that as a transcultural activity translation is much more successful when source text and target text are culturally or geographically proximate?*

**S.S.:** I think translation is indispensable for literary comparatism and indeed for many other kinds of comparatism too. Translation of course makes material available for literary comparatism it uncovers that material on which a comparative literary project can operate. But translation is also in itself a form of comparison. I think this latter observation is important because it allows us to underscore the ways in which we might learn from translation how to do comparatism. It will not do to think of translation as a servant bringing forth the dishes on which literary criticism in a comparative mode will feast. Rather, translation itself can school us in the modes of comparative analysis. To think this way is to disturb a naïve and utilitarian understanding of translation, which is very much to my purpose.

I broadly agree with you that cultural and/or geographical proximity facilitates translation. I say *broadly* because there are always exceptions. And I would not like to be understood as saying that cultures that are distant cannot be translated. In fact, proximity and distance are themselves clues to the primary way in which I prefer to approach translation as a historically situated activity. If proximate cultures lend themselves

*Interview with Subramanian Shankar .....*

more easily to translation, it's because they have historically, over time, shared and learned from each other. There is no reason to believe that a similar learning—and therefore similar outcomes—cannot emerge between cultures that may seem distant today.

A final thought on these questions: translation is not only a positive force, it can also be exclusionary. Translation need not always *provide* access—it might also, ironically, be used to *deny* access. In *Flesh and Fish Blood* I give the example of the original Tamil and dubbed Hindi versions of the Mani Ratnam film *Roja*. When the Tamil original was translated into Hindi through dubbing, Tamils were excluded from the film in startling and troubling ways. One could think of this as the denial of access to the imagined community of India for Tamils. That is an aspect of translation too that needs to be kept in view.

*You also place great emphasis on Dalit literary writings. What makes you focus on that brand of literature?*

**S.S.:** In writing *Flesh and Fish Blood*, I was led to Dalit writings for two reasons. First is of course the exciting boom in Dalit literature underway in various languages in India. This literature is valuable to me not just for social or political reasons, but also for the compelling questions it poses to literary convention. Dalit writing represents the emergence of new voices in the literary public sphere—which is not to say that Dalit intellectuals had no voice before, a manifestly untrue claim. All I mean to say is that the organization of the literary world has only recently and with difficulty begun to make room for Dalit writers. The other reason I turned to Dalit writing is because my argument in *Flesh and Fish Blood* compelled me to. If we seriously attend to the vernacular in the context of India we will be soon enough led to questions of caste or, as I prefer to put it, the varna-jati complex. The other way to make this point is to say that Dalit voices are not available to us unless we attend seriously to the vernacular. In other words, there is a close and reciprocal relationship between the vernacular public sphere and Dalit literature as I hope is elucidated by my argument.

I would like to be clear here about an important point—the varna-jati complex (or caste) is *not* the burden of Dalits alone. Since jati marks pretty much everyone in India, responsibility regarding it too belongs to everyone. It is not as if Dalit writers alone should be left the task of understanding and contesting the varna-jati complex that task is everyone's.

*“Materialism” appears to be a key word for you. Please explain its significance in the argument of your text. You have also spoken about its direct link with Dalit aesthetics.*

**S.S.:** At its most basic, materialism signifies for me a kind of worldly that is, non-transcendental, this-world centered approach to intellectual work. The sources for this materialism are many, and in some cases contradictory on certain aspects. One might go to Marx (in the “Theses on Feuerbach” for example) or to Edward Said (in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* for example) or to Ambedkar (in an essay such as “Buddha or Karl Marx” for example). It should be obvious that these intellectuals are very different in their orientations, but I think there is much to learn from each one of them. It would take me too long to explain why I find materialism of this kind

*Interview with Subramanian Shankar .....*

compelling-I will just note that I took up the question in some detail in my first critical book *Textual Traffic: Colonialism, Modernity and the Economy of the Text* (SUNY Press 2001). I should also not be misunderstood as saying Dalit aesthetics should necessarily be materialist. Materialist criticism is simply my preferred mode of analysis because I think it is best suited to reject and expose various kinds of obscurantism-various ways in which the complexities of human lives sustained in social and physical environments is obscured by market fundamentalism, religious extremism, literary formalism, or other forms of obscurantism.

*Unfortunately or fortunately (for some, I am not really sure) marketability plays a significant role in determining literary form. What status do you think a vernacular or its translation enjoys in such a situation?*

**S.S.:** Perhaps you are referring to the ways in which literature is made to fit preordained forms in order to sell in the international marketplace. I think you are right that what I call the vernacular text, the text expressive of a vernacular sensibility is especially vulnerable here. It is open to misreading or, to put it more precisely, grossly uninformed reading. On the one hand, the vernacular is fated in this situation to a condition of invisibility it cannot even be read as literature, it cannot even be seen in a literary sense. This is why Rushdie, as I point out in my book, condemns vernacular literature as Tractor Art. He has no way of reading this literature. He does not have the requisite knowledge and so of course it must be crude Tractor Art! The other risk that literature expressive of a vernacular sensibility runs in the marketplace is that of exoticism. When such literature is allowed to appear in the marketplace, it is often condemned to be exotic special, precious, different in predictable and problematic ways. That too is a difficult fate for the vernacular to endure.

*Can you please also elaborate upon your idea of translation since 9/11 specifically mentioned in your conclusive remark?*

**S.S.:** 9/11, or in India 26/11 such catastrophic events lead to extreme reactions. Cultures and identities are abstracted and reified in opposition to each other. An us-and-them mentality (think of George Bush and Hindu fundamentalists) sets in. Translation is crucial in this environment it is that cross-cultural meaning sharing practice that can be, in the best of moments, utopian in its impulse. Of course, translation can also, in the worst of moments, become a way to push opposites apart a way to appropriate that which is different and make it fit your own notions. But I don't believe the risk of such appropriation should cause us to reject translation. Caution yes, rejection no. That is why I believe in the practice of translation, and also in the spreading of what I call *a culture of translation* that is, a broad and widely disseminated view of translation that treats it as it should be, as a historically situated and situatable practice. Such a culture of translation, because it would entail a recognition of the contradictory richness of translation, would in fact make an appropriative deployment of translation difficult.

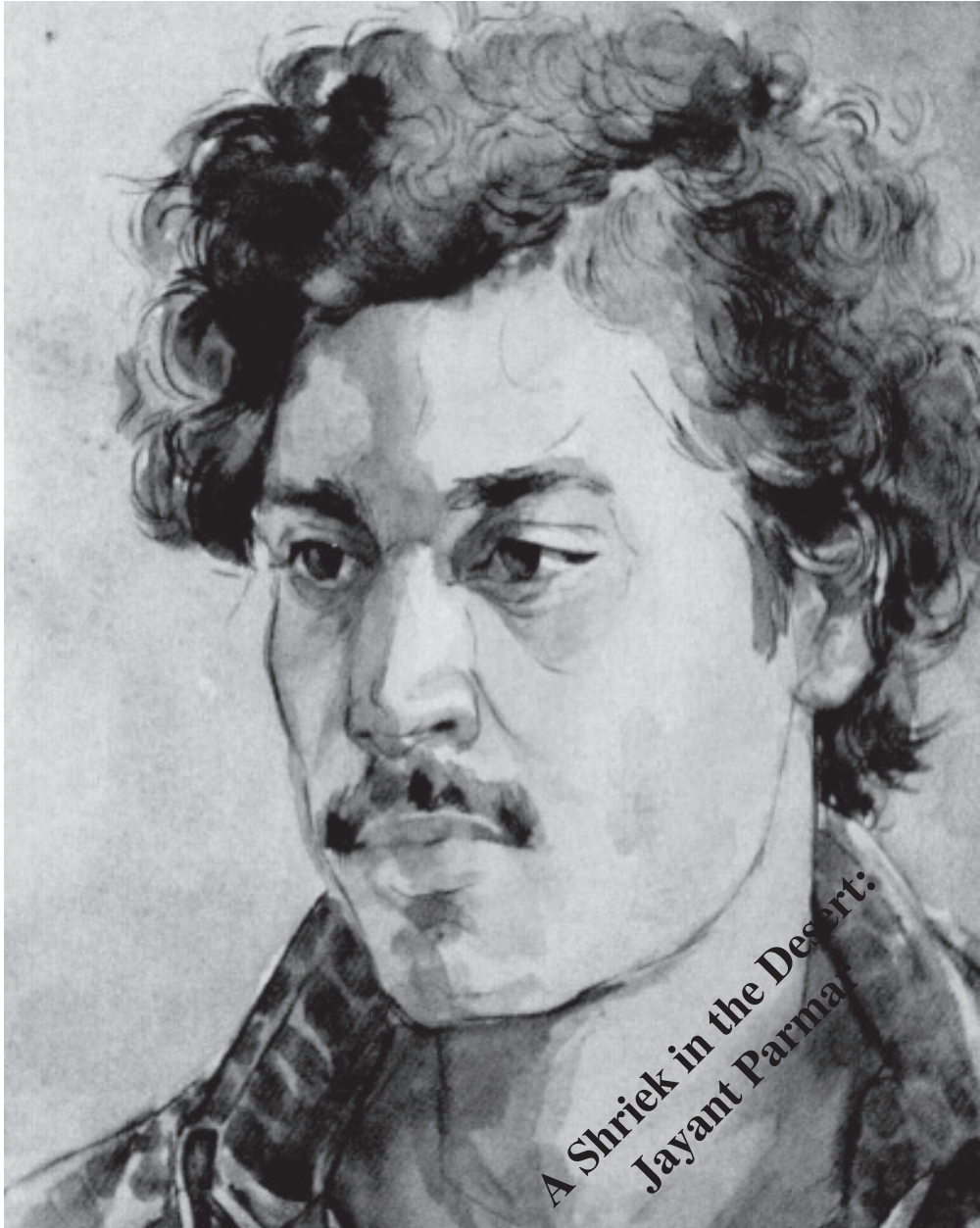
*We are all interested in knowing what are you planning next.*

**S.S.:** My main project for now is a novel that I have just finished. I am, hopefully, in the last stages with it. With regard to criticism, I am interested in expanding, elaborating

*Interview with Subramanian Shankar .....*

and delineating more carefully some of my arguments in *Flesh and Fish Blood*. I am at work on two essays currently. In one, I am interested in furthering my argument about translation particularly by asking questions regarding the translatability of love between languages, cultures and academic disciplines. In the second essay, I want to demarcate the limits of the vernacular more carefully by comparing it to related categories like the indigenous, the local, and the folk. I expect these two essays and the novel to keep me busy at least for a few months.

Thank you for your wonderful questions.



# Jayant Parmar

## (A brief Introduction)

**Intekhab Hameed**

*Jayant Parmar, a Dalit Urdu poet, a painter and calligrapher, has drawn attention across the countries for his strong commitment to the cause of the exploited and oppressed sections of human society, especially Dalits, and also for his radical intellectual stance against the main stream cultural designs perpetuating subjugation of the marginalized. Parmar has rightly been considered as 'doubly marginalized', primarily because he is a Dalit, and also because he writes in Urdu that has been deliberately politicized and ruthlessly marginalized in her own country in spite of her finest contribution to the National literary and cultural heritage. He has also been regarded as the 'first voice of Dalit poetry in Urdu'. The first rank creative writers, poets and critics like, Balraj Komal, Gulzar, Shamsur-Rahman Faruqi, Gopi Chand Narang, Shamim Hanfi and Shafey Kidwai have written laudatory reviews of his poetry and paintings. A bilingual poet as he writes in Urdu and Gujrati Parmar has been extensively translated into English and other languages by renowned translators, like, Bedar Bakht, Riyaz Latif, Dr.G.K.Vankar and many others.*

*Replete with a disconcerting sense of agony and anguish, and, electrified by an intense awareness of the different trends in painting and literary discourses, Parmar's poetry emanates an esoteric flavor of harmoniously blended romanticism, surrealism, cubism and even realism. His troubled vision of the prevailing reality and his unique perceptions of colours and images attribute his poetry a quality absolutely different from the contemporary voices from marginality.*

*What surprises most is that Urdu has not been his first or second language, nor does he have any academic training in the linguistics. He has learnt Urdu bit by bit, word by word till it was fully assimilated in his being and ignited his creative vision. He tried his hand at calligraphy too. A Herculean task indeed! Even otherwise nothing came easy to Parmar. Born in*



*an illiterate Dalit family that could hardly have enough to make the two ends meet, Parmar had realized as early as at 14 years of his age that he had 'to cling to life all alone'. The insistent artist in him, however, did not allow him to be lost in the labyrinth of immediate and transient urgencies. He took a road very often not taken. He took up art as a means of earning his livelihood; made sketches and paintings in miniature and sold them in the market - making of an artist along with the thorny paths of life. The atmosphere he breathed in was permeated with suffocating 'smell of hellpit', ruthless discrimination and humiliation. Being a person of low caste was not allowed to have water from 'the running tap'. His poetry, therefore, echoes the shrieks that emerge from endless torments and tragedies. Even the most romantic of his poems are tinged with anxieties and apprehensions, fears and frustrations.*

*His poetic art, nevertheless, unlike much of the marginal creative production, transcends the thematic preoccupations and encompasses the problems that determine the other equally important directions of his art. He carves images, both, in colors and words that attribute multiple dimensions to his poetry and painting as he finds both the arts complementary to each other. For him a poem is a painting in conversation and a painting is a silent poem. His paintings and poems have been noticeably appreciated by the lovers of art and literature.*

*Parmar has produced three collections of poems: Aur (1999) Pencil aur Doosri Nazmein(2006); Maanind (2007), Inkpot and Other Poems (2011). He has been a recipient of several awards: Gujrat Urdu Sahitya Akademi Award, 2001 and Kumar Pashi Award, 2001.*

# Jayant Parmar: Poems on the Easel

Gopi Chand Narang

Poetry, a coquette with myriad allures, is a sphinx tugging at the sleeves of the conscious and the subconscious. Although literary criticism attempts to unravel the secrets of poetry, it cannot always do full justice to the text as there is no final reading. Those who claim to do so don't look at the clay-feet of interpretation. When reading or listening to poetry touches one's heart, or evokes an experience, or opens a window in memory, then it can be attributed to a touch of aesthetics. Words are just words by themselves; they are transformed into an aesthetic wonder when they are infused with images creating myriad of multiple meanings. It might seem recondite, but the creative act is an integrated whole which comes to manifest itself in the form of a charged text.

Every poet has his own design; he may employ only those aesthetic men's which are consistent with his inner urge and design. A great poet uses an intricate design, on which only a few might have full his own means, however limited they might be, and if he touches the heart of his readers then he has provided enough justification for his poetry.

The making of images is a special part of the creative process. Different theorists have given different explanations, but no one can deny the importance of imagery to the creative process. It is this process that constructs sensory signifiers and connects poetry with visual arts. Image and colour, the basic ingredients of the art, are themselves ambiguous, yet quite wide in their interpretation. Every viewer is free to interpret and construct his own meanings. The language of poetry too has its ambiguity, because the meanings of a text are established by various factors. In other words, there are as many meanings in the presence as they are in the absence. In a language, the first level of meaning is literal, the obvious, those given by tradition. By contrast, the interpretation of art and painting is different as the realm of ambiguity is bigger and wider. However, the poetry in which images play a dominant role can a picture, and dialectically the picture reflects the poetry. There might be others, but the interaction between their creative processes is not that effective, nor is it so mutually reciprocal. Let us examine Jayant's poem 'Where have I kept the poem?' and see what he searches for in a heap of words.

## Where have I kept the Poem?

I've been looking for it  
In the drawers of my desk,  
On the table,  
In the cupboard,  
On the bookshelf,  
In the mad pages  
Of old and new books,  
In the worn pockets,  
Of my coarse-cloth shirt,  
In the camel-leather briefcase:  
Where have I kept the poem?  
Then I ask



*Jayant Parmar: Poems on the Easel ...*

Neruda<sup>1</sup> Amichai<sup>2</sup> and Rilke<sup>3</sup>  
I kept it somewhere just now.  
Searching for the poem,  
I come across the pen and paper,  
But the poem  
Is absent from the notebook of the heart.

After reading this poem, one might consider the method of the poet's creation. One cannot make or construct a poem unless the fountain of creation is flowing within the self. A poem also cannot be made by following or invoking other models. It can also not be written with the help of text books, nor by manuscripts in the drawers of a desk or in a briefcase. It was kept here just now when it suddenly disappeared. The moment of creation cannot be created consciously. The following poem will further clarify the point.

**A Surreal Dream**

Just now, her breasts were  
Lighting the canvas of her blue bra;  
On the green grass of the dark lane of the novel,  
Climbs the ant of desire;  
Footprints of madness  
Try to climb up to her breast  
But slide into a deep valley;  
Butterflies of lust languish  
On the couch of her lips;  
Waves of blood wrapped around the moon;  
Wet clothes  
On the tall coconut palms  
Being dried by the yellow sun;  
A red star descends  
From the leaf of eyelashes,  
To be drowned  
In the dark waters;  
The evening lying naked on the sand  
Kisses her warm calves;  
The restless fishes of her thighs  
Are about to take flight  
My hazy, so hazy dreams.

In art and painting, subconscious threads of the creative process easily mingle with surreal and subconscious roots. The poem advances image by image and the dynamic and vivid act of picture-making manifests itself in a rich visual imagery, which are ripe with subconscious images of sexual dreams like the breasts of a woman, the blue canvas of a bra, the dark lane of a navel, the ant of lust climbing on the green ivy: every line of the poem evokes an image in the mind. The footprints of madness slipping into a deep valley/ wet clothes/ ... / kissing warm calves/ the evening lying

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naked on the sand: all these images are part of the unfolding of a surreal dream, which is a salient feature of Jayant Parmar's poetry. Wherever words shiver and fall short, a vivid picture shimmers on the screen of the mind.

Look at the following poem 'Your Name.' The poem is vague, but the act of image-making makes every petal of the flower emerge before our eyes and the name becomes a fragrance fleeting through,

Your Name  
I write your name  
With my fingers  
On every petal of the flower!  
The flower withers,  
But your name  
Becomes a fragrance  
To spread everywhere.

In his collection, *Pencil aur doosri nazmein (Pencil and Other Poems)*, Jayant Parmar has included three poems in his 'pencil series'. Pencil draws lines that create image, just as words give way to meanings. Let's see in the following poem how the word becomes the sharp tip of a pencil to make a word-image.

**Pencil (1)**

The girl in the blue jeans,  
Sitting on bench,  
Sharpens her pencil,  
And out comes from it  
A black flower.

The pencil writes  
Black characters,  
Like black butterflies,  
On the virgin paper.

The pencil writes  
White characters,  
Like the sun, moon and stars,  
On the canvas of the sky.

The pencil writes  
Golden wings  
On the arms of the universe  
Like the dreams of the girl.

The girl in the blue jeans sharpens a pencil yielding a black flower. What does the black flower allude to that produces one image after another? Virgin paper/ black characters/ like black butterflies / or / white characters / on the canvas of the sky. The image then is further developed by these letters writings golden characters on the golden wing of the arms of the universe/ like the dreams of the girl. Thus, the

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cycle of image within image is reinforced and the image emerging from the black flower begin to take shape on the canvas of our mind with all their hues and colours.

There are some poems, which may appear scenic in nature: for example, 'A Morning in Darjeeling', 'The Toy Train', 'On Way to Gangtok', 'Mani Karan', 'The Dusk Painting(1)', 'The Dusk Painting (2)'. However, Jayant Parmar's poetry is not just scenic. These short poems have a variety of meanings. As sex lurks at the root of the subconscious, there is pain which lurks in the hidden chambers of the psyche which raises its head in the image-poems. Although the poet talks about the deep space, there are moments when he is afraid of the self. For examples: in the loneliness of the night/ in the mirror/ I put my own head/ on my shoulders/ and cry for hours. It does not mean that Jayant Parmar's image-poems do not peek from the inside to the outside world. Once in a while, at home. Jayant has lived through the bloody riots of Gujarat. See how an external atrocity transforms into a spiritual anguished experience and then into an aesthetic act. The title of the poem is 'The City'

**The City**

Within a moment,  
He fell into a river of blood;  
Taking the support of his palms,  
He just got up with great difficulty.  
Blood still drips  
From his temples and forehead.  
His one hand is in a sling.  
One leg has a blood wound.  
With the help of his crutches,  
He straightens his back  
And tries to stand up.

In another poem, 'March Second', the poet does not write the year. For the destruction of the grave of the poet Wali Dakhni<sup>4</sup>, he brands the shining forehead of his city with black letters.

**March Second**

March second,  
Your shining brow  
Is branded with a black mark.  
Wali, you had once sowed a pure heart  
In this very land.  
You had told me proudly:  
I am a Gujarati.  
But your own city  
Razed your grave  
Brick by brick.  
My city has succeeded  
In wilting even flowers of offering.  
You are my life;

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You are smeared with blood.  
I am smeared with blood.  
March second,  
Your shining brow  
Is branded with a black mark.

Jayant Parmar has also written black ghazals for the city of Ahmedabad. See how full of anguished images these ghazal verses are! See how a teardrop moulds itself into lines of a poem:

Just wait, let me shoulder its weight;  
This is the corpse of my city.

\*\*\*

The flower of green affinities  
Was smouldering in fire  
Who could I call?  
Who is there so listen to me?

He was pleased to burn the house  
The city was my own

As far his ghazals, I should add that the poet has adorned the space of his nazms with bouquets of ghazals, in which bright and dim colours, images and fleeting letters have the same effect as in his nazms. The mould of the ghazal is somewhat limited than that of the nazm, but its condemned effect is much sharper (of course for a reader in the original!)

Wilted, withered yellow flower;  
On a branch, here and there, a flower.

In lanes, offices and markers,  
Scattered inside and out, a flower.

Sunlight, and a bright backyard;  
Descending in every window a flower  
In every body, in patches of earth,  
True fragrance, false flower

The doorway gazes at the pathway;  
In the evening smoulders the hear-flower.

\*\*\*

Every particle glimmers:  
Who passed through my desolate hear?  
You filled it with seven colours.  
The page of my heart was so colourless.  
God, I did not recognize you.  
You came out wearing light.

\*\*\*

My God, let no one suffer this fate:  
The season is spring but every branch devoid of flowers.

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I know that a day will come  
When the eyes will be lightless, and hands devoid of Books

Most verses are dynamic in character and impact images on the screen of one's mind. Words and affinities can be green, blue, yellow, black or anything. The moon, mirage, book, flower, rivers of sleep and islands of dream lead to images within images. Sometimes, a little raw use of the language, or an unusual turn changes the tone of the verse. In one of his ghazals, he exploits old style of making plurals, or throws in a few archaic words; such ghazals cannot be translated here for obvious reasons.

Another aspect of Jayant's poetry is that it abounds in poems written for various celebrities. There is a poem on Octavio Paz,<sup>5</sup> another on Neruda. There are poems after many poets, as is common in Bengali, Hindi and Gujarati poetry. Jayant has dedicated several of his poems to his contemporaries; however, what is important is that he has also written poems to evoke peerless personalities of the past. For example, about Van Gogh 6 ( 'Sunflower', 'The Black Bird of Pain', 'Crows over Cornfield') Paintings of Ram Kumar,<sup>7</sup> Amrita Sher-Gil 8 (The Poem of Pale Sadness), Gauguin<sup>9</sup>, Swaminathan, Salvador Dali, 10 Marina Tsvetayeva, 11 Meeraji 12, Ustad Faiyaz Khan 13 As is known Octavio Paz was for many years the Mexican Ambassador to India. He took great interest in Indian philosophy and thought and paid tributes to Indian personalities and places. See Jayant's poem on Paz.

**I Have Seen Paz**

I Saw Paz  
At the tomb of Amir Khusrau,  
In the pale shades of the evening,  
Under the dome of word and note,  
Between the mendicant Nizamuddin Aulia<sup>14</sup>  
And Amir Khusrau,<sup>15</sup>  
Sleeping under the arches of poems:  
I have seen Paz.

This picture of Meeraji is also worth reading.

**Meeraji**

A turban on his head,  
A large earring dangling in his ears,  
A bead necklace on his neck,  
Along with an amulet;  
Knocking on a door  
In the city of words:  
A dervish.

Painting and poetry are rightfully his, but word-poems also sprout in the moist soil of Jayant's psyche.

**The paper**

In olden times,  
They use to write

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On ordinary leaves,  
On the bark of a tree,  
On palm leaves,  
On chests of palm trees,  
On stones,  
On animal leather.  
The four reds  
Were also written  
On the bark of a tree.  
But the black accounts  
Of tyranny  
Were written  
On my body.  
Even today....!

This creative account of the long night of social injustice and discrimination borders on protest. Jayant Parmar knows his job as a poet-painter. He knows that creation is an internal act, in which every truth must pass through the crucible of internalization to do justice to its effect. The language of poetry is not the language of statement who knows this fact better than the artist? So whenever Jayant raises his anguished voice he does so essentially remaining an artist. In 'A Thousand Hands,' he recalls injustice of history and holds on to the future, whereas the will of the Dalit poet, has the feeling of helplessness. However, in my opinion the masterpiece poem of this category is the morning winds,' which can be regarded as the most effective Urdu dalit poem, in which the soul burdened by the weight of centuries of pain turns into a part of the blood colored sun.

**The morning winds :**

The morning winds,  
Stay by my soul;  
Give me the blood-colored sun,  
Which is not hidden by clouds,  
Which never sets;  
In the dense jungles of the horizon,  
I'll spin it on my forefinger  
And throw it on them  
Like the krishna's discus.  
I'll throw it on those,  
Who after severing my tongue  
Seek blessings from ceremonial fire;  
On those who severed  
The head of my flower-like tiny girl  
And threw it in the fire;  
On those who made rivers of blood flow  
From the breast of my sister ;  
On those who buried my father alive

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On those who made my mother naked  
In broad daylight.  
My fire will not extinguish  
Give me the blood – coloured sun,  
O the morning winds,  
Stay by my soul.

I had no intention of writing on the poems of Jayant parmar, but I have a weakness the criticism that tires to communicate with a creative work, and which give pleasure and delight, is a kind of mental luxury, because it relates to the demands of the heart. It is an act that requires time and single mindedness, both of which are rare for me these days. The manuscript had been sitting with me for quite some time. I am sure that Jayant Parmar must have given up on me, because he had stopped reminding me about it. Letely, when I had to go to Germany for the historical Leipzig Book Fair, I kept a few of these poems with me. Leipzig is the city of Goethe and my ideal philosopher Saussure.<sup>17</sup> Although the weather was cold, the centuries old buildings of the university were alive with the warmth of zeal, and the restaurants and pubs were buzzing with life. I started reading the poems. I had read them before, but this time I read them more leisurely. Slowly, the poems began to take effect. I will not hesitate to admit that critical appreciation is not possible without being somewhat subjective, somewhat partisan, otherwise why does the saying go, ‘Not that we are friends of Ghalib we admire as we have the capacity to discern.’<sup>18</sup> In any case, Jayant Parnar’s method and tools are different from those of the other poets: the easel, brush, the palette of colours, and the stokes that can be discerned only by the eye of the mind. And along with it, the bowl of molten words! Now it is for the discerning readers to make room for this modest, reclusive, quiet yet effective poet.

Translated from Urdu by Baidar Bakht

**Work Cited :**

- 1) Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), the Chilean poet, received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1971.
- 2) Yehuda Amichai (b. 1924) born in Germany, is a poet who now lives in Israel.
- 3) Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926),The Mexican Poet and critic,was born in Prague
- 4) Wali Dakhni (1668-1707), Urdu poet from Gujarat, generally regarded as the first major Urdu Peot; his grave in Ahmedabad was destroyed on December
- 5) Octavio paz (b. 1914), the Mexican poet, received the Noble prize for literature in 1990; he was the Mexican ambassador to India during 1962-1968.
- 6) Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), the Dutch poet, was regarded as one of the pioneers of Expressionism.
- 7) Ram Kumar (b. 1924), an Indian painter, is also know as a prominent writer of short stories.
- 8) Amrita Sher-gil (1913-1941), the daughter of an Indian father and Hungarian mother, is one of the most celebrated painters of India.
- 9) Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) French post impressionist painter.
- 10) Salvador Dali (1904-1903), Spanish surreal painter.
- 11) Marina Ivanova Tavetayevn (1892-1941), the Russian poet committed suicide after the execution of her husband and arrest of her daughter in USSR.
- 12) Sanaullah Khan Meeraji (1912-1949), the maverick urdu poet, generally regarded as one of the best modern urdu poets.

With thanks to *Indian Literature*

## Poems by Jayant Parmar

### Black Poetry

Whenever  
I take pen  
In my hand  
Dark screams  
Emerge from it  
Perhaps  
In the black ink  
Live  
The souls of black folk.

### I Declare

If they write my biography  
When I am no more  
What would they find  
But  
The strong chains  
Of darkness resonating  
Insults-hate-rejection  
Stumbles from door to door,  
The blue on my back from lashing whips.  
When did my mother  
Remember my birthday?  
I have written only  
The date of my departure in my diary.  
Within these two moments  
I lived and  
Died,so many deaths!  
The soil in which  
My roots were fixed

### My poetry is a sharp, stabbing knife

Be it  
A lane, crossroad or  
A Street.  
Sniffing my words  
Police reaches  
Ahead of me  
As if terrorists were to strike!



*Poems by Jayant Parmar .....*

Whole lane and street are crowded with khaki,  
My poetry is  
Recorded by police.  
They are afraid,  
My poetry is a sharp stabbing knife.  
Some day  
It shall plunge  
In the bosom of night!  
On that day  
Every page of my collection  
I shall put in the hands of the wind.

**Manu**

One day  
For sure  
I will hang you  
In front of my house  
Naked,  
From the *neem tree*.  
I will tear your veins into pieces  
And see  
How much blood you have consumed  
Of my ancestors.  
One of these days, for sure,  
I'll skin you alive.  
(From Aur)

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### **The Manuscript of Sand**

the aged ochre camel inscribed  
through the panting foam from its nostrils  
some poems  
of shimmering golden mirages  
in the manuscript of sand

### **Rainbow**

a pathway between earth and paradise  
where, barefooted, only a poet shall reach  
and God too, on his arrival,  
shall fling open the portals of the universe

### **Darkness**

the moon flung the white vest into the river  
when the jasmine-bud had dried away  
I had heard the clamor of darkness  
Woven with silk-strands of jasmine-fragrance  
I have seen that spread of darkness  
placing sparse patchwork I embroider  
*tamas* between two words  
in the talisman of utterances  
I have interned  
Several mysteries of radiance!

### **Masks**

in my childhood on their faces  
donning new masks  
friends used to scare me always  
out of fright, leaping,  
I used to take refuge amid the hem of my  
mother's mantle  
at my door calamities too  
wearing creepy masks  
keep terrifying me  
often of a lion, often of a tiger  
often of a bear and a cheetah  
even in sleep, nights on end  
I remain petrified  
I seek the hem of my mother's mantle

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### **Dalit Poetry**

Keeping you at the center  
the poems that I had written  
each line of those poems is a shackle  
I am carrying out a sentence for life behind irons  
I will bear all the agonies  
For you, O Dalit poetry!

### **Kaleidoscope**

set foot on the sky  
seven-hued abodes of dreams  
heavenly bodies of dream-abodes  
on the pretty arc of dream-abodes  
I sojourn on a rainbow-rug  
colors turning into meaning and meaning into  
colors  
each fresh image dancing  
each fresh inscription dazed  
poems keep forming  
in a mere instant dream-abodes  
change tongues!!

### **Demented**

darkness, all day,  
picking up black twig-straws  
has fashioned a nest  
on heavens' bough  
in which glows  
a zero-power bulb  
but before dawn  
some lunatic  
wrecks the fuse

### **Endeavor**

on my head since several days  
down, dusk, and all night  
hover dispirited birds  
it's difficult to restrain them  
but I surely can prevent them  
from nesting  
in my shadowy dark tresses!

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### **A Poem, That is...**

a poem, that is...  
to make a portrait of wind  
on the canvas of golden grass  
to keep walking on the trail of silence  
to keep watching our shadow vanish in the gyrations of dance  
amid the interval of two words the budding of verdant blossom

a poem, that is ...  
to await for hours  
the reverberations of a rose- petal's falling into a yawning abyss

a poem is a jumping net  
with whose help to keep leaping and bounding  
in the whole universe!

### **Calligraphy**

My words,  
like insense fragrance,  
Flow  
Towards your shadow  
Sometimes.  
Flutter like birds  
On the canopy of the mosque  
Like sunflowers  
Stare at your rays  
Sometimes  
My words,  
With white blue ink  
of sea waves  
Write on the sand:  
Allah!

Translations : Riyaz Lateef

# Jayant Parmar

## The First Voice of Dalit Poetry in Urdu

Shafey Kidwai

It looks incredible. A 30-year-old who uses word and brush with equal felicity picks up a language learning guide from the downtown market of Ahmedabad that is famous for ‘thing not with it’ as it is the area where one hardly see any shopping mall, food plaza and multiplex. It is the place that makes him realize that the life does exist beyond selling, buying and sensual pleasures. Soon he becomes fully conversant with the nuances and idioms of a language that is apparently incompatible with his cultural ethos, ideological concerns, value system and religious beliefs, surprisingly within no time he rides roughshod over the complicated and formidable prosody of that language. Eventually his ever-increasing proficiency in that particular language coupled with his creative dexterity, has earned him the prestigious **Sahitya Academy Award** in 2009. It is a piece of fiction but is exactly what has been achieved by Jayant Parmar. His transformation from a Gujarati poet and painter into an accomplished Urdu poet leaves many awe-struck as his second collection of poems **“Pencil Aur Doosri Nazmein”** (Pencil and other poems) got the Award of the National Academy of Letters- Sahitya Academy- for Urdu last year.

Jayant Parmar who has continuously been haunted by the fetidness of hell pit admits that atmosphere around him was hardly conducive for any creative work. Narrating his childhood experiences he points out:

“My mother was and illiterate Dalit and my father was a factory worker who never attended a school. During my formative years, I realized that I have to cling to life all alone. At the age of 14, I took up brush to earn a livelihood. I started selling portraits and soon miniature paintings have become my profession. I would draw miniature painting for a frame seller but here I found untouchability at its peak, a separate water pot was ordered for me and I was not allowed even a running water tap. It left me completely dejected”.

Jayant Parmar lived in the Muslim dominated locality of the walled city Ahmedabad, he developed a strong liking for Urdu poetry and it prompted him to start learning Urdu.

“I bought a copy of Urdu Script Teacher form a roadside market and I found Urdu the most effective medium of my creative expression. I also laid my hand at Urdu calligraphy”.

Jayant Parmar first started composing poems in his mother tongue Gujarati, and then found it quite appropriate to express himself in a language that takes pride in taking recourse in a to sentimental exoticism. Urdu poetry, largely infused with highly suggestive imagery, conjures up multiple meanings but Jayant Parmar’s poetry, betrays a definite deviation as he zeroes in on relentless probing of the human predicament through the prism of his intensely personal anguish which he describes as the **“smell of hell pit”**. He does not wear his sufferings lightly and peels away layers of ignominy of untouchability accumulated over years in an idiom that is direct and completely devoid of rhetorical flourish.

From the scrap of poetry of committed to romanticism, social realism and modern sensibility, he repudiated feigned morality. With his laconic poems, he tries to transcend the ideological caste and ethnic schisms that had cursed our country. One can hear the voice of a stolid narrator who refuses to compose a poem on the experiences of the past or wishful past. The protagonist pays no attention to the beauty around him as he has continuously been dogged by the smell of hell pit. The smell smothers his creativity any it lingers on no matter how hard he tries to ward it off.

**The smell of hell pit**

Used to dog me  
To my school  
Below the sun umbrella  
It would descend  
Barefooted  
In the hell pit  
She wailed  
Wet  
The animal skin  
In the sult and.....  
And cleanse it  
With her dead feet  
As a reward  
For me  
Pieces of meat  
Even today  
Before I leave for my office  
When I shine my shoes  
With cherry blossom  
In the shining  
I see my mother's face  
Dogs me to my office.

**The smell of hellpit**

Translated by Dr.G.K.Vankar

Here the narrator's evisceration of the past produces poignant vignettes about his upbringing and it surfaces everywhere- be it mother's face or be it shoeshine. The memory of the mother is peppered with interminable images of indignity and "**Shine of shoes**" calls to mind the face mother who was taken for ride by the hoity-toity. Such anecdotes spurn out of control and the poet finds it mor than what flesh and blood can stand.

Jayant Parmar's laconic poems question established truths, as he cannot ingest the fiendish attitude of the society. He has set Dalit poetry in motion in Urdu and his four collections **Aur** (And, 1999), **Pencil Aur Doosri Nazmein** (Pencil and other poems, 2006), **Manind** (Similar, 2007) and **Antaraal** (Pause, 2010) unflinchingly makes it clear that his poetry is not being written for astral beings. His poems touch the subject of affliction and also turn attention to a savage impulse that exists beneath all human actions, the pervasiveness of exploitation of have-nots. The pitiable and dolorous

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condition and degeneracy of the outcast makes the narrator to take refuge in ironic posing and his clear-eyed account is generally wrapped in opprobrious terms in a language modulated on speech rhythm:

I had asked for him  
And they buried me alive  
I had asked for a small piece of land  
And they put a stone of migration on my head  
I had asked for bread  
And they out live coals on my tongue  
I had only asked for a book  
And they poured the molten lead in my ears

**Hands**

Translated by Dr.G.K.Vankar

The apparent reference to some common possessions such as book, pencil, paper, pen, ink, brush and colour hardly make one inquisitive but these common place belongings become the most sought after things for those who were not allowed to use them by the snooty ruling class. The simple demand was rejected with contempt and the seekers were severely punished. It is an appalling situation that is depicted through irony.

Jayant Parmar touches the theme of humiliation time and again and his each poem is scorched by the blazing sunshine of denial and disavowal. Wrapped in everyday conversational idiom his poems on above-mentioned themes are born as a result of angst.

The inflamed narrator no longer prated about the infidelity of the lover and his medium of expression-pencil-suddenly turns into a grieving witness of the sensitive poet:

A polio-stricken hand  
Asks a broken blue pencil  
Lying next to one foot  
Can you write?  
The pencil hesitates and says:  
Yes, I can write  
And make your pictures too  
But only if  
You can remove the plaster of my frail body  
With the help of a pen-knife  
Surprised  
I keep listening to Hussain Baksh  
On Zee TV  
Leave the cup and the flask.....  
.....I

**Pencil – 1**

Translated by Bedar Bakht <sup>1</sup>

For him the paper is not made up of leaves or pulp but it resembles with his body that is dotted with untold tales of the torment and miseries. Sordid tales of the untouchability

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can only be written on the naked body of the Dalits and no one seems brother about it. Dehumanization gets widespread approval that leaves the narrator dumfounded:

In the olden times  
They used to write  
On ordinary leaves  
On the back of a tree  
On palm leaves  
On chests of palm trees  
On stones  
On animal leather  
The four Vedas  
Were also written  
On the back of a tree  
But the black accounts  
Of tyranny  
Were written  
On my body  
Even today

**Paper-1**

Translated by Bedar Bakht <sup>2</sup>

Instead of the broom and scrubbing brush, the narrator picks up the pen, pencil, brush and paper through which he asserts himself as he wants to get a distinct recognition these not based on his caste or profession. Pen empowered him and he uses it as a poisoned knife to tear apart the Brahminically defined social system. The omniscient Dalits appear as a newly created social, religious and political community.<sup>3</sup>

With sledgehammer irony, Jayant deflated the myth of metaphoric precision of poetry and weaves filigreed word pictures with satirical and epigrammatic endings. For him love is not a panacea for derivation but courtly love and romantic excess is a charismatic weapon for manipulating the toiling masses.

With consummate ease Jayant strives for self indulgence and in his poems the distinction between the personal and universal pains becomes extraneous. Death is nothing but a form of mindscape that delineates complete split up of words and meaning

The migration of words and meanings  
From the street of heart  
On the leaves of passion  
The footprints of autumn

Dalit poetry uses the diction, which is somehow not the same that we are used to.

Having been subjected to the worst atrocities, the Dalit poet remonstrated about all forms of exploitation based on class, race and occupation. Jayant deliberately rejects traditional poetic restrictions and assiduously conjures up the feeling of aversion and detestation. His poems are filled with the voice of oration, arguing and exhortation. His poem “The Last Will of the Dalit Poet” appears to be a vestigial symbol of the staggering painful effort to find some sense in the world of non-sense:

A Dalit poet  
Leaves several things behind;



A paper dripping wet with blood,  
A black sun,  
On the night's head,  
A river of blood,  
A lantern of his ancestors,  
He never assaults you with  
Symbols,  
Metaphors,  
Or personalities  
A heavy burden on a donkey's back,  
He is himself a wounded shadow  
He has no existence  
There is little difference  
Between Him and a broken cup  
He who makes images with cow-dung  
Has at least the sense to know  
That in the hour glass  
In the smell of exiled earth  
In the sunflower of rebellions  
In the spear of the pen and the ink  
And lives forever  
But now he is looking for his existence  
He is looking for himself  
He is proud to call himself  
A Dalit poet.

**The Last Will of the Dalit Poet**

Translated by Baidar Bakht <sup>4</sup>

Without words, his poetry becomes a question mark even for himself. It is time for exultation as the newly-acquired identity 'Dalit Poet' has made him proud. Caste liberation discourse pervades these poems and they have their own idiom, which has no bound, but they can not be laid aside jeremiad. With his gleaming poetic candor, Jayant merges his poetic individuality into a nameless mass. In an unjust moribund society, the poet is impelled to use pen and ink as a spear but it cannot untangle the knot of human predicament. Jayant seeks a new kind of freedom that is peppered with strong disapproval alienation and informality.

Jayant avoids obscure vocabulary, Persian idioms, and unlike his contemporaries he does not repeat himself conversely as **Balraj Komal** points out he takes birth in his poems time and again and every time discovers a new dimension of his awe-inspiring creativity. Title of one of his famous poem "sapne dekhne wale hath" betrays an extreme form of suppression and exploitation as the narrator is impelled to use his hands for having dreams as he can not make use of his imagination. Even for creative urge he has to use hand through which he earns his livelihood. **Imtiyaz** rightly points out his dreams are ought to be of making knives and draggers and putting heads on the draggers. It is violent protest unheard in Urdu poetry.

*Jayant Parmar The First Voice of Dalit Poetry in Urdu .....*

Delineating the contours of the poetic creation of Jayant Parmar, eminent Urdu critic **Gopichand Narang** aptly observes:

“Urdu is the cultural language of minority, but Jayant Parmar’s predicament represents a minority within minority. In other words this marginalized voice is subaltern within subaltern. Subdued in the haze of pain, this is sigh of leaves falling in the autumn sun; In the backdrop of sad colours; poems with the themes of ‘mother’ shock the reader. If one could be lost into the text, one can discover it in words of rags of historical pains and discrimination that has been taken for granted and has been going on for ages”.<sup>5</sup>

Jayant too writes romantic poem but they too are meshed with his commitment to the causes he lives for. His desire for securing an honourable place in the society and anguish at poverty runs through all his poems. Explaining the symbolic meaning of the title of his second collection ‘Aur’ (And), Jayant points out: “There is an invisible mountain behind the elevated peaks. Apparent is not always the truth and I intended to go beyond it. The word ‘Aur’ (And) joins words and sentences and I try to bind hearts together through my poems. In my creative world, lion, bear, leopard, flavor, darkness, sunshine, seasons, paper, pen, pencil, brush, canvass, easel and man, all have their distinct identities. My symbols and metaphors are drawn from routine type. My poems do reveal a deep sense of agony and pain. One might hear in them a tone of assertion rather than a note of an apology”.

**Work cited :**

- 1) Indian Literature, Issue 252, July-August 2009, New Delhi, page no.74.
- 2) Ibid, page no.69.
- 3) Dharnandkar Vinay; The Dalit Poetry in Marathi, World Literature Today, Volume 68, Issue 1994, page no.1994.
- 4) Indian Literature, Issue 252, July-August 2009, New Delhi, page no.81-82.
- 5) Gopichand Narang: Jayant Parmar: Poems on the Easel, Indian Literature, Issue 252, 2009.

With thanks to *Indian Literature*