Scholarly Poetry
A Study of Nar Deo Sharma’s Poetry

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The present age of disharmony, deceit and discomfiture of the wise and knowing ones, the disappearance of values and humane attitudes make a scholarly poet unhappy and avidly critical of the actuality around. Nativism, talking about our people and our politico-social-economic scenario offers contemporary poets writing in English with innovative, cerebral, nature loving originality. Even the attitude on nature is new. Nar Deo describes this in ‘In my Poems’.

Words in my poems
don’t bristle with the doting
on political messiahs
absurdities of plastic modernity

… … …

Feel for common grief
wish for mass happiness
find soil in my poems.

A sensitive and careful reading of Nar Deo Sharma’s poetry demands two epithets to put his work on the pedestal of eminence: Innovative and Inimitable; innovative because of his employment of deliberate and dexterous stylistic devices and inimitable because he produces an ‘I’ which is unique as a pronoun in most of his poems. Sharma is a scholar’s poet and his poetry wins scholars’ acclaim.

Indian English Poetry in recent times has come to such a pass that the work of some of the poets draws heckles that it is sentences broken into lines and presented as poems. Metrical verse is not written in English except for a few like Tulsi and readers of her Metverse Muse. Even with a slender praise the poetry that does not inspire enlighten and enthuse would go down the drain vey fast. The litmus test for good poetry is its being in currency for long, if not centuries. Present day poetry is medley of many things bordering on a melange of desires and goals to win awards. There are poems in two or three lines going up to more than a score
without being divided into quatrains, stanzas or expressive sections. Free verse rules the roost but verse should be revealing imaginative perception and mind-winning expressiveness in vocabulary and imaginative expression. There is no easy way to win acclaim without hard work, experience, imagination and pleasing, impressive poetic expression. Not knowing the fact that the ‘I’ of the poem is not the poet but the speaker of the poem.

Sharma wrote a note on poetic perceptibility by way of a very instructive introduction to his own work. This is necessitated by the critiques and reviews of his first collection ‘Melody of Wounds’, published first 1984 by Writers’ Workshop Kolkata. The second came as a reprint in 2007 by Ideal English Publications. A few excerpts from that:

*A lot of literary critics misjudge the significance of first person perspectives in the ‘I – centric’ poems due to misconceptions, and they commit blunder (sic) when they misconstrue that the poets- ‘I’ in the poem refers to the confessions of his wrong doings.*

This scholarly poet knows stylistic niceties according to stylistics which is not an ordinary poet’s cup of tea. He believes that style is reflected in the totality of specific linguistic choices patterned in poetry. This know how is used in Sharma’s first collection of poems ‘Melody of Wounds’ published first in 1984.

In the poem ‘Growth’, he says

Outwardly I might be great

But I am too dwarf. (p.12) Here dwarf is used in the sense of having inferior virtue

‘The Clown’ ends with this line:

He outgrows his dwarf agony. (p13.) Here dwarf signifies the green agony of small size. He uses a neologism in the poem ‘Mother Teresa’

She fastens her compassion

On lepers whose nauseating looks

Of gingerous fingers, deformed faces

People cover with their loathing. (p.23) The word gingerous is a form of neologism which is a compound of ginger and deformed – pungent and losing its normal form.
In the poem ‘Suicide’ he wrote:

But as the flies buzz

A round a naked, sanious wound

A motley crowd beleaguered his corpse. (p.29) Here the word sanious is a metaphorical term for greenish discharge.

These niceties are not expected to be understood by all. But then they landed the poet in trouble for displaying his knowledge of stylistics and the poet’s prerogative to form words. The poet quotes Prof Geoffrey Leech for justifying his action: The remarkable linguistic inventiveness of a poet involves both extra freedom (including freedom to depart from the rules of grammar) and which comes with the superimposition of special structure on language).

In the poem ‘Leader’ he writes:

The x-rayed poverty of the nation

Paraded by skeletal, naked children… (p.19)

The use of unfamiliar words like diaphanous disgrace is a sample of Sharma’s style. There is jibe at the mistreatment of justice in the poem ‘Law Court’:

As wounds, bruises area

Swathed in white relief

So in the Gandhian coffin

He covers his national nuisance

Of corruption, bribed defection. (p.3)

Indian is an inclusive term but different rites are there in all faiths. The poet comes out with a strong expression – rather a grand declaration in ‘Indian Rites;

I don’t espouse old rites

That ossify my progress,
Although I know that

Every change’s met with

Gibbet or hard cross. (p.7)

‘Show of Sorrows’ subtly refers to the expression of grief for payment of a fee (as in the film

*Rudali*)

Parading their pains

… … … …

But the altruism

Of my dead mother

Women’ll never cultivate

Into their habits. (p.8)

In ‘Dead Joy’ joy refers to the death of a girl child. For many in actuality the birth of a baby
girl is not a good omen. Mothers are different since they penetrate into the pulp of pains
oozing grief. The speaker of the poem rues the birth of a daughter:

On your birth

My dear daughter

I bried gods

With my profane prayers

Begging your death. (p.11)

The poem ‘Suicidal Note’ is a powerful conceptualization of a man committing suicide.

Well, I condescend

To my self-made end (suicide)

To see you blossoming,
No matter, on my grave

As the cotyledon of love

For a man

Who was analogous to you

At least in flesh and bones. (p.15)

‘To a Critic’ is an utterance of the poet criticising a critic. This is the poem addressed

To the critic directly:

Slang, colloquialism,

Archaism are the straws

Of literary delicacies

Which you can’t stomach

You love

The raiment of thoughts

That’re sprayed with

Virgil, Homer, Dante odour.

… … … … … … … (p.16)

At least in flesh and bones

‘Epitaph’ rues the fact that the poetry of the poet is not cared for, appreciated, or even expressed on the stone. ‘Mother Teresa’ describes the healer and caretaker nun, who was ‘blessed’ later:

Evermore she lives in a dream

Of bunching people into love

To clear up the human litter
Of privation, poverty, hate

From our earth. (p.23)

The bravery displayed and the pains and tribulations suffered by soldiers are a subject next to the poet’s heart. The first “Heroic Pains’ is the song of the crippled soldier expressed thus:

Ah, how shallow is the love

I reap from my country:

My country’s minted honour

Keeps me in abysmal wants;

Crutches are my only friends

Of my cripples helplessness

Unattended miseries. (p.25)

In ‘Soldier’s Memories’ another aspect of the front-fighter’s feelings are expressed:

I get immersed in the memories

Of your married beauty

Clothed with blush rush

Whose embrace still revives

The fountain of thrills in my veins. (p.32)

Phrases like ‘minted honour’ ‘blush rush’ and thrill in veins linger long in the reader’s mind.

The poet is alive to beauty also. ‘Kashmir: Paradise on Earth’ (later carried in a new collection Emotionoceans (2015)) is a case in point:

The gentle breeze

Will inebriate you

With a cocktail of fragrance
Culled from various flowers.

….. ..... ...... ...

The pensive lake

Ripples into joy

When you tickle its bosom

With your boating desires. (p.26)

A deeply dissatisfied hubby in the poem in the ‘Melody of Wounds’ bemoans thus:

Our life’s marriage

Of heaven and hell.

For your happiness I’ll pawn

My little pleasures to pains since

Grief’s the sobriquet of my destiny.

I have the magic

To canalize the geyser of grief

Into the melody of wounds.(p. 27)

‘Love Poem I and ‘Love Poem II’ are sweet, joyous poems from Sharma’s pen:

Without you

I am cruet

Filled with

The fragrant void

Of your memories

…….. ...... ... (p.35)
I was natural, darling

When I clothed your love

In my plain praise that

You’re air and water

Of my happiness,

That your love

Dispels dismay

Dips me in delight. (p.36)

*Emotionoceans* (2015) is an enthusiastic jumble of feeling emotion and oceans. This collection includes ten poems in the first collection (many already cited) making the count forty-five. The very first poem is a prelude to this much matured poetic expression and imaginative ‘Green Go’ is a neologism for autumn green and fall. Go suggests a coming back and fall wouldn’t suggest rising of the fallen leaves again. The following lines are effectively poetic.

Like the congregation of ascetics

Merged in meditation

The eye-cry-dry-trees are

Poised, pieced in pensive prayers

To preen on green go. (p.16)

A rich fabric of nature and ascetic meditation as warp and weft - sound echoing the sense, assonance distinguish the poem as scholarly. This is enticingly imaginative poetic fancy.

‘Selfishness’ is the poet’s expression of disgust of the contemporary neighbour:

For you

The need means
Of your own home from

The geography of the world. (p.17)

‘Pink City of Jaipur’ is the poet’s criticism of contemporary society:

People heap streets with

ten their stinking neglect of hygiene.

…… ……… …. …

Stray pigs, herds of cattle

on busy roads are incidental to

The panoramic implementation of

a tolerant democracy.

…. …. … …

Except for its pink painted walls

the national worries have

turned its people pallid. (p.18)

Decadence and sociological inequities and imbalances have eaten into the fabric of beautiful Kashmir and its Dul Lake too.

Melancholic Dul Lake reminisces her

enthralling people-pleasure-past.

Miscreants minister the morsels of horror:

Dul Lake boat-riding goes down to death-riding. Kashmir: The Ugly Present (p.53)

The acid burnt faces of women and the young have come to be the most disgusting feature of decadence and demoniac male stupidity and arrogance.
‘India Widow’ is a touching description of the fate of being a widow – particular of the upper castes.

... ... ...

cornered in the family of hate

a litter box she has been since

time has snapped her

man tied conventional cord *(mangal sutra)* p. 28

‘Cabaret Dancer’ expresses pain and sadness of the woman’s ultimate condition the loner’s misery.

Nobody burrows into her

Compulsions that traded upon her grace

The sweets of orchestra, clapping

luxury-larded-life

nothing balms her lonely life. (p.31)

The poet speaks of the filth and squalor of modern living which is devoid of virtue or goodness. The humane and good qualities are spoken about in ‘Dots of History’:

Living far from

the rush of base selfishness

a few people think of others

although the dots of history

they have been. (p.33)
‘Mothering Miseries’ is a poem about the hard times for girls. The vicious demon grasp of dowry, the misery of being born poor makes the death of a daughter a blessing for an impecunious father.

Should I thank death?

Why … why for …? That it

spared my daughter from

her whirling into

the raperush sporting trend,

her wrapping in

the dowry burning package. (p.36)

‘Love Loss’ is about the disappearance of love with hatred and apathy encircling society in the nasty scenario of contemporary malaise. Religion in its present state cannot bring love or goodwill between people.

Demolished temples, mosques may

restore their stone grandeur

but no lint of love can

heal her love loss. (p.37)

There is a poem ‘Distinction’ which is a dubious thing doing the wrong things like corruption, cruelty and evil and the poet asks a rhetorical question:

Can you soak in truth that nothing is so soft as sympathy

nothing is as hard as hate

nothing is more aloof than apathy

nothing is so clean as morality

nothing is so deep as love (sic) (p.38)
The reader is reminded of Tagor’s ‘Where the mind is without fear’ when he reads Sharma’s ‘The Best Award’:

Only when my poems

transform my nation into

a heaven on the earth

… … …. …

where people identify themselves

with love, fraternity, peace. (p.39)

The present millennium is described in the poem ‘Millennium Mess’

Love, hate, joy, grief, loss and success

What we treat others we possess.

With altruism we rarely dress

Money measures human progress.

No thought to piece with God to bless

Drafts of desires do us distress. (p.40)

Intense cerebration and disgust with the present human condition are found in most of Sharma’s poems. He makes use of words in a new way as in the title of the poem ‘Shame of Nataions’, which may mean shame of nations. This would suggest nations plus emotions.

Peelings of privations

nude-clad poverty,

these children

transport ton-toil. (p.41)
Word compounds are samples of word squeezing to promote thinking. Many a poet thinks and speaks of his own canons of his compositions and here announces his own which is quoted in this article at the beginning.

A young man’s thirst for his love and the eventual jolt from his sweet heart are the subject of the poem “Grudge”:

Daily stirred the streets:

hey! She flaunted the tidbits

… … … …

He’s has been green with

the cactus of grudge since

she spurned him as her Hero. (p.43)

Poetry apart, the poet is not liked for his wares by his own children as shown in the poem ‘Poet – A Family Funroll’

On poetry why do you

fritter away you talent?

What’ll people

do with your poetry?

Privation for you

starvation for your children

are your poetry yields –this is from the poet’s father.

From the wife is this

Staple life with a poet

to marry myriad miseries.

From children is this:
Be innovative, dear brother:

Feel father’s feelings,

pursue your Ph.D.

on papa’s pains. (pp 44-45)

‘Mean’ is word play. Neither a quality nor an adjective it is a verb with the meaning of ‘signify’.

What the light for a means

What the rays for the sun means

What the throbbing to hear means

For each other we mean. (p47)

The poet pays a tribute to nature in ‘Nature’s Homage’

Nature confers homage

on her muse son who

played in Nature’s lap

kissed her, embraced her

versified his love for her. (p.48)

There is one just one poem where the poet goes in for buxom and blithe gaiety: ‘Mismatch’ and worth presenting in full:

A poet was married to a village woman

Buxom, rustic was she to stare, to scan.

The poet praised his wife figuratively

Rural wife listened to him attentively

Apple cheeks, rosy lips, gourd-groins, cabbage breast
Good metaphors define your beauty best.

Oh, no … she cried, you are so insensible

My body doesn’t grow fruits, vegetables. (p.56)

‘Inhuman Ecology’ is a poem with sociological concern for nature. Civilization has spoiled man and made him inimical to ecology and nature.

Sky-sweeping smoke columns,

spattering of terror tattooing,

dead dating bullets announce

their violence vending ventures. (p.57)

The poet is sore about man’s depravity and the deceit of leaders who mock Gandhism in the poem ‘Mockery of Gandhism’

Wrapping natty khadi

of inventive corruption,

the gandhians excercise

Mahatma as a gambit to achieve

their depraved political gains. (p58’).

Poetry never pays and writing can never be monetarily enriching. Ever writer, most importantly, every poet knows this. Even Milton’s Paradise Lost – the great epic fetched him a meagre five pounds – I remember someone He is Sharma’s poem on the subject in ‘Father’:

Unexplored, unsung in poetry

has remained father

the backbone of the family.

It is true that poetry is never praised most importantly - by the poet’s wife.
But then on thing is absolutely true in the Telugu poet Sri Sri’s madhuraaksharas – sweetest - we say even golden letters - kavitamoka teerani daaham, writing poetry is a thirst unquenched.

Nar Deo Sharma, is sure to forge ahead, writing, writing poetry.