

A Comparative Study of Indian & Canadian Poetry

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A poet whether he is of India or of Canada or of any other country, it is the human nature that makes him quite similar to the other poets in experience and feelings. Regarding colonial experience, India and Canada, like twin sisters, have a close resemblance. The poets have raised a radical realistic voice against the oppressions and exploitations that the people in these countries suffered. Both the countries see their own reflections in each other and now are on the way to progress within their limitations. Diversity is the common thread that binds the people of both the countries. In the midst of diversity, both have propounded an ideal of a free, powerful and independent nation. There are various problems-ethnic, demographic, constitutional, economical, legal and social which are to be solved with each other's experience and co-operation. "Canada has evoked a great deal of interest in the Indian minds, a country with similar patterns of experience including colonial and post-colonial experience, immigrant experience, experience of exile and isolation, experience of living in border lines and multicultural structures and so on. There has also been increasing realization that the two countries have a great deal to learn from each other's experience in solving many ethnic, demographic, economic, constitutional and legal problems including the problems of women. It is particularly interesting that women in Canada, for all the freedom and equality of opportunities given to them, are no happier than their Indian counterparts" (Ramamurti : 12). Basically both countries are the same in their feelings and general tone but they are different in their method and approach concerning life. In India there is 'unity in diversity' while in Canada there is "a mosaic of ethnic cultures and a mosaic of regions, each with its own sense of identity" and the notion of nation exists "in a dialectic of regional and ethnic tensions" (Chellappan : 88).

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The making of Canadian cultural is in her stride. She, with her cultural anxiety, is obsessed with fear though longing for rising above her victim-victimizer phenomenon. She suffers from an emotional state of unpleasant anxiety, which is neurotic and imaginary in nature. She apprehends that she will not be able to cope with other cultures of the world in times to come. She has always been keen to learn and adopt what is best. Her people feel this fear, struggle for survival and face the crisis of identity. As she is young, she intends to spread her wings in the cultural firmament through her literary sons who are the carriers of myth, religion and science. Canadian literature specially poetry is charged with cultural anxiety and thus *ever* struggles to keep away from the state of isolation in the world that appears to be hostile and threatening.

Arthur James Smith, a poet, critic and anthologist is the supporter of modernism in the present day Canadian scenario. He voices the Canadian people in the Canadian idiom for which he always makes, as George Woodcock points out, "an unending search for words that are crisp and small" (Manorama: 172). He feels that the Canadians are imbued with faith; staggers sometimes and again becomes strong. A kind of anxiety remains deep rooted in their heart. "Stagger". "Fall", and then "Recover" are the steps to recover strength. In the poem, 'The Lonely Land', the poet has generalized the characteristic quality of the Canadians who are, no doubt, strong but are broken by the same strength. "This is the beauty / of strength / broken by strength / and still strong" (TC 27).

Hypocrisy in Love is traced in the Canadians who, though are in the grip of materialism, cry for love without feeling it in their heart's core. Louis Dudek whose purpose as a poet is "to treat everyone as a person worthy and serious and vulnerable to love" sketches the outline of the mental conditions of such people as are crying for love. Sample these lines : "Lately, of woman has been deprived / -the smaller man and the greater too -/ and in all the language of his verse / love, love, love / he cries, never having enough" (TC 69).

Phyllis Webb in her poetry paints a landscape that is "bleak and complex" but gives the positive shades with the hope that it can be transformed into a well defined design. She believes that patience and pain are correlated and have become the fate of the Canadians who outwardly seem to be relaxed but actually are wounded inwardly. They

are quite anxious regarding the future. Patience that is “the wideness of the night” becomes “the simple pain stars.” It is patience that silences them. Very pathetically, the poet voices their feelings. For the Canadians silence is “the prose of tears” and they go on with: “the history in the heart / and futures where pain / is a lucid cargo” (TC 89). Here men are doubtful and confused like the poet who is not sure whether persons whom she loves are dying or her love for them is dying. “Brief life, brief candle” is the epitome of their life. In her poem, ‘From Water and Light’ the poet in Phyllis Web presents not only her mental state but of every Canadian. “My loves are dying. Or is it that my love / is dying day by day, brief life, brief candle” (TC 93). Deviation from goal is the consequence of their failure in grasping spiritualism. Material gains are many but spiritual ones are less. Success is different to them as they set their target of touching the level, not grasping the level. The poet cries: “Not grasping, not at all. *Reaching* is / different -can’t touch that / Too hot. That star. This cross-eyed / vision. Days and nights, sun, moon the up-there claptrap” (TC 93).

Douglas Gordon Jones in the poem ‘I Thought There Were Limits’ tells about the radical realism that has enveloped the people of Canada. The machines responsible for the progress and prosperity are also responsible for ‘adversity in cultural confidence’. Life is not in the hands of gods; machines have taken their place. The poet in D.G. Jones reminds us of William Shakespeare’s Macbeth who, in his last days, finds life “a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing”. The poet states: “Dreams, hallucinations which reveal/The sound and fury of machines / Working on nothing-which explains / God’s creation: *ex nihilo fecit* / Wrong again” (TC 97).

John Newlove, a major Canadian poet of the antiheroic, explores the root cause of despair, self-hatred and self-pity. In his poem ‘America’, he warns of the danger to culture from outside as well as inside. “Even/ treason is imperial; the scornful / selfabuse comes from inside the boundaries / of the possible” (TC 118). Culture flourishes there where power speaks from the poorest. Very candidly the poet utters: “In the Empire power speaks from the poorest / and culture flourishes. Outside the boundaries / the barbarians imitate styles and send their sons / the talented hirelings, to learn and to stay” (TC 118).

Margaret Elleanor Atwood, popularly known as Peggy, dramatizes the relation of self with the outer world and presents a unique idea of facts in the light of tears. Sample the lines from her poem, ‘Notes Towards A Poem That Can Never Be Written’: “The facts of this world seen clearly / are seen through tears / Why tell me then / there is something wrong with my eyes?” (TC 125) Rosemary Sullivan shows her neurotic anxiety for culture and is afraid lest others should swallow it. In her poem, ‘Lesser Shadows’, she expresses the fear from America.

It is good the victim is young
and wealthy it is good that
he seems to symbolise something
as night absorbs the lesser shadows
America absorbs her murderers
Completely. (TC 161)

Knowingly or unknowingly, man hurts him whom he loves. Even the gentlest people do it. In ‘Christ is the Kind of Guy’, she declares:

Christ is the kind of guy you just can’t help hurting no matter
how much you love him (TC 159)

Canadian people, Darwinian by nature struggle for existence, fight for establishing their identity and thus, define life keeping the changing circumstances of the world in view. Those who are fit will survive. Head is more valuable than heart. None can stay or take rest. Leg pulling is the way of life. Small things are wiped out in this struggle. In his poem, ‘The Envious’, the poet George Bowering says:

and we come together across our decade
across the envies looking at one another
men in a place
where smaller things die early. (TC 111)

Greed is ready to devour things. Lust is never satisfied. Sexual harassment and exploitation are the realities behind the scene. The poet George Bowering is aware of this moral degeneration of the people. ‘In the Forest’ he states:

They are in the forest singing. they are in the forest fucking.
the colour in your body is green little daughter. don’t look for red of lion
eating beast. (TC 112)

The man in John Newlove’s poem ‘What do you want?’ stands for exploitation and wishes to keep his ego and individuality. For him the

lover will be a mere possession, not a person. The mentality of the man for women can be seen here:

I want a good lover
 who will not mistreat me
 and suffer indignities willingly.
 ... and love me
 and gossip too
 to enhance my sexual fame (TC 1 17)

The feeling of love is absent in sex, which has become only a mechanical routine of life. Michael Ondaatje in 'Burning Hills' presents the mental condition of the man who comes to write in burnt hill region of Kingston.

He closed the rotting door. sat down
 thought pieces of history. The first girl
 who in a park near his school
 put a warm hand into his trousers
 unbuttoning finally catching the spill
 across her wrist.
 he in the maze of her skirt (TC 142)

Margaret Atwood touches the inner self that longs for a spiritual journey forsaking victim victimizer struggle. In 'Death of Young Son By Drowning', she explores:

He, who navigated with success
 the dangerous river of his own birth
 once more set forth
 on a voyage of discovery
 into the land I floated on
 but could not touch to claim (TC 122)

To take Indian case, it is obligatory to know the life source of her strength and the traits that make her . unique in outlook and approach to life. It is spiritualism that makes India famous around the globe. Spiritualism is the very essence of Indian culture. It is the opposite of limitation, fixation and systematization. Sri Aurobindo in The Renaissance in India writes: "Spirituality is an attempt to know and live in the highest self-the divine, the all embracing unity and to raise life all its parts to divines possible value." Literature in India is imbued with spirituality that lies in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical

and practical being of man. Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Nissim Ezekiel etc; are some of the poets who have imbued Indian spirit in their poetry. Aurobindo's firm faith is: "Love is divine / Love is the hoop of the goods / Hearts to combine" and he is quite hopeful that "Someday surely / The world too shall be saved from death by Love."

Swami Vivekananda who is saint-poet introduces the soul of the east to the west. His poetry, bubbling with spiritualism, produces a soothing effect on the soul. In the poem, 'The Song of the Sannyasin', he asks the man to know his Self and to realize that the attractive things are immaterial and illusion created by Maya. He states:

There is but One-the Free-The Knower-Self
 Without a name. without a form or stain
 In Him is Maya dreaming all this dream
 The witness, He appears as nature, soul.
 Know thou art That, Sannyasin bold! Say-
 "Om Tat Sat, Om!

The fear of failure makes a man anxious and neurotic. Death dances before his eyes. The Indian spiritualism makes him bear with the reality of life. Failures are the part of reality and the man fails to realize what he wishes. The poet in Toru Dutt is conscious of these realities. The following lines can be the guiding force for the anxiety of the Canadians.

None have on earth what they desire
 Death comes to all soon or late
 And peace is but a wandering fire
 Expediency leads wild astray
 The right must be our guiding star
 Duty our watchword. come what may:

The life of virtues is the goal towards which a man should strive. If he performs his duty and leads a virtuous life, he becomes spiritually strong. It is the inner strength-the strength of soul that counts. For leading a higher life, in her poem, 'Savitri', she recommends:

Virtue should be the aim and end
 Of every life. all else is vain
 Duty should be its dearest friend
 If higher life it would attain

Spiritualism does not mean to leave the work and to lead a life of purity without indulging in the physical world. Rabindranath Tagore, a humanist propounds that 'Work is worship'. He spiritualizes the work and rejects the idea of 'Deliverance'. Hence, he asks man to work and not to think of deliverance. "Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our Master Himself has joyfully taken upon Him the bonds of creation: He is bound with us all forever".

The Individual Soul (Radha) will follow the Supreme Soul (Krishna). In 'The Flute Player of Brandavan', Sarojini Naidu makes Radha say:

So where thou goest I must go
My flute player with thee?

Nissim Ezekiel uses poetry as a means of selfrealization, a step towards spiritual evolution..... and what I had become / By merely touching with my fingertips / The tired world." He presents the feelings of an Indian Mother for her children in his poem 'The Night of the Scorpion.' Mark the lines for motherly feelings:

My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
and spared my children.

Physical leads to spiritual. The basis of ideal love is its experience through sex and then beyond sex. Kamala Das reveals this in 'Ghanshyam' :

We played once a husk game, my lover and
His body needing mine
His ageing body in its pride needing the need for mine
And each lime his lust was quietened.

In 'Conflagration', she asks women to gather courage to demolish the concept of male dominance and men's egotistical superiority.

Woman, is this happiness. this lying buried
Beneath a man
It's time again to come alive

The world extends a lot beyond his six-foot frame. The problems of Canadian people, related to their survival, existence, isolation, fear, anxiety can be solved through the Indian spirituality. The panacea of spiritualism possesses the power to cure unhealthy cultural anxiety and has the force to restore efflorescence to Canada. Both the countries

have something to offer. It is high time for them to learn from each other. The application of the literary transportation theory is the need of the hour and surely it will be helpful in bringing Indian and Canadian people together. The Canadians' consciousness for identity is the quality that attracts an Indian but a kind of fear that does not let the Canadians live a peaceful life makes him despise the way of life they live. Here in this particular field, Indian spiritualism will help them to lead a peaceful and fearless life. As "Most of the fundamental questions relating to life and death. love and marriage. war and peace or nation and region have to be answered ultimately at the philosophical and spiritual levels" (Ramamurti 20), the application of Indian spiritualism becomes a must for the Canadians.

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