

**CROSS CULTURE STAGING IN ABHAY K.'S POETRY****Amit Dhawan***Department of English, Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Abohar***Abstract**

This paper makes an attempt to unleash Abhay k.'s aspects cross culture presentation in his poetry. An attempt is made to study the celebration of different cultures of India and Russia, with respect to their similarities and dissimilarities hinting on their architecture, artists, sculptures, etc. The paper will also highlight on the poet's journey through history, how the major cities of India and Russia were a source of seduction for the looters in the past and by the consumer culture in the present.

Keywords: *Culture, Indian and Russian Culture, Delhi, St. Petersburg*



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Introduction

Abhay K. anthologies viz. Seduction of Delhi and Remains attempt to draw points of comparisons between the culture of two cities viz. Delhi (India) and St. Petersburg (Russia). The poet is stretched between the polarities of north, which is St. Petersburg and South which is Delhi. The poet discusses all the major components of culture of a country such as their historical monuments, literary personalities, their architecture etc.

Discussion

The poet addresses the city of St. Petersburg as the light of the North. Founded in 1703 by Peter the Great it remains Russia's cultural center, with venues like the ultramodern Mariinsky Theatre hosting opera and ballet, and the State Russian Museum showcasing Russian art. The poet addresses St. Petersburg as a city of beauty, glory, revolution, grandeur and harbinger of Russian renaissance:

city of novel ideas,
city of beauty, glory, revolution and grandeur,
harbinger of the Russian renaissance ¹

The poet, further, glorifies St. Petersburg for its renowned writers such as Gogol and Dostoevsky. The city also takes to its credit numerous canals and bridges. The poet addresses

the soldiers of World War II as heroes and salutes them who fought the military blockade of the German army for 900 days.

In comparison to St. Petersburg the poet speeches the city Delhi as beloved of poets, emperors and merchants. Praising the city for its architectural value, the poet hints the immortality of art over time. Going back into the history Abhay K. credits the *Pandavas* for bringing the city into existence. The city lost its presence until the coming of the *Tomars* in the 9th century:

Pandavas founded me, legend says
then long centuries of obsolescence,
Tomars brought me into prominence ²

Then started the commotion many emperors came exploited and perished. The first to rule was Razia, with all her feminine charms she couldn't rule long and the poet very satirically puts a rhetorical question- how could a women rule in man's world:

My first empress Razia
ruled me with her feminine charm
but how could a woman rule in man's world
she didn't last too long ³

Abhay K. makes a mention of almost all the emperors that ruled Delhi: the Khiljis to Allaudin to Ferozshah to Timur to Mughals to Hemau to Akbar. The poet talks about the brutal rivalry between these emperors for the want of power. In order to succeed to the thrown Shahjahan's successor Dara Shikoh assassinated his own brother Aurangzeb. Abhay K. compares Delhi to a 'rotten fruit' hovered over by many flies:

Shahjahan's successor Dara Shikoh
assassinated by his own brother Aurangzeb
the war of successions began
invaders and marauders started hovering over me
as fleas over a rotten fruit ⁴

The poet presents Delhi as a mistress of every conqueror, Nadir shah, Abdali, Marathas continued to plunder and rape, loot. And the worst befell after the battle of Patparganj when Delhi fell into the hands of British, who plundered the city as brutally as could be.

From cities of St. Petersburg and Delhi the poet now draws his attention towards the great writers of Russia. The poet starts with Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol who was a Russian dramatist of Ukrainian origin. He was one of the preeminent figures of the natural school of Russian literary realism, later critics have found in his work a fundamentally has

romantic sensibility, with strains of surrealism and the grotesque. He is best known for his “The Nose” and “The Overcoat”, are still discussed on Nevsky Prospect, a street in St. Petersburg:

Your long nose,
And even longer overcoat
Can still be seen wandering
On the Nevsky Prospect ⁵

After discussing the Russian dramatist Abhay K. accolades Dostoevsky. One of the greatest Russian novelist, short story writer, essayist, journalist and philosopher of the 19th century. The poet addresses Dostoevsky as a prophet who is both irrational and spiteful. The poet wonders as to how could Dostoevsky be as he is despite the circumstances that prevailed in his life. His father being murdered, he and his friends be arrested for treason and sentenced to death:

how could you be otherwise
your father murdered by his own serfs
you and your Petrashevskian friends
arrested for treason without rhyme or reason
sentenced to death by the deadly bullets of the firing squad ⁶

but destiny had different plan for Dostoevsky, rescued from the volley of bullets, he was shipped off to Siberia. That gave the birth to a new Dostoevsky who was a true believer, a fighter and a missionary:

but u came out a true believer
with a new mission... ⁷

Abhay K. now shifts his attention to one of the greatest Russian lyric poet Alexander Blok. Blok mainly wrote on political themes. His poetry is chiefly a pondering on the messianic destiny of his country. Blok was disillusioned with the Russian revolution resulting in his loss of faith in wisdom of humanity. Owing to his bad health he started to live in a lonely apartment thinking about the past and the after effects of Russian revolution that took his peace and his poetry:

Your lonely apartment by the canal
carries images of a bygone age,
age before the torment began
and the thugs took over
your peace,

your poetry ⁸

The poet continues to sift his focus and the next to come on his radar was the great painter and composer Mikhail Natyushkil and his wife Guro. They both were key members of **Union of the Youth**, an association of Russian Futurists. The poet had been a regular visitor to their home but to his disappointment they would never receive him. This did not disappoint the poet as he was determined to visit them sometime in future. The poet describes the journey of art from cubism (one of the most influential visual art styles of the early twentieth century) to suprematism (an art movement, focused on basic geometric forms, such as circles, squares, lines, and rectangles, painted in a limited range of colors):

The third time I visited your home
the third time, you did not receive me
but I'll not stop ⁹

By citing various examples, Elina and Matyushin, Malevich and Mayakovsky, the poet talks about Russian Futurism (a moment of Russian poets and artists who adopted the principles of Filippo Marinetti's - Futurist Manifesto)

After discussing in detail the great artists of Russia, the poet in **Seduction of Delhi** shifts his focus to the great Indian artist beginning with Ghalib. Ghalib was the preeminent Urdu and Persian-language poet of 19th century. Abhay K. starts his poem **Ghalib** by quoting a very famous couplet of his:

*Na tha kuchh to khuda tha, kuchch na hota to khuda hota,
Duboya mujhko hone ne, na hota main to kya hota?*

*(When there was nothing there was God, if there had been nothing there
would have been God, Being has ruined me, if I did not exist what would
have been?)¹⁰*

The poet discusses the struggle of Ghalib during his life time. The demanding journeys which Ghalib undertook to various cities, sometimes on bullock cart or palki, the other times on boat or tonga:

Months of journey
on bullock-cart, palki, boat
tonga, ekka and what not
Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow,
Allahabad, Banaras, Banda,
Patna, Murshidabad ¹¹

Despite being blessed with extra ordinary gift of poetry Ghalib had to live a life of destitution. His personal life witnessed unending pains of debt and loss. The death of his brother, the loss of his all seven sons made him ‘stone raped in human skin’:

my family debt-ridden
my dignity robbed
my brother died in my arms
none of my sons survived
I turned into a stone wrapped in human skin ¹²

This was not it, the worse was still to come. The only friends which he had were killed during the massacre of Delhi. He was the only one to survive that massacre and was left alone to lament on his destiny.

The next greatest poet that Indian history ever witnessed was Zauk. Zauk was an Urdu poet and scholar of literature, poetry and religion. He was appointed poet laureate of the Mughal Court in Delhi just at the age of 19. Zauq was a prominent contemporary of Ghalib and in the history of Urdu poetry the rivalry of the two poets is quite well known. Out of his humanity Zauk admits during his last years of life that Ghalib was a better poet than he himself:

time is the greatest judge
it has judged Ghalib the best
I accept it
turning in my grave ¹³

In a very systematical manner the poet moves now to the architectural heritage of both countries. In his poem **Bronze Horseman**, which actually is an equestrian statue of Peter the Great in St. Petersburg, Russia, the poet appreciates the beauty and the magnificence of the statue. The statue is situated near the river Neva. The poet feels that the statue is the witness of the constant decay of the city which now is just a shadow of its past grandeur:

witnessing the decadence
of the city he built once-a magnificent monument on the marshland.
now merely a mirage of magnificence,
shadow of its past grandeur ¹⁴

Architecture holds a very important part of every society. It provides physical environment for people to live in. Architecture is an expression of a particular time that outlives humans in the form of art. It expresses social values, desires, ideals and ideologies, sometimes revealing our fears and worries. Seduction of Delhi is replete with architectural magnificence of Delhi. The poet applauds **Qutub Minar** as a very decorative achievement and symbol of victory.

The poet describes **Humayun's Tomb**, **The Iron Pillar of Delhi** and **Lal Kila** as architectural feats of Delhi. There are few things which are beyond the grasp of time. This idea becomes evident in **The Iron Pillar of Delhi**. The pillar has attracted the attention of archaeologists and materials scientists because of its high resistance to corrosion, and has been called a testimony to the high level of skill achieved by the ancient Indian iron smiths in the extraction and processing of iron ore. The poet uses **Iron Pillar of Delhi** as a symbol of survival which witnessed the quest of numerous emperors who withered and vanished with time leaving behind the **Iron Pillar of Delhi** as a witness of their forgotten tales:

A symbol of an emperor's conquest
of Hindustan
withering the tides of time
emperors arrived
and vanished
all vainglorious
in their reigns
I alone survived
to tell
their forgotten tales. ¹⁵

In his poem **Two Mothers**, the poet addresses Ganga (India) and Volga (Russia) as mothers of two different civilizations. The poet personifies them for they both have washed for centuries the making and unmaking of humanities. They both inspire each other to forgive the sins of their children, purifying and blessing them with joy and wealth:

Ganga and Volga,
mothers of two civilizations,
flowing in silence for centuries
watching ¹⁶

Then in **Seduction of Delhi**, the poet described the river of Yamuna which flows through the city of Delhi as if it is cleaning all the malice from the very soul of Delhi:

I flow past Delhi
like dark silver
caressing the city shores
draining darkness

from Delhi's soul.¹⁷

The poet makes a very thought-provoking comparison between **Indian Coffee House (Seduction of Delhi)** and **Literature Café (Remains)**. On one hand the poet describes the Indian Coffee House as a province of elderly people in a hospital which is abandoned. These elderly people who are physically senile are discussing if the left's ideology is Asian in its truest sense.

On other hand is Literature Café of St. Petersburg, where Pushkin, a Russian Play write and Novelist of Romantic era also considered to be the greatest Russian poet and founder of modern Russian literature, used to read his poetry. Writers, poet painters were constant visitors of this café. This café is positioned right in the heart of the city, opposite of which is a winter palace. The poet in his vividly describes this palace which is lit up by many lamps which stood in the middle, live music with velvet red interior, white curtains, the walls decorated by the sketches and paintings of Pushkin, etc. added to the charm of this palace. The place had a white burst of the poet enjoying the piano, witnessing history as a 'sentinel of time':

a white bust of the poet looks straight
at the grand piano where the pianist plays,
witness of history, sentinel of time.¹⁸

Conclusion: Through his two anthologies viz., **Remains** and **Seduction of Delhi**, the poet has presented a spectrum of two different cultures, their traditions, their life styles, their quests, their beliefs, their tastes etc. Stretched among the polarities, the poet vividly describes the historical monuments, literary personas, market places of two different countries. Cultural identity and unity amid the diversity of national cultures does not amount to the simple indefinite expansion of an original cultural core. Cultural is a tightly woven fabric. This fabric consists on the one hand of a warp thread carefully stretched, which corresponds to the many strong national cultures, which themselves have their own identity and find their origins in a distant past; on the other hand, there is the weft thread, which represents the interwoven transnational bedazzlement and admiration, the reciprocal influences crossing the frontiers between cultures and between languages. The poet very maturely relates the two cultures in a very comprehensive and realistic manner. The poet has covered the entire spectrum of life of these two countries and shared with us their distinct expressions and identities by adapting poetry as a thread to bind different cultures.

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