

A. N. Dwivedi's *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

Dept. of English

Iswar Saran Degree College,

A Constituent College of

University of Allahabad,

Allahabad.

Abstract

Indian poetry in English written before Independence is too much preoccupied with Romantic tradition and inclined towards idealism and escapism. Indian English poetry of the post-Independence era, to some extent, becomes realistic and deals with everyday problems. Of late, a group of 'new' poets called 'academicians' has emerged fast. The poets of this group include Shiv K. Kumar, A.K. Mehrotra. O.P. Bhatnagar, A.N. Dwivedi, Niranjana Mohanty, Saleem Peeradina, Syed Amanuddin, Syed Ameeruddin and many others. These poets belong to the world of teaching and they have lighted the horizon of Indian Poetry in English with the lamp of their learning. Irony, sarcasm and wit are the hallmarks of their poetry.

Keywords- Romantic, Myth, Culture, Indianization

There is a long list of Indian poets in English. Amongst these vociferous spokesmen of authentic poetry stands Dr. A.N. Dwivedi. In fact, Dwivedi is a social realist having a keen eye on the social and political developments around him. Dwivedi has published, to date, about 100 research papers and articles in Indian and foreign journals, a dozen books of literary criticism and three books of translation. Dwivedi has enriched the treasury of Indian poetry in English with his five precious collections of English poems. They are: *Random Reflections* (1994), *Fine Frenzy* (1998), *Protest Poems* (2002), *Beyond Borders* (2008) and *Wayward Wanderings* (2012). Dwivedi has worked as Professor and Chairman in the Department of English, Taiz University at Al-Turbah, Republic of Yemen. Recently (in January 2011), he was awarded with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the International Poet's Academy of Chennai. At present, Dwivedi is busy in writing poems of India's hoary past having a bearing on the current socio-political-cum-cultural scenario in our country.

Since his boyhood, Dwivedi had a keen inclination to create genuine poetry. In his early days, he often wrote Hindi poems which were published in College magazines. Later he began to compose poems in English. He himself explains his sudden transformation from Hindi to English writing in an interview with Bijay Kant Dubey:

A. N. Dwivedi's *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

I have been writing poetry since my school days, but then it was Hindi poetry which I composed and the source of inspiration was Pt. Kedarnath Mishra ‘Chanchal’ of my neighbourhood. I have translated some of these Hindi poems – not too many, of course – into English and incorporated them in the first book of my poetry titled *Random Reflections* (Delhi: B.R.P.C., 1994). For instance, the poem “Launch the Boat, O Sailor!” is an English rendering of my Hindi poem ‘Chhod de Patwar, Majhi!’ Later on, when I became a Lecturer in English and started reading more and more of British, American and Indian English poets, I was fascinated with English poetry. To be accurate, I have been composing poems in English since 1966. ¹

Thus Dwivedi is undeniably a poet by birth and his poetry is deep-rooted to the soil. The first thing that strikes us, while reading Dwivedi’s poetry, is that he is a social realist. Dwivedi keeps his eyes open towards social events and scenes around him. Talking about his social concerns, Dr. O. P. Budholia writes thus:

Man as the chief transgressor for all social and moral values, is deeply and subtly analysed for his psychogenic traits by the poet. He brings forth in his poems the working of lower impulses in man. As a social realist, he touches the root of social ills and economic disparities. ²

Indeed, the poetry of A. N. Dwivedi unfolds the unmistakable relationship between man and society, their inter-dependence, man’s efforts to survive amidst the pressures of the tense age, and, above all, through the existential anguish.

Dwivedi takes poetry as a forceful channel of expression which is more condensed, compact and concentrated than prose. For him:

Communication is the soul of poetry, but it should be conveyed in an oblique way. Direct statements and didacticism should be kept out of it. Suggestiveness and intensity are the prized possessions of poetry and they may be attained by means of imagistic details and symbolist richness. I am also convinced that thoughtful poets without a sense of ‘music’ (as T.S. Eliot puts it) would look as dry and dull as wood. And ‘music’ is not merely the singability of the song; it rather sends a clear-cut signal about the harmony and delight within. ³

The poetic qualities mentioned above reveal a lot about Dwivedi’s own artistic practice. The most striking feature about Dwivedi’s poems is his commitment to Indian thought and feeling, which though expressed in English, has its roots in the indigenous culture. This fact enhances his originality and enables him to avoid the shortcomings of many other poets who have a Western orientation and training. Dwivedi has a keen eye on the wider canvas of our society. He makes us aware of many social and political issues of today, “embodying as it does imagery of the heart, with the forthrightness of the mind.” ⁴ To quote *Our Leader* (dated 25th June):

A. N. Dwivedi’s *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

Dr. Dwivedi is not the one who just gets involved in jumbling of words and starts calling it ‘poetry’. He is a serious careerist and desirous of the height which people rarely meet; his only desire is to express his feelings and emotions at certain moments.⁵

Not merely does Dwivedi aim at articulating his “feelings and emotions” but also his thoughts and reflections.

Wayward Wanderings (2012) is Dwivedi’s fifth volume of poems. The volume consists of forty poems plus an essay on *Poetry in Practice*. Most of the poems of the volume are based on various scenes and sites the poet has visited. Some of these poems depict his journey to the Republic of Yemen and his experiences there. Some others are an account of his visits to different important places of India. Some poems express his moral and spiritual yearnings, while others originate from his close observation of life and literature. There are also the poems full of patriotic instincts and love of the motherland. At the end of the volume are placed two poems cast in dialogue form which is an innovative experiment on the part of the poet. The volume is, in fact, about the poet’s wayward wanderings and appeals to the poetry-reading public with its variety of subjects, its arresting style and diction and its topicality. First time in literature, someone depicts the paraphernalia of journey by air. Dwivedi depicts vividly the scene at the Mumbai airport. His description of an airplane or flight is matchless as we can view in the following lines:

A winged, beaked ascending dove
pounded the earth with its feet
‘n’ then whirred in the arching sky.
Floating in the air, it doled out
film, music, song ‘n’ dance to us. (“A Journey to Yemen”, p.20)

The poet’s journey to Yemen goes through various formalities at the Mumbai airport, at the Sana’a airport, at the Taiz University before competent authorities in checking the certificates and testimonials in the Academic office until a contract, which was all in Arabic, was duly signed. The poet’s favorite mode of irony does not spare him to comment on a situation like this. He describes his signing of the contract thus:

For me, it was like shooting
an arrow in the dark.
I repented my linguistic incompetence,
my ignorance of a language so widely used
in the whole of the Arab world. (“A Journey to Yemen”, p.21)

Further, the poet makes a brilliant comparison of the town Turba to Indian hill-station Almora, pleasant in all seasons. However, to teach there seems to be a challenging task for an Indian teacher like Dwivedi. He settles himself to a routine starting from 5 a. m., taking *dabab*, a small bus of the size of a Maruti van, and staying in the college for about six hours. The poet feels restrictions there and expresses his dilemma:

A. N. Dwivedi’s *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

If, by way of elaboration or illustration,
you talk of Christianity, Hinduism or Marxism,
You are showing a red rag to a bull.

It's all right to teach Donne's songs 'n' sonnets
but not his "A Hymn to God the Father."

Where is 'Father' or 'Son' in Islam? ("A Journey to Yemen", pp.22-23)

Working proves very tiring for him as he is treated as a worker there. He is called *bokara* (tomorrow) at Work Permit Office and it never comes in Yemen. In the *Gawaja* (Passport) office, the condition is the same. So, according to Dwivedi:

Yemen is a land of tribals 'n' their chiefs.
Sheikhs enjoy power 'n' prestige here,
mobilizing public opinions for poor souls.

Gifts are freely given 'n' taken,

'n' bribery is the order of the day. ("A Journey to Yemen", p.24)

The atmosphere and people seem to be submerged in *qaat*, green leaves of intoxicating nature. The lazy *qaat*-chewers are found in plenty there and resemble with Tennyson's lotus-eaters to whom 'all things always seam'd the same'. Therefore, the poet takes a sigh of relief when he alights from the plane at his motherland after three years – "This is my own, my native land!"

In another poem "Life in Turba", the poet hints at a life moving at a snail's pace in a sleepy town like Turba and

Rocks 'n' valleys engirdle it
from all sides, rendering
it cold even in the summer,
all seasons simply appealing. ("Life in Turba", p.39)

Similar is the poem "An Exile" where the poet living in a foreign land "breathes in strange air", "eats another's bread" and calls life an exile:

Living in exile
is like putting a bird
in an iron cage.
The bird wants to fly
but its wings are clipped. ("An Exile", p. 51)

In contrast to the exiled position of the poet is the second part of the poem entitled "Returning Home" where the poet avers:

Life dull 'n' dreary alters
at once into a bright sunshine. ("An Exile", p. 52)

Even the inside atmosphere of the plane cannot escape from the sharp eyes of the poet: "a valley of instructions issued by the pilot and his crew, demonstrations of the hostess, instructions of the tightening of belt and about your emergency landing – "all pour in like the

A. N. Dwivedi's *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

rains/pattering on the tin rooftops.”(p.57). However, during his stay at Yemen, the poet always fears religious rift between himself and the people in Yemen. Being a hardcore brahmin, he thinks about them thus:

People are usually warm
towards one ‘n’ all,
but not so tolerant
in religiosity withal. (“My Stay at Yemen”, p.58)

The issues of global importance today also impinge upon the poet’s consciousness. They offer a striking comparison in the context of the currency of Yemen. His images and comparisons offer a resemblance to Donne’s far-fetched images and conceits. In this connection, the poet is quite modern in his approach. Mark the following:

The currency of Yemen is
ever in ebbs ‘n’ flows
like mercury in a dish –
no sign of recovery it shows. (“My Stay at Yemen”, p.59)

Being a cosmopolitan in his outlook upon life, Dwivedi believes in religious tolerance. “Eid in Yemen” is a poem where the poet describes celebration of Eid in Yemen – “People’s great festive zeal/can be judged from their/gleaming faces ‘n’ glittering dresses”. It reminds him of the Indian festival of lamps when people celebrate by lighting earthen lamps in their houses and offer their worship to goddess Laxmi and Lord Ganesha. Deriving inspirations from the diverse spheres of India’s cultural and literary heritage, Dwivedi embellishes his corpus of poetry with unique religious and philosophical thoughts. The official disorder in Yemen also goads Dwivedi to express his ire in unequivocal terms:

A crafty, clever official
crows like a cock
‘n’ lets you down,
putting in the dock. (“A Crafty, Clever Official”, p.28)

Another poem, “At the Graduation Party”, is a rare occasion for the poet to celebrate graduation party in a mood of exultation. In such an atmosphere, the poet highlights the importance of graduation:

We share your joyous feelings.
Our hearts leap in elation
at your trills ‘n’ warblings. (“At the Graduation Party”, p. 29)

And in the poem “For My Students”, he expresses his blessings to his students for their concern, for their respect, for their good treatment and behavior to the poet. He, therefore, offers his best wishes to them:

Let you be a true votary
in the Temple of Learning;
let knowledge, not grades/marks,

be the end of your churning.
Let it be the lesson of this fest.

Wish you all the best! (“For My Students”, p. 63)

Some of the poems of this collection reveal Dwivedi’s moral and spiritual instincts. The poet’s philosophical bent of mind demands a total self-surrender to the Almighty. He quotes the great romantic poet, Wordsworth, in this connection: “Heaven lies about us in our infancy”. However, he thinks that heaven lies about us when are nearer to God, and therefore offers his suggestion:

Rise above the din ‘n’ dust,
above the mud ‘n’ murkiness
of the mundane world
at hand ‘n’ about,
above the scourge of age
‘n’ the demands of time, (“Nearer to God”, p. 31)

In the poem “The Advancing Age”, the poet describes three stages in a man’s life – birth, youth and old age. The contrasting nature of the aspects of life is quite evident when the poet says that our birth on this earth is celebrated with “welcoming conch sounds/’n’ pealing musical bands” whereas the youth “scales the boundless skies/ ‘n’ all that is challenging”. But quite contrary to the first two stages of life is the advancing age that –

Turns the tide ‘n’ saps
one’s spirits ‘n’ aspirations
on hearing Death’s taps. (“The Advancing Age”, p. 32)

In terms of religion, Dwivedi is far from being a conservative. Narrow-minded ideologies of caste, creed and communities have no meaning for him as his religion is humanity and love of the human race. He is of opinion that “... humanity is inclusive ‘n’ vast”, (“My Religion is Humanity”, p.34).

Dwivedi’s unparallel knowledge of Hindu mythology leads him to compose a poem like “Salutations to Saraswati”. The poem is in the form of a paeon to Saraswati, the goddess of learning in Hindu mythology. The poet offers his salutations to the goddess and prays to her for leading all from darkness to light. The goddess has the capacity and the benign power of turning dunces into great scholars. She grants certitude and firmness to the wavering minds. The poet, therefore, longs for her benign blessings to open the windows of his mind so that he can kill the banalities therein. The poet says in reverence:

Let your glittering grace, O Goddess!
illumine the dark alleys of my mind
‘n’ reveal the subtle secrets of life
to enable me to tread the noble path. (“Salutations to Saraswati”, p. 66)

Dwivedi is an avid traveller. Some of the poems of this volume are inspired by his journeys and visits to various important places in India. The poem “A Journey by Train”

A. N. Dwivedi’s *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

describes the poet's journey from Allahabad to Mumbai. It is a long journey from a junction like Allahabad towards his new destination and –

Within minutes, it picks up speed,
runs past the signal post
'n' then over the British-built Yamuna bridge
whose solid pillars defy the deep waters
dotted with boats of all sizes. ("A Journey by Train", p. 53)

With the speed of the train, the poet feels relief from the tension of parting from his friends and relatives. The inside atmosphere of the train is also delineated well by the poet: feeling sleepy and the conductor jolts you up and enquires about the ticket, in case of e-ticket, you have to show a passport or driving license, ration card, telephone or electricity bill or anything that may silence him, serving of fresh mid-day meal by the pantry staff and selling of tea, biscuits, pea-nuts, raisins and cigarettes by the vendors in the bogey. Further, the poet describes the suburbs of Mumbai, the economic capital of India. He gives a live and realistic description of the Kurla station:

Kurla lies in the heart of Mumbai,
but the station is a-symmetrical,
platforms rough 'n' bumpy, coolies exorbitant,
taxies 'n' three-wheelers waiting outside
extort double charges from the passengers
destined for onward journey. ("A Journey by Train", p.55)

The poem "Nativity Breeds Bewilderment" refreshes the poet's fond memories of his native place in Pratapgarh district where he spent his childhood and youth. The search of self and position drags him to city-life where he rises to be a professor of English in the University of Allahabad. Amidst such fond memories of his family life, Dwivedi does not forget to mention today's all-pervading problem of a joint family getting split into nuclear families. Thus, the poet says:

Now, the family stands like
a leafless tree, offering no
comfort or bliss to inmates.
only a shadowy skeleton of
the old structure remains there. ("Nativity Breeds Bewilderment", p. 72)

The poem "Pinddants in Gaya" mentions the Hindu ritual of *pinddants*, offerings made to the dead in the form of rice-balls for the satiation of forefathers and their spouses. Many mythologies are associated with Gaya. According to one such mythology, all the rivers, Brahma Sarovar, Vaitarni, Vaikuntha Sarovar and river Phalguni from the earth to hell reside in Gaya for the salvation of the wandering souls. Another mythology is that the Phalguni changes its course every now and then. The reason is the curse of Sita, the consort of Lord Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The Sitakund narrates the full story. All the same, the

poet describes another place of importance that is Pretashila where *pinddans* are offered for those who died accidentally in their life. The people offer *pinddans* uphill, ascending more than one hundred steps, though some do not dare to go upwards and they stay at the foothill. Yet being a poet of modern sensibility, the poet does not forget to mention its seamy sides as to live in Gaya is to face many water-born diseases like dehydration, diarrhea, viral fever or aerial infection. In this context, the poet cites two lines from K. N. Daruwalla's famous poem "Boat-ride along the Ganga" in which Daruwalla says of Varanasi, another holy city of great importance:

"What plane of destiny have I arrived at
where corpse-fires and cooking-fires
burn side by side"? ("Pinddans in Gaya", p. 73)

In continuation of his journey, the poet describes another holy place, Both Gaya, about eight kilometers off from Gaya. This is the town where Lord Buddha got Nirvana under a pious Peepal tree. The poet offers *pinddan* here too. He describes the charming scene of the main temple where:

.... the Lord is seated in a tranquil pose,
with his eyes closed in perfect meditation
'n' the right hand lifted to bless the devotees. ("A Pilgrimage to Both Gaya",
p. 75)

The Prince Siddharatha got engrossed in deep meditation in this place, leaving behind his rich royal family, his lovely wife and a small son. The poet touches the trunk of the tree thrice in deep reverence as it has witnessed the meteoric rise of a perfect soul. The next poem is on his visit to Bheda Ghat in the poem "A Visit to Bheda Ghat". The poet is overwhelmed to see the unusual beauty of the transparent water of the river Narmada originating from Amarkantak, flowing contradistinct from the normal course from East to West, up to the mouth of the sea in Gujrat.

There are some other poems in this volume that deal with the conditions of modern man. Nowadays, reason and scientific progress have dwarfed his spiritual power. Now, we wrongly place 'the head o'er the heart' and exult in having overturned the cart. Modern man's attitude of thinking himself 'all in all' leads him to all kinds of troubles and sufferings. This accumulation of power and pelf and this attitude of thinking himself the supreme monarch on the part of man make Satan laugh once again in his sleeves as he has now terribly gripped 'the erring humanity'. Modern man, as the poet himself says, lives in none-too-happy situation and feels aloof and alienated. The post-world war generation always remains bewildered and confused. Suffused with power and pelf and obsessed with wine and woman, modern man has become a slave to Mephistopheles. The poet offers various comparisons to show his degradation: "blind as owl in daylight, active as a thief at night, believes only in pomp and show and engrosses in useless dash and dazzle", and therefore, the poet mourns at his fate:

A. N. Dwivedi's *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

Mammon is his sole god,
Venus his sole deity,
Bacchus drives his chariot
to lanes of pity. (“Modern Man”, p. 36)

Another malady in which a modern man is gripped is depicted in another poem “Claustrophobia”. According to the poet, no one is immune from this claustrophobia as the tension-ridden man feels the pinch of time and leisure. The poet further quotes Owen’s famous lines on war and its ill-effects: “‘Gas, gas, gas’ was the cry of a war-poet of the past” . In sharp contrast to Owen, Dwivedi longs for:

‘Space, space, space’ is
the clarion-call of modern poet
to save the human race
from the bug of claustrophobia. (“Claustrophobia”, p.38)

Today’s constricting conditions of life style has made man a machine functioning like a clock and performing his mounting duties like an oil-crusher’s ox. Mark the observations of the poet on modern man:

Breathless with workload,
Tax’d ‘n’ troubled inside,
devoid of a noble cause,
he moves around in the world
as a restless soul. (“Man is a Machine Today”, p.47)

Now modern science and technology have made an unprecedented advancement, but have not ameliorated the life of modern man in any significant way. A war is a tale of untold miseries not only for mankind but for birds and beasts, flora and fauna of the world of nature. The poet here refers to the worst tragedy of dropping of nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki by America, and being sad at heart, he says:

Today’s war will be the war of nerves,
of deadly gases ‘n’ infectious bacteria,
of stealthily spreading flus ‘n’ fevers,
sending chill down the spines. (“Nuclear Holocaust”, p.33)

In the poem “21st Century”, the poet sees no hope for future. There are fears and doubts everywhere in the society. The medical knowledge of the poet is also evident here as he describes 21st century’s maladies in which the crippled part of this century is adroitly removed through surgery by a skilled medical professional in order to impart it a new lease of life. Modern man lives alone in his self-created prison; torn within with tension; choked with the throttling gas of war and crippled with the after-effects of bombings (the poet recalls the bombing in Japan during the Second World War). As anesthesia makes people forget everything for a while, 21st century sends them back nostalgically to their good old days

when they had plenty of time and leisure to recount their past events. On the contrary, the poet regards this century as the century:

of chaos 'n' confusion,
of cold war 'n' tension,
of military build-ups 'n' militancy.
Cross-border terrorism foresees
countless legs 'n' heads mutilated,
numberless skulls severely smashed. ("21st Century", p.80)

Occasionally the poet takes up the subject of love and life in the volume. We may mention such poems as "A Vision of Beauty" and "Sleep Walking". The poem "My Bonds with the Earth" betrays his love of the human world. The poem "A Vision of Beauty" offers a brilliant contrast by the poet that he draws between natural beauty and physical charm. Dark eyes are compared with a translucent lake, "lips and cheeks" with the red roses, gait with the gait of elephants and snowy body is as soft as a doll. According to the poet, such vision of beauty has no earthly existence and "a divine soul alone/can claim such grace". Similarly in "Sleep Walking", the poet expresses his gratitude to his loving wife whose fondling touch gives relief in his sufferings. Even in his sleep, he does not forget her miraculous touch and says:

I still feel the heat
of her caressing touch,
her sweet, soft-spoken words,
sustaining me in my exile, ("Sleep Walking", p.41)

Further, in the poem "My Bonds with the Earth", the poet sings the glories of earthly existence, and therefore does not long for the flavour of nectar, the Garden of Eden, Indra's throne or the land of angels and fairies:

I know my limits,
my bonds with the earth;
I can never transgress them
in sorrow or mirth. ("My Bonds with the Earth", p.35)

Some of the poems of the volume reveal the creative role of words as in "Winged Words" and the use of English as the medium of expression in his poetry as in "My English Poetry". In the first-named poem, the poet regards words as "winged birds" that scale new heights and explore linguistic regions and make fresh experiments. Such words are perceptible to the reader through images and symbols. They lift the imagination of the poet into the realm of unfettered vision. Rhymed words in a poem swim and flutter in the air for the sole purpose of affecting the reader. These words are the basis of difference between a poet and a common man as the poet's imagination is far superior to that of a common man. These words get retrieved and recharged in the poet's mind. The poet is full of praise for such words:

A. N. Dwivedi's *Wayward Wanderings: A Critical Appraisal*

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

Words clash ‘n’ crash,
igniting sparks of friction,
before settling in new forms.
Without a thoughtful friction,
words become lifeless ‘n’ dull
like a plume-ruffled seagull. (“Winged Words”, p. 68)

The choice of medium for the expression of his views has always been a matter of discussion for a poet. Being an Indian poet, he is advised by his friends to use Hindi as “Hindi is after all/our lingua franca”. In fact, English is rendered alien in an Oriental land and is regarded as an off-shoot of British hangovers. But the poet finds English felicitous, fluent and fiery as the medium of expression. It is quite capable to vent his vibrating thoughts and pulsating emotions. It is never branded as local, regional, insular or parochial, and therefore the poet favors the use of English:

... The choice of
English is, for me,
a marriage of convenience,
a case of ‘Arnold-in-sari’ –
Western in external paraphernalia
‘n’ Eastern in soul. (“My English Poetry”, p. 70)

Some of the poems of Dwivedi are prompted by patriotic feelings and sense of attachment to the Motherland. The poem “A Soldier’s Sacrifice” unfolds the miseries, hardships and dangers faced by the soldiers posted on the borders. Their sacrifices are matchless, and no one can be equal to them as they join the war-front with mirth. They brave snow and wind, high altitude and monsoon and face shortage of oxygen and eatables yet are ever ready in the service of their motherland. The poet is full of gratitude for them and sings this song in their praise:

Sure he rises from his sacrifice
like a phoenix from its ashes,
‘n’ becomes the honour’d soldier
who the doors of Death smashes. (“A Soldier’s Sacrifice”, p. 43)

Quite contrary is the poem “Wah, Swaraj”, in which the poet mocks at the present-day practice of ‘self-rule’ turning into misrule as today “Swaraj offers you freedom of a nation, / ‘n’ goads you to riot, loot” (p. 65). And therefore, we can choose between ‘rule yourself or misrule’. Laws are formed merely for the laymen who are ever squeezed like a lemon and politician-goon nexus is beyond all law. The poet laments at the fate of Swaraj in our country though with a tinge of sarcasm:

Gandhi’s *swaraj* has slipped into a mess, –
this makes us grieve none-the-less. (“Wah, Swaraj!” p.65)

However, the poet is full of praise for his motherland. India is verily a paradise on earth. India abounds in hills and rocks, lakes and rivers. The giant Himalayas are her pride. Many rivers, such as Ganga, Yamuna, Krishna and Kaveri, sanctify the land here. The outstanding beauty of Kashmir valley compels one to feel heaven here. The Bay of Bengal bathes her body and the Indian Ocean washes her feet. However, the poet thinks:

Her immaculate power lies
in her indomitable spirit –
the power of ‘unity in diversity’
that kills the germs of riots ‘n’ rift. (“Paeans for Mother India”, p.67)

There are, then, some poems which the poet does not put in a distinct category. In fact, these poems are the sudden outbursts of poetic passion on the part of the poet. These poems include “Man-Power”, “Restless Souls”, “The Bird Wants to fly”, “Life’s Boat”, “Maintaining Balance” and “My Dream”. In the poem “Man-Power”, the poet distinguishes between man-power of today and the real man-power. According to him, man-power does not lie in machines and tools, or in creating war-like hysteria, tensions, confusions and doubts in the people’s mind, nor in stirring strife and slogans, nor in amassing destructive weapons as bombs, battery and booming cannons. For real man-power, we need universal peace and prosperity, mutual love and trust, war-free society, freedom from arms and ammunition. Therefore, the poet says:

The true man-power lies
in doing constructive work,
breeding fellow-feelings among all,
‘n’ building bridges across the globe. (“Man-Power”, p.40)

In the poem “The Bird Wants to fly”, the poet depicts a bird’s attempt to be free and fly on its open wings in the broad blue sky. The bird wants to reach the zenith of the distant horizon, but the despotic hunter wants to tame it down by putting it in a cage. But its intensity of passion to be freed is so high that the bird will “flap ‘n’ flutter, toss ‘n’ twist, /until it is freed to fly” (p.44). Today’s worst violence and disorder are the theme of the poem “Restless Souls”. The poem delineates those who are victims of some or the other misfortunes in life, such as a doctor who died on the road and a rich engineer who fails at the court in his attempt at reinstatement, consumes sulpha tablets. The poet has seen a lot in this world: daylight murders by goons and gunmen, flouting of land’s law, slaughtering of young calves and bleating goats, thieves and robbers, molesters and rapists who roam in our country fearlessly without being nabbed by law-makers.

The poet’s philosophical speculations about life’s boat are quite vivid in the poem “Life’s Boat”. The boat of life glides gaily on the waters of time, but it often gets stuck up in mounds of sand-dunes or against the rocky lime. Facing difficulties is quite natural in one’s life and yet life must go on:

To float smoothly, great labour

‘n’ skill it entails
at the planks ‘n’ oars. (“Life’s Boat”, p.49)

In “Maintaining Balance”, the poet is quite aware of the contrariness in this world without which the order of the universe is not kept in balance. We are the inhabitants of the world that is preordained by God. The scientific spirit along with the religious one is quite evident in the following lines:

The gravitational forces are found
at the back of geographical balance,
or the dark will consume the light. (“Maintaining Balance”, p. 50)

The poet’s self-contented attitude is witnessed in the poem “My Dream”. The poet’s only desire is to live a full earthly life following the principles of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*. He never aspires for a high class job as a civil servant, a doctor, an engineer or a technocrat or a bureaucrat. The poet has achieved enough in his life and is fully contented:

Thus contented I’ve lived
‘n’ contented I’ll die,
having no desire of that
which is beyond my reach,
no itching for an official hat. (“My Dream”, p. 64)

The *Vedas* define the first three goals of human beings, *i.e.* *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*, while the *Upanishads* declare the supreme goal of human life *i.e.*, *Moksha* (Salvation), which is nothing but the realization of the Supreme. Therefore, the lines reflect the poet’s attitude, as defined in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*.

The last two poems of the volume “Old Man ‘N’ Old Woman” and “Man ‘N’ Machine” are cast in dialogue that adds a dramatic colour to the poems. These poems are quite relevant as far as today’s social set-up and global context are concerned. The first poem expresses the satiety of the old man as a family man who now grows in years yet contented with life and does not feel sad over the weird ways of the world though the old woman of the poem is full of groans and grudges against their daughter-in-law:

To persuade a heady woman like her
is to melt a snow-capped peak
of a mountain with fading fire. (“Old Man ‘N’ Old Woman”, p. 82)

“Man ‘N’ Machine”, another poem in dialogue form depicts machine as a supreme creation by man who himself is the greatest creation of God. While the man creates machine to save his labour and for his merriments, the machine dwarfs his position as its proclaimed sire:

Now I’ve gather’d force
to make man endorse
my ordained, mechanical course. (“Man ‘N’ Machine”, p.84)

It is heartening to note that Dwivedi remains roped in the post-modern era, reasonably interacting with the contemporary milieu, yet tenaciously adhering to his native ethos.

A. N. Dwivedi’s *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

“Humanistic benevolence, patriotic feelings, and experiences of academic life, particularly as a scholar of literature, besides other aspects of personal experience – these are mainly his sources of inspiration. A social realist in theme and technique, he responds and reacts to aspects of city life, especially to the world of the teaching profession, books, career, students, and colleagues.”⁶ However, the worth of Dwivedi’s poetry lies in its overwhelming effects on the mind of the readers. “His poetry creates a sense of flavour (*rasa*) through sound (*dhawani*), and it becomes synonymous with the principles of Indian poetics - “Vakyam rasatmakam Kavyam”. The modern linguistic theory insists on the simplicity of language. Without any ostentation, his language is simple yet suggestive”.⁷

For Dwivedi, poetry is a refined art that requires constant efforts for perfection and an honest commitment to its subtle nuances. To quote him:

Writing poetry is an exiting discipline, which calls for, according to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “best words in the best order”, and for this a lot of rigorous practice is required. W. B. Yeats, a highly philosophical poet, suggests this when he remarks that poets, like women, “must labour to be beautiful,” and Nissim Ezekiel, a well-known Indian English poet of our times, also means the same when he states, “The best poets wait for words” (in his poem “poet, Lover, Birdwatcher”).⁸

He warns the budding practitioners of poetry against laxity or sloppiness in composition. A true poet is free from cheap popularity and propaganda of any sort. He does not sacrifice his authenticity and his characteristic language or style if some people do not approve of it.

The five poetical volumes of Dwivedi have an indigenous and authentic voice in their core. They share some common features as far as Dwivedi’s poetic style is concerned. In his *Syed Amanuddin: His Mind and Art*, Dwivedi states, “A writer’s mind is a strange mechanism, which receives and absorbs impressions from different quarters”.⁹ He expressed a similar view in another book, *T.S. Eliot’s Major Poems: An Indian Interpretation* (1982), that “a poet’s mind is a complex mechanism. It absorbs influences from different quarters and transmutes them into something fresh and strange.”¹⁰ And Dwivedi seems to be following this view in his poetical volumes. They outline very well the variety and complexity of Indian life.

Thus, Dwivedi emerges as a genuine poet who has always been true to his native soil and indigenous culture. He expresses an authentic voice in his poetry. As a poet, he adopts an indirect, oblique and a suggestive method of approach in expressing his emotions and thoughts. He feels proud to sing of his own social milieu, cultural ethos and philosophical heritage. Here it is worth mentioning that Dwivedi’s method of expression, his perception of thought and feeling, follow the norms set by the great modern poet and critic T.S. Eliot. Like Eliot, Dwivedi also believes in the “unification of sensibility” which is the true cause of genuine poetry while the “dissociation of sensibility”¹¹ proves that a good poet can acquire greatness not by expressing his ideas or by putting his personality into his poetry but by the

A. N. Dwivedi’s *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

composite nature of his sensibility through which he gives vent to his emotions and thoughts. Finally, by virtue of his metrical and musical excellence, of his use of unmistakable comic sense, sparkling wit and humour, of his favourite mode of irony and satire, Dwivedi shows his impressive appearance on the literary horizon, but even this appearance has secured a prestigious place for him in contemporary Indian English poetry. Moreover, the use of allusive technique in his poems has enabled him to adopt an indirect method of writing. In this connection, Dr. R. S. Tiwary accurately writes:

One outstanding attribute of Dr. Dwivedi's Muse is the rich store of allusiveness. References from the classical Indian English Poetry, the Vedic and Non-Vedic philosophies, the holy Bible and the like, which are found scattered through the slim delicate corpus of his poetry and which are illuminated by a holistic approach to life and lucid, transparent communication have contributed a lustre to his creative genius.¹²

Dwivedi is, thus, a poet with modernist set of mind, and his *Wayward Wanderings* amply demonstrates his allusive technique and complex language and style, imbued with a rich fund of thematic resourcefulness.

References

1. Dubey, Bijay Kant. "An Interview with Dr. A.N. Dwivedi", *Poetcrit.* Vol. XIV, No. 1, Jan. 2001, pp. 13-14.
2. Budholia, O.P. "A.N. Dwivedi As A Poet", *Points of View.* Vol. VI, No.2 (Winter 1999), p. 96.
3. Dubey, Bijay Kant. "An Interview with Dr. A.N. Dwivedi", *Poetcrit.* Vol. XIV, No. 1, Jan. 2001, p. 14.
4. Currimbhoy, Asif. "Foreword", *Random Reflections.* Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1994. p. 9.
5. Dwivedi, A. N. *Our Leader* (dated 25th June 1995), "Views and Reviews of A.N. Dwivedi's Poetry", *Fine Frenzy.* Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1998.
6. Bannerjee, Krishna. "New Signatures in Indian English Poetry", *Indian English Literature Since 1950.* (ed.) Charu Sheel Singh. New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2002. p. 192.
7. Budholia, O.P. "A.N. Dwivedi As A Poet", *Points of View,* Vol. VI, No.2 (Winter 1999), p. 99.
8. Dwivedi, A. N. "Poetry in Practice", *Wayward Wanderings.* Delhi: Authorspress, 2012. p. 7.
9. Dwivedi, A. N. *Syed Amanuddin: His Mind and Art.* New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1988. p. 12.
10. Dwivedi, A.N. *T.S. Eliot's Major Poems: An Indian Interpretation.* Salzburg/Austria: Institute for Anglistik and Amerikanistik, 1982. p. 1.

A. N. Dwivedi's *Wayward Wanderings*: A Critical Appraisal

BY

Dr. Pallavi Srivastava

11. Eliot, T. S. *The Metaphysical Poets: Selected Essays*. London: Faber & Faber, 1932. p. 288.
12. Tiwary, R. S. "The Poetry of A.N. Dwivedi", *Recent Indian English Literature*, ed. S.D. Sharma (Karnal: Natraj Publishing House, 1998), pp. 278-79.