

Unfolding Ultimate Truth: A Critical Appraisal of D. C. Chambial's Poetic Oeuvre

Dr. Dilip Bhatt

Associate Professor,
Department of English,
V. D. Kanakia Arts and M. R. Sanghavi Commerce College,
Savarkundla, Gujarat, India

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ABSTRACT

This article lays focus on the Unfolding Ultimate Truth of D. C. Chambial's Poetic Oeuvre.

Key words: *Unfolding Ultimate Truth.*

In the jacket-flap of the *Collected Poems (1979-2004)* Dr. Atma Ram aptly observes about D.C. Chambial's poetry:

"His is the poetry of life with an inherent, incessant urge to unfold the ultimate truth. He builds elements of irony, observation and clear description into an organic whole." D.C. Chambial has long been recognized as a mentor, promoter, and editor of the erudite literary journal *POETCRIT*. He has considerably enriched and influenced contemporary Indian English poetry for more than 20 years. Passing through this veteran verse practitioner's oeuvre, namely, *Collected Poems 1979-2004* (Published in September 2004, by POETCRIT Publications) one would hardly fail to notice his compassionate clinical accuracy, austere concentration, missionary zeal, his true blue concerns, and an idiosyncratic imagination of its own. His artistry lies not in presenting plethora of lexicons or evasive maze of didactic reverberations of the do's and don'ts. His is poetry of robust intellectualism, an accomplished sobriety, poignant urgency, and plausible ideas. His archetypes come from the commitment to the society of which he has been an integral part. His protagonists are

scions of rising investigators, inquisitive miners of neurons, and untimidated belligerent gladiators constantly fighting for a cause. Most of them are always away from home but always worried about home. They are, like Thom Gunn's aggressive rough and tough motor bikers, raggedly and unremittingly battling for their lawful rights. In their mission, they are as steadfast and staunch as Thom Gunn's snail trying to run on the thorns, sleeping on the blades of grass. Knowing, as they have to live their lives among the murky inhabitants of the perfidious politics and chaotic administration they are destined to be perpetual invigilators, never-at-ease common lot, as the one unnamed and epitomized in the latest Hindi movie *A Wednesday* (2008) made by a promising young talent Neeraj Pandey.

The titles of the books of poems previously published and included in the collected version are far more than enough to tell us what they are all about: *Broken Images* (1983), *The Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts* (1984), *Gyrating Hawks and Sinking Roads* (1996) etc. Likewise, there are captions of the poems lapped in these books: denoting chaos, doggedly *aam aadami* helplessness, bullying

perfidy, self-imposed hibernation, nihilism, vandalism, bestiality, and so on and so forth. Look at these captions: Irony of Fate (11)¹, Helpless Victims (12), The Gyrate Hawk (20), Cruel Hour (22), Ocean of Despair (31), Ashes (39), Mirage (42), Bleeding Clouds (44), The Cog (47), The Burning Tree (62), Helpless (62), The Storm (64), Stolid Walls/Quagmire (82), Fire Test (86), Peace Mutilated (95), Yellow Fate (98), Death on Road (109), The Tempest (110), Vultures in Sky (114), The Casualty (121), Wounded Soul (132), A Cry of Heart (136), Bone Debris (137), Death by Fire (141), Stampede (147), Anaemic Sun (148), Jungle of Hyenas (150), A Blind Race (151), Desire for Void (153), Virtue Weeps (154), A Terrible Storm (156), Hopes Belied (164), Vultures and Crows (166), Dust unto Dust (168), Crimson to Crimson (169), and so on. Only by reading of these poems' titles, one may very well anticipate what they would be containing in them. The imagery of these verses spread in 172 pages discloses the reprehensible scenario of the culpable present. It is Common Man's heart-wrenching cry in the wilderness against all inglorious wrongdoings, against all depravity, debauchery, rapaciousness, turpitude, degeneracy, and decadence. The characteristic mood of a typical Chambialian speaker/hero is that of a beseeching witness of moral decadence, a truculent rebel, a belligerent iconoclast, an unimpeachable man-in-arms, persistently urging for our attention at all the dire problems aforementioned. Alternatively, he belongs to a Jatayu clan, whose wings are though half torn apart he fights for humanity's chastity and sanctity. The relentlessness of their pursuit in these cries is too palpable to soften the rough rocks into pebbles, as does a river. However, he is aware that it not only takes a lifetime to do so but several lifetimes. Nevertheless, for the poet the age is brightly

“promising”. Ironically, he is a hopeful that “Bits of reality... give rise to a new set of ideas” (“This Promising Age”, 5). From this eponymic poem onwards throughout the collection, we see Chambial's Mauberley (as in Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*) always in search of a better human life. Chambial's distinctive articulation, as exhibited in his poetry, is grave and dignified. Like Pound's Mauberley or Ginsberg's speaker in “America” or Claude McKay's speaker in “America”, he is always conscious of his social and intellectual common-man status. Like these protagonists, he strives to resuscitate what humanity has lost. Moreover, for that he does whatever he is required to --- purveying for radical reforms, criticizing the politicians, appealing humans for an awakening, delegating heartrending imagery of disillusionment and anguish, voicing against corruption. Shiv K. Kumar, a major contemporary poet and critic, aptly introduces D.C.Chambial in the foreword to *The Promising Age and other Poems*:

He is essentially a poet of the hills -- of valleys, clouds and birds. But he does not limit his vision to mere descriptions of nature, but also charges his verse, with a refreshing moral fervour. He is anguished by the corruption in that has seeped into our lives. However, he does not articulate this disillusionment through abstraction but only through images, metaphors, and similes, which are truly striking.²

In a very succinct prose-like lines, the speaker of the poem “On This Day” cries:

Men and women born as white pearls'
 Innocent as limbs,
 The lust for power
 (political and religious)
 Makes them blood-thirsty;
 Turn into wolves and hyenas.
 Save them! Save their lives! (“Helpless
 Victims”, 13)

He has cognized reprehensible acquisitiveness and other ignominious human traits. Almost clinically, he has also realized that this has stultified inner human development. His covetousness has led him nowhere:

All the hungers and all the greeds

Left here on this land, carry no trace
("Beyond Beautiful", 15)

"End to End" which is the last line of the poem "Words in Commotion" (16) provides the title to the freshest book of poems written by Dr. I. K. Sharma, a fellow-poet, editor, and critic. This poem reminds one of the recurrent motifs of darkness in Mark Strand, a premier Pulitzer Prize winner American poet. Look at the resemblance in the two expressions. Strand's speaker says:

I have a key

So I open the door and walk in

It is dark and I walk in

It is darker and I walk in.³

Whereas Chambial's speaker says:

In the wee hours

When I come out of darkness

I find darkness

More fertile

In darkness. (16)

Chambial's poetic oeuvre displays human predicament at its worst with all its heinous apparatus: corruption, depravity, sham, orthodoxy, emotional blackmailing, avarice, and deterioration of all human values. It is an appeal for communication and dialogue, an urge for awareness and awakening to our own existence, and a kicking slap on the ugly hip of our age-old somnolence. His protagonist is a scion in the genealogy of Mauberley created by Ezra Pound in his eponymous poem wherein the protagonist prefers to die at the outset finding himself discordant with his times. Likewise, Chambial's speaker in "My Death"

hears people opine "free and fair judgment" of his life. The boisterousness of the "Cruel Hour" (22) is unbearable to shoulder ennui or action of the times. Yet he is not so chagrined as to eschew and procrastinate. Therefore, at the end he arrives at some "Resolution" (23): to stir someday something even in "the ear of the dead December" (23). Amidst all estrangement and coldness of the addressees, his stout words would upsurge his boiling blood to spread concrete ideas.

Broken Images (1983) resumes this resolute hero's labyrinthine journey from where it ceased for a while. "The Stones" (27) obviously an image of indifference is applied to peasants having "spades and sickles" constantly at work for some "vain hope" drudging their diurnal strife. In "Volcano" (23), the speaker reminds us of Agastya's never-materialized promise of return which he had given to his disciple Vindhyachal in lieu of making him stoop forever. He had to do thus for retaining life and light on earth. The life force on earth goes on in flux forever. Ironically, the end of life begins: the life-virus is quarantined when the "storm is calm" for a while (27). The eternal paradox of "sun and snow" ("In a Trance", 28) and "A cold ball of fire" ("Submission", 28) is enforced to a balancing "compromising pose". The cold war continues at the cost of some greater causes of life.

A desperate virtuoso of "The Reverberations" (31) and "Ocean of Despair" (31) cries an SOS in futile. There is either none to hear or "...none/ to catch the reverberations –the real message" (31). This same resolute speaker who calls himself "steadfast" (33) at the age of sixty prides himself in being so for he finds that nature outside his window has not moved

an inch from its “natural course”(33);then, why should he move from his projects?

In a very plaintive mood he succinctly confesses both to himself and the deaf world in “A Captive” (35):

How desperately
I’ve tried and tried
to break the chakravayuha
of cobweb
around my transparent self

In this life-long journey of strife he has found his pure self shackled by words and fantasies. The self struggles to be free from its doppelganger to achieve an aura of ultimate “soulful effulgence” (35). For him, the kingdom of heaven is not a place, but a state of mind, as per Rilke’s dictum: “The only journey is the journey within.” It is essential that the mind and body become motionless to this bliss. The otherness of self is recurrent theme in these poems. The same adjuring persona exhorts in “Manacles” (36) not to imprison him in any watertight compartment of the definition of happiness. His is a search for “maiden bliss” (36) devoid of “cares and concerns.” But it seems, his doppelganger wouldn’t allow him to do so. Hence he is again detained from by that shrewd self in “Waiting” (38) who is unheeding at the persona’s “Agony anchored deep in heart” (38).

The 1984 book of poems *The Cargoes of the Bleeding Hearts and other Poems* opens with the eponymic piece wherein the déjà vu dilemma of life-in-death is ruefully reiterated. Though decrepit by age the persona is steadfast at accomplishing the remaining tasks of life. Blood is the prime image / symbol in majority of these poems. The defending champion finds himself atop the perilous wasteland of Kurukshetra where “Bleeding

clouds” atrociously fall on “Marmorial Hearts” (45). The Ulysses-like desperate virtuoso is held in perennial waiting-for-Godot predicament. He looks ahead, walks forward in the inward journey of the sentiments of “unfathomed seas.” Always in jeopardy it is full of all the necessary evils you have ever thought of or heard of.

“The Tireless Wheel” (45) of time moves on teaching humans “respect, tolerance, and love” since Adam’s days. Ironically, it also teaches that to live “successfully” one must learn to wear “Masks” (58). The racer must keep up appearances to beguile onlookers and others in the race and then thwart by maneuvers his rival to establish himself victorious (58). “To My Soul” (61) and “Awaiting Moments” (64) are some of the frequent invocations to his self to arise, awake, and go for new searches in life. Hence the temperament of the 1986 book of the poems *Perceptions* readies its speaker and us to march as a citizen of the world forgetting religions, castes, and colours.

The most powerful poem in *Perceptions* is “Rising Images” (87) wherein each line is made of an image expressed in barely a word or two: Vultures, / crows, ... / Dogs, / Blood and carcass / and the last line: Water, water, water... At once, we are reminded of Coleridge’s nonplussed and impaired Ancient Mariner with his parched throat, or T.S. Eliot’s persona in “Preludes” who says “I am moved by fancies that are curled / Around these images, and cling: / The notion of some infinitely gentle / Infinitely suffering thing.”⁴

Before the Petals Unfold (2002) the last bouquet of poems in the *Collected Poems* unfolds the poet’s new climate of opinion though with a continuity of the temperament in the earlier poems. The speaker of these poems is still anguished at all wrongdoings but he has come to terms with his self. It

subtly suggests condensed metaphors of the eternal tension between life and death. Life is book of enigma the pages of which go on unfolding until the speaker is welcomed by the “pink ...cheerful doorman” (140). But, he has hardly cared for “Cleopatras” (“Boughs of Heaven”, 140) when he gleefully roams in heaven after his end on the earth. He has contentedly drunk the fountains of beauty when on earth. These pinker visions protracted by the darker ones in the next few poems (“Down the Drain”, 141; “Death by Fire”, 141; “Life and Death”, 142). The speaker is endlessly waiting for the rising of “myriad morn” among hooting owls, gyrating vultures, and digging wolves (141). In the fond memory of the burnt lot of people at Dabwali in Haryana, who were celebrating the DAV Centenary Celebrations in January 1995 the poet is reminded of the Fire at Baripada in Orissa in 1997 and the one at Mina, Mecca on April 15, 1997 where innumerable devotees were burnt to death. Likewise the poet is moved by the “Torture, rape, and guns, / bullets, fire and smoke, air-raids, / sirens’ deafening sounds” in “Yugoslavia” (159). In these poems the poet soulfully performs the duties of his humanitarian concerns.

D.C Chambial’s images are all set against the backdrop of all contemporary degeneration. They are condensed, concise, concrete, and corroborative to his experiences. They are

irreproachably readable for a common man by a common man and of a common man who is lost in the dense jungle of worldliness and trying to synchronize his entity and identity with those above and under him. He is as his speaker persona is: a non-compliant combatant always fighting for a cause of others and very rarely, his own. It is hoped that D.C.Chambial’s poetic predisposition which is comprised of many classicist artistic inclinations as expressed in his *Collected Poems (1979-2004)* will definitely stamp his superior place in the contemporary Indian poetic arena.

Referenes

1. Chambial, D.C. *Collected Poems (1979-2004)*. Maranda: POETCRIT Publications. 2004.
2. Kumar, Shiv K. “Foreword” to “This Promising Age & other Poems (2004)”, *Collected Poems (1979-2004)*. 2004. 4.
3. Strand, Mark. “Seven Poems”, *Selected Poems*. New York: Athenaeum. 1980. 65.
4. Eliot, T.S. “Preludes”, *A Choice of Poets* (Ed. R.P.Hewett). London: George G. Harrap & Co. 1968. 218.

Note: Numbers within brackets throughout the article refer to numbers in this book; that is, *Collected Poems (1979-2004)*. Wherever necessary, captions with numbers are shown to avoid ambiguity of different poems on the same pages.

It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently.

~ Warren Buffett