

Indian philosophy and Octavio Paz's Poetry**Sudershan Kumar**
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Haryana**Abstract:**

He loved India for what it is - with its uniqueness, variety and also imperfections. Consequently his reminiscences of India's years and his revaluation of Indian heritage stand out as a masterpiece of rare caliber. India exercised an overwhelming influence in his evolution as a poet. A collection of Paz's poems (written between 1957 and 1987) was published in 1990. In 1990, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. From the foregoing survey of Paz's life in relation to India, it is evident that he had sufficient exposure to India - its geography, climate, politics, public figures, artists, music etc. His first hand experience of India coupled with close study of Indian intellectual heritage enabled him to write his mature, mellow work - *In Light of India*. His sympathetic heart enabled him to understand the vast reality of India and his empathy enabled him to live and feel in India as only a few foreigners could. In India, Paz completed several works, including *El mono gramático* (The Monkey Grammarian) and *Ladera este* (Eastern Slope). While in India, he met numerous writers of a group known as the Generation. Eliot Weinberger points to this fact in the following comment: "Again and again, Paz's poems return to two gardens: the one from his childhood in Mixcoac and the one he shared with Marie-Jose in India". It is evident from 'Mutra', the first poem (1952) which he wrote to defend himself 'against the metaphysical temptation of India' to 'A Tale of Two Gardens', the last poem in *East Slope*. He assimilated the poetry of Dharmakirti and studied the philosophy of Nagarjuna; once he even thought of becoming a Buddhist.

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Influence of India in the personal and creative evolution of Paz:

It is all too clear that what Paz had for India was not the attitude of a tourist. On the contrary, toward India he had the deep love of a pilgrim in search of truth and clarity. While in India, Paz met and married Marie Jose - "after being born, the most important thing that has happened to me. He remained in India for well over six years and had travelled through the length and breadth of the vast subcontinent; also he studied Indian art, philosophy, music and history. The last book by Paz is about India. In Light of India, which bears ample testimony to his love for and knowledge of India, embodies the mature, mellow wisdom of Paz on life, culture, various issues in society, art, music, philosophy, purpose of existence, nature of time and meaning of life. Quite effortlessly and with positive ease and naturalness, Paz delves into the depths of any aspect of Indian reality and analyses Indian ethos with a clarity and mastery that stemmed from his close familiarity with India that lasted for over six years. The foregoing examination of the relationship between the poet and India clearly points to the abiding influence of India in the personal and creative evolution of Paz. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that on this Mexican writer, India exercised an influence that was equal to, if not greater than, that of his motherland. In world literature, a foreign country influencing the evolution of a master artist as profound as was in the case of Paz is quite uncommon. India has been an overwhelming presence in Octavio Paz's creative life, but he never became a blind admirer or unthinking initiator of Indian ways and thought. Octavio Paz is one of the most acclaimed writers of twentieth century who is intimately connected to the culture, civilization, philosophy, art and ethos of India. Paz had been living in Paris as a minor official in Mexican embassy when he was transferred to India as part of Mexican government's plan to open a mission in New Delhi. Always a seeker deeply interested in Buddhism with its emphasis on middle path ('Madhya Marg'), Paz retained admirable balance and equilibrium in his approach to 'the immense reality of India' and avoided both extremes of aversion and admiration. In 1951, he was appointed under secretary to the newly established Mexican embassy in India. On board the ship, Paz had as fellow passengers, among others, Auden's brother, Santha Rama Rau, a well known writer and Faubian Bowers, her husband and a group of Polish nuns. In his trip to India, he had with him a little anthology of poems by Kabir, a print of the goddess Durga and a copy of the Bhagavad Gita which he described as his "spiritual guide to the world of India". Paz travelled to India on board the Polish ship 'Batory' and "arrived in Bombay on an early morning in November 1951.

Paz was captivated by the Indian experience and travelled:

He hired a taxi, because the poet in Paz was captivated by the Indian experience and travelled through the city and neighborhoods. He wandered toward Malabar Hill and reached the seashore and 'sat at the foot of a huge tree, a statue of the night' and tried to review the impression: "dizziness, horror, stupor, astonishment, joy, enthusiasm, nausea, inescapable attraction". Paz views the influence of the first Indian experience on him:

"What had attracted me? It was difficult to say: Human kind cannot bear much reality. Yes, the excess of reality had become an unreality, but that unreality had turned suddenly into a balcony from which I peered into - what? Into that which is beyond and still has no name . . . ?"

Paz visited the island of Elephanta and was struck by "corporeal beauty, turned into living stone". Overwhelmed by his first Indian experience, he tried to analyse the quality that charmed him. Paz experiences a unique vision of life that fuses together phenomenal and transcendental realms of existence as is evident from the following words:

Shiva smiles from a beyond where time is a small drifting cloud, and that cloud soon turns into a stream of water, and the stream into a slender maiden who is spring itself: the goddess Parvati. The divine couple are the image of a happiness that our mortal condition grants us only for a moment before it vanishes.

Paz hits the bulls' eye when he describes the idols of gods on the Elephanta as "corporeal beauty turned into living stone and also as "sexual incarnations of the most abstract thought, gods that were simultaneously intellectual and carnal, terrible and peaceful". Thus Paz gets an insight into the essential nature of divinity and mortality.

Paz attempted to answer the question:

His Indian experience parallels his experience in Mexico. The fact of being a Mexican helps him to understand India. "From the beginning, everything that I saw inadvertently evoked forgotten images of Mexico. The strangeness of India brought to mind that other strangeness: my own country." Paz points out the importance of the treatise *In Light of India* in his oeuvre which will, in turn, point to its importance for an Indian. Paz had written *The Labyrinth of Solitude* as an attempt to answer the question that his country asked him. Similarly, now India was asking another question, 'one that was far more vast and enigmatic'. Paz attempted to answer the question by writing 'In Light of India'.

Paz wrote poem in honour of the monument:

New Delhi, According to him, a planned city that was constructed in a few years by the architect Sir Edwin Luytens, represents "a picturesque Fusion of classical European and Indian architectures". As always, in his account of place and monuments also, Paz emerges as an astute observer. The Red Fort impresses Paz "as powerful as a fort and as graceful as a palace". Qutab Minar is "a prodigious stone

tree", "a tower that combines the height, solidity and slender elegance". The mausoleum of Emperor Humayun is 'serene' where "everything has been transformed into a construction made of cubes, hemispheres, and arcs: the universe reduced to its essential geometric elements". Paz sounds lyrical when he says that "the mausoleum is like a poem made not of words but of trees, pools, avenues of sand and flowers". Later Paz wrote a poem in honour of the monument, in which he viewed the mausoleum as,

high flame of rose
formed out of stone and air and birds
time in repose above the water
Silence's architecture.

Observing the mausoleum as a construction made of cubes, hemispheres and arcs, Paz points out the difference between Islamic architecture and Hindu architecture: "In Islamic architecture nothing is sculptural – exactly the opposite of the Hindu".

According to Paz, Indians are hospitable and 'cultivate the forgotten religion of friendship':

Paz's first session in India lasted for less than a year; he made a few friends in India. According to him, Indians are hospitable and 'cultivate the forgotten religion of friendship'. Paz attended the concerts of music and dance which initiated him to the legends, myths and poetry of India. Also they gave him a profound understanding of the sculpture which is "the key to Hindu architecture". In a memorable sentence, Paz reveals the connection between architecture and dance: "One could say that Hindu architecture is sculpted dance". His Indian experience, which began as ambivalent and later transformed into inescapable attraction, came to an end when he was transferred to Tokyo.

His experience was not limited to India, but included the vast Indian subcontinent:

Paz returned to India in 1962, as the Mexican ambassador and remained in that position till 1968. It was a rich and delightful experience: he could read; he wrote books of poetry and prose and cultivated friendship with a few friends who shared the aesthetic, ethical and intellectual affinities. He visited many places including 'the venerable ruins of Taxila'. In Peshawar, Paz had his first experience of the Pathans and also met nomadic groups such as the Khoji and the Uzbeks. He says: "Peshawar was an important city in the history of Buddhism". Paz observed many stupas and architectural remains in Peshawar and saw the art of the Kafirs, an Indo-European people, in the museum. Nothing escaped his attention. His experience was not limited to India, but included the vast Indian subcontinent; his Indian experience was not confined to books and scholarship. On the contrary, Paz traversed the entire subcontinent and saw and experienced the vast reality of India with a poet's heart and a scientist's mind.

About his education in India, Paz wrote: "It has been a sentimental, artistic, and spiritual education:

About his education in India, Paz says, 'it has marked me deeply'. Commenting on the nature of that education and its impact in his personal and creative life, Paz wrote: "It has been a sentimental, artistic, and spiritual education. Its influence can be seen in my poems, my prose writings and my life itself?" His

experience spilled over to Southern India also as is evident from his numerous allusions to Madras, Mahabalipuram, Madurai, Tanjore, and Chidambaram in his works. Paz celebrated many of these places in the poems included in East Slope. Paz points out why he mentions these names. He has been using these names as though they were talismans, But "they are like certificates: a testimony that my education in India lasted for many years and was not confined to books".

Indian ways and philosophy helped Paz, to face the dilemma in life:

Undoubtedly Indian ways and philosophy helped Paz, to face the dilemma in life. In 1963, Paz had been awarded the Knokke le Zoute International Prize for poetry. Consequently Paz was in a dilemma, whether to receive the prize or not. For Paz poetry had been a secret religion, 'celebrated outside the public eye'. "Prizes were public, poems private". Paz told his problem to his friend Raja Rao, the well known novelist who took him to an ashram where he met Mother Ananda Mai. She looked at Paz and smiled and threw an orange at him which he caught. It was a symbolic gesture intended as an answer to Paz's problem which she had learned from Raja Rao. After stating that 'the puppet whom you call Ananda the Mother is your fabrication', she advised Paz to be humble and accept the prize. She continued: "To not accept it is to over value it, to give it an importance that it does not have True disinterest is accepting it with a smile, as you received the orange I threw you What matters is not prizes but the way they are received.

Disinterest is the only thing that matters" The session ended. Paz told Raja Rao that he was happy, not because of the Prize, but for what he had heard. That spiritual session persuaded Paz to accept the prize. It was decisive in his personal life also as is evident from the following encounter and its development. While Paz was on the way to Belgium to receive the prize, he stopped in Paris for a few days and one morning he met Marie Jose. It was chance, or fate or elective affinities; they decided to return to India together. In this context Paz brings out his philosophy of life and love:

"To live is to be condemned, but it is also to make choices; a
determinism and a freedom. In love's encounter, the two
poles entwine into an enigmatic knot; embracing as
couples, we embrace our destiny".

Paz, as Mexican ambassador, saw Nehru whom he found to be always immaculately dressed with a rose in his lapel. Paz mentions how Nehru unexpectedly turned up at the opening of the exhibition of a group of young iconoclasts headed by the painter J. Swaminathan. In his capacity as the Mexican ambassador, Paz came into contact with many national leaders and statesmen including V.K. Krishna Menon and Indira Gandhi. According to Paz, Indira Gandhi believed that she "belonged to a predestined lineage" - the Brahmans of Kashmir - which 'clouded her realism and her sharp political understanding'.

Indian reality with an insider's awareness and information:

Paz's personal contact with national figures in politics which helped him to understand and evaluate contemporary Indian reality with an insider's awareness and information. Paz resigned his post as a sign of protest When the Mexican government suppressed the student rebellion resulting in the death of many

in October 2nd, 1968. Thus his official relationship with India came to an end. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, invited Paz and his wife to a dinner at her house as parting ceremony, in which Rajiv and his wife Sonia attended along with a few mutual friends. A farewell tribute was organized by writers and artists at the International House. In connection with Paz's resignation and departure from India, "there were articles and interviews in the press". This shows Paz's stature as a writer and the reputation he enjoyed in India even in those days. Parting from India was quite poignant for Paz as is evident from his thoughts at the moment of departure. "We thought that we were seeing all this for the last time. It was as though we were leaving ourselves".

The phenomenal life of the mortals and the transcendental existence of the immortals:

During the night before the day of departure, Paz wrote a poem, partly as an invocation and partly as a way of saying good-bye. Addressing the divine couple Shiva and Parvathi, Paz ponders over the phenomenal life of the mortals and the transcendental existence of the immortals. Paz views the divine couple as 'images of the divinity of man'. Towards the end of the poem, the poet celebrates the life of the mortals which is phenomenal and so finite.

Shiva and Parvati

the women who is my wife
and I
ask you for nothing, nothing
that comes from the other world:
Only
the light on the sea,
the barefoot light on the sleeping land and sea.

His last visit to India:

Paz got an opportunity to visit India In 1984, at Indira Gandhi's request; he had been invited to Delhi to give the annual lecture in honour of Jawaharlal Nehru. Before the day fixed for it, Indira had been assassinated. Consequently the lecture was suspended but the officials insisted that they come for two weeks visit. In 1985, Rajiv Gandhi renewed the invitation and Paz came to India which was his last visit. After eight years, Paz read the text of 1985 lecture and decided to recast it entirely: Thus originated In Light of India. According to Paz, it attempts to answer the question: "How does a Mexican writer, at the end of the twentieth century, view the immense reality of India?" Guillermo Sheridan, who was named by Paz as director of the Octavio Paz Foundation in 1998, published a book, *Poeta con paisaje* (2004) with several biographical essays about the poet's life up to 1968, when he died. He died of cancer on April 19, 1998, in Mexico City.

In Light of India:

A prolific author and poet, Paz published scores of works during his lifetime, many of which have been translated into other languages. His poetry has been translated into English by Samuel Beckett, Charles

Tomlinson, Elizabeth Bishop, Muriel Rukeyser and Mark Strand. His early poetry was influenced by Marxism, surrealism, and existentialism, as well as religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. His poem, "Piedra de sol" ("Sunstone"), written in 1957, was praised as a "magnificent" example of surrealist poetry in the presentation speech of his Nobel Prize. His later poetry dealt with love and eroticism, the nature of time, and Buddhism. He also wrote poetry about his other passion, modern painting, dedicating poems to the work of Balthus, Joan Miró, Marcel Duchamp, Antoni Tàpies, Robert Rauschenberg, and Roberto Matta. According to Paz, *In Light of India* can be regarded as "a long footnote to the poems of East Slope. *In Light of India* deals with the intellectual context of East Slope. East Slope, a collection of poems, embodies what Paz 'lived and felt' during his 1962-1968 periods in India. In those poems, Paz tried to 'preserve certain exceptional moments' in his life. *In Light of India*, which bears ample testimony to his love for and knowledge of India, embodies the mature, mellow wisdom of Paz on life, culture, various issues in society, art, music, philosophy, purpose of existence, nature of time and meaning of life.

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