

Review

Title of the book: Anger in Contemporary Indian English Poetry
Author : Dr. Vijay Vishal
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Review by Prof. T.V.Reddy

The critical book *Anger in Contemporary Indian English Poetry* is a scholarly work by a remarkable poet and critic Dr. Vijay Vishal who has a total picture of Indian poetry in English from its beginnings to the contemporary period including the recent trends and development. With firm command on English poetry and criticism he is competent to undertake the arduous task of critical work and has remarkably dealt with the challenging topic which forms the title of this book. In fact, he has explored a relatively less attempted field of contemporary Indian English poetry i.e. the theme of anger. In the Preface to the book he tries to explain the contextual meaning of the seminal term 'anger' which has been conceptualized as a running stream or force that marches till the close of the book: "Far from being subjective, a poet's anger is righteous in nature and corrective in purpose."

The book is rightly divided into six chapters with the first chapter titled as Introduction that introduces the general objective of the critical work which is a modest attempt to identify the subject of anger in the poetry of post-1947 Indian English poets from Nissim Ezekiel onwards. His main objective is to make a detailed study of anger in three select poets, namely R.K.Singh, I.K.Sharma and P.Raja.

Chapter II, titled Survey of Anger in Contemporary IEP devotes 62 pages in a general study of the aspect of anger in the poetry of most of the contemporary poets in Indian English beginning with Nissim Ezekiel, P.Lal, Shiv K. Kumar and A.K.Ramanujam and ending with women poets Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza, Margaret Chatterjee, Chetna Vaishnavi and others. He starts with Nissim Ezekiel's *A Time to Change* (1952) where Ezekiel expresses his anger at the appalling poverty of the people in the dehumanized metropolis:

Barbaric city sick with slums
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
child-like masses, many tongued

Whose wages are in words and crumbs. ('A Morning Walk')

Though the bulk of the poetry of P.Lal who had promoted the cause of poetry deals with love and Nature and man. Some of his poems present his anger at the poverty, disease and apathy of the people and this dehumanization is the focus of the poem 'Calcutta': 'Pray for them Mother/Pray they walk straight.../ In the valley of our sorrow/In the city of Calcutta.'

Shiv K.Kumar's anger, as Dr. Vijay Vishal says, "melts into its numerous variables while probing the realities of everyday existence" (p.41). and He cites the poem 'Epitaph on an Indian Politician' which "is a daring portrait of a corrupt politician who combines hypocrisy, falsehood, immorality, double speak and deceit": 'Vasectomized of all genital urges for love and beauty/ He often crossed floors,/As his wife leaped across beds.' Then he comes to A .K.Ramanujan's familiar poem 'A River' which "shows his agonized concern for the affected poor men, women and even animals" (p.46). Jayanta Mahapatra is pained at the general poverty and his poem 'Hunger' presents the grinding poverty of a poor fisherman father who tries to hook a customer for his daughter who is just fifteen:

'I heard him say:/ my daughter, she's just turned fifteen/ Feel her, I 'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.../she opened her wormy legs wide./ I felt the hunger ere/ The other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.' Then he talks about the element of anger in the poems of R.Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel Pritish Nandy, Keshav Malik, Adil Jussawala, Arun Kolatkar and Keki.N.Daruwalla, Later he comes to the contemporary poets such as O.P.Bhatnagar, I.H.Rizvi, Syed Amanuddin, Syed Ammeruddin, R.R.Menon, P.C.K.Prem, D.C.Chambial, Baldev Mirza, Vijay Vishal, Hazara Singh, Krishna Srinivas, K.V.Venkataramana, K.B.Rai, D.H.Kabadi P.K.Joy, Pronab Kumar Mazumdar, T.V.Reddy, H.S.Bhatia and others. D.C.Chambial, he says, "is another distinct name who raises an anger-laden voice against hypocrisy, poverty, exploitation, injustice and selfishness and it is proved in poems such as 'Man is Lost' (*Gyrating Hawks & Sinking Roads*): 'The perfidious new lords/ Find it their sacred duty to suck/Like vampires each drop of her blood' (p.73). Now let us see the pattern of anger in the poetry of the present writer, Dr.Vishal, a poet of repute and see how he describes the present day politician in the poem 'Portrait of a Politician' :(book *Speechless Messages*, p.52): 'A snake/Who stings and bites /Those/ Who manages milk for it.'

Then the writer comes to T.V.Reddy whose poetry is expressive of his righteous indignation and he aims his satire at the social evils such as hypocrisy and corruption. His poem 'Swamiji' is shown as an example where he portrays a hypocritical Swamiji enjoying enormous respect in the society (p.85):

They all praised his spiritualism and simplicity
For he ate only apples, cashew nuts and dried grapes,
Drank pure milk and juice brought by fair sex
His Holiness left, leaving his fragrance behind. (*When Grief Rains*)

He then turns to H.S.Bhatia and says he “is a poet of social reality” (p.85) and quotes as an instance the lines of a poem ‘Girl Child from *The Necklace Wild* revealing his anger at the animal sacrifice: ‘A pitiable goat/at the altar/to be butchered/amidst much merry-making/ and rejoicing.’

Now the writer turns to women poets and starts with Kamala Das who expresses her frustration in love, “feels cheated in the game of love. Frustrated, she turns an adultress in search of self-fulfilment in sex. She experienced with many” (p.88-89):

Then lost count, for always in my arms
was a substitute for a substitute
Oh, what is the use, explaining
it was a nameless, faceless crowd. (*The Descendants*, p.17)

Thereafter, Dr.Vishal, discusses the theme of anger as seen in the lines of Mamta Kalia, Eunice DeSowza, Anna Sujatha, Gauri Pant, Margaret Chatterjee, Vimala Rao and others.

Chapter III is exclusively on Dr. R.K.Singh, a well-known contemporary poet, critic, reviewer and editor. Singh expresses, “A good poem makes me smile or feel happy. It must not be long – the shorter the better – and have a pattern, rhythm and meaning.” To him poetry is “Self-awareness and a means of inner liberation. ... To me it is also a means to defy the disgusting socio-political world outside”(p.102). He further explains: “Sex is something positive in the structure and texture of my poetry..... I doubt a serious analysis of my poems will ever prove that I am obscene...” (p.103). More often his poems are untitled and they are simply numbered. The poem with number 66 beginning with the line “Ganges condescended / to flow down from Shiva’s matted hair / with white laughter / from Himalayas to Kashi / it failed to quench / the earthly thirst / or cleanse the human heart / their sinful mind / the goddess couldn’t change...” (p.119) is a clear instance of the poet’s social concern and his concern for the suffering humanity. His anger at the atrocities such as raping is painted here in no.15: ‘a crow / pricking sperms from his mouth / to feed anger/of an unwed mother / gang raped in the temple / dumb deity couldn’t father / the broken lives’(p.127).

The writer says, “ ‘Anger’ crystallises into anguish when Singh spells out utter helplessness and hopelessness when he sketches dirty and shabby surroundings in terms of poor dwelling places and pot-holed roads” (p.173): “Widening cracks, leaking roofs / choked drains in the courtyard / waterlogging and myriad / such small things make rains a pain / there is no romance in rainbow...” (‘Revelations’, New and Selected Poems Tanka and Haiku, p.22).

Chapter IV is wholly devoted to the study of anger in I.K.Sharma’s poetry. It is no exaggeration to say that I.K.Sharma, judged by any standard, is an eminent poet of the modern period. Indeed in the words of Dr. T.V.Reddy “The emergence of I.K.Sharma as a poet marks the emergence of real poetry as opposed to the shallow prosaic lines and vast output as statements liberally produced by supposedly established poets from their workshops (p.184)”. I.K.Sharma’s poem ‘Gandhi at Cross-roads’ is an impressive example of the nature of satire employed by the

poet who succeeds in giving vent to his anger at the corrupt values both at the social and political levels. What is really remarkable is that poet has the boldness during the Emergency period (1975-77). to describe our political leaders as asses:

To the Gandhi standing on the pedestal I said:
To me you look a Traffic Inspector
who has been made permanent
on a government post ...
These asses are gazing the green grass
right under your vary nose,
what's the use of your lathi then?

His relatively longer poem 'A Shadow on Your Face' (MLB, pp.33-42) in the words of Dr.Vishal, "presents a photographic description of the sad and sordid facts of man's history ailing with a graphic description of disappointing realities of today's world", and "An accumulated 'anger' of the poet finds its utterance, first in his own person and later, Vidur. The poet's persona subsequently presents a comprehensive picture of today's over-all degradation (p. 230)".

Chapter V deals with the theme of anger in the poetry of Dr.P.Raja, a poet from Pondicherry. Raja is a poet, short story writer, essayist, biographer and translator. As Dr. Vishal says, "Even a common subject gains an uncommon significance in his hands... His themes are as wide and varied as life. His social and human concerns are vital and deep" (p.243). His anger at the senseless rituals in temples is clearly articulated in the lines where he finds fault with people pouring cauldrons of milk and ghee on stone idols while little babies are starved for want of milk: "The wee ones with empty stomachs / Crying for a cup of milk, when cauldrons of it / Wash the dirt off the sacred stones. / A vast gulf in priorities!" (p.251).

Chapter VI is Conclusion where Dr.Vishal makes an impressive summation of the content of the preceding chapters. He has rightly identified the fertile areas rich in the aspect of anger and with wonted skill evaluated the theme of anger embedded in the poetry of the poets judiciously dealt with here. Thus the theme of anger which remains still a less explored field has been deeply studied extensively by the critic Dr. Vishal and he has done full justice to the subject by extending the wider possibilities of understanding the thematic pattern with his profound scholarship.