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# **Writing Today**

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## Editor's Note

*WritingToday* is an International bi-annual journal published at Aurangabad, (MS) India. It is a peer-reviewed refereed and registered journal supported by rigorous processes of criterion-referenced article ranking and qualitative commentary ensuring that only intellectual work of the substance and significance is published. *WritingToday* aims at providing a comprehensive approximation of literature produced in English today. The journal is committed to register the responses of the young and the senior scholars who approach a text as a discourse across cultures, literatures, themes, concepts and genres. It focuses on the excellences of literature and language as viewed in different critical contexts, promoting a fresh and insightful appreciation of the text. The basic targets of the journal is to publish a rich collection of selected articles on issues that deal with studies in Indian writing in English, diasporic, colonial and post colonial literature, critical theory and translations. Articles may include studies that address multidimensional impact of the recent intellectual and critical discourses. *WritingToday* invites scholars and writers to submit works on critical writings, literary and linguistic studies, creative writings that include works of prose, drama, fiction and poetry, reviews and review articles on books of academic, literary, cultural and theoretical orientation. The *Journal* embraces internationalism and indicates an attempt to engage in the concerns of teachers, researchers and scholars around the world with the critical or creative contextualization of the issues that signify the intellectual endeavour within and outside academia.

Recent occurrences and the historico-political, ideological and other allied disciplines that have a direct impact on the generic, linguistic or contextual transformations are especially taken care of. This issue, therefore, has articles on sociological nuances, minority discourses, women's voices both within and outside the country. Translation as we know, remains an authentic cultural transaction. The Journal, therefore, intends, as a regular feature, to publish translations from indigenous Indian and other languages so as to have a holistic view of the creative and critical directions. English translations and some noted reviews of a widely recognized Canadian Urdu poet, painter and musician, Parvin Shere, are noticeably placed in this issue.

The editorial board believes in authorial freedom; readers' responses will be published to promote a healthy and productive debate. *Writing Today* has also planned to initiate debates and provide platform for discussions on the current issues that keep coming up and reverberate the intellectual, cultural and academic institutions. We humbly seek suggestions of the readers in this regard.

**Intekhab Hameed Khan**

Editor



## **Parvin Shere**

*A poet, painter and musician, Parvin Shere is internationally recognized for a variety of reasons. She is a unique example in Urdu literature who can handle pen, brush and strings with equal control and dexterity. Parvin basically writes in Urdu but her entire body of work is also available in reliable English translation. Her unique style, mellifluous diction, balanced femininity and highly sensitized perceptions have won a place for Parvin that is distinctly her own in the realms of Urdu poetry. Her poetry has drawn attention of the best of critics and creative writers in Urdu and English from the Sub-continent. A fairly large number of laudable critical reviews, special issues of journals and news papers and a voluminous critical anthology *Parvin Shere : A Poet of All Times* (*Parvin Shere: Ahde Natmam ki Shayera*) have appeared across the countries. Parvin has lived in Canada for more than four decades now and therefore enjoys a vintage position in synthesizing East and the West in terms of trans-continental migrations, cultural transformations and value crises. Her paintings have been exhibited in the US, UK, France, and various other countries. A recipient of several awards, Parvin was also honoured as one of the five nominees for the prestigious "Woman of Distinction Award" for her contribution to Art, Culture and Heritage" in Winnipeg, Canada. Born in a highly educated family (in Bihar, UP, India) Parvin completed her education in painting at the University of Manitoba, Canada. She lives at Winnipeg, Canada, with her husband, Warish Shere, a Professor of Mathematics. She works for the Government of Manitoba, Canada at Film Classification. Recently she has visited Peru (South America), South Africa, China and Morocco and is busy writing a Travelogue. Her two collections of poems and Paintings, *Fragments* (*Kirchiyan*) and *Raindrops on a Parched Land* (*Nihale Dil per Sahab Jaise*) have been published in fascinating coffee table book form. The essays and English translations of her poems are from these two anthologies. Seven of the English translations (even the original Urdu poems) are fresh and unpublished. We record our thanks to her.*

**Intekhab Hameed Khan**

# Parvin Shere : A Painter Poet

**Satyapal Anand**

There is no precedent in Urdu to what Parvin Shere has done. She has penned a large number on a single theme mother child consanguinity. Having no prior model in Urdu before her doesn't mean that she has strayed into byways of dark and dismal personal feelings at the demise of her own mother. Indeed, she universalizes the theme as would be seen when we discuss her paintings and poems in detail. It also doesn't mean that in breaking new ground she has not kept to the norms of Urdu poetry. She has kept to the age-old rules of prosody in so much as all her poems can be put to the very hard discipline of Urdu urooz and they would come out unscathed when taqteeh is done.

Her poems, written more as an immediate first reaction to the passing away of her mother, are well-formed and originally unified chunks of a single thought. It is as if she is asking herself, both in the medium of poetry and paint; "How will I live without my mother's tender and loving presence?"

To know the finesse of her art, one might take a few examples from the art gallery of about 50 paintings in the book.

1. The offspring is left alone in a tangled forest (Urdu title: Jungle mein be aman, Helpless in Jungle) the painting showing a forest of human beings with the girl child in the corner, alone and abandoned. In English translation the opening lines of this poem, without let or hindrance, addresses the late mother in these words: since the moment you left me alone in this jungle, I am always scared and fearful.
2. The spiritual presence of the mother is graphically presented through the age old mother-child theme, (a well known motif of world painting) the child's head resting in the mother's lap (Urdu title: Magar ho tum: Still you are there), and the mother's hand shows shriveled, old and seer, fondling the child's head at the back. The equivalence of this painting with the short poem under the same title is very apt.

The opening lines are;

My head rests in your lap  
My eyes are sunk in the enlivening,  
soul-inspiring dream of protective safety

Your fingers are still busy in straightening out my disheveled hair.

3. (Urdu title; Shams-O-Qamar: The Sun and the Moon) is a painting with a large hilly tract. The protagonist herself is sitting forlornly a little distance from a grave stone. This painting shows desolate loneliness of barren nature as the objective correlative of the forsaken destitution and lonesomeness of (the middle valley in which the tomb stone is the only spatial object protruding out), and the unconscious anonymity shown as the darkest shade below. The female figure is just a silhouette with despondency writ large in her body frame, the elbow resting on the knee and fingers holding her own face.
4. (Urdu title: A Canopy ) that means of a roofed retreat symbolizing a shelter in rain and sunshine. The artist uses the light-and-shade effect to show the same dichotomy as in the previous painting. The window has its drapes partly drawn

and a flood of light is entering through it. The light chute ends midway showing the frontal visage of an aged woman with her hands spread as if in prayer. The beauty of this painting is that the source of the emanating light could be seen both ways-from the window to the female figure or from the female figure to the window.

5. Another painting, (Urdu title: Safaid Parday mein ik Maseeha: The Messiah in Whites) has a female figure draped in white “dhoti”, the typical female dress of eastern UP or Bihar, holding a lantern in her hand going forward step by step. A dimly lit up scene of habitation is far ahead in the distance and the aged female figure seems to be looking forward to the world hereafter. It takes a relatively longer moment to see how she is trying to unclasp her hand from a holding hand, which, it seems, is that of her daughter trying to hold her back. It is a beautiful painting, the essence of theme being the mother-daughter relationship in which the mother has the force to go to her heavenly abode while the daughter would like to hold her back. Safaid, i.e. the white apron is indeed the doctor's as also the world-resigned nun's or raahiba's dress code, and indeed the lamp is showing her the way to hereafter. It seems to me that the real theme of the painting gets a little vague because the last lines of the original Urdu poem add a dimension to it. These are:

White, spotless and shining was the sheet with which  
You had covered all your wounds and you just walked (away from me) on  
uneven paths  
Clad you were in the pain-manifesting head-cover.  
In spite of those killing, heart rending sorrows that you had all along endured  
You were still guarding of your daughter.  
You were indeed a messiah who was both a mother and a father to her.

6. A superb painting with the Urdu title Adhura Unsar: Incomplete uses the technique of “fissured fault” as practiced by some in the early phase of twentieth century surrealists. This painting has a split face with a wide margin in between. One side depicts the bright face of a young woman; the other presents the worn out, tired and faded face of an old woman-the age-old mother-offspring theme now taken a step farther away from a full blooming mother with a baby in her lap, the oft-repeated specimen in world painting of Mary and Jesus concoction. The contrast is fully representational, from hair down to forehead, eyes, cheeks, nose, mouth, and throat-one, a fresh, vital, glowing visage; the other, a sad specimen of tired, faded and sickly physiognomy. The great thing about these two half-faces is their detail; all features have a stark contrast.

However, since the book has double merit, namely poetry and painting, one might see both either as separate art activities or as a conjoined function-a coin with two sides. Both are indeed of equal merit. Paintings with reference to the poems or even without that relevance are by themselves excellent.

One might reason out the why and wherewithal of poems having been written before the paintings and even surmise that the second activity is either a continuum or the end-product of the first-or one might look at them in their isolated text and context, but whichever way one might look at them, both as art forms are exceptionally excellent.

Parvin Shere's poems are known to be free of Ghazal Jingoism and while she cannot shun the cliché-ridden ghazal idiom, her poems are marked by a fresh use of

smile and metaphor which is entirely her own. She has an organically unified method of beginning with an image and then strengthening it by stroke of similar images till almost the end when she gives a bold brush stroke and presents her ‘punch line’. This thematic necessity of ‘saying in unambiguous words’ the main preoccupation of poem is considered necessary by her (as by many other poets) because the untrained mind of the Urdu reader, as of now, expects a clearly worded ‘statement’ rather than a metaphor encompassing it.

Luckily for her, she has found two estimable translators who have rendered some of her poems into English. Both Bakht and Mr. Karamat Ghauri are first-rate translators and they have shown this quality in their exact or near-exact use of equivalent expressions in English. I might succumb to my habit of taking up at least one poem and do a little scanning of this methodology to prove my point. For example, The Sun and the Moon (Urdu; Shams-O-Qamar) has these striking opening lines:

Glowing in cup of the night  
The Wine of the moon  
Spills over to light up the world  
Scared, the snakes of darkness  
Hide themselves.  
Moon, the prince of light-rays  
Sees the magic of his beauty  
And smiles of his pleasure.

If one were to catalogue and classify the image-pattern, one would find an easy access to Parvin Shere’s method. Night – cup: Moonlight = the glowing wine that spills over and lights up the night : Darkness = snake-infested (the word ‘snake’ having a multiplicity of religious, mythological and proverbial meanings as this slimy breed symbolizing evil, loves to hide in darkness) : Moon = the prince of light-rays, happy to see the magic of his beauty and charm, ‘smiles with pleasure’

It is this pattern that continues in the first four stanzas till we reach the penultimate one. There, all of sudden, the metaphorical of the mother-child theme hits the reader with a sudden awakening call.

I was an ordinary piece of stone  
You turned me into the moon  
Ever since you’ve shunned me  
Your moon has become a stone again Lying quietly in a corner  
Wrapped up in the dust of darkness.  
(Translated by Baidar Bakht)

This celebrated method is the hall mark of very few modern nazm-go Urdu poets, Parvin being one of this special cadre or class. Almost all of her poems use this method and it seems that this has become a second habit with her. Another poem titled Stillness (Urdu= sukoot), allegorizes the mortal body of the daughter into the planet earth itself and uses a string of images of body parts and living tissue that have become almost mummified and show no sign of life. The graphic rendering of this state of suspended animation is presented in these lines:

This planet  
Under the mantle of stillness  
Stands glum.  
Its breathing is heavy and irregular,  
As if it’ll stop suddenly

Then comes the depiction, in terms of concept-image combinations, of various body parts and the major senses without which one is just going through a vegetative existence. The eyes, or the absence of the eyesight typifies all of them. There is a “river of pain” that courses through its veins. The panorama of celestial being is portrayed in these lines:

The wind is also sitting  
In a corner  
Quiet, desolate  
Its playmates, the restless stars  
Have forgotten their hide-and-seek games;  
They peep scared from behind the clouds.  
The pale, partial face of the moon  
Is now darkening.

The last stanza, as was expected, sums it all up in just one line, slivered into three run-on lines. This planet

Has become lifeless  
Ever since you have abandoned it.

(Translated by Baidar Bakht)

Yet another poem titled *Gravitational pull* (Urdu = *Kashish-e-Seqal*) also uses the astronomical metaphor of the sun and the planets. The sun preserves and enlivens all planets around it with its gravitational pull. So was the mother who had given life and light to the daughter. But now . . .

This world does not have the pull  
To support me.  
O my mother!  
For how long will I wonder in space?

(Translated by Baidar Bakht)

Unfortunately the generality of Urdu-wallahs, even in this age of modernity and contemporaneity in the Global Village context, shrug off this kind of beautiful image pattern as a “graft from the West on the fragile plant of Urdu poetry”. However, Parvin Shere and a few others of the younger generation in the contemporary scenario in Urdu seem to have now a sure foothold in the native soil which still largely continues to grow the brush of classical ghazal which, sadly enough has been prevalent in the last two centuries.

I hope this book of poems, on a single extended theme, with such a meritorious way of handling it without repetitive similarity, will be well-received by those in the Urdu world who understand and appreciate the modern poetic idiom and the art of painting.

# Shadows and Light

**Kevin Hill**

Parvin Shere maintains a delicate balance. Her paintings reveal two sides of the complex and perplexing world. She sees one side a peaceful, tranquil world of light, shadow and natural beauty; a world where children float on canoes and walk woodland paths. The other side is another and darker world one of violence, poverty and oppression. Capturing and painting the two has been the challenge for this Winnipeg painter and writer. She now has a long list of solo exhibitions behind her including shows at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Main / Access Gallery, The Piano Nobile Gallery, The Archives Building, The Manitoba Legislature and most recently, Manawaka Gallery, Neepewa, and The Joyce Smedegard Gallery, Clear Lake. Her work is some of the most sought after in the art for sale and rent department at the WAG and she has sold to private collections around the world. While both sides of her artwork seem to come from different artistic cloths (her natural painting is strictly Canadian realism, while her political work is a blend of realism, expressionism and secularism they inform each other and exist in a delicate balance. Shere admits she couldn't do one without the other. It takes a brave artist to look poverty and oppression square in the face, recoding and describing it with an unflinching eye. However, this also takes its emotional toll and the natural world Shere captures is an antidote to the nightmares of oppression and poverty.

"I paint natural world because of its serene, spiritual it does take the pain away for me. I try to capture the spirituality in my paintings. I don't know what other people see in the paintings, perhaps the samething." It is also part of her own philosophy that insists that the light and dark sides of life beauty and peace and suffering and violence exist in a state of balance. Without ugliness there can be no beauty. Many of her paintings feature children or young people interacting with the environment. "As a very young girl, I would play amongst the flowers and hug the trees," explains Shere. "I would look at the clouds and I would imagine that there was another world up there; a world of happiness and melodies.

Nature gave me a sort of peace and shelter, and it still does. When I started painting, the natural world around me influenced me. Today, when I am sad or depressed I can still dissolve into nature" Shere saw more than her share of poverty and oppression, those scars have remained and they drive her to explore the darker side of our world. "it is my desire to educate people," says Shere. "People want to escape the bitter realities of some other people's lives. They want to live in happiness and forget about those who live in poverty. I talk to my children about the poverty I saw as a child, and they don't believe me. They think it is some bad fairy tale, so I feel the need to describe how some people are living in this world."

Unfortunately, there is plenty of subject matter for Shere's pen and paint brush. Whether it is the oppression of women in Afghanistan, the brutality of apartheid, desperation in Mexico or grinding hopelessness in India, Shere manages to capture pain and suffering while, preserving dignity and avoiding the trap of fetishizing poverty. "When I paint the oppressed, I become them in a way," explains Shere. 'I am in the painting. That is the only way I can avoid exploiting the subject."

# Parvin Shere: A Truly Creative Artist

**Pirzada Qasim Raza Siddiqui**

The basic creative talent that exists in Parvin, seeks expression in all genres of arts, poetry and music. Painting has now become a distinct identity of Parvin and the blossoms of her poetry have started spreading their fragrance. One can notice a delicate note of anguish and grief in her poetry. All woes and agonies gradually sublimate into contended sadness in her poetry and paintings

....For Parvin this world is full of oppressed, miserable and exploited toiling masses, in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Mexico and at other places. Her pen and brush comment equally on human misery. Her pencil-sketches are impressive and poignant. The ease with which she exposes the miseries and agonies of life in the form of sketches is astonishing. Silent suffering finds an eloquent image in her work. Her pencil-sketch titled “ The Farewell” is a clear and candid depiction of extreme love, agony and helplessness where a mother has to give away her child; an alien wants to embrace the child but the child clings tenaciously to the mother’s lap with tears. There is another child in one of Parvin’s sketches. This child has lost all the dear ones, all victims of violence. Tears of a lonely, helpless child and his deep fears, is the theme of Parvin’s paintings

....[Her] couplets are a blend of poetic splendor and craftsmanship. However, a notable characteristic of her poetry is maturity of thought which exists right from the beginning till the end, and this has become her identity. Her splendid patience and fine determine rescue her poetry from superficial sensitivities. These qualities tend to increase the prospects of popular acceptance of her poetry just as her art work has been well-acclaimed. Her poems, like her ghazals, have a marvelous poetic vigour and can be taken as an extension of her ghazals. A short poem ‘Iraq’ is an impressive one in the current scenario but in the context of larger meaningfulness, it is a running commentary on the menace of expansionism and tyranny....Parvin Shere’s fame as a poet and painter has now reached Pakistan from Canada and she has been well-received here. She creates poetry with her distinct creative sensitivity which meets the canons of the stern muse. Parvin deserves our gratitude for the publication of the work which comes under the category of charity and benevolence.

# **Parvin Shere : Aesthetics of Enduring Relationships**

**Hameed Khan**

Radically changing global scenario has drastically altered the notions of life and the entire gamut of the disciplines associated with it. Literature, especially poetry, being a highly sensitive genre, could not have remained unaffected. Urdu poetry, like all the literatures written in English and indigenous Indian languages, has kept its pace with the pressures of times—misinterpreting or misreading of it notwithstanding. It has, very subtly and elementally, assimilated and accentuated the recently emerging linguistic and literary ethos in terms of the modes of perception and presentation. Urdu poetry has a rich tradition adorned with oriental philosophies, metaphysical depth and delicacies, socio-cultural complexities and linguistic niceties. Second half of the earlier century brought in the unprecedented advancement in the field of science, technology, politics, intellectual inquiries and cultural studies that had a direct bearing on the creative consciousness all over the globe. Unprecedented migration of the masses and creative writers to the West has also given a sharp turn to the very idea of literary concerns and commitment. It has, in fact, added a new dimension to what is now called literary productions. Parvin Shere's poetry is an excellent synthesis of the tradition and the current internationalism which invariably seems to be the dominant concern of the immigrant writers.

Parvin Shere's poetic concerns and thematic preoccupation, however, needs to be understood in terms of simultaneity of the emotional translucence and intellectual intensity that determine the tone and texture of her poetry and directions of her ideology. Her intellectualism and ideological stance, it should be noted here, cannot and should not be perceived in the Western political, polemical, theoretical or merely academic context. Her new culture, certainly, has sensitized her creative consciousness and sharpened her analytical and critical acumen, that many a time attributes subtlety and pungency to the balanced but highly devastating ironic phraseology of her poetic structures.

Like any other competent diasporic discourse, Parvin's poetry embodies a bitter critique of the male dominated society. Her poems like, "Mirage" (Sarab) and "Disposable" represent her emotional and intellectual response to the woman's predicament in the suppressive patriarchal system. These two poems betray two different dimensions of Parvin's poetic reactions against the callous sexist society that resembles across the borders and nations. The very title "Disposable" is highly suggestive of the Western cultural reality that exemplifies the constitution of the western disposition and it also effectively communicates the nature and texture of human relationship in a culture where romance with consumption reigns supreme. The poem also makes a sarcastic statement on the culture that has reduced woman to the trivial position of a commodity; she is bought, used, abused and discarded :

Exquisite...  
Sighting in a show case

He bought it and brought it home  
Filling it up  
He threw in the dustbin  
Then left to get another one.  
(Disposable)

“Mirage” offers another dimension of Parvin’s poetic vision. It reveals the intrigues of the cultural institutions shrewdly engineered by the exploitative male society to perpetuate subservient female psyche. The dominant system makes a woman internalize the submissive positions in absolutely natural way. Obliterating her own identity and independence, she willingly/unwillingly gets subsumed into the roles designed by the male conspiracy. “Mirage” bemoans this helplessness:

I am water, you a goblet.....

Towards the end, however, the poem takes a turn that unequivocally registers Parvin’s intellectual reaction:

Even so,  
I am water,  
a spring source of life  
and you———  
a rock,  
impervious to what life is!

(“Mirage”) trans. by: Hameed khan

Parvin’s poetry epitomizes the agony of a continually tormented and tortured woman’s soul:

How many more tests and trials of my patience  
How many more skies are there over my head ?  
Layers after layers are incessantly revealed  
How many faces are there behind the faces?

“Gazal”, trans. by: Hameed khan

Is there an end to it ever! is a perennial question that keep appearing in her poems like a refrain.

“The Last Station” is an elegy on the decay and death of the human relationships. The values of love and mutual trust, disinterestedness and selflessness are a rarity in the contemporary world that is ruthlessly governed by materialistic drives and ulterior motives. We are all a ‘lonely crowd’, lost in the labyrinth of narcissism. John Updike has rightly pointed out that contemporary man needs assurance, without mutual lies we all will be suspended like planets in the azure skies. “Octogenarians” (Darul Zoafa) dialogizes yet another dimension of the rotting human concerns. The poem portrays the heart-shattering reality of the helplessness of the old people who are mercilessly abandoned by those who had been the pivot of their life. John Updike’s first novel The Poorhouse Fair seriously addresses itself to these issues. The thematic canvas of this novel, however, is wider as he also takes into fictional account the larger issues of “social homogenization and loss of faith”. Parvin’s other poems like “The Coffin” (Tabut), “Helplessness” (Bebasi), “No Exit” (Sabhi Raste Moattal Hain), “Dilemma” (Kashmash), A Beautiful Dream-like House” ( Khubsurat Khwab sa Ghar) are exquisite subjective expressions of the irresoluble tensions between the worlds within and outside.

Contemporary woman’s plight in the male dominated world is doubly worsened. Parvin Shere effectively employs the metaphor of train and journey motif. Everyday,

right from morn a woman is continually shocked and shattered, dejected and disillusioned. By the end of the journey the train stands against the gloomy landscape tragically deserted and desolated :

left alone,  
my wet eyes,  
keep trying to locate—  
from each and every window,  
all human relations  
lost in the thick mists of time.

(“Last Station”) trans. by: Hameed khan

Parvin’s scathing criticism of the gender-biased society, nevertheless, is not a projection or a manifestation of the radical feminist ideology. Because feminist ideology, *ipso facto*, aims at subverting the system perpetuated by patriarchy. In her indictment of the patriarchal designs Parvin is, one with her contemporary Canadian women novelists and poets like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Aritha Vanherk, Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlette and many others. But it should also be carefully noted that she is noticeably different from them in terms of modes of perception and presentation and also in terms of linguistic and generic experimentations. Many of these Canadian poets are constantly engaged in ideological discourses that are vehemently directed towards annihilation of the murderous male supremacy. Deliberate transcendence or transgression is the launching pads of their poetic subversive endeavours. Debunking male-oriented language is also one of the major preoccupations of these women writers. They are often infuriated by the canon, the generic traits and their male association. Sexual deviation and moral digression is yet another point. These radical poets, however, have a well-defined logic and logistics for the subversion of the dominant system as well as for reconstruction of woman’s identity and her absolute independence. The alternative systems beyond the limits of family and morality, however, would not suit Parvin’s refined oriental sensibility and inherently feminine delicacy. Like many of the women poets from the sub-continent Parvin retains the she essential and intrinsic poetic idiom coupled with highly loaded phraseology assimilated from her diasporic experiences in the world that is, ironically, looked upon as a haven of freedom and paradise of consumption. She is a solitary example who enjoys dexterity in painting, music and poetry. Her poetry presents a harmonious blending of these three different disciplines of the fine arts. Any sensitive reader can easily discern masterfully organized shades and colours in her words and soothing sonority in her diction. Her painting, it can surely be construed, must be highly poetic.

Parvin has been living in Canada for more than four decades now; she has been in live contact with the practicing women writers. As an intellectual poet she has been closely following the directions the creative consciousness in Canada and in the west at large. But her poetry does not provide any evidence of being carried away by the inflated intellectual intricacy or triviality. Nor does her poetry betrays any desire to sell-off her own culture to the western readers, as many of the immigrant writers are accused of. Her western exposure, on the contrary, has widened the horizon of her experiences. Like her Canadian colleagues she sharply interrogates the male hierarchies.

Rather than aiming at subversion, Parvin's poetry betrays a creative consciousness questing for lasting and enduring human relationship. It is this relationship which, in its ultimate analysis, attributes dignity and integrity to human stature and makes his life meaningful, colourful and eventful.

Her insatiable quest for enduring relationships does not confine itself to the interpersonal or social extent. Imperialistic drives in the cultural, intellectual, political and economic spheres on the international level also reveal disconcerting upheaval owing to an obvious lack of sincerity and authenticity in human relationships. Her poems like "Iraq", and "Outrage" (Andhera), are the moving portraits of the precarious conditions humanity is deplorably placed in. It immensely grieves Parvin's heart to think, "what man has made of man"!

Parvin's poetry, in fact, is a heart-rending scream of a bleeding heart and agonized mind. It is a perennial quest for order, authenticity and equilibrium conspicuously missing in the contemporary spheres of human relationships. And it is this quest that determines the aesthetics of her poetic art.

**Alzheimer's**

Hiding her face in the quit of helplessness,  
Wandering in the dark labyrinth of the mind,  
Hiding even from herself,  
She holds her head in her hands  
Screaming: Let someone tell me,  
‘Who am I ? Where am I ?  
What is dark labyrinth?’  
Is this the ruin of the palace of her memories?  
In the rising and falling calamour of her own wails,  
She sobs and laments.  
The compiled book of life  
Has scattered into pieces of torn pages;  
All words are jumbled,  
Not yielding any sense or meaning.  
The door of memories,  
Closed with rusted locks,  
No longer responds to knocks.  
Even the blood-stained fingers  
can't open the door,  
Storms have flown away  
The pages of the book of her life.  
Will never open.  
They keys are lost.  
O God,  
Is there any remedy?  
There is no remedy,  
No remedy, at all.

**Identity**

Again, a drop  
Has now merged into oceans  
[ps. Iam reading ‘har’ as ‘phir’]  
To lose its own existence  
In the belief  
That its identity now  
Is that of the boundless ocean  
But a lonely single drop  
Looks at its existence  
With pride, smiles:  
Many oceans  
Have merged into it.

**Temporary**

Shunning the world and  
Running impatiently after  
A firefly,  
Glowing in the air far away,  
Does make life intoxicating,  
A cup of ambrosia is slowly  
Drained away.  
The firefly is extinguished,  
And turns into  
Just an insect.

## Where are the butterflies?

Only dust – clouds hold sway here.  
The tall swaying trees,  
Fluttering flowers and leaves,  
In the courtyard of my life  
Have all been consumed  
By the leaping flames of pain.  
A smouldering branch still lingers;  
It asks me:  
Why haven't the butterflies come yet?

## How 'd they know?

Children sit in a classroom,  
Hold pieces of a puzzle,  
And wonder where they should fit,  
How to solve the puzzle?  
But their perpetual efforts  
Are useless.  
They always put the pieces  
In wrong places.  
How'd the simple children know  
That every piece has  
Its own place?  
Only when each piece  
Is placed in its own place,  
Will the meaningless pieces  
Assume meaning  
And the picture will be complete.

## Curiosity

It was a strange moment of curiosity:  
The eyes were soaked in wonder;  
Feet refused to move ahead  
When the tangled silk chords  
Emerged from the cocoon of thought  
On the far-reaching tracks  
Of the milky-way.  
The web of millions of stars and planets  
Is cast in the boundless space,  
And time has shrunk in the robe of secrets  
To drown the curious eyes  
In the boundlessness of the sea of space:  
These curious eyes  
Search for the seashells of answers.  
The child of the mind,  
Tied in the strong chains of queries,  
Struggles in vain.  
Why are so many stories written  
on pages of space?  
Why should the truth be so elusive?  
Why every moment of day and night  
Weighs heavy on the succession of life?  
Let a kind person, a wizard,  
Open the knots of secrets  
With the nails of his effort.

## Toy-houses floating on Lake Titicaca [1]

The round isle of this earth  
Has been installed for ever  
On the broad bosom of ancient times.  
Titicaca is also  
A tiny planet.  
Holding the thread of past centuries,  
It still watches from a distance  
The changing face of time.  
The ancient tiny world of reeds  
Still exists, wearing its multi-coloured robes;  
Its breaths are in sync  
With the silken threads of the nature;  
Its every heartbeat resonates with nature;  
It still holds fast in its fist  
The wealth of its citizens,  
Clouds, rains and rainbows,  
The gold of the sun,  
The pearls of flowers.  
They feel safe and sound  
In the protective lap  
Of this planet,  
Always changing its tumultuous face.

1. A lake in Peru, supposed to be  
the largest lake in the world  
at the altitude of 2,000 m.

## The bridge

A bridge appeared  
On the sea of the blue, boundless sky.  
Wearing colours,  
It holds the two ends  
Of two worlds  
To become a messiah.  
The rainbow road  
Will lead us to our friends  
Who have gone to another world.  
This glittering bridge of the rainbow  
Erases distances on the sea of the sky.

### **Blind yet clear-sighted**

In the blind caves of his lightless eyes  
Were hidden worlds within worlds,  
A boundless darkness;  
It was ruled by an ink-darkness;  
All his skies and earths,  
All his moons and stars,  
All his birds, rivers and trees,  
All his pathways and streets  
Were shrouded in darkness,  
But when he opened a window  
In the closed room of his mind,  
He saw a new scene:  
Holding the cup of the moon,  
The night stood intoxicated  
in the moonlight.  
He saw the dawn-bride,  
Wearing a soft gown of silk,  
Was sprinkling the glitter of its rays.  
Supple branches,  
Streams flowing in abandon,  
Butterflies, flowers, rainbows:  
There was a riot of colour.  
Birds, coming in and out  
Of the veil of soft clouds,  
Chirping of birds,  
Comfort, pleasure:  
The peaceful scene  
Was a balm to his lightless eyes.  
The healer did not know  
That emerging from  
the whirlpool of darkness  
Will lead to a new light,  
And the one that gives sight  
Was himself blind.

### **Dreamland**

The open sky,  
The dreamland of the earth;  
The touch of the long fingers of the sun  
On the forehead of the mountain;  
Grey and white sailboats of clouds,  
Floating on the boundless  
ocean of the sky;  
Stories on the lips of silence;  
Singing waterfalls, and the moist air  
Kissing the red silken lips of flowers;  
The veil of clouds on  
the body of the mountain;  
Dense trees in the mist,  
Sometimes seen, sometimes not;  
My eyes are listening to a melody.  
The dream-like elegance  
has touched my heart.  
The intoxication of the touch  
Flows in the veins of my soul.  
This magical environment  
Has made my bewitched heart  
Fly on the shoulders of the wind,  
Has taken me to another world.

## Abstract art

This world of yours is  
a pretty gallery of art;  
Your creations are everywhere.  
Wherever we go  
We find your masterpieces.  
The colours of the gallery  
Shine everywhere,  
Sink in every heart.  
But a complex work of yours  
Has gone over the heads of everyone.  
Whoever has seen it,  
Could not decipher it with his logic.  
There are some onlookers  
Still trying to solve its mysteries.  
Even after trying a lot,  
They could not fathom its depth.  
O God Almighty,  
Create a connoisseur,  
Who could solve your riddle,  
And admire it.  
Let there be someone,  
Who could read me.

## Treadmill

These feet have been  
walking perpetually  
From Day One,  
But they remain at the same place.  
Apparently, there is movement,  
But the only difference is  
That they used to cover their bodies  
With leaves and barks of trees,  
And now, wearing silken robes  
That hide their canine teeth,  
Talons and tails,  
They are running  
On the treadmill of life.  
Since the beginning of time,  
All sons of Adam,  
Have been standing  
On the same starting point,  
Yet running perpetually.

Translated : **Intekhab Hameed Khan**

### **Towards the spring destination**

What is it all!  
What phenomenal transformations!  
Whose palm the glow-worms adorn?  
The light of whose eyes  
Have made the world bright?  
Whose lips  
Have met the desires and dreams?  
The sweet music  
Of whose laughter jingles in the air?  
Why is the ambience so intoxicated?  
Why does the cloud dance?  
For whom has the sky  
Adorned itself with glittering stars?  
Why the trees are  
Swaying and singing today?  
Whose sight has spun  
The phenomenon into ecstasies?  
Never has the face of life  
been no serene and bright!  
How come, all these?  
Whispered stars to the Moon.  
Tow hearts met today!  
Breeze composes the tales of love  
On the slate of time.  
Holding hands  
They are on their way  
To the spring-Destination.

### **Eternal**

Why it so?  
All songs are irrevocable lost!  
The sky with its wet eyes  
Showers the jewels of drops.  
The tree  
Absolutely silent,  
Keeps gazing at the skies  
With its gloomy eyes.  
The sun  
That always soaked  
The world in its lights  
Has dwindled,  
Torn and tired  
It has slept  
Under the quilt of earth,  
But  
Its echo is still vibrant.  
Sweet, sonorous light  
Is still alive,  
Like the ever-flowing stream  
In the ambience of life

## To spring

Ask the breeze  
To lead the caravan of fragrance  
And the muse for eternal songs  
Let the skies shower stars on the paths  
And the earth to spread buds on the roads.  
Flowers should an abode of colours,  
Let the atmosphere  
Initiate the tunes of desire,  
Let the dawn whet the light  
And  
The earth come into full bloom  
Ask the moon  
To weave the shelter of its lights,  
May your life bloom like a garden  
May your fortune shine bright  
Under the roof of the moon light.

## Well Said

When I handed my wounds  
over to paper,  
he looked at them  
eyes blinked,  
strange lines criss-crossed the face,  
I thought  
he would burst into tears  
but he  
immersed in the bright red beauty  
of the blood  
gushing from these wounds  
kept gazing at me,  
before I could speak  
a soft inquiring word  
he said this,  
“Well-said”

## **Circles, ants**

Around a deep ditch  
Are inscribed circles  
On which rows after rows of ants,  
Are running, squirming,  
Carrying their travel luggage  
In their bundles.  
There are many obstacles on the way:  
Somewhere gardens, butterflies,  
flowers and fireflies,  
Elsewhere, snakes, goblins,  
bats and storms.  
But nothing stops them.  
Leaving their travel luggage,  
Hatred, love and struggles,  
Behind on the trail,  
They return exhausted, scattered,  
To the same place where they started,  
And fall in the deep, dark ditch:  
Poor ants.

## **Files and spiders**

Buzzing flies  
Are flying everywhere,  
Accelerating every moment,  
Colliding with each other,  
Trying to defeat each other,  
Wanting to go ahead of others.  
But the spiders are busy in their work,  
Knitting their webs,  
Looking in all directions.  
Flies, busy in their flight,  
Are caught unawares;  
They struggle  
But only for a few moments.  
This spectacle has been going on  
For centuries,  
And will go on for ever.

# A Dialogue with Kavery Nambisan

Deepa Mishra

*Kavery Nambisan is a prolific writer of novels and short stories in English. She is a doctor by profession and, therefore, one can discover in her writing a vivid dissection of human psyche and a clinical accuracy of portrayal of reality. Her corpus, however, is noticeably signified by generic beauty, linguistic excellence and socio-cultural details which rightfully attribute her the place she occupies amongst the contemporary Indian women writers in English.*

*Born and educated in Kurg, Kavery Nambisan joined the St. Joseph Medical College at Bangalore .After graduation in medical science she went to England for her specialization in surgery .She returned to India with a FRCS . While in England, often she felt bored of loneliness. So she started loving “all things concerning books and words especially poetry and fiction, “...once I started to write I knew it was something I would continue to do, seriously.” She was, right from childhood, a voracious reader even though the thought of becoming a writer had not yet germinated in her. She says that she was fond of reading Mahatma Gandhi and Thoreau. Their boldness and clarity of thought impressed her. Besides both of them have written in a simple and truthful way which also has a discernible impact on her style of writing.*

*Kavery Nambisan is very straight forward, truthful and pragmatic in her statements. When asked about her creativity she boldly asserts that creativity is a need, a hunger and a challenge. There is nothing else like it”. She further adds that in the process of creation of a novel, Most of the time , it is a fusion of imagination and observed her lived experience.” Her experience of the world both the east and the west is very extensive.Different people, beautiful landscapes and multifarious incidents and situations have undergone a sort of imaginative churning resulting in the creation of her faithful and real characters and situations. As a surgeon she has served in many tribal areas of Bihar, Utter Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. she is,thus acquainted with the suffering of the rural people due to abject poverty. Her tour of America as a fellow of the international writing programme IOWA University gave an opportunity to her to visit and lecture at Cornell,Yale,Berkley and Columbia University.Thus she has the experience of life in the western world too. This rich experience helped her to know human beings in different settings and environment. One thing that is clear from her writing is that her creative works are neither autotelic nor didactic. To maintain such a non attached view while busy in her creative process is really a special quality. She is also detached from the review of her works. She takes the reviewer’s view casually. She tells that“often reviewers seem to read desultory and comment in a careless way.” Her final words on the novels in general is that“good novels are compassionate”.*

*This interview is primarily concerned with creativity and Nambisan’s view on her own creative process:*

**DM : How do you view the act of creative writing especially by women in the larger global context today?**

**KN:** I don't think that creativity changes with time or due to global factors. For those who believe in it, creativity is a need, a hunger and a challenge, there is nothing else like it. For writers, especially women in these fast-paced times, the struggle is to find the time between home and career.

**DM : What do you think are the problems Indian women writers face today, as the serious creative writing demands absolute involvement and intellectual preoccupation?**

**KN:** You're right, it does need absolute involvement and seriousness. The writer must know how to pull back from the frenzy of life and make the time for reflection, and for writing. Not easy but if you love it, you do it. It is not all that different for men, really. They are also as caught up with "living" as we are.

**DM : When did the idea of becoming a writer occur to you?**

**KN :** As a young surgeon training in UK, I went into it more or less accidentally. It had something to do with the fact that I am a sort of loner, I don't have any desperate need for company. And I love all things concerning books and words, especially poetry and fiction. So once I started to write, I knew it was something I would continue to do, seriously.

**DM : What was the reaction of your family to this decision of yours?**

**KN:** Ask any writer, family has very little or nothing to do with the decision! Family members who lack understanding of the creative urge will try to discourage a writer. But such people can make it difficult only if you let them. I have been lucky. I don't come from a literary background but my family has always been encouraging and very supportive of my writing.

**DM : Professionally you are a surgeon and you also enjoy recognition as a novelist. In fact, you present a wonderful blending of scientific approach, intuition and refined imagination. Do you find these two dimensions of your personality complementary or contradictory to each other?**

**KN:** They are complementary. Neither suffers because of the other. Surgery is mainly about the learning of medical science and practical skills. It involves years of training and a great deal of discipline, both mental and physical. Also it is team-work. However, intuition does play an important part in the making of any good doctor. It aids the process of diagnosis and judgement as to what one must do and when. But yes, writing is very different, it being a lonely occupation. I don't find it difficult to move from one vocation to the other through the course of a day. Even when a whole day of surgery has been tiring, once I come home, I can easily sit down to write for an hour or so.

**DM : Your novels are known for economy of words, accuracy and sharp perceptions. Quite often spatial facility as the novel enjoys, accommodate certain details which do not really add much to it. Is it your surgical precision that helps you in making your novels quite appropriate in length and also engaging?**

**KN:** I think the process of revision and rewriting, and the editorial feedback helps to a great extent. My first draft is always too flabby and I spend time trimming it down. Maybe my surgical mind gives me focus and a certain practicality, but I'm not sure because in all things that are outside my surgical and my writing life, I come across as absent minded and disorganized. I don't mean to be that way, but that's the way it is.

**DM : Do you follow a schedule for writing; does an ambience really make a difference while writing?**

**KN:** I don't have the luxury of following a schedule. I like to write in the mornings, with my daily fix of a triple-strong cup of coffee, and then at any moment in the day when I can make the time. This must be true for a lot of writers who have to hold on to jobs, keep homes etc. If you really want to write, you will do it.

**DM : Can you please recollect for us your feelings after the publication of your first novel?**

**KN:** I was pleased with the novel and with the reception it received, and of course, amused when people said that they did not expect me to write in that – irreverent tone that I use in The Truth (almost) about Bharat.

**DM : Do you get more pleasure out of writing the first draft than in the actual revision of the work?**

**KN:** I haven't thought about it. I think it is satisfaction I feel when something gets done, the pleasure is when I feel I have done a good job. It is not so easy to satisfy oneself about such things.

**DM : Are the characters in your fiction a creation of your imagination alone?**

**KN:** Difficult to be sure. When I plan a novel and the characters, and when I write, I am not self-conscious about where and how the material comes. Sometimes there may be a fact, an image, a news report or a real-life experience that sets off a train of thought. Most of the time, it is a fusion of imagination and observed or lived experience.

**DM : How important is experience to writing?**

**KN:** It is not so much experience as the manner in which your memory and your emotional intellect feeds on life and files it away in unexpected ways. I cannot always be sure if it is real memory or something that came to me in a dream. It is better not to delve too deep into the writing process.

**DM : How frequently do you read your own works after they are published?**

**KN:** Very little, if at all I read the first few pages, or the end. Sometimes I look at a passage. Maybe I'll read all my books one day.

**DM : How do you take the critics' opinions on your work?**

**KN:** It is never easy to take criticism. Honestly, though, if I feel the reviewer has made a genuine effort to read and understand and has then pointed out some flaw, I appreciate it, think about it. Often, reviewers seem to read desultorily and comment in a careless way. I don't pay much attention to that. Praise of course is always nice to hear.

**DM : When the writing of a novel is in the process do you often discuss with others about it?**

**KN:** Never. Vijay who is always the first person to read it, sees it only when I have properly finished the novel.

**DM : While writing, do you have a target and specific readership or it is for general public?**

**KN:** I don't think of any particular reader because I'm too engrossed in telling the story. If I do think of it, I imagine everyone and anyone.

**DM : Do you feel that a creative artist, especially a novelist, has limitations?**

**KN:** Yes, an artist is no different from any other person in that sense. It is individual motivation and the creative urge that makes one press forward. Some use it better than others; they dig deeper, so to speak. And more significantly, they stay true to their muse.

**DM : How did you come to write the Truth (Almost) About Bharat? Do you think while describing Bharat's Bharat Darshan on a bike, Gandhi's tour of India in a third class railway coach was in your sub-conscious mind?**

**KN:** Wow! No, it never entered my mind, Bharat perhaps would have admired Gandhi but he did not have any intention of doing what Gandhiji did.

**DM : Mango Coloured Fish and Wings of Butterflies are the two novels where you seem to assert the power of women. But one finds female bonding is not very strong in your writing. What do you think about it?**

**KN:** There is female bonding of a more subtle sort in most of my novels. There is the unlikely friendship between Nanji and Clara in The Scent of Pepper, the understanding between Egavalli and her daughter Sentha in The Story.... In my new novel of which I am just completing a rough first draft, there is the relationship between an ageing prostitute and a young woman caught in a vortex of confusion regarding her personal life.

**DM : As a writer how far you have been influenced by the feminist movement?**

**KN:** More than the feminist movement, I am deeply affected by the actual, day-to-day exploitation of women in all strata of society. I've seen it in western society too. But this exploitation and oppression of women which has been in place for thousands of years cannot be washed away easily. It will take generations to remove certain types of gender conditioning.

**DM : How do you look at feminism in Indian context?**

**KN:** I'm not comfortable with feminism as separate from the struggle against injustice of all sorts. How about caste prejudice, child exploitation, the trampling over of the poor, or certain voiceless minorities?

**DM : Are your novels autotelic or do they aim at social reform?**

**KN:** My desire is to tell a good story, to create characters and then see the world through their eyes. Since I have lived and worked in very interesting cultural and social milieu, my story-telling will contain details about the society we live in.

**DM : Do you think literature can bring about social transformation? Is it an intention of literature by any way?**

**KN:** I don't think it is the intention of any novelist to bring any transformation that would be too egoistic. The intention is to create different realities through characters and situations and thus take the reader into the minds of others. Good novels are also compassionate.

**DM : How do you perceive a novel, I mean, is it a theme or a character, a situation or an event which leads you to the construction of a narrative? Or do you deconstruct a character or an idea through your fictional structures?**

**KN:** It is a combination of all these factors. The process of creating fiction is a delicate one and I'd rather not delve too deep into my own process. It makes me feel self-conscious.

**DM : How does the idea of Gandhari wearing a scarf around her eyes, a form of protest against a lack of freedom of choice, came to your mind?**

**KN:** This was a perception written about by Irrawathy Karve in her brilliant book, Yuganta. I could identify with that Gandhari immediately. I'm a rebellious sort of person, I would have rebelled.

**DM : In your essay "Migration", Diaspora and Exile: The Writers Survive", you have mentioned that "our ancestors knew how to bend the meaning of words so you could ponder over them long after they were uttered or read"**

**By this do you mean that words vis-a vis literary works do not have fixed meaning or a priori meanings. Do you suggest here that how to “bend the meaning of words” lies at the back of creative works?**

**KN:** Oh yes. There are hundreds of examples in ancient texts, mythologies and classics from every part of the world which show how language can be used. Most of the time, it facilitates meaning in a direct way. But it can also be used with cunning, with playfulness and also by first confounding in order to drive home a point better. The parables are an extension of the same, so is satire, allegory, spoof and all types of good humour.

**DM : Do you consider migration, exile association and adjustment can propel creative consciousness produce enduring works?**

**KN:** It may, it may not.

**DM :What do you think of the concept of inspiration in the creative process?**

**KN:** Again, this something I’m not comfortable talking of, lest I sound glib!

**DM :Is Nalli in *The Hills of Angheri* Kavery Nambisan herself? Do you have the same attitude towards nature as Nalli has?**

**KN:** Yes, I’m a lot like Nalli but not about everything.

**DM :Your fictional women characters, besides being actually living beings of flesh and blood, do represent women’s plights with social refractions. Of all your women characters who do you like the most and why?**

**KN:** I guess it is Nanji in *The Scent of Pepper*. She is brave, hard-headed, big-hearted but also cunning in her own way. She is a survivor.

**DM :In the Story that must not be told you write “the poor will not go away” while writing this were you inspired by leftist ideology?**

**KN:** Not at all. It is the reality that I have seen all these years, working as a doctor. Do you believe that literature/novel can bring about reform in society? They can at best enhance one’s sensitivity, which is a wonderful thing to have done in these times of narrow-minded, divisive thinking that pervades societies all around the world. Yes, a bit of humaneness will do the world a lot of good. And a good novel often portrays humaneness by simply allowing the reader to see the world through the eyes of others.

**DM :How do you assess your own fictional work in the larger context of the women’s writing?**

**KN:** Not my job. There are enough people who feel they are better qualified to do it.

**DM :Writers like you are our assets, we pray for your health and well-being. We are looking forward to something more beautiful and engaging? What are you planning to write now?**

**KN:** I’m completing the first draft of my next novel, so it is too early to start talking about it. The only thing I can reveal is that I have used the narrative voice of a town to tell the story, that is, the town speaks.

**DM :Do you have any suggestion or message for those who have taken writing as a full-time engagement and for those who want to go for it?**

**KN:** Make sure you enjoy writing and that you have a story to tell. Stay close to your imagination and listen to your muse. The rest follows.

We feel immensely delighted and enlightened, Mam. Talking to you has been a wonderful experience.