



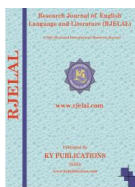
DELHI: LOST DREAMS AND PROSPECTIVE HOPES AN ANALYSIS OF ABHAY.K'S *THE SEDUCTION OF DELHI*

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ABSTRACT

The poetry collection *The Seduction of Delhi* by Abhay.K describes various aspects of Delhi. New Delhi is the national Capital Territory of India. The readers are very well aware of its historical monuments and the prosperous, posh life lived by the people. Abhay tries to show the other side of the coin through his collection of poems. The book is divided into three sections, they are: Places, Portraits and Reflections. The paper analyses select poems from the collection using Cultural Materialism Theory. Cultural Materialism is concerned with "the meanings and values as they are lived and felt (Barry 175)." The paper aims to highlight the socio-cultural problems subtly hinted by the poet and to bring the pitiable condition of people of Delhi to limelight.

Abhay K is one of the literary flag-bearers of contemporary Indian poetry. He was born at Chhabilapur near Rajgir in Nalanda district in Bihar. He joined Indian Foreign Service in 2003. He wrote the Earth Anthem which was translated into eight languages. He received the SAARC literary award for his contributions to contemporary South Asian Poetry. His poems have appeared in several magazines and literary journals. His famous works are *River valley to Silicon Valley*(2007), *Questions to the Soul* (2010), *Fallen leaves of Autumn*(2010), *Candling the light*(2011), *The Seduction of Delhi* (2015) and *The Eight-Eyed Lord of Kathmandu*(2015). . The collection of poems *The Seduction of Delhi* by Abhay.K became the best seller after its launch in January 2015. It was released by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra at the Jaipur literature festival.

Every work of literature contains its zeitgeist. The poet becomes the representative of the society. He depicts and hints at the black holes of the society with an intention of rectifying it. In *The Seduction of*

Delhi, Abhay puts tongue into every monument and every trifle which craves for public attention. Delhi is a palimpsest city. Palimpsest is something which has changed over time and shows the evidence of change. Delhi, the national capital territory has traversed a long way in the Indian History. It was discovered and named after its first emperor Dhillu, who lived in 50 BC. From then on it has continuously remained the capital city of various dynasties. Its transformation from Indraprastha, the capital of Pandavas of *The Mahabharata* to New Delhi is very significant. Delhi has been a silent spectator of various transformations. T.S. Eliot in his *Tradition and Individual Talent* says that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. Delhi, the palimpsest city exists in perfect harmony with the past and the present.

The main theme displayed in the poems is the disregard of the people towards the abundant cultural heritage and lives of their brethren underdogs. Delhi has a conglomeration of sophisticated art of living, infrastructure, metro

transportation and all the facilities of the world at the same time, it has the most populated slums, high rates of poverty, unemployment and heinous crimes. Abhay.K has broken the eternal, engulfing silence and hinted at the societal problems of Delhi.

Abhay takes the reader to the paradoxical nature of Delhi. He quotes two poets who have contradictory ideas of Delhi. In the 'Reflection section, he quotes Mirza Ghalib 1797-1869: "I asked my soul, what is Delhi? /She replied, The World is the body and Delhi its life"(80). Here he presents an epitome of eulogy. Delhi is described as the very life-force of the entire world and the poet also quotes Mir Taqi Mir in the 'Musing' section of the book,

There was once a fair city,
Among cities of the world the first in fame;
It hath been ruined and laid desolate,
To that city I belong, Delhi is its name. (87)

The state which was compared to the elixir of life is now compared to a dead corpse. Abhay describes the paradoxical nature of the city in a similar tone in his poem "Delhi, as I am": "I am the city of cities/ A city of invaders, conquerors/Merchants, immigrants- "(37).

Through the recollection, the city boasts of its wealth, its beauty, the charm and luxury with which it attracted so many people: "I am the city of ruins/ O' Mighty and powerful" (37). Here the idea of mortality is presented. The emperors who conquered the eternal city for time being could not conquer time. The poet reminds the reader of Shelley's *Ozymandias*: "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings/Look at my works, ye Mighty, and despair". The city continues to lament at its state

I am the city of Satya, Shanti and Nyaya-
My streets bear these names.
but the truth is –
rapist roam my streets in peace
and my women perpetually seek justice
in one of the city courts. (37)

Through the device of anti-climax, the poet throws light on the vulgar crimes and political loopholes of the society.

Through the poem "Delhi University", Abhay paints the vulnerable lives of students.

Most soar like Icarus,
some return years later
tracing footprints
of glorious years
with dusty, moth-eaten memories
in the crevices of consciousness (49).

The students join the university with wings of aspirations and ambitions, only a few succeed in reaching their destinations. Others like the Greek mythological figure Icarus are destined to fall and fail in achieving their goals. They are left with nothing but for the momentous enjoyments of their university life. Delhi University has attracted social attention recently for the student protest over the universities claim of changing the Bachelors' course to four years. The conflict arose and the university had to accept the claim of the students. In order to emphasize the charisma connected with prestigious universities and its part in students' life, Abhay mentions the poem.

Abhay also depicts the psyche of bureaucrats working in various government offices. Through his poem "Bureaucrats", he points at the corruption level and Red Tapism in the capital: "We bureaucrats shine outside, /inside incarcerated inmates/ ever-seeking atonement (63)." India also stood witness to the historic passing of Jan Lokpal Bill on 18 December 2013. The poet being the part and parcel of society incorporates the merits and demerits of the society he lives in.

Abhay takes the readers to the lives of lower working class community. First of all he paints the life of a "Security Guard": "And sometimes absently, you ask-/'how are you?' and move on. / Do you really want to know the answer?(64)" The piercing question is for the reader's community to answer. Then he proceeds to depict the life of a "Flower Girl". She is not the fortunate Eliza Doolittle of Shaw's *Pygmalion* but an ordinary wage earner whose priority is food than her honour.

...I plead,-
take my flowers.
He pulls me nearer –

I jerk back in disgust;
my clothes torn,
flowers scattered,
I gather myself,
then my flowres ,
and start again –
pleading, hoping. (65)

The pathetic and vulnerable condition of young working girls is showcased in the poem. The girls dare not complain about what they suffer even if they want to, because the society has dumb folded itself against their wrenching cries. They have accepted the indifference of people towards their very existence and go on with their works as if nothing has ever happened to them. In their desperate struggle to survive they do not care to complain. Abhay voices out for those dumb victims.

Abhay next speaks about the 'Maids': "Imagine a day without us. / Yet, we remain invisible silhouettes" (66). The people of Delhi extract their labour but fail to pay their due in all aspects. Their works are neither recognised nor appreciated. Delhi's paradoxical world has no place for the virtues like honesty, hard work or justice.

The poet draws pen picture of yet another community of 'Rag pickers' through his eponymous poem.

Nearby a stinking slum-
our home-
waiting to be metamorphosed into
a ten lane highway. (69)

The capital city is always expanding and making significant growth in the field of transport infrastructure and multidimensional development programmes which would lift the entire country but amidst all these development the government forgets the rag pickers. Their slums are evacuated to make multi-lane roads but their welfare is not ensured.

The poet asks the existential questions through the poem 'An Immigrant in New Delhi'

You were brought into this world
because of a quirk of fate;
to serve us till your death.'

Enlightened
I returned to my village. (67)

Abhay depicts Delhi as a hostile city for immigrants. Its dual nature absorbs all the energies of an immigrant's youth and expectorates him as helpless and inefficient after his years of service, just like the sugarcane juicing machine.

The point to be noted here is that Delhi contains both good and bad in itself. But Abhay has penned his poems on those aspects of society which requires public notice. The poet does not speak about the upper, posh and prosperous section of society. His style is very captivating, aesthetic and mild. The very title has dual meanings, the first is to charm or attract with its beauties which Delhi obviously does and the second is to persuade someone to do something. The poet indirectly urges the readers to do the needful to redeem his beloved Delhi from these depressing conditions.

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