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D.C. Chambial – Some reflections on his Early Poetry

-Pure Mind of a True Human Being

P C K PREM

Chambial is one of the most distinguished voices in Indian English Poetry. He is genuine, innovative, powerful and influential. He appears in 1983 on the poetic scene with his first collection of poems – ‘Broken Images’. Until now he has published –The Cargoes of the Bleeding Hearts & Other Poems (1984), Perceptions (1986), Gyration Hawks and Sinking Roads (1996), Before the Petals Unfold (2002) and This Promising Age & Other Poems (2004). Afterward, he came out with *Songs of Sonority and Hope* in two segments: *Hours of Antipathy* 2014 and *River of Happiness* 2017 and he did not stop until premature death embraced him.

He was still busy with his creative activity, and poetry lovers were expecting more anthologies in poetry in the near future. Unfortunately, sudden death took him away from us and left a great

vacuum. If one goes back to his poetic region, it delights, baffles, questions and leaves an imprint of mystic aura one continues to decode.

His poetic areas are varied and multi-dimensional. Not only Chambial is worried about the predicament of modern life but the challenges it poses to existence are also causes of anxiety to the poet. Contemporary man, according to the poet is not happy. Like W. B. Yeats, out of the mundane and materialistic life, he wishes to extract the spiritual element in the life of man. When Chambial talks of eternal soul, there is an intense struggle. Like Yeats, it is ‘the self’ of man, a product of social milieu and ‘the anti-self’ pitted against ‘the self’ in an inner battle so that the poet could redeem the spirit, the eternal force. Growth of Chambial’s poetic thought and sensibility has been marvelous, for it reveals to man’s anarchic conditions in the humdrum of life. Only when man finds peace within that he shall be competent enough to contribute to humankind at large. Nothing remains untouched as the poetic flow begins to inundate the reader. It is imperceptible but it creates stir in the veins. The sublime flow of emotions and feelings saturated with gentle thoughts instill freshness. He authentically speaks about the modern anguish, of pains arising out of disorganized and frenzied living conditions and of scrambled thought processes while man fails to locate his existential position of surging despair and overshadowing frustrations.

‘Broken Images’ 1983 is a collection of poems where poet’s intensity of feelings befuddles a gentle heart. Here, poets’ depths of experiences find expression in wonderful images.

Life –an urge to go

to deeper recesses/but annulling force

of buoyancy doesn’t relax/until volcano erupts.’ Volcano, 27

Man in life confronts mysteries of life and wishes to unravel the meaning hidden beneath the surface of apparent life. To go deep and fathom the concealed message is a constant struggle of intellect and heart, for there are discouraging moments in life. A search prolongs and no breather soothes. Still hope of an ‘enthraling melody simmers’ when it satisfies the parched hearts under a breezy shower. Earlier, it is the stoic attitude that creates a stage of unfeeling and vacuity -

Cold and stolid stones/senseless and apartheid

Wriggle with/spades and sickles

Atop murderous hills... The Stones, 27

Here, hard realities of life shock. It is total apathetic attitude of man that brings out bloodshed and violence, and hardened men do not mind killing others. Stones, apartheid, spades and sickles are words, which create fear in the mind of peace loving people. The images so born of the words speak of the world in which we live and hope to survive. The images created with words like falcons, skeletal sky, colliding thoughts, blank canvas and myriad ‘In a Trance’ stun and perplex. It is an escape from a frightful callousness and brutality in

experience to a life of bliss. A faith in the ultimate is a path to redemption the poet appears to say. An intense experience, in the merger of emotions and thoughts cries for meanings amidst struggles, ending like a fall down of ‘a rootless tree /in the storm.’ An engaging hop of similes make ‘A Blade of Grass’ an interesting poem. ‘Incarnate’ is a beautiful dreamy sequence that ends with the rubbing of eyes while face to face with humdrum life. Chambial is excellent here. It is between fancy and reality that he wants to strike a balance but perhaps, the efforts continue.

There are intellectual wailings that make existence full of despair and disturbance where harmony is a distant dream. Modern life appears rootless to the poet and finds no synchronization anywhere. The sensitive poet is disturbed at nature’s anguish as hills tremble and sky weeps, where pensive smoke is nothing but a sea of desolation. His hinting at frequent bloodthirsty wars, communal riots, bomb blasts and fanatic religious battles continuing in some parts of the world and man killing man are timely, and these gruelling incidents warn us of the impending annihilation. To find identity in calamitous situations is an enigma where destination may appear quite near but it turns into a question as the feeling of futility dawns.

Life is music/attuned by/maestro divine.

Pleasant to those/who pick/and dance with the song.

Jargon to those/who fail to find rapport

On the steps of melody and heart Life, 33

A highly philosophical poem from Chambial makes one wonder at its brevity and directness. If earlier he appears disillusioned, these lines exhibit tremendous faith in life; and the poet's optimism gushes out with a rare spontaneity. While nature is accurate in its movement as is shown by 'Moon' Vicissitudes though always uncertain in life, are essential if man lives life. The poet hints at the law of eternity. 'A Tribute to a Hero' deals with a contemporary theme where a beautiful aura of similes appears to astonish. Poet's dread is alive as he lives life with its limitations and restrictions. All that is materialistic puts obstacles in the way of freedom. It is unknown entry of words and ideas and here a man thinks he is adorning himself with glory but it does not happen. He lives in a prison he builds and this is obvious in 'A Captive'. 'Manacles' is a prayer. A poet wishes to live a free life ...and in beautiful images and dreamy sequences; he lives and attracts with puzzling smiles and mystical expressions.

Chambial interprets life's conundrums and questions differently. He is not straight but uses images and metaphors, creates pictures and attempts to convey his inner turmoil. A search for peace is alive in him and in a subtle way he awakens the reader but meaning at times wears a veil. A strain of agony disturbs the poet when he finds shackles around but still optimism somewhere down deep tickles and so in 'Dawn', the dark forces are pushed to the background -

Victory over gloom/of the night,
gleeful smiles/honeyed music/of divine singers
prayers of innocent hands/burn frosty incense.' Dawn, 40

Chambial lives in poetic aura and radiance. It appears he is confined, and rarely wishes to open up to the outside world. Possibly, he finds sufferings and pains in contemporary life. In the collection, 'The Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts and Other Poems' 1984 is a return to despair and disillusionment of life. Cynicism and illusive world drive him away to abstruse imaginings.

The sun's gone/the moon wails/meteors play funny tricks.

Tomorrow will be a cloudy/morning. Wolves are out

To devour earth and sky Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts, 42

These lines only contribute to the already disheartening scenario around. Nevertheless, harsh truth exists when one goes through the little poems Moth, Mirage, Bleeding Clouds. 'I sink my feet in the cold water/on a bed of sand and stones / dreamed about past when/bacteria struggled in snow 44-45.

Chambial strength is in the words he uses and meanings he imparts to each in an entirely different context. His forte is to create images, paintings and pictures out of life and nature and at some intense moments out of nothing. Those objects, which usually escape attention of a common person, attract poet's vigilant eyes. The world of nature is an inexhaustible treasure for him where he goes any time, any moment, draws out the precious jewels, and thus weaves dreams in words. Objects dead or alive, plants, animals, birds, water, earth, stars, sky and ocean are instruments to carry emotions, thoughts and philosophy. He uses them as symbols of man's internal strife and the

outer camouflaged quality of life. Hypocrisy, violence, mendacity and fears in life repulse the poet to the inner world where he finds solace.

The poets obliquely points out at the mental and physical sufferings and meaningless wars fought around the world. Today, man seeks life and existence in incessant violence and ever-alive fear of death, is a disturbing thought. ‘A Cry for Peace’ carries the burden silently and the ‘Masks’ exposes deception and vanity in the living of modern man. Even mythical characters used to enhance the impact of modern sufferings and ordeals in life frighten, and on the ‘On the Bank of Sarayu’ and ‘Awaiting Moments’ inspire the poet to get back to meaning and truth in life.

‘On the bank, I stand/and ruminare
by the dhooni of a yogi.
Rising smoke/whispers in my ear
Not to bother brains – to stitch the parts lost in yugas.’

On the Bank of Sarayu 63

Continuing sufferings, rejections, disenchantment and failures if impart meaning to life, it is also an abrupt incursion into mild but strong feelings, which strengthen a quality life. At times, one feels quite down the dumps on reading certain poems but at this moment immense patience will prove rewarding.

In 1986, appeared fourth collection of poems – ‘Perceptions’ with a bright splash of hope in life and future. The earlier anxieties and tensions of life are gone. Here the poet is relaxed and thinks about life

in a cheery countenance. He considers life as an opportunity to create and disseminate joy around. In the first poem 'The Ripe Time', the theme is forceful with an eye for the future. It is a basic duty to continue the tree of life and a sacred obligation of man to do his task without caring for the fruit. Only in concentration and single-minded devotion, one achieves the target. The similarity drawn only inspires and instils hopes. For Chambial, poetry is not merely an emotional outburst but it has a definite purpose toward humanity.

I am an honest peasant believe

In sowing the seeds, not reaping the harvest

I think it is time to sow the seeds.' The Ripe Time, 67

One should understand innocence and impulse do not recognize any specialty or technique, meter or rhythm, cadence or rhyme. It is an area, in fact, where he is in full command. In certain poems, Chambial is simple and straight and he does not stop. 'To her Luscious Lake' is a sizzling and aesthetically sound love verse.

Her lovely, naïve face/entices one to luscious lake

to enjoy the ripples/and brave the storms

in the ocean of heart. 68

It is in images that the poet finds intellectual and psychic consolation. The world looks quite awry and uncomfortable, full of agony and sufferings. Man may toil hard, work day and night but the unrestrained greed and violence, hunger for power and fame keeps him occupied in the rituals-ridden life, and thus, the man within feels asphyxiated. He runs back to nature and there in the multi-spectrum

objects he tries to invent many-sided images, similes and parallel situations where man can find harmony. With words he works out a labyrinth of several descriptions and as said earlier birds and animals, stones and rocks encourage him to find meaning. ‘Rising Images’ is a fine poem of imagery and ideas and this flow is unhindered. He stops the reader and asks him to think deep. ‘Deliverance’ shows man’s struggles, hardships and trials in the world. The material and scientific progress notwithstanding, there remains imperfection. Intimate moments are treacherous sometimes and one simply fails to believe. A hallow wish makes it all the more difficult and consequently, the question turns to ambiguity.

Gaze at the horizon and the sky

For deliverance

Should we come closer or part away? 92

‘Adieu 98’ is a refreshing poem of love for nature. One finds here a superb blend of beauty and musical flow, lyrical streams of words with visit to past which stir minds and hearts. The beautiful bud is a source of faith and love, eternal and flourishing.

...I saw all the beauties of the world

With her all the happy kingdoms I did rule.

She, an oasis in the heart of a desert,

An anodyne to the blistering thought

A poet’s wish is moderately eloquent and poignant when he says

-

When I saw her last / On her sailing bed...

Her eyes shut, her lips mute

with cock's crowing she fell dead.

You my pole star; I, a solitary ship

In the sea, I think to catch you on your trip.

A justification to unite with the beloved –nature he finds, as he goes back to history and evaluates the truth. In 'Summer to South' 100 sovereignty of God is established. God is the invisible power who controls life, birth, death and rebirth of human beings. Poet's sense of discrimination is transparent. Sufferings, rejections, disenchantment and failures if probed seriously impart meaning to life. It is a foray into mild but strong feelings strengthen a quality life. One may be quite down the dumps on reading certain poems but an immense patience will prove rewarding. Man's life does not end simply by living and doing nothing, it is a holy duty to continue the tree of life without caring for the fruit. He, it appears, is an addict, an ardent lover of poetry and does not believe poetry should serve only poetic tastes. It must break barriers and become purposeful

'Gyrating Hawks and Sinking Roads (1996) appeared after a gap of ten years. The long period is itself a sign that the poet's meditative and emotional, analytical and philosophical faculties were not idle or lethargic. With immense experience as the years rolled on, he has been able to crystallize and straighten some of the ambiguities. In early days, love for images and metaphors was making it difficult to go deep into the mind of this poet. However, with uplifting, mild filtering and sieving there is clarity and transparency and the philosophic tinges assume a different character. He deals with

contemporary realities with understanding and positive disquiet but symbols and similes flow in elegiac lines with refreshing liquidity.

Violence makes life difficult because faith and betrayal govern men. No one is sincere and only conceit overwhelms men, minds and hearts. In an age of insecurity and stark inconstancy, survival reigns supreme in human beings and so it is a mind that 'one hand severs the other' and feelings of 'love and compassion' mean nothing. 'Sinking Crossroads' talks of vacuity and chill in fragile relations, though elsewhere in 'Flaming Candle' in fine images transient life worries him. The simile of burning candle fascinates. Bit by bit life lingers on and finally goes deep down the abyss of oblivion, and the mystery remains.

Drop by drop I melt
like a flaming candle
into the unfathomed deeps. 105

A swift change of images in the 'Beauteous World' is a different experience and one is delighted at the scene where a woman stands waist-deep in water. It stirs sensuous feelings for a while. In 'Rainbow' again, nature touches like breeze, and suddenly, it disappears giving another kind of passionate pain.

Before I'm conscious and stretch fingers
Across wide expanse between/Earth and heaven to hold
The spectrum in the hollow of palm/someone already gathered in his bag
The joy of epiphany 108

Unhappy time cannot last long. Grief and gloom are just temporary. In a routine life, darkness and suffering may dampen spirits but it has an end. 'Night can't be Long.' celebrates optimistic view of life.

Night can't be long

Dawn peeps from the eastern hill

Swan peace to knock the sill. 106

'Confessions' though not very original in thought yet it reveals naked hypocrisy. Sentiments of love mean nothing. Absolute selfishness and egoism guide man whether in childhood or youth. Goodwill and charity have no value. Materialistic living is the theme of modern life. Demon of corruption is the god today. It shocks when one learns 'for they also love who rape and kill'.

Ultra-modern mentors/set examples to toll the knell

At the altar of Mammon/care a fig for men and morals;

Indebted to these caring captains'

Brain-babies: hawalas & scams.'

The spleen and vermin of corrupt and unethical life continue to haunt the poet in the next lines also. It is now a culture of modern life. He talks of India perhaps and men of the world. Nothing is left untouched. 'The Tempest' 'Rubble of Thick Night' and 'Birth of a Schizophrenic' with images of modern life, just startle and confound. A callous attitude to life benumbs a sane man. When the poet encounters an old couple, an eternal 'Life's Truth challenges. Here, the poet reminds us of young Siddhartha.

The year marching into grave./I looked at myself
A sun at the horizon-/weary wait for knock at door 113

The poet appropriately observes in another poem, 'Dreams.' 'Enigma' is a plain suggestion - a big question. It tickles and disturbs. In 'Canker' the poet painfully questions - why spread hatred and not love. 'The Third Man' is the invisibly noticeable man. In shadows, he is alive who guides and teaches art of life to all and acts as 'a ray of hope to tired soul from the distant goal'. It is self – a metaphysical inquiry important for a modern man. Though not lyrical like the metaphysical poets -Cowley and Herbert, Chambial exhibits a fine mix up of thought and passion. He draws images from nature in a startling rapidity. Images though obfuscate at times yet they are not as intricate and baffling as that of poets dealing with metaphysical themes. Nature is eternal and nothing can hurt it, is the message 'Singing Blossoms' symbols of beauty, harmony and meaning convey to violent man.

Sing about the innocent/Tears shed in gang rapes, bomb-blasts

Sing about the epileptic morals/in moments of white fancy.'

Again:

'He's left far from where/none ever returns

...to tell about the voyage' are words that succinctly sum up life's dilemma and complexities where everybody runs to find meaning in living but comes out empty handed 'in the search of the face/lost in void in/the valley of maya. 127

Surprisingly-

with the tolling of knell/bells toll, the new born
stares at the rut of wheels/to decipher/the mystery there. Mystery 128

Sufferings around disturb and the poet wishes to escape. He thinks of the Invisible, the force that remains not even at the experiential level. 'Dance of Harmony, 'An Alter', 'A Wish' and 'A Cry of Heart' are poems where poet's faith in life is strengthened. The pious and sacred aura spreading around with abundant raptures if captured eternalize the experience, the poet maintains placidly. However, death is the ultimate reality and the lord of Death visits all yet evaluation is inevitable before beings go to the altar. If man in earnest makes efforts to live in harmony and belief in God, the torture of eighty –four lakh yonis –the cyclic theme of birth, death and rebirth does not exist-

Let us, you and I/saunter beyond
the murky lanes and by-lanes
in search of moon of tender lullabies! A Wish, 136

In 2002, the poet comes out with his fifth collection of poems – 'Before the Petals Unfold'. Again, pangs and pains of modern life surface with sensitivity. It may embarrass and disturb but the themes of fragmented, vicious, corrupt and unprincipled life and living form

the basis of modern creative writing. In this volume, the poet not only speaks of trials and trivialities of modern life but nature and other lofty ideals make life worth it. In Hopkins' poetry, one realizes immensity of love for nature and his genuine imparting of meaning and beauty to nature around. Hopkin's images drawn from nature are quite distinctive having an integral quality. For Chambial, natural objects have deep meaning and each object or segment of nature gives him material for images with multi-dimensional meaning. Chambial talks exclusively of life with intensity. Its concern and meaning disturbs him quite often. In 'Life -An Enigma' 140, life is equated with a map on the palm where life's movement can be visualized. Like an observatory, it works and gives the results. Man ought to know the 'fount of beauty' and should drink it 'like a heaven gazer lirts on an endless lake/when he peeps through his eye great.' Life if lived properly gives purpose. 'Heat' stands for life and 'coldness' for death.

...crawling fingers crave/to feel the peaks of moon
in this frost with a hope to flow/from stasis to flux
from coldness to heat. Life and Death, 142

Again, the poet in gentle words, in a different context tells that a question still trickles whether He is happy with the world He created. Such penetrating queries concern man and his life. The symbols of 'heat' and 'icy chill' stir the poet again as he thinks 'of mangled relations.'

Let us leave behind/this world full of icy chill
And mount up a higher hill/where sun shines

Warm and bright/against mundane gall and fright 147

The poet explores various possibilities to reach a definite conclusion. He knows man's routine affairs in thoughtless pursuit. Man has turned insensitive in spite of splendid progress with less of humanism. He ruefully observes-

Ethic and morals marginalized/by the money-minded man
Who carries a bag of ashes/in this blind race to grave.'

Angst and uncertainties continue to sadden the poet. The harsh realities of life resurface in another lyric –Life. Life to the poet is 'an endless tale of/vales, dales and hills/from the black holes of eternity', and individual is - 'mere cog/in the wheel of time/no will'. The poet is conscious of the fears, which assume different shapes and fill life. It is 'amalgamated with deeds; heaven, hell and hell-fire' Life to the poet is vague and uncertain where end is unknown. Out of this conspiratorial existence, he wants escape but with the help of 'Light' desires 'to regain the paradise lost'. This path, he wishes to believe leads to a life of virtues. If a dewdrop on the blade of grass is pure and sublime, man is equally a sacred creation, the poet tells. Nevertheless, man needs protection from the clutches of evil forces -

A man is - 'A true amalgam of/angel and Satan
Delights much in the latter's company/than that of the former
Virtue weeps bitterly/silently sobs dew, Satan smiles
At his success. 155

The philosophic attitude lessens agonies of life. If one looks into the embryonic meaning of 'Yesterday is not today', it is evident that man not for a moment feels cut off from the past -

Every new moment/springs from the womb/of the moment gone by
Fertilized in mind/bears young one of its kind. 158

If the intentions are clearly understood, man could lead a joyful life. 'The Nudging Present' CP.146 gives a new tilt to the above meaning when the poet says -

the past far behind
the future far ahead/the present nudges from...the wound bleeds
the hoary /past full of dead dreams.

Past and present become inseparable and stealthily tell of past and predict future. The poet lifts images from nature fine-tuned to sensations nature stimulates. 'Behold her Atop the Tree' CP 143 is a sensuous poem where nature a young attractive woman, lives on earth, below the azure sky.

Passionate wind tickles bosom/crimson cheeks, roses in bloom
loose hair frolic with wind/water, in the stream below
Holds her in its bowl

'Spring Tickles in Blood' 145 mixes nature with hard unpleasant facts. The advent of spring is harbinger of colour and meaning in life where 'frozen mind begins to stir/spring tickles in blood.' The message of hope exists here. 'A Sluggish January Evening' 167 is mildly cosy and gently motivating experience. Nature moves softly as

the ‘sun slowly sinks down/shadows rise to the sky/ shadows rise to the sky/A toddler tittle-tattles at the whining dog Labourers look at watches/at their cosy hearths.’

Beautiful images emerge in ‘A Day in Rains’, ‘Crimson to Crimson’ and ‘Esoteric’. The last poem is noteworthy for its vague undertones and seriousness at the same time. A reference to the corpse perched on the back of a living legend of past, attempts to answer queries, an endless process that has still not covered all the questions of life, and as such, the mystic halo spreads as an invisible phantom rides.

Contemporary issues find the poet apprehensive. Birth and death cause deep philosophic wounds. Modern life is materialistic and devoid of virtues, is the truth that frustrates. Man’s despair and melancholy in life need appropriate medication. Thus, he observed life, lived... and finally gave a huge shock to us. Amen!

P C K Prem

Email: pckpremkatoch@gmail.com

BIO

An author of more than seventy books, P C K Prem (p c katoch of garh-malkher, Palampur, Himachal, a former academician, civil servant and member himachal public service commission, Shimla), a post-graduate

(1970) in English literature from Punjab University, Chandigarh, is a poet, novelist, short story writer, trans-creator and a critic in English and Hindi from Himachal, India. In 2015, Authorspress, Delhi published a book on P C K Prem -*Echoing Time and Civilisations* by Dr Rob Harle, Dr Sunil Sharma & Dr Sangeeta (Editors) and another by Dr P V Laxmiprasad - *The Spirit of Age and Ideas (in the Novels of P C K Prem)* in 2016.

He is also an author of *History of Contemporary Indian English Poetry – An Appraisal* 2019 in two volumes and *The Lord of Gods* 2019 also in two volumes. He published ‘As I Know - *The Lord of the Mountains –Shiva Purana*’ in 2021. *Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana* in three volumes 2023 and *ETERNAL TRUTHS –A few pages from Ancient Indian Literature*, 2024 in Five Volumes, are his latest books.

At present, he lives with wife Shakun at their farm in Palampur, Himachal, India