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**From the Hour of Antipathy on the Hour of Immortality: A Critique on Chambial's
*Hour of Antipathy***

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It was truly heartbreaking to learn about the untimely demise of D. C. Chambial, a significant contemporary Indian English poet. I got a WhatsApp message of the ninth-day ritual from his son, Brigadier Avaneesh Chambial who informed me his beloved father had passed away following a tragic fall at home, which resulted in a fatal brain injury. He further shared that his father breathed his last on 19 November 2024 at 9.15 a.m. I was profoundly shocked and grappled with the reality of his passing. Memories of my association started flooding back. I recalled how I first came into his contact through *Poetcrit*, the international journal which provided a platform for the new and reputed voices that enriched Indian English poetry and criticism. In honour of Chambial's legacy, I here share once again my article on his poetry collection *Hour of Antipathy*.

D.C. Chambial (1950-2024), with his poetry collections *Broken Images*, *The Cargoes of the Bleeding Heart*, *Perceptions*, *Gyrating Hawks & Sinking Roads*, *Before the Petals Unfold*, *This Promising Age & Other Poems*, *Collected Poems (1979-2004)*, *Mellow Tones*, *Words 1979-2010*, *Hour of Antipathy* (2014), *Songs of Sonority and Hope* (2018), and *Song of Light and Other Poems* (2020) to his credit, stands out as a significant contemporary poet in this materialistic age, which is dominated more by fiction than poetry. Though the present age is an age of fiction, even more than five hundred poets are penning poetry. Time will only sieve and separate the genuine ones from the poetasters. The nightingales are at rest and weep at their fate, while the insects and minor birds have been awarded the position higher than they deserve.

Chambial's ninth poetry collection, namely, *Hour of Antipathy* (2014), which records the journey of the poet, who, on the wings of memory and dream, soars high in the sky watching the landscapes dotted with cacti and lilies which offer him a peep into the roots (of blood) that create a storm within him so violent that he feels anger to the extent of calling the present hour—the hour of antipathy, and ultimately, seeks peace within while offering his vision—the vision of Heaven that will rise “out of Hell / On this bloody Earth” only when the people “sacrifice / the devils of / ego, desire, greed.” No doubt, he finds himself in darkness, and calls life “an unsought tragedy” but he is not a diehard pessimist. It is his conviction that “the Hell of hate and discord disappears / And reigns the Heavenly glow pearly white” (*Hour* 74).

Softness is life while toughness is death. What is required in life is softness. The poet favours softness because he knows that it can perform wonders. It seems that he is influenced by the Holy Tao Te Ching, which speaks thus in Text 76 and Text 78:

Man at his birth is supple and weak; at his death, firm and strong. (So it is with) all things. Tree and plants, in their early growth, are soft and brittle; at their death, dry and withered.

Thus it is that firmness and strength are the concomitants of death; softness and weakness, the concomitants of life. (Text 76)

Everyone in the world knows that the soft overcomes the hard, and the weak the strong, but no one is able to carry it out in practice. (Text 78)

The poem ‘Radishes and Turnips’ recommends softness in place of toughness. It is natural that their roots enter the soil deep while penetrating the hard soil. This happens with life. If a man is soft, he can conquer what he wishes. Here is the excerpt which recommends softness as the principle of life:

Soft is what one needs:
Soft sentiments, soft moments,
Soft touches and, of course,
Soft relations
To avoid hurts and bruises
For copious growth
Of stout relations and roots. (*Hour 15*)

Life, in its original form, is peace and love, but the materialistic demon turns it into the valley of sorrow. One can regain peace if one leaves Satan within. “Heaven rises out of Hell” is the conviction of the poet, who longs for drowning “the world of care and concern” in “the halcyon sea of content”, so that “the reign of Heaven” may replace “the Hell of hate and discord.” Uncertainty in life is its magic. Life, to the poet, seems to be “a tale unforeseen, untold” (*Hour 74*). Life without peace is Hell in itself. Peace is abstract like love itself. Here in this world people continue to run after one longing to another. Being hurry is to be restless. A man, who wishes to be in peace, will have to free himself from tensions and concerns otherwise his condition will be like a man, who is in the desert, where hot sands burn him inwardly and outwardly. Underline the excerpt which beautifully presents the mental state of such a man:

Like a mirage notice
in the hot sands
burn all hopes and images.

Images of life
full of rainbow
lost in the gale.

Gale within shakes
peace from one
like mangoes from a tree. (*Hour 54-55*)

What he needs in such adverse circumstances is love. Love can give him strength to rise above the concerns, worries and tensions. The poet sincerely advises: “one has to care with love / to transcend tensions to peace” (*Hour 55*).

One who goes from this world to the other after death never returns to share his experiences. It is imagined that one who performs good tasks goes to Heaven, which is on the other side of that hill, beyond horizon. Heaven is there where there is harmony, peace and love. This is the mysterious world where “all the rivers and streams” merge together “into a Harmonious whole.” This is the perpetual home where there is no feeling of guilt. Here is the reign of light, which is deathless. The poet calls man’s soul glow-worm that goes to meet the light in Heaven. Pay attention to the excerpt which reveals the soul going to the way to Heaven after death:

The glow-worms that go beyond the hill
merge with the light.
None dare defy the cosmic law;
none return to tell the tale:
Heaven and Hell.
All sit beneath the Tree
and wait, one by one, for their turn
beneath the beauteous blend. (*Hour 42*)

The poet seems to be inspired by the Romantic poet, who longs for the lost days. Romantic melancholic strains flow in their expression. The poet in Chambial also longs for the days, which are no more. He recalls the songs, which used to echo among the hills and valleys. Take a look at the excerpt which reveals the poet’s melancholy vein:

Where is gone
the song:
once resounded
on the hills,
in the valleys,
and gorges deep;
Flowing like falls
fast
into the air above. (*Hour 24*)

The poet knows how to recall memory and mix it with pleasure for the sake of pleasure for the present and the future. The poet, in ‘An Escapade’, recalls the day when the young and old people, with the intention of pleasure, move towards the village where they enjoy themselves life fully while cutting the grass, spinning and twining the rope for swing. While doing all these activities they feel that they are in Heaven. The poet mentions the process of swinging for pleasure. The poem reminds one Robert Frost’s ‘Birches’. Swinging gives them the feel of gliding high above the clouds without any fear or tear. Examine the following extract which reveals Frost’s touches in the process of swinging up and swinging down:

A branch of the banyan so selected
to hang the sturdy rope and take their turns
to scale the heights and reap the elixir

so sweet in delights. Moments full of divine
bliss except now and then: one of them
excelled the rest in that feat of taking
swing to height atop flying on the swing
to and fro, high and low like one gliding
above clouds scaling heights sans any fright. (*Hour 12*)

Then, suddenly, the rope breaks and makes the man on the swing fly in air. The man shrieks but does not lose balance and, thus, saves himself by leaving the rope and clinging to the safe spot instantly. This escapade fills all the people with joy. The poet calls it a jovial trade because all have come for pleasure to fill their memories with the present for the future. Tide of fear gives place to the tide of joy. Life is full of such dangers which come at every step. The need is to face them without losing the balance of mind. No one except the person on the swing will have to face the consequence of his moves. Hence, help within is the only help that one finds during the journey of life.

The poet enters the memory lane which reveals him the sight of a temple and the red flag on the bamboo pole. The structure of the temple is changed from the old one to the new one but what is not changed is its flag, which still waves revealing the history of the past and the memories associated with it. The poet calls the flag “a memento of past memories” (*Hour 9*) as it carries the past with it. The temple can be seen from afar because of the red flag. The flag has become an identity of the existence of the temple. By telling the story of a mad man, who enters the temple and returns as an ordinary man, the poet proves his faith in the healing power, which gives solace to the troubled soul. Notice the suggestion of the following excerpt which reveals the healing effect of the temple on the mad man:

Once a person, they called him mad;
came shouting,
went up to the temple,
climbed the steep,
all feared his fall.
Opened the door
Bowed to deity and sat there
for hours.

When came out:
he was an ordinary
human being, tranquil. (*Hour 9*)

Faith remains the same when the temple was with the thatch in the past or in the present when the temple is with the concrete walls. “The thatch gone: / concrete walls replaced Mud walls, / thatched roof by lintel” (*Hour 9*). Hence, the poet believes in God and respects every temple where one can go for peace of mind.

The poetry of Chambial reflects the contemporary landscapes which are now dotted with corruption, bribery, rape, murder, and what is not. Morals have become valueless. Virtues sob in one corner while vices dance in joy. What rules the world now, is hatred and jealousy. Satan reigns supreme with its rod of hatred. Observe the lines from the poem, ‘We are Living’, which reveals the truth of the contemporary scene:

We're living at a time
when morals, ethics and virtues
emaciated, scared, crouch in a corner;
when debauchery, larceny, treachery
have become the order of the day
shamelessly;
love and compassion banished,
jealousy and hatred rule the roost. (*Hour 43*)

In this materialistic age, man prefers matter. The poet misses the songs of affected love, which the lover used to sing during the days of the European Revival. He realizes that time has changed since then. Social concern has dominated love, and man has started preferring matter. How to be rich instantly has become the primary concern. For this, he does not dither even from taking the help of Satan within. Platonic love is outdated and valueless. It is tragic to see the condition of man whom God made in His own image. Take note of the lines from the poem 'Man For Mammon', which reveals the damage done to earth by man:

Man has meddled not with morals only,
Dug deep into the bowls of Earth as well;
Has made vulnerable Earth, life, a hell,
In his blind quest for Mammon selfishly. (*Hour 37*)

The poet reflects over the changes that have occurred in the present. Life is not money; but money has become life because it makes it alive. He doubts whether the day comes when man will think of man in terms of relation, and not in terms of commodity. Kurukshetra will determine the way of life for man. Stone Age is over. Now man does not find space and time, his barriers, for thinking. He thinks beyond space and time. The acquisitive activities have made him material enough not to consider love for the human beings. Man has developed the material teeth which bite man for the material gains. Examine the following lines, from 'There Was A Man', which reveals the truth of the damage caused by the materialistic attitude of man:

The rainbow is lost
in the cacophony
of debates futile;
man has grown fangs to bite man;
love is lost in the human heart,
sits like a vulture on the carcass
digging tones of his own demise. (*Hour 59*)

The poet also paints the scene of corruption though he doubts its end despite the sincere attempts of Anna Hazare. When he sees the presence of corruption everywhere, he feels a storm within but finds himself helpless before this demon. What he longs for, is the victory of Anna Hazare, who wages a war against corruption. But he doubts whether the corrupt men will leave corruption. Consider the selection, from the poem 'Panic', for this doubt:

Storm
Within and without.

People rejoice
His victory.

Will the rats
Stop to nibble.

Running blindly
In labyrinth. (*Hour 19*)

No doubt, democracy is a system for the well-being of the poor. But, in India, it has become a mockery—mockery in the name of justice to the poor people. Prices soar high. The people want to change the government. How elections are managed becomes a matter of concern. Meditate upon the lines, from ‘Masters Beggars’, which clearly reveals the truth of elections that are manipulated with coins:

The season changes every half a decade
The paupers to gain some might;
But choose to sell souls for few coins,
A bottle of wine, they pawn souls
Another half a decade looking at the stars
In some hope of bolt from the blue. (*Hour 50*)

The poet respects woman but feels restless when he finds them going astray in the name of modernity. Now-a-days kitty parties have come in fashion. In kitty parties the poet reveals the truth that these women do not talk of arts but of money. Money matters because it makes the mare go. The poet satirizes when he says that they return to their holy houses. Houses are not holy in themselves. Its dwellers make them holy. Here the holy women play, dance and enjoy the kitty parties. As soon as the party is over, the host is left to struggle with the pots and plates. Think over the extract, from the poem ‘Women in Kitty’, which reveals the condition of the host after the kitty party is over:

After an hour or two,
they will be off
to their holy houses,
after the treat.

Host will be left alone
to quarrel with the pans and plates,
bottles and glasses,
mercilessly mutilated paper napkins. (*Hour 31*)

D. C. Chambial, with the passage of time, has become more communicative and convincing to the reader than he was earlier. He used to pack his lines with allusions and difficult words but now, *Hour of Antipathy* is different from his earlier poetry collections as it reveals the poetic thoughts in simple and lyrical ways. If it talks of Satan, Solomon, Queen Sheba on one hand, it also reveals the Indian world where ‘tandava’, ‘Om Shivam! Tat tvam asi! etc., are heard. Sometimes he pens lines like “How can one fly back in time for fresh glow!” (*Hour 37*), and “Soft breeze pregnant with heavenly fragrance” (45), “Animal within / seeks to enjoin / animal without” (57), which strike the reader with wonder. His phraseology is equally poetic and simple to the extent that it directly goes into the heart of the reader. How

can one forget such phrases as “Breathed breath with breath” (14), “smoky sounds / of treason” (20), “hill of hope” (26), “A celebration of colours” (45), “a flood of faith” (63), and the like?

Idiom is not poetry. What makes poetry is metaphor and imagery. One feels the heat of idioms which scorches him with their hot rays of “cats and dogs” (*Hour* 10), “kith and kin” (37), “to keep the wolf / From the door” (50), “to make both ends meet!” (50), “bolt from the blue” (50), “Life – a nine days’ wonder / Make hay while the sun shines” (71). The reader moves from pages to pages to take a bath in the shower of metaphors and images but fails though the cascades of similes, personification, and alliteration offer him some relief. Mark the instances of similes:

The world of
Queen Sheba vanishes
like a mirage. (*Hour* 54)
.....
Happiness - long cherished dream
flowed like a sore wound. (*Hour* 25)
.....
The faith flows like a perennial river (*Hour* 63)

Here are the instances of alliteration:

Fears not to selling his soul to Satan (*Hour* 36)
.....
strangers settle down in satisfaction (*Hour* 65)
.....
Sheen Sun silently
Sinks into silent sea
Of dark dungeon.

Dark dungeon
Drives dark horses -
The door of dawn. (*Hour* 73)

Mark the excerpt for the use of personification:

All trees and plants
quaver with fear unknown (*Hour* 18)
.....
Society, the cradle
of child, distorts mind
with likes and dislikes. (*Hour* 48)

Study the lines, which not merely reveal a beautiful combination of personification and simile but create a lively image before the eyes also:

Earth turned black,
cries for a drop like papiha
to wet the dried throat

in this cruel hour of antipathy. (*Hour 18*)

The poet does not forget to employ symbols if their presence can add to the charm and beauty of the poem. Heed the excerpt which makes a good use of the symbol roses and other flowers that expose the truth of the human beings:

Erstwhile roses,
lilies, even rajnigandhas
wizened
in the heat of hatred. (*Hour 25*)

The heat of hatred does not let the flowers go free and, thus, takes them in its monstrous grip. It happens with the human beings who see themselves and their young ones in the embrace of hatred which colours them in its colour. The poet knows how to use all the seasons together. Muse on the lines, which reveal the technical skill of the poet in employing the poetical touches from all seasons:

Summer comes tickling with its heat and drought,
Rains wet the earth; autumn dumps spirits low,
Winter sits deep on senses: chill and snow,
Spring many a hope in heart with Spring's glow. (*Hour 46*)

What one feels in *Hour of Antipathy* is the passivity of the imaginative fairy, which does not seem to shower her grace as she used to do so earlier. But, the other thing that enchants the reader is the fusion of memory and dream. It seems that imaginative fairy is busy in dreaming dreams that take her to the memory lanes which colour the canvas of poetry be it nature, temple, man, or an object. The fairy is lost in the well of memory, which unrolls the personal and historical pages that the poet read and wrote in the past. The past becomes the present when it comes to the white sheet through the pen which feels the force of the fairy. Hence, these poems are flowers—the flowers that have come out of his fancy rather than imagination.

Overall, the poet in Chambial succeeds in his attempt of revealing the outer landscapes dotted with contemporary evils which play havoc with the inner heart that feels storm within to the extent that it revolts though remains helpless against the monster of materialism. This monster, no doubt, offers bodily pleasures, but takes the soul of the human beings, who remain restless like the earth which “cries a drop like papiha / to wet the dried throat / in this cruel hour of antipathy” (*Hour 18*). While assessing his poetry, R. C. Shukla aptly writes:

The simplicity of Chambial as a poet is charming and his social concerns are that of a person who is more interested in necessities than the luxuries of life. The most significant thing about him is that his entire poetry is rooted in contemporary life and its ordeals. (xi)

As Chambial is no more, his words are with us. I recall his words in his *Collected Poems* where he preached “a life of holiness, perfection and purity” (*CP 71*) and, like a saint, asked us: “throw to the wind the claims of caste and creed / Out of love and compassion hug the humanity” (*CP 72*). What he wrote in words is true. Now, to prove the worth of his words, he has marched towards heaven to turn the hour of antipathy into the hour of immortality.

Though he is in heaven, he continues his search. He is “in search of that heaven / where milk of humanity gushes out / and springs of fraternal love flow / continuously; the clear air fills lungs” (CP 69).

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