



Afflatus Creations

Vol. 2, No. 1

Jan - Mar, 2025

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Intellectual Attitude to Life Poetry of D C Chambial

Chambial, one of the most eminent voices in Indian English Poetry has so far published more than twelve anthologies of poems namely: *Broken Images* (1983), *The Cargoes of the Bleeding Hearts and Other Poems* (1984), *Perceptions* (1986), *Gyrating Hawks and Sinking Roads* (1996), *Before the Petals Unfold* (2002), *This Promising Age and Other Poems* (2004), *Mellow Tones* (2009), *Words* (2012), *Hour of Antipathy* (2014), and *River of Happiness* (2018) are notable collections of poetry from Poetic Publications, Maranda, Himachal. *Broken Images* is a Samkaleen Prakashan, New Delhi (1983) and *The Cargoes of the Bleeding Hearts & Other Poems*, is from Golden Books of India, Calcutta (1984). His eight collections appeared in one book, *Words: 1979-2010* from Aadi Publications, Jaipur (2012), and two latest as *Songs of Sonority and Hope*, from the Authors Press, New Delhi (2018) and the latest is *Song of Light and Other Poems* from Aadi Publications, Jaipur.

One of the most prominent features of Chambial's poetry is an intellectual probing into life's dilemmas in the contemporary scenario. The man in the poet is disturbed as the poet's multifaceted personality interferes too often and a coherent view of life is possible only when one goes into the psyche and intellect of the poet. Only then one is competent enough to understand. It is imperceptible but it stirs. He authentically speaks about the modern anguish, of pains arising out of chaotic living conditions, of scrambled thought processes while man fails to locate a correct existential position amidst surging despair and overshadowing frustrations. Chambial's intellectual intensity befuddles a gentle heart. To understand the poet, it is necessary to know the intellect of the people. The post-independence period witnessed many changes at various levels in the system in totality and the people minds and hearts throbbed with the exciting possibilities of charting out a bright future. It is pertinent to point out that Chambial's 'intellect and heart' was more inclined to observe what was taking place around than what had occurred. He is away from the colonial hang over and tries to depict life as it is with all the Indianness.

In Chambial's poetry, one feels an intensity of experience which gets unique expression in wonderful images.

Life –an urge to go
to deeper recesses
but annulling force
of buoyancy doesn't relax
until volcano erupts.
(“Volcano,” *Broken Images* in *Collected Poems* 27)

Man in life confronts mysteries of life and wishes to unravel the meaning hidden beneath the surface of apparent life. For the poet, it is a continuous process to find meanings in volcanic intellectual struggle pestering life and existence.

Despite despairing moments in life, a rigorous search prolongs. Still hope of an 'enthralled melody simmers' when it satisfies the parched heart and intellect under a breezy shower. An earlier stoic attitude creates a stage of unfeeling and vacuity.

Cold and stolid stones
senseless and apartheid
Wriggle with
spades and sickles
Atop murderous hills...
(“Stones,” *Broken Images in Collected Poems* 27)

Harsh realities of life shock and an apathetic and hardened attitude brings carnage and violence. Stones, apartheid, spades and sickles are words loaded with terrific images, which create fears in the minds of peace loving people. The images created with words like falcons, skeletal sky, colliding thoughts, blank canvas and myriad “In a Trance” shock and bewilder signaling a frightful callousness and brutality in experience. A merger of emotions and thoughts, cries for meanings amidst struggles ending like a collapse of ‘a rootless tree / in the storm.’ Intellectual wailings make existence disturbing as harmony is a distant dream where modern life seems rootless and so lacks synchronization. He is distressed at nature’s anguish as hills tremble and sky weeps, where smoke appears like a sea of desolation. Poet’s hints of frequent blood-thirty wars, communal riots, bomb blasts and fanatic religious battles in various parts of the world are timely; and warn men of the ominous extinction. To find identity is an enigma defying reasons and scrutiny that renders intellectual exercise futile

Highly philosophical lines below astonish with brevity and candor. Earlier the poet was disillusioned but this verse exhibits tremendous faith in life as the poet’s optimism gushes out with a rare spontaneity.

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,” *Broken Images in Collected Poems* 33)

Chambial lives in poetic aura and radiance and rarely opens up to the outside world. Possibly sufferings in contemporary life disturb him. *The Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts and Other Poems* appeared in 1984 heralding a return to disillusionment. Hopeful 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,"
The Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts & Other Poems in Collected Poems 42)

These lines are disheartening but truth exists in the lines below when one reads the meaning of images the words create.

A moth mad to kiss flame
the flame, bright and beautiful.
but cruel burns the moment you
approach it. A bee-spider episode!
("Moth," *The Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts & Other Poems in Collected Poems 42*)

I sink my feet in the cold water
on a bed of sand and stones
dreamed about past when
bacteria struggled in snow.

... ..

A boat dances on waves
river sobs, clouds bleed
Hills turn blue.

("Bleeding Clouds," *The Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts & Other Poems in Collected Poems 44-45*)

An incessant struggle in the mind continues as mad engagement in daily run shadows life with emptiness and escape from this 'bee-spider' run-about never terminates.

Chambial's forte is to create images, paintings and pictures out of life and nature and at intense moments out of nothing. Objects which usually escape a common man's attention draw poet's vigilant eyes. The world of nature is an inexhaustible cache from where he draws out pearls of wisdom and weaves dreams while trying to give rational interpretation of life. Objects dead or alive, plants, animals, birds, water, earth, stars, sky and ocean are instruments to carry emotions, thoughts and philosophy. The poet uses these as symbols of man's internal strife and the camouflaged quality of life. Hypocrisy, violence, mendacity and fears in life repulse the poet to the inner world. Man is discontented in the modern world despite varied comforting gadgets. Poet's finds apt words and images to depict the intensity of agony.

Chambial's mental and physical sufferings pile-up as meaningless wars fought around the world burden his inborn sensitivity. He is anguished that man seeks life and existence in incessant violence. "A Cry for Peace" carries the burden silently and the "Masks" exposes deception and vanity as a modern man makes strenuous efforts to find causes and reasons of a not very happy destiny.

One after another
mile-stones are left behind
With a hope
of reaching some destination

... ..

The straw has caught the fire
ready to singe the spirit
Of cats and rats.

(“To My Friends,” *The Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts & Other Poems in Collected Poems* 46)

In these lines, a ray of hope, a stream of flowing life and again a wish to fill the world with “satyam, shivam, sundram” is observed. A melancholic shadow overtakes while one reads gentle lines of “To Mother”. A child’s psychology finds fine expression with the eternal question: ‘Who I am?’ “A Prayer” again makes a startling departure where the will to live encourages the poet to discern the true meaning of beauty, truth and God in life. Soon the poet settles down contentedly in life as words form images impregnated with meaningful reflections. Strangely enough, one is mildly irritated.

The poor pigeons
stare at the horizon
in the hope of a new sun
will it dawn?

(“The Burning Tree,” *The Cargoes of Bleeding Hearts & Other Poems in Collected Poems* 62)

In “Awaiting Moments,” the poet exhibits determination:

In this hour full of loneliness
Hence you cruel time!
Cease my waiting moments
To my idol let me run.

Chambial’s philosophic anxieties and tensions almost disappear as the years roll on. *Perceptions* (1986), makes a radical shift in the poet’s mind and heart. Now, the poet is relaxed and meditates on life in cheery countenance. For him life is an opportunity to create and disseminate joy around. In the verse “The Ripe Time”, the theme is forceful with an eye for the future. Concentration and single-minded devotion leads man to achieve the target the poet appears to say. Chambial tries to establish that poetry is not merely an emotional outburst but it has a definite purpose.

I have a few acres of land
with the coming of rains,
Thundering of clouds
I get ready to sow the seeds.

... ..

I have belle blithe and debonair;
she sings, snorts, laughs
Weeps and fumbles.
Is it time? Is it time to sow the seeds?

... ..

I think it is time to sow the seeds.
(“The Ripe Time”, *Perceptions in Collected Poems* 67)

Here land, rains, sow, seeds and belle are significant words presaging creation, procreation and rejuvenation and that is exactly the purpose of life and living. If the poet hints at the famous sloka of Gita, it is focused. Desire if inspires action for fruit or reward, is futile. Karma, if selfless, makes life meaningful. It seems Chambial's is worried about humanity. At times, poet's symbols and images obscure clarity and also the poet refuses to work on a predetermined pattern. He writes naturally and spontaneously and it creates difficulties in understanding his poetic prowess.

If "To her Luscious Lake" is a sizzling and sensuous love verse with a sprinkling of fresh thoughts, love for humanity worries the poet in "Let Us March" where he is blunt and philosophic. Humanity and humanism do not recognize any religion or dogma or doctrine but repose faith in man and life.

Let us march, today, hand in hand
concatenating souls like beads
into the thread of the greatest ROSARY
the ever cherished HUMANISM.

... ..

...march in search of that heaven
where milk of humanity gushes out
and springs of fraternal love flow.

... ..

...march into that land and time
where colour and creed do not impede;
impede not the free flow of fellow feeling...

("Let Us March" *Perceptions in Collected Poems* 68-69)

When the poet thinks deeply without respite, even "Silence" tortures mind and spirits. Nature's silence before the storm is not terrible as compared to inner chaos:

In the silence of the seas
I smell a perilous storm
Brewing in the womb of time

... ..

The silence of the heart more harrowing
than all seas and storms
A lesson taught by time.

("Silence" *Perceptions in Collected Poems* 85)

In a subtle intellectual power, in "Summer to South", *Perceptions in Collected Poems* 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 revealed here.

It appears that for a long period the poet's meditative and emotional, analytical and philosophical faculties were not idle or lethargic. As the years roll on, he is able to crystallize and straighten a few ambiguities. Earlier love for images and metaphors made it difficult to go deep into the mind of this poet. But with uplifting, mild filtering and sieving, there is precision and transparency. Contemporary realities are dealt with an empathetic feeling as symbols and similes flow with a refreshing liquidity when one confronts *Gyrating Hawks and Sinking Roads* (1996) a new collection of verses.

In an age of insecurity and stark faithlessness, the question of survival reigns supreme 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 nature of life, worries the poet. Bit by bit life lingers on and finally goes deep down in the abyss of oblivion and so the mystery remains:

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

(“Flaming Candle” Gyration *Hawks and Sinking Roads* in *Collected Poems* 105)

Grief and gloom are just temporary. In 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.

(“Night can’t be Long.” Gyration *Hawks and Sinking Roads* in *Collected Poems* 106)

Materialistic living is the theme of modern life. Demon of corruption is the god today, the poet deliberates. 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.

(“Confessions” Gyration *Hawks and Sinking Roads* in *Collected Poems* 108)

In “Without the Qualms of Conscience” the poet talks of cunningness, violence and loot of a modern man bereft of ethics and morals where horse-trading is a trait of politics. It is life of arson, rapes, violence and sexual orgies. A graphic picture emerges that provokes to think agonizingly.

We feel safe
with whisky in pegs
legs in plates and become
Blind to everything else
even our nudity.

(“Without the Qualms of Conscience” Gyration *Hawks and Sinking Roads* in *Collected Poems* 110)

Rhythm is the causality and if a man aspires to the contrary, it is “Longing in Void” and he observes only “Vultures in Sky” with no hope of tranquility. In a heartless world a sensitive thinker like the poet is “causality” at last, and “I feel cut asunder / from the world / like a shuttle lost in space” (“The Casualty”121). If a man sticks to a little quality life – with morals and virtues – he is a non-entity during this age where.

Sun is proscribed here

only dead walk
with a cross
on shoulders
for our deliverance!

(“Dreams” Gyrate *Hawks and Sinking Roads* in *Collected Poems 121*)

It is the self –a metaphysical inquiry that is important for a modern man. Though not lyrical like the metaphysical poets -Cowley and Herbert, Chabial exhibits a fine mix up of intellectual inquiry and passion. Like these poets, he draws images from nature in a startling rapidity. Nature is eternal and nothing can hurt it, is the message of “Singing Blossoms” (125). The blossoms symbolize beauty, harmony and meaning.

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 for from where
none ever returns
to tell about the voyage

These words succinctly sum up life’s dilemma and complexities where everybody pursues meaning in living but comes out empty handed “in the search of the face / lost in void in / the valley of maya.” (“In the Memory of a Dead Friend” 127)

The poet’s pangs and pains arising out of modern life are evident in *Before the Petals Unfold* (2002). The lyrics embarrass and disturb but the themes of fragmented, vicious, corrupt and unethical life provoke to think deeply about life.

In Hopkins’ poetry, one finds immensity of love for nature and genuine imparting of meaning and beauty to nature around. Hopkin’s images are quite distinctive having an integral quality. For Chabial, natural objects have deep meaning and each segment of nature gives material for images with multi-dimensional meaning of life with intensity. In verse “Life-An Enigma” life is equated with a map on the palm where life’s movement can be visualized. “Heat” stands for life and “coldness” for death. The poet, in fine words emphasis that:

...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,” *Before the Petals Unfold* in *Collected Poems* 142)

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.

(“In quest of Cheerfulness” *Before the Petals Unfold* in *Collected Poems* 147)

The poet knows that man is occupied with routine thoughtless pursuits and has turned insensitive in spite of splendid progress. Angst and uncertainties continue to depress 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 challenge the intellect.

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 is cut off from the past. Man’s life is embedded in the past and so the flow of:

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

(“Yesterday is not Today” Before *the Petals Unfold* in *Collected Poems* 158)

If the intentions are clearly understood, “The Nudging Present” 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.

(“The Nudging Present” Before *the Petals Unfold* in *Collected Poems* 146)

Past and present become inseparable and stealthily tell of past and predict future. The poet lifts images from nature and is fine-tuned to sensations stimulated by nature. “A Sluggish January Evening” is mildly cozy and is a gently motivating experience as it excites a brooding mind to observe-

sun slowly sinks down

shadows rise to the sky

A toddler tittle-tattles at the whining dog

Labourers look at watches

at their cozy hearths.

(“A Sluggish January Evening” Before *the Petals Unfold* in *Collected Poems* 167)

The poet recalls fire tragedies that occurred a decade ago at Dabwali, Baripada and Mina in Mecca. Here, he is serious about the turns fate takes.

What a poetic justice! Fruit of past Karma?

... ..

Man, a helpless mortal

in this drama of despair.

(“Death by Fire” Before *the Petals Unfold* in *Collected Poems* 142)

The poet dwells on contemporary age, its predicament, failure and glory in *This Promising Age and Other Poems* (2004). If it is at the pinnacle of brilliance, it has also touched nadir of disgrace and sin. Man’s life and philosophy move between two pendulums and in-between, he builds a world of truth and facts, fancies and dreams. The heart feels, eyes observe and intellect analytically interprets life and society. “This Promising Age” is a realistic poem in fragmented rhythms. Like the age itself, words disregard a pattern. But the narration is obvious and the images stridently frighten. It is life of inner contradictions and outer variations. Life is mechanical and just looks as if it were designed years back. This “antagonistic society” is “acute” with heartless “attitude”. The misfortune is that “in this robot culture / where soul defies / the principle of metempsychosis / and enter into / wires, screws, transistors.../ to help, interpret and amuse?” (“This Promising Age”) in a chilling series seems ghastly. Finer sensibilities feel a vacuum and aridness and look sterile.

Compassion, pity, sympathy

face retreat

in the face of hypocrisy and cynicism.

... ..

Nature has been cruel

to the honest individual...

Ordinary time flows into

Bhrigu time.

Unknowingly know centuries

yet feel not so

(“This Promising Age” *This Promising Age and Other Poems* 6-7)

This age structures and reshapes man’s life and activities. Man moves around below the surface and above into the deep sky; and feels and yet is unfeeling and this is man’s intellectual anguish

When nature is enraged, the poet appears to warn and bluntly tells that nature destroys and spells peril. Wreckages and remnants are its indelible marks on the earth and here a man learns to reconstruct life. A little verse “With a Whimper” makes a grave situation, witty. Morning rituals of brushing teeth and shaving assume a ludicrous character and inspire to think differently.

I look like a fool

on the face of the mirror

for an easy answer

with a whimper.

(“With a Whimper” *This Promising Age and Other Poems* 11)

The poet looks at transient human life with a philosophical eye and through images created out of the objects of nature, interprets it. In “Sand-Smell Spreads” a unique fragrance emanates, as if, from the vast desert of Rajasthan. His control over the images is fantastic and in this little poem, while tributes are paid to women in Rajasthan for the sturdiness and vigor, the verse also prompts invigorating thoughts to look at life from another point of view.

Sink into, emerge from the vast wilderness

Ploughing the sands

Mirage metamorphoses into reality.

Pagodas of water

Poised on steady heads;

The fiery sun feels defeated.

(“Sand-Smell Spreads” *This Promising Age and Other Poems* 24)

I am inclined to reaffirm here that in the intellectual horizons of Chambial, one discerns a characteristic blend of realistic and rational mind of Harvansh Rai Bachhan, superb perceptive authority of Ageya, Suryakanth Tripathi and Shamsheer Bahadur, who exercise a lasting influence on people as they are well known Hindi poets and authors of India. He is genuinely worried about the contemporary sufferings, injustice and sense of discrimination prevailing in the society. Like Shiv K Kumar, I K Sharma, O P Bhatnagar, I H Rizvi, K V Dominic and P C K Prem, he fully understands the dilemmas and asserts an intellectually viable presence in many lyrics.

One is often escorted by Chambial to an impenetrable and cryptic land of frequent changes in sequences, mindscapes and heretofore, strange inner areas of vibrations filling the physical and psychic world, where a man is scarcely aware of the internal developing growth. A sensitive heart feels and contemplates deeply when one goes deep into the poetry of Chambial. His poetry is difficult to understand as there are abrupt shifts in images. It happens

often and if this unintentional technique of his poetry is fully comprehended one enjoys his verses. The poet's search for perfect images to interpret life is still unfinished and so to understand Chambial, one must try to know the energy and horizons of poet's creative activity and his own limitations. The moment truth opens up, understanding is a reality. In the case of Chambial, energy with creative urge is essential to understand his poetic perspective.

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PCK Prem

Email: pckpremkatoch@gmail.com