

Review Article

**Reading Manas Bakshi's *Man of The Seventh Hour* : A  
Brief Appraisal**

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Indian English Poetry has made an exceptional stay despite all odds & vulnerability. Compared to Indian poetry & weighed against the rich variety of poetry produced in regional languages of India, Indian English Poetry handovers a unique array of protocol, connections, mode and manners amply displayed by post millennium innovators and experimenters of this ubiquitous genre. Nearly two centuries ago Indians endeavored to learn and translate English classics into Indian languages and Indian classics into English to win world wide popularity. Well known Indians familiarized India and her ancient wisdom to the western world alongside making India acquainted with the science and civilization of Europe. This inter-relationship of two antagonistic yet complimentary world-views begot a new breed of writers we know today as Indo-Anglians or IEW. As India's is a multihued picture here are multiple traditions following multiple ethics in multiple dialects resulting in multi-cultural chaos. To arrange this prevalent chaos in a tidy order or structure seems the logic of today's bards. In the galaxy of post millennium Indian English Poetry Manas Bakshi's prominent voice broadcasted on A.I.R. and appearance as an introspective wordsmith and litterateur extraordinaire radiates a rare glow, glamour and brilliance having no counterpart or peer today. Though I have read and seen cursorily Bakshi's poems in anthologies and literary Journals which appear time after time in Indian literary scene, it is the first time, I got opportunity to go through his complete works and literary output. Bakshi's poems indeed have a sublime compelling force that not only entices and induces by its lyrical murmuring but also inspires and motivates almost all thoughtful readers in favor of a re-vision. His poetic collection entitled *Man of The Seventh Hour* (2006) entwines Hours like seven Rishis of the constellation. Each Hour discovers to explore the meaning of the name- tag attached to it. There are seven name- tags for respective seven Hours. First is victory, second Desire, third one is Greed and the fourth Fear, fifth Hour is Rage, the sixth Conflict. Along these lines the seventh Hour that is Decadence compactly completes the orbit of man's journey in pursuit of humanity and civilization. Additionally, there are three major aspects the poet covers comprehensively- Discovery, Exploration and Existence, like omnipresent creator Brahma so as to facilitate a finale in *Midnight Star*. (2009).

The First Hour : Victory with which the poet begins his collection reveals altogether extensive study of inscrutable secrecy of the Universe. He moves further to complete his perception of Silence. Sound is born in silence. So the sound that is Word accordingly denotes the birth of the universe- the Genesis. That is why, the poet with good reason and subtle poetic precision unfolds simultaneously the mystery, wonder, joy and ecstasy of creation. To further explain the theory of the inert and dark matter of the universe the poet alludes to R.N. Tagore's verse as fitting tribute. Then goes ahead to depict man's dilemma of existence-a perennial and persistent quest for identifying the

reality. The reality of life-cycle from beginning to end, from birth to death has been portrayed with full intellectual vigor to explain to humanity the notion of the reality of the Self. One who lets go the flow of the creative force gets entangled in the endless process of diversifying and multiplying existence. For this reason the poet comes forward as a distinct entity in whom evolution, convulsion, revolution and dissolution swivel and circle. This regularity of rotation also explains that life is not only in a state of flux but also an unending continuity. After giving metaphysical thoughts a full swing, the poet dives deep to pick up charms in a serene quite contemplation to adore and enrich the mythological convention. In this perspective, it will not be out of context, to compare the poet with the great savant, philosopher, art historian and cultural ambassador Alice Borner of Switzerland. (*The Times of India*)<sup>1</sup>. Not because there are art illustrations Hour- wise, but because deepening of cultural ties, expansion of cultural links between cultures and continents provides the poet a rare insight into the Reality. Bakshi's therefore, is a significant contribution in the field of making India popularize and known not only in the subcontinent but also in the continents abroad. The poet seems to experience and enjoy a heightened measure of intellectual and spiritual comfort in such sort of creative life and experience. Being hierophant of an unconventional vision holiness or sacredness for the poet has no separate entity but exists inseparably within the framework of his poetic oeuvre to reveal transcendental truth. As mentioned above Bakshi's collection inimitably explores cosmological cycle of creation, evolution or sustenance and destruction. A notion of the great *Triptych* or *Trimurti* (*The Times of India*)<sup>2</sup>. In an age of decadence wherein the whole world is passing through unprecedented corruption, exploitation and sleaze. Unethical values are propping up day by day. Education too is no exception. *Man of The Seventh Hour* if does nothing at least provides a greater solace and support in favor of rational or scientific ethics.

Myth plays a significant role in the make up of the poem. It not only co-relates prehistoric values with contemporary world but also adds flavor and fervor to the mode of poetry. The poet himself appears at his best in composing these lines "....." *The seven seas/The seven hills/The sun/On a seven-horse chariot*" (*Man of The Seventh Hour* 11)<sup>3</sup>. No discerning reader or critic can undermine poet's knowledge of Greek mythology, Indian scriptures & philosophy. How progressively the poet depicts planet earth at the very outset of creation...." *A stone ball rolling down/Algae taking shape/....The cosmic splendor.*" (10-11) The ephemeral existence of man and woman amidst Geological upheaval and Geographical cataclysm along with the bubbling and sparkling beauties of the nascent world finds exceptional outpourings. Man created in the image of God cannot escape Divine blessings. Likewise the portrayal of the mundane is no less thrilling and amazing. Man steeped in confusion and ignorance queries and questions to be resolved confidently so rightly. It is not easy to mold this self-multiplying nature unless man works against with his higher self-integrating nature. Hence trysting with the mysteries of Nature and his own escapades amidst cogitative agitations the poet concludes by delineating the pleasures of creation and pride of Self-Realization....." *Pride of being/God's best creation/Human being.*" (13) However the victory continues till the poet labels the tag specified as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hour : Desire. Man's destiny is not inscribed on his forehead as is generally believed. The reward of man's *Karma* alone bring fruits. So this Hour elaborates briefly yet precisely

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the theory of *Karma Yoga* practiced by M.K.Gandhi and preached in *The Bhagwad Gita*. The hustle-bustle, hullabaloo, hubbub, huffs and puffs of worldly life get succinct expression through poet's pen. Abruptly the track turns and the poet seems to give expression to the idea of non-duality by affirming the oneness of man, nature and the universe. How aptly he quips- "*One alone/Roaming/one in a crowd*" (14). Then the desire of possession- *To win & reign/with/Power & acumen/An entire worldly domain* (14). But the desire of man is not worldly, mundane or materialistic, it at once embraces the sublime beauty of Nature and the fragrance of divine-love away from the tendency of accumulation with a bountiful and productive future. Correspondingly desire is the expression of the creative impulse said to have been set at work ever since the original creative will of the Universal Being was let loose. Likewise the purpose of the poet is to find out the true meaning of Life, not to live it merely like inhuman and subhuman beasts..... "*In enrichment of values/And ideas/Day by Day/ In the realization/Of a self/In the art of knowing/Life itself*" (17). Man is superior to beasts only by dint of his wisdom to validate this tenet the poet quotes two metaphysical poets John Donne & George Herbert in First and 2<sup>nd</sup> Hours respectively. Afterwards he goes on gradually to unfold the limitations, aspirations, ambitions, bonds of relationships and the caged existence of man on this earth canopied by the luminous aura of the cosmos. The inner poise of man forces the poet to praise vividly the exuberance and outer magnificence of the universe seen, experienced and concealed. Besides interpreting the objectives of man in order to find the purpose and significance of Life Bakshi unmistakably exposes the hollowness of man and his existence like T. S. Eliot..... "*From birth to death/Facing/ The infallible lesson of time/Living itself a question-/Hounded by/The endless desires of the mind.*" (18). Though fully aware of Life's futility, its' fleeting and transient nature the poet has an unwavering trust and conviction in..... "*The indomitable spirit/The insurgent inner urge*" (19). The insurgent inner urge truly points towards Human skull that is said to be by ancient philosophers –an unending sermon and confession on discontentment and dissatisfaction. However BAKSHI'S man, his human being struggles without qualms of conscience, therefore seems to affirm ..... "*Human being/Becomes desirous/More than he needs to be/Gets lust-obsessed/More than he desires to be/Squandering everything/To satiate/His desirous self*" (20).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Hour or the third phase of man's destiny : Greed, as the poet calls it, begins with a tribute to William Shakespeare. The poet then further elaborates the Desire that is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hour to intermingle it with the third : Greed. Accordingly Desire begets instinct, instinct lust, lust scourges the mind to turn it divergent and wayward with Greed. Thus the moral Fable interspersed with evenhanded allegory continues. Greed is unnecessary want, a craving that goes beyond reasonable needs. Unlimited demands extend to broaden and multiply their limbs till man becomes crazy and is tangled into the web of exaggeration. This abundance of desires, their plentitude never gets fulfillment instead breeds malignant germs of frenzied and incurable GREED. Thus Greed one among Seven deadly sins when enters into *the life of man impalpably begins to play havoc. It not only fades graceful & genteel relations.....*" *Polished relation fades/To mean/Dragging it/From drawing room/To bed room/*" (24) but also distorts the mind, intellect and reason.... "*Mirror of mind/ Broken everyday/For reasons unknown*" (24). However, the poet feels contented at the sad, adverse, unfavorable and unpleasant plight of man. So goes on demarcating the commonplace truth that is disharmony

between finite and infinite ,transitory and long-lasting, mortal and immortal and sums up by affirming that all this is....."*Life's momentary game/ Part of the very universal system*" (25). In spite of all odds the poet appears a bold optimist without slightest tinge of pessimism always assertive never timid. Like a seeker of truth he goes to the very root of self-reproductive energy and compels to diffuse itself in the Ground-Noumenon. Also because human mind that has its abode in the temple of body is subjected to frequent fissures....."*Since the days/ Lust & greed have been/ Covered with/Sartorial love & befooling grin/*"(25). In tandem love , lust and greed has no derogatory meaning rather are part and parcel of human life. But man seems somewhat tired and fatigued. His weary-ways of prayer are only to sort out ..... "*Snags & intricacies/ Of besieged worldly life.*"(25) Violence in Social life too gets inescapable attention. Therein animals, birds, even men are sacrificed and slaughtered to satisfy one's insatiable lust, avarice and greed. Here onward , the poet takes into account the time schedule to measures the past and weighs it against the present. How pithy are these lines..."*Primitive beauty/Lost in /Today's global consumerism/Primitive instinct /virulent in/Today's jejune but vaunted/ Gestures of humanism!*"(26). The man of twenty first century, his pertinent needs and greed for self-satisfaction puts questions those remain unanswered. Nonetheless the poet seems to opt for an apt substitute...."*The flower knows not / How its fragrance springs/ The garbage knows not/ How its rot stinks-*"(26) Truly the affluence and opulence of the Mammon is centralized beyond limits. In a realm as such socialism, decentralization and parity appear as if a far- fetched dream. The poet dexterously outlines the cunning nature of today's man...."*Man seeks to be overpowered/ Even at times, with feline tricks*" (26).

The fourth Hour entitled Fear consecrates offerings from W.B.Yeats. The poem abounds in comparisons drawn from various sources. Man like mute beings is compared to a tree, feeling like trees he speaks in the unspoken language of Nature. It also reveals stages of development in the evolution of man .Man a skin-bag of elemental natures in this material world seems lost....."*Lost / As anything/ Desired, not deserved / Lost/As love making/For the sake of sheer carnal fervor!*" (31).In the cyclical evolution of the world, man is a mere episode –an occurrence . Immaculate and innocent in his childhood like the offspring of God, he grows with the bundle of desires and greed making a kingdom to foster crime and sin. His heart being hollow is frequently visited by the Fear that leaves him alone, helpless, dejected and defeated in the world of his own making. So much so that he becomes apprehensive even afraid of...."*The specter / Of his own shadow/ Or/ His gone awry self/*"(33). Sometimes as though in the garb of a Satan man seems sowing seeds of dissident and sedition to ridicule his fellow beings notwithstanding his own faults and misdemeanors. Often appears as a disguised bait for attention-grabbers or for publicity stunt. The growing contamination due to smog ,toxic waste and greenhouse gasses has further eclipsed the ecology. Proliferating Nuclear energy too has been a burgeoning threat to the wholesomeness of Nature. Consequently the future of posterity too appears morbid ,macabre, vague and uncertain as viewed by the poet.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Hour: Rage, opens to commemorate Lord Byron. The poet depicts a man whose dreams are now weather-beaten and whose austere plight sees only emptiness and meaninglessness around. How curtly the poet asserts...."*Man stokes up/ Nothing*

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,but hatred/ Acrimony & rage/ To combat/ With a defiant self" (37). Truly it is the phase of self-struggle in the life of the protagonist. Facing contradictions and contraries which captivate his conscience and compel him to follow the rituals of his own whims, he moves ahead to find him like a pawn in the hands of the Devil. The sinister notions of jealousy and animosity, envy and rancor further bind man to the strong pillars of worldly ties and hinder soul's progress towards eternity. Regardless of all this, the poet is competent enough to aver... "For/ Extremism or terrorism/ Product/ Of the same/ Establishment in power" (38). Thus the poet seems protesting against the ruling elite, he does not appear to conform to the systems of the present government but again looks imprisoned for the power wielder himself goes round insecurity. In a world where life is hellish... "Who saves whom/ When living itself/ Becomes an infernal gloom" (38). The course of development for sustained survival in a world as such can be achieved all the way through Purification... "Purification/ A process/ Linking/ Body to soul/ Thought to maturity/ Humanism to eternity" (39). From this Italian concept of purification the poet marches forward to the Indian notion of *So Aham* or *I am he*..... "Man trying to come out/ Of a deceptive self/ To see an individual/ One with/ 'HE' (39). In fact the poet wants to emphasize the belief that Supernatural power is identical in every man, in all and sundry irrespective of age, religion, color or caste. The truth that Existence is One. He further goes to convey that Suspicion or doubt is born of ignorance, as elaborated in detail in Chapter- 4<sup>th</sup>, Verse no. 40, 41, 42 of The Bhagvad Gita (4). Many more such questions the protagonist averts to argue due to the fear of being leveled a Fanatic or of losing power owing to the lack of faith in God. In a little while the poet winds up the Hour: Rage, because man ignorant of his own self..... "From Babri / To/ Bamiyan/ From/ World Trade Centre/ To/ Tube rail in London/ It is / The same/ Hydra-headed monster/ Call him/ A hoodlum/ Or a hypocrite/ Shorn of realization/ ....Commits/ The same crime/ Repeats the mistake" (42).

After Rage comes the 6<sup>th</sup> Hour : Conflict that truly raises the skirmishes and scuffles. Leaves from the leaflets of T. S. Eliot herald the ensuing clash. What inflates the conflict further, as Eliot puts it, is the perpetual struggle between good and evil. Differences, divergences and disagreements prop up diurnally. The customary ways of today's misnomer modernity concoct a colorless, indecent, insipid and disorderly tale of life, putting mind at stake. In the feverish, hectic and raucous music of Cupid's song love and lust decompose and putrefy. However poet's aspirations, sonority and music of life in a frolicsome way continue soaring to discover destiny's unknown realm. In this age of Nuclear proliferation and excess man seems to die of undying craze, appears heedless sometimes oblivious of his ancient roots, his heritage, harmonious living amidst unadulterated love and reconciliation. Above all his divine origin and mission. Climate change, global warming and rising pollution of environment have changed the contours and countenance of Nature..... "The entire Universe/ Now threatens/ To sink/ Into its own/ Windy networks-" (46) The cosmic, celestial and extraterrestrial outlines which were as bright as gifts from God now look bleak and unwelcoming. Mother earth..... "Now/ Only intermingles/ Tough truths/ Of nature/ With/ The immoral signs/ Of misled humankind" (47). Many more disapproving, dubious and unpromising propensities such as - erotic impulses, momentary emotion, ignoble tie-ups, deliberate promiscuity, sadism and morbidity have truly swallowed and stolen the cheerful spirit, blissful existence and rather auspicious luminosity of man and the



world. Man himself is to be blamed for all this enduring chaos. For all disgraceful, shocking and outrageous outcomes. Notwithstanding the nitty-gritty of time, nasty and noxious phenomenon of nature, man himself has added to his untimely ruin-his unsolicited tragedy. There is no expiation, no confession for the misdemeanors since man has to cope with the challenges and hostile attitude of his own siblings being paraded half-naked on grounds of poverty. In an amusing way the poet articulates....."Mothers & sisters / Half-naked / For the reason of poverty / Against / The backdrop / Of volatile woman / And night butterfly / Semi-naked / For being sex hungry" (49) The predicament of modern man, as I have called modernity a misnomer earlier, is that he has no safe ground for him, amidst rising insecurities and present day holocaust, degenerating and disintegrating day by day man has....."A definite fall / An inescapable Nemesis!" (50). Neither he has the control over his own destiny nor vision enough to foresee the destiny of his progeny. This Hour in all honesty gives an astonishing and stunning picture of the Fall of Man.

The rot persists owing to the detachment or lack of involvement in ancient and prehistoric roots as marked wisely by Eugenio Montale (54). How unrighteousness prevails in an age of Dharma - righteousness is the recurrent theme of the 7<sup>th</sup> Hour: Decadence. Elaborating age-old legendary tales of Asghar and Karbala, Abhimannu and Kurukshetra, of heaven, earth and hell, the poet succinctly avers....."God or Prophet / Lives everywhere / In every age / In everything / As the one-Absolute" (56). Concurrently, the poet does not fail to notice or undermine the inhuman carnage at Karbala or Kurukshetra and the gruesome, ghastly reality of Germany after world war second. All such gory deeds form an indelible layer inside history of the world. For the humanity grown in sin and prone to sin, the tragedy of Tienanmen Square and of Auschwitz is not new. It still reverberates like Socrates's hemlock. Afterwards the poet uses scores of traits to define and characterize sin such as-offence, injustice, malpractice, crime, loss of faith and self-denial. Furthermore sin is an inevitable threat at once destructive, eruptive and epidemic. It is the root cause which manifests in moral degradation, co-existential collapses, cultural decay, social delinquency and existential disorder. In a world full of rot, debauchery and profligacy man instead of giving the appearance of an angel having goodness in profusion, gives a diabolic look to devour, deride and ridicule both humdrum of everyday life and living and the divine prop or celestial support-the substratum of all beings. These and other such budding incongruities have brought man to such a ruin that there is no scope for further growth or evolution, fruition or flowering. So he aptly terms this Hour: Decadence. However the solution the poet suggests or the remedy he recommends for aforesaid anomaly and malaise pervading then ailing the planet earth subsequently encompassing the whole universe is Penance..."To / Wake up / And / Do penance" (64). Asceticism, self-punishment or atonement alone will be capable of purifying man and disinfecting nature. It is the only Yagna- ritual sacrifice the poet intends to offer in a way nearly incantatory. To tell the truth Bakshi's poetry discovers a World to traverse the equidistance or seems stranded in a World in-between Dream and Reality. Though thus assessed benevolently by intercontinental critics of repute - Bernard M. Jackson and Rob Harle - as Micro-Verse, Dramatic, Mystic, Aphoristic, figurative and idiomatic still there is span enough for scaling Bakshi's thematic style,

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texture and technique that I handover to linguists and stylistic litterateurs and on my part feel elated in coming to a close, to wrap up 64 pages of- *Man of The Seventh Hour*.

### End Notes :

1. *The Times Of India*: New Dehli, Wednesday, September-7 – 2016 :Page-16.
2. *Ibid* ,Page-16.
3. Bakshi Manas : *Man of The Seventh Hour*: Script, 61 M.K.Gandhi Road: Kolkata, 1<sup>st</sup> edition-2006.( P.11) .( All subsequent references are to this edition with page numbers given within parenthesis).
4. *Gita, The Bhagwad*: Gorakhpur (U.P.), Gita Press- 10<sup>th</sup> Reprint-2012