
Dream India Dream: Re-kindling a Post Colonial Perspective Through Manas Bakshi's Vision of India

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ABSTRACT

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In an era when colonial legacies are being abandoned and national identities are being re-claimed, literature, rather than history, is recognized as the most reliable source of information on monumental events, epochs, and upheavals that mark the evolution of various civilizations. Since both literary works and historical events are influenced by social dynamics, they can both point to watershed moments and spark transformation. Poetry, in a reasonable sense, also qualifies as an authentic record of times and a way of looking at life with an attempt at drawing greater meanings from one's circumstances of existence than may be apparent through other modes of expression. Poetry, with its ability to evoke emotions, communicate complex ideas, encapsulates the essence of human experiences in a manner that is both subjective and universal. Apart from enabling the quest for self-knowledge and self-fulfillment, poetry has also helped humanity survive against demons of destruction and annihilation. It has aided as a sure and steady tool for social criticism, proving its lasting significance not only for humanity but to other lifeforms and the planet as a whole. The latest compilation of poems brought out by Manas Bakshi, titled *Dream India Dream*, published in 2022, constitutes a significant addition to his artistic oeuvre.

Poetry bears witness to the events and occurrences that leave an indelible mark on the fabric of time and on human consciousness. Throughout history, poets have assumed the mantle of "conscience keepers" and denounced and derided aberrant and erroneous tendencies. Resonating with what Indian economist Amartya Sen observes in his definitive work *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity*, "While we cannot live without history, we need not live within it either," Bakshi's poetry invites readers to examine history to reconsider the place of its subalterns in relation to its vigorous culture, multi religiousness, and intellectual heritage. The opening quote featured in the anthology, attributed to Dr. A.P. J. Abdul Kalam, posits that a "Dream is not what you see in sleep, is the thing which doesn't let you sleep (A.P.J. Abdul Kalam)" and that precisely is the sentiment working behind the illuminating verses of this anthology. These poems could be seen as the articulations of a vigilant sentinel scrutinizing the events that define his beloved country's character. The volume features some serious musings on life, death, and the perils that face our magnificent land. One could also perceive this as a fair response to the much talked about, meticulously planned and ferociously guarded narratives of "Rise India" and "New India". This collection offers an opportunity to re-think the dominant discourses of "nationalism" and "development" as debated in elite circles in contemporary India. It provides alternative viewpoints that challenge the homogenizing and exclusionary tendencies of these discourses and opens up space for pluralistic visions of the nation and its future. The poet's deep reflections on the current crisis call into question those who take advantage of their positions of power, status, and privilege to distort the image of a country that has been hailed for its diversity, tolerance, and compassion for fellow humans. Dedicated to P. Gopichand and P. Nagasuseela, the work also pays a rich tribute to Stephen Hawking and other individuals who have selflessly worked towards the

betterment of their respective societies. The poet, as an informed individual, engages with the questions of history, politics, culture, science, arts, and economy, thereby unifying all disciplines of thought and attempting to comprehend life holistically. At times bleak and melancholic, yet all the more earnest and concerned about the nation's ethos and integrity, the volume makes serious forebodings about the country's future that seems to be at great risk owing to changing conditions of living, thought process, climate, and erosion of indigenous traits and cultural values. Many poems evoke both the Wordsworthian consciousness and the Vedantic thought, bringing to the fore the understanding that the divine permeates every blade, stem, and stalk in the universe. The poems unfailingly capture the essence of human emotions and experiences, providing a unique perspective on historical events and social issues. The poem "Break Dance of Democracy" eloquently depicts the rot that has infected the most important institution ever established for the purpose of protecting human rights and fundamental liberties:

Window on
 The Indian world of politics,
 The greatest festival of democracy
 Celebrates poverty and illiteracy
 Or, a shadow of democracy)
 of the gullible people (35).

The anthology vividly recalls and chronicles the times when life came to a standstill during the outbreak of the coronavirus. Taking count of days spent in isolation and without human company, the poet speaks of hope and the preciousness of life. His ruminations give voice to "poetry of untold pain" (85) and an empathic response to life's drudgery as it was lived in the sordid years during the global pandemic: "Now caged like parrots/Squawking in vain/ Have perhaps realized/What's poetry of untold pain." (85) Manas Bakshi's poetry is a valuable record of times because it depicts the essence of human emotions and experiences felt during periods of growing inertia and intellectual stagnation. As believed by Plato, "Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history," Bakshi's poetry thus records truths about myriad moments of life that may not be found in conventional accounts. It makes us understand the unsaid emotions of the survivors and their courage to deal with the unpredictability and vulnerability of human experience.

The poet's mopey disposition and incertitude about what lies beneath the surface of things gives us an opportunity to look around and reflect on the remnants of the past. These vestiges of the past provide us with reasons to introspect and reflect about our beginnings and transitions so that we may go forward and make plans for the future.

Sediment of
 Cute longings
 Sacred Feelings
 Fake Commitments
 Brow-raised bashing
 Faded relations
 Closed chapters
 And yet unfinished games

Surging long after

Decades mark the distance (38).

To mention a few, the best poems in this collection are “A Wanderer's Silhouette,” “Nearing Sublimation,” “Cruel Joke,” and “Soul of India Survives.” The poems are distinguished for their clarity of thought and expression, and they are both cutting and precise and, at the same time, a powerful critique of the current situation. In this collection, the tone, diction, rhyme, and use of poetic techniques are near faultless. Originally, a wanderer and a solitary figure, Manas Bakshi makes us partake in his vision of 'truth' and reality. The anthology is absolutely fascinating since it provides a fresh perspective on life's vicissitudes while also sharing cues on the viable strategies for surviving them.

Great literature has the power to embody people's aspirations and condemn negative trends, attitudes, etc. As observed by Samuel Beckett, “Poets are the sense, philosophers the intelligence of humanity.” The same holds true for the poet and philosopher Bakshi, whose works untiringly to enlighten us about the human condition and serve as an invaluable source for learning about ourselves and the world. Writings of Charles Dickens, George Bernard Shaw, Thoreau, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon and Northrop Frye have enumerated the social function of literature, whereas the insightful verses of Matthew Arnold, Shelley, Keats, W.H. Auden, Ilya Kaminsky, Nazim Hikmet, Maya Angelou and Adrienne Riché have shaped our understanding of the world in other times. As a committed artist, Bakshi raises concerns, informs society, and vehemently criticizes corrupt institutions. The poem “How Long?” mocks everyone's “doll-like presence”, inability to raise a voice, indicative of a failed democracy. The poem emphasizes the need for individuals to abandon their passivity and actively partake in the democratic process in order to effect change. It encourages individuals to demand accountability from those in positions of authority.

The puppet show's over.

Mute dolls compelled no more to dance,

Viewers too have left.

The narrator's sarcastic barbs from behind the stage

At playing vote-bank politics

Drowned the audience

First into a spurt of restlessness

And then, in eagerness

To brood over what next,

May be it lasted only for the moment (72).

He urges generations to view the status quo with scepticism and to challenge its ongoing existence. The poet bemoans the “News N' Views” of an increasingly dehumanized existence: “Smelling poison in polluted air and water./Taking adulterated food/Jobless millions crucified everyday/Still expecting things to change one day/To deflect their attention at the moment/ Another scintillating news comes to the fore:”(43) The poem evokes an atmosphere of social desensitization and the total absence of compassion and empathy, where such occurrences have become commonplace and no longer elicit a moral response. His poetry expresses a yearning for the traditional way of life that is fast vanishing. Life in a community, the significance of values such as compassion, forgiveness, and empathetic regard for others, awareness of spiritual force and most importantly, the importance of love and harmony in the land of Krishna

and Buddha, where peace and prosperity would predominate, are frequently stressed upon. The poet's work reflects an overwhelming nostalgia for simpler times and a desire to preserve his community's social and cultural heritage. He underscores the significance of people adopting these values in order to build a kinder and more happier world. The trees and rivers are mute witnesses to the enormous chaos that has been unleashed upon the planet. They have seen the destruction caused by the proliferation of mindless human activities such as deforestation, pollution, and urbanization. The poet implores us to pay attention to the subdued pleas of the environment and take steps to safeguard our planet. The poem titled "Seeking Human Face" depicts a gloomy atmosphere and a void landscape that envelops the globe:

How river
 And rain
 Danced Together
 Beneat the tree
 Rollicking in the mystic mirth
 of cosmic unfolding
 In the hour of
 Primordial Beginning. (24)

Most of the poems stress the need for change and encourage readers to identify the systemic maladies that plague society. His words convey a potent message of hope and resiliency, imploring readers to act for a better tomorrow. He grieves the decline of mutual trust and faith in society. He grieves to see that the land that once boasted verdant pastures, undulating trees, and jubilant peacocks is no longer the same. He even moans about the distraction and apathy of the youngsters who seem to be losing their energy in sensuous gratification and pleasure-seeking rather than contemplating their country's future. The universe seems to have turned upside down, as suggested in the oft quoted speech of the witches, "Fair is Foul, Foul is Fair" (Act 1, Scene 1, Macbeth). Manas Bakshi, taking a cue from Shakespeare's Macbeth, discusses the pandemonium that has currently engulfed everything. "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity," as stated by W.B. Yeats, seems to encapsulate the essence of most of Bakshi's observations informing, his poetic scrutiny and musings.

"A Monsoon Poem" reflects the growing sense of despondency that has taken hold of a smaller subset of people who are unable to think rationally for the betterment of the general population.

"When a caged bird's shrill
 Ajilted lover's thirst
 A revolutionary spark
 All're destined to a sudden outburst
 Leaders fail to lead the followers
 From dystopia to utopia
 Failing to tear off the cover of cumulus
 The decrescent moon too suffers hysteria (73).

The poet is constantly bringing into picture the change affecting all spheres of life, which may seem a bit cynical, but given the breadth of his observations, one needs to value the unique insight he offers. He knows that he is a mere protagonist in the general drama of pain and his

words signify fury and nothingness thus highlighting the unchangeability and impermanence that characterize human existence. Apparently, it's art alone that can stand the test of time and can be an affirmation of human sufferings.

A protagonist passes away, his words reverberate.

Certain is silence as life and death.

Poignant words-never silenced, come alive

With a nostalgic monsoon evening (73).

Truth is being twisted everywhere, and the long-held value system has been thrown out the window. No surprise the generations have compromised every noble thought, even connotations of love have become gross, and music that once satisfied the soul seems to have lost its rhythm due to the vacuity and anxiety of the listeners. The lines from the poem "Satyamev Jayte" effectively reflect the sense of disillusionment and resultant bafflement.

Love's very often fleshly-

Enmeshed in a cacophony

Music too seldom appealing,

Krishna too might be aware:

It's Kaliyug. (68)

Even if the majority of nations and civilizations have experienced a downturn at some point in their histories, protests and resistance appear to hold the key to the restoration of democracy. It is imperative that some awakened souls continue fighting for what is fair and just, even when one is faced with brutal opposition.

The poet reminisces about the good old days and wishes that people be more connected to nature and have a stronger sense of responsibility, and wishes that the current generation would prioritize environmental conservation and social responsibility over their own immediate desires. His words resonate with those who seek to make a difference and his call for action has sparked a movement of individuals who strive for a better tomorrow. He decries the unethical behaviour, illicit gains, cold-blooded crimes, disparities, pillage, and corruption in public and private life.

His writing is characterized by incisive wit and purposefulness. The poem "Soul of India" is an exhaustive discussion on the country's glories and ignominies. The poem includes a summary of the nation's achievements and characteristics, as well as a reference to the various threats; vitriol of hatred and violence perpetrated in the name of religion and other divisive forces. Ultimately, it is the home of Nanak, Tagore, Krishna, Mohammed, Buddha, and Jesus. This poem illustrates the opulence and diversity of Indian culture. The poem makes a strong case for mutual coexistence, respect, and tolerance among all of its people, as well as a strong connection with the natural world. Despite the fact that the poem may sound somewhat trite and quaint, it encapsulates the poet's philosophy and vision for future. The poem "Soul of India Survives" depicts obstacles that have jeopardized the integrity of the country but have failed to break its soul. The poem serves as a reminder that the nation's essence remains intact and unbroken despite the numerous challenges posed by conflicting factors:

Soul of India survives

In the great souls

of Krishna, Mohammad, Buddha, Nanak, Jesus-

Forget not their lessons The future is ours, only ours (84).

At last, it is the people, the sturdy pillars of our democracy, who have the capacity to mould our future and build the world we wish to live in. The poet invites perceptive readers to collaborate in order to make the world a better place for everybody. Having witnessed the clash and the eventual collapse of numerous ideologies, he has lost confidence in all traditional monolithic institutions. He believes that neither capitalism, socialism, consumerism, terrorism, nor colonialism have been able to uphold democracy, but rather have violated the principles of justice, equality, and progress for all. As a result, he has become disillusioned with the notion of an ideal political system and now believes that individual actions and personal accountability are the key to a better world. He promotes a more ethical and sustainable lifestyle that places a high value on belonging, environmentalism, and social justice. In “A poem for the common people”, he urges the average citizen of the nation to take charge of the situation.

O common people, shake off colonial hang-over

You have neither an attractive stage

Nor a sizeable audience to address !

Have to fight all along your life

The battle of being third world citizens

Don't allow yourselves anymore

To be their colonial friends:

An easy target (23).

The poet deserves applause for engaging with offbeat, yet important subjects, such as old age, problems of the common man, vision of a child, cyber psychosis, hidden threats, ecological imbalance, oppression of the downtrodden, with tremendous efficacy. He exhibits remarkable grit and courage in “unmasking the shameless inhuman face” of the civilization. In an engaging tone, he speaks for multitudes and unmasks the hidden bruises of society. While the subjects may not qualify for the exuberance of emotions or feelings, they certainly have a bearing on our day to day life. The poet's commitment to the country as a responsible citizen can be gleaned from the fact that he has kept eye on every incident threatening the integrity and sovereignty of the land. He protests the seclusion of modern man and the terrorist attacks in Pulwama and other places that endanger the lives of many. Some poems traverse the warp and woof of intimate relationships in an interesting manner and conclude that dedication or devotion is the only key to a happy and fulfilling relationship.

Nothing seems to be giving any satisfaction to the poet as it is a dystopian universe and peace, stability, love and happiness seem to be overturned by the onslaught of terror, anarchy, violence and grief. There is a sharp decline in the value system and the natural world order seems to be collapsing. The poet is apprehensive about the loss of ceremony. The taste of truth is not refreshing anymore nor is the flute of Krishna of any pleasure. Love too has lost its meaning and music is not appealing to the soul as the world ushers into Kaliyug. While truth can't expose the guilty and the tyrant, it certainly unmasks the peevish of civilization “unmasking the shameless inhuman face.” The poet chooses to sit beneath the rock to “grapple with the myriad metaphors of being”.

The undercurrent of the entire collection is nostalgia as the poet recalls a time when life was lived passionately and meaningfully. He bemoans the loss of love, tender feelings in relationships, and the predominance of mechanical nature of existence that is the contemporary reality. The poet's yearning for the past is evident in his longing for the emotional richness and

intimacy that seem to be absent from life today. He asks the reader to join him in contemplating what has been lost and how it can be retrieved through the written word. The poet has “A Wanderer's Silhouette” and he craves for the eternal mirth amidst the joyless existence.:

As if face to face
The earth and sky
Unravelling the episode of those days
When living was not hybridized
Nor was love testified by lover's material pride,
When life fascinating as rainwater
On lotus in the lake
Craved only for eternal mirth,
Lent space to drowsing with the summer afternoon's
Calm and airy feather touch; (26)

The poet's contemplation in “Seeking human Face” on the widely growing ecological crisis, the growing disconnect between the different life forms and natural forces are extremely timely and pertinent. Once vibrant hues of life are now fading away, leaving a drab and monotonous existence in their wake. The allure of life's vitality appears to have diminished, leaving us yearning for a spark of exhilaration and bliss:

How river
And rain
Danced together
Beneath the tree
Rollicking in the mystic mirth
of cosmic unfolding
In the hour of
Primordial beginning (24).

While the universe was once brimming with vitality and energy, the present scenario appears to be one of decay and entropy, which poses threats of extinction, death, and disorder:

Tree's axed
River silted
Global warming
Melting of glacier
Rain uncertain
Untimely reaching
The brink of extinction
Flora, fauna
Aquatic plant

And animal...
 Dark ambience,
 Blank canvas
 Seeking face
 Human face (25).

The catastrophe brought about by human folly, avarice, and lack of mindfulness can only be averted by a human touch, a humane approach to life that prioritises compassion, empathy, and cooperation over individualism and self-interest. The poet is cognizant of the fact that we are all interdependent and interconnected and wishes for a better future for ourselves and future generations through equilibrium and mutual regard. The book's cover is awe-inspiring and immediately captures the reader's attention with its startling graphics and visuals. The most striking aspects of the cover designed by Sutapa Dey and Avijit.

Dey are the tricolor draped map of the country and the individual optimistically looking forward to the country's expanding power. The design of the cover captures the poet's patriotic sentiments and his aspirations for a better future for his land. It is an accurate reflection of the aspirations of a developing nation's citizens. Alongside this image, one can see the immense expanse of the Indian subcontinent with its diverse geography and natural landscape: its rivers, forests, and mountains contribute to the country's appeal on a global scale by enhancing its beauty and charm.

The anthology is a reminder that during turbulent times it's the power of literature that would redeem humanity from its unwanted sins and crimes. Subsequently, it's the generation of thinkers, writers, scientists and philosophers that holds the potion to arouse and ignite the minds of slothful populace.

In a reflective tone, Bakshi encourages his fellow beings to be self-critical and also develop empathy for others in order to help create a more compassionate and just society in which everyone's needs are met. He stresses the significance of perceiving the interconnectedness of all beings and looking beyond one's own petty interests. Some of the poems may sound like the rantings of a world-weary, stressed, and lonely individual, while others may reflect the beauty and marvel of life, expressing feelings of affection, optimism, and happiness. These poems, which are invariably, centred on the fundamental human condition, help us navigate through a range of emotions and, in a sense, provide cathartic release for both the poet and the reader, thereby assisting us in realising a collective way of life.

Soul of India shines
 In the noble creation of Tagore
 Opening our eyes before
 The true 'Religion of Man',
 Singing the eternal songs of life
 Imbued with a devotional lore (*Dream India Dream* 82).

Although somewhat didactic and moralistic, the poet's voice stands out in a sea of verbose utterances as it cuts through the jargon of rhetoric, deceit, and lies to emphasize "the weariness, fever, and fret" of our day. Its honest treatment of the subject is its greatest strength; it can't be ignored because it shines a light on muck and dirt, and because it contains "more truth than history" (Aristotle), as can all great poetry. His tone is solemn, and rather than being a mere

trumpeter of a preferred ideology, he chooses to present himself as a defender of social justice and human rights. The poet's ecological consciousness, as well as his unwavering loyalty to the long-revered and universally acknowledged heritage, culture, and value system of his land, is reassuring and inspiring. Throughout the collection, the poet's approach is non-dogmatic, his poetic skills are well-honed, and his reflections about the future of his fellow men and country are well argued and aesthetically presented. The collection ought to be regarded as a truthful record of the times and a beacon of hope for the subsequent generation to strive for a more equitable universe. The reverberations of Bakshi's poetic articulations will resurrect the 'deluded generations' like a phoenix from the ashes prompting them to ponder about choices of existence "beyond the stark banalities of the present"(39).

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