Octavio Paz vis-á-vis India

Octavio Paz's Objective Assessment of Indian Culture with Special Reference to *A Tale of Two Gardens* and *In Light of India*

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By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the preliminary dissertation entitled **Octavio Paz vis-à-vis India: Octavio Paz's Objective Assessment of Indian Culture with Special Reference to *A Tale of Two Gardens* and *In Light of India*** is a record of bona fide research carried out by the candidate **Reji Paikkattu**, Lecturer in English, M.G. College, Iritty, Kannur, under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title or recognition.

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DECLARATION

I, REJI PAIKKATTU, Lecturer in English, Mahatma Gandhi College, Iritty, Kannur, hereby declare that this preliminary thesis entitled **Octavio Paz vis-à-vis India: Octavio Paz's Objective Assessment of Indian Culture with Special Reference to *A Tale of Two Gardens* and *In Light of India*** has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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Introduction

In recognition of Octavio Paz's "passionate writing of wide horizons . . . characterized by sensual intelligence and humanistic integrity" (qutd. in 'Octavio Paz: Otherness and the Search for the Present" Enrico Mario Santi, 265) the Swedish Academy awarded him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1990 thereby acknowledging the writer's poetic and intellectual career as of unique and supreme importance throughout the world. In fact, it was strongly believed that the official recognition was long overdue as Paz's stature was unique in that he was a poet, critic, historian and a formidable presence as a commentator of social realities making him the intellectual conscience of the 20th century.

Born in Mexico on 31 March 1914 to parents who sided with the peasant guerrilla leader Emiliano Zapata, Paz had an impoverished childhood redolent with memories of 'an old, dilapidated house, a jungle like garden and a great room, full of books' (265). The library became an enchanted cave for the young Paz; soon he began to have lessons in French which became a window to the world in the poet's life.

While in the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria San Ildefonso, the prestigious public school in Mexico, Paz wrote his first poem, 'Cabellera'

("Head of Hair") and his first essay ("The Artist's Ethics"). As a poet, Paz progressed through Luna Silvestre (Sylvan Moon, 1933), had his baptism as a writer with commitment in Spain during the civil war and came out with *No Pasaran* ! (*They shall Not Pass*, 1936), founded a school for workers and farmers in Yucatan, attended the Second International Conference of Writers in Defense of Culture at the invitation of no less a writer than Pablo Neruda. There he came into contact with literary luminaries like Andre Malraux, Stephen Spender and Antonio Machado.

Back in Mexico, Paz founded a magazine *Taller* (Workshop) whose motto was 'to take the Revolution to its ultimate consequences' which lasted for three years. With *A la orilla del mundo* (*At World's Edge*, 1942), Paz established himself as the most important young poet of Mexico. In 1944, Guggenheim Fellowship enabled him to study in the United States of America. There he discovered its poets : Eliot, Pound, Williams, Stevens, Cummings. Later he became an official in the Mexican Foreign Service and served in a variety of countries - France, India, Japan, Geneva.

Paz's geographical as well as spiritual exile from Mexico enabled him to analyse the Mexican psyche and culture in a major book - *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. While in Paris, Paz had an intense exposure to the surrealist movement which left deep marks in his creative career.

In 1953 Paz came back to Mexico as a poet of wide acclaim. The year 1956 saw the publication of Paz's reflections on poetry *El arco Y la lira* (*The Bow and the Lyre*). During the next year Paz came out with a long and complex poem *Piedra de sol* ('Sunstone') which is written in a circular pattern. It has 584 lines, the same number as there were days in the Aztec calender year. Using the circular structure of this ambitious poem, Paz fused together seemingly contradictory aspects of experience which are really one.

> All of the faces a single face,
> all of the centuries a single moment
> and through all the centuries of centuries,
> a pair of eyes blocks the way to the future.
>
> (*The Collected Poems* 11).

In 1951, Paz came to India as a minor official in Mexican Foreign Service. Then he was sent to Japan. In 1962 Paz again came to India as Mexican ambassador and remained here for six years. This exposure to the Orient deeply influenced Paz and it radically altered his manner of writing. *East slope* and *Toward the Beginning* are collections of poems inspired by his Oriental experience.

In 1968 the Tlatelolco massacre of the student demonstrators in Mexico city prompted Paz to resign from the diplomatic service as a gesture of protest and indignation. During his tenure as ambassador in India, Paz brought out prose works like *Los siguos en rotacion* (Rotating signs, 1965) *Corriente alterna* (Alternating Current, 1967) and studies of Levi-strauss (1967) and Marcel Duchamp (1968).

After 1968, Paz held teaching posts in many universities, mainly in the United States, for the next three years. In 1971, Paz came back to Mexico and founded the literary journal *Plural* which continued till 1976. Then he started another review entitled *Vuelta.* With his creative intervention in the social life through the pages of these periodicals, Paz became a major voice in Latin America and eventually became the very conscience of a troubled century.

Paz got a number of prestigious awards - the Grand Prix International de Poesie (Belgium, 1963), the Jerusalem Prize (1977), the Olin Yoliztli Prize (Mexico, 1980), an honorary doctorate from Harvard University (1980), the Cervantes Prize (1981), the Neustadt Prize (1982) the Peace Prize (Frankfurt, 1984) and the T.S. Eliot Award (1987).

The grand finale of this series of accolade was the Nobel Prize for literature which was awarded in 1990.

Throughout his creative life, Paz sought to examine man in relation to time and space. In an age of fanaticism and block thinking, Paz's free, authentic and impartial interventions in his role as a social commentator had a salubrious effect. In founding *Plural* and *Vuelta*, Paz's one aim was a critique of Mexican situation and its one party system. Paz was a cosmopolitan and sought a critique of the world situation in general and pointed out the contradictions and injustice in order to make the world a bit more humane. Pluralism is an idea dear to Paz. In his acceptance speech 'Laureate's Words of Acceptance' at the Neustadt Prize presentation ceremony in 1982, Paz observed:

> Plurality signifies tolerance of diversity, renunciation of dogmatism and recognition of the unique and singular value of each work and every personality. Plurality is Universality and Universality is the acknowledging of the admirable diversity of man and his works . . . To acknowledge the variety of visions and sensibilities is to preserve the richness of life and thus to ensure its continuity. (*World Literature Today* (Autumn, 1982) 596).

Being the founder editor of the journals *Plural* (1971-1976) and *Vuelta* (1976–) Paz excercised a major infuence as social commentator and

critic of the society whose intellectual integrity was widely acknowledged. His insightful awareness of the complexity of existence in the modern world and his creative responses to the challenges and crises in the civil society added one more diamension to his existence as an artist. As a critic of the society, Paz had an inclusive and harmonious conception of the tradition that sustained and nourished him as a writer. In his Nobel Lecture on 8 December 1990, 'In search of the Present,' Paz observed:

> The temples and gods of pre-columbian Mexico are a pile of ruins, but the spirit that breathed life into that world has not disappeared; it speaks to us in the hermetic language of myth, legend, forms of social coexistence, popular art, customs. Being a Mexican writer means listening to the voice of that present, that presence. (*The Georgia Review* 1995, Spring, 257)

Paz was deeply anchored in Mexican trdition; at the same time he had wide exposure to the oriental and occidental traditions in literature. He saw each poet as 'a pulse in the rhythmic flow of generations' (Nobel Lecture, 261) who has 'sown a different plant in the miraculous forest of speaking trees.' Eventually, he was as familiar with the mystic poet Sor

Juana as he was with Su Shih, a Chinese poet who lived in the eleventh century and Nagarjuna, the poet-philosopher of the 2nd century India.

As a poet, Paz was in search of modernity and recognized that 'the search for modernity was a descent to the origins'. His quest for modernity led him to the source, his own antiquity. This apparently contradictory but authentic awareness made him realize that a poet is a pulse in the rhythmic flow of generations. Paz's awareness of time, which is cosmic in its proportions and all encompassing in its inclusion of the phenomenal and the transcendental aspects of existence, allows him to have this sublime vision of a poet in relation to his/her past and future.

Apart from his grand concept of literary tradition, Paz had immediate influences and personal preferences in his creative life. Jean Franco, Professor of Latin American literature at the University of Essex, refers to Paz's participation in the Writers' Congress in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War and observes the poet's dialectical relationship with large social movements in the following words:

> his literary influences were far removed from any committed view of literature. First T.S. Eliot and then St. Jean Perse and later the surrealists and Indian religions

made deep impressions on him. (*An Introduction to Spanish American Literature* 291).

In the magazine *Taller* which he founded, Paz published translations of poems of Holderlin, Rimbaud and Blake. These different influences have a common preoccupation - they are expressions of a visionary disposition, 'deeply at war with modern society, and concerned with something that lies beyond the world of phenomena' (Jean Franco, 291). His conception of poetry is perfectly in tune with this quest for something beyond the apparent. Characteristically in *The Bow and the Lyre*, Paz describes the relation between poetry and society as a perpetual conflict of opposities.

Evidently in his major work *The Bow and the Lyre* Paz views poetry and society as contradictory but complementary terms. Paz observes:

> A society without poetry would lack a language: everyone would say the same thing or no one would speak, transhuman society in which all would be one or each person would be a self-sufficient unit. A poetry without a society would be a poem without an author, without a reader and, in fact, without words. Condemned to a perpetual association that is resolved to instant discord, the two terms seek a mutual conversion: to poetize social life, to

> socialize the poetic word. Transformation of society into creative community, into living poem; and of the poem into social life, image incarnate. (The Bow and the Lyre 234)

In the form of a question Paz pointed out his concept of a poem in the same chapter of the book.

> The poem - is it not that vibrant space on which a few signs are projected like an ideogram that might be a purveyor of meanings? Space, projection, ideogram : these three words allude to an operation that consists in unfolding a place, a here, that will receive and support a writing: fragments that regroup and seek to form a figure, a nucleus of meanings. (249)

Paz views a poem as a purveyor of meanings and a pattern in space which implies that for him, a poem need not be a simple 'song', an unalloyed expression of emotion. As a poet, Paz is in search of a language that will have the universality of philosophical language. Consequently, it becomes highly abstract. Ultimately the poet's aim is to arrive at a mode of expression that will integrate the variety and flux of the world using words. In the concluding part of *The Bow and the Lyre*, Paz observed:

> All poetic creation is historical; every poem is a longing to deny succession and to establish an enduring realm. If man is transcendence, a going beyond himself, the poem is the purest sign of that continuous transcending himself, of that permanent imagining himself. Man is an image because he transcends himself. (262)

Evidently, Paz views poetry as a way of transcending the being of the poet with a view to effecting a form of communion. Thus, in the world of Paz, poems regain the quality of a ritual of communion.

In the last chapter of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* entitled 'The Dialectic of Solitude,' Paz propounds the concept that communion and love are almost impossible in modern society. Still, man must try to break out of his solitude and to effect communion. According to Paz, myth is the agent through which man can transcend his solitude. The awareness of time, not as succession and transition but as 'the perpetual source of a fixed present' is part of mythological time. Paz conceives of a unique condition where 'life and time coalesce to form a single whole, an indivisible unity' (209). The effect of any fiesta is also similar. A fiesta reproduces an event. Then chronometric time disappears and the eternal present is reinstated. In addition to myth and fiesta, 'love and poetry also

offer us a brief revelation of this original time' (210). Paz muses on 'the eternity of the poetic instant' the hallmark of which is 'the conception of time as a fixed present and as pure actuality.' Thus, according to Paz, the poem partakes of the nature of myth and fiesta and allows human beings to escape from the prison of time. Paz succinctly says:

> In the poem, being and desire for being come to terms for an instant, like the fruit and the lips. Poetry, momentary reconciliation : yesterday, today, tomorrow; here and there; you, I, he, we. All is present : will be presence. (*The Bow and the Lyre* 262)

In an incisive article entitled 'Octavio Paz: Otherness and the Search for the Present,' (*The Georgia Review*, 1995 Spring) Enrico Mario Santi, a professor of Spanish and Latin American literature at Georgetown University observed that Paz's attempt to formulate" "universalist poetics" and his concept of poetry as "otherness" account for Paz's stature and influence. As the critic says, "such an ecumenical definition of poetry, the origin of which is found in being itself, has won him followers the world over, across nations and languages, generations and ideologies." Enrico Mario Santi continues : "Poetry, Love and the Sacred - the poem, the lover and God - mean, for Paz, the three ways to a radical absolute, what he calls

otherness, which in the end turns out to be the experience of an encounter with ourselves" (270).

According to Mario Santi, the second factor for the eminence of Paz is his many sided achievement. As he says, "it would be difficult to find in the world today another writer who has treated so many subjects: poetry and anthropology, history and politics, visual arts and philosophy, medicine and mythology etc." (271). Moreover, using his journals - *Taller, Plural* and *Vuelta* - Paz monitored the literary, artistic, intellectual and political currents of the 20th century thereby exercising overwhelming influence throughout the Latin America. During the fiftees of the 20th century, Paz dealt with the uniqueness of Mexican culture and the nature of poetry and poetic process in the light of psychoanalysis and existentialism. In 1960's, Paz analysed Hindu philosophy and Buddhist logic in such works as *Alternating Current* and *Conjunctions and Disjunctions.* His analysis of contemporary world situation in *One Earth Four or Five Worlds* is searching, incisive and brilliant. In every decade Paz conducted his "search for the present" in order to find his authentic voice. Whether he is writing poetry or analysing Mexican culture or dealing with international situation, the most striking quality of Paz is his utter honesty and sincerity to the truth of being. As Charles Simic observes in the article "Poetry is the Present" in *Western Humanities*

Review, (Spring 1991).

> Throughout his life Octavio Paz has remained free, tempted by neither the ideological utopias nor the nostalgias which have proliferated and emprisoned so many of his contemporaries . . . . it takes a heroic constitution to endure our modern age. Paz is one of our true heroes (16).

The present study is divided into six chapters including the conclusion. Chapter First focuses on the importance and impact of Octavio Paz in the 20th century world literature. Chapter Two is a specific exploration of the connection between India and Paz and looks at the way in which the poet was distinctly influenced by India. Paz's incisive and startlingly original analysis of the evolution of Modern India is the subject of the Chapter Three. The area of enquiry in the chapter Four is the extent of influence of Indian ethos in the poems of Paz. Chapter Five analyses how Paz envisions a complete life as the sensual interaction of the masculine and the feminine. The final chapter puts forth the argument that the literary evolution of Paz bears ample testimony to the abiding influence of India in his creative life which proves that the socalled East and West can be contradictory yet mutually fulfilling factors in the growth of a truly master-artist.

Chapter 1

Octavio Paz in World Literary Tradition

Octavio Paz, the Nobel Laureate for literature in 1990, is equally acclaimed as a poet and prose writer of supreme eminence. Highlighting the importance of Octavio Paz in the central tradition of European literature, Richard Gott, a distinguished critic wrote in *Guardian*: that Octavio Paz was one of the greatest European cultural icons of the 20th century and added that he was a poet beyond praise, a critic beyond criticism and an essayist whose insights illuminate our mediocre culture with the gorgeous richness of a stained-glass window. Being a poet of sublime heights, Paz is able to bring his poetic insight and astounding knowledge on any subject that he chooses to write which makes the reading an enlightening and edifying experience. His poems and essays map the labyrinths of the Mexican mind. Paz could endow universality in whatever he wrote which makes them relevant in any corner of the world. Carlos Fuentes the distinguished Mexican novelist and an intellectual who differed with Paz on ideological grounds conceded that Paz has "changed forever the face of Mexican literature" (Kandell 177). The veracity of the praise is all the more convincing as the encomium comes from a literary rival of Octavio Paz. Pablo Neruda, the senior poet in Latin American

literature and a towering figure in 20th century world literature, who got Nobel Prize for literature in 1970, was impressed by Octavio Paz when he was in his twenties and introduced him to other writers.

It was Mexican President, Mr. Ernesto Zedillo who announced the death of Octavio Paz that happened on 20th April, 1998 (*The Indian Express*, 21st April, 1998). In his tribute to Paz, Mexican President said: "This is an irreplaceable loss for contemporary thought and culture – not just for Latin America but for the entire world" (Kandell 75). Associated Press commented on the distinctive style of Paz: "Mr. Paz's style was sometimes harsh, but it was so precise and clear that he changed the very way Mexicans express themselves" (*The Indian Express*, 21st April, 1998).

The Nobel Prize citation of 1990 described Paz as "the cultural polymath" and observed that the justly famous prize was given for the writer's "humanistic integrity". While giving him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1990, the Swedish Academy of letters hailed Paz for "impassioned writing with wide horizons, characterized by sensuous intelligence and humanistic integrity" (Kandell 75). The academy cited the following poem by Paz as the one illustrating his literary credo:

> Between what I see and what I say
>
> between what I say and what I keep silent

between what I keep silent and what I dream

between what I dream and what I forget:

poetry.

Gonzalez Echecarria, a Professor of Spanish at Yale University, reviewing *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957-1987* and *Convergences*, essays in art and literature, in *The New York Times Book Review* in 1988 said, "Mr. Paz is a vestige, an homme de lettres alive to all that is happening around him, willing to incorporate everything into his meditation, convinced that his perspective as a literate, non specialised observer is one worthy to be taken into account not only by intellectuals but by the public at large" (Kandell, 76).

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, records that Octavio Paz is "recognised as one of the major literary figures in Latin America after World War II" (9: 220).

Octavio Paz was born in Mexicoac, Mexico City on 31st March, 1914. The family was mestizo on his father's side and his mother's family was purely Spanish. A well known journalist and writer, his grandfather fought with the patriot Benito Juarez against the French occupation of Mexico in the 1860s. Paz's father was a lawyer by profession who took part in the Mexican Revolution of 1910. He was associated with the agrarian

reforms and represented the peasant guerilla leader Emiliano Zapata in the United States. As the family was ruined financially on account of the Mexican civil war, young Octavio grew up in straitened circumstances.

Educated at a Roman Catholic School and at the University of Mexico, Paz turned to writing and in 1933, at the age of nineteen, published his maiden book of poetry entitled *Luna Silverstre* ("Forest Moon"). Paz went to Spain in 1937 where he strongly sympathised with the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War. In Spain he met celebrated writers like Antonio Machado, Alberti, Pablo Neruda, Caesar Vallejo, W.H. Anden, Stephen Spender, Andre Malraux, Andre Gide and Tristan Tzara. The next year he came back to Mexico via Paris and came under the profound influence of surrealism. In Mexico Paz founded a magazine named *Taller* (1939: "Workshop") and another named *El Hijo Prodigo* (1943: The Prodigal Son). These magazines introduced writers like Eliot, Lautreamont and John Donne to the Spanish reading public. The subsequent period witnessed the publication of his major poetic compositions like *No Pasaram*! (1937, "They Shall Not Pass!"), *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949; "Freedom under Parole"), *iAguila o Sol?* (1951; Eagle or Sun?) and *Piedra de Sol* (1957; The Sun Stone). Paz produced prose volumes of essays and criticism including *El laberinto de la soledd* (1950;

The Labyrinth of Solitude) a controversial and original analysis of modern Mexico and the Mexican character. A startling and insightful exploration of the formative influences on Mexican personality, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* became a rite of passage into the world of intellect for his fellow Mexicans and a required reading for anybody interested in Mexico.

With the help of a scholarship, Paz studied at the University of California, Berkeley and for sometime worked in New York as a translator rendering Hollywood scripts into Spanish. Paz went to Paris in 1945 where he formed a close friendship with Andre Breton and participated in the activities of surrealist movement. In 1946 Paz was offered a job as cultural attache to the embassy in Paris. As an official of the Mexican Foreign Service, Paz worked in Paris, New York, San Francisco, Geneva and New Delhi. Paz had been Mexico's ambassador to India from 1962 to 1968; in the latter year he resigned the post in protest against the Mexican government's brutal repression of student revolutionaries who demanded political reforms and democracy. About this incident and his reaction, Paz wrote: ". . . on the morning of October 3, I learned of the bloody repression of the previous day. I decided that I could no longer represent a government that was operating in a manner so clearly opposite to my way of thinking" (*In Light of India* 203).

After his resignation from Mexican Foreign Service, Paz held teaching posts at Cambridge University, the University of Texas and Harvard University, a fact that bears out the solid scholarship of the poet-diplomat. Returning to Mexico in 1971, Paz started a monthly *Plural*, which was published as a supplement to the newspaper *Excelsior*. When the government took over the paper, another monthly *Vuelta* (Return) was founded with Paz as editor. During this period Paz published collections of essays, as Eliot Weinberger says, "on nearly everything" (Preface, *The Collected Poems,* xv). Among these volumes, mention may be made of *Los hijos del limo* (The children of the mire), Paz's Harvard lectures on Romanticism and the avant-garde.

Paz's diplomatic stay in India had a rich creative flowering. *Ladera este* (1971; "East Slope") a mature volume of poems celebrating his oriental experiences in India, Ceylon and Afghanistan is the most significant of these works. His other important poetic works include *Blanco* (1967), *Hijos del aire* (1981; Airborn), *Arbol Adentro* (1987; A Tree Within). *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957-1987*, a bilingual edition in Spanish and English, was published in 1987 (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation). The important prose works of Paz include *Conjunctions y disyunciones* (1970; Conjunctions and Disjunctions),*El mono gramatico*

(1974; The Monkey Grammarian), *One Earth, Four or Five Worlds* (1985; trans.Helen Lane. N.Y. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) and *Convergences: Selected Essays on Art and Literature* (trans. Helen Lane. N.Y: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).

In 1995, Paz published *Vislumbres de la India* (Glimpses of India), a testament to his Indian experiences that lasted well over six years. The translation *In Light of India*, was brought out in 1997 (trans. by Eliot Weinberger; London: The Harvill Press). About this work Paz says: "It is not a memoir, but rather an essay that attempts, with a few quick notes, to answer a question that goes beyond personal anecdotes: How does a Mexican writer, at the end of the twentieth century, view the immense reality of India?" (*In Light of India*, 32). It is also "a long footnote to the poems of East Slope. It is their context – not vital, but intellectual" (32).

Paz's training for writing *In Light of India* is partly personal and partly official. In 1962 he was appointed the Mexican ambassador to India. Around this time Paz met Marie-Jose Tramini who became his wife, a union which Paz described in a memorable sentence: "After being born, the most important thing that has happened to me" (*The Collected Poems*, xv). Along with his wife he travelled throughout the subcontinent and began to

study Indian history, art, philosophy and literature with an absorption which is all too evident in his subsequent creative career.

A litterateur with deep interests in the visual arts, Paz organized the first exhibition of Tantric art in the west in 1970. Besides he collaborated on projects with many artists like Robert Motherwell, Rufmo Tamayo, Adja Yunkers *et al.* Commenting on the variety of Paz's interests and activities, Eliot Weinberger wrote: "In the 1980's Paz has been lecturing and reading around the world (India, Japan, South America, Spain, Germany, the US . . .), editing *Vuelta*, appearing regularly on Mexican television" (*The Collected Poems*, xvi). Throughout his creative life, Paz showed his fierce-passion for his native land and its unique culture, a fact clearly demonstrated by monumental works like *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) and *Sun Stone* (1963). True to this spirit, Paz published an exhaustive study of Sor Juana Ine's de la Cruz, the 17th century Mexican poet and visionary. Besides, there is a three volume edition of his writings on Mexican history, art, and literature.

From this brief survey of his personal life and creative evolution, Paz's 'myriad mindedness' and his solid achievement in Mexican literature in particular and world literature in general become evident. Against this background of Paz's many sided achievement, the comment made about

Octavius Caesar by Seutonius Polinus rings equally true in Paz's life too: "he found it built of brick and left it in marble" (Snodgrass, 297).

Commenting on the multifaceted achievement of Paz, Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria wrote in *The New York Times Book Review* that Octavio Paz was such a masterly presence in the dialogue of Latin American culture that it was easy to forget he is first and foremost a poet. According to Echavarria, a reading of the volume *The Collected Poems* reveals that in the polyphony of his voices the poetic one still rings loudest and clearest.

As an individual and thinker, Paz has been deeply committed to truth and throughout his life, remained a sincere seeker in quest of authentic existence. As a poet, Paz possessed an exceptionally energetic and creative intellect. Reading his poems, one is left with the impression that Paz has the ability to express the permutations and combinations of hundreds and thousands of ideas, images and imagination in finely integrated poetic discourse. Sometimes he wrote in a way that it sounded to be absurd on the surface; upon closer and deeper examination, the apparently absurd blooms into poetic utterance having rich levels of significance.

With his deep commitment to life and literature, Paz became the intellectual conscience of the 20th century. As a poet he relied on the creativity of language and spoke in a subdued tone thereby amplifying the impact of his utterance. As a thinker, he remained a pilgrim with inner vision who frequented different lands and domains of thoughts. His quest as a poet and thinker led him to Breton, Surrealism, Eliot, Blake, Gongora and eventually to Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti and the Buddha. In nowhere can we find contradiction or dissonance because Paz was deeply committed to the truth of language and the truth of being.

Highlighting the importance of Paz in world literary tradition, Manuel Duran, a distinguished critic hailing from Yale University wrote in *World Literature Today*, 1991.

> If we are to compare Paz's total impact with that of others famous poets, we might say that he is as much a philosophical poet as T.S. Eliot was, but he is more intimate, more erotic, warmer than Eliot. We might add that he has become as much of a public poet and writer as Victor Hugo was in the nineteenth century, although Paz's style is less grandiloquent than Hugo's; Paz never over acts (7).

Chapter 2

Octavio Paz and India

A Tale of Two Gardens (Viking, 1997) collects together the poems inspired by India and *In Light of India* (Harvill, 1997), the last major work by Paz answers the question: "How does a Mexican writer, at the end of the twentieth century, view the immense reality of India?" (*In Light* 32). It is all too clear that in the creative life of Paz, India was always a dominant influence and a constant presence. Eliot Weinberger, Paz's distinguished translator observes in his introduction to *A Tale of Two Gardens*: "No other Western poet has been as immersed in India as Paz" (*A Tale* 11)..He continues: "More incredibly perhaps not since Victor Segalan in China at the turn of the century has a Western poet been so expert on, experienced in, and written so extensively about a cultural other" (*A Tale* 11).

For Indian readers, Octavio Paz is not just a Mexican writer who wrote in the Spanish language but one of the most acclaimed writers of twentieth century who is intimately connected to the culture, civilization, philosophy, art and ethos of our nation. Eliot Weinberger very clearly notes that undeniable fact: "For forty years India has been the twin of Mexico in Octavio Paz's life and work: the other to his self described otherness as a Mexican" (*A Tale* 9). India has been an overwhelming presence in his

creative life, but he never became a blind admirer or unthinking initiator of Indian ways and thought. He did not have even an iota of baseless aversion to India in her manifold aspects: nor did he fall into the trap of so called orientalism. Always a seeker deeply interested in Buddhism with its emphasis on middle path ('madhya marg'), Paz retained admirable balance and equilibrium in his approach to 'the immense reality of India' and avoided both extremes of aversion and admiration (*In Light* 32).

Paz's first contact with India was in 1951 when he was appointed under secretary to the newly established Mexican embassy in India. Paz had been living in Paris as a minor official in Mexican embassy when he was transferred to India as part of Mexican government's plan to open a mission in New Delhi. It was 'bewildering and painful' (*In Light* 4) for him to leave Paris.

Paz travelled to India on board the Polish ship 'Batory' and "arrived in Bombay on an early morning in November 1951"(*In Light* 7). In his trip to India, he had with him a little anthology of poems by Kabir, a print of the goddess Durga and a copy of the Bhagavad Gita which he described as his "spiritual guide to the world of India" (*In Light* 5). On board the ship, Paz had as fellow passengers, among others, Auden's brother, Santha Rama Rau, a well known writer and Faubian Bowers, her husband and a

group of Polish nuns. From the ship, Paz saw the Gate Way of India and later, Taj Mahal Hotel which was constructed with its back turned to the sea as the builders failed to read the plan. Paz perceives the mistake as deliberate, "an unconscious negation of Europe and the desire to confine the building forever in India" (*In Light* 8).

Paz touched the land of India and was 'surrounded by crowds', entered the ramshackle customs building for a tedious interrogation by a customs official. Then a crazed drive in a taxi led him to the Taj Mahal Hotel. Paz put his things in the closet, had a quick bath, put on a white shirt and "ran down the stairs and plunged into the street". There an 'unimagined reality' confronted him: a reality comprising 'waves of heat', 'torrents of cars', 'skeletal cows with no owners', 'the apparition of a girl like a half-opened flower', 'women in red, blue, yellow, deliriously coloured saris', 'the violently blue sky' and 'crows, crows, crows . . . .' Paz was overwhelmed by the unforeseen intensity of the experience.

The poet in Paz was captivated by the Indian experience and so he hired a taxi and travelled through the city and neighbourhoods. He wandered toward Malabar Hill and reached the seashore and 'sat at the foot of a huge tree, a statue of the night' and tried to review the impression:

"dizziness, horror, stupor, astonishment, joy, enthusiasm, nausea, inescapeable attraction" (*In Light* 12).

Overwhelmed by his first Indian experience, he tried to analyse the quality that charmed him. In retrospect, Paz views the influence of the first Indian experience on him:

> "What had attracted me? It was difficult to say: Human kind cannot bear much reality. Yes, the excess of reality had become an unreality, but that unreality had turned suddenly into a balcony from which I peered into – what? Into that which is beyond and still has no name . . . ." (*In Light* 12)

At the suggestion of Santha and Faubian, Paz visited the island of Elephanta and was struck by "corporealbeauty, turned into living stone" (*In Light*, 13). Here Paz experiences a unique vision of life that fuses together phenomenal and transcendental realms of existence as is evident from the following words:

> Shiva smiles from a beyond where time is a small drifting cloud, and that cloud soon turns into a stream of water, and the stream into a slender maiden who is spring itself: the goddess Parvati. The divine couple are the image of a

> happiness that our mortal condition grants us only for a moment before it vanishes (*In Light* 13).

Thus Paz gets an insight into the essential nature of divinity and mortality. Paz hits the bulls eye when he describes the idols of gods on the Elephanta as "corporeal beauty turned into living stone"[1] and also as "sexual incarnations of the most abstract thought, gods that were simultaneously intellectual and carnal, terrible and peaceful" (13).

Using *Murray's Handbook of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon,* 1949 edition, as a guide, Paz boarded the train for Delhi. That interminable journey reminded him of a long train ride which he took as a child with his mother from Mexico city to San Antonio, Texas. His Indian experience parallels his experience in Mexico. The fact of being a Mexican helps him to understand India.

> From the beginning, everything that I saw inadvertently evoked forgotten images of Mexico. The strangeness of India brought to mind that other strangeness: my own country (15).

In this context, Paz points out the importance of the treatise *In Light of India* in his oeuvre which will, in turn, point to its importance for an

Indian. Paz had written *The Labyrinth of Solitude* as an attempt to answer the question that his country asked him. Similarly, now India was asking another question, 'one that was far more vast and enigmatic'. Paz attempted to answer the question by writing *In Light of India.*

Paz reached New Delhi, which he regards as 'unreal', "an assemblage of images more than building" (*In Light* 15). According to him, New Delhi, a planned city that was constructed in a few years by the architect Sir Edwin Luytens, represents "a picturesque fusion of classical European and Indian architectures". As always, in his account of place and monuments also, Paz emerges as an astute observer. The Red Fort impresses Paz "as powerful as a fort and as graceful as a palace" (*In Light* 17). Quitab Minar is "a prodigious stone tree", "a tower that combines the height, solidity and slender elegance". The mausoleum of Emperor Humayun is 'serene' where "everything has been transformed into a construction made of cubes, hemispheres, and arcs: the universe reduced to its essential geometric elements" (*In Light* 17). Paz sounds lyrical when he says that "the mausoleum is like a poem made not of words but of trees, pools, avenues of sand and flowers". Later Paz wrote a poem in honour of the monument in which he viewed the mausoleum as

high flame of rose

formed out of stone and air and birds

time in repose above the water

silence's architecture

("The Mausoleum of Humayun" *A Tale* 30).

Observing the mausoleum as a construction made of cubes, hemispheres and arcs, Paz points out the difference between Islamic architecture and Hindu architecture: "In Islamic architecture nothing is sculptural – exactly the opposite of the Hindu" (*In Light* 18).

Paz experienced a moment of beatitude when he visited a tiny, empty mosque in Delhi: "A vision of the infinite in the blue rectangle of an unbroken sky". After many years, he had a similar experience in Heart when he was on the balcony of a ruined minaret. Paz preserved the experience in a poem of which the last section is as follows:

I saw the world resting on itself

I saw the appearances

And I named that half-hour:

The Perfection of the Finite (*In Light* 19).

Though Paz's first session in India lasted for less than a year, he made a few friends in India. According to him, Indians are hospitable and

'cultivate the forgotten religion of friendship' (*In Light* 19). Paz attended the concerts of music and dance which initiated him to the legends, myths and poetry of India. Also they gave him a profound understanding of the sculpture which is "the key to Hindu architecture" (*In Light* 20). In a memorable sentence, Paz reveals the connection between architecture and dance: "One could say that Hindu architecture is sculpted dance" (20). His Indian experience, which began as ambivalent and later transformed into inescapable attraction', came to an end when he was transferred to Tokyo.

In 1962, Paz returned to India as the Mexican ambassador and remained in that position till 1968. It was a rich and delightful experience: he could read; he wrote books of poetry and prose and cultivated friendship with a few friends who shared the aesthetic, ethical and intellectual affinities. Paz travelled through unfamiliar cities in the heart of Asia; also he met his future wife, Marie Jose Tramini. Simultaneously Paz was ambassador to Afghanistan and Ceylon. He visited many places including 'the venerable ruins of Taxila'. In Peshwar, Paz had his first experience of the Pathans and also met nomadic groups such as the Khoji and the Uzbeks. He says: "Peshawar was an important city in the history of Buddhism" (*In Light* 21). Paz observed many stupas and architectural remains in Peshawar and saw the art of the Kafirs, an Indo-European

people, in the museum. All these biographical details point in one unmistakable direction: His experience was not limited to India, but included the vast Indian subcontinent; his Indian expereince was not confined to books and scholarship. On the contrary, Paz traversed the entire subcontinent and saw and experienced the vast reality of India with a poet's heart and a scientist's mind. Nothing escaped his attention. From the art of the Kafirs, an Indo European people who lived in Afghanistan in the past, Paz observed that they used chairs, "which were generally unknown in Asian cultures" (*In Light* 21).

His experience spilled over to Southern India also as is evident from his numerous allusions to Madras, Mahabalipuram, Madurai, Tanjore, Chidambaram in his works. Paz celebrated many of these places in the poems included in *East Slope.* Paz points out why he mentions these names. He has been using these names as though they were talismans, but "they are like certificates: a testimony that my education in India lasted for many years and was not confined to books" (23). About his education in India, Paz says, 'it has marked me deeply'. Commenting on the nature of that education and its impact in his personal and creative life, Paz wrote: "It has been a sentimental, artistic, and spiritual education.

Its influence can be seen in my poems, my prose writings and my life itself" (*In Light*, 23).

Unique that it undoubtedly is, Indian ways and philosophy helped Paz to face the dilemma in life. In 1963, Paz had been awarded the Knokke le Zoute International Prize for poetry. Consequently Paz was in a dilemma, whether to receive the prize or not. For Paz poetry had been a secret religion, 'celebrated outside the public eye'. "Prizes were public, poems private" (24). Paz told his problem to his friend Raja Rao, the well known novelist who took him to an ashram where he met Mother Ananda Mai. She looked at Paz and smiled and threw an orange at him which he caught. It was a symbolic gesture intended as an answer to Paz's problem which she had learned from Raja Rao. After stating that 'the puppet whom you call Ananda the Mother is your fabrication', she advised Paz to be humble and accept the prize. She continued: "To not accept it is to over value it, to give it an importance that it does not have . . . . True disinterest is accepting it with a smile, as you received the orange I threw you . . . . What matters is not prizes but the way they are received. Disinterest is the only thing that matters" . . . . (26).

The session ended. Paz told Raja Rao that he was happy, not because of the Prize, but for what he had heard. That spiritual session persuaded Paz to accept the prize.

It was decisive in his personal life also as is evident from the following encounter and its development. While Paz was on the way to Belgium to receive the prize, he stopped in Paris for a few days and one morning he met Marie Jose. It was chance, or fate or elective affinities; they decided to return to India together. In this context Paz brings out his philosophy of life and love:

> "To live is to be condemned, but it is also to make choices; a determinism and a freedom. In love's encounter, the two poles entwine into an enigmatic knot; embracing as couples, we embrace our destiny" (*In Light* 27).

Paz, as Mexican ambassador, saw Nehru whom he found to be always immaculately dressed with a rose in his lapel. According to Paz, the two ruling passions in Nehru's life were politics and women. In Nehru there was not even the slightest trace of any sympathy for the Hindu or Muslim religious tradition of India. Paz is emphatic in his assessment of Nehru: "Nehru was a man of Western culture" (28) in whom the English education had become a 'second nature'. He was interested in young

artists. Paz mentions how Nehru unexpectedly turned up at the opening of the exhibition of a group of young iconoclasts headed by the painter J. Swaminathan.

In his capacity as the Mexican ambassador, Paz came into contact with many national leaders and statesmen including V.K. Krishna Menon and Indira Gandhi. Paz regards Krishna Menon as the evil spirit of Nehru. Indira Gandhi, who often consulted Paz about Latin American political and cultural affairs strikes Paz as "a reserved and affable woman' whose questions and observations were succinct. Commenting on the grooming of Indira Gandhi by Nehru, Paz observes: "For many years she was his (Nehru's) confidante, his right hand, and councilor" (*In Light* 28). In the light of what Paz regards as her attempts to promote her sons, Sanjay and Rajiv, Paz makes this penetrating comment: "Indira belonged to modern democratic culture, but her deepest sentiment was traditional: the family" (29). According to Paz, Indira Gandhi believed that she "belonged to a predestined lineage" – the Brahmans of Kashmir – which 'clouded her realism and her sharp political understanding' (29). His familiarity with Indira or his admiration for her doesn't make him blind to the truth. In the context of Punjab problem and her assassination, Paz is impartial and comments how she had 'lit the fire that consumed her' (30). He doesn't

mince words; Paz's independence of judgment is striking in this context.

When the Mexican government suppressed the student rebellion resulting in the death of many in October 2nd, 1968, Paz resigned his post as a sign of protest. Thus his official relationship with India came to an end. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, invited Paz and his wife to a dinner at her house as parting ceremony, in which Rajiv and his wife Sonia attended along with a few mutual friends. This shows Paz's personal contact with national figures in politics which helped him to understand and evaluate contemporary Indian reality with an insider's awareness and information.

A farewell tribute was organized by writers and artists at the International House. In connection with Paz's resignation and departure from India, "there were articles and interviews in the press" (*In Light* 203). This shows Paz's stature as a writer and the reputation he enjoyed in India even in those days. After a train journey from Delhi to Bombay during which, at various stations, groups of students boarded the train to offer the traditional garlands of flowers as a sign of affection, Paz and Marie Jose stayed at the Taj Mahal Hotel and visited some friends. Both of them spent the last Sunday on the island of Elephanta and relived what they

had felt years ago. Parting from India was quite poignant for Paz as is evident from his thoughts at the moment of departure. "We thought that we were seeing all this for the last time. It was as though we were leaving ourselves" (*In Light* 204).

During the night before the day of departure, Paz wrote a poem, partly as an invocation and partly as a way of saying good-bye. Addressing the divine couple Shiva and Parvathi, Paz ponders over the phenomenal life of the mortals and the transcendental existence of the immortals. Paz views the divine couple as 'images/of the divinity of man'. Towards the end of the poem, the poet celebrates the life of the mortals which is phenomenal and so finite.

Shiva and Parvati

the women who is my wife

and I

ask you for nothing, nothing

that comes from the other world :

Only

the light on the sea,

the barefoot light on the sleeping land and sea. (204-205)

In 1984, Paz got an opportunity to visit India when, at Indira Gandhi's request, he had been invited to Delhi to give the annual lecture in honour of Jawaharlal Nehru. Before the day fixed for it, Indira had been assassinated. Consequently the lecture was suspended but the officials insisted that they come for two weeks visit. In 1985, Rajiv Gandhi renewed the invitation and Paz came to India which was his last visit.

After eight years, Paz read the text of 1985 lecture and decided to recast it entirely: Thus originated *In Light of India*. According to Paz, it attempts to answer the question: "How does a Mexican writer, at the end of the twentieth century, view the immense reality of India?" (*In Light* 32).

East Slope, a collection of poems, embodies what Paz 'lived and felt' during his 1962-1968 period in India. In those poems, Paz tried to 'preserve certain exceptional moments' in his life. According to Paz, *In Light of India* can be regarded as "a long footnote to the poems of *East Slope*. *In Light of India* deals with the intellectual context of *East Slope*.

From the foregoing survey of Paz's life in relation to India, it is evident that he had sufficient exposure to India – its geography, climate, politics, public figures, artists, music etc. His first hand experience of India coupled with close study of Indian intellectual heritage enabled him to write his mature, mellow work – *In Light of India*. His sympathetic

heart enabled him to understand the vast reality of India and his empathy enabled him to live and feel in India as only a few foreigners could. He loved India for what it is – with its uniqueness, variety and also imperfections. Consequently his reminiscences of India's years and his revaluation of Indian heritage stand out as a masterpiece of rare calibre.

India exercised an overwhelming influence in his evolution as a poet. Eliot Weinberger points to this fact in the following comment: "Again and again, Paz's poems return to two gardens: the one from his childhood in Mixcoac and the one he shared with Marie-Jose in India" (*A Tale* 11). It is evident from 'Mutra', the first poem (1952) which he wrote to defend himself 'against the metaphysical temptation of India' to 'A Tale of Two Gardens', the last poem in *East Slope*.

It is significant to note that the last book by Paz is about India. *In Light of India*, which bears ample testimony to his love for and knowledge of India, embodies the mature, mellow wisdom of Paz on life, culture, various issues in society, art, music, philosophy, purpose of existence, nature of time and meaning of life. Quite effortlessly and with positive ease and naturalness, Paz delves into the depths of any aspect of Indian reality and analyses Indian ethos with a clarity and mastery that stemmed from his close familiarity with India that lasted for over six years.

While in India, Paz met and married Marie Jose – "after being born, the most important thing that has happened to me" (*A Tale* 9). He remained in India for well over six years and had travelled through the length and breadth of the vast subcontinent; also he studied Indian art, philosophy, music and history. He assimilated the poetry of Dharmakirti and studied the philosophy of Nagarjuna; once he even thought of becoming a Buddhist. It is all too clear that what Paz had for India was not the attitude of a tourist. On the contrary, toward India he had the deep love of a pilgrim in search of truth and clarity.

The foregoing examination of the relationship between the poet and India clearly points to the abiding influence of India in the personal and creative evolution of Paz. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that on this Mexican writer, India exercised an influence that was equal to, if not greater than, that of his motherland.

In world literature, a foreign country influencing the evolution of a master artist as profound as was in the case of Paz is quite uncommon.

Chapter 3

Octavio Paz's Assessment of the Evolution of Modern India

Octavio Paz, though first and foremost a poet, is equipped with the precise scholastic tools of a master historian as is evident from the second section of *In Light of India*, 'Religions, castes, languages' which gives a brief but insightful survey of Indian history and its amazing society. The third section is 'A Project of Nationhood' which is an in-depth analysis of modern Indian politics, comparing the Islamic, Hindu and western civilizations through the course of history.

Paz's mature and mellow assessment of Indian reality is embodied in his last work, which is his last will and testament of his relation with India - *In Light of India*. In fact it is a veritable mine of seminal observations on the nature of Indian culture and the characteristics of the Indian peoples. With characteristic acumen, Paz observers that in Indian stories genres that are separate in western tradition combine in surprising ways. So he concludes that "it is a characteristic of the Indian people: frank realism allied with delirious fantasy, a refined astuteness with an innocent credulity"(*In Light* 32). India is the land of Puranas and also Patanjali. Paz rightly perceives "contradictory and constant pairs in the Indian soil

like sensuality and asceticism, the eagerness for material well-being and the cult of poverty and disinterest" (*In Light* 33).

Paz makes a pregnant remark on India when he says that the first thing that surprised him about India was 'the diversity created by extreme contrast'. In India modernity and antiquity, luxury and poverty, sensuality and ascerticism, gentleness and violence exist side by side. But the more remarkable aspect of India and the one that defines it is the co-existence of Hinduism and Islam. One is the richest and most varied polytheism whereas the other is the strictest and most extreme form of monotheism. Paz observes that between these two religions there is an incompatibility. In Islam the theology is rigid and simple whereas Hinduism contains so many doctrines and sects which "induces a kind of vertigo" (*In Light* 37). The followers of the former faith affirms a creator god whereas the latter envisions "the wheel of successive cosmic eras with its procession of gods and civilizations" (88). Paz sums up: "Hinduism is a conjunction of complicated rituals while Islam is a clear and simple faith" (37). In Islam, there are divisions within itself, but these are not as profound as those within Hinduism which "accepts not only a plurality of gods but also of doctrines (darshanas)" (*In Light* 38).

The religious literary, legal and historical works of the Hindus are poles apart from the similar works of the Indian Muslims. Also there is nothing similar in the architectural, artistic and literary styles of the Hindus and the Indian Muslims. Commenting on the contrasting nature of the two attitudes to life, Paz opines that it is impossible to say whether they are 'two civilizations occupying a single territory' or 'two religious nurtured by a single civilization. Tracing the evolution of Hinduism, Paz says that Hinduism began in India and it has a filial relation with the Vedic religion of the Aryan tribes. "In contrast, Islam is a religion that came from abroad fully formed, with a theology to which nothing could be added". Though the two religions live side by side, the separate identities of the two communities have been preserved. But there are points of contact between the followers of these two religions. As Paz astutely observes" "many things unite them: similar customs, languages, love of the land, cuisine, music, popular art, clothing and . . . history" (38).

Evolution of Modern India

As Paz observes "the first forays of Muslim soldiers into India were in the year 712, in the province of Sind" (*In Light* 34). What began as looting expeditions became a full scale invasion. In 1206, the Sultanate of Delhi was founded. It was ruled by various dyanasties until sixteenth

century when Babur founded the Mughal dynasty in 1526, ending the Delhi sultanate.

During the days of the Delhi sultanate, life in the villages underwent little changes as the rulers left the social fabric almost entirely intact"(39). But in the cities, Turkish aristocracy superseded the ancient ruling groups like Brahmans, Kshatriyas and wealthy merchants. The Delhi sultanate was 'the center of the entire Muslim world' (40), since it flourished after the sack of Baghdad by Genghiz Khan's troops in 1258. In those days people from the lower castes adopted Islam owing to factors like the new political order, the possibility offered by Islam to free oneself from the law of karma and the work of the Muslim missionaries.

The sixteenth century saw the beginning of a new period in Indian history when Babur founded the Mughal Empire. With the insight of a historian of finest calibre, Paz evaluates:" This is was the height of Islamic civilization in India, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (*In Light* 44). But with the 18th century, a period of decline began.

In the relation between Hindus and Muslims, there was a moment of exceptional harmony' under the reign of the great emperor Akbar (1556-1605). As a sign of religious toleration and conciliation, Akbar commissioned translations of the Atharva Veda, the Ramayana, and the

Mahabharata and built the House of worship (Ibadat Khana) as a meeting place for theologians and priests of different religions. Moreover he issued a decree called Divine Faith, in which he was the arbiter of all religious disputes. 'Din-i-Ilahi' - Divine Faith - was a blend of Islam, Hinduism and other religions. In Europe, those were the days of the Reformation.

The reign of the Emperor Jahangir (1605-27) was a period of the tolerance and coexistence. Paz has this to say about Jahangir: "He had aesthetic leanings and political skill, but he was not inspired by grand designs (*In Light* 47). Percival Spear, the noted historian says that 'he became a kind of life-president of Indian artists" (*A History of India* 2: 54).

Jahangir was succeeded by his son Shah Jahan who ascended the throne after assassinating his brother. His reign was 'a period of artistic splendor (*In Light* 48). the crowning achievement being the construction of the Taj Mahal. As Percival Spear observes: "He was in a special sense the architectural director of his day . . . the great building of his reign, the Taj Mahal, the Delhi fort, and Juma Masjid . . . would not have been what they are without his personal inspiration and direction" (*A History of India* 2: 54).

The war of succession among the four sons of Shah Jahan led to the ascension to power of Aurangzeb. Paz notes that one of the slain princes,

Dara Shikoh was an intellectual who sought a bridge between Hinduism and Islam. The reign of Aurangzeb, which lasted half a century, had far reaching consequences in that he "proposed the impossible: to govern a vast empire, composed of a majority of Hindus, conforming to the laws of Islamic asceticism" (*In Light* 49). Though Aurangzeb was an astute politician and a talented soldier, the decline of the Mughal empire was started by his unwise policies and senseless wars. Paz categorically says: "his long reign was a series of terrible mistakes, senseless wars, and useless victories. The decline of the empire begins with him" (49). Aurangzeb died in 1707, fighting the Marathas in the Deccan.

The internecine struggles among the new powers like the Sikhs and the Marathas and the growing weakness of the Mughal empire set the stage for the appearance and domination of the British, the new protagonist from across the sea. They were bent on economic and political domination of the region and not on religions conversion of the people. The conquest of India by the British was a process that lasted more than a century and involved many extraordinary personalities like Robert Clive, Warren Hasting and Lord Wellesley who were 'wise diplomats and remarkable military men" (51). The British came to India as part of the commercial activities of the East India Company. Eventually it became an

instrument of Great Britain's political expansion. It was directed by Governor General. The administrative set up of the company underwent changes when it had to face the revolt of 1857. The revolt was crushed by the company and the Governor General was replaced by Viceroy, the direct representative of the crown.

In November 1858, Queen Victoria solemnly sanctioned religious freedom and also granted the right of Indians to serve in the colonial government. The proclammation of the Queen had far reaching implications. Religious freedom abolished the connection between religion and the state consequently the Muslims lost their traditional privileged position. The right granted by the Queen was, according to Paz, "the seed for the future independence of India" (52).

According to Paz, what happened in 1857 was not a national revolt because the idea of a nation had not blossomed in the Indian consciousness. In the context of India, Paz views nationhood as a modern concept imported by the British. In two brilliant sentences, Paz sums up this judgement of the importance of 1857 and 1947 in the history of India:

> The revolt of 1857 was a doomed and chaotic attempt to return things to the way they had been before the British arrived. The Independence of 1947 was the triumph of

British ideas and institutions . . . without the British (*In Light* 53).

Encounters and Contradictions: Evolution of Modernity in India

Paz says that 'the independence of 1947 was the triumph of British ideas and institutions . . . without the British" (*In Light* 53). How is he justified in this judgement? A review of the interaction between cultural, religious and political factors in Modern India will clarify this problem.

The Delhi Sultanate was 'the centre of the entire Muslim world' since it flourished after the sack of Baghdad by Gangling Khan'stroops in 1258. Though Muslim intellectual and artists found Delhi as their haven, the sultanate period was not characterized by solid scholarship and study of the sciences, which was the hallmark of Baghdad. Scholars in Baghdad and Cordoba assimilated the classical philosophy and the rich pagan tradition resulting in cultural symbiosis for the benefit of all. But nothing salubrious like that happened in Delhi. In a remarkable sentence Paz expresses that deplorable condition: "Delhi never had an Averroes or an Avicenna" (40). Scholars came to India and found asylum there, but no one of the sature of Averroes or Avicenna emerged out of that cultural interaction.

Paz is quite objective and impartial in his assessment of the period. He says that there were great poets like Amir Khusrau who wrote in Persian and in Hindi. The contact was not without influence: "Indian music deeply influenced that of the Arab world and central Asia" (40). The same cannot be said about architecture and painting belonging to Hindu and Muslim tradition. According to Paz, Ellora and Taj Mahal were inspired by two different visions of the world.

In between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, three sufi orders came to India and preached the doctrine of Islam in the pantheistic vein. The Sufis emphasized that all is God, a doctrine that is heretical for orthodox Islam. Nizam ud-din, a famous saint and Amir Khusrau, his friend belong to the Sufi tradition. Paz observes that the end of the Sultanate period saw a fusion of Hindu and Sufi mysticism. In Sufi mysticism there is a pantheistic vein which has some similarities with Hinduism. The Sufis in India influenced Muslims as well as Hindus. Among Hindus there was a movement of popular devotion to personal God which was called 'Bhakti movement'. Paz rightly observes that the "Bhakti movement might have been the nucleus for the union of the two communities and the birth of a new India" (44). The bhakti movement inspired such mystic poets as Tukaram (1598-1649) and Kabir (1440-1518)

both of whom wrote in the vernacular about Rama and Allah. In the poems of Kabir, Tagore saw "the failed promise of what India could have become" (43).

With the Mughal empire in the sixteenth century the relation between Hindus and Muslims entered a new phase. Paz succinctly observers: "The tendency toward fragmentation - a permanent aspect of Indian history, and one that the sultans of Delhi continually faced - was especially pronounced during the long decline of the Mughal Empire" (*In Light* 44). During the days of Akbar the Great, the relation between Hindus and Muslims was harmonious. Akbar commissioned translations of the Atharva Veda and proclaimed Divine Faith, a fusion of Hinduism, Islam and other religions.

Though the age of Akbar was characterized by religions tolerance, it had its opponent among the orthodox Islamic clergy in the person of Sheik Ahmad Sirhindi who opposed Sufi pantheism. As Percival Spear, a noted Indian historian says, "Sirhindi sought to reconcile Sunni legalism with the religion of the spirit and so to repel the tendency to syncretism with Hinduism" (*A History of India* 2: 57).

The reign of the Emperor Jahangir was a period of tolerance and co-existence. Jahangir was succeeded by Shah Jahan whose four sons fought

among themselves for the throne. Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's eldest son, was an intellectual educated in the Sufi tradition. He was convinced that a bridge could be built between Islam and Hinduism using the philosophy of the Upanishads which he called "the most perfect of the divine revelations. (*In Light* 48). He disliked Ulemas and mullahs and made fun of the chatter of the clergy in a poem.

> In Paradise there are no mullahs
> One never hears the racket of their discussions and debates (48).

It is quite clear that Paz too, like Dara Shikoh, doesn't like fanatics and fundamentalists. He calls Aurangzeb a Sunni fanatic and observes: "The decline of the empire begins with him" (49). He states the reason for the decline: "Aurangzeb, a Sunni fanatic, proposed the impossible to govern a vast empire, composed of a majority of Hindus, conforming to the laws of Islamic asceticism (49). Auarangzeb's long reign was characterized by terrible mistakes, senseless wars and useless victories." He restored the hated tax-on non-Muslims. "Under Aurangzeb, the breach between Hindus and Muslims became insurmountable" (50).

In this context Paz mentions how the broadmindedness and the liberal outlook of Dara Shikoh influenced the course of European thought.

In 1657 Dara Shikoh, with the help of a pandit, translated the Upanishads into Persian. A French traveller and Orientalist named Anquetil du Perron, made a Latin version of Dara's translation. This version had a profound influence on three Western thinkers: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Emerson.

Apart from Hinduism and Islam there are other religions in India like the Christian, Parsi and Jewish minorities and also groups whose beliefs are somewhere between the two religions such as the Sikhs and the Jains. "Sikhim is a compromise with Islamic militancy: Jainism, an archaic heresy, is a compromise with Buddhism" (*In Light* 54). There are tribes and indigenous communities that live at the margins of Hinduism. Paz, using a striking imagery describes the way in which Hinduism deals with foreign belief and cultures. "Like an enormous metaphysical boa Hinduism slowly and relentlessly digests foreign cultures, gods, languages and beliefs" (55). The reason for this ability on the part of Hinduism is the fact that it is a conglomeration of beliefs and rituals. It has got immense power of assimilation and 'practices, with great success, appropriation" (55).

The co-existence of Hinduism and Islam in India is, according to Paz, "more than a historical paradox" (37). Viewed in the light of the failure of a

syncretic relationship between the two religions, the decline of the Mughal empire is significant. Eventually a new protagonist appeared on the political arena of India- the British. Initially, the East India company confined their activities to business and commerce; but in due course the company became a military and political power. Like the Muslim emperors, the British were also monotheists, but they were bent on economic and political domination of the region and not on religious conversion of the people.

After the revolt of 1857, the crown began to rule India through viceroy. In November 1858, Queen Victoria granted religious freedom to Indians and recognised the right of Indians to serve in the colonial government. As Paz says: "This right was the seed for the future independence of India"(*In Light* 52).

Modernity was introduced in India by the Western rulers, especially the British. As an attitude, modernity begins with the Reformation and its central characteristic is the freedom of examination. Along with the British, Protestantism came to India and Protestantism insisted on free examination of the Scripture. As Paz observes: "With Protestantism came modern thinking: philosophy science, political democracy, nationalism" (102).

The English developed interest in Indian civilization and many Indians learned English either for practical purposes or out of a keen desire to know European culture. English system of education was introduced in India in 1835 under the recommendation of Lord Macaulay, the President of the Commission of Public Instruction. The educational reforms created 'a class of Anglophilic Indians' in Bengal and also in important cities like Bombay, Delhi and Madras. They used European ideas that they received through English education to purify their traditions. A series of reformers like Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda arose in India. The Theosophical society with its dynamic leader Annie Besant was quite influential in the last decades of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries. In 1917, Mrs. Besant was elected president of the Indian National Congress.

The religious reforms kindled the ideas of nationalism and in turn, 'Hinduism and nationalism became synonymous". (*In Light* 107). Indian National Congress was a sort of loyal opposition to the colonial administration; later it was divided into the opposing camp of moderates and extremists. With the coming of Gandhi, the political scene suffered a sea change. Both the moderates who stood for reforms and extremists who adopted an intransigent attitude towards the British were disarmed by the

strategy of Gandhi. Gandhi came when the Congress was paralyzed by the split. "In 1920, Mohandas K. Gandhi became a central figure" (111). Gandhi adopted the strategy of nonviolence and friendship with the other religious communities. The secret of his immense influence was in the 'union of act and word in the service of a disinterested ideal'. Commenting on the greatness of Gandhi Paz says; "In an impious century such as ours, the figure of Gandhi is almost a miracle within him, opposites merged: action and passivity, politics . . . at the service of a religion of disinterest" (113).

Paz has penetrating comments on the nature and activity of other national figures like Subhas Chandra Bose, Tilak, Savarkar, M.N. Roy, Patel, and Nehru. About Nehru Paz says: "His attempt to modernize India, which was partially realized corresponds exactly to what he truly was . . . . His waverings were due to the complexities of the circumstances, not to the influence of irreconcilable values and ideas" (124).

Paz mentions Nehru's love for India and his love for Western civilization in relation to rationalism and socialism. In the words of Paz, Nehru was 'as aristocrat who was a socialist' and ' a democrat who exercised a kind of peaceful dictatorship'. Paz sums up his assessment of Nehru:

> He was the heir of Gandhi, not his disciple or continuation. In fact, he moved India in a direction opposite to the one preached by the Mahatma: modernity. Nehru was the founder of the Republic, and his legacy may be summarized in three words: nationalism, secularism, and democracy (*In Light* 125).

Modernity in India - Dilemma, Contradiction and Solution

In this masterly analysis of the evolution of India as a modern nation entitled "A project of Nationhood' Paz critically examines how modernity came to India and the contradictions it has generated in India.

Octavio Paz emphasizes the fact that India doesn't have a monolithic culture. On the contrary the country has got a multicultural and polyglot society with bewildering complexity. Commenting on Sikhism with its fundamentalism and violence in Punjab, Paz writes;

> In the past the Indians created a great civilization, but they could never create a unified nation or a national state. The centrifugal forces of India are old and powerful: they have not destroyed the country because without intending to, they have neutralized one another (*In Light* 30).

Paz, an objective student of India, believes that India is not one nation. One important section in *In Light of India* is entitled 'A Project of Nationhood'. In that section he observes: "India is an ethnographic and historical museum" (*In Light* 75). Here one can see most modern modernity exists alongside with archaism that have survived for millennia. Paz rightly observes: "India is a conglomeration of peoples, cultures, languages and religions". At the same time it is a territory under the domination of a state regulated by a national constitution. Paz in order to clarify his perception of vast reality called India cites Jayaprakash Narayan's words: India is "a nation in the making" (75).

If India is 'a nation in the making' then national questions have to be tackled with care and sensitivity. Here Paz raises a strong criticism against national leaders who resolved the question of national language. Paz astutely observes that the ultra-nationalist groups opted Hindi for Hindustani, the spoken language of the majority of Indians in the north. Its effect was disastrous. As Paz says, "The decision to make Hindi the national language threw oil on the fire of the conflict with the Muslims" (69). For the Muslims the traditional and national language had been Urdu and it was spoken by more people than was in the case of Hindi. Regarding the constitutional Assembly's motion to make Hindi the national

language of India, Paz unhesitatingly observers: "A unwise decision, and one that is impossible to defend: Hindi is a foreign language in the South of India, in the Deccan, in Bengal in short, in most of the country" (69).

In clear terms Paz views the nature of Indian state. India is a state and it is and enormous democracy. But as Paz says,

> In reality, from a historical and political perspective, India is a commonwealth, a confederation of union of peoples and nations: one that is always in danger of fragmentation, but which. . . has resisted its centrifugal tendencies. In this senses, the constitution of India was founded on a fiction: it is not a reality but a blue print (77).

In Indian society, caste is a central reality. The all pervading influence of caste in Indian social life nullifies the idea of nation as understood inwestern sense. Paz is unequivocal in his pronouncement: "the idea of a nation is incompatible with the institution of caste" (110). At the same time, Hinduism, the religion of the majority of people in India and an integral part of Indian culture cannot do away with the system of caste. "The existence of castes is one of the consequences of Karmic law, the central principle of Hinduism" (110). This creates a clear contradiction in the formation of a modern state in India and a profound dilemma in the

life and activities of people who strove in that direction. With rare acumen and brilliant insight, Paz examines the problem in detail.

Paz deals with the institution of caste-a truly unique phenomenon in India. There are more than three thousand castes in India which very well indicates its complexity. As Paz observes:

> Castes are . . . social realities: family, languages, trade, profession, territory. At the same time, they are an ideology : a religion, a mythology, an ethic, a kinship system, a set of dietary laws. They are a phenomenon that is explicable only within the Hindu vision of the world and of humanity (56).

The Hindu term for caste is 'jati' which means 'species'. Various qualities define caste such as origin or blood, place where one lives, one's trade or profession, kinship rules, diet which ranges from the strict vegetarianism to the possibility of eating beef.

Paz makes a penetrating analysis regarding the antagonism between caste and the idea of a nation. "Castes are groups ruled by councils that serve a political function in self-government" (98). He comments on the static nature of castes in the following sentences: "Castes were invented not for change but for endurance. It is a model of social organization for a

static society, change destroys its nature" (*In Light* 60). Paz seems to think that caste system in India made our society a static one and stunted the proper development of the idea of a nation. It has, in other words, 'petrified culture'. Paz is eloquent in stating the negative sides of this unique institution. "The caste system is a-historical: its function is to oppose history and its permutations with an immutable reality". Caste, system stands diametrically opposite to the idea of a nation state. In clear terms Paz states the contradiction between 'caste' and nation. "Castes constitute a reality that is indifferent to the idea of a nation" (60).

With surprising sharpness of judgement and insight, Paz compares European experience with Indian reality and points out why western civilization gained upper hand in its encounter with India on political level. In Europe, owing to the influence of the Renaissance, people could assimilate the valuable aspects of their classical intellectual and artistic tradition. Reformation enabled them to purify their social and religious life of unwanted elements and debilitating customs and practices. Modern Europe is the result of the Renaissance and the Reformation. In India the weakness of Hinduism as well as that of Islam is that both civilizations had no such intellectual movements to reinvigorate it. As a result of that "the

two civilizations were petrified spiritually and in perpetual political and social turmoil" (104).

Modernity was introduced in India by the westerners in the guise of colonisers and administrators. As a result of that, India too has developed a version of modernity and evolved a nation state. Paz analyses how the education reforms undertaken by the colonial rulers shaped modern India. According to him the education reforms of 1835 started by Lord Macaulay were "decisive in the formation of modern India" (105). Macaulay intended to create a class of Anglophilic Indians through English education. This class of people assimilated English and used it to reinterpret their own traditions, thus sowing the seed of the independence movement.

Secondly the introduction of English provided India with a universal language. Indians trained in European languages saw European culture as a way to purify their own traditions. These Anglophilic Indians assimilated some aspects of modernity and tried to see the same condition in ancient Indian social structure and ethos through a sort of cultural and intellectual induction. Paz mentions the case of Ram Mohan Roy's attempts to restore Hinduism to its original purity with the establishment of proof in the sacred texts of Brahmanism that the true Hindu religion

was a monotheism. Paz remarks that "he never realized that he was the creator of a pious fraud" (106).

In 1899 Swami Vivekanda urged the Hindus to return to the ancient rites and beliefs: Hindus should "embrace one another like true brothers" without caste distinctions. With perfect equanimity and with sharp insight Paz passes this comment on the exhortation of Vivekananda:

> Apart from his evangelical zeal, this exhortation contained a triple heresy: an embrace between different caste members (a contamination), brotherhood among men (a denial of karmic law), and the postulation of the existence of a creator God (106).

Paz makes an astute observation in this connection. These reformers, according to Paz, christianized Hinduism in order of defend it against the criticism of the missionaries. "Their secret religion was Christianity; without knowing to, they had adopted its value". In Hinduism with its adherence to 'Varna - Ashrama - Dharma' there is no place for the equality of human beings, no scope for philanthropy and no relevance for the concept of a creator God. Paz may sound harsh but he doesn't mince words. He calls a spade a spade.

Paz makes an apparently starting observation about Indian tradition when he says that 'the idea of a just society forms no part of' the Hindu philosophical tradition". Some may say that the concept of dharma is a compensation for this but Paz points out the difference: "dharma is an ethic, not a politics". In Hinduism Moksha or liberation is the work of hermits. They experience joy of beatitude in solitude. There is no collective or social action or sense of communion in this which is diametrically opposite to the Christian ideal of kingdom of Heaven.

As for the place of the idea of philanthropy in Hinduism, Paz analyses the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in *Bhagavad Gita* and concludes: "Krishna preaches a disinterest without philanthropy. He teaches Arjuna how to escape Karma and save himself, not how to save the others" (184).

Which factor makes a civilization as it is? Why is it that modernity and nationalism are not incompatible with European civilization whereas the same produce contradictory effect in India? Paz analyses this complex but illuminating point in detail in the section "The contraptions of Time'. As Paz pronounces: "Every civilization is a vision of time. Institutions, works of art, technologies, philosophies, all that we make or dream is a weave of time" (185).

Paz distinguishes the concept of time in Hinduism and Christianity. In Christianity the concept of time is linear. Adam and Eve committed their sin in Paradise and were expelled from there and they fell into history. Through the sacrifice of Christ and through the exercise of his freedom, man is capable of saving himself. So for Christians "time is not only a life sentence, it is also a test". In Hinduism time is illusory, it is maya. It is impermanent and changing. So for the Hindus, 'time in itself is evil'. Paz defines the concept of time in Hinduism in poetic vein. It is "a lie with charming appearance that is nothing but suffering, error, and finally the death that condemns us to be reborn in the horrible fiction of another life that is equally painful and unreal" (*In Light* 186).

Time has no meaning in Hinduism, In other words it has no meaning other than 'its obliteration by total Being'. The absence of a historical consciousness among Hindus stems from this concept/contempt of time. Though India produced great poets, philosophers and architects, until modern times, there had not been a great historian. In Hinduism there are two modes of negating time. One is metaphysical negation which prevented the growth of the genre - history. The second is the social negation with the institution of the castes. It immobilized the society and

petrified the culture. As Paz emphatically argues: "the idea of a nation is incompatible with the institution of caste" (*In Light* 110).

With the rare insight of a deep student of Indian culture, Paz comes up with this observation on contending nationalisms in India: "In India many nationalisms live together, and they are all fighting with one another (126). Paz mentions Hindu nationalism that wants to dominate the others and a nationalist movement in Kashmir that wants the state to unite with a hostile nation, Pakistan.

Paz analyses tendency of disintegration that exists in Indian society and comes up with the solution to resist disintegration: secularism. With no state religion, separation of temporal and religious power, equality before law, freedom of belief, secularism involves a concrete policy which implies impartiality. True secularism is dependent on two conditions: the separation of powers and governmental prudence. According to Paz, prudence is cruelly absent in modern democracies without which good government is impossible.

Paz quotes the words of Jean Alphonse Benard: "the political problem of India . . . is not the irreconcilable conflict between tradition and modernity . . . but the excessive polarization of power at the top" (128). At

the same time, there is the traditional tendency toward separation and fragmentation. Paz overviews the problem down the ages in cryptic style:

> This is the reality that had to be confronted equally by the Maurya and Gupta empires, by the Mughals and the British. It is a history of two thousand years of struggle between separation and centralism. (128-29).

A fusion of modernity, with its emphasis on democracy and separation of powers, with traditional centralism can resolve the conflict between a central authority and local powers. In this context, Paz finds an element in the Indian project of nationhood as original in that it 'attempt to avoid the danger of depotism with the only known remedy: democracy" (129). Paz is aware of the limitations of democracy. Democracy also can be tyrannical and the dictatorship of the majority can be odious. But with separation of powers and a system of checks and balances', democracy becomes 'an instrument for introducing a little justice into our terrible world" (131). Paz's concern for the humanity rings true in these words.

Democracy is inevitably allied with secularism. Paz is emphatic and unequivocal in this context: "A non-secular democratic state is not truly democratic; a non-democratic secular state is a tyranny" (*In Light* 130). Paz finds secularism and democracy as the two complementary aspects of the

legacy of Nehru that suffered serious damage on account of political corruption, contending nationalisms and regionalisms.

Paz is aware of the levels of poverty in India that are simultaneously pitiful and infuriating' which when coupled with population explosion, makes a mockery of democracy and secularism. But, according to Paz, democracy is a way to ensure that progress is not realized at the expense of the majority" (131). The paradox of the Indian state is that democracy and secularism function in societies that are 'to a large extent still traditional. However there are favourable factors like a central administration, a common law, a political democracy that rules the entire country and national network of economic and commercial interests and activities. The national economic interests are the allies of the secularism of the state in the struggle against separatism. Paz calls the revival of nationalism and fundamentalism as fanaticism and observes: "although Hindu fanaticism is strong in the north . . . it is weak in the south. I believe that heterogeneity will work in favor of secularism and against the hegemonic pretensions of Hinduism" (133).

It is not possible to predict the evolution of events in future. Perhaps Fate is always at work. Nevertheless, Paz points out dialogue as 'the surest method for resolving conflicts': As Paz observes: "Talking with our

adversary, we become our own interlocutor. This is the essence of democracy. Its preservation entails the conservation of the project of the founders of modern India" (*In Light* 134).

From the illuminating way in which Paz analyses the evolution of modern India and the introduction of modernity and nationalism, it is clear that Paz, is deeply informed about the undercurrents in Indian society that make it vast, complex and richly fascinating. Paz observes how the institution of caste negates the idea of a nation and analyses the factors that hinder the blossoming of life giving movements like the Renaissance and the Reformation.

In spite of the handicaps, India is a nation in the making that has resisted the tendency of disintegration. Paz astutely observes that democracy and secularism can lead the nation to stability and prosperity. Paz hits the bulls eye when he remark that both secularism and democracy belong to the legacy left by the intervention of the West in India in the form of colonialism from the seventeenth century to the middle of the 20th century.

Paz is not blind to the limitation of the Western tradition with its absolute faith in the superiority of science and technology and a drive for limitless development. At the same time, he is conscious of the moral

superiority of the western tradition owing to the belief in, unlike the Indian tradition with its rigid institution of caste, human equality and the need for justice in human interaction which has pragmatic and humanistic value than what the concept of 'dharma' has in Indian ethos. Paz keenly observers that there is no scope for philanthropy in Indian tradition with its concept of the endless cycle of birth and rebirth and belief in karmic law. His remark that the concept of 'dharma' is an ethical idea is a razor sharp distinction as he distinguishes justice as a political concept. Thus, always Paz strikes us as a keen, unbiased and balanced thinker who has the lyrical gift of poet even when he deals with complex issues in culture and society. Paz is a historian among poets and a poet among historians. *In light of India* is solid achievement and a rich testimony to his gift as a thinker and historian. Paz brings his gift as a poet while dealing with subtle issues in culture and society thereby making it a treatise of exquisite charm and incomparable excellence.

Chapter 4

India and Indian Ethos in the Poems of Paz

Though *In Light of India*, a treatise on the peoples, places, philosophies, art, history and literature of India, bears ample testimony to the solid scholarship of Paz and is widely acclaimed as a major work, Paz regards it as 'nothing more than a long footnote to the poems of *East Slope*' (*In Light* 32). The poet explains that *In Light of India* provides the intellectual context of the poems.

Octavio Paz wanted to be remembered primarily as a poet and so he regarded *In Light of India* as a long footnote to the poems collected in *East Slope*. What is the significance of a book of poems in the life of a poet? It is, according to Paz, "a sort of diary in which the author tries to preserve certain exceptional moments, whether joyful or unfortunate" (32).

In his interview with Claude Fell, a University Professor in France, which took place in 1970, Paz spoke about his difference of opinion with Levi-Strauss who believed that myth can be translated whereas poetry is untranslatable. Paz said:

> I believe that myth and poetry are translatable, though translation implies transmutation or resurrection. A

> poem by Baudelaire, translated into Spanish, is another poem and it is the same poem ('Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude' *The Labyrinth of Solitude* 334).

Paz's poems on India are mainly collected together in *Ladera este* (East Slope). Paz visited Mathura in the summer of 1952 and wrote a long poem based on that experience – 'Mutra' – a fragment of which is included in *Octavio Paz Early Poems 1935-1955* (New York: New Directions, 1973). The full text of the poem is included in *A Tale of Two Gardens*, edited and translated by Eliot Weinberger, and published by Viking (London, 1997) which includes, with a few omissions, poems from *East Slope* and *Toward the Beginning*. There is the comprehensive anthology *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957-1987,* edited by Eliot Weinberger and published by New Directions (New York, 1987) which includes some other poems on India by the poet.

Paz's various commitments to India as Mexican ambassador, student of Indian heritage and as a poet, inspired poems of scintillating power and sensual charm of a rare order in world poetry.

Readers of *East Slope, Toward the Beginning* and 'Mutra' get a poet's experience of the vast reality called India in all its complexity as it is 'resurrected' in English translation. Paz wrote in the Spanish language

which was translated into English by eminent translators like Mariel Rukeyser, Elizabeth Bishop, Paul Blakburn, Lysander Kemp and Charles Tomlinson. As a translator, Eliot Weinberger's commitment to the poetry of Paz was lifelong and deep. When those poems have been translated or 'resurrected' in English language, they retain the same source of inspriation expressed in another language. Is the picture of India in *Ladera este* different from the picture in *East Slope*? Whatever be that, Paz was deeply committed to India and to poetry.

Paz's first contact with India was in 1951 when he came as a minor official in the Mexican embassy in India. The new experience evoked mixed emotions in him: "dizziness, horror, stupor, astonishment, joy, enthusiasm, nausea, inescapable attraction. What had attracted me? It was difficult to say"(*In Light* 12). The excess of reality is transformed into an unreality which becomes a balcony for him to peer into that 'which is beyond and still has no name.'

Paz's first poetic response to India was guarded. He visited Mathura in the summer of 1952 shortly offers his arrival in India and wrote a long poem based on that experience – 'Mutra'. Later, in a letter to Alfonso Reyes Paz confessed about the intention of the poem: "I wrote it to defend myself against the metaphysical temptation of India" (*A Tale* 100).

As Paz records in the notes written for 'Mutra', "the subject of the poem is the arrival of summer in the city and the fevers it generates on the earth and in the mind. A subject associated with Hinduism and its search for unity in the plurality of the forms of life" (100). The poet pictures the arrival of the spring in the following manner:

> Like a too-loving mother, a terrible mother of suffocation,
> like a silent lioness of sunlight
> a single wave the size of the sea
> it has arrived noiselessly and in each of us has taken its place
>
> like a king
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Summer, enormous mouth, vowel made of fumes and panting!
>
> (*A Tale* 15)

The expression 'a too loving mother' contrasts sharply with 'a terrible mother of suffocation' both of which are applied to the effects of summer and, by extension, effect of India (at least initially) on Paz. The poet presents various images associated with India in the succeeding lines: 'afternoon rich in birds,' 'night with its bright stars armed and in

full regalia', 'the beggar rising himself like a feeble prayer,' 'women bricklayers carrying stones on their heads as if they carried extinguished suns', 'the man covered with ashes who worship the phallus, dung and water', 'musicians who tear sparks out of daybreak and make the airy tempest of the dance come down to earth'.

Obviously the poet was overwhelmed and suffocated by the experience, a response which is clear from the following lines,

> all this long day with its frightful cargo of beings and
> things slowly being stranded on suspended time
> (*A Tale* 16).

Paz is intensely conscious of the all pervasive presence of death and annihilation that surrounds everything:

> We all go declining with the day, we all enter the tunnel,
> we cross through endless galleries whose walls of solid air
> close behind us . . . . (16).

Against this illusory nature of things in the light of transience and annihilation, the poet takes a courageous stand:

> No, take hold of the ancient image: anchor existence
> and plant it in the stone, base of the lighting

> Some stones never give away, stones made of time, time
>
> made of stone, centuries that are columns. (*A Tale* 17)

But ultimately nothing is permanent, everything, including the being of the poet, is transcient. So the poet continues:

> Stones also lose their footing, stones too are images,
>
> and they fall and they scatter and mix and flow with
>
> the flowing river
>
> The stones also are the river (17).

Here Paz, who was deeply interested in Buddhism, consciously or unconsciously uses an idea that recurs in Buddhist discourse to denote the transcient or imperament nature of things – that of the stream of water. 'The flowing river' into which stones fall is strongly reminiscent of the nairatmyavada (doctrine of no-self) in Buddhism. It is explained in the 'Questions of King Milinda' (which was written in the beginning of the Christian era) where, in the form of a dialogue between the Greek King Menander and a Buddhist sage Nagasena, the doctrine of no-self is elaborated using the example of a chariot. When asked to define a chariot, the king realizes that the pole or the axle is not a chariot, but the word 'chariot' is a mere symbol for those parts assembled in a particular

way. As the sage says, 'the self is only a label for the aggregate of certain physical and psychical factors'. When we look at the reality of things taking the element of time,

> this aggregate, according to Buddhism, does not continue the same for even two moments, but is constantly changing. So the self and the material world are each a flux (Samtana). The symbols are generally used to illustrate this conception – the stream of water and 'the self-producing and self consuming flame . . . . It will be seen thus that every one of our so called things is only a series (vithi) – a succession of similar things or happenings, and the motion of fixity which we have of them is wholly fictious (Hiriyanna 141).

Among various schools of thought in Indian philosophy, Paz had a special fascination for Buddhism. Even in this early poem on India, Paz seems to reflect the world view of Buddhism.

Paz presents a family in Mathura in the following lines:

> The sleepless children picking fleas by moonlight
> fathers and mothers with their family flocks and their

beasts alseep and their gods petrified a thousand years ago

(*A Tale* 16)

Paz in his treatise *In Light of India* observed that Hinduism had not experienced anything similar to the Renaissance or the Reformation. Consequently the Hindu religion was deprived of reinvigorating changes and the Indian culture was petrified owing to the static nature of the institution of caste. Later in the same poem the poet asks,

> Where is the man who gives life to the stones of the dead,
>
> the man who makes the stones and the dead speak? (17)

The above mentioned lines must be a search for the man who gives life to the stones of the dead. Paz feels that there is nothing to revive the petrified culture in Mathura. The man alluded to in this context is suggestive of Jesus Christ.

In Mathura the poet sees vast images belonging to the past-sculptures, idols and contemplates that god-realization must have been what prompted the unknown people to undertake such stupendous tasks of image building. But the poet doesn't feel one with the people who carved out those statues and who celebrated festivals in their pursuit of God realization/self realization.

. . . I do not want to be

God,I do not want to grope in the dark, I will not return

I am a man and man is

man, he who leapt to the void and since

then nothing has sustained him but his own wing

(*A Tale* 18)

Against the all consuming desire to annihilate ego in pursuit of god realization so characteristic of oriental tradition, Paz poses the typical western attitude towards life as action and heroism. Paz views his predicament in the central tradition of the West stemming from the Greeks as represented in their twin epics, *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*. Western activism is highlighted using his own solitary but heroic condition: He is an exile in India

the one who let go of his mother, the exiled, rootless,

with neither heaven or earth, a bridge, a bow

stretched over nothing, in himself unified, made whole

and nevertheless split from the moment of his birth

struggling

against his shadows . . . .

. . . . . king of

himself, son of his own works (*A Tale* 19).

As the poet views human condition, man is reduced to a position where he has to find meaning for his existence in his humanity. Man is seen as shorn of religious consolation as represented by idols and festivals. The poet felt a strong reaction against that mode of life and at the same time he is conscious of the dead end to which unthinking activism would lead. In order not to fall into despair Paz projects a via media to save him from black despair:

The ultimate images overthrown, the black river drowns

Consciousness,

night doubles over, the soul gives way (19)

Paz has something precious to preserve in memory.

But in my head keep vigil adolescence and its images,

the only treasure not ravaged:

Ships afire on seas still unnamed and each

wave striking memory in a storm of reminders

. . . . . .

and the high-walled city that on the plain glitters like a

jewel in pain
and domolished watch-towers and the champion
  defeated and in the smoking chambers the treasure of
women
and the poem rising and covering with its
  wings the embrace of day and night
and the straight line of discourse planted in potency
  in the middle of the city (*A Tale* 19-20).

In the notes appended to *A Tale of Two Gardens*, Paz wrote that he had just read some fragments of the translation of the *Illiad* by Alfonso Reyes. In this last stanza, oblique allusions to classical Greece, Troy, Trojan war, sacking of the city of Troy abound which cannot be ignored in any perceptive reading. The 'goddess of green eyes' must be an allusion to the story involving Hera, Athena and Aphrodite into whose possession the Apple of Discord came as a present by Eris, the goddess of Strife – the incident which culminated in Trojan war and the sacking of Troy: 'demolished watch-towers', 'smoking chamber' and 'the treasure of women' point to the destruction of the city of Troy.

This reading of the poem is warranted in the light of the words written by Paz in the notes. He says:

> The end, of the poem sets against this metahistorical absolute (i.e., 'unity in the plurality of the forms of life'), the idea of life as action and heroism which we have inherited from the Greeks (*A Tale* 100).

Against this tremendous waste and destruction which indirectly points to human vitality and adventure, however misguided, the poet highlights the powers of poetry and creative process: "the poem rising and covering with its wings the embrace of day and night" (p.20). Poetry is viewed as something resembling 'forbidden fruit' which is the produce of the tree of knowledge of good and evil:

> the straight tree of discourse
> planted in potency in the middle of the city. (20)

It is clear that poetry effects salvation against the senseless and illusory acceleration of phenomenal existence.

The entry on Paz in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes that the poet's "most prominent theme was man's ability to overcome his existential solitude through erotic love and artistic creativity" (9: 20). Here in this poem, Paz sings of 'acts, the high pyres burnt by history'.

The poet doesn't aspire the divine stature; on the contrary he is perfectly content with his humanity. He says:

> Under these black remains asleep, truth,
> who roused the works: man is
> only man among men (*A Tale* 20)

For Paz poetry is a gift which enables him to appreciate and express what it means to be a human being. He receives that gift with deep commitment and responsibility. For Paz poetry is also a means of salvation. As he says,

> And I reach down and grasp the incandescent
> grain and
> Plant it in my being: it must grow one day (20)

For Paz, poetry is his religion and the very essence of his existence. He was committed to poetry as to nothing else and as no one else was.

From this lengthy analysis of the poem, it is clear that Paz was on the defensive when he confronted Indian reality. He defended himself against the metaphysical temptation of India as is obvious from the thematic evolution of 'Mutra'. Instinctively he felt that 'the idea of life as action and heroism' perpetrated by modern western activism is superior to

oriental attitude to life, which he perceived to be a negation. Paz writes in the notes: "A somewhat more balanced and just position is taken in the final chapter of *In Light of India*" (*A Tale* 100-1). In his poems dealing with India collected in *East Slope* and *Toward the Beginning* we see a similar evolution of attitudinal change.

East Slope collects together some fifty poems and *Toward the Beginning* contains fifteen poems. A brief analysis of some important poems in these collections will reveal how Indian heritage – its art, culture, philosophy and history – influenced Paz in his evolution as a world-poet.

Among the different religious traditions in India, Buddhism held strongest fascination for Paz. He believed that Western civilization lost its unifying centre when it opted for unlimited progress with the help of science and technology creating 'air conditioned hells' in metropolitan cities. Also in dealing with problems of existence, Paz found the philosophy of Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism, as a system of belief at once modern and convincing. Paz was interested in the interpretation of Buddhism by Nagarjuna and many poems contain allusions to Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti, a Buddhist logician and poet. Also poems abound in clear and direct allusions to

central concepts in Buddhism like sunyata, nirvana, prajna, karuna, Boddhisattva, Prajnaparamita. There is a poem with the title 'Sunyata' and another 'Maithuna' that deals with the path of illumination followed in Tantric Buddhism and Hinduism. 'Shiva' and 'Parvati' appear in 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta'.

In the notes written for the poem 'Sunyata', Paz explains the concept of absolute void and proves how 'samsara is nirvana because all is sunyata'. Paz refers to *Buddist Logic*, a monumental modern study of Buddhist philosophy by Stcherbatsky and the commentary by Chandrakirti on Nagarjuna, *Prasanapada*, in the French translation by Jacques May. All these prove that Paz had tremendous fascination for Indian thought which he studied in detail using authoritative works in English and French translations.

'Balcony', a dense poem with philosophic undertones with which the collection *East Slope* begins, can be taken as embodying an image that reveals Paz's special relationship with India. Eversince he came to India, especially after 1962, Paz began to regard India as his second garden, the first being his native Mexico. His days as an 'exile' in India in the official role as Mexican ambassador afforded him with a vantage point, just as a balcony gives one who stands on it viewing the panorama below. From

that vantage point, he saw and lived the vast Indian reality. Apparently, the poem is about

> Delhi
>
> Two tall syllables
>
> surrounded by insomnia and sand (*A Tale* 23)

The poem cannot be regarded as an ordinary one celebrating a historic city. On the contrary it is a poem that fuses together the history of the city and the destiny of the poet in time. In order to understand it, a consideration of some central concepts in Mahayana Buddhism is essential. Paz had a peculiar fascination for this school of philosophy which is evident in many poems.

According to Mahayana Buddhism, as interpreted by Nagarjuna, truth is void or 'Sunyata' and so attributes of things are illusory in nature. Nagarjuna's important treatise is *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (Middle stanzas). Nagarjuna believes in no reality whatsoever and his philosophy is therefore known as 'Sunyavada'. Its distinctive quality is explained in the following manner by Hiriyanna:

> The other Buddhist schools believe in things originating, though their view of causation is quite singular. The

> Madhyamika denies the possibility of origination itself. The very first verse of Nagarjuna's *Karika* tries to unsettle the notion by subjecting it to the test of a negative logic. 'Nothing exists anywhere whether we conceive of it as born of itself or of others, or of both or of no cause whatsoever'. It means that the notion of causation is an illusion; and, since the doctrine of Buddha admits nothing that is uncaused, the whole universe must be illusory . . . . All experience is a delusion; 'Anubhava esa mrsa' (Nagarjuna's Karika); and the world, a tissue of false things falsely related (220).

In other words, according to Nagarjuna, truth is void or sunyata; objects have no intrinsic character (Nissvabhava); vijnana is devoid of self-essence – it is a thing which is not in itself. One who follows this line of argument concludes that though knowledge may serve the purpose of empirical life, it is impossible to attach any metaphysical significance to it. Such a person can believe neither in outer reality nor in the inner reality. This doctrine is 'sunya vada' because it holds that everything is void.

The Mahayana Buddhism as interpreted by Nagarjuna deeply influenced Paz which is evident in his career as a poet. Paz wrote a poem entitled 'Sunyata' in which he speaks about 'tinder / of charred space' and also

> the day
> now nothing
> but a stalk of scattering vibrations.

For the poet 'sunyata' is

> presence consumed
> in a weightless glory (*A Tale* 59).

which makes the day 'a stalk / of scattering vibrations'. In the poem 'Sunyata' Paz writes about the illusory nature of space ('charred space') and time ('the day . . . a stalk of scattering vibrations') which is in tune with the philosophy of Buddhism as interpreted by Nagarjuna. Empirical change is the attribute of time. But, if experience itself is illusory in nature, time also must be illusory or maya. This philosophic concept of time is woven into the texture of many poems of Paz including 'Balcony' where the philosophy of Buddhism exerts a subtle and highly complex

influence in the theme and structure making its analysis so important in the context of Paz's relationship with Indian ethos.

In the poem 'Balcony', a poem about Paz's experience in Delhi, the city undergoes change but the poet is unsure whether the city or himself passes through time. Time has got 'empty hands' in which it holds him ('time / holds me in its empty hands'). The poet writes:

Stillness
in the middle of the night
not adrift with centuries
not spreading out nailed
like a fixed idea
to the center of incandescence
Delhi
  Two tall syllables
surrounded by insomnia and sand
I say them in a low voice
  Nothing moves
the hour grows
  stretching out (*A Tale* 23)

What is nailed to the center of incandescence must be time which is illusory in its acceleration. Then the poet alludes to the city of Delhi that had undergone changes – Delhi in history:

> Old Delhi; fetid Delhi
> alleys and little squares and mosques
> like a stabbed body
> like a buried garden
> For centuries it has rained dust
> your veil is a dust-cloud
> your pillow a broken brick
> on a fig leaf
> you eat the leftovers of your gods
> your temples are bordellos of the incurable
> you are covered with ants
> abandoned lot
> ruined mansoleum
> you are naked
> like a violated corpse
> they stole your jewels and your burial clothes (*A Tale* 26)

The above stanza is a quick, random glance at the history of Delhi with its countless wars, acts of wanton destruction and cruelty; but still, a place brimming with human activity and sometimes depravity. In the end what the poet remembers is 'not height' 'nor the night' 'and its moon' or 'the infinities', 'but memory and its vertigoes' (24). Paz realizes that 'this spinning / is the tricks and traps' / behind it there is nothing / it is the whirwind of days'. The poet gets an overwhelming awareness of the illusory nature of things and says: "What you have lived you will unlive today" (25). 'Leaning over the balcony / I see / this distance that is so close' – the distance that is so close is not contradictory in the light of the illusory nature of things. Then Paz moves toward a vision that is in tune with the ephemeral nature of things:

> I saw for an instant true life
> It had the face of death
> the same face
> dissolved
> in the same sparkling sea" (*A Tale* 24).

Again Paz muses

> "Delhi / two towers / planted on the plains"

Who is the poet, then?

I was there

I don't know where

I am here

I don't know is where (25).

Then the poet realizes: 'Not the earth / time / holds me in its empty hands'. He is a plaything of time which is illusory in nature. He sees night and moon and movement of clouds; violence in the air and furious dust that wakes, observes that the lights are on at the air port land listens to the murmur of song from the Red Fort. Then he remembers a line by Gongora,

'a pilgrim's steps are vagabond music'

Paz is also a pilgrim in India. He looks to a beyond and sees:

On this fragile bridge of words

The hour lifts me

time hungers for incarnation

Beyond myself

somewhere

I wait for my arrival (*A Tale* 27).

In the words of Paz, poetry is

> the bridge suspended between history and truth

'On this fragile bridge of words' which is poetry, Paz has a vision similar to enlightenment. For Paz poetry is more important than anything else and so he has the vision 'on this fragile bridge of words'.

Earlier in the poem Paz spoke about 'a sparking sea' which must be the transcending of life and death leading to 'nirvana' mentioned in Buddhism. There, the distinction of time as present, past and future melts away and emerge as one, eternal continuum of presence.

'Vrindaban', a long and interesting poem in *East Slope* presents Paz as a traveller (or a pilgrim) to the holy city. There, enveloped in the dark, the poet imagines himself to be 'a tree and spoke' and raced to follow his thoughts and reminiscences.

> The remains of sparks
> the laughter of the late parties
> the dance of the hours (*A Tale* 52).

The he asks

> "Do I believe in man or in the stars?"

and answers:

"I believe (with here a series of dots)

I see"

What is the significance of this 'series of dots' in parenthesis? Perhaps it points to the illusory nature of seeing and believing.

In Vrindaban, Paz observes 'putrefaction / fever of forms / fever of time / ecstatic in its combinations' and realizes that 'everything was flaming – stones, women, water.

It is significant to note that in Buddhism 'flame' is one of the two symbols (the other being stream of water) used to illustrate the conception of the constantly changing nature of things.

Everything sculptured from color to form

from form to fire

Everything was vanishing (*A Tale* 54)

Here Paz pictures everything – color, form – as changing and eventually vanishing. The line reminds the readers of a concept in Mahayana Buddhism. This school of thought propounded the non-reality of the world using an original and apparently startling argument. About this, Musashi Tachikawa, an authority on Mahayana Buddhism writes:

> The Mahayanists' methods of arguments were quite startling, for they began saying things that ran directly counter to everyday logic. One of their favourite such expressions was "form is emptiness" (rupam sunyata). 'Form' signifies anything with colour or shape, but here it further refers to the world of delusion or the profane world, while "emptiness" refers to enlightenment or the sacred. The existence of any third possibility other than delusion or enlightenment is not recognized, and the sum of these two constitutes everything (2).

The lines are also reminiscent of the ksanika-vada or the doctrine of momentariness that asserts that everything changes from moment to moment – a central concept of Buddhism.

Then, there is the sight of a saddhu

> covered with pale ashes
> a saddhu looked at me and laughed
> watching me from the other shore (*A Tale* 54)

The poet think that perhaps he saw Krishna in the form of a sparkling blue tree, or as Paz says,

Perhaps in a cleft stone

he grasped the form of woman

its rent

the formless dizziness (*A Tale* 55).

Paz is fond of celebrating sensual beauty which is clear from these lines having strong sexual connotations. About the same saddhu, Paz writes

Gone gone

He watched me from the other shore (56).

In the notes, Paz explains that the expression 'Gone, gone to the other spore' occurs frequently in the Prajnaparamita sutra. It means: 'the sage has crossed over from this bank, the phenomenal world, to the other, perfect wisdom' (p. 106). Then the poet's testament of faith is expressed

The absolutes the eternities

their outlying districts

are not my theme

I am hungry for life and for death also

I know what I know and I write it (56).

Paz is a poet who sings in praise of fullblooded life and he is not fond of philosophizing in a cold vein. His commitment to poetry and the

realization that his vocation is that of an authentic poet rings true in these lines.

'Vrindaban' ends with the poet's proclamation that he is history.

I am a history

a memory inventing itself

I am never alone

I speak with you always

you speak with me ,always

I move in the dark

I plant signs *(A Tale* 56-57*)*

For Paz, "history is knowledge situated between science properly so-called and poetry" (*The Labyrinth of Solitude* 333). In *In Light of India*, Paz wrote: ". . . a poet, before speaking, must hear others – that is to say, the language, which belongs to everyone and to no one" (118). Paz recognizes himself as history that reclaims memory from the past. Its language cannot be a monologue; it is in the form of a dialogue. The poet reconciles poetry and history by being intensely truthful to his medium, which is language. The poetry can reconcile mutually antithetical attributes by employing images that effect moments of illumination in the darkness of banal speech. "I move in the dark / I plant signs", says Paz.

'Wind from All Compass Points', the poem with which the collection *Toward the Beginning* begins, is a scintillating recollection of various moments in his life and also a poetic evocation of places visited by him – bazar in Kabul and the river that crosses the city, many places in northern India, Western Pakistan and Afghanistan, Datia, the palace castle built by Raja Bir Singh Deo in 17th century in Madhya Pradesh, Salang Pass in the mountains of Hindu Kush. Paz effects a superb poetic synthesis of significant moments, persons and places from his past into a mode of discourse that comes alive in this long dense poem with the refrain.

"The present is motionless".

In this motionless or eternal present, the poet and his wife become divine couples or the divine couple – Shiva and Parvathi – descends into the phenomenal world as the poet and his wife.

In course of the poem, Paz brings together past and present. The poem was written during American intervention in Dominician Republic and Paz remembrs the words believed to be uttered by General Anaya in 1847 when he surrendered the Plaza de Churrubusco to General Scott, the head of the U.S. troops that attacked Mexico.

Our brothers are dying in Santo Domingo

If we had the munitions

You people would not be here (*A Tale* 68)

The first line alluding to the condition of the people (for Paz 'our brothers') in Dominican Republic is juxtaposed with an utterance by a Mexican hero in the nineteenth century in the succeeding line. It is followed by the ironic depiction of their present response to the challenge in the present – that of cowardice and inaction:

We chew our nails down to the elbow (68).

Effecting a transcontinental shift, Paz's poetic memory comes to South India where 'Tipu Sultan planted the Jacobin tree' (69).

Paz is a poet of sensual emotions who is always fond of presenting imagery of overt sexual connotation. It is obvious in the following stanza:

Down there

the hot canyon

the wave that stretches and breaks your legs apart

the plunging whiteness

the form of our bodies abandoned (70).

In the country where wind from all compass points meet, there are 'Russian cottages on the other bank of the Amu-Darya', 'sound of an Usbek flute – another river invisible clearer', Bactria, a shattered stature'. The refrain – 'The present is motionless' – accompanies shifts of places and memories. In this motionless present, the poet and his wife become divine couple:

> At the top of the world
> Shiva and Parvati caress
> Each caress lasts a century
> for the god and for the man
> an identical time (72).

Here the phenomenal world and the transcendental world fuse together in the world created by the poet. In this country of the mind, silent spaces of transcendence exist along with the noise in the market in Peshawar; fire, water, earth and air interact

> If fire is water
> you are a diaphanous drop
> the real girl
> the transparency of the world (70)

and is transformed into a transcendental reality which is illusory – 'Sunyata'.

> The mountains are of bone and of snow
> they have been here since the beginning
> The mind has just been born ageless
> as the light and the dust (67).

Which is the world where there are mountains of bone and of snow? In the transcendental world evoked in the poem, 'they have been here since the beginning'. There the wind has just been born; still it is ageless.

Using a series of images that mutually negate one another which is a characteristic of surrealistic poetic discourse, Paz reconciles phenomenal world and the transcendental world and create a unique country of the mind – a world that exists in language and in the mind of the poet.

'A Tale of Two Gardens', a long poem with which the collection *Toward the Beginning* and the anthology *A Tale of Two Gardens* ends, brings together two 'gardens' or formative influences in Paz's intellectual and artistic life – Mexico and India. The poem traces significant moments, places, people and experience in the life of the poet. Paz visualizes Mixcoac, his childhood village in Mexico as one garden or

starting point in his life. The second garden implied by Paz is India itself. The long poem alludes to various obsessions, likes, fascinations, philosophical quests and poetic explorations in the many lives of Paz as a Mexican, a poet, a diplomat in India and a human being sensitive to various issues in the society.

Paz is a poet who is deeply conscious of the transcience or impermanence of things in this world. For him

> A house, a garden
>
> are not places:
>
> they spin, they come and go (*A Tale* 86).

As human beings, 'we are condemned to kill time': so we die, little by little'. While he was a boy, Paz remembers, he had a garden in Mixcoac, which was 'like a grandfather'. The fig tree was a goddess, the Mother. There in the garden he had an encounter with 'the cleft in the trunk, the feminine void, the fixed featureless splendor. Paz confronted 'the stuff of time and its inventions'. Also the pines taught him to talk to himself. One day he reached a clarity as if he had returned to the 'beginning of the Beginning'.

The view that human beings are creations of time and so 'condemned to kill time' and that fig tree was a goddess or the Mother and the perception of a cleft in the trunk of a tree as symbolising the feminine void thereby indicating the unity between nature and feminity ('Prakriti' is feminine principle in Indian philosophy) are deeply in tune with the spirit and ethos of Indian tradition.

Paz poetically alludes to his meeting and union with Marie-Jose and its power to transform his being. He realizes that 'the other is contained in the one, the one is another; we are constallations'. Perhaps it is not far fetched to observe that this oneness of 'the one' and 'the other' is not unlike the world view of the Advaita school of philosophy in India.

Paz realizes that a garden is not a place: 'it is a passage, a passion'. The depiction of a geographical space as passage is to be understood in the impermanence of things as understood in Buddhist philosophy. Later Paz realizes that 'passion is passage' (94). The poet's next insight is all encompassing and involves a unitive understanding of the nature of the universe. The essential mystery of the universe – the creation – is not something esoteric and arcane. It is to be realized in a mundane, down to earth and physical level using body as an agent and eroticism as a means. For Paz 'the other bank is here'. Consequently the consummation of his

erotic relationship with Marie Jose makes her Prajnaparamita (perfect wisdom) a female deity of Mahayana Buddhism, who is at one with 'Our lady of the other Bank'. In Tantric Buddhism ('Vajrayana') physical union of the couple is the way to Prajnaparamita or perfect wisdom, as Paz observes in the notes written for *East Slope*.

For Paz also physical union of the couple leads to perfect wisdom; erotic experience moves him to 'the other bank'.

I forgot Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti
in your breasts
I found them in your cry
Maithuna,
two in one
one in all,
all in nothing,
Sunyata,
the empty plenitude
emptiness round as your hips (*A Tale* 94).

In this poem Marie Jose alternatively becomes Almendrita, a little girl in a fairy tale in Mexico, yakshi, graceful deity of trees and plants and prajnaparamita, a female deity of Mahayana Buddhism. Locked in love's

battle, both of them together transcend time and return to 'the beginning of the Beginning'.

Towards the end of the poem Paz writes about the scattering of memories and images as maya, illusion. Places and experiences transform into 'weightless structures' and 'the garden sinks' and becomes 'a name with no substance'. Such a treatment of places and experiences is deeply influenced by the philosophy that sees everything as impermanent or illusory in nature. The central aspect of Buddhism is the impermanence of the world; Buddhism is even known as Ksanika-vada or the doctrine of momentariness which holds that everything changes from moment to moment. The vision of the poet regarding what subsists inspite of the change is 'clarity' which may be a perception of the world as 'Sunyata', empty plenitude.

Return to the beginning and the total extinction of the flow of time into eternal present are recurrent themes in the poetry of Paz from 'Sunstone' onwards. It is associated with the consummation of two beings in erotic act:

> two bodies, naked and entwined
> leap over time, they are invulnerable
> nothing can touch them, they return to the source

there is no you, no I, no tomorrow

no yesterday, no names, the truth of two

in a single body, a single soul,

Oh total being (*The Collected Poems* 19).

Commenting on classical Sanskrit poetry that celebrates sex and eroticism, Paz wrote that it is "quite modern in its uninhibited praise of physical pleasure" (*In Light*, 144). For Paz physical union is the road leading to Prajnaparamita – Perfect Wisdom. Just like the classical Sanskrit poets who celebrated physical pleasure, Paz also sings in praise of physical pleasure derived through love and eroticism involving man and woman.

India appears in many other poems of Paz. 'The Religious fig' presents the pipal tree, first cousin to the banyan. The Buddhists regard the pipal as sacred and depict them in sculpture, paintings and poems as Gautama was enlightened and became the Buddha under its shade. The tree is associated with the 'Krishna cult' and so for the Hindus also the pipal tree is sacred. Paz writes: "The pipal and the banyan are central elements of the Indian landscape" (*A Tale 102).* In the poem 'The Religious Fig', Paz presents 'the great tree' as,

Green, humming,

its entrails in the air,

it is a huge overflowing cup

where the suns drink (28).

Nizam-Ud-din, a Sufi theologian and mystic of the 14th century and Amir Khusrau, friend and disciple of the former, appear in 'The Thomb of Amir Khusru', where Paz defines poems: "each poem is time, and it burns". 'The Mausolem of Humayun' visualises the historic monument as 'high flame of rose/ formed out of stone and air' (30). The poem 'The Day in Udaipur' alludes to the palaces of Udaipur in Rajasthan and against this backdrop sees the erotic union of the poet and his wife as 'bodies entwined over the void' (34). The poem contains an allusion to the sacrifice in the Kali temple ('Flies and blood / A small goat skips / in Kali's court, 33) and also to Black Kali dancing on the prone body of the ascetic Shiva and decapitating herself ('over the pale god / the black goddess dances / decapitated', 33).

'On the Roads of Mysore' presents Tipu Sultan, the Tiger of Mysore, who fought against the British in South India. Paz writes that he is 'worth as much as Nayarist and its Tiger of Alica' who was Antonio

Losada, the Mexican guerrilla of the 19th century. Mysore strikes Paz as 'a land good for dreaming and riding horses' (37).

Innumerable Indian birds (crows, parrots . . .) also figure in the poems of Paz. 'Ootacamund' depicts the Todas, who 'guard a secret from Sumeria' and 'worship Ishtar, the cruel goddess' and pictures Miss Penelope who, sitting on the verandah of the Cecil Hotel, regards India as a 'country of missed opportunities'.

In the poem 'Cochin', we find the Portuguese church and the people who go to six O' clock mass. 'Madurai' satirizes 'Sri K.J. Chidambaram, Director of the Great Lingam Inc. / a bus company specializing in tourists'. Paz met him at the British Club and he introduced the temple in the city as the largest temple in India and the T.S.V. Garage as the biggest in the subcontinent.

The long, complicated poem 'Blanco' begins with the quotation "By passion the world is bound / by passion too it is released" from *The Hevajra Tantra*, a central text in Tantric Buddhism in which Paz had profound interest. Paz remarks that 'Blanco' can mean white or blank or an unmarked space. It also means emptiness, void. The poem offers variant readings.

Allusions to places in India and Indian tradition recur in many other poems – 'Himachal Pradesh', 'Concert in the Garden', 'Epitaph for an Old Woman', 'The Effect of Baptism', 'Nightfall', 'The arms of Summer'. The poem 'Altar' is arranged in the form of a 'lingam' placed on 'Yoni', an emblem that reminds one of the path of self realization in Tantric Buddhism and Saktism. The poem begins with 'a name and its shadows' and passes through mutually antithetical and parallel succession of images and finally reach the realization: 'one in the other / unnamed' (*The Collected Poems* 289).

In addition to *East Slope* and *Toward the Beginning*, the collection *A Tree Within* also contain poems where allusions to Indian ethos appear. The poem with the title 'A True Within' begins as follows:

> A tree grew inside my head.
> A tree grew in.
> Its roots are veins,
> its branches nerves
> thoughts its tangled foliage. (*The Collected Poems* 595)

The fifteenth chapter of *The Bhagavad Gita* begins with the description of 'The Tree of Samsara'.

"They speak of the indestructible Asvatha having its root above and branches below, whose leaves are the metres. He who knows it knows the Vedas" (397).

The aswattha spoken of in this is man himself. Katha-Upanishad also speaks of an Asvattha which has roots above and branches below and which is eternal (3.2-1).

In his composition of the poem 'A Tree Within' Paz might have been influenced by the *Gita* which became, in his own words, his 'spiritual guide' to the world of India. Though this may be an instance of the influence of Indian philosophy on Paz, there is a seminal difference between the transcendental sense in which the *Gita* treats man as Asvattha and the down to earth and materialistic sense in which Paz finds the man as embodying a tree.

For Paz it is your glance that sets it on fire / and its fruits of shade are blood oranges / and pomegranates of flame (595). Here Paz alludes to the encounter between feminine principle and masculine principle as a means for fulfilment of life. The outcome of the erotic encounter is physical pleasure. Then,

Day breaks

in the body's night. (*The Collected Poems* 595)

'Kostas Papaioannou' (1925-1981), a poem dedicated to Nitsa and Reia, begins with the dedicatory words Milton used for *Lycidas*. The identity of the poet in the locale of the poem is as a young man of 30 who 'came from America, and was searching in the ashes of 1946 for the phoenix' egg' and Kostas at that time was a youth of mere 20, who 'came from Greece, from the uprising, from jail'. They met in a café, full of smoke and voices and literature and 'talked of Zapata and his horse' and remembered 'the beautiful sorceress of Thessaly who turned Lucius into an ass and a philosopher (539). The poem is written in the vein of the poet's reminiscences of Kostas 'a universal Greek form Paris, with one foot in Bactriana and the other in Delphi' (539).

In his ratiocination, Kostas follows a path carved out by his reasoning which comes to a dead end. Then he transcends it and enters a new path. At this juncture Paz realizes a deep philosophical truth:

. . . you neither enter nor leave, there is no inside

or out, there is only time with no exists.

Here Paz seems to be influenced by the philosophy of Buddhism according to which the world is a void ('sunyata') and so 'you neither enter nor leave'. The entities also change from moment to moment in time and so 'there is only time with no exits' (541).

The impression that deep philosophical truths of Buddhism seem to be present as a undercurrent of the poem is reinforced in the following stanza where Paz writes:

> You went to India, where Dionysius came from, and
> where the general Meander was king
> and was known there as Milinda,
> and like the king you marveled to find that the
> difference between the One and the Void
> resolves in their identicalness.
>
> (*The Collected Poems* 541)

According to the philosophy of the Upanishads, the ultimate reality is one; but Buddhism holds that the ultimate reality is void or 'sunyata'. Or Buddhism does not recognise the existence of any ultimate reality. The cardinal difference between these two schools of thought in Indian tradition is masterly articulated by Paz in the above mentioned lines

depicting Kostas Papaioannou as the person who muses on the identicalness of the One and the Void.

Paz deeply studied classics in Indian tradition. This fact is clear from the following lines where Paz presents the way in which his friend responded when he saw in Mahabalipuram 'a girl walking barefoot over the black earth, her dress a bolt of lightning'.

> and you said: Ah beauty as in the time
> of Pericles! and you laughed
> and Marie Jose and I laughed with you,
> and with us three laughed all the gods and
> heroes of the Mahabharatha and all
> the Boddhisttvas of the Sutras. (541)

The gods and heroes of the Mahabharata believed in the One whereas the Boddhisttvas perceived the world as the Void. Does Paz imply that in the appreciation of beauty, they are of one mind?

In the poem Paz says about his friend: "your genius drank not only the light of ideas but also from the fountain of forms" (541). This is equally true in the case of Paz too. Paz was in his element in the world of

ideas and 'drank' the light of ideas with relish. As a poet, he wove them into the texture of his poems with the craftsmanship of a master-artist.

A close reading of the poems of Paz reveals the impact of Indian experience in the evolution of the poet. Allusions to Indian places and abstruse philosophical ideas abound in Paz's poems, especially in the following collections – *East Slope, Toward the Beginning* and *A Tree Within.*

The school of thought that had a perennial fascination for Paz was Buddhism, mainly Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism. The world view of Buddhism and its emphasis on the impermanence of every form had a familiar echo in the soul of Paz. Many poems including 'Sunyata' point to this preoccupation with the world as void.

Paz celebrates sensual beauty and eroticism in his poems with an openness that may startle some readers. Consequently, there is nothing surprising in that Tantric Buddhism, which regards eroticism as a means to enlightenment, struck a responsive chord in the heart of the poet. He wrote a poem – 'Maithuna' – highlighting erotic love as leading the couple to self-realization. Indian tradition is noted for the central place it accords to love and eroticism in human life and also in the working of the universe. Erotic love – 'kama' – is one of the four aims in human life.

Desire or 'kama' is seen as the force behind the projection of the One as this phenomenal world of multiplicity and diverse forms. Paz's perception is in tune with this philosophy: he treats love and eroticism with total involvement and accords it a prominence enjoined in Indian ethos.

Chapter 5

Masculine and Feminine - Paz's Picture of Perfect Life

'Pillars', a poem in the collection *A Tree Within* that begins with a sensual sentiment of John Donne ("And whilst our souls negotiate there,/we like sepulchral statues lay"), contains a startlingly explicit reference to the carnal aspects of the physical union between the poet and his wife.

> Knotted bodies
> are the book of the soul:
> with eyes closed,
> with my touch and my tongue,
> I write out on your body
> the scripture of the world
> A knowledge still nameless:
> the taste of this earth (*The Collected Poems* 613).

For Paz body and soul are not diametrically opposite and mutually exclusive aspects of being. On the contrary body and its attributes lead to the realization of soul and its transcendental qualities. When locked in erotic experience, what the poet succeeds in doing is the writing of 'the

scripture of the world'. It is a 'nameless' knowledge because what has got a name is finite or limited. Knowledge springing from physical union of bodies leads the poet to an awareness of the essential mystery of the existence itself. So it is nameless; it is not finite or limited. At the same time, this knowledge reinforces the sense of what it means to be human - it has 'the taste of this earth'. The poet continues with the celebration of the sensual union of bodies and writes,

> Between the end and the beginning,
> a moment without time,
> a delicate arch of blood,
> a bridge over the void.
> Locked, two bodies
> Sculpt a bolt of lightning. (*The Collected Poems* 613)

What the poet signifies here must be the orgasmic moment in the union - 'a moment without time' - when time is extinct for the couple. 'It is a bridge over the void' because the couple come to know the wisdom of the other shore as a result of the sexual encounter. The awareness that they have effects a 'sea change' in their conscience - it is like 'a bolt of lightning', sudden and quite overwhelming.

It is really doubtful whether there is another writer in modern time who is as much explicit and emphatic as Paz is in the celebration of sensual beauty of the body and erotic union of male and female. It is obvious to any reader of 'Pillars', an ecstatic outpouring of the erotic experience.

"Night, Day, Night", another poem celebrating love and eroticism, presents the beloved in terms of nature's majestic forms; the lover also assumes similar forms. The beloved is a "leafy canopy" and the lover wants to assume the form of 'the wind' and 'the sun'.

> Under the leafy canopy of your hair,
>
> your forehead:
>
> a bower,
>
> a clarity among the branches.
>
> I think about gardens:
>
> to be the wind that shakes your memories
>
> to be the sun that clears through your thicket ! (*The Collected Poems* 617).

The title "Night, Day, Night" is suggestive of the grand cyclical changes in the universe. Paz seems to believe that the grandest attribute

of the universe is to be found in feminine nature in its sensual manifestation. So Paz writes:

> Your body
> a backwater in the shadows
> Stillness. Vast noon
> barely throbs
> Between your legs time, stubborn, flows (*The Collected Poems* 619)

The last line is startling in its explicitness of expression. Paz continues to write about 'vein of sun', 'living gold', 'grooves' and 'green constellations'. 'The triangular insect moves through the grass at three or four millimeters an hour.' 'For an instant you held it in the palm of your hand . . . and reverently you let it go.

Go back to the Great All (619)

Sex experience enables one to transcend the limitation of human being. For Paz it helps one to go back to the source of everything - "The Great All."

For the poet, 'an intangible village sleeps under' the eyelids of the beloved: avid whirlwinds . . . are the changing forms of desire and are always the

same : The poet unravels the mystery of existence - that of life and death - enveloping every human being. There are the apparent changes that are superficial beneath which there is the unchanging primeval source of creation - eros.

face after face
of the life that is death,
of the death that is life. (621)

Paz is intensely conscious of the complexity of love. As the poet says in "Letter of Testimony."

Love is an equivocal word,
like all words.
It is not a word,
said the Founder:
it is a vision,
base and crown
of the ladder of contemplation. (625)

Love is the be all and end all of life and it opens door to highest type of awareness possible for a human being ('base and crown of the ladder of contemplation"). Love is many things for many people - "It is an

accident", "it is born of that which is perfection," for the others : a fever, an aching, a struggle, a fury, a stupor, a fancy." Paz traces the geneology of love.

> Desire invents it
> mortifications and deprivations give it life
> jealousy spurs it on,
> custom kills it
> A gift
> a sentence
> Rage, holiness
> It is a knot : life and death.
> A wound
> that is the rose of resurrection. (*The Collected Poems* 627)

For Paz, when we speak of love, we speak of life, we speak of everything essential to us ("speaking it, we speak ourselves"). Paz believes that love leads us to the ultimate wisdom or perfect knowledge.

> To love :
> to open the forbidden door, the passageway
> that takes us to the other side of time.
> The moment:

the opposite of death,

our fragile eternity. (629)

The poet believes that 'love takes us to the other side of time,' where time is an eternal present. It must be similar to the moment of enlightenment. If love leads us to the world of transcendence, then we become immortals. The consummation of love is the moment when we experience what eternity is. It is fragile because it is human. In the poem 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta,' Paz wrote:

Shiva and Parvati

We worship you

not as gods

but as images

of the divinity of man

You are what man makes and is not,

what man will be

when he has served the sentence of hard labour. (*A Tale* 85)

Love helps us to transcend time and experience what eternity is ('our fragile eternity').

To love is to lose ourself in time

to be a mirror among mirros. (*The Collected Poems* 629)

'Time is evil' and 'the moment is the fall.' It must be what Eliot described as "awful daring of a moment's weakness."

to love is to hurl down:

interminably falling,

the coupled we

is our abyss. (629)

Paz perceives love as "Axis/of the rotation of the generations." In the act of love, 'the girl turns into a fountain' and 'her hair becomes a constellation'. A woman asleep is an island and blood is the 'music in the branches of the veins' and touch is the 'light in the night of the bodies.'

Paz contrasts the solitude of one when alone with the sense of abundance of two in erotic encounter: "The one is the prisoner of itself . . . . it only is, it has no memory . . . .

to love is two

always two

embrace and struggle,

two is the longing to be one,

and to be the other, male or female (*The Collected Poems* 631)

When the one meets the other and becomes two - what is formed is 'fountain of vision' and 'arch over the void'. The meeting of the masculine and the feminine is the 'bridge of vertigoes' and mirror of mutations.'

In the third section of the poem love is seen as 'timeless island' surrounded by time and 'clarity besieged by night.' The paradoxical nature of the act of love is hinted at : In love, one loses oneself and gains one's self.

To fall

is to return

to fall is to rise (635).

In the act of love one loses one's individuality and tastes of divinity and eternity thereby gaining richness of existence.

"To love is to die and live again and die again : it is liveliness" (633).

The poet believes that the highest type of activity or the noblest kind of attribute of human being is love:

I love you

because I am mortal

and your are (633).

For the poet, love is the source of inspiration; it is the fountain of creativity; it is what makes poetry happen. Paz sings:

In the garden of caresses

I clipped the flower of blood

to adorn your hair

The flower became a word

The word burns in my memory. (*The Collected Poems* 633)

As Paz hints at in innumerable contexts, love's encounter leads one to Perfect Wisdom. It is what erases contradictions and paradoxes from existence, from life.

Love:

reconciliation with the Great All

and with the others,

the small and endless

all. (633)

Love saves one from the monotomy of monologue. With words of water, fire, air and earth, the couple 'invent the garden of glances'. "High above the constellations always write the same word; we here below, write our mortal names." We remain what we are because we have no garden of Eden, the Garden of Perfection.

> We are exiles from the Garden
> we are condemned to invent it. (*The Collected Poems* 635)

Then the human condition has an attribute of its own. We are destined to forsake the garden for the world.

> We are condemned
> to leave the Garden behind:
> before us
> is the world. (*The Collected Poems* 635)

The paean of love entitled 'Letter of Testimony' has a coda which proclaims:

> Perhaps to love is to learn
> to walk through this world. (635)

Love enables the poet to be silent like the Oak and to learn to see. Paz then points at the fountain of inspiration in his creative life as a poet,

Your glance scatters seeds.

It planted a tree

I talk

because you shake its leaves. (635)

The very analysis of these three poems will show how frank and forthright is the attitude of Paz when dealing with man-woman relationship. Without even an iota of inhibition and emotional constraints, Paz sings in praise of erotic love as the source of creativity and also as the sure means to profound realization. In his treatise on India, *In Light of India*, Paz points to the nature of being in erotic love as follows: "In love's encounter the two poles entwine into an enigmatic knot; embracing as couples, we embrace our destiny." His search for and union with his soul mate Marie-Jose and its transformative power in his consciousness are analysed in the light of the nature of the Spanish language as follows: "I was searching for myself, and in that search I found my contradictory complement, that you (tu) that becomes I (yo), the two syllables of the word "yours" (tuyo) (*In Light* 27).

In his treatment of love and eroticism, Paz sounds very much like an Indian poet. With a joyous abandon that reminds the readers of classical Indian writers who treated sex and erotic experience, Paz writes

about the sensual encounter between man and woman. There are innumerable instances for this in his poems. In his prose treatise also, Paz appears as a liberated writer who is happy to refer to sensual beauty, aspects of erotic encounter and unabashed meeting of the bodies of lovers. Paz is the best example for a writer with post Freudian attitude to sex which is not seen as taboo.

In his description of the initial experience in India in *In Light of India*, Paz writes about "women with feline grace and dark shining eyes" whom he saw in Bombay (4). He saw "the veiled women with eyes as deep as the water in a well" (6) and "women with amber-colored skin, hair and eyebrows as black as crow's wings, and the huge eyes of lioness in heat" (9). A few pages later Paz writes about "the apparition of a girl like a half-opened flower" (10).

In his treatment of philosophical and religious movements also, Paz is equally at home in his description of the intricacies of the world of ideas as he is in brief references to love and eroticism. Paz notes that the philosophical antecedent of Sufism is a Spanish thinker named Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) "who taught the union with God through all this creations" (42). Paz records that there are affinities between Ibn Arabi and Neoplatonism and mentions about 'an exalted eroticism' in *The Interpreter*

of Desire, the poems of the Spaniard. Paz comments: "The union of opposites, whether in logic or in mystical experiences, has both a carnal and a cosmic aspect: the copulation of the feminine and masculine poles of the universe" (42).

It is said that, Ibn Arabi experienced a genuine epiphany when he saw a Persian woman in Mecca, who showed him the way toward the union of human and divine love. In this context Paz writes: "Love opens the eyes to understanding . . . . . everything that we touch and see is divine" (*In Light* 43).

In his treatment of Akbar, Paz notes that in his youth, Akbar was devoted to Persian poetry, especially that of Hafiz who was influenced by Sufi pantheism with its exalted eroticism. While presenting Catarina de San Juan, the most important religious visionary of Mexico, Paz observes that her vision of her relationship with Jesus was amorous one as she describes these visits of Jesus to her cell "as though they were the visits of a lover" (*In Light* 84). Paz presents Lalla, a woman prophet who lived in fourteenth century India who composed poems combining yoga with "the exalted erotic mysticism of the Sufi poets" (86). While commenting on the diversity of flavors in Indian cuisine, Paz mentions that as part of the Tantric feast, 'foods are mixed in forbidden combinations' and "the

ceremony ends with ritual copulation among the participants, men and women" (87).

Commenting on the nature of language used by classical Sanskrit poets of ancient India and the French writers of the second half of the eighteenth century, Paz observes that both of them never used vulgar words in their depiction of love and eroticism. "They almost always avoided explicit mention of the genitals" (*In Light* 147). Incidentally Paz mentions that the reticence of the authors is not due to morality; "it is aesthetic, a question of taste" (147).

In the section entitled "The Apsara and the Yakshi" where Paz analyses classical Indian literature, Vidyakara's anthology of poems in Sanskrit language is introduced and commented on. Here Paz records that Vidyakara, a Bengali Buddhist monk in the eleventh century, shows "a precise literary taste and an open and tolerant spirit" (149). Paz observes with obvious relish: "Erotic poems, dealing with a love that is inseparable from the body and its encounter with other bodies, form the major part of the book" (149). More than twelve pages are devoted for the description of this anthology; twenty three poems are also translated by Paz and included in the treatise, *In Light of India.*

Paz gives a fine example for the suggestive nature of poetry as well as the sensual and erotic themes celebrated by many classical poets when he translates the following poem from Vidyakara's anthology.

> When the ankle bracelet is still
> ear rings and necklaces jangle;
> when the man grows tired,
> his determined lover relieves him (*In Light* 154).

In this context Paz differentiates between Western eroticism and Indian. Since the end of the eighteenth century, "Western eroticism has been largely concerned with infraction and violence" (154). Indian erotic poetry in Sankrit doesn't see eroticism are violence or transgression; it displays 'the whole range of pleasures' (154). Eleven pages later, Paz again compares Western eroticism with Indian. As he observes, the key word of Western eroticism is 'violation' whereas in India, the key word is 'pleasure'. Paz continues: "Similarly, in Christian asceticism, the central concept is redemption; in India, it is liberation" (165).

Paz notes that "the poets resort to suggestion, saying it without saying it" (154) and translates a poem celebrating erotic appeal of feminine beauty.

Beauty is not
in What the words say
but in that which they say without saying it:
not naked, but through a veil
breasts become desirable (*In Light* 160).

Here the poem reveals the secret of poetic appeal by celebrating the sensual charm of the feminine appearance. The suggestive power of poetry is similar to the feminine beauty through a veil. The aesthetics of Paz is expressed through erotic imagery.

Classical Indian poetry abounds in the depiction of various shades of love and eroticism. It is a central element in Indian ethos; even gods in Indian mythology are no exception. With characteristic insight Paz writes that the Indian divinities are sexual and that the activity of the universe is seen as 'an enormous divine copulation' (170). In contrast the God of the Bible is a neuter God, unlike Zeus and Vishnu, Venus and Aditi. In a revealing sentence, Paz points out why eroticism is a central fact in Indian mythology, literature and even cosmology: "In a tradition of gods and goddesses in a perpetual state of heat, it is impossible to condemn sexual love" (170).

Paz quotes from *Atharva Veda*: "Desire(kama) was the first to be born; neither gods nor [departed] ancestors nor men have reached [equalled] him: [he is] superior to all and the most powerful" (9.2). And in another hymn: "Desire arose in the beginning, which was the first seed of thought" (19.52).

The role of sex and eroticism in Indian tradition is masterly assessed by Paz in the section 'Chastity and Longevity.' He notes that in Indian ethos, sexual pleasure is regarded as valuable. As Paz notes, "For Hindus, it is one of the four goals of man" (*In Light* 170). Desire (kama) is a cosmic force, one agent behind the movement of the universe. Like the Greek God Eros, desire is also a God. "Kama is a god because desire, in its purest and most active form, is sacred energy: it moves humanity and all of nature" (170). So it is obvious that Indian heritage subsumes a vision of sexuality as cosmic energy and regards human body as a fountain of creative energy.

For Paz sensual beauty is one of the most charming aspects in nature. Obviously Paz regards erotic pleasure as one of the important aims implicit in human existence. He regards love as the key that opens the hidden mystery of human nature and the universe. Love and eroticism lead human beings forward in their quest of life and helps them

to have perfect wisdom. Paz had deeply studied 'Vajrayana' - Tantric Buddhism - according to which ritual copulation of man and woman leads to enlightenment or liberation. The revelation that everything is void, 'Sunyata', and also an insight into the plenitude of the void stem from eroticism which is a part of Tantric Buddhism. It is not surprising that Indian ethos with its idea of desire (Kama) as the procreative and driving force behind the universe and means of enlightenment like Tantra and Tantric Buddhism deeply attracted and influenced him. Poems of Paz present many contexts where Paz takes the position that the erotic encounter between man and woman holds very important possibilities. Paz implicitly believes that erotic experience is inseparable from the fulfilment of human life. The poet's concept of perfect life envisions love and eroticism as the central fact of human existence. For Paz, nothing human is alien to him, least of all sex and erotic enjoyment. Many poems of Paz can be cited to illustrate this aspect of his creative output.

The poem 'Mutra' contains an allusion to a 'girl who appears in the street and is a stream of quiet freshness' (*A Tale* 15). It is significant to note that the girl is pictured here using positive and life giving attributes like 'stream' and 'freshness'. Both words indicate life, vitality, creativity,

change and growth. Here the girl stands for life and abundance; she is the source of everything positive in life.

'Balcony' pictures Paz in Delhi where he gets a vision : "I saw for an instant true life / It had the face of death" (24). Then the poet realizes the illusory nature of everything ('what you have lived you will unlive today'), but finds comfort in this thought

> I don't deny myself
> I sustain myself (*A Tale* 25).

For him there is the possibility for sustaining his life. It is erotic in nature as the following lines subtly suggest:

> It I stretch out my hand
> the air is a spongy body
> a promiscuous faceless being. (*A Tale* 24)

'On the Roads of Mysore' records the poet's experience when he visited Mysore. The sight of the women elicits this response in his mind.

> In spite of the famines, the women are well-endowed
> full breasts and hips, jewled and barefoot. (37)

For Paz the sight of women with 'full breasts and hips' is a positively welcome thing, which is to be appreciated. So Mysore becomes 'a land good for dreaming and riding horses.' The line is strongly suggestive of sexual symbolism. Horse is, "In the symbolic tradition, an embodiment of power and vitality" (Hans Biedermann 177). It is seen as an image of victory especially in relation to sex. For Paz erotic relationship between man and women is the most natural and most spontaneous activity that leads to fulfilment in life.

The poem 'Vrindaban' presents a saddhu who watched the poet 'from the other shore'. Paz says that

> Perhaps he saw Krishna
> Sparkling blue tree
> dark fountain splashing amid the drought
> Perhaps in a cleft stone
> he grasped the form of woman
> its rent
> the formless dizziness. (*A Tale* 55)

As Paz pictures the saddhu, it is not enough that he saw Krishna in the form of a sparkling blue tree. Similarly he might have had a vision of 'the form of woman' 'in a cleft stone' and experienced its rent as 'formless

dizziness'. If the vision or religious experience of the saddhu is to be complete, it should embody the vision of a woman as well as Krishna. One is incomplete without the other. The masculine god - Krishna - and the form of woman are mutually inclusive in the vision of Paz.

"The Wind From All Compass Points", an autobiographical poem using techniques similar to that of surrealism, contains a powerfully suggestive context where Paz reminiscences about his erotic experience, probably with his wife Marie-Jose.

> Down there
> the hot canyon
> the wave that stretches and breaks your legs apart
> the plunging whiteness
> the form of our bodies abandoned. (*A Tale* 70)

The obvious sex symbolism cannot be missed as it clearly suggests the consummation of sex act. In the notes on this poem, Paz writes about the relationship between love and eroticism. "Love is inseparable from eroticism but it crosses through it unharmed" (108).

The same poem depicts the divine couples - Shiva and Parvati - in amorous encounter.

At the top of the world

Shiva and Parvati caress

Each caress lasts a century

for the god and for the man

an identical time (*A Tale* 72)

In Paz's world view, divinities are also seen as engaged in amorous pursuits just like human beings. To be complete, to be fulfiled in life, erotic experience is the sure way - this is the concept of complete life in the world of Paz.

In 'Maithuna', a poem celebrating the exalted experience of erotic encounter, Paz explicitly alludes to some positions of love making using intensely suggestive imagery.

Burgundy tongue of the flayed sun

tongue that licks your land of sleepless dunes (75).

In unmistakable idiom, Paz immortalises the experience of last night. Here, carnal aspects of the copulation are brought out using explicit imagery that coalesce into beautiful, ethereal interlude:

Last night in your bed

we were three:

the moon you and me (*A Tale* 80)

It is with joyous abandon that Paz writes about sex act. The poem 'Axis' contains overt depiction of copulation.

Through the conduits of blood
my body in your body
spring of night
my tongue of sun your forest
your body a kneading trough (83).

Here the poet celebrates the physical side of the erotic love using the explosive power of surrealistic imagery. Paz presents a powerful evocation of the sublime heights to which a couple can rise in erotic love.

'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta' deals with the poet's visit of the island with his wife. 'Invocation' the second section of the poem is addressed to Shiva and Parvati to whom Paz says,

We worship you
not as gods
but as images
of the divinity of man (85).

Here also, gods and divinities have significance in so far as they are "images of the divinity of man." So the four arms of Shiva becomes four rivers "where the lovely Parvati bathes." When the sea beats under the sun, it is the laughter of Shiva. When the sea is ablaze, it is because Parvati steps on the waters. The poet and his wife have nothing to ask of the gods 'that comes from the other world' except "the barefoot light on the sleeping land and sea."

"A Tale of Two Gardens," a complex poem that moves through significant places, people, events and experience in the life of Paz, presents a moment in the life of the poet when he saw "the other face of being/the feminine void/the fixed featureless splendor." Then the poet 'crossed paths with a girl.' After a passage through many countries and experience, the poet finds a self-contained autonomous world in his erotic experience with his wife. There he gets an insight into perfect wisdom and experiences the plenitude of the void. The poet is explicit and emphatic in his affirmation of the overwhelmingly powerful nature of erotic experience:

> I forgot Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti in your breasts
> I found them in your cry

Maithuna,

two in one

one in all

all in nothing

Sunyata

the empt plenitude

emptiness round as your lips ! (*A Tale* 94).

It is to be noted that the penultimate section of the long poem visualizes Shiva and Parvati in erotic love. The concluding stanza is a profound exploration of concepts of time, ego, reality of the world, and illusory nature of things in the light of Buddhist logic. The poet writes about the scattering of images and memories so that he gets this revelation:

The signs are erased:

I watch clarity (95)

Here the poet alludes to the wisdom that comes from the other bank which is perfect wisdom - 'Prajnaparamita'. Nagarajuna and Dharmakirti taught about that Perfect Wisdom. But what Paz learns in his erotic communion with his wife is more important than philosophic concepts like 'Prajnaparamita' and 'Sunyata'. There cannot be a more convincing evidence for the importance that Paz gives for the erotic fulfilment of man

and woman, than this long poem that pictures Paz and his wife in the context of Nagarjuna, Dharmakiriti and 'Sunyata'.

Paz is really fond of using suggestive imagery evoking sexual associations. In the poem 'Vrindaban' Paz writes.

> Perhaps in a cleft stone
> he grasped the form of women
> its rent
> the formless dizziness (*A Tale* 55).

In the same poem Paz expresses his credo:

> "I am hungry for life and for death also" (56).

The purpose of human life is to live. To live is to experience varied sensations and emotions. The quest for life that Paz expresses through his poems reminds the readers of the attitude towards life shown by Krishna through his example.

The 'Indianness' in the treatment of love and eroticism by Paz

It is well known that India had been 'the other' in the creative life of Paz for more than forty years. His tryst with Indian ethos, culture, philosophy and art had its sublimated manifestation in the form of poems

(*East slope, Toward the Beginning*) and prose works (*In Light of India, The Monkey Grammarian*). Paz wrote that his Mexican identity helped him to understand India better.

A close study of his works would reveal that in his portrayal of love and eroticism also, he shows an attitudinal similarity with Indian ethos. There is nothing of misogynistic in Indian tradition. Its sculpture, poetry and philosophy glorify the feminine as the Great Goddess or 'Sakthi' without whom the universe cannot exist. It is in sharp contrast to the tradition of semitic religions that portray a Patriarchal and masculine God who is completely independent of a feminine counterpart.

Western tradition and especially the semitic religions associate sex with sin and fall as is evident from the story of Adam and Eve.

In the West, a frank and open appraisal of sex and its central role in human life began with the theoretical works in psychology of Sigmond Freud. His theory that sexual urge is the driving force for human creativity - he called it 'libido' - revolutionised man's awareness of sex and its manifold influence in life. With Freud, sex was increasingly seen as the energy which, when sublimated, finds expression in art and literature. Hitherto, it was relegated to the background and even suppressed or forcibly kept in oblivion. All on a sudden, in the 20th century it was

'discovered' and highlighted by Freud making the Post Freudian world of literature and art overtly sexual or erotic content.

Paz is a poet who glorifies and celebrates sex and erotic experience. Many poems from *Salamander, East slope* and *Toward the Beginning* can be cited to show how uninhibited Paz is when he deals with masculine feminine relationship. With a joyous abandon, Paz glorifies it and at the same time points out its, philosophical diamensions.

Reading such poems, an Indian would be reminded of the peculiar way in which spiritual experience is treated in Indian classics. Spiritual experience is often modelled on the metaphorical concept of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure was seen as the externalization of highly mysterious and subtle power that pervades the entire universe. In Indian tradition, it is called 'Kama' which was supposed to be the power behind the projection of the world, evolution of manifold beings and their activities. In other words, the universe, with its different forms and beings, is projected and transformed and on account of the mysterious working of the sex drive (Kama or desire). So, in Indian tradition, 'Kama' or Desire has a cosmic significance.

It is obvious that Indian tradition bears ample testimony to the all pervading influence of love or eros on personal level: witness the ecstalic

way in which poets like Jayadeva (Gitagovindam) celebrate the feeling of love and the painstaking dedication with which sculptors carved out erotic poses in quite unabashed manner. Sculptures in Ajanta and Ellora are a living testimony to the central place love or eros enjoyed in classical ages.

Paz's treatment of love is also in tune with this Indian temperament as is evident from many poems included in *Salamander* (1958-1961) and *East Slope* (1971). The keynote of many of the poems is the celebration of sensual love and its overwhelmingly positive influence in human life. Readers don't come across any inhibition on the part of the poet when he treats human love in poems. On the contrary, the dominant tempo is that nothing is taboo in life. The poet seems to say that everything human, including erotic love, is dear to him. In the poem "Clear Night" (included in *Salamander*) which is dedicated to Andre Breton and Benjamin Peret, Paz writes,

> Everything is a door
> all one needs is the light push of a thought
> Something's about to happen (*The Collected Poems* 95)

The poem presents the three who wait in the Cafe 'd' Angleterre. "The damp footsteps of fall" can be heard outside; a prostitute crossed the street and disappeared.

'The three' in the cafe remain witness to the changes outside brought out by the fall that 'walked toward the center of Paris/with the certain steps of the blind." Suddenly the poet realizes the possibilities of human existence : "Everything is a door . . . ." (*The Collected Poems* 95)

The poet says a big YES to life which is evident from the line "I read the signs on the face of that moment"

> The living are alive
> Walking flying ripening bursting
> the dead are alive (95).

The poet perceives 'grapes that fall between the legs of night' and comes to this realization:

> The city opens like a heart
> like a fig the flower that is a fruit
> more desire than incarnation
> the incarnation of desire (95).

The poet is ever conscious of the possibilities open as part of human condition which is expressed in the refrain of the poem: "Something is about to happen."

The poem presents "a teenage couple" comprising "a blond Cupid's arrow" and 'a redhead'. The four letters of the word 'Love' burned on each finger of the boy. The poet is reminded of the 'student tatoo chinese ink and passion throbbing rings' and the refrain reveals the significance of the couple in the thematic context of the poem

"Everything is a door"

Love is a force that belong to a class of its own in its power to effect changes in human condition. It is the magic wand that changes a frog to a prince. So everything in the world of lovers belong to a unique category.

They speak to each other in a language of fire
their struggles and loves
are creations and destructions of entire worlds

(*The Collected Poems* 99)

It is self evident that the poet welcomes life (with its infinite possibilities) with a big 'Yes'.

Earlier, in his major poem 'Sunstone', Paz visualized love as the fountain of life, creativity, vitality and the very quality that makes what it is, in short, the very essence or substratum of the entire creation. Paz wrote:

to love is to battle, if two kiss
the world changes, desires take flesh
thoughts take flesh, wings sprout
on the backs of the slave, the world is real
and tangible, wine is wine, bread
regains its savor, water is water
to love is to battle, to open doors (*The Collected Poems* 23).

Paz expressed the power of love to transmute the ordinary into incomparable in the same poem:

the world changes if two, dizzy and entwined, fall
on the grass:
the sky comes down, trees rise, space becomes nothing but
light and silence, open space for the eagle of the eye (25).

For Paz it is love that ennobles the existence; Paz does not regard love as a Platonic idea. On the contrary, love expresses itself in erotic encounter between man and woman. It is physical love that transforms the world of the lovers.

In western love poetry, there are some glowing examples of a poet being inspired by his lady love to dizzying heights of inspiration that leads

to ecstatic poetic utterances which have stood the test of time. To take only two examples from two countries and ages: Petrarch (1304-1374) was divinely inspired by Laura (witness verses in 'Laura in Life' and 'Laura in Death') and Swift (1667-1745) had his Stella as an inexhaustible fountain of inspiration. In a similar vein, Paz is inspired by a lady whom he immortalises in the poem 'Across':

> I turn the page of the day
> writing what I'm told
> by the motion of your eyelashes (*The Collected Poems* 127).

With a clarity that startles the reader into its significance, the first stanza points to the overriding importance of the feminine inspiration in every moment of the poet's life. The poet and his lady love are not lovers in the ideal world where contemplation of love and expression of sweet sentiments in a dreamy language fill their day and night. On the contrary, they experience erotic pleasure ('I' enter you') of game of love ('I want proofs of darkness, want / to drink the black wine'). The poet celebrates the physical love using metaphysical language. Theological allusions are employed to sing in praise of erotic experience.

> A drop of night
> On your breast's tip :

mysteries of the carnation (*The Collected Poems* 127).

The poet believes that there is no need to be reticent about the role of body in love's encounter. For Paz love is not an abstract concept; it is the encounter of two bodies in the act of love. The union of the two is a fusion of one self in the other. In the act of love, the poet loses his self as he merges into the self of his beloved. Consequently he experiences an expansion and gets an "insight ('I open them inside your eyes').

Closing my eyes
I open them inside your eyes (129).

The culmination of the sex act leads the poet to the very mystery of life as is evident from the last stanza:

With a mask of blood
I cross your thoughts blankly
amnesia guides me
to the other side of life (129).

As a consequence of the sex encounter, the poet is led out of the fret and fever of life and gets an insight into the true nature of existence and true essence of being.

In the context of the unabashed celebration of the erotic relationship of human beings as depicted by Paz, it is worthwhile to compare it with the treatment of a similar theme in Indian tradition. For Paz, the inspiration for poetry comes from his sensual relationship with his lady love. In the celebrated Sanskrit poem *Saundaryalahiri*, the Great Goddess, was attracted by the cry of the Dravidian infant and breast feeds him which instantly turns him into an inspired poet (*Soundaryalahiri*: 75). Figuratively speaking, poets are like forsaken infants who cry for the milk of poetry. Either in a very mundane, concrete and sensual as in the case of Paz or in a very metaphysical and divine manner as in the case of the poet mentioned in *Saundaryalahiri*, the inspiring influence of the feminine principle leads to a blossoming of the individual making him creative and quite fulfilled. In Indian tradition, the central idea depicting the poet as being inspired by the goddess when the latter breast feeds him, can be traced back to Vedic days:

The Rishi prays for the milk of the goddess Saraswati (7-1-10).

It is to be noted that the ideas in *Atharvaveda* and *Saundaryalahiri* primarily present the feminity of the goddess in the role as a mother in a transcendental realm whereas in the poems of Paz the feminity is sensual and libidinal.

'Discor', another poem that treats erotic theme from *Salamander*, contains a passionate meeting between the poet and a lady in a metaphoric language.

> Whispers and rapid steps
>
> dim passage, long sigh
>
> . . . . . .
>
> stairway that leads nowhere
>
> Leads no where, forever leading (*The Collected Poems* 135).

In this passage the poet confronts 'a sudden mirror' and 'fixed present'. The second stanza is explicit:

> Abolition of time
>
> Wounded mirror and perpetual wound (135).

The poet comes to a "room full of faces and lips and names" where the sense of being alive is sharp.

From the poetic context and the connotation of words, it is obvious that the sensual encounter between the poet and the feminine source of inspiration is metamorphosed in the narrative of the poem as 'passage', 'room', and 'mirror.' The culmination of the encounter fuses the past and future into the present effecting 'abolition of time'. That moment is 'a

moment long as a howl', as the poet says (p.135). When that moment is over, the poet realizes that 'it leads nowhere'. But this is the only path leading the poet forward, though no definite destination is arrived at. The poet is overwhelmed by the

> Your body of grass your body of silver
> throne of the night and spur of the day (*The Collected Poems* 135).

It implies that the love and eroticism which he experienced inspires him day and night; it helps him to blossom. As he says,

> "Blood rains on your dry soul" (135).

The poet realizes "dampness of desire and the peace of desire" after experiencing "timeless hour" and "naked nakedness". It is a fairly obvious allusion to the climax of erotic encounter and its aftermath in the temper and outlook of the couple. Eventually both of them achieves salvation through intense sensuality.

> We leave night and are lost,
> mirrors abolished in a fixed present (17).

The poet's conception of a complete life subsumes erotic life and its harmonious fulfilment. Paz acknowledges the centrality of sex in life. His

celebration of love and eroticism is quite uninhibited. It is spontaneous, natural and expansive. Paz sings in praise of love and eroticism. With gusto and elan, Paz traces the contour and unfolding of erotic experience involving man and woman in many poems in *Salamander, East slope, Toward the beginning* and *A Tree Within.* It is clear evidence for the affirmation of the overwhelming importance of love and eroticism in Paz's attitude towards life. Love and eroticism play a central role in Paz's picture of complete life.

The anthology *A Tree Within* (1976-1987) contains a long poem - "Letter of Testimony" - which is a clear poetic ulterance of poet's attitude towards life. For the poet the act of writing is a fusion of dialogue and monologue ("I write: / I talk to myself / I talk to you'). Here Paz sees love as "a permutation, barely an instant in the history of primigenial cells and their innumerable divisions" (629) and presents love in a strickingly beautiful image of feminity.

> Invention, transfiguration:
> the girl turns into a fountain
> her hair becomes a constellation
> a woman asleep is an Island (*The Collected Poems* 629).

Here feminine nature is seen as having a mysterious power embodying an enigma too great to be unraveled easily. The girl becomes a 'fountain' (source of water which is the source of life) and her hair becomes a constellation (as expansive as the universe). A woman asleep is seen as an 'Island' which is insular, enigmatic, enveloped in solitude and inviting exploration of adventurous navigators. History of the world in modern period is largely the history of the exploration of islands and continents by sailors goaded by the quest for adventure. History of the Americas is precisely shaped by the outcome of such expeditions. When Paz views a woman as an island, he consciously or unconsciously present an image which is closely related to the history of the region. A woman is an island inviting the exploration of man; the fulfilment of both lies in the encounter and exploration which is inseparable from love and eroticism.

Paz sees sex as a means to transcend solitude. Sensual encounter liberates one from the prison of itself.

The One
is the prisoner of itself,
it is
it only is
it has no memory

it has no scars

to love is two

always two,

embrace and struggle,

two is the longing to be one

and to be the other, male or female,

two knows no rest

it is never complete,

it whirls

around its own shadow,

searching

for what we lost at birth,

the scar opens:

fountain of visions,

two : arch over the void (*The Collected Poems* 631).

According to Paz, 'one' is the 'prisoner of itself' which indicates a vegetative life ('it only is'). 'To love is two' with 'the longing to be one' and the scar opens : 'fountain of vision.'

According to Paz

Love, timeless island

island surrounded by time (631)

and

To love
is to die and live again and die again:
it is liveliness (631).

Paz writes about "pleasure wounds" which turns into 'flowers', then: 'The flower became a word' (631).

It is a clear reference to the inspiration for writing in his life which is love and its fulfilment in erotic relationship. Love enables him to blossom, to 'flower' which becomes 'a word'. The word inspired by love is his writings. Love is the source of inspiration for the poet.

Then love is assigned with a great scope and role in the following lines:

Love:
reconciliation with the Great All
and with the others,
the small and endless
all (633).

The deeper implication of love and sex is that it reveals the very mystery of existence. It opens the insight into the interrelatedness of the multitude of names and forms in the universe ('reconciliation with the Great All and with the others, the small and endless all'). Love and eroticism help Paz to have an integrative vision encompassing the diversity of 'the others' 'the small' and 'endless all.' This conviction of Paz is similar to ideas in certain religious practices that prevail in India - Tantra, Saktism and Vajrayana.'

In Tantric school of religion and in Tantric Buddhism ('Vajrayana') sex act is used as a means to unravel the mystery of life and the universe. The highest form of Saivism is Tantra. It is also known as Saktism or Goddess-worship. For spiritual realization in this practice, five separate actions are followed:

> The drinking of wine and liquor of various kinds (madya); the eating of meat (mamsa); the eating of fish (matsya); the eating of parched or fried grain (mudra); sexual union (maithuna) (Monier Williams 192).

For Paz love is the 'reconciliation with the Great All' which means that love leads him to a well integrated vision of life. Obviously love or sex occupies a very high pedestal in the world view of Paz. It is endowed

with a theological dimension when Paz perceives it as the key to reconciliation with the Great All which is the substratum of the Universe or Creation. In the Philosophy of Paz, love enjoys an eminence and is equal in importance to what beauty is for Keats. If Keats is a poet of Beauty, Paz is a poet of Love.

Readers of the poems of Paz can never miss the overriding importance of love and eroticism in the world view of the poet. Sensual beauty is the most fascinating attribute of human beings and the fulfilment of them lies in the erotic experience involving man and woman. For Paz, love unlocks the mystery of life and the universe. It leads human beings forward and helps them to blossom in life; eventually it leads to Perfect Wisdom or the wisdom of the other shore. In other words, it is love that leads to enlightenment in the world of Paz.

Paz can never conceive of a life devoid of love and eroticism. The erotic relationship between the masculine and feminine, a theme celebrated in many poems of Paz, holds the central place in Paz's conception of perfect life. As Jason Wilson observes in *Octario Paz*:

Paz's great theme is the redemption of the divided alienated individual through love or union with the Other, a completion of the isolated individual in a passionate couple that offers hope of a collective salvation (4).

Conclusion

The unique feature that is self evident to any objective student of Octavio Paz is that he is, without undue exaggeration, as much an Indian writer as he is a Mexican litterateur. This fact is obvious to any reader of, among other works, *A Tale of Two Gardens* and *In Light of India.* Paz's sympathy for 'Indianness' and his empathy with the ethos of India led to the flowering of his creative career which is a 'second spring' with India as distinct background and unambiguous inspiration.

Readers of *In Light of India* and collection of poems like *East slope, Toward the Beginning* and *A Tree Within* will be invariably impressed by the sympathy for and empathy with Indian ethos shown by Paz throughout his creative life. His affinity with Indian ethos reaches its zenith in a significant poem - 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta' where Paz writes:

> "Shiva:
> Your four arms are four rivers
> four jets of water.
> Your whole being is a fountain
> Where the lovely Parvathi bathes,
> where she rocks like a graceful boat" (*A Tale* 85)

The poet and his wife worship Shiva and Parvati 'not as gods but as images of the divinity of man'. In his perception Shiva transforms and his four arms become four rivers. In fact Shiva's whole being becomes a fountain 'where the lovely Parvati bathes'. Here Shiva is inseperable from Parvati; Parvati bathes in the fountain that is Shiva, It is not a question of two beings; rather Shiva and Parvati are one being. '(Your whole being is fountain where the lovely Parvati bathes'). This unity of Shiva and Parvati is amplified in these lines:

> "The sea beats beneath the sun:
> It is the great lips of Shiva laughing;
> the sea is abalze
> it is the steps of Parvati on the waters" (*A Tale* 85)

The 'beats' of the sea are the lips of Shiva and when the 'sea is ablaze', it is the steps of Parvati. The unity of Shiva and Parvati is accentuated here also.

Clearly, here Paz is inclined to write like this because he imbibed the concept of Shiva and Parvati as Ardha-Nariswara in Indian philosophical tradition. In Indian philosophy the spirit is called the self (Atman) and also the Male (Purusha). The Purusha became a separate

male god and the eternal productive force (Maya or Prakriti) became a separate female god. Commenting on this concept Monier Williams says:

> The union of the two was expressed in the later mythology by the Ardha-nari or androgynous form of Siva - in which one half or the right side of the god's person is represented as male and the other half of left side as female" (183).

The poem 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta' is striking for the unique way in which Paz presents Shiva and Parvati, the divine couple in Indian mythology.

In fact, various facets of India exercised abiding influence on Octavio Paz. As a tribute to this lasting influence on him, Paz wrote *In Light of India* combing autobiographical reminiscences of his Indian days, intellectual analysis of the cultural and historical aspects of India and a brief but poetic survey of the polyglot society. The treatise includes a forthright review of modern Indian politics and an insightful exploration of the soul of India, i.e., its arts, literature, music, religions and philosophy. Paz's comments and observations retain astonishing clarity and abiding relevance. Implied throughout the book as a strong undercurrent is the forthright indictment of the self-centred materialism of modern western society. The long essay "The Contraptions of Time"

brings to focus the present day necessity of a new politics based on the present with the help of a reflection on time. In this section Paz argues that we have to take hold of the concrete reality of everyday. In a long note written on 10th July 1995 for *A Tale of Two Gardens,* Paz wrote:

> What the moderns have failed to undertake - a centuries of Indian thought once did - is a critique of time and of its senseless and ultimately illusory acceleration. We must make this critique on our own account, and form our own suppositions. We need to relearn the ancient and forgotten art of contemplation (101).

In the insightful section entitled 'The contraptions of Time' in *In Light of India,* Paz observes that the European expansion with the help of science and technology has given us the 'power over the material world and the freedom that power gives us' (193). The Europeans believe in endless progress and they are trying to create technical marvels. For the moderns, 'time is a permanent beyond' and their belief in progress as a historical law has made them idolators of change. But now these ideas have begun to crumble on account of 'two world wars and the establishment of totalitarian tyrannies' which have undermined out faith in progress. Moreover, technological civilization has given ample evidence

for its destructive power: "poisoned rivers, forests turned to wastelands, contaminated cities, uninhabited souls" (194). Democratic liberal societies are also not a model as they are 'ruled by the demon of money'. Modern media, especially television, will 'anaesthetize the human race'. In short, future is not a radiant promise but a grim question. Paz tackled the same problem in his masterly analysis of Mexican psyche - *The Labyrinth of Solitude* where he noted:

> Progress has peopled history with the marvels and monsters of technology but it has depopulated the life of man. It has given us more things but not more being (225).

As a way out of this deadlock, Paz argues that we should concentrate our attention 'at the center of the triad of time' - the present. We should take hold of the concrete reality of everyday" (*In Light* 194). In these words Paz enunciates his suggestion for solving the problem: "I believe that the reformation of our civilization must begin with a reflection on time. A new politics must be based on the present" (194-95). What is to be especially noted in this context is that the modus operandi for solving today's ills - reflection on time - is deeply related to Indian philosophical and religious tradition. Paz is categorical in this context:

"We need to relearn the ancient and forgotten art of contemplation" (A Tale 101).

Octavio Paz strongly believes that people of this age can learn a valuable lesson from Indian heritage as Indian tradition involves 'a critique of time and of its senseless and ultimately illusory acceleration" (101). According to Paz, this will help us to 'relearn the ancient and forgotten art of contemplation'. Obviously Paz views this as an antidote against both totalitarian ideologies and blind faith in limitless progress which is totalitarian in its power to stifle the harmonious nature of life.

Now a days ecological imbalance in nature has grown into alarming proportions that threaten the very existence of humanity on earth. The hole in ozone layer and the poisoned rivers are signs of an impending break down of the grand harmony of nature. Here, Paz's recommendation 'the ancient and forgotten art of contemplation" which is inspired by Indian tradition, is a path leading to a viable solution. This shows that Paz was not only a supremely gifted poet who is inspired by Indian ethos and tradition, but also a superbly insightful thinker who could arrive at solutions for the ills of today's world and humanity. The fact that his eastern experience inspired him to find a way out of the problems created by the blind faith in limitless progress is to be noted by an Indian reader.

The *Indian Review of Books* (Vol. 17, Number 8, 16 May 1998 - 15 June 1998) remarked on the death of Paz in its editorial entitled 'India Loses a Dear Friend' with the following words:

> Controversial in his criticism of religion and the caste system, Paz was a frank and fearless commentator whose thoughts on India are best elucidated in the book, *In Light of India*, published last year. In his death literature has truly lost one of its greatest monarchs, and India, a dear friend (3).

The creativity of Paz was refined in and tempered by his wide and expansive sympathy for humanity which enabled him to evolve as the intellectual conscience of the 20th century. He was Mexico's greatest writer in the 20th century. Deeply anchored in the tradition of his country, Paz grew up to be a devotee of Indian cultural heritage, especially Indian philosophy and art. Drawing inspiration from the region, religion, landscape, philosophy and art of India, Paz wrote more than fifty poems each reflecting several aspects of his complex Indian experience. Deeply read in Indian religion, Paz wrote a masterly study of India, which was last work – *In Light of India* (1995). According to Paz the book is "the child not of knowledge but of love". The observation

shows the fascination and love that India had on the psyche of Paz, throughout his life. In spite of the modest claims made by Paz for *In Light of India*, pages after pages of the book bear ample evidence for Paz's close familiarity with Indian heritage. According to Paz, the book is part of Paz's attempt to answer the question. "How does a Mexican writer, at the end of the 20th century, view the immense reality of India?" (*In Light* 32).

Paz was immensely qualified for that job. As he says: "my education India lasted for years and was not confined to books . . . It has marked me deeply . . . Its influence can be seen in may poems, my prose writings and in my life itself" (32).

What is to be especially noted in the connection between Paz and India is that he never fell in the trap of so called orientalism with its hallmark of uncritical admiration for everything eastern. Though the poet in Paz was deeply attracted by the vast and complex reality of India, the thinker in him was frank, fearless and quite impartial. While analysing the phenomenon of caste in India, Paz recognized that its existence cannot make India a nation. Also he recognized that the static nature of caste-ridden society petrified Indian culture and hindered the development of a life giving Renaissance and reinvigorating Reformation. Thus Paz impresses his readers as an utterly honest thinker who is never afraid to

call a spade a spade. In his analysis of the complex nature of Indian culture and elucidation of crystal clear views, fearlessness and impartiality are his hallmarks. Though Paz is fascinated by the complexity and richess of India, he is never blind in his love for India.

Octavio Paz is not a mere foreign writer in India. Paz has a special place in Kerala's literary firmament also. Years before he got Nobel Prize, in 1983 itself, his major poetic achievement 'Sun Stone' was translated into Malayalam by the celebrated Malayalam poet Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan and published in an anthology of translations from the Spanish language entitled *Latin American Kavitha* edited by another illustrious Malayalam poet K. Sachidanandan. A selection of the translation in Hindi of the poems of Paz has been brought out by the Sahitya Academy, New Delhi.

Primarily Paz was a poet and he was one of the most authentic poetic voices in 20th century literature. He was true to his Mexican identity; at the same time he was the ultimate cosmopolitan in his attitude. He wrote that the fact of being a Mexican helped him to understand India.

His connection with India was deep and intimate in his personal and creative life. India became the background of the poems in *East Slope*

and *Toward the Beginning.* Many illustrious place and historically important monuments became sources of inspiration for his poems – Witness, 'Vrindaban', 'The Tomb of Amira Khusru', 'One Day in Udaipur', 'On the Roads of Mysore', 'The Musoleum of Humayun', 'Madurai' and 'Sunday on the island of Elephanta'. Deeply attracted by Indian philosophy and mysticism, Paz frequently alluded to such concepts 'Sunyata' 'Prajnaparamita' and wrote poems on themes like 'Maithuna' which is, in Tantrism, 'a ritual for reaching enlightenment" (*In Light* 126).

His complex and dense poems weave into its texture allusions from humanistic tradition of the west, religious and mystic tradition of the East and the democratic, liberal aspirations of the modern man. In his examination of modern Mexica in *The Labyrinth of solitude* he was careful to analyse how it was formed and critically reminded the readers of the Meso American culture and the conquest of it by the Spanish in the sixteenth century and its aftermath is all its complexity. His treatment of Modern Indian culture in *In Light of India* follows the same mode of analysis where he critically examines various factors and historical processes which are behind the formation of Indian reality.

In Mexico, Paz is regarded as the national poet. It is a rare credit for the poet that in India, he is not regarded as a foreign writer but

deemed as a writer who has become the adopted son of India. On his death, all major newspapers, both in English and in Indian languages, covered the news in front page itself and wrote sketches of his life and creative career. *The Indian Express,* a prominent newspaper in English and *Mathrubhoomi* 'the national daily in Malayalam', wrote sub editorials highlighting Paz's importance and pointed out his connection with India. The prominent literary journal *The Indian Review of Books* remarked that in the death of the poet, India lost a dear friend. In the same journal Paz was described as one of the greatest monarches of literature. The description was adequate and suitable as Paz was equally a master of poetry and prose.

Paz showed wonderful acumen in analysing complex aspect of national cultures, both Mexican and Indian. His analysis of the world situation and contemporary international politics entitled *One Earth, Four or Five Worlds,* is masterly and acute; his formulation of aesthetic in *The Bow and the Lyre* is original and comprehensive; his authentic translations of foreign writers like Donne and Eliot introduced them to Spanish reading public; the anthologies he edited like *An Anthology of Mexican Poetry* and *New Poetry of Mexico* introduced Mexican writers to an international audience. True, Paz strode the literary world like a

colossus. Like his name sake Ocatvious Caesar who effected a 'sea change' in Imperial Rome in 1st century B.C., Paz, with his unique achievement as a poet and thinker, divided Mexican literature into Pre-Paz phase and Post-Paz period. This fact was acknowledged and proclaimed by Carlos Fuentes, the distinguished Mexican writer when he said that Paz had forever changed the face of Mexican literature. Similarly, with his masterwork, *In Light of India* Paz has forever changed the way in which Indians look at themselves and the vast reality called India.

By birth, Paz is a westerner; as a creative writer, he is solidly grounded in the central Western tradition. In his native Mexico, Paz is esteemed as the national poet; in the world literature, he is regarded as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century; the official recognition came in the form of Nobel Prize in 1990. In the liberal, humanistic tradition of the world, he is accorded the unofficial recognition as the intellectual conscience of the 20th century.

Besides all these, Paz has the rare credit of being recognised and esteemed, apart from his native Mexico, in another country as one of their own writers. It is not often that a writer gets ' acclimatized' to the culture and ethos of a foreign nation. It is rare, but not impossible. In the case of Paz India had been 'the other' for over forty years to his self-described

otherness as a Mexican; in turn, for Paz, India accorded the unofficial status and unsparing esteem that is usually granted for an Indian writer of very great eminence.

With his poems and prose works dealing with India, Paz became as much an Indian writer as any one who writes in Indian languages. He belongs to Mexico, a country in the western hemisphere; equally he belongs to India, a country in the central tradition of the East.

Rudyard Kipling who got Nobel Prize for literature is 1907 wrote that 'East is East' and 'West is West' and 'The twine shall never meet'. Octavio Paz, another Nobel Laureate, with his literary career and philosophical evolution, points in the opposite direction.

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