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Editor's Note

It has been a long way since the bards of Indian English Poetry started writing 'chameleon verse'. The colonial harness that they carried for some time could not stop them for long and in 1913 India broke all the barricades with the publication of Rabindranath Tagore's Nobel Prize winning *Gitanjali*, more a prosaic work than poetry. I don't know whether this breakthrough is important on account of western recognition or because of the high merit of the work that certainly was there. However, I am convinced that people know this work more because of the former reason, a factor that questions even the worth of our intellect unparalleled in the past. I still believe that more *Gitanjalis* were in the line, but they withered on the vine in the course of colonial dictations. In any case after the euphoria that *Gitanjali* created not many voices emerged and those who did were more of ecclesiastical cult than the hard realities of time.

The post-independent India witnessed a quantum jump as a new generation of poets like Ezekiels, Ramanujans, Lals, Parthasarthis, Moraes, Daruwallas and Nandis (1950 to 1965) plunged to the fore, of course because of some quality writing. Som Ranchan belongs to this generation of poets. What is peculiar about the poetry of Som Ranchan is that his perspective is fairly wide in range and mental landscape quite rich where a melange of ideas intersect and amalgamate only to sprout into the crop of fecund thoughts and ideas. Never does he enter into the forays hyperbolic and keeps in constant touch with the land of man, his sufferings and the evading values.

Like a meditative seer he transcends the narrow temporal bonds and brings to the fore a mosaic of characters from mythological, philosophical and religious backgrounds. His knack of unravelling the so far unseen or complex through the technique of long dialogue and deep communion makes him a poet of different class. Of course, what Edward Said observes that post-colonial literature has played a crucial role in 're-establishment of national cultural heritage in the reinstatement of native idiom, in the re-imagining and refiguring of local histories and communities'.

We are proud to have such a significant voice in Indian English Poetry today that represents a vast space of about half a century, almost equanimous to the life of free verse in free India. It is this achievement of the poet that inspired us to devote a special issue on the work, experience, and philosophy of Som Ranchan.

Associate Editor's Note . . .

Given the variety and sheer range of Ranchan's poetic corpus, it becomes difficult to offer an editorial summation. Staggering as his poetic output is, Ranchan's poetry can be categorised into epics, mini-epics, dialogue epics, short lyrics, and folk ballads. Whereas *The Splintered Mirror, Loose Ends, In the Labyrinth of the Self, Love Poems, Retrospections: Over Travell'd Trails* fall in the category of short lyrics, his dialogue epics (a genre that he invented to suit the demands of his creative consciousness) comprise a veritable cavalcade viz. *Christ and I, Mother Sharada and I, To Vivek Then I Came, Soul Making with Sri Aurobindo, Krishna with Love, Paramahansa Ramakrishna, Baha'u'llaha, Manjushri, The Man Said, Kali, Dalai Lama, Shirdi Sai, Uggita, Ashitanga Bhairava*. Ranchan's satirical epics spewing venom against the corrupt political system and politicians constitute *The Dwarf Titan, Clone and India That is Bharat*. His secular epics comprise *Anteros: Friendship Sahrdaya, Ayaan, Pam, Sharada Mai, Raja is a Raja*. This is not all as there is epoch making, torrential epic called *America with Love* alongside another epic cycle consisting of *She, Devi, Nigamas for the Age*. Since it is a brief account of Ranchan's poetic output, we may well imagine the difficulty if one were to sum up the whole body of his writing comprising folk ballads, fiction, short fiction, non-fiction, critical essays, poetic transcreations and translations, browse basket, etc. He has published about seventy books out of which nearly forty are on poetry. It is indeed challenging to deal with such a vast creative, poetic frenzy within a limited editorial space.

Indubitably, Ranchan is a major poetic voice and a class apart. The endeavour in this special issue of *Conifers Call* is to put together critique dealing with variegated aspects of Ranchan's poetry to supplement two critical books on him namely Ved Sharma's *A Profile in Creativity: Poet, Professor, Person* and Kirpal Singh's *Som P. Ranchan: Poet of Many Voices* along with an earlier special skimpy issue of *Ken* published from Lucknow. It is time that the critical world woke up to take note of phenomenon called Ranchan. In India, there is no dearth of minor poets pretending to be major in English. The contemporary Indian poetry is characterised by flatness, stridency, aridity and contrived sensuous imagery. It is thematically lean dealing with a few family aeres, fake identity issues, urbanite squalor and alienation, contrived surrealism and wimpish confessionism. It lacks depth and imagination. P. Lal who spent a lifetime promoting Indian English Muse till he lost sense of quality in bulking it, mentioned once in an aside that India lacks even a major minor poet in English. It is hard to doubt P. Lal who should know having promoted and patronized many generations of poets since 1952 with commitment. Being a land of myth and lore, India offers infinite possibilities for its creative transmutation. It is sad that Indian English poets have failed to capitalize on myth due to their urbanite pretensions. If at all they have tried to employ myth, its use is superficial, referential, decorative or at best didactic. It lacks modernist terseness and precision, archetypal depth and alchemical finesse that characterise Ranchan's poetic idiom.

A Testimony

I have known Som Parkash Ranchan for many decades as friend and fellow poet and am therefore delighted that Professor Harish K. Thakur, Editor of *Conifers Call: Shimla Journal of Poetry and Criticism*, is publishing a special issue focused on Ranchan's achievements as possibly the most significant Indian poet writing in the English language. As one who has collaborated with Ranchan, I know how meticulously he has crafted his verse infusing it with lyrical beauty, essential internal rhythm, intellectual vigour and vast erudition generated from both Eastern and Western civilizational thought systems. His many wide ranging books and the several analyses written about him by a number of eminent academics both in India and abroad are too long for me to list here. But take my word for it, Som Parkash Ranchan is a world poet of the first order, a polyhistor *extraordinaire*.

Reginald Massey

Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London.

Som Ranchan – A Memoir from America

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Paul Garza, Jr.

It is with special joy that I share a few random memories about Som Ranchan. His time at Cal-State Fullerton was very formative for him and, our friendship very formative for me. Friendship can warm or cool based on circumstance or misunderstanding. I am not saying that neither has ever come between us but I am proud to say that our friendship, despite gaps and distances, is as important to me – perhaps even more - as it was when it began. There are very few friends who any of us can say that about.

First Meeting

It seems more than a lifetime ago when I first met Som Ranchan. It was in Fall of 1967- an exciting time in America: the Beatles had gone to the Maharishi, Timothy Leary was advocating LSD, Vatican II had re-shaped Catholicism, Martin Luther King had changed the face of America, the Vietnam War was exploding, the anti-war and for that matter anti-establishment movement was fueled by blindness of officials still locked in War World II and all of this was heading America toward bitter civil confrontations. But it was also a time of great joy, great experimentation, a time of great hope in which America opened-up in a way that's its trauma of 9/11 and continuing hysteria about security may never allow again. It was a great time to be young, to be a student in college, and to be seeking.

I had part-time job that was funded by the War on Poverty providing after-school tutoring to children in a barrio a few miles from Cal-State Fullerton. I had hired a fellow student and friend as my assistant because he and his wife were absolutely destitute. In those days, the campus of Cal State Fullerton was very small and surrounded by orange groves that would be gone in just three years. A road built for access to the campus extended about a half-mile from the campus to a small boulevard. I picked up my friend at the front of the campus and we went down that road. I saw a short, dark man dressed in a suit

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walking along the road. My friend hailed loudly for me to stop, excitedly telling me “That is Dr. Sharma!” I did stop, backed up a bit, and opened the door to my Volkswagen bug for that short man. He got in and we were introduced – my friend was taking his class in Early American Literature – and we were together may be not even a mile to the entrance of his apartment complex. Just before he got out, he smiled with what I would later recognize as his signature mischievous smile, told me in a tone and manner that suggested he was revealing a great secret. “This is the best ride I have had all day.” We drove on to our after-school tutoring program. I was baffled by his comment and asked my friend what he meant by it. He said that he was probably just tired and appreciated the ride. That began a friendship that has spanned more than forty years now.

Friendship

During those forty years – and especially in the first twelve or so when Som was in America most of the time – we shared our inner selves with each other in a way that I have never come close to experiencing again. The last time we sat down with one and other, by the way, the richness of sharing was still there and began flowing almost immediately. In those days we revealed dreams, family background, shared poetry and readings, mythology, folklore, talked about India and Tantra and Jung. Together we drank coffee, drank beer, smoked cigarettes, analyzed each others' dreams hour after hour after hour, and sought out gurus, wise men, eccentrics and saints. It was a magical time – and I admit I miss it to this very day!

Som became my teacher of American Literature Spring Semester of 1968 and then for a series of classes the following Fall he created for the University: Quest for Self: East and West; Yoga: Indian Literature (I took every new course he taught in the next few years and attended many repeats - sometimes unofficially auditing, sometimes acting as an assistant). I remember walking into the third course that first week of the Fall 1968 semester. Som looked up surprised. “Are you in this one, too?”, “Yes, I guess I am majoring in you this semester” I answered. But he was pleased. And, we very quickly became friends and our families bonded as well. But then, Som is, as you

know, Indian. And being Indian, he drew me into the constellation of Indian kinship – ever expanding concentric circles overlaid with a spider web of relations, friends and kindred and odd spirits. Many Americans are troubled by the Indian web of life but my family is of Mexican origin and, like Indians, we always thought the more of us there were when we got together, the better it was.

Background

To his credit Som never became one of the cool, close-to-the-vest, anglicized Indians that you have warm-up for a long time but never get warm. You never really know whether they are, as we say, 'coming or going'. They seem okay with other Indians but can't or are afraid to cross the cultural divide. Som detested these 'ex-pat' Indians and their inability to reach across boundaries. In a wonderful way and despite his stunning intellect, learning, academic and literary achievement he remains, at heart, a Panjabi peasant: simple, direct, passionate and heartfelt. He shared with me once that Partition was a gift for his career and spiritual development. Growing up in a rural area of Lahore, his first great love was his family's water buffalo. He escorted the buffalo to ponds, fed it from his hands, petted and massaged it. Had he not been forced out of that environment, he believes he would have become an animal.

Perhaps it is the upset of Partition that caused him to reach out across boundaries, to fulfill the remarkable *svabhava* that energizes the powerful poetry he has penned. Som has always been heroic in his desire to engage others, their cultures and religious ideas. Som will tell you that his ancestors were from Ladakh – a very remote Himalayan region that shares more culturally with Central Asia than the Indian plains. That is where he says the name "Ranchan" comes from that he has always preferred for his writing. Apparently, they were Buddhist priests who later settled in Panjab becoming Hindu priests. Oddly, Partition returned his family back to the Hills. Based upon the many stories he told, his family must have, like all displaced, struggled for a long time. Som told me he once tried to convince his father that they should register as 'scheduled' or without caste. He says that his father was a proud Brahmin and would have

nothing to do with it. Whatever the upset and it must have been great, the family found themselves reconnected to their roots and Hill folks once more. That was most fortunate for Som and for most fortunate for Himachel. Som has always been enthusiastic about the culture of the Hills. He has collected and published stories and travelled to many secluded places hidden in that region of the Himalayas. The plains people consider the Himachelis very backward and primitive. This is all the more reason for Som to champion Himachel's culture and people and, to find and demonstrate the great wisdom, beauty and inspiration the living myths of the region possess.

As Professor/Teacher

As a teacher, Som was inspiring, affective, available and lavishly generous with his time. I have never had another teacher who had so much presence in a classroom, was so caring toward his students, and whose insights were so exciting. Like any professor when challenged, he didn't back down but he was always so gracious - even to those who I felt didn't deserve such consideration. He was somehow able to find value and take genuine interest in students who often seemed ridiculous to me. Perhaps that is the Indian love of eccentricity. As I learned later as a graduate student in India, Indians value idiosyncratic and eccentric friends. He was (and I am sure continues to be) remarkably democratic. He was as open, receptive, loving and patient with the beautiful young maiden as he was to the middle-aged matron, to the long-haired, counter-culture type as to the business executive (all of them found their way into his circle) and, the huge mix of ethnic foreign and domestic students who enrolled in his classes or met him on the campus. He personifies the great equanimity line of "Song of Myself":

"Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same."

He consistently found qualities to admire in his students: they were very spiritual, or psychic, or possessed a gentle spirit, or had a brilliant mind, were heroic, intuitive, displayed a great sense of humor, were gracious, or had a beautiful soul or were especially caring. He was always so pleased to see his students on campus or in the community.

taking time to talk with them, listen to them. Som was highly sought after for advice and helped many who were lost often by just affirming them and listening to their experiences. I know he helped several students who experienced types of 'possession'. He was a veritable bodhisattva of the classroom. And, I learned so much about appreciating others from him. It was an initiation in the Buddhist virtues of loving kindness and sympathetic joy. For me, taking his classes was an intoxicating experience. There is a part of me that still plays the tapes I recorded sitting in those classes, coffee shops and beer bars between 30 and 40 years ago.

I remember attending his Graduate Seminar in Walt Whitman. The class met in the late afternoon and finished at 7 PM. From there he would go to the beer bar across the street with several of the graduate students. He would sit and talk. Hear stories like how one of the students was detained by the Santa Ana Police for reading Whitman aloud in a local park (Som always recommended to his students that they read Whitman aloud). He would sit there nursing his beer, cracking peanut shells and offering the edible contents to his students

Poetry

Anyone approaching Som's writing needs to understand he is a deeply religious person who has had profound spiritual mystical experiences. I have been privileged to listen to his recounting of many of these. He has a mastery of a very significant amount of esoteric Indian knowledge and is a font of Indian myth, folklore and tradition. Those looking to analyze and conduct literary studies need to immerse themselves in Tantra – both Hindu and Buddhist – for Som alternates between the two because in the Hills it is really a single stream. They should know that the legendary teacher Swami Prabhavananda initiated him. The Church of Antioch ordained him a minister and that he has sought knowledge from Sufis, Zen masters, Rosicrucians, esoteric Christians, Jungians, Qabbalists and Hasidim – not to mention the long succession of Indian gurus, teachers, fakirs, holy men, monks, and yogis. If you want to understand him, you must recognize that his primary compelling quest has been to know himself in the classical Indian sense. That is where his immense creativity and energy come from.

What of his poetry? I am neither a recognized critic nor a professor of literature. Nonetheless, I assert that poetry is his great genius, his rare gift. It is only a matter of time before his body of work will cause him to be recognized among the great voices of English language poetry. Why it has not come yet, is hard to understand. I have been with him when he has composed poetry – seen him stopping when 'hearing' a line to scribble it down. I have the privilege of being the first one to listen to him read some of his poetry. It was always a special experience.

Strange Times and Lessons

To spend time with Som is to experience the unpredictable. I visited Som in India in 1978. He graciously came down from Shimla and fetched me at the Delhi airport, we stayed overnight with his sister's family, and the next day boarded an express bus and headed to Chandigarh. There we met a Professor of Sanskrit (for Som always seeks out those with knowledge) and stayed with other relatives for an evening. We got up very early the next morning to catch another express bus to Shimla. After talking with ticket seller, the bus driver and several others Som came to me sheepishly and informed me the bus was sold out. He then broke into his mischievous smile and said: "Now you will experience the REAL India". I wasn't much impressed because I had experienced plenty of the real India in my days as a student at Hindu College. But then the distance is only 95 km; how bad could it be? The bus took off from Chandigarh station with plenty of room and managed to get across the plains of Panjab and begin the climb up into the hills near Kalka with enough space around us; passengers got on and off at each stop but the flow was within tolerances. By the time we reached Solan, however, the bus was full and after that over full. The rest of the way was amazing. I could never expect to see a bus in the openness and expanses of the foothills, cliffs plunging hundreds of feet down, far from any hint of even a large village, filled beyond overflowing like a Delhi local. I was seated in a bench made for two. After Solan the bus became subject to 'Indian space' and there were soon four and later five sharing that seat. The saving grace for me is that I sat next to the window. After the fifth joined and a young lady hung precariously in front

of me. Som, seated in the chair just ahead turned and said, "See, this is the real India." I kind of had that figured out already. But he said it with a keen sense of pride, telling me that he was still one of folk. Som has a grand way about him that I have only found among the Irish that turns missteps into adventures.

Using Som's own vocabulary, you have never had a 'real' meal until you have had one cooked by Som Ranchan. Not that Som is a bad cook – quite the contrary. He went about cooking with great verve. I use the past tense because it is doubtful that, considering the servants in the household in Shimla, he has cooked for many years now. Too bad! He always used to say how cooking was a matter of pride for every Indian male. A very few times Som cooked at my house; my wife was always against it. She claims he used every pot and pan in sight. She couldn't imagine how that was possible. He used to, however, make a wonderful Panjabi style chicken stew – you may think of it as a curry – but stew is a better description. He also made an outstanding Panjabi dish from potatoes and cauliflower to mention just one more. My wife actually learned that one from him. But his cooking did typically leave a wake across the kitchen. That assessment is coming from someone even more estranged to the kitchen and its routines than he.

Som was also prone to experiment a great deal when cooking. Some of them came out well. The experiments, however, came from his lack of 'sensation' – a la Jung's typology. Sometimes he just forgot to do the shopping. One night I was staying with him while the family was in India and, he wanted to make pasta – in those days we just called it spaghetti. It was in the days before elegant Italian style cooking became fashionable. He had linguini noodles but no tomato sauce to go with it. He rummaged through the pantry and finally found a can of enchilada sauce. I remember the look on his face vividly. He displayed the can proudly and you could see his mind turning it over: enchilada sauce is also tomato-based. Like a medieval Alchemist he proclaimed that like would produce like and, that he had stumbled upon something special: that is until we sat down to eat. I cannot recommend the combination and, if Som is being honest (and willing to remember) he would not either. Enchilada sauce is typically on the sour side of the scale while

tomato-based Italian sauces are typically on the sweet side. We didn't finish the meal.

Final Thought

In sharing the above reminisces, I am not seeking to canonize Som. Like all of us, he is a work in progress. He can be mercurial, petulant, and impatient. Sometimes he wants to help others so badly his approach borders on heavy handedness. But there is no cruelty in him – he just gets his head and heart going at the same time in the same direction. Unlike most people, as his hand testifies, Som's heart and head often follow the same course. It gives him a remarkable ability to concentrate and to extend that concentration. But once started, it is very, very hard to stop. It is in that shamanic state that the poetry flows out of him: his gift to all of us.

Dialogue Epic as a Genre: Decoding Som P. Ranchan's Expressive Strategies in *The Man Said: An Encounter with Krishnamurti*

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Roshan Lal Sharma

Som P. Ranchan is a prolific writer and has contributed substantially to Indian poetry in English. His poetic corpus comprises epic poems, mini-epic poems, dialogue epics and lyrics and evidences his versatility, encyclopaedic range of knowledge and a profound understanding of human nature. Ranchan's originality lies not only in his amazing turn of poetic expression but also innovative experimentation vis-à-vis handling the content, form and style of his poetry. One may readily agree with A. K. Srivastava who observes that decoding Ranchan's complex and multilayered poetic universe demands a "new aesthetics" (Singh, "Preface" 1994). Ranchan fuses the immediate present with the distant past in all its literary, historical and mythical aspects and then expresses himself via employing various myths and archetypes belonging to diverse cultures of the world as expressive strategies in his poetic universe.

Amidst different types of poetry that Ranchan has written during his poetic career spanning more than five decades, "dialogue epics" (as he himself calls them in his "Preface" to *Three Poems*) hold unique place. His dialogue epics include *Christ and i* (1982), *Mother Sharda and i* (1982), *To Vivek then I Came* (1984), *To Krishna with Love* (1986), *Soul-Making with Sri Aurobindo* (1986), *Manjushri—Tibetan Buddha* (1992), *Sai Baba: An Encounter* (2001), *Baha'u'llah—A Talkathon* (2003), *The Man Said: An Encounter with Krishnamurti* (1998) and *Three Poems: Shirdi Sai, Kali, Upgita* (2004). Dialogue epic is a genre that Ranchan has invented in view of the basic curve of his poetic consciousness which is dialogue-centred. For Ranchan, dialogue epic is conceived and executed as a poetic dialogue

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wherein the wisdom figures from diverse religious traditions of the world are placed in the *guru* master *murshid* locale and the poet himself assumes the role voice of a seeker disciple *murid* representing humanity at large. Even though, Ranchan seems to apparently keep traditional guru-disciple dynamics (in the *Upanishadic* sense) at bay, his poetic consciousness (which is essentially dialogic) seems indebted to the very same source as it has an implicit Nachiketian slant vis-à-vis its relentless and vigorous spirit of enquiry. Towards the end of each dialogic epic, the poet-seeker develops clearer understanding of variety of issues pertaining to life thereby attaining a higher level of consciousness.

Ranchan's preference for dialogue epics is mainly due to his "compulsive tendency to apprehend everything in terms of dialogues." Discussing about the dialogic (not in the Bakhtinian but *Upanishadic* sense) aspect of his poetry which he started writing during 1980s, Ranchan tells Ved Sharma in an interview thus:

When I was a third year college student, I would make sense of the philosophies of Hobbes and Locke and Rousseau and Hegel by inventing dialogues between them. I do this even in my teaching. It helps you to avoid divorcing of your thought from your being and it also helps you to establish a relationship with emotion. I have always felt the need of talking to people. I find dialogue very healing. Even telling the dream to your own self will connect you with the person behind the dream and the motifs in the dream. I think my early repressive life has much to do with my choice of the dialogue form: it is used for the resolution of my problems. (Sharma 4-5)

As such, dialogue forms the very core of Ranchan's psyche as a poet, teacher and scholar. Moreover, he has also touched upon its therapeutic dimension.

Here it would be pertinent to question as to why Ranchan selects wisdom figures (such as Christ, Krishna, Aurobindo, Mother Sharda, Krishnamurti, etc.) as characters in most of his dialogue epics. He himself answers it by stating that talking to wisdom figures helps him balance his lopsided involvement with issues pertaining to ego thereby developing larger "perspectives and angles." Besides humanising the

wisdom figures from various religious traditions, Ranchan also views them as metaphorical extension of our “finest aspirations.” Therefore, he believes that one needs to understand them, and it “can best be done through dialogic form” (Sharma 5). Each of his dialogue epic indeed is an exploration of self. Anil Wilson has appreciated Ranchan’s use of dialogue as a poetic strategy (*Ken* 38) as a means to negotiate the poetic content of his consciousness. He also observes that the poet is intently focused on the question that has eternally baffled man: “Who am ‘i’?” (Sharma 38) and through each dialogue epic, Ranchan earnestly endeavours to find an answer. Wisdom figures, as stated earlier, being the “finer essences,” man approaches them time and again to be able to cope with the problems of life. Ranchan does not allow the reader to push the wisdom figures into an abstract realm where they remain unapproachable; he rather engages them as tangible presences vis-à-vis human life in his dialogue epics: “the importance of Christ, or Sharda or Vivekananda, or Aurobindo, lies not in their historicity or abstract teachings (though this may be important in an incidental way). The importance lies in the impact that she/he has on the human heart and mind, on her/his interaction with human beings, on her/his dialogues with individuals, and on the alchemical transformations she/he wrought in the lives of individuals.” Thus we may say that Ranchan’s poetic discourse fundamentally aims at working out the possibility of first humanising the wisdom figures and then making them available to the “uninitiated in their world and their language.” (*Ken* 37-38)

Ranchan’s dialogue epics have a vast and varied canvas. Since he is steeped in Hindu philosophy and mythology, Ranchan dialogues with rare finesse with various wisdom figures from Indian tradition such as Mother Sharda, Lord Krishna, Vivekananda and Sri aurobindo. It is essential to understand the *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* frame of Hindu thought to work out as to how Ranchan employs it in a modernist way via blending it with psycho-analysis, psychotherapy, Greek mythology and motifs from diverse religious traditions of the world, and thereby imparting his expressive strategy a “calibrated complexity” (“Preface,” *Three Poems*). As a Professor in California State University system, Ranchan had sound grounding in inter-

religious studies. In fact, it was here that he acquired the first hand knowledge of major religious traditions of the world. Whereas *Christ and I* evidences his Christian connection, *Manjushri* exemplifies Ranchan's assimilation of Buddhism into which he was initiated through Chogyam Trungpa's writings. *Baha'u'llah: A Talkathon* is yet another milestone in Ranchan's great chain of dialogue epics. He deliberately employs multiplex mythopoeic strategies to situate wisdom figures in the living context of life wherein the poet-seeker is based so that he could develop an understanding of life from different perspectives. Ranchan taught courses on "Search for Self" when he was in the United States. In an interview with Ved Sharma, Ranchan talks about his "polyglot" creative register: "It ['Search for Self'] was inter-disciplinary course. Texts were selected from fiction, Upanishads, Vedanta, Zen, Buddhism, etc. This course was cross listed in English Literature, Comparative literature, Psychology, Inter-disciplinary Studies and Religious Studies. I was formally initiated into meditation in 1968 by Swami Prabhavananda of the Ramakrishna mission. After this I was a minister with the Church of Antioch where I did lot of pastoral counseling. I held classes in counseling and counseling techniques for the Ministers. Now all these things meander through my psyche simultaneously and find expression in my poetry. This is why my creative register is polyglot." (Sharma 3)

In his dialogue epic *The Man Said: An Encounter with Krishnamurti* (1998), Ranchan introduces J. Krishnamurti as the one who denounces conventional guru-disciple dynamics, belief in sects, and conditioning of all sorts. Krishnamurti approves experiencing rather than the gathering of what we experience. This is because each experience is "disparate" and "unique" and is not meant to be either compared or referred to. The Man (Krishnamurti) also disapproves of the scriptures as they have "Spawned bigotry and hatred Murder and mayhem" (2). He encourages man to be free of all that religions and scriptures have taught him and "unfold in his own way" (3). Krishnamurti equates self-knowing with "choiceless awareness" which is devoid of perspectivalised introspection (be that Poggroffian or Aurobindonian) and comprises instead "the streaming flux" that is inclusive-neither inherited nor monitored

or controlled by convention – custom. In this state, according to Krishnamurti, the “intensity of seeing” is all that matters – a process that helps one see one’s hidden motive behind all one does – thinks. Rather than lopsided knowledge, he underscores the importance of understanding and concern for living. He also spurns heroes and conventional role models such as Moses, Pharaoh, Perseus and Gandhi and prefers instead to merely be in living and being modes.

At this juncture, the poet-seeker intervenes as he finds it hard to shed the garb of his identity in terms of his upbringing and education, awards and achievements. He can pin-pointedly identify his problem as it has been that of introducing “will into everything” that he has done or accomplished so far (5). Krishnamurti, however, expunges the whole idea of will which can be imposed on neither others nor yourself. His thrust is more on being aware and watchful of all that happens within and around you. He also emphasises the importance of sharing of insights without reproducing oneself through them. Later on, he talks about the relational aspect of existence. When he says: “All is relationship,” there is a slant toward “human fellowship.” The accent further falls on “deeper communion – a further union between man and man – man and woman – man and animal.” It is basically the “soul interchange” charged with love that has the capacity to obliterate the cruel constructs such as “bigotry, racism – history, nationalism” (7-8). Acute sensitivity vis-à-vis the process of experiencing is what Krishnamurti rates very high. He dissolves conditioning as well as accumulating since both are detrimental to the perception.

The poet-seeker now asks Krishnamurti as to what it is to be an inspiration for a poet. The query extends further filled with the essence of the latter’s ideas. In fact, the poet-seeker is immensely benefited from this encounter with Krishnamurti and wants his company in the “Night Sea Journey” so that both can “mine darkness” together (10-11). Ranchan calls him his “metaphor, icon / eidolon of effulgence” and implores him to be his “inspiratrice.” According to the poet-seeker, alchemy cannot be restricted; it is instead the “culture of intelligence” and also the “*coniunctio* – of soul with soul” (12). After that, Krishnamurti confesses before the poet-seeker as to how out of sheer ignorance

he once stepped into the messianic role from which he freed himself never to look back. This was followed by a physical process of transformation which was unbearably painful but he overcame that too. For Krishnamurti, the process (that one undergoes to evolve / grow / transform / know the truth) is more important than the intellect or memory. It is symbolically represented as a meandering "mountain road," a "winding river" and as "Immensity breaching the shackling dykes / flooding the inland" (13). The process for Krishnamurti is a "pathless path" that defies any sense of definitive cartography. It was more or less akin to his understanding of Truth which according to him is a "pathless land" unapproachable by any path, religion or sect (Krishnamurti). He also refers to the "Other" that fills him all the time with "pain," "perplexity" and "sorrow" of those who come in contact with him on day to day basis. Even on personal front, Krishnamurti suffered "periodic breakdowns" as he would collapse on bed complaining about "reek of blood and violence" and also the smell of "stale rape-seed semen" (14-15). He had to endure extreme physical pain like a vulnerable child calling upon his mother as well as dead brother for help. Not everyone could bear this "living crucifixion" (15). He would never lose consciousness and stay watchfully aware all the while. He could have resorted to escape through his "astrality" but he always experienced benediction towards the end.

Talking about one of his meetings with Krishnamurti, the poet-seeker describes about his soothing presence and sweet courtesy as giving way to the latter, the Man says: "Apres vous Monsieur" (After you, Mr). He observes vegetables and wines as if they were "alive." In one of the sessions and discourses, Krishnamurti holds the poet responsible for his "abused" state in the present by enumerating the wrongs done to him by his relatives, friends and scholars. Through such dialogues, Ranchan, in fact, ventilates his personal hurts, anger and frustration with the world around him as the poetic idiom loses consistency on account of attribution of the words / expressions such as "overgave," "giving lacked measure, proportion / lacked discrimination," "subliminal scripting," "occult," (17-18) etc. This is where the poetic dialogue starts losing its grip on the reader. Nevertheless, the poet does not give in that easily and

regains the pace via employing objective idiom which is in sync with quintessential Krishnamurti. For instance, he expresses disapproval of both self-grandiosity as well as reducing of the self. He approves humility and says that there is no use fretting and fuming about one's faults (19). Rather than comparing and contrasting which is nothing but "exalting one thing at the expense of another" (20), it is better to have understanding. Speaking against programming, Krishnamurti asserts that it is "anti-human anti-freedom" and that it is reinforced by culture as well as tradition. To the poet's question whether deprogramming is possible, Krishnamurti has simple answers such as "be aware," and "experience" without of course seizing. Another idea that baffles the poet-seeker is that of living in the present as it amounts to deny time past and time future. Krishnamurti terms them as "abstractions" hindering the pulsating process of living from moment to moment. Past, for him, is dead as is evident in history, psychology and anthropology. Even construct such as "collective unconscious" is useless since it impedes the onward moment in view of flux called life. His perception of future which remains "unborn" does not allow any anchor-hold for the reader corroborating Heraclitus' understanding of the 'now' characterised by transience, flux and motion.

Upon being questioned about transcendence, Krishnamurti faults it by saying that all religions have created "fetish" out of it and those who claim to have experienced *Samadhi* also escape via leading "unexamined" lives. To be more lucid on this account, he counter-questions the poet: "What are you transcending? And where to?" (24). The poet-seeker further problematises the query by referring to our "appetite for transcendence" which Krishnamurti dismisses by taking a relational stance which underscores human company and further reiterates: "The important thing be awareness from moment to moment" and furthermore there is "no need to escape and transcend" (25). The poet seeker now moves onto the point of meditation which according to Krishnamurti is not meant to "bliss out" to trip with a dangling godling, an archetype" as it is intoxication of a sort. Real meditation is "to clearing the mind of the rise and subside of mood" (25) and also to stay watchful "in the midst of flux" called "mindfulness" by Buddhists. Such

meditation is possible anywhere and everywhere: “in bus, train, in the thick of activities, in the thicket of anxiety, in the seethe of passion or breakdown” (26). Suggesting a way to deal with the problems of life, the Man says that the key lies in the “seeing” of it. None can talk you through a difficult situation, nor can anyone come up with a solution. He does not even uphold the idea of turning to God as he abandoned theosophists himself.

Towards the end of the poem, Ranchan is keen on categorising Krishnamurti thereby attaching a label (viz. “poet, mystic, metaphysician, psychologist”) to him. The Man views it as a limitation as well as compulsion of the poet-seeker given his training as a therapist. Nevertheless, Krishnamurti confesses that he is not a poet despite having composed few poems and parables. As regards his status as mystic and metaphysician, he reveals that he “experienced a transfiguration:” “as I testify to a Reality, as Numinous one as distinct from the Mundane, which infills the latter” (30). As a psychologist, Krishnamurti’s psychology presents a peculiar commixture of the Vedantic, Zen, Tantric and Existential and is free of “heavy-duty nomenclature.” Simple as it is, he tells people to observe their consciousness which may help them see their conditioned selves and pave way for a new consciousness that challenges and destabilises “institutions, societies, politics” (31). Being “negative metaphysician,” the Man is against organisations, schools and systematised thinking. The poet is satisfied at the end.

Nevertheless, it is towards the end of this poetic dialogue that the craftsman in Ranchan takes a back seat as there is much that seems to be thrust on the wisdom figure. For instance, the whole issue of psychological categories is brought to the fore by the poet and the label of “Wise Old Man” is attributed to Krishnamurti (in his own words) whereas, as discussed earlier, another precept called “collective unconscious” from Jungian psychology has been denounced by him. As such, there is inherent contradiction in the expressive strategy that Ranchan adopts to portray Krishnamurti. The categories that Ranchan creates for Krishnamurti such as that of Wise Old Man, impressionist poet, mystic, metaphysician and psychologist (30) is natural in view of his understanding of the

typology a la depth psychology, but attribution of the same to the likes of Krishnamurti who defied all categories, at times challenges as well as confuse the reader. Despite that Ranchan's understanding of core Krishnamurti is evident from the ease with which he handles his thought.

NOTES

¹ According to Heraclitus (500 BC): "Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed. You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others, go flowing on." As such, transience/flux/motion is fundamental as per Heraclitian view in regard to the constantly 'changing' world of "apparantism."

² Ranchan's poetic self could never remain religion-specific. In fact, despite being an initiated Hindu, Ranchan remained minister with the Church of Antioch where he used to have lot of counselling sessions with the other ministers. This left an indelible mark on Ranchan's creative consciousness. Moreover, his stay of more than eleven years in the United States as a Professor of English and American Literatures, Comparative Literature and inter-disciplinary studies, enabled him to deal with Christianity considerably. Later on he also became the President of the Church of Antioch, which incidentally was more ancient than the Roman Church (Sharma 8). This engagement with the Church of Antioch stirred his poetic imagination powerfully and resulted in *Christ and I* which was written in 1982.

J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was a philosopher and a passionate speaker about issues concerning human life viz. love, violence, freedom of the mind, network of thought, psychological revolution, etc. He opined that no change at any level whatsoever (be that social, political or religious) can be effected until the psyche of every individual undergoes a radical change. He was against the idea of guru/spiritual teacher and declared that "Truth is a pathless land" and none can lead us there. He did not subscribe to the notion of nation and observed that it has caused violence and bloodshed throughout human history. Krishnamurti spoke all through his life about the freedom of mind which he rated very high alongside

underscoring the importance of watchfulness and awareness in our day-to-day lives.

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Ranchan as a Satirist

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Written in a satiric mould, Ranchan's three poems *India that is Bharat*, *Dwarf Titan* and *Portrait of a Clone*, at first look, remind one immediately of Byronic rage that had the strength of conviction both in its wisdom and impetuosity to tell the Scotch Reviewers:

I'll publish, right or wrong;

Fools are my theme, let satire be my song.

If the poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world," Ranchan has every right to fume and fret in poetry the way the acknowledged legislators do in the legislative assemblies, especially in India, where 'verbal aggression', unlike Ranchan's poems, takes the shape less of satire or censure and more of ribaldry or billingsgate. Nevertheless, Ranchan's satire and censure too have less of the mild and genial tone of Horace, and more of the bitter and indignant temper of Juvenal. And, indeed, if democracy does not and cannot permit a man to behold openly the demons of evil, the freedom of expression guaranteed by democracy definitely allows a poet to employ all the Juvenalian weapons of satire "To rowze the Watchmen of the Publick weal" in the manner of Alexander Pope. A satirist, in fact, cannot avoid these weapons since 'satyr' in its very origin and outlook is half man and half beast. So there is nothing reprehensible if Ranchan gives his mental convulsions the shapes of lampoon, invective and diatribe by means of wit, irony, sarcasm and cynicism. In the process, he not only ridicules the persons and objects of his attack but also curses them for being what they are.

Lampoon is a unique subgenre of satire wherein a poet attacks an individual or the individuals in a veiled way, and yet making it sure that the satiric portrait does not remain completely hidden behind the generalised mass of denunciation.

Aristophanes' portraits of Cleon and Socrates in his plays *The Knights* and *The Clouds* respectively, Seneca's

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presentation of Emperor Claudius in *Apocolocyntosis* and Dryden's portrayal of Thomas Shadwell in *Mac Flecknoe* are its classical examples. Though the initial intention of a satirist in lampoon is to attack the personalities, but as it happens, a lampoon also becomes a denunciation of the system in which the personalities under attack are shown to operate. So is the case with Ranchan's Portrait of a Clone:

Do not just take it just as the portrait
of a specific ceo
he is the composite monstrem
of our times

Nevertheless, the 'Composite' framework does not hide the area of operation of the person under attack:

My man should know
that he is headman of academia
not of a political outfit

So it is obvious that Ranchan's intentions are to expose the evils prevalent in the academic world as well as the oddities of the person or persons who are spoiling it to the bottom from the top. Indeed, the headman of any academic institution has the power to subvert the whole system in case he chooses to do nothing. The problem aggravates when he is hell-bent to do anything to that nothing. So Ranchan ridicules the tantrums of such a good-for-nothing fellow whose contribution to the academic world amounts to nothing for good:

In official meetings
he sings
hosannahs to himself
in his listening to others
if someone clicks with his agenda (up
his sleeve)
he executes the closure
discussion is killed

The most disgusting aspect of such a person is that he poses himself to be more knowledgeable than others. One may accept his assumption that he is an intelligent person, but one can never accept his presumption that he is the only intelligent person. Indeed, the most difficult thing in the academic world is to acknowledge that there are brains that even if do not adorn its tops still are the strength of its foundations. In such a situation,

what arouses the indignation of a satirist is that the concern of collective sagacity is stifled by the apathy of an idiotic individuality:

Not for him to realize
that your strength derives
from your own identity
initiative from a shared corpus
funded by others
like-minded and yet different
who are in your demesne

Such persons as consider themselves learned enough as to need nothing more to learn get to the tops of the academic world, in India that is Bharat, by the meanest of the means of political clout, unabashed sycophancy and unprincipled motivations. But the tragedy is that they, though themselves deprived of all grace, do not add to their personalities even the grace of the office they sit in. So such persons do not “Listen to petition, prayer, and protest,” “can go against any subordinate,” and “chew any official.” Gilbert Highet in *Anatomy of Satire* considers lampoon as a “parasite which has no life of its own” and opines that it “can exist only through destroying its victim.” In an effort to do so the writers of lampoons often resort to farragoes of violent protests and fervent appeals, sympathetic fits and vitriolic spasms, and earnest prayers and fiercest curses. Ranchan too undergoes all such farraginous splashes of spleen, pleading here, “after all, he is the product of india” that “looks up to the authorities which appointed him,” and bursting there, “what a fall my countrymen! / the bosses devoid of altruistic / intelligence / degrade the people.” The devastating irony reflects even in softness towards the victim: “there is nothing amiss to the gross eye / in this eco.”

Ranchan would assure us that “*my man is not a beast*” but “... *a human with overvaulting ambition*,” and yet would not desist from calling him “*a gopher...a gacko...a tadpole...a frog*.” Though Ranchan would liken his victim to ‘Nahusa’, ‘Chand’, ‘Mund’ and ‘Dhumralochan’ — all different evil-incarnations from Indian mythology, he still would display his inability, in all honesty, to fully decipher the cryptograph he is dealing with:

I have no key to unriddle
this weird freak
but for sure, he is a phenomenon
of our ersatz age, ...

So while the poetic justice in Ranehan must castigate the hollowness of 'Ersatz Age' that sucks in non-entities to catapult them to eminence, the human rancour in him would curse the ilk. So the poet rues the age wherein "*gandhi moulders in raj ghat*" and the "*children of immortality*" are "*born dead with broken shoulders*." But the writer of a lampoon cannot help showering curses on the man who triggered off his wrath. So strong is the ire that Ranehan shall not say with Voltaire in the mildness of Horace: "O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous." He rather must be with Ovid, Donne and Swift, in the manner of Juvenal, in seeking death and desolation for his adversaries:

may your crooked tongue turn black
wither and drop off...
crooked be your gait...
may snakes hopple your feet...
may worms infest the neurons
and sap the synapses...
you must be exorcized
bonfired where four lanes meet
for us to be free.

No Quintilian effort can ever judge whether the writer of a satire is really so morally upright that he may call into question not only the institutions in general but also the personalities in particular. It is why the satires in general are rarely taken seriously. The common responses to them include revulsion and accusations of poor taste. However, a comprehending reader of a satire must remember what Gilbert Highet said in this regard: "Whether in fact every satirist's motives are so august is open to question. But the satirist's motives aside, the satire may accomplish the truth-telling function whether or not the satirist has high ideals." Even if we do not take into account the motives and ideals of a satirist, one thing that may still be said of a satirist is that the nature of his complaint must have been higher than the stature of the personality under attack. It is, perhaps, the reason that the

vapours of complaint spread outside casting clouds of aspersion over an individual and pouring droplets of truth in public.

While in *Portrait of a Clone* the person under attack occupies the centre and the system in which he operates remains at the periphery, in Ranchan's *Dwarf/Titan* the Titanic personality under attack – perhaps because it is 'dwarf' – gets receded into background and what emerges to the forefront is the Indian polity in which he functions. Ranchan knows quite well:

It's just that in pathological times
your kind surfaces
sometimes struts centre stage
and casts a shadow on the viewers...
but make no mistake
history is not your lengthened shadow

As such, the person becomes a symbol of that sad aspect of our political system in India that is Bharat, which is reflected in a number of Dwarfs whom power makes Titans capable of corroding the polity and corrupting the society. Ranchan puts it poetically thus:

Strange in india that is bharat
polity and a decayed society have so
meshed
as to spawn a proliferation of dwarf
titans

So Ranchan's invective is, in fact, the condemnation of a whole lot that, in the manner of Dwarf/Titan, has "*sprung from the seed of Lucifer shed in time's foul womb.*"

"In literature," to quote Cuddon and Preston, "examples of invective are to be found evenly distributed in verse and prose, and it is closely associated with satire, lampoon and caricature. Many writers have employed invective for a variety of purposes, the commonest being to express dislike, disgust, contempt and even hatred."¹ In fact, as has been observed by Steven S. Vrooman, "invective served an important function in communicating social and political perspectives."² D. H. Lawrence's poem '*How Beastly the Bourgeois Is*' uses invective to express his intense dislike of the early twentieth-century industrial civilization, Victor Hugo invokes the Muse of Indignation to lambast Louis Napoleon and his coterie. His '*Les*

Chatiments', a collection of one hundred and one poems, is one of the richest invectives ever written. Swift directs his invective against the English nobility in *'Gulliver's Travels'*. Martin Luther's *'Address to the Christian Nobility'* is a famous invective attacking Pope and the Roman Catholic Church for their corrupt practices, abuse of power and perversion of Christianity. Samuel Butler in *'Hudibras'*, John Dryden in *'Absalom and Achitophel'*, Alexander Pope in *'Dunciad'*, and Smollet in *'Humphry Clinker'* are notable exponents of invective. However, the greatest of inveighers in Classical literature is unquestionably Juvenal, who wrote ferocious invectives on the vices of the Roman life-style. Wit, irony, sarcasm, ridicule, objurgation and even vituperation have almost always been there in the language of invective.

Ranchan traces the whole graph of evolution of Dwarf Titan, starting from the days when he was *"innocent...his youth aspirational"* dreaming of *"serving the nation and freeing it from the / incubus of want."* In order to realize his dreams *"he joined a fundamentalist organization...discovered his gift of the gab / honed it through writing and oratory"* and finally *"emerged as the leader of the pack."* Indeed, as Ranchan remarks sarcastically:

Politics rewards such perilous leaps as
no other profession does

As leader, the Dwarf Titan *"struts on the stage / exhibiting his narcissism...builds temples...raising storey upon storey in vertical / arrogance"* and *"wants to be imam of the collective / en-mass whom he is still hurtling on the / path of bigotry."* Living *"in terms of fixed ideas,"* he *"wants to superimpose"* his propositions of *"hindu india, hindi lingua,"* and in the process,

he would like to exorcise eight hundred
years
of muslim rule
two hundred years of british.

Ranchan catalogues almost all the evils that the politicians in India that is Bharat have and spread in plenty. What such dwarf titans do not know or understand is the composite culture of India. So the poet wants that *"all dwarf titans / should go to corrective schools...do anything / even pimping will do / but*

not politics.”

Ranchan employs a plethora of allusions from literature, mythology and psychology to read and define the heart, mind and soul of the politician he is satirising: the dwarf Adlerian motives to compensate his humble and gutter origins, his titanic Freudian ego inflated by the surrounding minions and sycophants, his Jungian introversion and unresolved complexes, his lineage from the family of dwarf demons like 'Chand', 'Mund', 'Nishumbh' and 'Shumbh', and his titanic urge to be worshipped like 'Hiranyakashipu'. Stylistically, Ranchan's poetry shows influences of Walt Whitman in its sprawling and ebullient emotions, malleability of free verse and sonority and resonance of chants, and of T. S. Eliot in its wide range of literary allusions, evocative references and depth of symbols juxtaposing past and present. Indeed, as has been observed by Matthew Hodgart and Brian Connery, "satire can turn from a state of mind into art only when it combines aggressive denunciation with some aesthetic features." If Dwarf Titan's cocky absurdity in withdrawing the support price just because of his personal dislike of 'apricots' steals our smile, his lycanthropic delusions and hysteric manipulations that drive the 'Duchess' of Indian polity to 'the ward of the insane' rouse our anger and invite our protest. Quite enchanting is Ranchan's choice of words and phrases from his vast range of diction and equally impressive is his capacity for finding exact objective-correlatives for his colloidal emotions that must have been for a very long time brewing and oscillating in his mind to find an energetic expression.

Ranchan's satiric prowess is at its best in *India that is Bharat* – a 'diatribe' form of satire which originated among the Sophists before 200 B.C. The 'diatribe' has been since ages a Socratic method of censure and persuasion through discussion and discourses. With the passage of time it emerged as a literary genre reflecting the oral public preaching style of wandering cynics and stoic philosophers. Epictetus, Bion and Horace are the classical practitioners of diatribe. Jonathan Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' and Robert Browning's 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' are its best examples from literature. Ranchan's poem employs almost all the features of diatribe: censure, persuasion and exhortation through dialogue and rhetoric.

The poem in the manner of a typical diatribe is conversational in tone using all its stylistic markers: question-answer format, vivid dialogues with different persons to make evaluative statements, and use of pronouns "we" in general and at times 'you' emerging as a dialogue-partner. First the poet censures Indian society and polity wherein "*we, indians, the real impotents / schizophrenics of the earth*" "*have sinews to think / not thews to act.*" It has resulted in a moral disorder: the wicked and the worst are taking the nation to perdition, and the righteous and the best are too paralysed to check them. The situational topsy-turvy makes the poet raise a volley of questions which as a matter of fact become indictment of our way of living in the present vis-à-vis our ideals of the past. Where is the woman that inspired poets, painters and heroes? -- "*turn not to durga, kali / for reconnection and renewal.*" Where have gone our altruistic impulses, our wisdom, and our common-sense? Where is "*the ear that listens...the heart that responds...the hand that delivers?*" And the poet harangues forcefully thus:

don't blame the system
for sure core rotten
don't deny your own responsibility

The fictitious 'dialogue partner' is chided for the lack of warmth and relational ties: "*why do you not talk to the rickshaw / man...?*" "*why do you not reach out to the waiter...?*" "*will your tongue hurt...?*" The fictitious 'dialogue partner' always plays a central role in diatribe. He is often abruptly addressed as an anonymous man or an insensitive fool to register the poet's fulminatory jeremiads.

For censure and evaluation the writer of a diatribe, according to Robert C. Newman, often employs rhetorical devices like comparisons, contrasts, parallelism, historical examples of some famous events and persons, and concise statements of general truth or rule of conduct in a form closer to maxims and proverbs. Ranchan also, likewise, compares the attitudes of a proud and possessive C E O and his simple and humane driver who was fired for giving "*a ride to an old woman / stranded, in a lane.*" contrasts "*two sons from the self-same clan*" typifying "*two ideologies / the secular and the communal / love and hate / reconciliation and revenge.*" gives parallels in terms of

similarity between 'Raja of Mund' and 'Advani of the Rathayatra' and difference between 'the Rhino lady' and her sister in the South, to show one basic urge of the Indian politicians – to stay in power by any means, recalls Gandhi, Nehru and Patel from Indian history, and makes concise statements of truth:

when the relationships decay
the republic decays
no amount and manner
of ambition, wheeling dealing
networking can save it
we fill the absence with magic
necromancy yoga
to what avail!

In a diatribe if censure exposes the shams and evils, persuasion overcomes the vices with a call to the philosophic life by describing and illustrating virtue. The poet starts preaching the virtues by the examples of emotional bond between him and his grandson, and a 'silent bond' between a stray dog and the family dog, Charlie. He fails to understand why in the land of the Vedas, Shastras, Puranas, Tantras, rich mythology and an affluent and enlightened past there has descended a 'Kalratri'—an interminable night harbouring death and engendering 'Macbethian ambition', 'engineered riots', 'murder' and 'mayhem'. The poem, as in a typical diatribe, ends on a note of exhortation : to the politicians to stop their unscrupulous quest *“for power and pelf;”* to the bureauerats to *“have a bit of fear / because of judiciary and vigilant public,”* to the English Dons to know their own 'history' and 'psychology' *“before taking initiation from Otto rank,”* to the students to know their 'Parents' and 'Gurus' *“before whoring in the global marts / for icons and emblems,”* to the 'Multinational Moghuls' to learn and practice their traditional and ethical *“system of finance,”* and to the 'Countrymen' to

become active in the polity...
armed with Gandhi's ideals
Nehru's vision, Patel's steel...
break through kalratri...

As a whole, the poem is an ethical discourse, a

blustering tirade and a powerful diatribe. Ranehan uses philippic language for censure and a proverbial verve for persuasion.

There is a long tradition behind satire of being misinterpreted and misunderstood. Thus, there were many who misunderstood Swift's purpose in 'A Modest Proposal', assuming it to be a serious recommendation of economically motivated cannibalism. Many critics saw Mark Twain's 'Huckleberry Finn' as 'racist'. Ambrose Bierce gained notoriety as a black humorist for writing 'The Devil's Dictionary'. Samuel Johnson's 'London' and William Burrough's 'Naked Lunch' were found by many objectionable and indecent in their content as well as tone. In fact, a satirist is fated to be dismissed contemptuously by those who have only the eyes to see their follies exposed, and not the accompanying vision to comprehend the satirist's honesty of rage and sincerity of purpose. After all, it is, indeed, very ridiculous to sell mirrors to the blind and combs to the bald. I think Ranehan knew it well before venturing into the realm of satire.

Reappraisal of an Appraisal

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Paresh Prabhakar

At the age of 52, looking at my bookshelf, I happened to pick a festschrift on Som P. Ranchan which was published by Konark Publishers and edited by Dr Ved Sharma, the then Associate Professor of English at H.P.U Shimla in 1992. The dedication was to an I.A.S officer Dev Swaroop, who according to the actual text “exemplified the pothos. Strain in Ranchan’s Anteros space”. It had three parts entitled “Talking with Som P; Talking about Som P. and Tributes, opinions, comments and reviews. As a scholar of Dr Som P. Ranchan I had also contributed my article entitled “Guru: a Collage from his letters”: the very letters, even after 19 years; written over a span of 30 years are still with me to rely upon over the vicissitudes of life. So, the book in my hand, I thought of making a reappraisal of the prolific poet, whose creativity is phenomenal and which shows no signs of abating even at the age of 80; the professor, who guided scores of M.Phil’s, and PhDs, both in India and in America and the person who is unique in his own eclectic way- covering the space between an Apollonian and a Dionysian. As a social man, even if he doesn’t feel physically good, and V. P. Sharma goes to his place, Dr Ranchan comments, “More than medicines I need someone to talk with, to interact with.” He assured V.P.S. that “dialogue” is important. I quote V.P.S., “Conversation brings him to life, exhilarates him. He is a brilliant talker, and a spell binder at that.” Till that point of time Ranchan had traversed much ground in terms of east and west- he hailed from Buddhist ancestors and imbibed their tantra; he was baptized in the Antioch church; memorized Greek mythology; made his own the Freudian and Jungian psychology etc. About a post structuralist question by V.P.S., which was in vogue at that point of time, regarding his texture militating against the structure? Dr Ranchan replies him thus: “I work with my inner material consciously... my epic meditations have a mythopoeic or symbolic structure... music of ideas. Moreover, the language

Paresh Prabhakar, An Admirer Anonymous

of dhyana, of meditation, of the unconscious is symbolic... my texture comes from diverse relationship to lots of people- Hippies, Blacks, Yogis, Sufis, and so on." Som P's meditation is essentially, 'Mantric'. His poetry comes out after having a dip into the 'Nad' of the mantra, as it were. This takes Ranchan to comment to V.P.S., "Other is the projection to self. Or, to put it differently, the two sometimes collide; sometimes caress each other, and occasionally dance with each other." Ranchan, while concluding, tells V.P.S. that wisdom figures are above you and there is a need to understand them, to come to terms with them, and it can best be done through dialogue form.

P.V. Bisht in his epigraph invokes a quote from Idris Shah's 'The Way of a Sufi' and gives his personal experience- "To me he has been like Hermes- the Adept, the Mature Initiate, and an Illumined Guide." Poetry writing started under the pseudonym 'Larry' Ranchan! Professor A.G. Stock regarded Ranchan as a young and promising poet. After a stint as lecturer in S.D.B. College Shimla, Vaish College Bhiwani and Govt College Malerkotla, he was selected as a Fulbright scholar by the U.S. Educational Foundation to pursue his PhD course at the University of Wisconsin. On receiving his PhD (Whitman: The Great Adventure with the Self) he was employed by California State University at Northridge as an Assistant Professor in English. He returned to India and became Reader in English in Punjab University Patiala for two years. On the strong recommendation of California State University Ranchan emigrated to U.S.A. and for the next eleven years taught courses as a professor of English literature; on Comparative literature, on American literature and on Inter disciplinary Studies. Ranchan's personal expansion includes- Initiation into the worship of Kali, Presidency of the Church of Antioch, attraction towards the schools of Analytical Psychology of Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung and practicing psychotherapy.

About his vocation as a guide Ranchan admires the Bodhi Sattva ideal, and quotes his Holiness the Dalai Lama's lines from his autobiography:

For as long as space endures
For as long as the living beings remain
Until then may I, too, abide

To dispel the misery of the world.

The concluding part of the piece involves special interest PVB: if you had your life to live all over again, how would you like to live it? SPR: I think I would live my life without any sense of guilt at all. At present I am more at peace with myself than ever before, despite the contradictions that others see in my behaviour.

PVB: Where did your guilt come from if I may ask?

SPR: from diverse sources- orthodox programming, adolescent revolt against it, this engendered its own brand and residues of guilt: from a perfectionist syndrome, yoga-fostered; and from a Magian religious temperament. The remnants will always remain. Now I prefer to being complete, to being perfect and I accept Dantesque discontinuities. This approach to the present is not in the nostalgic mode. It is the poetic fervor, devoid of the pastiche and of the stereotypical past, which aims at retaining a distinction between surface and depth and seeks to grasp the 'totality' of social, cultural and psychological dimensions. I have had the occasion not only of reading his post retirement work but also listening in his own vibrant voice the poetic fragments in their incubation stage: the experiences were exhilarating!

'Talking about Som P. Ranchan' has eleven articles ranging from his students like Janesh Kapoor to his PhD scholars like Lalit Mohan and literary aficionados like B.M. Sagar, Sankaran Ravindran, A.K. Srivastava, R.S. Pathak, A.N. Dwivedi, Late Dr Jaidev, Kirpal Singh, D.N. Verma and the editor Ved Sharma.

While talking of the difficulties faced by the reader regarding Ranchan's style and texture of his poem, Janesh observes that 'if one is a persistent reader, he will soon discover a treasury of thought and emotion in them.' In fact he has been producing a rich harvest of poems essentially lyrical, with deep emotional content. The poems in *Anteros* speak loudly for him as a poet of the heart and its concerns, with regard to friends who have been and also to those who could be. Going back to V.P.S.'s visit to Ranchan's house I am reminded of Gelett Burgess' lines "love is only chatter. Friends are all that matter." Ranchan strives to recapture the old charm of journeying with them towards his individuation:

Friends and comrades, therefore
I thank thee
For many things made clear,
For many truths revealed,
For words spoken, and thoughts exchanged
And the power to retrieve
From the dross of despair.

Through this process Anteros is purified and graduates to the exalted 'Pothis,' the mutual merger, unconditional. In friendship none imposes one's script or register on the other! True friendship is unpremeditated compassion, even unconditional invitation for those who could BE!

Lalit Mohan Sharma's 'The Wounded Quester and Anteros' metaphorically regards friendship as the perfection of syzygy. With this kind of merger with chosen friends like DEV the Quester, the "I", the protagonist, or you may call everyman, through a backward glance, recalls other encounters and dissects the wounded relationships, the flaws in friendships. But due to his intense desire to consummate the relationship, the protagonist fantasizes about the ideal excursions he would have enjoyed if his friend were his brother. This quest for friendship continues 'even in Bardo while passing on to the next incarnation.' Lalit ends the article on a note of equanimity where the wounds of the protagonist are healed and the Quester in him is shaken into the poise of a person who can take on the chicanery, clamor and shibboleths which frustrate the alchemy of relationships!

B.M. Sagar has given a very cogent title to his article- 'Som's Energy: Soul-making with Sri Aurobindo', by associating the title of the book with the flow of energy in the intellectual emotional life of the writer. According to Sagar it helps to read the message first, in which sessions are called "analytical and intellectual." They are like the Upanishads, in which the disciple and the guru converse, the former talking of his metaphysical search for the soul in terms of his life problems and the latter gives him esoteric wisdom in the light of his own experience of reality. Alchemy is used in the sense of transformation which is attainable without the aid of any medium-"direct and immediate." The message ends with "Alakh

Niranjan," the salutation used by mendicant Sadhus who do not stand at any one place for a long time. Similar seems the predicament of the poet who has encountered Sri Aurobindo for a time before advancing on his life quest. The poem becomes an interface for jostling Eastern and Western systems, references and institutions- Gestalt, Jung, Maslow, Evangelist, Inquisitor and Psychoanalysis on the one hand and Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and the flow of soul like Ganga on the other. Here Hindu culture responds to the Western to its greater glory. It exhorts one to rise above religion, politics and concerns of this world by becoming one with the absolute by sensing the inflow of soul in the cells of one's body, and thus feel the presence of bliss, truth, power and beauty. Going further and beyond one would see the holistic pattern, beyond good or evil, and participate in it to the full.

Energized thus, the poet, Zarathustra like, goes on to play at the lexical level-"Birthing galaxies, I sessioned with you, overcycling divine fiat, cunning symbologies, Psychicise the vital, and aggressivities" etc. Ranchan's America with Love, according to Sankaran Ravindran is conditioned by three stages of artistic consciousness- of fear, struggle and a sense of liberation. It is not only a poem that needs criticism but also one that successfully resists criticism due to its simultaneous movements in three areas: routine consciousness versus transcendental consciousness, earthly experiences gleaned from America and English language evoking Indian concepts. Ranchan's poem is a Talisman because he feels and believes that materialism constitutes only one dimension of reality and that there is a higher dimension of reality to which consciousness will have to evolve by confronting and overcoming the former.

The processes involved in writing are akin to those of a Talisman that can successfully forestall the currents of barren materialism, infuse spiritual dynamism and vitality into the poet and transform his nearly fragmented consciousness into a unified transcendental consciousness. Hence poetry becomes a religio-magical act, not only for the poet but also for the reader who can also wear this Talisman. Beginning with R.W. Emerson's "To be great is to be misunderstood," A.K. Srivastava strives to devise ways of breaking the mysteriousness of Ranchan's poetry in the

form of reader-response in the context of three long poems “Me and Columbia”, “Christ and I: A Dialogue” and “Mother Sharada and I”. According to A.K.S. the language of Ranchan's thought belongs to those fine days before Plato's Parmenides when Not-Being still Was. Ranchan anachronises the world back into his process with little concern for the bafflement of his reader.

Ranchan makes Columbia lose its identity as a place and it becomes a symbol, and further a revelation connecting the psyche to some mysterious presence embodied in the icons of a mythopoeic vision. The torrent of words with which Ranchan's poems are often inundated is part of his soundscape recalling Whitman's “Leaves of Grass” or Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri' where the tones, the sounds and noise become 'the Eros of attentive listening'. His poetry is indeed luminous and a solid example of universal human metaphysics which can be earned by living one's life and discovering in it the general condition and an adjustment to it. Not only for the poet, but for the reader also.

Ranchan's poetry enables one to carry the burden of existence and therefore its achievement is larger than it's “Pastiche of Phrases, learnt, rehearsed jargon from psychology, argot from literature...” The article concludes with Ranchan's own lines:

Such be the conceit of us
Professors, psychologists, intellectuals
Less psychology
Wee bit mythology or sociology
or anthropology
And a smidgeon of spirituality.

R.S. Pathak in his article could not help quoting the lines from 'To America with Love' which was also quoted by A.K.S.:

Go, my poem, sprung
From the cavern of my heart
Nourished by Hinduism, Buddhism, Tantra
Pierced by America, her Eros and ambiance
and the
Zeitgeist of the sixties...
Go gyrating, spiraling, tobogganing.

splintering
Shards from the manadla of conunctio, ...
With all its delight and bewilderment
And the state beyond
Go, prospecting, snowballing
Into the guts and Antahkarans of unknown
readers
Now, and not in the year 2000.

Poetry, to Ranchan, is primarily "the psychedelic door of my ululating tongue". The poet wishes his poetry to go directly in the reverberating hearts conveying his frenzy and 'quidditas vision.' One has "God's plenty" here-- right from highly subtle spiritual poetry to readable 'Bar Eclogues', and the poet is equally at home with all themes and plays on all keys with the same enviable confidence—a confidence which is capable of generating a rare ease and a parallel confidence in his readers, howsoever limited their number may be. Regarding Late Jaidev I particularly remember Dr Ranchan's remark in an International Seminar on the Fiction of the Sixties held at H.P.U Shimla when I was pursuing my M. Phil. After completing his paper on Pastiche, during the discussion, Jaidev was speedily answering the questions and Ranchan laughed and commented, "Don't touch Jaidev when he is charged!" In his article Jaidev wrote an appreciation of Ranchan's 'She' from the point of view of craft. He begins by making a polemical statement: "Poetry with Ranchan, to put it bluntly, is not a discipline, nor a craft; rather, it is a matter of inspiration, of hallucinatory trances." Jaidev regards this poem as the best introduction to Ranchan the poet and as a significant event in the Indian Poetry in English. It has a very solid, concrete social and psychological texture. It is full of intoxicating poetry to make one realize what heights Ranchan is capable of achieving whenever his inspiration breaks loose of abstractionist, jargonist pegs. Reading 'She' aloud is an overwhelming experience. Kirpal Singh regards Ranchan as the poet of Eros. According to Diotima, Plato's mouthpiece, in Eros one has to scale the various stages like the climbing up of a stair. At the lowest rung is the Physical or Sensual Love. At the next higher rung is the love of all physical beauty, and at the highest is love for the divine which is also termed Agape. In Ranchan's

poetry Eros finds expression in physical, spiritual and cosmic through multivalent tones, images, myths and symbols. Psychologically, it is concerned with both the conscious and the unconscious levels of awareness. In 'Me and Columbia' the poet envisages a new social attitude to love. He stresses the need and value of what Saul Bellow calls the "axial-lines" of life: love, hope, sympathy, nobility and purity of mind with self-control. Thus most of Ranchan's poetry is of all-encompassing love or Eros which becomes the creative force of Hesiod, the oceanic feelings of Freud, the diemonic spirit of Plato, and as in St. Augustine, a power which drives us to the realization of the divine.

Ved Sharma talks of 'Representation of the Self in Ranchan's poetry'. According to him Ranchan's long poems are epic meditations because of their theme, execution, range, richness and amplitude. Since their concern is exploration of psyche of man, they encompass history, literature, myth, legend, religion, tantra, psychology and psychoanalysis. These are like atoms in his plastic imagination. His poetry is the process resulting from their bombardment, fission and fusion. This energy is produced in the psychedelic imagination of the poet. Extra sound effects are produced by the inclusion of a number of Mantras in the poems . This fusion takes place even at the linguistic level so that the form imitates the content. Various linguistic registers co-exist and make Ranchan's poetry a linguistic melting pot. A line may begin in the form of a Punjabi Tappa and after wriggling, twisting, turning through various formal moulds finally can terminate in a deep, agonized, romantic cry of the soul. The most important part of the third section is "A Foreword to Manjushree" by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in which he congratulates Ranchan on his long poem dedicated to Manjushree, and complements him for partaking of an ancient tradition with contemporary flair. What makes an apparently ordinary human being achieve greatness? Here is a question which has occupied the attention of many an eminent mind and has elicited a variety of answers. This rare phenomenon can be studied in the Poet, Professor and Person Som P. Ranchan. To understand Ranchan and his poetry it is necessary above all to have an open mind, unfettered by past

experiences, ready to learn, ready to unlearn. What Ranchan does all the time in his work is akin to describing a shade of rainbow and its beauty to a man who insists on keeping his eyes shut. Ranchan's goal, in his talks, in his work, in his living is Self-knowledge, a process as deceptively simple as opening one's eyes. Aldous Huxley also says, "Self-knowledge is always an awareness of first-order experiences-of events below the level of words... but paradoxically it is through words that we are made aware of the subtler forms of non-verbal experiences."

In some of his meditative poems Ranchan merges himself in consciousness with his beloved and his poetry looks on life from the serene summit of the Infinite. In some other poems the individual personality of the poet is endeavoring to commune with and delight in an Infinite Person who manifests Himself through love and beauty in the universe. On the one hand Ranchan's poems have an intensity of feeling as a result of separateness of human element from the divine, and on the other they also have the tranquility and serenity of perfection and Godhead. It is the consummation of both the identification with God and the realization of God. Indeed he is a poet of Life.

The Book of Woman: A Book of the Woman for the Woman and to the Woman.

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Suneela Sharma

'The Book of Woman' is an anthology ensemble of three collections of poems composed by Dr Som. P. Ranchan namely 'Recoil, Signatures and Sketches and Scroll. The Book can be rightly summed up as- 'A Book of the woman, for the woman and to the woman'. It is a tribute to the womanhood from a heightened male perspective and experience. This present study tries to reach some level of comprehension of one of his latest published works, "*The Book of Woman*". For this purpose the book was read twice to make an understanding and critical appreciation of this work. Besides reading the book myself I requested five other people to go through it and share their reactions and responses with me. Their feedback and response has been a valuable source to formulate my own analysis of the work.

The Book of Woman, though divided into three sections, is unified by its uniform theme, style and language. At the same time the three collections of the poems clearly seem to be spaced and timed during the different phases of growth and evolution of the life and career of Dr. Ranchan. The poet seems to journey a lifetime through these recollections of poetry in the sequenced sections. '*Recoil*' seems to comprise the reminiscences of his youth and the women whom he encountered during that period. '*Sketches and Signatures*' mirrors his middle age and by the end of this section the poet seems to have arrived at the stage of satisfied achievements in his life. The poetry seems to be a ripe mellow expression of his forties and fifties. '*Scroll*' rolls up in itself the cream that comes to the surface after all the creative churning in the two previous sections is over.

Majority of the poems in this book are the incidents, experiences- mostly real and imaginary at times, self-reminiscent and introspective. There are poems that are monologues, made up of statements, judgements, reprimands, warnings, self musings, lines addressed either to the women

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subjects of his poems, to the reader or himself. The language used is passionate, powerful, exulted and rich with the words borrowed from various other languages like Sanskrit, Latin, Italian and even Tibetan. To some readers this may be a hindrance to easy comprehension. Whereas the passion of the language grips the readers to their conscience, the latter may discourage at times as the meaning of mythological references, metaphors and similes may have to be verified for a better comprehension. This may check the free flow of the thoughts. Metaphors such as *Yogmaya*, *Kanakakee*, *Matangi*, *Vajrapani*, *Bhadrkali*, *Sidhadhari*, *Dhooma*, *Vidya*, *Avidya* and many more need a deeper knowledge and conception. The Sanskrit words and references like *Samrasya*, *Chidakash*, *Schaj*, *Aham and Idam*, *Rudraullas*, *Vipritmudra*, *Phatswaha*, *Raga and Dwesha etc.* are some more examples. This Style and language may be out of reach of a layman but is a creative relish and a tasteful treat for a reader with a literary bent of mind and certain level of knowledge of creativity. The ordinary and the commonplace are non-existent in this work. Moreover the poet has used a unique style of blank verse which is completely devoid of any use of punctuation such as commas, full stops, question marks and so on. This lends a pace and speed to the language and expression that matches the pace of the poet's thoughts.

In the very first line of the first poem of 'Recoil' (a collection of 60 poems) the poet seems to be in a hurry to board a ship on a quest. At the very onset it is the quest to unravel the truth behind the 'enigma' that a woman is. As soon as readers start reading, they too are ushered into the same pursuit, the poignant thoughts and the words of the poetry propel them up to the deck of this 'ship' of 'quest'. The poet and the readers huddle together ready to move on the voyage. With forceful words the first poem sets the ship into motion and the journey begins with a jerk since the poet is in a hurry to see more. The first vision is of a 'serpentine' woman whom the poet describes

Physically:

Your thighs are strong
 Upper body light
 So spray cork screw waves,
 her skull 'snake festooned'

(probably a reference to kundalini)
and her 'rudraksha rosaries ... even on her
thighs'.

And Spiritually:

Her third eye... holds in it
The noose of her fingers for them
To see her soul.

Thus, the first initiation is an intense juxtapose of the physical with the soul. The poet leads us further in frenzy of inspiration with which he seems to have composed the rest of his poetry that unfolds before us hereafter. From here on Ranchan takes us along from one to the other unexplored, unseen waters, lands, visions and scenes showing us all that he has seen been to. He is like the 'Ancient Mariner' who captivated and mesmerized the wedding guest in Coleridge's *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*. Ranchan too grips and entrances the reader with labyrinths of Metaphors sucking us into a new world of visions and pictures – a fantasy land of forms and shape of women, his sweetie pie, his kankie, his kitto, and ours too very soon. They come and pass us by on this journey of the quest for the unknown. It is as if we are being taken by the poet on a conducted tour in a picture gallery of a museum. So grippingly powerful is the verse and the poet's characters that we move along in a stupor, gaping, gasping, exclaiming, and as wonder struck as the poet himself is at his own discovery of his creative outburst in form of his lines on woman. She is a 'Serpentine', 'then a blood clot', 'a corpse to maleness' in the act of love on whom 'the feet press', pound with thigh weight (poem 4) somewhere there is a question to a woman, "how can you be your own pleasurer"? And then the answer, "romance of soul and world of Aham and Idam".

There are comments and suggestions to a submissive woman: 'you do not use your tongue' and an advice, 'Honey you need its fulsome varied deployment'. The poet calls the woman 'a fly in the bottle bujbizzing who needs to open it to become the bumblebee.

There are poems terming the women "Vidyas and Avidyas" on whom several elaborating poems are composed. Vidya, kind and beneficent woman to all, the man possessing her becoming a "Vidyadhar". She is the one who gives herself

'Shamans, rogues, animals, ghouls and gods unstintedly'. And one is led by her to the stage of 'HANSAL, HANSAL, KRING and HANSAL'. These cherished and shunned women are followed by another woman – a woman complete as picture of perfection, the divine embodiment of perfection yet out of the reach of the poet as well as the reader. She is the unattainable, illusive, vision, leading the poet to a point of surrender – physical, emotional and spiritual but at that very point rejects and withdraws. Ranchan refers to this woman in several poems of this segment. This type of woman draws a man so near to the fulfilment but closes the door in his face (Poems 7,8,10,16,21,23,31,37,38,52,53). Some references are as follows:

Perverse of you to deny the
 Relationship which started in Sehaj.
 Earth familiar, secure ...
 Body affectionate ...
 Lost Lost forever Lost
 Subtle refusal in the lack of response.
 She may be pretty as a picture ...
 you could not respond to my Tanha. (Poem 21)
 but just when we were on the threshold
 to enter into for real connectivity
 to pierce the veil of appearance
 you bolted
 perplexed I stood at the door perspiring.

This woman is *Dhoomralochani* – passionate and yearning but suddenly indifferent and cold.

Ranchan continues to sing the celebration of variety in, 'women came went, a cavalcade through the years' ... 'Frigidaire's, Matrons below the will-o the wisps, cerebralist and country lassed women'.

Then there are poems that warn the men of projecting on a woman unless she is a '*Shudha Vidya*'--- a signature, a signifier.

Beware of her sympathy
 And she can make a oozing moron out of a
 man (poem 26)

Such thoughts are occasionally interspersed by the

poet's return to the idea of his unfulfilled desire to possess his ultimate woman. Ranchan seems to be searching amongst all these women whom he passes by in his memory lane, the woman he could never win. In the poem 34, he encounters her again. "After a considerable time lapse she called ... but the poet in spite of the "Impulse to dash to her city to shake the begging bowl", listens to "a counter voice" telling him to hold on to his dignity. This vision is quickly lost and the poet moves on his journey trying to locate more women in his memories, talks to them searching for more, sharing his disappointment with the common place.

Further he comments, "woman you are not unique, you represent a type" and, "most women turn off the tap for a minor gaffe" For him she is just a "Nixie" swishing in the "pixie whirlpool".

The last poems of *Recoil* lift the poet's spirit and he seems to suddenly behold the yet unbeheld and possess the unpossessed for a little while. In the 43rd poem he desires "to be blessed, to be loved, to be absorbed in your body". He resigns himself to be dying, already at Bardo's door, fledgeling crow in the white cleavage of his woman. Reality reminds to him that touch taboo and effete culture had restricted the desire soul of his most desired woman who had refused, "to be mate" and declined, "being inspiratrice". Futility of the world around him strikes the poet at the end of the first segment and he exclaims:

"Awful his human birth O Pythagoras ...
I would rather be a worm"

Thus poet continues the narration of his thoughts in the second collection --- *Signatures and Sketches* on the surface there is no break away from Style and language of the poetry. The visions of more women continue to emerge and fade but the difference lies in the poet's own treatment of these. His reactions mellow down and are more spiritual than before. The first poem is titled 'Matangi'. She is the woman --- The Creator, Preserver and the Destroyer. She is the Goddess of Eros, the *Diana*, the *Kankakee*, the *Hung phat Swaha*. She empowers man, gifts him boldness. The poet thus enumerates the 'beejmantra' of Kali- 'Hring for great Mother', 'Shring for Beauty', 'Kling for Eros', 'Aing for knowledge' as a celebration of the existence of the

ultimate feminine powers. Ranchan is more introspective and reflective in the second collection about the need to control the basic instincts and desires in human such as *anger: raga (lust) and dvesha (jealously)* “in a sweeping stroke and to free one’s warped consciousness into an expanse of space”. He finds means and ways such as “*Yognidra*” to achieve this. Confidently he promises to move ahead “with vision clear purged of past dross”.

In this mood of introspection he is able to locate that “the demons are many, a veritable horde,” so you must enlist the Gods in your hosts.” (poem 7). The 8th poem takes us further on a spiritual journey on the road winding, climbing up and down the poet’s consciousness shifting the gaze from mountains, lush grass, expanse of aqua blue and finally to his *self* in the vision of *Matangi* resplendent on a lotus throne. This is his prayer to the ultimate woman and then he returns to his memory lane, to talk to those women who come his way but his mood remains spiritual:

“Far, far, far from Sat-Chit-Anand are you ...

Unless you affirm syzygy of *Aham* and *Idam*” and further, Lady, you are mediumistic with a phantom soul ... heal the sick rejoice with merry. It is after the first eleven poems, the poet again comes across his ever elusive ideal woman once again and he rejoices at her sight once again. He wonders where to place her ‘cool confidence, modesty prime, sizzling intensity at times in the cartography of the feminine. He wails her absence in the seventeenth poem, “six months have passed ... when you will come for a visit”. This reverence continues in the twenty first poem where there is a powerful personification of woman as *Mother Courage, Wisdoms Fount, the Sidhidatri*, who could become “*Kali*”, *Mahamaha Vidya*, and finally, the *Sophia sempiternal*, with her toe dust on our head. With a sudden twist poet turns back and picks up from the dust of his memory a sketch and signature of another woman--- the *Dhooma* who “swallowed her husband”, made him “a traumatised corpse carrying a tail in his pocket”. Another advice to a weak woman is-- its time woman empowered herself, dismantling structures of modesty false and sacrifice but very soon he bores himself with such women and invokes a stronger female force “*BhadraKali*”.

“Kill Kill Kill, rid the world of sloppy sentimentality ... rid the world of egoity.” Once again the poet is looking for his

muse -the ever elusive *Maya* of a woman that he has lost somewhere and wonders, "under what Zodiac sign are you born". At the same time he reminds himself of his old age, "now that he is old ... he enters imaginally whenever the desire waxes, converses with his projections and carries them inside with questing tenderness. The poet in his unfulfilled desire in the thirty fifth poem--- "I longed for you like an alchemist ... you were wayward ... I am an old man now, old, old, trying to go down ... you mature, mellow .. a rich recompense".

By the last poems of this section Ranchan pleasantly acknowledges old age and contemplates the vision of his ultimate woman as *Mahavidya* who alone has the power to free one from all that is lacking, purge and purify, "Unless you worship the Sea and the Moon her semes, no tide will rise for you".

The third and the final poetic treatise of about six hundred lines is a contracted account of the poet's lifetime "*Scroll*" marks the finishing line of the poet's search and quest. This is the recognition of his final destination. The ship of quest on which he and the readers have travelled so far, anchors here finally with the union of the poets oneself and his *Shunyata*- the Peace. The poet first describes this ultimate woman, thirty five years younger than him and unmarried. A clear and vivid description follows. She reminds him of his Professor A.G. Stock, an intellectual diasporist. Ranchan compares her with his Professor "Her eyes and your eyes are alike. They lucent, still when they share memories, ideas, readings, words from roseate lips, resonating from navel". He identifies similarities in the magic of their speech- sweet, mellifluous.

You inject an eel cork screw shimmering in light in the waters of Galilee in the heart ... utter absence of meanness and mendacity.

The poet narrates a memorable meeting with this woman when they probably went together to attend a seminar and where she was to read a paper. The poet gets carried away by his desire to absorb her in his mind if not in the body. He requests her to stay with him, to give him longevity, to cut the dross of his past Karmas. He promises to her that he still has "the *Urja of Vajrapani*" and invokes her as "Tara, Yellow, Green and White"

gradually the poet loses himself in a dream reverie. of an Emerald Isle ... "wandering in the desert on the bank of death I hallucinate the oasis". The poet recalls all the rest of that meeting with this lady and narrates this encounter in full and vivid detail. The session of reading, the tea break, the very significant tight hug of this lady to a girl, their visit to the temple at Norbuingka that evening thereafter the meeting with the Buddhist uncle the night fantasy of possessing his woman in the hotel room, a jerk back to the reality in the morning walk and his final journey with her to Chandigarh are honestly recounted by the poet. Ranchan unknowingly wanders at the ultimate possession of this woman for whom he has rampaged visions of numbers of women throughout the book. She is *Manjushree*, *Prajna* and the *Shunyata*. Here in her company the *Pragya* flows. "Sometimes in trickle, sometimes in spate ... then subtle, sweet ... sparkling consciousness, she is established in *Samata Bhava*--- the same sightedness.

Poet is so engrossed in his recollection that he loses himself again in the frenzy of imagination and sings the song of divine bliss—Tare, Tare, Tare, Tutare, Sutare ... and there is a deluge of a dream in which he raises his silver bowl of the lifelong desire to be one with the ultimate woman, his Maha Maha Vidya- his Shunyata. In a trance he makes love to her and we experience this ultimate union of the both, the desire and the desired: "She desired, I perspired".

Having achieved the divine fulfilment Ranchan in invites his woman to be with him as his saviour:

"Then the skies is ours
Walking from hither to hither...
if we journey together and tarry not
The sea is ours; we can churn the deeps for
others".

This is the final self-realization of the poet. In the end we come to conclude that the Book of Woman is the ultimate celebration of love and life, *Recoil* is- of a woman, *Sketches and Signatures* are- to the woman and *Scroll* is- for the woman.

Iconization of Indian Culture: Four Indian English Poets

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A full-length study of iconization of Indian culture in the poetry of four contemporary Indian English poets, A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das and Som P. Ranchan deserves justification at the outset. The available critical material on Indian English poetry, comprising a few book-length studies and a plethora of articles in literary journals, presents a casual and unfocussed attention on the portrayal of Indian culture, usually described as Indianness, and dismissed as unnecessary component for any serious critical inquiry. It is the lack of consistency, seriousness and objectivity on the critics while dealing with the all-important issue of Indian culture as represented by Indian poetry in English that justifies the undertaking of this study. The available material gives the impression the cultural norms have little significance and that it is only technique that matters in any worthwhile study of poetry. Moreover, it reveals a woeful absence of any unanimity even on the basic postulates of our culture.

A creative writer, a poet, a dramatist or a novelist, always carries with him the impress of the culture to which he belongs. Culture, in fact, is not something which can be avoided at will. In general, it implies a way of life, a value-system that establishes itself through centuries, and yet has not ceased growing. It includes human behaviour and achievements in different fields of life. It can be studied at three levels. The first is the reality culture which includes the achievements of goals in science, technology and other useful arts. The second is social culture which covers human relationships, family, clan or tribe, and the economic and political system. The third is value culture which includes the value-system, traditions, codes and customs, etc.

Indian culture, as it stands today, defies a unanimous definition. In spite of its inherent contradictions or paradoxes, it has its unique identity with its distinct components: the belief in

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the fundamental unity in the whole universe, spirituality and secular outlook of life. But only a writer like Tagore or Sri Aurobindo can offer unqualified affirmation of this culture, ignore the seamy side of life in our times. A contemporary writer cannot ignore the paradoxes that Indian scene presents today. At the level of culture, in particular, the Indian scene is quite bleak and pathetic. There is total erosion of the spirit of unity and nationalism; spirituality has given way to abashed materialism; and fundamentalism has given rise to sectarian tendencies. The institution of family, one of the stabilizing forces of our culture, has weakened. The time-tested economic and political systems have almost crumbled. There is restlessness, violence, corruption and exploitation at every level of our social set-up. And yet, there is hope. There are still people and institutions committed to upholding the distinct identity of Indian culture. The Indian psyche is not totally changed; it asserts and reasserts itself for its cultural values from time to time.

In the context of this complex cultural scene in India of today, it becomes imperative for a contemporary writer to be aware of this complexity, and touch in his works as many facets of it as possible. For an Indian poet writing in a regional language, it is not very difficult to do so. His language, experience, sensibility and milieu are naturally interlinked. An Indian poet writing in English, on the other hand, has a peculiar difficulty. Even when he is capable of conveying his sensibility and experience, he has to cope with bi-culturism. In writing in a language (English) of a different culture, his Indian sensibility gets partly westernized and the language partly Indianized. The end-product has always obvious cross-cultural bearings. Only a very genuine poet can bring about an effective fusion of two cultures. Happily, there are Indian English poets who have shown their capability to do so. Some of them- Ramanujan, Mahapatra, Ranchan to name a few – have been able to communicate their native experiences and cultural values in spite of the inevitable pulls of the alien culture.

Any perceptive reader of cotemporary Indian English poetry can find unmistakable impression of Indian roots, socio-cultural ethos and native background in the poetry of four poets under our study. Each of these poets deals with some basic aspects of culture according to his or her own peculiar orientation

and methodology. Among these cultural aspects are the quest for the self, the longing for transcendence, a cosmic and unified vision, a mythic consciousness, a concern for the family and the outside world. And a peculiar Indian landscape and milieu.

In fiction, the cultural background gets explained in the course of the narrative. The novelist or short writer has the scope and means to explore and interpret the culture to which he belongs. In poetry, however, we have to depend more on poets who, unlike Sarojini Naidu, or Sri Aurobindo, are quite wary of using culture explicitly on the thematic level. The modern poets in India, like their western counterparts, speak through metaphors, and appeal to us through imagery. They follow what we can call a principle of indirection, and generally avoid direct statements. Therefore the chief method of this study is to focus on visual imagery. Iconization, in its dictionary meaning, means "representation" and it has obvious association with icons. And specially visual images, therefore the emphasis is on finding icons of Indian culture and how these have been worked out in the poetry of four poets chosen for this study. As an image derives its full import only in context, three things remain at the centre of our enquiry: (i) icons (visual images) representing some aspect of Indian culture, (ii) setting or ambience, and (iii) statements of affirmation or rejection, if any.

An eclectic approach is needed to deal with a poetry which is essentially bi-cultural and multi-dimensional. As such, critical methodology adopted for this study is both descriptive-expository and analytic-evaluative. No fact or insight is ignored simply because it belongs to an unpopular school of thought.

The poetic domain of A.K Ramanujan shows an acute awareness of the individual self, its problems and its inextricable links to others. The realization of the self as a part of the Greater Self, the Divine, is present at the iconic level (as in "Self-Portrait" and "The strider's"), but it is obliterated by the deliberate flat tone and quasi-comic and ironic perspective. In Jayanta Mahapatra, one finds a real identity crisis such as is missing in Ramanujan. The question -- "who am I?" -- recurs in Mahapatra's poetry, and is the result of the inner conflict between two ways and traditions of life, Christianity and Hinduism. It does not indicate any spiritual quest such as we find in the bhakti poets of

yore. In her poetry, Kamala Das holds her self as all-important. At times, she gives vent to her longing for transcendence, and her feelings to relate her to others. In Som P. Ranchan, however, we find an awareness of the individual self as a part of the Greater Self, and a desire to evolve and expand. The self in Ranchan undergoes a painful spiritual quest again and again to purify itself of all evils and achieve a true body-mind-speech equilibrium.

The cosmic and unified vision of the world is one of the basic postulates of our culture. In Ramanujan and Mahapatra, there is an acute awareness of historical process. In several of his poems in *Second Sight* and *The Black Hen*, Ramanujan conceives circular movement of time as he shows close kinship between body and nature, life and death, and past and present. Mahapatra, too, shows his unified world-view, particularly in *Relationship* as he surveys the past, present and future of the land of his birth. In Ranchan, the poetic-self transcends all barriers of time and space by identifying itself with Shiva, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Vivekananda, et al. In Dialogue poems Ranchan tries to amalgamate various philosophical strands in order to arrive at a unified world-view, something in the tradition of our ancient seers. In Kamala Das, however, there is hardly any striving for, or any conscious awareness of, this type of world-view because the range of her poetic world is limited.

Myths and legends are an integral part of our culture, and are, hence, the chief pre-occupation of all our mature writers and poets. Ramanujan employs various Hindu myths, rituals and legends in his poetry, sometimes as mere allusions, and sometimes as sub-structures. He iconizes the myth to support a point of view, to universalize a particular happening, or to compare and contrast the past with the present. As he places his myths in an ironic or comic perspective, the use of his myths remains by and large secular. Like Ramanujan, Mahapatra, too, employs myths to juxtapose the present with the past, and to strike a point of view in an ironic perspective, and with a secular attitude. The use of myth in Kamala Das is limited and superficial. Her poems on Radha-Krishna myth, of course, validate her faith in the spiritual and religious traditions of our land. However, one suspects that Kamala Das uses myth as defence-mechanism for her extra-marital affairs. The myths

which give a distinct identity to our culture find powerful expression in Ranehan's Dialogue poems. Though he puts most of his myths in a religious framework, he very often strikes a secular note by humanizing his deities (as in *Christ & I* and *She*) and by engaging them in discussions peculiar to the contemporary world (as in *Krishana with Love*).

In all these four poets, the iconization of the aspects of domesticity, familial relations, love and marriage is quite visible. Family is at the centre of Ramanujan's poetry. Most of his family poems imbibe memorized familiar experiences. The tradition of joint family in our culture is perhaps best iconized in his poem "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" the comic perspective and ironic tone make it difficult to know whether he celebrates or denigrates the joint family system as a way of life in India. On a larger plane, this poem offers a brilliant miniature picture of India conceived as the great house. In several other poems, Ramanujan recalls his family bonds, his strained relationship with his wife and his painful moments in love. His love poems, on the whole, leave us cold because they seem to be merely cerebral outpourings of a conscious mind. In Mahapatra, family holds relatively less important place. The father-son relationship only sets in the poet's mind the conflict between tradition and modernity. The grandfather's memory merely heightens the sense of guilt in renouncing the cultural (the Hindu) heritage. In Kamala Das, the focus remains on husband-wife relationship which is a deep source of anguish, pain and sorrow. Her extra-marital affairs, too, remain unsatisfactory. Only the memories of the old-world house and the grandmother provide her with some joy and comfort. She seems to uphold the old family traditions in our culture, though she is painfully aware of their decay reflected in the decay of her old Malabar house. In Ranehan, there is no exclusive portrayal of family, but in some poems there is an unambiguous affirmation of family values. "Ancestral Home" in *America with Love* may be taken as a testimony to his belief in the sanctity and validity of joint family system in our society. In poems on husband-wife relationship, he celebrates the importance of mutual love and understanding. Unlike other poets, he highlights the importance of friendship between identical sexes. Friendship and love which have

sustained our culture in difficult times occupy an important place in his poetic domain. Evidently, then, each of these four poets portrays familial relationships and other human bonds in accordance with what he or she has experienced in life.

The distinctiveness of a culture is best reflected in its landscape and milieu. In Ramanujan's poetry, there are some icons of Indian setting, depicting the various modes of life of our people, their problems and hardships. Of course, there are numerous descriptions of, and allusions to, rituals and customs of snake-worship, child-marriage, mother's extreme fondness for her children and her self-sacrificing nature, the hypocrisy of the people in sexual matters, the traditional Hindus' extreme detachment and non-violence. Indian landscape finds its elaborate poetic expression in Mahapatra's poetry. The eastern coast, the incessant rains, dirt and filth, temples and priests, flowers and trees, burning ghats, dirty river banks, fish scales and the like not only capture the modes of life of a people but also portray certain traditions that landscape provides a significant backdrop in his poetry and serves as objective correlative to human experience. So far as his milieu is concerned, his focus remains on the hardships of common people, the exploitation of women, and the rot and decay in the socio-cultural life of the whole nation. In Kamala Das, the social milieu is limited to her own exploitation in a male-dominated world. At times, she shows her awareness of general exploitation of women. The milieu she depicts is heavy with all-round hardships and exploitation iconized in the dance of the eunuchs, the slow-moving life of the farmers, the weary herdsman, etc. In Randhan, the distinctive Indian landscape comes out alive in beautiful icons of rainy seasons, flowers and trees, the starry sky, silent noons and nights. The forces of nature get endowed with attributes of human beings in his poetry in a similar way as in Mahapatra's poetry.

The changes that have come about in the contemporary Indian social scene have also affected these poets deeply. Though Ramanujan habitually puts everything in the historical framework, he portrays vividly the fast changing social scenario in India in our times, with his focus on the collapse of domestic harmony, adultery, political corruption and hypocrisy.

Mahapatra expresses his anguish over the attitude of the liberated city woman, sexual exploitation, growing poverty, hunger, dirt and filth in our towns and cities. Kamala Das, though a highly individualized poet, gives vent to the voice of the newly liberated Indian woman. Perhaps for the first time in Indian English poetry, she projected a rebellious image of woman ready to challenge the male-oriented world and claim her rightful place in society, her uninhibited accounts of extra-marital affairs caused a sort of stir in prudish Indian society. Even now only a few critics realize it to be a subterfuge. For novelty and a plea of an exploited woman for love and honour. In some poems, particularly in *America with Love* and *Loose Ends*, Ranchan, too, portrays the changing face of Indian society by focusing on the pub-culture, free sex, adultery and alienation in human relationships.

There are many things in common in the use of icons in the poetry of these four poets. In Ramanujan and Mahapatra, the poetic mode is mainly imagistic. Whereas images formed of metaphors abound in Ramanujan, there is an abundance of descriptive images in Mahapatra. In the poetry of Kamala Das and Som P. Ranchan, images are as important as statements. In Kamala Das, there is no conscious striving for using images in ironic perspective to work out ambiguities in the manner of the modernists. In Ranchan, traditional imagery abounds and acquires new meanings in different contexts. As in Mahapatra, forces of nature acquire human traits. Nature, in fact, is the chief source of icons in the poetry of these poets.

The very fact that an Indian chooses to write in English pre-supposes an interaction between two different cultures. This interaction may lead to a synthesis or confusion or ambiguity. In case of Ramanujan, this interaction takes place in the fusion of techniques derived from native and foreign poetic traditions. When these techniques are used to treat a purely Indian experience, the result is not always happy. Too much dependence upon irony in Ramanujan makes his poetry excessively cerebral and at times ambiguous. But it is cross-culture interaction that lends to Ramanujan's poetry a remarkable balance between the ephemeral and the permanent, the abstract and the tangible, the rational and the sentimental (such as in "Self-Portrait" and "Of Mothers, among other things"). Mahapatra's poetry offers

another instance of bi-culturism. Though a Christian, Mahapatra has close affinity with the native traditions. His poetry imbibes a conflict arising out of his affiliation to two diverse cultures, and so is steeped in uncertainties, doubts and ambiguities. In Kamala Das, the native traditions come into conflict with those associated with the West. Her rebellious tone against male-oriented world and her longing for total freedom in her poetry are suggestive of non-Indian modes of living. Opposed to these her nostalgia for joint family tradition, search for ideal love, familial and maternal leanings are distinct traits of Indian female psyche. In Ranchan, the cross-cultural fertilization takes place at many levels. Ideas from different religions, cultures and philosophies meet in a unique synthesis in his poetry.

On the textual evidence, it becomes clear that Ramanujan is a poet of the family circle. Though he tries to put his experience in historical perspective, he fails to capture the epical sweep and the glory of Indian culture and heritage. The sweeping changes that have overtaken Indian ways of life find only casual mention in his poetry. In contrast, Mahapatra's portrayal of Indian culture is far more adequate and realistic. Though he remains stuck in a sort of cultural conflict, he is able to iconize the various facets of contemporary Indian life and culture. The poetic world of Kamala Das is intensely personal and limited. Though she is a rebel against the female stereotypes in our culture, her icons capture the essence of Indian psyche in general. Ranchan, in comparison with these poets, shows a much more comprehensive vision. He responds passionately to the various dimensions of Indian culture, its past glory and its present decay. His poetry is truly Indian as it powerfully expresses and affirms Indian culture.

Each of these poets has made significant contribution to Indian English poetry. Ramanujan's singular contribution lies in according primacy to technique. He shows how even a traditional theme can be treated with sophistication. Jayanta Mahapatra offers a typical instance of a modern poet who can best exploit all the available poetic vision and sweep of thoughts. Kamala Das may be credited with creating a suitable climate for honest confessional poetry by women poets in India. Ranchan's poetry promises much to the coming generation of poets. On the

thematic level it shows that poetry need not confine itself to the lower level of consciousness, merely physical or tangible. It should rather strive to reach the higher realms of consciousness, and portray higher truths of existence.

Finally, Ramanujan, Mahapatra, Kamala Das and Ranchan may be viewed as representative modern poets. In spite of the rootlessness, Ramanujan and Mahapatra affirm their Hindu heritage. Kamala Das is a rebel, and yet she reveals her love for Indian culture and her longing for some of its lost traditions and values. Despite his expatriate background, like that of Ramanujan, Ranchan's poetic affirmation of cultural ideals is powerful. Perhaps no other modern Indian English poet is so sincere and genuine in search of lost traditions and values as these poets seem to be.

Dialogue as Meditation: Som Ranchan's Mother Sharada and i

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Mother Sharada and i (1980) along with the first published Christ and i (also 1980 and by Writers' Workshop) fall in a rather unconventional unexplored genre of the Indian poetic tradition. These poems are in the genre of dialogues with divine personages, demi-gods or wisdom figures. Through interaction and dialogue, the poet tries to refine his relationship with them as also with his own psyche and self. Both the poems, thus, come to embody the poet's struggle to know himself and through dialogues meditate on the higher beings. In the process, the poet remorselessly analyses himself.

In this paper, however, I will restrict myself to Mother Sharada and But before I do that a prefatory note on the dialogue tradition would be entirely in place.

I may point out at the outset that there is nothing absolutely revolutionary in Ranchan's dialogue genre. Dialogue paradigm is used by all of us – we often dialogue with ourselves, our residues, our failures and frustrations. Ranchan tries to use this axiomatic fact, psychologically verified, for purposes of his growth and individuation. All that he does is to concretize an abstract higher self and dialogue with it. Consequently, Mother Sharada becomes an archetypal higher being in Ranchan, with whom the 'I' of the poem, the lower self, dialogues. Dialogue is, moreover, an accepted ancient way of interaction and meditation. In poetry, however, it is not much explored and used. To a poet, it affords an opportunity to assimilate by observing, and understanding the life and ways of divine personages, while dialogue allows an active relationship and a strategy through which he can introject their dynamised charged energies through interaction into himself.

Ranchan's dialogues with Christ and Mother Sharada are attempts on the part of his protagonist with a shadow-infested and complex-ridden psyche to venture into higher

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consciousness. In this attempt, his protagonist is not a passive recipient. He is eager to 'know' and realize what he sees in them. He actively invokes, communicates, relates and communes with the archetypal divine powers in passionate intense dialogues and makes conscious efforts to assimilate their surcharged energy.

The genre because of its inherent complexities has, of course, had but few takers. Ezra Pound in his *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1917) was probably the first to use this form. Sextus Propertius was a Roman poet of the 1st century B.C. Pound engages the ancient poet in dialogue and tries to understand his times and his life through the common bond of poetry. In paying homage to Propertius, Pound looks at his own times and as such his poem becomes a work of self-justification concerned with the fate of poets in the age unsympathetic to his art. John Berryman who was inspired by Pound's Propertius wrote *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, commemorating a long dead poet of the 17th century. Berryman through his dialogues with Bradstreet tries to understand her gifts as woman, wife, mistress and mother. He also explores her psychic processes, sorrows, and passions. In order to participate in her life and sufferings, the poet Berryman makes love to her. The last four stanzas of the coda are the poet's anguished passionate outburst at the burial of Mistress Ann Bradstreet.

This is, however, not to say that Pound and Berryman have used dialogue form as mediation exactly as Ranchan does. The former do engage them in dialogues but since none of them is a wisdom figure, their dialogues do not rise above the daily quotidian worlds of joys, failures and frustrations. With Ranchan, however, the dialogues are in the saguna and saakar worship of the saints of god in his attempts to integrate the divine attributes of the gods in his psyche. It may be added that with Hindus and Buddhists archetypal realization and visualization of deities is common practice. Even in Christianity the devotees meditate on the archetype through the saints of god who act as mediators between the archetype and the sadhak.

In the poem, *Mother Sharada* and i, through a curious enmeshing of religion into poetry, Ranchan invokes the Mother as a manifestation of the Eternal Feminine. He invokes her as

Annapurna, Demeter (12), Jagaddhatri (12), and Isis (15). In terms of functional manifestation, these goddesses are the goddesses of earth's fertility and are great givers. Moreover, Annapurna and Jagaddhatri are Indian; Demeter is Greek while Isis is Egyptian name of the goddesses of earth and corn: by invoking Mother Sharada with these names Ranchan links her with the Archetypal Feminine, the "Numinosum Tremendum" (18) as he calls it. At several places in the poem, the poet visualizes her as a "Primitive Mother" (42). According to Erich Neumann, the character of a primitive (or Elementary Feminine) Mother is characterized by the functions of giving, nourishing, bearing, protecting, releasing, and leading from darkness to light. In the ancient sculptures, she is envisaged as a huge vessel with the mouth conspicuously absent. This is significant because to the Primitive Mother a mouth is unnecessary--she possesses everything in the abundance of her vessel. She is not a devourer of the riches of life, but a giver.

It is the 'giver' aspect of Mother Sharada that Ranchan stresses most. The protagonist notes how the mother fed, nay, "tricked" (32) Ramakrishna her spouse into eating, fed daily the thronging multitudes at their Dakshineswar ashram (14) and worked for the starving millions to relieve their hunger and misery when famine struck Bengal in 1905. Not only human beings even the cow received "succulent tall grass" (12) from her hands. This sustenance, individually and collectively, blessed one and all with her loving concern--she blessed dacoits, beggars, lunatics, gurus, monks, and all those who visited her. She "initiated literally thousands of disciples" (41) initiated them into the order, into the blissful pure life that Hindu religion exhorts one to lead. She is thus seen as a "pitcher of bliss" (13), an "immaculate fount of purity" (14), giving food to the hungry, giving light to the ignorant, and giving divine blessings to those lost and to those seeking.

Ranchan twins the primitive and the transformative mother rightly into a mana figure who has the power to transform the humble food into something divine and blessed. She is not simply a mother happy in nursing and feeding. She is one who adds and gives herself in the food that she serves. The twinning of the two polarities and dimensions is exemplified in the

following passage:

The Primitive Mother does not give just
food
She gives the whole of herself
In nourishing her children
Alchemizing the vegetables, lentils, greens,
with the accent of her feelings
Waking up in the dishes flavours occult. (42)

The poet emphasizes her mothering, her tenderness, loving concern, and her uncontaminated ungrudging giving of herself to all her children. Yet she is discriminating in her “litany of relationships” (45). She does not relate with one and all as a mother. The poet notes different shapes and modalities of her behaviour—now a daughter, a wife, a daughter-in-law, and then a mother to the unfed, a tender benefactor to the famine struck, and an understanding companion to her sadhak husband, a benignant initiatrix to the seeker, and an agent mediating between the archetype for the lost (like dacoits and drunkards—Ajmat and Ghose). To the poet, she offers a relationship—the relation of a mother and an older sister. But she does not want to be held or fixated in any relationship—she has others to take care too:

Don't hold me
And as I lifted my head
Straightening myself
Realizing with a twinge of guilt
That she was to go back to her place
on the dais
To receive the homage of thronging
devotees (19).

Her love is thus for all—though the relation with all is not the same.

This thought brings the discussion to a very important relationship of her life, a relationship to which Ranchan devotes a full section. The section is called “syzygy”—and means an alchemical relationship between two partners where an endless exchange of masculine and feminine attributes take place. Mother Sharada, though illiterate and living a conditioned life of traditional Bengal, and in spite of devoting herself to feeding his

disciples, continued to be an exquisite companion to Ramakrishana. Ranchan envisages the two as actualizing a rare phenomenon in human life – living a syzygy.

The fact of her motherhood
Didn't stop her being companionate
To the naked fakir of a husband
She communed with his presence
Communed with his absence (42).

The psychologists (Jungians in particular) see the mother and the companion face in a woman as antipodal to each other. Yet Mother Sharada lived both the mother and companion role and synthesized successfully the psychologically contrary polarities in one human form. She rose from an inhibited traditional Indian woman to become the archetypal Shakti of a Shiva, Venus of a Mercury and “circulated in the space of their mystic being yoked together as the Androgyné” (31). Ranchan compliments the paradoxically “homely and transcendent” (29) couple, upon growing into each other “like a single soul inviolate In bodies twin” (27) and complementing in such a way that their syzygic relationship could be compared to any cosmic couple. Mother Sharada, a shy woman during Ramakrishna's life time, took on his powerful and indefatigable spirit and carried on, after his death, his mission and his work.

Toni Wolff envisages four functional categories of the Feminine, viz. Mother Hetaira (companion), Amazon (independent), and Medium (divine mother). Mother Sharada, it may be said, to have integrated the Mother and companion faces of the archetype during the life time of the ascetic, and fully realized the two other personalities after his death to become the Sophia Saraswati, the prajna-paramita, the Archetypal Mother Durga. In other words, she became a sublime woman in human form.

In terms of imagery also, Ranchan sees her as an archetypal Sophia figure. He sees her as a tantric srichakra as a “Triangle of diamond light Enclosing hexagonal worlds of fire” (14). In his mind's eye, he sees her as inhabiting the “cave of effulgence” (15), as sitting on “marmoreal steps of a mansion in the sky” (16). It might be noted that in the immediately preceding section, Ranchan sees her occupying a one room hut. “Living-

cum-kitchenette-cum-pantry-cum-bedroom" as he visualizes her filling the vast of the vast sky. In an exquisite lyrical description Ranchan describes the Mother as a supreme supernal being. He writes:

The wind of Heaven has blown off her
garments
Her body now space-clad
Studded with galaxies, stars
Her hair loose, unfurled, dark
Darker than the dark, interstellar spaces
Plangent
Resonant
In the heart's deep
Aye
On a moonlit night
She sits, now giggling, now crying
Now hushed in trance
On marmoreal steps
That rise tier upon tier (16)

The Mother here is not only visualized in a human form but also as filling the vast space in the star-spangled sky. She thus becomes more than mother earth--she is here envisaged as a mother of the universe with her loose hair bringing about the night. In a latter section Ranchan sees her as Sakambri, the mother of plants. She cries and giggles like a little girl, and then passes off into a trance and the poet visualizes her in the vast expanse of the sky. She is thus seen as a blend of the concrete and cosmic, human and divine, as an archetypal figure, the Eternal Feminine, which is "spacious as the sky."

It is in relation to this amalgam of both human and divine attributes of the Mother that the poet-protagonist visualizes himself and his stature. Ranchan's protagonist is an Everyman wallowing in the mire of carnality, materiality, jealousy, anger, pride, paranoia, aggression, and so on. He lives in an ambrosial world of self-delusion and fosters exaggerated notions about his "giving" and magnanimity. In comparison to the mother, who is an unassuming and ungrudging giver, the poet-protagonist realizes the falsity of his misconceptions:

In my mind's eye I am hot-rodder
I have an exaggerated grandiose
Image of my giving and generosity
I have nourished it carefully through the
years
To compensate for the hunger and the
hankering
Which says give me give me
Give me this give me that (54).

He realizes he has an inflated ego, a pueristic Brahmin complex with its inbuilt expectations (55), a "poor man's mentality", "a bungling ineptitude" (54), which he does not like being pierced, his overblown expectations "in terms of appreciation-validation and compound interest" (52).

As he dialogues with the mother and observes her, he realizes what he does not have in comparison to her richness and plenitude in spite of her humble abode and mundane poverty. He realizes that he contaminates his giving by imposing conditions and provisos.

I get strong redemptive impulses to give
But somewhere along the transmission line
Giving gets stopped thwarted
Diluted Hedged with qualifications
Conditions and sub-clauses (53)

The mother accepts him, takes him, mothers him and teaches him to purify his giving. She tells him not to belittle the generosity and giving of others, to cherish a good deed by another towards him. The mother exhorts him to come out of his ego-bound shadow-nurtured world and try and look beyond the personal. The Mother says:

The thing is to respond and reciprocate
Block neither the giving nor the taking
Drop the ego
Drop the mind
Sleep, my baby sleep (56-57).

This is the Mother's message to Everyman through the poet to burst the barriers of egotistic "I" and see himself beyond into the transpersonal.

Ranchan's protagonist bemoans his "moribund heart defunct for centuries" (13), a heart which has lost the vital capacity to relate emotionally because of too many worldly hankerings. But each time he tries to involve himself consciously, uses Eros in the service of logos, with a priori motives, he runs "smack into complexes expectations value conditionings theirs and mine" (44). He comes to the mother for some "tips and techniques scripts and games" (44), which to harness in order to relate, to involve, to be in the midst of the love of others. Mother Sharada advises him to drop the ego and plunge, not consciously, but feelingfully, passionately, impersonally. She tells him not to use the head in order to rationalize and explain relationships but to use heart and relate:

Remember little one
It is the heart for you . . .
Remember always and forever
That in the path to the Mother
Logos is subordinate to Eros (48-49)

Ranchan's protagonist wishes, therefore upon realization of what he lacks in comparison to the mother, the gift of Eros (64) "the heart relationship" (62). He begs of the Mother a gift, an ability to relate which the mother grants without a hitch:

Be Kalika
Eros in the heart

Kalika incidentally is the affectionate diminutive of Goddess Kali who is regarded as adyashakti (the goddess of cosmic vibrations). In other words she wants him to be a mini-Kali and be involved dynamically in the life and existence of whosoever may come into his life.

The protagonist on observing and conversing with the unassuming, humble, and pure Madonna figure realizes more and more about himself. He realizes he is a manipulator who would not shrink from using his relationship with the mother to create an illusion of holiness around himself to impress people around. The interaction with the holy Mother brings the protagonist the much-needed awareness of his lower self together with warnings against his gross and phony ideas:

Time and again you came . . .
To warn me of my illusory inflation

To warn me of my gross contaminations
Lust and anger
To warn me against my grandiose
Exhibitionistic flamboyances
My love of abstraction, the misuse thereof
My phony peace... (73).

The protagonist learns through dialogue with the Mother about his weaknesses and surrenders himself at her feet. The surrender of an egocentric to the Mother is important. The Mother with her touching humility converts his *asuric viritti* into self-realization. The poet wails at her feet:

Mother Sharada, Saraswati, Sophia
Forgive this demon son of yours
Who projects his demonism even now on
others?
Circumstance, on beings from outer space...
(74)

The poet protagonist realizes himself and thus breaks free from the old self or at least tries to turn a new leaf in life. The poet here attempts to integrate and introject the subliminal self of the mother by discarding his own deluded and pathological self.

Seeing the powerful relationship of the Mother with her spouse, the poet tries to understand why human relations fail and why is it that the frustrated modern man ends up on the analyst's couch. The poet tries to explore and find out why the modern woman does not relate to her man as she did. The Mother's answer is simple but full of messianic undertones. She gives an oracular message to the chauvinist male nurtured in patriarchal set-ups to transcend his egotistic expectations.

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Seeing the powerful relationship of the Mother with her spouse, the poet tries to understand why human relations fail and why is it that the frustrated modern man ends up on the analyst's couch. The poet tries to explore and find out why the modern woman does not relate to her man as she did. The Mother's answer is simple but full of messianic undertones. She gives an oracular message to the chauvinist male nurtured in patriarchal set-ups to transcend his egotistic expectations. Ranchan's handling of the unique technique of dialogue to meditate is a constant practically in all his dialogue poem from Christ and I to guru Rinpoche Padam Sambhava, published in 2011. The genre began in 1980. He has perfected it through a dozen epics.

Mystical Elements in Ranchan's *O'er Travell'd Trails*

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Vipin Pal Singh

Som Prakash Ranchan is a poet of many voices. The note of mystical themes is noticeable in his writings. The phenomenal world, for a mystic, remains an illusion, a dream, a magic spell (Halbfass 59 - 60). As we know, a mystical experience may come through visions or ecstasies, or through meditation. This experience of Reality can be extroversive or introversive. The term 'mysticism', with its root (lexical) in the Greek term 'muein' means 'to remain silent': this implies not only switching off the external world, but also silencing the mind. In *O'er Travell'd Trails*, Ranchan seems to be shutting the doors of fleeting senses and passing passions. It appears as if he is going to be self-evident, self-sufficient and self-luminous. Through the purgation of bodily desires and the purification of profaneness of heart and will power, Ranchan discovers the illumination of mind, which enables him to pursue the union with the Absolute, leading to a state of ecstasy and a state of bliss. The experience, thus, is vividly joyous, finely intellectual and fully divine. It is also distinctly personal and evidently universal at the same time, which sets in a life of reception, transformation, transfiguration and continuous living in that state of rhapsodic exaltation.

It is often believed that superficial failures in the ordinary existence provide a mere chink or fissure for the bursting out of the hidden soul, the concealed divine spark. But such failures are not always necessary, if the spiritual thirst is there without any measurable occasion for failure. There are some moments in Ranchan's poetry when his soul has touched the infinite and has become intensely conscious of it through illumination of joy. Ranchan's spiritual journey reveals that he has assessed the truth of his beatific visions by his own observation and found them capable of leading him to the brink of a transcendental realization of the Supreme Reality. Since both the religious person and the mystic aim at communion with God by

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transcending the mundane limitations, there is no conflict between the mystical mindset and the religious reckoning. Mysticism is, however, inseparably linked with religion. Religion in its highest place is also coloured by mysticism. Mysticism thus is not a system of beliefs, but a method of approaching life. Eventually, a mystic seeks ecstatic union with the Divine. The path to that union is usually developed by purgation (of desires), purification (of the will), illumination (of the mind), and unification (of one's will or being with the Divine). Mystic experience has therefore, been said to be unique for each individual. These simple and sincere verses attest the mystic vigor and the urge for divine communion in Ranchan's poetry:

You are light years above me
Eons ahead
Give me a wee bit of your light
A smidgeon of your sweetness
To last the fag end of my life
My inside is tender as coconut
I cannot break the hard shell of a head
Bake it, mother
Let the gooey milk flow
From the broken heart's fount (Mother
Sharda)

Ranchan is essentially a transcendentalist, who integrates all the forces of mind into a unity and reconciles himself with the community and with the totality of experience as a spiritual system. Evelyn Underhill accepts mysticism as 'the science of the ultimate' (Underhill 86). Eventually after all, mysticism is not a mere pursuit of supernatural joy, rather a highly specialized and active search for the Reality, which is always an object of exploration culminating in the living union with the One and the Absolute. Nevertheless, such totality is always full of disharmonies and tensions. Ranchan, however, by his strenuous contemplation resolves these disharmonies and tensions into a harmony and balance, a meaningful poise, where all relativities merge into 'a still point', where being and nothingness embrace each other, where to be is also in a sense not to be. As he says in *Enantiodromia*:

He could never imagine
That a day will come
When the outside that he had prized--job
Colleagues, social life--
Would suddenly cease to charge
Replenish him--
That he would turn to his inside
For healing and insight

A literary person is as much a product of his society as his art is a product of his own reaction to life. Literature, as we know is also affected by the physical, cultural, social, political, psychological and literary background of a country. In this context, Ranchan appears as an iconoclastic poet difficult to be defined only in relation to the dictates of a single faith. Self-transcendence, as we know, is a determining feature of all mystical experience. Ranchan feels that the self is to be transcended since it blocks the mystic from the divine influx. In *The Man Said* he says:

“Mind must occupy itself with its noise
How can a noisy mind meditate
No way” he said
Only when the mind is dropped
Can freedom come
The first and the last
the worst part of the mind be
to solidify its noise into stereotypes
be so attached to them as to kill
the influx of fresh experience
awareness without concept

Ranchan does not make an artificial division between humans and nature, but he feels that the two have an inner bond of kinship and are intensely united by a living inner principle. From nature this love is diverted towards God and from God to humanity at large. The poet is not so much worried at all for his own salvation: he rather prays for the whole world's redemption from misery, greed and heartlessness. Ranchan desires to set himself free from material anxieties. He pines for spiritual heights, and invokes Mother Sharda:

I will not burden you

With my material anxieties
My relational messes
Them I'll handle myself
With whatever it takes:
Wit, heart work, trickery
But no headway can I make
Where it really matters
Without your grace
Begun the count down.

- (Mother Sharda)

Poetry is not a mere matter of feeling or expression; it is the creation of form. Ideas take on shape by some hidden, subtle skill at work within the poet. This creative power is the origin of poetry. Perceptions, feelings, or language are only its raw materials. The language of mystic poetry is usually symbolic. Symbols and images are the products of a poet's psychic process. With the help of images and symbols, Ranchan gives the essence of what communication really means:

Communicate
In heaps
In its absence blanks flourish
Are filled with the blight of inferences
Spawn of projection
Communication is not exchange
Of platitudes
It is soul-making
Engenders growth

-(Communication)

Ranchan never looks upon nature as something hostile to man. Like all mystics he is a firm believer in the essential unity of man and the external universe. Nature and man are, in the Vedantic terminology, Prakriti and Purusha, the two aspects of the Absolute. Meditation on Nature or an aspect of Nature leads to realization of God. Nature, according to Ranchan is the melody of God. It ennobles man. Man is ultimately bound up with nature. That is why his metaphysical body doesn't become a tomb from which the soul has to be liberated. The body is the sign and utterance of soul. Though Ranchan is a firm believer in the union of man and God, he has no faith in absolute identity.

Ranchan is a dualist who believes in a mysterious identity in difference. That is why in his poetry, there is a constant synthesis of opposites. Thus freedom means freedom from bondage, but it can be realised only through bondage. Just as the string is bound to the harp and it produces music so also life realizes its freedom in the midst of bonds, just as the string and the harp realise it in being bound to each other. See, how nicely the very idea is expressed in the following sweet lyric from *Dharmalochans Abound*:

Yet despite the mimic manic-depressive
routine
Our life, meek meek, mechanical
With mild adrenalin
It never occurs to us
To change the inane script of games no end
And tune to the verities of recoil and rage
Beginnings of tranquility.

Ranchan's poetry encompasses many ideas but behind all these, the essential theme is the longing and searching for peace and quiet contemplation. He has the restless urge and will to realize the divine being in the beauty of nature, and this is evident in his poem *Mountains*:

Perhaps
There is nothing comparable to the mountains
They dip, curve, volute, rise
Hide a thousand shapes
.....
You wonder how something so solid
Hung and massy
Can harbour such a panorama of sights
Such a delicacy of myriad life.

Mysticism, truth and simplicity combined with humility invest the poems of Ranchan. Like the English Poet Wordsworth and the Nobel Laureate Tagore, Ranchan uses everyday words and idioms of the common man in his poetry. He breaks away from the mode of artificial expression, stereotyped personification, uninspired imageries, and rhetorical arguments. He has reshaped his poetry by the free play of emotion and expression, as is clearly visible in Feeling vs Bhava:

We do know what feeling is:
Its depth, curve, volume
How it refers to the self and the other
In a clasp enduring
Deathless sometimes
As far Bhava
It alters the body's alchemy.

Ranchan has woven philosophical and metaphysical ideas in simple, lyrical poetry. Colloquial speech makes his language earthy, vibrating with potent emotion, ranging from firm supplication to righteous fury, and from utter submission to indignant ethical declaration. In this connection we may say that Ranchan's contribution to literature is supreme.

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Multifarious Manifestations in Som Ranchan's Vajra Guru Rimpoche Padamsambhava: An Encounter with his Mystique

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Prem Singh Negi

Buddhism is believed to be the world's fifth largest religion. There are also signs that it is one of the fastest growing religions. It is defined as a 'philosophy and psychology wrapped around a moral code of mind training'. Many people follow it with the aim of self transformation by achieving altered states of consciousness through meditation, which offers [potential for personal growth, spiritual advancement through the conquest of psychological obstacles and possibility of greater happiness and in quest for inner calm. Buddha taught that meditation combined with observation of moral code and development of wisdom is path to enlightenment.

Tantric Buddhism is an offshoot of Mahayana, which evolved in Tibet from Indian Vajrayana teachings which is third major school of Indian Buddhism. Tantric Buddhism is based on scriptures called Tantras which emphasise technique to effect rapid enlightenment.

Som Ranchan's Vajra Guru Rimpoche Padamsmbhava (2011) is an epic poem with 52 cantos covering 112 pages. It is a dialogue epic on Guru Rimpoche Padamsmbhava, a Tantric Mahasiddha from Oddiyana who came to Tibet in late eighth century and was instrumental in the development of early Tibetan Buddhism. Guru Padamsambhava was invited to Tibet to exorcise the demons of the indigenous Bon religion from around the site. This being accomplished the monastery of '*bsam-yas*' was above thirty miles from Lhasa. It is difficult to estimate his stay in Tibet but he left a profound impact on the Buddhist tradition. Generally he is regarded as the founder of *Nyingmapa School* of Tibetan Buddhism. This school has an extensive and authoritative collection of text in which his biography and the *Tibetan book of dead* (Bardo Thodrol) is also included.

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Som Ranchan is a poet litterateur, critic, and therapist. He is an international man of letters with an amazing interest in mythology, folklore, personality studies, religion, spirituality and philosophy (Rajiv, 2008). For R. Massey Professor Ranchan is an unusual combination of rigorous scholarship, high academic standard, critical vision and exacting authorship. No doubt Professor Ranchan is an eminent Indian English poet known for his prolificacy, variety, depth and magic. He has authored several volumes of verse and also authored books on religion, spirituality, myth, folklore, psychology, therapy and political theory. In addition to it he has authored a good number of critical books on Walt Whitman, J.D. Salinger, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, W.B. Yeats and Ruskin Bond. He has also supervised 22 PhDs.

Present study is an effort to reach some level of understanding of one of his recently published work. It is an attempt to explore the multifarious manifestations in Vajra Guru Rimpoche Padamsambhava which is an epic poem on the sage spiritual teacher who was thoroughly conversed and skilled in tantric Buddhism. In an encounter with his mystique the poet actuate an inner illumination which invariably leads the attainment of eternal peace. The epic commences with a soulful invocation to the Mahasiddha:

Padamsambhava
 You suddenly appeared on a lotus when you
 Were eight
 Like Minerva sprung from the head of the
 Zeus
 Where were you prior to that
 Perhaps, you were in Vyoma
 In boundless space
 Growing with Buddha. (p.6)

Padamsambhava, the tantric master was a prominent figure involved in establishing Buddhism in Tibet and give new culture of arts and Gsa-sum (the three roots) to the people of Tibet.

When you come to Tibet
 You blaze trail after trail
 Gave to the host country a new culture
 Of art, dance, meditation, mudra
 Mandala... (p.9)

Vajra Guru is a source of sudden positive energy in the vicinity of which once 'indigence retreat'. Vajra Guru is also a force which can keep one away from all obstacles as he is the key to the problems and suffering of man. He rejuvenates the internal processes of man as also raises his level of consciousness. Vajra Guru is a font of sympathy and compassion for the marginalised and the afflicted. For him it is not the compassion only that will diminish the sorrow and pain but for that it is the amalgamation of action, insight, skill, and mindfulness of thought and feelings which will work. All the deficits of life are curable through the Vajra which also disarms the evil forces:

In due course even suddenly
You will put on Vajra power
To remove obstacles
Disarm the destroyer
Pulverise the demons and djinns
Who desecrate... (p.32)

Vajra is symbolic of cosmos, indestructiveness, strength, energy, transformation, healer, aesthetics, culmination, prajna and wisdom is like a thunderbolt of Lord Indra, Sudarshan Chakra of Lord Vishnu, and Mallet of Lord Hanuman. However, it has its own distinctiveness which make it a creative therapeutic mean since it heals all the incurable maladies, saves one from sudden death, turns victorious in conflict and warfare and work as an antidote against the evil spirits and three poisons like ignorance, hatred and delusion and promote the cardinal virtues:

Vajra culminates in decision delight
In pure insight
Vedana, sanskaras, chetna
Combine, cohere
Into thunderbolt deed... (p. 45)

Canto XXXI reads that Mahasiddha hailed from Oddian, bordering Hindustan. He was lotus born and as he marched ahead in life was adopted by an issueless king as a prince at the age of eight. When he was about to be coronated he emancipated a terminally ill minister with his Vajra ridding him from the body ailments. Banished for the act he transformed into an enlightened being meditating, subjugating cannibals, subduing Dakinis and a prophet is born. The prophet was unidentified in his home town returned to Zahore where he had an affair with princess Mandarva, only to invite the wrath of the king. Escaping several attempts of assassination he moved towards Tibet. The journey to Tibet was another addition to his scholasticism and spirituality. It is believed that he returned to

Oddian in his lasting days where he entered Nirvana.

Dakini known as *Mkha-gra-ma* in Bhoti, which is an enigma, a feminine character that transcends the bounds of time and space at an instant. They signify the bliss and wisdom at the same time depending on the state and time. Dakini can be an ordinary being with a limited degree of spirituality and wisdom against the one's who are fully realised. Dakini represents action, protection, bliss, wisdom and altruism:

Dakinis give to Dhyani Buddhas
Altruistic orientation
They make their light shine in darkness
They turn their sights into lakes
Their feelings into gems...(p. 93)

Compassion, *Karuna*, is the 'law of laws, eternal harmony'. Compassion is identification with an empathy towards lives' many forms. To embrace the concerns of other people and other forms of life is to work for the benefit of all life:

Compassion is not just grieving
Empathizing
Quite often it involves
Easing some one's death
Easing him, her to leave
For the next world
For a better life
less poisoned existence... (p. 96)

Bodhdhichit,' the enlightened mind ', a Boddhistava attains a mental state called Bodhdhichit. This is a motivation or decision to become enlightened but not for personal salvation. The enlightened mind possesses infinite compassion and seeks salvation for all other sentient beings, and help other beings to progress along the path to *nirvana*. Bodhdhichit compassionate motivation to attain enlightenment not for once own salvation but solely to benefit others, whatever they might have done to cause them to remain trapped in *samsara*:

Is intrinsic and ubiquitous
Except that it is clouded with ignorance
Lust, anger, greed, pride and spite
Which you have to dispel
And remove
For compassion to shine... (p. 109)

In his dialogue epic the consciousness of the poet and his endeavour at communion with the divine finds a tranquillity and serenity in attaining the *vidam*, which is part and parcel of Tibetan psychology and a symbolic construct. During the vast

space of over five decades Som ranchan has produced dozens of volumes beginning with *Splintered Mirror* to *Vajraguru Rimpoche Padamsambhava* reflecting seriously over the elements of truth and spirituality.

With the help of metaphors and references from various languages (Sanskrita, Bhoti, Greek, Latin) for example *Yidam, Bardo, Mandala, Guru, Dakin, Dakini, Vajra, Prajna, Parmita, Minerva, Zeus, Vyoma, Mudra, Dharampala, Mahakala, Kalpas, Dhvani, Amitabha, Karma, Vibhooti, Padamsana, Pitra Loka, Naga Loka, Indra Loka, Ghasoot., Bhadra, Boddhichit, Dybbuks, Shring, Hring, Kling, Aing, Hung, Phat, Swaha, Virocana, Upaya, Vedana, Chetna, Sanskaras* to achieve the goal of his meditative poem and to foreground the invisible things visible through his skill in use of tantric symbology and in depth psychology which makes a cosmic vision of Vajra Guru Padamsambhava and decoding the codified, compressed, condensed, complexed, multi-layered mantra to an intelligible level. Finally, the wisdom flows through his verse by achieving the state of perfect bliss representing conjunctio dance of Dakin and Dakini symbolizing male compassionate action and female wisdom which is the essence of the individuation and omnipresent life force.

Om Ah Hum Vajra Guru Padme Sidhe Hum.

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Interviews and Recollections

A Journey with Dr Ranchan

Conifers Call
Shimla Journal of Poetry and Criticism
Vol 2 No 2 Sep. 2011

Rajiv Khandelwal

I have had the pleasure of knowing Dr Som Ranchan since 1996, when my elder daughter was studying in a boarding school in Shimla

Those were the days when I used to visit Shimla regularly on a monthly basis and on one of such trips I was accompanied by my friend Mr. Anil Sharma. Both of us at that time, viz a viz as poetry lovers or writers would fall in the genre of what is called in the Music World as 'bathroom singers'.

Shimla Mall Road boasts of a Book stall that sells antique, rare books, maps and such stuff and has the distinction of being visited by Indira Gandhi – we being book lovers decided to go and visit the book stores on the Mall Road

Therein, I happened to come across a book written on "Dr Som Ranchan". I gathered from the book that Dr Som Ranchan was a poet and lived very close to Shimla. On an impulse – motivated more by the desire to see, how a poet looks like – I gathered enough courage to go and meet him with my friend Anil Sharma.

Dr Ranchan met us and we had a normal social interaction, with both me and my friend reading a couple of poems of the caliber that most youngsters write when they reach the age of 16 or so.

Dr Ranchan politely heard us out and autographed the book that I had bought on him by writing "Dear Rajiv - farther, farther, farther, sail" both me and my friend were highly impressed by Dr Ranchan and were highly the motivational aura he seemed to exude.

This meeting with Dr Ranchan was decidedly the turning point of my creative life.

On returning home, in that same motivated frame of mind, I wrote a couple of poems and sent it to Dr Ranchan for his

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opinion. Remember, till this point in life, I did not know that I could write anything, this was in November 1996. Though a very busy man, he took out the time to read my poems and made inspirational comments on them.

"My dear Rajiv,

Imagine my surprise on hearing from you. I could not have thought in my wildest imagination that half an hour interaction, mostly social, some emotional around your daughter and a few poems would yield such a promising harvest in such a short time. I have read your poems carefully and with pleasure and come to the conclusion that you have the blessings of the muse.

P.S. It is true that I'm busy, very, very indeed, but I always find time for poets in the making. More on hearing from you".

Nothing else can convey confirm the passion and the dedication that Dr Ranchan has towards nurturing the budding talents of even non-descript persons. He is a generous teacher. He openly shares his energies and becomes a catalyst in one's own transformation.

This was November 1996 and in January 1997 I came in contact with another doyen of Indian English Poetry and he commented on my writing.

"As raga and scale for music, choreography for dance, perspective for painting, blueprint for architecture, so prosody (strict and flexible) is needed for poetry. Please learn the basics, because poetry is not chopped up prose".

If this had been Dr Ranchan's reaction during our first meeting – would I have dared pen anything?

The greatness about Dr Ranchan is that he believes in the potentials within each of us and if we are willing – he is tirelessly willing to become guide and mentor with enthusiasm.

In February 97 – Dr Ranchan wrote in response to some poems I sent to him. Excerpts of his letter are as under:

I am sending toady by registered mail your packet of twelve thirteen poems, considerably corrected, somewhat commented upon to facilitate your becoming a reader of your own poems.

Dear Rajiv, creativity is a quest, the initiatory period is

long, arduous, the return is non utilitarian. If one stays with it, one becomes a sage, more than a Guru who confines himself to matters spiritual"

"From your poem, one in which word finally is found through the pregnant cow. Read some material on the archetype of the great Mother. Since you're psychology-inclined, You may read Jung on it, to begin with".

I was and am still overwhelmed by the greatness of Dr Ranchan – which should be apparent from the letter he wrote to me in April 97. Excerpts from the letter as under:

"Thank you for being thankful. But don't be over grateful. I like to serve the development processes especially creative".

Dr Ranchan despite the enormous creative work that he has done is a man's son's an ego, and is a man free of arrogance.

By May 97, I had a manuscript ready for publication – Excerpts from a letter Dr Ranchan wrote to me should be of interesting read.

"Let me begin my enquiring the progress of your manuscript. Your last letter accompanying your manuscript was touching. Believe me, I enjoyed the time I spent with you correcting your poems. You don't have to be that beholden. I'm glad to be of some use. It brings me in touch with people like you. What more can one ask for?"

Please continue writing.

In his letter of July 97, Dr Ranchan writes:

"I hope you are continuing with the Muse with zest and delicatessen".

I am sure that you will not find it out of place when I say that Dr Ranchan has the unique gift of inspiring others that is coupled with his immense patience, like that of a coach who has the time to build excellence or like the Bollywood director mentoring the hour glass beauty, reeking of low artistry.

Just his presence fires the dormant creativity inside a person – I am a clear example of this, for, either he has the academician's knack of knowing a persons comatose aptitude or he has the great ability of nurturing a person's hibernating skills, nurturing it from a seed to a flowering, shadowing tree. This is something that I can not confirm, because the answer has eluded

me, all these years – all I can say is that I was a man of mathematics and Science, an engineer by education and Dr Ranchan's association stoked my mediocrity and I have been able to pen some poems that some critics consider as a milestone in my creative journey.

In his presence – I have always felt a motivational aura – that gives a push to the creative slump and after just a sitting with him – that could be just over a cup of coffee or talking on any subject unrelated to poetry - I always felt that fresh ideas inspirations were just a thought away.

Hesiod the Greek oral poet referred to nine muses, while Homer, revered as the greatest ancient Greek epic poet said there was just one muse – whatever the scholars may say, for me he is the muse of all muses – a creative catalyst

They say that Great men are hard to find, but I have found Dr Ranchan

I and my family and my friends have had the rare pleasure of interacting with Dr Ranchan on a personal level, during his visits and his stays with us at Agra. We have found him to be an unpretentious man, who is completely at home with whatever comfort and discomfort is dished out to him.

He is equally at home, talking Kitchen dishes with the ladies of the house with a profound curiosity as he is discussing my friend; some of them wholly undistinguished; personal problems with the explorers desire. What is signatorial about him is that he has no fear of forming new friendships and can relate with ease with people from different persuasions and whoever he interacts with – he can interact with them at their level of knowledge and in spite of the academic laurels he has received he still conveys to the people with whom he socialises that he is still teachable and can grow in knowledge with people who are nowhere close to his stature. To him, evenings spent with other people in other people's houses are just not dull as ditch water. He just does not exude the aura of a man who may have “arrived” and been labeled as “a scholar, a literary critic, a revisionist of Indian culture, literary and secular personalities”

His simplicity is depicted by the letter that he wrote in April 2000 after one of his visits to my house in Agra. Excerpts of the letter as under:

"Remember me to the Shridi sai Bhakta and the golfer. My emotional images adhering to them".

Being an intent attentive listener, never critical - his popularity, is clearly indicated from the fact – that when he arrives at Agra even for a short visit, none of my friends ever plead “previous engagements” and really are envious of getting time-share with him.

No matter how he connects with people, he invariably leaves a mark and his charming qualities are indicated by what a friend of mine who has been unable to forget him. He has the following to say about him:

Manishiyon ki Jaan, Gyan ki Pahchan
Shabdon ka Shringar, Ek Dahakta sa Angaar
Kaya se kaachan, Shri Som P Ranchan
Bhavon ki mala ka sumeru, Savayam hi guru
Gambhir aesa ki kanth mein ho garal
Vicharon se Viral, Vayahar se saral

Dr Som Ranchan blazes a path where highways do not run and evidently makes an impact on the people that he comes in contact with. Confucius said “Without knowing the force of words, it is impossible to know men.” and Dr Ranchan has written so much that Literati will probably deconstruct Dr Ranchan for ages. To sum up, I would have to say the following :

Jis tarah sheetal pawan ka anubhav hai
Jis tarah Poonam ki sharad raatri ka aanand hai
Jis tarah Aaditya ke uday ki kiran hai
Jis tarah pratham barish ke samay maati ki sugandh hai
Jis tarah Vasant mein sarson ke lahlahate pushp hain
Jis tarah greeshm mein paharon se girta jharna hai
Jis tarah Samudra ki Gaharai hai

All these can be experienced, but words can fail, when trying to do justice in describing them. The same stands true of the man known as Dr Som P Ranchan

I am personally richer for being associated with this great genius person and icon of creativity and patience.

A Professional and Literary Profile

Canifers Call
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Laxmi Kanan

Professor Som Ranchan is a major talent from Himachal Pradesh. He is a distinguished Professor of English who worked with Indian University for several years; he also has wide experience in University administration, notably as a Dean of the Arts Faculty and of Languages. In spite of an extremely busy professional schedule, Professor Ranchan has been amazingly active as a writer, spanning poetry, criticism, religion, political thought, myth, folklore and other areas in an interesting profusion that defies conventional classification. Not surprising, he has received a number of Fellowships in India and in the USA, all of which have resulted in nearly sixty titles of enduring interest for the Ranchan scholars and for scholars in general alike. Two book-length critical studies of his works, *A Profile in Creativity* and *Poet of Many Voices*, and other ones underscore the critical acclaim earned by the author.

Truly, one may say of Ranchan that he is a Renaissance Man whose wide-ranging interests spill over areas that another writer may consider risky or perilous because of his/her own reasons. But Ranchan is a driven man, a pilgrim visionary, unafraid to step into territories that are new, hitherto unexplored and he has a great capacity to absorb, to ingest, a gift for handling myth, an expansive, fabulatory imagination, together with a tireless innovativeness that takes him to alternate realms of reality in his quest for completion, his poetry and prose weave in the rich strands of this seemingly disparate knowledge and experience in an inextricably synergy, engaging the reader in an inter-active, dialogue mode, the hallmark of the author, where the writer argues with the reader, with himself, with life, all in a friendly banter. It is this encounter, an actual lived encounter between him and life, that lends his works body, substance and soul.

In his books, whether they are books of poetry, fiction or non-fiction, the spirit is essentially creative, where the "Self"

Laxmi Kanan, Novelist and Short Story Writer in Tamil and English

of the author is seen in a growing , participatory action with a transparent clarity. He allows his self to dissolve as much as he allows it to condense in the ceaseless process of unmaking / making , bringing with him a spontaneity , a curiosity and enviably un-spoilt child- like wonder about the world we inhabit. For this reason , the epic mode comes naturally to him . Me and Columbia, a long , Whitmanesque narrative poem with remarkable pace and flow, is an epic as much as the shorter piece Kali is , where his poetry takes on an incantatory cadence . Once again tremendous potential of the "I" together with the hazards of the "ego" come in for a lucid articulation when he takes up the agentie energy of the ego in Swami Vivekananda : Insan- e- kamal where he realizes that one can explore or understand the superordinate world best only " through hints, guesses and dreams " . He can realize because Ranchan the Renaissance Man is also Ranchan that impossible Indian , at once old as the myth that incredibly survives through people for centuries and young as can be , sharing this knowledge with the reader , with the freshness of a first reaction and in a style that is contemporary in tone and diction, in a language that today's reader can relate to. For instance , the affirmation that comes through in the way he identifies society's group souls which reaches the reader with an easy grace : " The godlings are settled in the deepest layers constituting , as it were , a racial deposit" .

Professor Ranchan guided twenty two Ph. Ds. After his retirement in 1992 , he extended his mentorship to at least twenty- five scholars as a service , not only in literature , but also in History and Education . He has also worked on Aurobindo , evolving a way of making the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo an active healing force in one's life. Truly , he is generative with his ideas and altruistic in service . He is indeed an educationist par excellence , in addition to being an innovative litterateur.

Making of a Poet: *Ru ba-ru* with Ranchan

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Roshan Lal Sharma

"My work philosophy consists of stoicism and joy as stoical acceptance of your circumstantial given leads to joy..." (Ranchan)

[As I reached *Bhagwati Niwas* at Sanjauli (where Ranchan lives after his retirement as Professor of English in H.P. University, Shimla), he was seeing off two persons working for 'Keep Shimla Clean' project. After casual greetings we settled for a *ru ba-ru* (face to face) interaction in his study that offers breathtaking view of the mountains overgrown with bluish-green deodars atop which Chail is located. Dressed in his corduroys, deep green Nautica jacket and a woollen cap, Ranchan started narrating in a lighter vein as to how a scholar came to interview him few days back. Poor chap, took hours of preparation in framing couple of queries but ended up asking just one after showering accolades on Ranchan's diverse creative sweep. That was amusing. Having known Ranchan for more than two and a half decades as teacher, philosopher and guide, I feel perfectly at ease with him. Before we could start, he suggested that we should go to some drive-in restaurant preferably out of Shimla as of late his physical movement was little restricted. I said 'alright' and we started conversing on a rather informal note.]

Beginnings...

Ranchan had a fine sensibility even as a child of five – indubitably a genetic carryover from his mother whose living, despite being simple, remained through and through nuanced characterised by concern, compassion and giving. Ranchan imbibed this all even though subliminally. He would chant *Gayatri mantra* and meditate with her as a child and developed a rich relationship with *naad*. He even recalled an experience of his body expanding which scared him as a child.

He also used to sing Kabir's *dohas* with passion. Even though belonging to an Arya Samaj family, Ranchan always

Dr. Roshanlal Sharma, Associate Professor (English), Government Degree College, Rajgarh, District Sirmour (H. P.)

lived like a Sanatani as he had an “instinctive relationship” with Sanatana

Dharma. Whenever he would visit his ancestral village, Fambian in Hoshiarpur from Lahore where his father was based, he used to visit Shiva temple and offer his prayers.

Initial poetry writing . .

To the question as to when Ranchan started writing, Ranchan said that it was during his third year in B. M. College, which I mistook for BA III. As a matter of fact, 'third year' stood for 11th standard in 1949 when he was 17. Ranchan became member of the college literary society. He used to write poems alongside stories. Later he became student editor of the college magazine and regularly contributed to the column “Leaves from a Diary” of which he was very fond and it became extremely popular with the students. By the year 1951 when he did his BA with honours in English, Ranchan knew that he had to write poetry. After that he started scribbling short poems in a small size diary which later got misplaced and which his daughter found during mid-eighties. In 1986, Ranchan revisited those “finished and unfinished poetic pieces” and brought them out as a book of poems called *Loose Ends*. During last year of his college, Ranchan left his home for Delhi and worked as a Prudential Life Insurance agent. During this very period, he worked with a printer as an assistant editor for a magazine which could not see the light of day. But it helped Ranchan evolve as a poet as he wrote quite a few poetic pieces along with stories in his one-room-office-cum-residence. He used to meet with many elderly people every evening to seriously discuss about literature and existential philosophy in the coffee house. Moreover, his brief stay in Delhi sharpened his lifelong interest in character study and life narratives. And it was here that the seeds of *Splintered Mirror* (1960) started sprouting. This was Ranchan's debut collection of poems that served as “germ for all his future writing” and deals with existential angst of a young man alongside a variety of issues that he took up in his later poems. Ranchan viewed this book as a “seed matrix” even of his torrential epic *Me and Columbia* (1968) which he published in the United States after a hiatus of nearly eight years. Humayun

Kabir has pointed out about the modernist strain in Ranchan's poems in his "Foreword" to *The Splintered Mirror* and has admired him for using powerful images and phrases that linger in the memory.

[In the meanwhile, Ranchan's servant brought a steaming hot cup of tea along with sweets. His wife also came to say a brief hello. Affectionate as ever, she told us to help ourselves if we wished to have limea, coke or juice after a while since the servant was going out. After tea we drove to the Himachal Holiday Home (HHH) rather than moving out of Shimla and continued talking about Ranchan's literary journey.]

On his writing of *Me and Columbia* . . .

During his Associate Professorship at Fullerton, a Poetry Reading Contest was organised for which Ranchan wrote and read out the Canto I of *Me and Columbia*. "The applause from the audience" according to him, "was so thunderous and overwhelming that the writing of the poem went on for 29 days. There was so much happening all around—lot of lateral interaction, intense teaching, group discussions and seminars—and amidst this all I kept writing *Me and Columbia*. There were certain changes that occurred in me as pointed out by my fellow colleagues who would come to attend my classes. One of them would describe my teaching as 'Asian non-structured teaching.' My voice attained a deeper resonance possibly owing to continual chanting that I would do after I was formally initiated into Durga in 1966. Once while meditating in Yagoda Society's church, I experienced expansion of consciousness."

On source of his poetry and creative process . . .

The source of Ranchan's poetry is "dialectics between the poet and his chaotic reality comprising people, books, therapy, counselling, meditation, interaction, etc." His extroversion is too diverse to describe, but the very basis of his introversion is deep introspection and meditation which is *mantric* in form. His introversion and extroversion fuse in an unusual fashion and create a creative synergy which impels the poet in him to write. As regards his creative process, Ranchan said: "Once I connect with something—an idea, image, symbol, myth

or a person – it stays with me for long. The relationship is active – be that at the conscious or subconscious level and ramifies into an altered state of consciousness. Here, it is further deepened until it attains amplitude of extraordinary degree resulting in gushing and frenzied poetic expression. My poetry does not emanate from head; it instead springs from heart which is the seat of my relational principle. Active interaction with people in real life situations engages me deeply.” In fact, Ranchan's creativity is by and large stirred by specific situations or the circumstances he is in. Prior to expression, Ranchan allows the poetic content to sift through diverse knowledge registers such as psychology, mythology, philosophy, depth psychology, folklore, etc. along with his vast experiential reservoir. The relevant creative codes (comprising symbols, images, myths, metaphors and phrases) start flashing in Ranchan's mind and remain available to him until he finishes writing. According to him, “My creativity neither has formal beginning nor formal closure. A symbol/idea/experience effortlessly connects with/ integrates/multiplex range of my experiencing. I am just there with my senses alert, intuition active and an idiom which keeps coming to me.” Does it mean that his poetry is inspired? “No. I don't subscribe to the category of inspiration. It would be obfuscating the whole issue. My poetry comes from deep involvement with people, or as I stated earlier, it originates from dialectics between my life narrative and what happens around me.”

[Having seated in the HHHH restaurant, Ranchan expressed his unwillingness to have lunch and I readily agreed. He wanted to have Shami Kabab which was not available and had to go for mutton cutlets. I ordered a sweet corn soup followed by veg grilled sandwiches.]

Shaping influence on Ranchan's poetic thought . . .

“None, no poet/author has shaped up my poetic thought in particular,” said Ranchan. However, there are Whitman's stylistic echoes in his cataloguing and Eliot's terseness in his technique. Ranchan's use of the mythic mode seems like that of Eliot but it is much more amplified. His satire is not Drydenish; it rather springs from a strong emotion of disgust, recoil,

lampooning and invective. He has no favourite writer as it is the essence that becomes a part of his creative consciousness. The persons behind the essence tend to vanish in the process. There is a powerful modernist streak in his poetry and some of the scholars find a peculiar blend of Whitman and Eliot in Ranchan. He recalled having read Edith Hamilton's *Greek Mythology* at 11th level in the college. In 1955, as a teacher in Mahendra College, Patiala, Ranchan would read Freud, Jung and Adler. Patiala was very important for his creativity. He used to go out of the town into open fields where he would read and write. Likewise, he also reminisced about Green Hotel where he would drink beer, communicate with his friends as well as himself and write poems. As regards the sources of his symbolism, Ranchan employs symbols from Devi mythology, Hindu mythology, Greek mythology, Jewish mysticism (Kabala), and Christian and Buddhist mythologies along with depth psychology. He was trained as a psychotherapist by Pan Coukoulis, a certified Greek analyst who would lecture on Greek mythology. Ranchan was the only non-psychologist official member of Jungian Club of California. He learnt about Kabala from Richard Kuehn, a priest in the Church of Antioch who later made Ranchan a Minister. Ranchan did not stop there and became the President of the Church of Antioch. It was now that he took serious plunge into Bible and Christian mythology. He had always been receptive to Buddhism and read about it seriously during his 26 day maiden voyage to the United States in 1960. There is a considerable use of Tantric symbology in Ranchan's poetry which he attributes partly to reading, partly to relationality and partly to dream work. Various types of mysticisms blend with the tantric motifs in his poetry. For instance, *Me and Columbia* presents a beautiful fusion of Buddhist and Tantric symbology.

On his stay in the United States and experience of teaching in India...

Ranchan summed up his experience of the United States in one word—"liberating." He obtained his PhD from University of Wisconsin—Madison in 1964. He fought for students' rights successfully and established remarkable rapport with his teachers. He was awarded Hazen fellowship along with

University fellowship for being the best student of the university. As a Professor at Fullerton, Ranchan was very popular among his students as well as colleagues. When I asked him to share his experience of teaching in India, Ranchan termed it as “negative” as it is not growth-oriented. The course content is poor and is repeated over and over again. There are hardly any challenges vis-à-vis teaching here and the departments are poorly staffed. It is sad that teachers cannot grow and are always “digging dirt from few authors and wallow in being toenail specialists.” The saddest part is that they cannot be kicked once they are in. There are no jump promotions and therefore mediocrity rules. One thing that Ranchan expressed his satisfaction about was “research guidance” that he took up in a big way along with his prolific creative output as he wrote not just poetry, stories and a novel but also books on criticism, political, philosophical and religious thought, folklore, etc.

On his dialogue epics . . .

Ranchan invented the genre of dialogue epics to suit his creative purposes. In fact, his creative consciousness is essentially “dialogic.” He is appreciative of the concept of *samvaad* in Sanskrit as it takes place between the equals. It is through *vivaad* that *samvaad* is contested, problematised and eventually given meaning. Ranchan as a youngster had the tendency to understand everything in terms of dialogue. Even when he would diarise day-to-day details, Ranchan used to do it in terms of dialogues. Moreover, he has also been mindful of its therapeutic value as it is very helpful in healing. Regarding his dialogues with wisdom figures, Ranchan stated that the idea clicked to him when he read a chapter on “Dialoguing with Wisdom Figures” in Ira Pogruffe’s *Journal Workshop*. The purpose behind inventing this genre was to develop clarifying insights about self in relation to wisdom figures from diverse religious and philosophic traditions of the world. They undoubtedly represent the “finer essence” but Ranchan keeps them in humanly approachable locale. Be that Krishna, Christ, Mother Sharda, Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, J. Krishnamurti, Sai Baba, Baha'u'llah, or Manjushri, all the wisdom figures for Ranchan have something to offer that can satisfy our “finest

aspirations” as human beings.

On his work philosophy ...

To the question regarding his work philosophy, Ranchan responded by saying that “My work philosophy consists of stoicism and joy as stoical acceptance of your circumstantial given leads to joy.” He also shared as to how he prioritises “intuition-feeling” in his functioning in the creative realm and employs “thinking” to perspectivise his insights about self in relation to others and society at large. Eliot’s idea that the man who suffers is different from the man who creates is not applicable to Ranchan as the material that he deals with is part of his soul mythos (narrative) which implies shared being that finds expression through his poetry.

[The waiter served snacks during our conversation at the HHHH restaurant. Ranchan was cheesed off with the way they had prepared mutton cutlets. Anyway we shared the sandwiches and ordered mushroom-tomato-capsicum pizza which he relished more. Later I took coffee espresso since Ranchan didn’t want any of the hot beverages. We drove back to Sanjauli afterwards where I had to drop him. On my way back to my village in Solan district, I kept wondering about the making of this living legend called Ranchan who despite being 79 has enviable energy charge and absolute commitment to writing.]

Interview II

30th March 2011

Conifers Call
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Sandhya

Sandhya: Good morning, Sir.

Dr. Ranchan: A very good morning to you too.

San: When did you start writing, as a poet in particular?

Dr. Ranchan: To start from the very beginning, my father wanted me to be an Engineer. So, I took non – medical for my Intermediate, in DAV Jalandhar (Punjab). But, in that period I realized, in fact my father also realized it but did not agree; that, I had no aptitude for Science, my natural inclination was toward literature. I used to read – stories – written, particularly in the Illustrated Weekly of India. Finally, to the great annoyance of my father and other elders, I shifted to Arts and stood triple first: 1st in Economics; 1st in Sanskrit; 1st in English – in all over the Punjab State. In spite of the fact, the atmosphere there was choking for me. Mainly, because of the 'Dadagiri' of the seniors. It was not ragging as such but, without any rhyme or reason they used to bully the juniors. A feeling of suppression or repression prevailed over the atmosphere. Second thing which I did not like there was, the 'Dharam Siksha' which was given to the students; according to their own understanding of the Dharam Shastras. Their talking against ' Draupadi' was difficult for me to bear. To cut the long story short, I felt more liberated when I left the hostel and came to Shimla and joined BM College, Bhargava Municipal College was set after partition, particularly for the displaced students who were here from all over the country. The college was co-educational and the atmosphere was free; hence, conducive to my creativity. Creativity and liberation go hand in hand. So, in this period of adolescence activation of my feelings (every type of feeling) took place and as a result, I wrote love poems. During this period I very actively, participated in the students' affairs. I was the student editor of the College Magazine. I also became a member of literary society and started reciting my own poems.

Dr. Sandhya Sharma, Associate Professor in English, Rajkiya Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Shimla- 171001 (HP)

during the meetings of that society. Incidentally, a few years back my daughter found a very shabby note-book, in a tin box, in which I had written poems, in pencil : during the 3rd year of my college. Now I have converted those poems into a book. Loose Ends.

The 4th year of my college was the period of disturbance I started having a sense of poverty. As compared to the good old days of Lahore Cantt. where we were comparatively well off; owned a house and also a buffalo or two. Here, with his meager income father was unable to change the situation. Family was large So, in order to help father (thank God I was sensitive enough to think and feel that way) I left home and went to Delhi in 1950. Here I would like to add one more point, i.e. writing has its own dialectics, its own thesis and anti- thesis : and a person who does not dialectise with life cannot write. In Delhi at Paharganj I joined as the assistant editor of a journal or you can say a magazine. On that post, I worked for six months and earned Rs.101 per month. Though the magazine never saw the light of the day yet, because of this job I had my first exposure to the "coffee house intellectuals". Got exposed to intellectual journalism and existentialism in particular, as at that time the elite class was interested in existentialism. After coming back to Shimla (to take my examinations) I started writing poetry in 1953.

San. : Who is the source of your inspiration?

Dr. Ranchan. : In 1953, though I was not in the University rolls yet, I used to attend classes in Hoshiarpur. There I met an Irish lady A.G.Stock. A born mentor of students whose eyes were always twinkling with humour. With her social awareness and communist inclination, she has made many a great leaders in India. She also set up English department in various Universities, e.g. in Dhaka, Jaipur. In Hoshiarpur even though the department was already there but, she gave it purpose and direction. She is no doubt, a legend. She is the one who encouraged me in writing poetry, taught me the discipline of words. Gave affection, as if I were her colleague. Although, we were together for a short period yet, when I look back I find her

mine, 'Creative Matrix' I can say that, even though outwardly this period of my life was disturbing , displacing, full of hardships yet, poetically it was a stimulating period.

San. : It seems that your writing and your reading went parallel?

Dr. Ranchan: No, you are a reader first then a writer . I was a voracious reader. I used to read everything. Later, a synergy took place and I started writing.

San. : When did you start teaching?

Dr. Ranchan. : Immediately after completing M.A. in 1954 . I became a lecturer . Felt financially secure... . I have taught in number of colleges, beginning with SD college , Shimla; now known as RKMV(Rajkiya Kanya Mahavidyalaya). There I taught only for four months, had to resign because the authorities did not like my popularity with the students ,across the gender . No doubt , here I had my first , typically Indian ,adolescent experience of love ;though unfulfilled yet ,it activated lot of poetry in me .After this ,again for four months ,I taught in Bhawani ,Haryana . From there I shifted to Malerkotla, where I got exposed to Muslim culture as it was a Muslim state .

San. : What do you say to this constant change in your life, like a vagabond you have been shifting from one place to another.

Dr. Ranchan: It has helped me to get exposed to the various facets of life, directly , which has no doubt helped me in my poetry. The story does not end here, after Malerkotla I was transferred to Patiala where I married and got going professionally and poetically in a big way. Patiala has no doubt played a very important role in my life. There I taught in a very good college; even today that college is known as one of the best colleges in Punjab. Period between 1955 to 1960 was the period of intellectual as well as emotional development. Developed interest in T.S.Eliot and Walt Whitman in particular. I was so impressed with their writings that I have manifested them in my

style. Even today their impressions are visible in my poetry. Terseness of Eliot and diction of Walt Whitman are matchless. During this phase in my life, drinking took me to the 'altered state' of mind. In 1960, I published my first book, *The Splintered Mirror*. In the foreword of this book, the then Education Minister, Mr. Himayun Kabir has written: "Ranchan is a modern poet, who coins an image which lingers in memory..." Such encouraging remarks from the egg-heads gave me self-confidence.

In the same year, I went abroad, USA. There, for 7 years together, I did not write anything, not even missed writing as if, it were a thing of the past. Came back to India in 1964, again went back. When I started teaching in California State, Fullerton, a poetry reading function was organized and I was asked to read my own poetry. There I wrote the first canto of my epic, *America with Love*. When I read the canto, the whole hall shook with reverberation. Even today people call it my leading most epic. For me it was a massive altered state experience. After that there was no looking back, my confidence knew no bounds. I became very popular with the students and the teachers of both the gender. In America I experienced free, open and transparent relationship with women; which is not possible in India. Agha nanda Bharti in his book, *Tantric Tradition in India* says that, tantra cannot be practiced in India because, here emotional experience is not cross gender; even if it is, it is only through films. In India one cannot directly have a relationship with the Anima or the Dakini-- who is the giver of bliss and knowledge. Symbolically the relation is there but, literally it does not come to practice. It is, in fact, confined to a family or a group which is not the real 'swaroopa' of the Feminine. Lately, in my book on *Padamsambhava*, I have tried to show that relationship with Dakini is central to individuation. Only when you will generalize the sense of Dakini, then the gender synergy will take place, which will take you to higher state and can finally liberate you. Anyway, in 1966 I got initiated to Ramakrishna order and got involved with Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Mother Sharda and Vivekananda and entered into existential not ritualistic sadhana. Finally, I came back to Shimla in 1978 and between 1967 to 1980 again there was no writing. In 1980 I started writing the dialogue

epics, one after the other, Christ and I (1981), Mother Sharda and I (1982), To Vivek then I Came, Soul making with Sri Aurobindo, To Krishna with Love, Krishnamurti, then a book on Baha'u'llaha. In addition to that Anteros, and a long poem on friendship, Friendship – Sahrihaya . Recent dialogue epic is on Dalai Lama and on Padamsamya . probably now this genre is over.

San: Where do you get the stimulus from? Is it the result of your sadhana or something else?

Dr. Ranchan: Stimulus comes to me from the circumstances and also the people that I meet . For example, I attended classes for learning Christianity and simultaneously, I developed a sort of inner relation with Christ, hence the book, Christ and I. After my initiation into Ramakrishna order , I developed a deep relation with Mother Sharda and wrote two books on her, So on and so forth. Now is my Buddhist phase and I am writing books on Buddhism.

San: Do you call yourself a religious person or a poet?

Dr. Ranchan: My interest in religion is more of a quester than a believer.

San. : How does poetry come to you?

Dr. Ranchan: It comes to me in the form of a dialogue.

San. : Are you affiliated to some Indian poetic group?

Dr. Ranchan: No, that's not possible. I am a lone wolf... . Dialogue epic is something totally new for the world. In fact , to my mind I am the only dialogue epic writer.

San: Certainly you have (perhaps unknowingly) established a new genre tradition in Indian English poetry nay world poetry. Your non- traditional insights are marvelous . How do the poems originate in you?

Dr. Ranchan: In my dialogue epic the figures are from life also. I

get the inspiration from here, there and everywhere. A psychic , spiritual activation takes place in my subconscious mind when I come across different situations or circumstances and also when I meet people. A part of my mind stays with the situation and keeps working till the thing is over. In my long epic cycle : She-Devi- Nigmas , similar process has taken place.

San: Is it true that you are a poet first, then a writer?

Dr. Ranchan: Yes, perhaps that's why it is my pattern of writing that first I write a poetic volume and then an analytic book on the same figure.

San. : In your poetry you have worked wonders but still you have not got that much of recognition. What can be the reason ?

Dr. Ranchan: Yes, that's true, mainly because in India, we are totally dependent on Sahitya Academies. So, they judge you or recognize you according to their own wisdom based on their caste, clan and religion. Honestly, it hardly matters to me. My reader knows me and that be is enough for me. But, it is true had I been in the West, I would have certainly got more recognition. There they have, 'critical tradition'. What I mean by this word is, critics draw the attention of the others towards a writer or a poet. For example, E.R.Leavis drew the attention of the critics towards Eliot's works, prior to that people paid little attention to his works.

San. : Are you really very greatly influenced with T.S.Eliot's poetry?

Dr. Ranchan: No, personally I am more influenced by W.B. Yeats and not Eliot, who believes that the writer is different from the man who suffers or who enjoys life. I agree with Yeats who works from the core to the periphery and not from periphery to the center.

San. : What are your final words for the readers and the scholars .

Dr.Ranchan: Writing is just an engagement or dialectics with life

and I do not subscribe to the exalted view of a poet, he is not different from ordinary man or woman. He is not a seer or a prophet nor is he a 'stithpragya'. A poet is just a sensitive person who is more vulnerable to life, which exposes him to the deep feelings and expressions to satories. One should not oversubscribe to the development psychology of a life narrative to find the key to his creativity exclusively. The material comes from your experience from the web of relationship, but the poetic perspective comes from your Chaitya Purusha, from stabilized satories. So the key to poet is partly in the development of his life narrative, partly in his vast and varied surreality, and finally in prayer, in his spiritual life.

San. : Sir, what I gather from your words is that, a poet is a creative, sensitive person, who has the ability to convert his feelings into words. At the end, I would like to thank you for sharing your precious knowledge with us. Thank you very much, Sir.

Dr. Ranchan: Bless you, take care.

Form IV

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I, Parmod Kumar Thakur, declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

(sd) Parmod Kumar Thakur

Signature of the Publisher