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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 17: Pritish Nandy

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



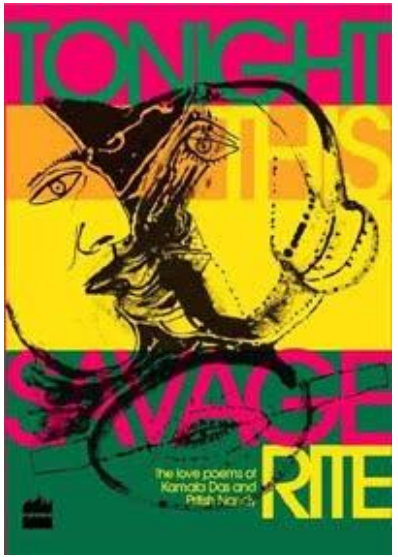
Introduction

- Born on 15 January 1951, in Bhagalpur in the state of Bihar in eastern India to a Bengali Christian family.
- Indian poet, painter, journalist, parliamentarian, and film maker
- E. M. Forster Literary Award, 1976, & Padma Shri in 1977.
- Nominated as a Poet Laureate by the World Academy of Arts and Culture at the Fifth World Congress of Poets in San Francisco, 1981.
- Publishing director of *The Times of India* between 1982 and 1991.
- Associated with *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *The Independent*, *Filmfare*, *Femina*, *Science Today*, *Dharmayug* and *Madhuri.*
- Nandy founded Pritish Nandy Communications in 1993 and remains its Non-Executive Chairman.



Poetry Collections

- *Of Gods and Olives* (1967)
- *On Either Side of Arrogance* (Calcutta, 1968)Writers' Workshop
- *Riding the Midnight River: Selected Poems* (1974)
- *Lonesong Street* (Calcutta, 1975) Poets Press
- *In Secret Anarchy* (Calcutta, 1976),United Writers
- *The Nowhere Man* (Calcutta, 1976) Arnold Heinemann
- *Again* (2010)
- *Stuck on 1/Forty in 2012* (2014)
- *Peerless Minds: An Arc of Achievement* (2019)



Characteristic Features of Nandy's Poems

- Wild energy and verbal belligerence
- Urban violence, horror, death and sex
- Political protest
- Popular song lyrics (Pop Poems)
- Political, social and personal
- Experimentation of the second half of the '60

Symbols and Myths

“The use of symbols is also invariably a deliberate attempt. Since a straight statement is not enough to communicate a specific idea, the poet resorts to an oblique reference or a symbol. My idiom and my language belong to my time, which often makes it necessary to use a particular symbol which is neither time-based nor time-bound. The symbol conveys meaning.” - Nandy

“Calcutta if You Must Exile Me”

Calcutta exile me if you must exile me wound my lips
before I go
only words remain and the gentle touch of your
finger on my lips Calcutta burn my eyes before I
go into the night

the headless corpse in a Dhakuria bylane the
battered youth his brains blown out and the
silent vigil that takes you to where they will Pataldanga Lane
Where they will gun you down without vengeance
or hate

Contd...

Calcutta if you must exile me burn my eyes before I go
they will pull you down from the Ochterlony Monument and torture each broken rib beneath your upthrust breasts they will tear the anguish from your sullen eyes and thrust the bayonet between your thighs

Calcutta they will tear you apart Jarasandha- like

Contd...

they will tie your hands on either side and hang you from a wordless cross and when your silence protests they will execute all the words that you meant and synchronized Calcutta they will burn You at the stake

Calcutta flex the vengeance in your thighs and burn silently in the despair of flesh

if you feel like suicide take a rickshaw to Sonagachhi and share the sullen pride in the eyes of women who have wilfully died

Contd…

wait for me outside the Ujjala theatre and I will bring you the blood of that armless leper who went mad before hunger and death met in his Wounds

I will show you the fatigue of that woman who died near Chitpur out of sheer boredom and the cages of Burrabazar where passion hides in the wrinkles of virgins who have aged waiting for sexless war that never came

Contd…

only obscene lust remains in their eyes after
time has wintered their exacting thighs

and I will show you the hawker who died with
Calcutta in his eyes

Calcutta if you must exile me destroy my sanity
before I go

Characteristics of the Poem, "Calcutta if You Must Exile Me"

- Emotional identification with the city
- Violence, cruelty and sickness
- Lyrical and nostalgic strain
- Combines myth with contemporary idiom
- Myth of Jarasandha
- Use of space-punctuation for fragmentary sense
- Existence?
- Suresh Kohli regards this poem as Nandy's finest individual poem

“Speak What is Darkness”

we speak what is darkness
our love is like memory
your eye is the night

outside us
nothing exists

rivers that cannot run
bodies that cannot desire
ships that cannot sail

Contd…

outside us
the wind
tracing footsteps
whispers that cannot be heard
houses we have never visited

waterfalls we have never seen
outside us
streets
run into streets
into streets

Analysis of the poem, “Speak What is Darkness”

- Correspondence between lovers
- The personal space of lovers.

- Brisk and Unconventional
- Poem written without punctuation
- Images of nature
- Love Poem

“Lonesong Street” (1975)

when you’ve crossed the bustling mainstreets of everever land
you reach a lonesome sandstrip called the nevernever strand
then you take the turning left
& you take the turning right
& where the twilight breaks you turn your ragged sight…

round the duskfall where it’s blue
lonesong street waits for you…
lonesong hour is when the asphalt cracks
with the far off steps of a strange malhar
lonesong hour is when the first rain
chases the whirlwind midnight train

lonesong hour is when our love declares
wildots have turned again to wildergrain

Contd…

& when it’s time to return
to turn to where the sandstorms burn
In the stern eye of the twilight
come and wait for me there

I shall open the cyclone of the trees
& wrapped in the tendrils of the fire
I shall bring you a poem
In a raging saphhire…

when you’ve crossed the tired highway
&you’ve crossed the fevered night
&where the twilight breaks you turn your ragged sight…
round the duskfall where it’s blue
lonesong street waits for you…

“The Nowhere Man”

1 Come, let us pretend this is a ritual. This hand
in your hair, your tongue seeking mine: this
cataclysmic despair. Let us pretend tonight that
you are mine. Forever. For when daybreak returns, we
shall realise once more that forever means an
empty room, a tired night swirling into nowhere,
when I shore up to your tattered skyline.

2
At midnight I move in on strangers, for the caress
or the kill. I have come to terms with shadows,
I have been assaulted by gentler lovetimes: once
in a long while a face comes near, our eyes meet
in challenge, or is it love? Our bodies come alive
in secret oneness: one spring ago, terrified to be
touched, you draw me tonight, at last, deep within
your frantic countryside.

Contd...

4

The wind disentangles itself from your frenzied body as hurricanes of dreams follow me: eternity is only a river reaching towards the sea. My tongue travels to your navel, and downwards: I cling to your body, my mouth breathes in the shadow of your breath. Someday perhaps the sea will reveal itself, the delirium of the flesh fatigue at dawn.

11

It hurts to say I am sorry. So let us use unfamiliar words. The summer has gone the ground's turned cold. The old road calls me back again. Another time we shall meet again: as strangers or as friends, or perhaps as lovers once again. Now turn, turn, to the rain again.

15

Tonight I draw your body to my lips: your hand, your mouth, your breasts, the small of your back. I draw blood to every secret nerve and gently kiss their tips, as you move under me, anchored to a rough sea. I cling to you, your music and your knees. I touch the secret vibes of your body, I fill my hands with the darkness of your hair. This passion alone can resurrect our love.

Nandi on his Poetic Craft

"I write for those who can never read the language. I use and write in a language that has no roots in my country but my voice is the voice of my people for I speak of their loves and ambitions and secret shames my eyes share, the hunger of the shameless woman who makes dispassionate love on the pavement whose large black nipples remind of my mother who is now old and lonely. I write for those who will craft a new country with their simple implements." (Nandi)

Nandy in the eyes of critics

- Nandy's fecundity as a poet is obvious enough, but the reader is often put out. The typographical oddities seem frightening, the titles intriguing, the images disconcerting. Read without preconceptions, however, the apparently ill-assorted and chaotically permuted words convey the distinct nuances of meaning that we expect from a poet. There is much innovative audacity in the expression, and the staccato formations and pythonish twists and turns of phrase shock only to satisfy. (Iyengar)
- Nandy's verse gives the impression of wild energy and verbal belligerence only occasionally amenable to discipline– a verse of which nimiety is at once a source of power and weakness. (Naik)
- Nandy 'appears to have imitated the obscurity, obliqueness, and radical juxtapositions of avant-garde poetry without having a clear reason for such experimentation.' (King)

Conclusion

- ✓ Nandy is a multi-faceted poet and his early poetry is ‘superficially modernistic’.
- ✓ His poetry ranges from political protest to popular song lyric.
- ✓ His most characteristic contribution is prose poetry.
- ✓ Urban images of love and sex, violence and horror, death and decay are found aplenty in Nandy’s poetry.
- ✓ Nandy excels in experimental verse. His poetry mixes desire, memory , dream and silence.

Summing up

Poetry always starts with words
When words start to hurt, we pause

regain our innocence and start again

But this time it's not poetry
Its life writing itself out
in a strange unfinished way

What you may choose to call
an autobiography of sorts. (from *Again*)

Thank You

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