

Desire, Despair and Delirium in the Selected Love Poems of Vikram Seth

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Abstract – The poetry of Vikram Seth has multiple layers of themes but his love poetry is entirely different in nature and treatment from his other themes. He does not present only the beautiful and romantic side of love like William Shakespeare, John Donne, and Robert Browning, rather he talks about the unsatisfied desires which lead him to despair and then it seems that he has lost his emotional balance in the life and become a victim of delirium. Love, being the basic desire of the universe, plays an important role in the life of every individual. The omnipresent and omnipotent love, is the cause of the growth of this universe and every living being of it. Desire of love ties us all together. Everything and everyone who has taken or takes and will take birth on this earth, is born without religion but not without love. But the study of this research is focused on love between lovers. The desire is the cause of every pain. When desire is not properly satisfied or fulfilled it causes despair, frustration, separation and delirium. In the final stage of delirium, nothing remains in the life of a lover except darkness, despair, sorrow and negativity. This disastrous effect of love has to be faced by a lover all alone. Even nature plays an important role in it. When lovers are happy with each-other the nature, even in the autumn season plays a vital and supporting role in their lives. But if the lovers are separated or rejected by each-other the nature, even in spring and rainy season fill their hearts with despair, negativity, glum and delirium. In/at this stage nothing remains good or positive for them.

Keywords: Desire, Love, Lovers, Separation/rejection, Despair, Hope, Delirium, Nature.

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INTRODUCTION

Vikram Seth (born-1953) born in Kolkata, India, is trained as an economist and has lived for several years in England, California, China, and India. He is a well-known poet, novelist and writer of children literature. He came across various cultures of the world that colour his writings profoundly. Vikram Seth, well known for his noted works, possesses the art of creating a living and breathing world that keeps the readers focused and engaged. He has authored three novels, *The Golden Gate* (1986), *A Suitable Boy* (1993), *An Equal Music* (1999) and his an upcoming novel *A Suitable Girl*. As for as his poetry is concerned his all anthologies are published in *The Collected Poems* (2014). His anthologies in this collection are, *Mappings* (1980), *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), *Beastly Tales* (1991), *Three Chinese Poets* (Translated in 1992), *At Evening* (1993), *The Frog and the Nightingale* (1994), and the latest collection of poems *Summer Requiem* (2012). He has written literature for children entitled, *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1991) and a travelogue, *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983). He received the Crossword Book Award, 1999 for best fiction in English, Padma

Shree in Literature and Education (2007), The 25th Greatest Global Living Legends in India (2013).

The themes of his prolific works consist of family relationships, tension, pain and frustration. He maps out the sorrows and failures, the agonies and ecstasies, the wit and despondence, love and hate, and myriad other emotions. The glimpses of nature, love, despair, nostalgia and homesickness reverberate in his early poetry. He has also written historical poems about the Muslim kings' invasions and the resultant problems of it in India.

"Seth's subject matter is almost invariably love, in all its myriad manifestations. He does explore other themes in passing-India's political landscape for instance, or religious frenzy, but in these instances his role is always that of storyteller, not of commentator" (Gupta, 9). Seth's nature poetry needs a special mention here because his portrayal of nature brings him near the romantics. Like Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson, "he writes with his eye steadily fixed upon his object. His emotional response to Nature is quiet and balanced. The stillness of a pond, the turning of a leaf, the ripples made by the wind on the surface of water; he stands, unobtrusive, content to paint in words what his eye sees" (Gupta, 33). He saw/feel

about nature what his mood/heart feels. If he is in happy mood the nature will respond to him same, if he is in the doldrums of despondency then he will find the same in nature. Nature seems a mirror in his life and writings as well. Being a realist, there is reality in his poetry, what he see and feels in his real life he paints it on his papers. The themes of his poetry are from real life situations and emotions. He embraces life with all its passions, joys, sorrows and many other such issues.

Some of the poems of Seth deals with the love fulfilled. As for as theme of love is concerned, "...Seth is clearly a sensitive soul, very much in touch with all his feelings. Love is central to his existence, making him soar with the eagles when he has it in his grasp, and plunging him into the bottomless, inky depths of despair when it eludes him. But he is resilient enough to survive. So he say's in "The Balcony:

If I have bent so far and not snapped, it cannot destroy me now. This thing will pass

As it has passed before. Elation is no birthright [...]"

(Gupta, 18)

When he was asked why he writes about it, he simply replies that, "one can't quarrel with inspiration" (Mohanty, 136).

It is said that love is God and the whole creation of God is the result of love, in this context Dalai Lama has rightly said that "We are born without religion but not without love" (Merchant, 89). Love is the beginning of the universe and it is "love that makes the world go round!" (Mohanty, 221). The immortal/eternal truth of this mortal universe is that everything, "What was to come/ Has come to pass/The only truth is love" (Merchant, 294). Love is eternal and the lovers are the souls of its art. Lovers die but love remains forever. Love is the assimilation of two souls where, "You are no longer you. I am no longer I" (Dharker, 52). Lovers assimilate each-other as life meets death, never to separate again. The well-known legend of prince Satyavan and Savitri is the story of true love. Savitri, the devoted wife of prince rescues him from death. With her pure love she conquers death even. Pure/true love can face any trouble of the universe, in this context Ranjit Hoskote in his poem "Nazam" has rightly said that, "Forget the star maps of the old kingdom/Dress yourself in night./Trust me:/our hands can see in the dark" (CT, 23). Here, it is right to quote that "Love can wear down stone" (Merchant, 186). The true lovers are like twins or one can say two bodies with one soul, as is described by Hoshang Merchant in his poem, "The Gemini Poems"

If one were to hurt the other would suffer

If one were to drown the other would resuscitate him

If one were to dream the other would become sleepless

If one were to look in the mirror the other would peer out

If one was a cage the other would become a bird

If one was a river the other would become stone

If one was light the other would become night

If one were to strike the other would turn the cheek

If one was an enemy the other would become friend

(MSM, 217)

Ranjit Hoskote, like Hoshang Merchant expresses the same views about true lovers, in his poem "Couple" where he says,

Sharers of skin,

dreamers of one another's landscapes.

Thieves of one another's thoughts,

rivals for destiny's attention.

Convicts serving time

in the prison of one another's arms.

Savage antagonists marooned

on a planet no wider than a bed. (CT, 40)

Situated at the "interface of desire, despair and delirium, Indian English Poetry today explores the self, the context of self-discovery through childhood, memory and history, the despair of love discerned from the interlacing of various relationships, and the delirium of madness is evident in poeticisation itself. (Biswas, 177). At the core of the heart every one of us crave for the basic human desire to be loved but the desire or "passion only means suffering" (Merchant, 179), in this context it is right to quote from Mita Biswas that, "My desires are many and my cry is pitiful" (Biswas, 43). All this implies that desires means only suffering, if not in early stage, sure at later stage of life. Love "... with its naive joys, blind rage, then sudden tragedy, it reflects on the wider issues afflicting mankind, the place of love in human life, and the sacrifices required before one is entitled to the happiness that love brings" (Gupta, 58).

In the poem "Day and Night" poet is suffering with loneliness and perhaps searching for love or a beloved, to gull the peaceless night,

Sleepless, exhausted and perplexed,

Not knowing what is coming next,

I sense the stab of causeless fears,

The tedium of pointless tears.

Lonely, yet lacking will to find

One who could ease my limbs and mind,

I wait once more for faceless day

To blind the peaceless night away. (SR, 25)

"... In life's brief game to be a winner/A man must have [...] O yes, above/All else, of course, someone to love [...] (Gupta, 49). So poet also desires for a beloved with whom he can ease his days and nights, and can avoid the stab of loneliness for this in his poem "Love And Work", he says,

If I had a lover

I'd bear it all, because when day is over

I could go home and find peace in bed.

Instead

The boredom pulps my brain

And there is nothing at day's end to help assuage the pain

I am alone ... (TCP, 140)

Again in his desire for beloved in his poem, "Late Light" he says,

Outside the great world's gifts and harms

There must be somewhere I can go

To rest within a lover's arms,

At ease with the impending snow. (SR, 8)

Lover is waiting for love as the earth, after long droughts of winter and summer waits for spring and rain, respectively.

The search or desire for love is like an antidote to loneliness itself. Search for love must be with the serenity of heart as poet says, "...Look for love;/ Drown a lesser voice./Silent now of choice;/Breathe in peace, and be/Still, for once, like me". (TCP, 210). Initially search for love is a simple desire, "...to

establish relationship, slowly the desire develops towards friendship: "Hands held in friendship, hand caressed in love, ..." (Mohanty, 43). This is the starting of love relationship. For this poet is accountable only to his heart and says,

Above all, to my heart I'm true.

It does not tell me what to do.

It beats, I live, it beats again.

For what? I wish I knew it knew. (TCP, 211)

Poet and his heart only knows about the love so he says, now "let me sleep in peace" (SR, 32) of love. In this ecstasy of love poet says that love, "Leading me God knows where-/ Into a universe/ Beyond-beyond... (TCP, 3). Now nothing will remain for him to lose because poet has lost himself in love and in his poem "Which Way?" says, ...

No reed or frond,

No lake – a zone of mist, in which I stray,

And soon I will have lost my way.

Alone, I wander where I choose,

And soon there will not be a me to lose. (SR, 46)

The expectations of true lovers from each-other are expressed by Nikita Dutt in her poem "Love Me Not" where she says,

Love me not for my good looks,

Love me not for my affluence,

Love me not for my praises,

Love me not for my wisdom,

Love me not for my demeanor,

Love me not for my politeness,

Love me not for my good deeds,

But love me because of love,

Love me for love's sake ! (Nikita Dutt)

In response to these expectations, in their true love for each-other they say that everything is nothing for them if their love is not there or that thing. For this in his poem "Sonnet" he says,

I can't love anyone who isn't you.

I don't know how to. No, my lady, no –

| | |
|--|---|
| Venus herself could come to earth below | for sooner or later |
| And not delight my heart the way you do. | till |
| So sweet, so gracious are these eyes I view, | till |
| A single glance from them is like a blow | death us do |
| That kills me, while the next one may bestow | death us do death us |
| Life where the first gave death – two worlds in two! | death tries to get us |
| If I lived for five hundred thousand years, | and we laugh and we stall |
| Believe me, dearest love, and trust your ears: | and we tell it to call us some other |
| I could love no one else – no one, nowhere. | fine day because we are busy today |
| I'd have to fashion other veins; my own | ... |
| Are now so filled with love for you alone, | I take |
| Nobody else could find a lodging there. (SR, 39) | thee |
| He is truly in love with his beloved and even the goddess of love and time can never change his heart from his love. In this true and inexpressible love for his beloved he wants to keep her with him, in a place where love resides everywhere. In this context Imtiaz Dharker in her poem "I Take" says that, | I take |
| I take | thee (OTM, 77) |
| your body where love takes place | The lover wants to keep his love with him forever in the world of love. They are so busy in their world of love, that even death can never separate them from each-other and for this they suggest to death that it should call them at some other day. For such type of true love, it is better to quote from John Donne, a great love poet for whom the true love is eternal. He says when the true lovers will enter the kingdom of love, "... they shall dwell, where there shall be no cloud or sun, no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends or beginnings, but one equal eternity..." Here "equal" becomes a synonym for the divine, for something that is perfect beyond imagining" (Gupta, 94). In such happiness, equality and eternity of love, poet finds himself at the zenith of peace because he is enjoying the company of his beloved and serene nature, for this in his poem "Sea and Desert " he says, |
| I take | How do I merit such happiness? To have |
| your mouth where my life takes shape | The moon, the Pacific, and you beside me, waking |
| I take | ... |
| your breath which makes my space | ... I have been watching you; |
| I take | ... |
| you as you are, for good | |
| I take | |
| you with open arms, to have | |
| I take | |
| you to have | |
| and to hold but not to hold | |
| too hard | |
| I take | |
| you for farther for closer | |

... Your face with its
Clean lines and tousled hair is beautiful
And it is hard to believe that even in
This stark and lovely place it is the cause
Of so much of my peace. (TCP, 5)

He is enjoying the company of nature and his love
but the physical beauty of his beloved is troubling
his mind, like

"... a little white snake
with lovely stripes on its young body
troubles the jungle elephant

...
her teeth like sprouts of new rice
her wrists stacked with bangles
troubles me." (Mehrotra, 307)

The desire for physical love is further enhanced like
the burning sun. The desire for physical love is
aroused when he has a glance over her body. In his
poem "A Little Distance" he says,

... we ourselves as the sun burns through a cloud
Into the secluded valley, onto the pool,
Onto the rocks, into our cold bones.
Tired, tired, my mind melts in the sun.
... I sit up: there

You lie, beautiful, half-nude on the white pebbles,
Cream-coloured breasts open to the breeze and the
sky

And a few lines of silver hair in the brown
To announce the burden of your twenty-eight years.
To be chaste, how frustrating for minutes, (TCP, 98)

The beloved is chaste for "twenty-eight years" it is
frustrating for the lover, means he wants physical
relation/union with her. The desire for
physical/sexual/sensuous love, sometimes costs the
love between lovers as is said by Ranjit Hoskote in
his poem "The Madman's Kaleidoscope",

We suck the flowered blood of those we love,

make them real. Their fruit grows to flesh
in our cloistered thoughts,
ripens in cold gardens
that the sun has never breached. (VA,60)

Such type of feelings in true love, starts thinning the
thread of love and from this point of time destiny
takes a turn, as far as their relation is concerned.

Lovers want to meet each-other as life and death
meet each-other to assimilate or never to separate
from each-other, but destiny has something else for
them in her future's bag. In this context Vikram Seth,
in his poem "Summer Requiem" has rightly said that
"Perpetual replacement is the only song of the world"
(SR, 4). Change is the rule of time and nature as
well, in reference to this fact Hoshang Merchant
also says that "What was to come/has come to
pass" (CW, 294). Here Hoshang Merchant
counters with his own views as well as the views of
other poets, mentioned here about the change in
love. If the love changes or diminishes with the
passage of time, it is not love but only desire for
female body i.e. sex. For this in his poem, "At the
Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem" he says,

The eye is a watcher

Woman, the beloved, is watched

Time is what takes: perfume from the rose

Beauty from the friendship. If it stands still

It is not love.

Love takes from earth.

Gives to air

This fragrance some called god (CW, 64-65)

Love is not a flickering emotion, it is as eternal as
God.

For the lovers "The cause of pain is separation"
(MSM, 133) from each-other. For example in "The
Garden of Isolation" separation is the cause of pain
and agony of the lovers – "Out of my life the
coloured lights are gone/Deep dark surrounds me
and I cannot see/Night, sorrowful, immense,
without a dawn/Descends on me..." (Mohanty, 12-
13). The separation leads to thinning of relationship
and love starts diminishing with it, the sense of
failure deepens, in this context Mohanty has rightly
quoted that:

"... we talk only

Of us, only of us, and what went wrong
 Curious, I suppose to note how our rich strong
 Companionship has thinned to this lament.

The end is one of a sense of emptiness, relationship coming to a diminishing end: I've spoiled your mood. I'm sorry. Yes, I will/keep clear of you .../...but I know/Too well that these diminishing chords of light/Will be resolved to soundlessness and night." (Mohanty 43). But they do not want to lose their love and relationship, so want to keep her safe from any harm, so he says, - "How did I lose you, sweet/I hardly know/Roughly the storm did beat/Wild winds did blow/I with my loving arm/Folded you safe from harm/Cloaked from weather" (Mohanty, 41).

Nothing has changed so fast like their relation. So in his poem "A Cryptic Reply" Seth is seeking for the cause of their drifting away from each-other, so early,

Prudence and love-that true link makes me smile.

A sea change may take long, or just a while.

The sun stays where it is, so does the sea.

It is the clouds and haze, the you, the me

(It's good that you imagine my concern)

That vary with the hours, burn off, or burn. (SR, 7)

Lover finds that it is their varying attitude for each-other, is the cause of their separation. The sudden change in their love-relationship is quite shocking for the lover so he says,

The shell of forgetfulness has broken sharply,

The harmony wrapped in my hands.

Jaggedness and discontinuity, as if the pebbles

Smoothed by centuries were crushed again.

It is clear ...

...

Birds are not desolate, impute how you may. (SR, 2)

For this increasing estrangement in relationship Arvind Krishna Mehrotra has rightly said that, "Life could never be the same again" (Mehrotra, 358).

Vikram Seth's nature poems, "... are of two types – one type is purely Nature objective, describing Nature perse, the other is subjective, in which the poet deals with his pain by hoping that mother nature

will wrap a numbing blanket around him" (Gupta, 18). For example in his poem "One Morning" Seth says,

Rose light enflamed the eastern sky.

A greyhound, masterless, loped by.

A poplar's black denuded crest

Thinned to reveal a magpie's nest.

On the red lake two snowy geese

Swam in a sarabande of peace,

And as a breathed the callous air

I lost the drift of my despair. (SR, 22)

Now the fact is that he has separated from his love and now despair is his only lot. For this in his poem "Dark" poet says, "The mood of night, /of letting be, /Of letting darkness/Enter me" (SR, 54). With this "darkness" or despair in him he finds himself in the clutches of loneliness. Again in his another poem "Late Light" poet says, "At three the late light glides across/The last gold leaves on the black ground./ The snow is near, as is my loss:/ The peaceful love I've never found" (SR, 8). "Moonlight" (TCP, 135) is another poem, "... mourning the loss of love, and accentuating the fact that even time the great healer, can never fully assuage the pain of poet's heart. Seth says, "The moon tonight/Sears with a fire new time and love won't douse" (Gupta 26-27). So, now it can be said that "All life's a shaky dream" (Mohanty, 141) for the poet or one can say for a separated lover. In a poem "Tripping on a Bus" the separated lovers are described alongwith sunset as "Everyone is happy-/ But look, the lovers are not happy-/.../... As if a world were dying. / The sunset burns out with a terrible glow" (SR, 34-35).

Like seasons human-beings also change but this change in human lives leads them to complete end of relationship or separation from each-other. There remains not any type of hope for amendment as in the poem "Caged" by Vikram Seth. They came to reality and said,

What grew with time took time to disappear,

But now we see that there is little here.

We are ourselves; how much can we amend

Of our hard beings to appease a friend?

We cannot lose our ways, and cannot choose

To lose what then it would be peace to lose. (SR, 15)

The love has now lost between the lovers, but just for the sake of formality in their relationship they are living together and waiting for the death of their love, in the same poem poet says this,

I lie awake at night, too tired to sleep,

Too fearful you should wake, too sad to weep.

I hear you breathe. I do not touch your face.

How do we live like this, caged in one space?

We two have lost each other, you and I.

Why could this not wait till our love could die? (SR, 14)

In this context Seth in his poem, "A Cryptic Reply" he says "... We each need love in our own time and way" (SR, 7) which is not possible because love on convenient and conditions is not possible. Seth himself feels this and he, "merely toys with the idea for a while, when love has brought him too much pain, but ultimately realizes that love cannot be reduced to a matter of convenience or a comfortable adjustment between two people" (Gupta, 34) while in reality they are feeling like caged birds, bound forcibly to each-other. Now poet in his despair and sorrow wants to leave his love, but unable to do this. He is praying to his beloved for the completion of cause, in the poem "Late at Night",

Till I cried out in my fear:

Here I am, and you are here.

You can halt my heart, I know.

Do it then and let me go. (SR, 26)

After rejection/ separation there is no one to balm the wounded heart of a lover and he longs for nothing and the darkness has now engulfed his life and heart, for this in his poem "Summer Requiem" poet says,

The cool of the evening brings relief to the sick fever
–

Those loved eyes dead to me, those sighs stilled,

Late-late-even the rooks have flown home;

The hour of the rust brings everything to a close.

Where the lock of longing was opened

There there will be a perpetual wound.

The steel cries out in grief, and there is no assuager,

Those who could have warmed are scattered,

And no one now can see the light in my window.
(SR, 3)

In the second stanza, mentioned here poet accept that 'longing' is the cause of 'perpetual wound'. After separation from his beloved now poet says that in this game of love nothing worse can happen now, in his despair he says, "Gathered and scattered, gathered and scattered,/What further pain can the future promise/To a wandering exile from heart to heart?" (SR, 3). Future can neither do any harm nor can cause any pain as compared to his present situation. With such type of shocks from love now the poet has become immune to pain and to him now nature is also a symbol of despair which was once a mirror to his happiness. Totally hopeless now, he in his poem "Summer Requiem" says,

All striving lapsed, the reclaiming grass has covered

The brick and stone and earth and the steepest agony-

Invulnerable, cold, immune to pain;

...

The sun bursts through his disguise and sprinkles

Gold on the world; and the hours pass

In silent emblems of despair. (SR, 4)

For lovers, when they were in love, the nature was a source of happiness and positivity, but after their separation, lovers find despair, negativity and hopelessness in nature and in their relation of love also, in the above mentioned poem poet again says, "... The opened rose closes, and welcomes night,/And lets the seat of joy become a grave" (SR, 5). Now in utter despair and lack of any hope he realises that everything now has come to an end and in his poem "A Cryptic Reply" he says, "As for myself, the hope I had is gone,/And not much left in lieu to build upon" (SR, 7). In his poem "Late at Night" poet says "Late at night I lay awake,/Hearing in my spirit's ache" (SR, 26). The spirit of lover is still aching for past love but now it is too late for him. Realising this now in the poem "Caged" he says,

The litanies that bleed the heart before

It understands that it can bleed no more,

The bitter tone that taints our every speech,

The thoughts that we attribute each to each

As if we were not friends but manacled foes,

As if one sorrow were two private woes. (SR, 14)

"... reflecting the ennui that comes through living a life devoid of any meaning due to the lack of the stabilizing anchor that love and friendship provide..." (Gupta, 25). The poem "Love and Work" by Seth, is like a realization about the total failure of relationship but like Robert Browning's lovers towards the end of the stanza Seth's lover is also optimistic and want to accept the life as it is so he says,

There is so much to do

There isn't any time for feeling blue.

There isn't any point in feeling sad.

Things could be worse. Right now they're only bad.

(TCP, 141)

But still the regret or pangs of love wriggling his heart. So in his poem "Summer Requiem" he says,

Returning to the wastes of expression,

I feel again dry ground, though sterile:

From the shining sea I was thrown back always

Into the harbours of regret. (SR, 2)

Even the setting sun now brings for him a sense of drowning, in the doldrums of despair, negativity and loss. He finds no ray of hope of any kind in his life now. For this feeling in his poem "Evening Scene from my Table" he says,

In a brief while the sun will go,

And grand unnerving bats will fly

Westward in clumped formations, slow

And dark across a darkened sky. (SR,31)

In his hopeless life now he finds nothing which can provide a sense of solace for him. Now in extreme despair he curses his beloved, who has never recognized his true love for her, it is in his poem "Not Now, Not Soon",

Not now, not soon, but not too far,

May you not still be as you are,

Untouched by love for any being,

Unsearable, unstung, unseeing.

May you know love, and may it be

Returned to you ...

... not, well, may you love in vain,

And know, if not that joy, this pain. (SR, 21)

There is no love now in the "town" i.e. world and every river or ocean of love has dried up now. In his poem "Summer Requiem" he says about such type of loveless situation,

... Thus atrophied

The love for lack of loving, the lovers through fear.

Now only the empty doors mark empty houses;

The rusted tracks lead to dead embankments,

The signals are always down, and whistles

Are forever smearing the air with grief.

The town is indifferent; (SR, 5)

Now for separated lovers everything seems indifferent towards love but still, they want to sing this love till they drop. In his poem "Rocking-Horse" poet says,

And the afternoon is fading and the tapestry is torn

And the universe is dying ...

But I love to sing regardless and I'll sing until I drop

But now the song is over and I don't know how to stop. (SR, 48)

But finally his song is over and in his despair he does not know how to stop now. In his delirium he does not know or is unable to accept the reality of his separation.

With the passage of time whole body with its every part grow decrepit but only the desire remains young, and grow more young, time has no impact upon it. In this context there is a quote that, "... to understand the structure of relationship, which is not unitary, but a complex one. Thus it is both, love and bitterness, sweet and wild, and is both accepted and rejected: If bitterness there is, still there was love" (Mohanty, 43).

The separated or rejected lovers are like stars nearing the blackhole, still they hope for life i.e. love, like "birds trapped in cages/still sing for the rain" (LF, 110). They are as desperate to meet each-other as drought-stricken earth waits for nectar in the form of rain. They still have faith in

their love and hopping against the hope, it is in the poem "From California"

'There is a comfort in

The strength of love'. I quote

Another favourite

... Please note

The lack of hope or faith:

Neither is justified. (TCP, 128)

Still there is hope of regaining the lost love, because, "...The gem of love won't dissolve after death so long as the debt of love remains" (Monigold, 26). As in the poem "From California" the old love revives again, and the drought of love drenched by the nectar of love:

...

Old love wells up again,

All that I thought had slipped

Through the sieve of long absence

Is there with me again:

The long stone walls, the green

Hillsides renewed with rain

... the end

Left much to be desired. (TCP, 126-127)

The room, where the beloved has lived with him is the replica of her for him, every object lying there reminds him about the beautiful moments of past love, he in the poem "This Room" says,

I love this room; this room means you to me.

The sun shines in, and sometimes music plays.

These books, this bed, this fan, that rug, these rays-

Predate and will outlast this ecstasy. (SR, 16)

Desire of any type is the cause of sorrows, pains and many other problems. Still he, in his hope expresses his love for her and in the poem "What's in it?" he says,

I heard your name the other day

Mentioned by someone in a causal way.

...

I love you more than I can say.

Try as I do, it hasn't gone away.

I hoped it would once, and I hope so still.

Someday, I'm sure, it will. (SR, 13)

Again the lover is proposing her to restart again by ending the distance of their hearts. He says,

"As you have asked for black and white,

May I send these lines to you

In the tacit hope you might

Take my type at least as true.

Let this distance disappear

And our hearts approach from far

Till we come to be as near

As acrostically we are." (Mohanty, 177)

Now finding no hope and being emotionally wrecked by blind hope/desire to restart, he finally realizes that their relationship had been affected adversely. In the poem "Walk" poet says that love has some other aspects also. The occasion in the poem is a walk at night by the side of a old familiar house, "I walked last night with my old friend./ Past the old house where we first met" (TCP, 160). "The time, as the poet said, was "night", the place lonely, and the weather bad ("The moon shone, and the path was wet./ No one passed by us as we strolled") and these aspects of the situation got transferred to the mental condition of the walkers – "... Though hand in hand/we did not speak. Our hands grow cold". Finally, the poet accepts all that time's passage and the change in time, and admits how their relationship had been adversely affected" (Mohanty, 71). Although the lovers were walking in each-other's company, but they are reluctant to fill the gap, in this context Seth in his poem "Walk" bluntly accept the reality of their respective hearts and says,

We did not deal in words or tears,

At the dead light we did not rage.

What change had crept through our forked years

We did not have the will to gauge. (TCP, 160)

To restart their relationship now, seems like a risk for them. This thought of risk further increases their desire not to restart/patch-up their relations. So in the poem "A Style of Loving" poet says,

...
 We two
 Have reached a safety the years
 Can claim to have created:
 Unconsummated, therefore
 Unfaded, unsated.

...
 And so we have set the question
 Aside, gently.
 Were we to become lovers
 Where would our best friends be?
 You do not wish, nor I
 To risk again
 This savoured light for noon's
 His joy or pain. (TCP, 153)

In this stanza, "The sentiment expressed is that it is better not to love, rather than to love and lose. Love with all its complications, is not for the faint hearted, and though Seth does not shrink from the commitment that love demands, he is at the phase in his life where friendship has more to offer than passion. ... Friendship thus seems a safer, if less rewarding proposition (Gupta, 28). The sense of indifference getting more and more dense and deeper. Now the desire for something else has aroused in the lovers' heart. It is in the poem. "Full Circle",

The circle from indifference
 To new indifference
 For you is perfect, but for me
 The present still is tense
 With rigid reminiscences that come
 Unwished – of you, your home.
 Gently I sift this great compacted
 Stock of memories:
 ...
 With silhouettes of dawn; (SR, 57)

If love is not from the heart, it can never be the source of happiness. With this sense, reality dawns upon the lover for this Seth says in his poem, "To Manijeh"

And dill may grow
 Ten feet in height
 But will no longer
 Yield delight. (TCP, 28)

In the poem "Protocols" " ... the intimacy of past love is contrasted with the distress of the present "broken" love- "Now that the facts are plain, the placid surface cracked./The protocols of friendship broken", and in the linked references to nature the poet wishes warmth and happiness to her independent of whatever may be his distress..." (Mohanty, 70).

May the sun burn away these footprints on the lawn
 And hold you in its warmth and keeping. (TCP, 152).

Here poet wants to shun every memory of her but at the same time pray for her well-being for the rest of her life. A true lover always pray for the welfare of his or her love, does not matter it is with them or away from them respectively. Now praying for her better life, poet finally finds rest and left everything in the hands of eternity. It is in the poem, "Evening Across the Sky",

...
 Safe from all thought, all fear,
 Now, heart, find rest.
 Sleep dreamlessly.
 Forget what chafed or held you fast.
 Settle such quarrels with eternity;
 The stars won't last.
 The moon will die,
 Earth, evening, you and I. (SR, 10)

Poet saw the death/end of everything on this earth, so now he is not worried about the end of his love and life as well. The lines of W.H. Auden that "We must love one another/Or die" (CW, 256) here proves totally irrelevant. But like Robert Browning's optimism, the lovers in Vikram Seth's poetry also hope for ultimate reunion i.e. union in death. In this

context Hoshang Merchant has said, "My lover and I join hands in the dust" (SP, 154).

A separated lover now finds not a single ray of hope to gain his love again. Now loneliness, despair, negativity, the memories of forlorn love of past are his companions. Seth is a great lover of nature and music. Except nature and music nothing can heal/balm the broken love/heart, because, "... love and music play on the emotions" (Gupta, 85) and particularly "... music is the food of love", it plays a major role in a narrative of love lost and found and finally lost again" (Mohanty, 230-231). Again in this context Seemita Mohanty has rightly said that, "A study of love lost, found, and then lost again..." an impassioned invocation of music-not time's-power to heal all wounds – or at least to make them bearable" (Mohanty, 247). For the separated/rejected lovers the music provides a strong sense of coming out of the despair and dejection to the realm of peace and relaxation.

Change is the rule of time and nature and everything have to change with them. Life also moves, "...through its vast frame as it does in the world with a "charged aimlessness" and the scenes unfold both elements of laughter and pathos, ..." (Mohanty, 162). Lovers are like a moth who, "... carries its own ashes/when it makes the long journey/round the flame" (LF, 110) i.e. beloved. In the next stanza the love is personified and described in wretched and desolate condition, "Thy music once was sweet-who hears it now?/ Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?/ Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain/ Neglected, mute, and desolate... thou" (Mohanty, 7).

Now the definition of love for a separated/rejected lover has changed. Love is not real but just a black reflection of the true love, in this context Hoshang Merchant says ,

...

Only love is real

The love of the pitying thing upon a Cross.

And all our human loves are only a weak reflection of that

(CW, 242)

Again, in his poem, "The Last Poem" he says that, "Love makes the time real/Reality is a fictitious" (CW, 234). Now love has become a fictitious thing for him. In his delirium now life and love, both are synonyms of pain for him, so he says,

"What is the difference between my life and my love?

One gets me low, the other lets me go.

... rack me no riddles more". (Mohanty, 230)

Even the entrance in the kingdom of love and happiness is denied to him by his fate, as described in the poem "Full Circle" by Vikram Seth,

Last night when from that pitted roadway

I wandered as a dreamt,

The trees were bent, hostile, entangled,

Weeds massed and grass unkempt,

The house locked and the only key inside;

Ingress denied. (SR, 58)

In this context, Seemita Mohanty like Seth has expressed same views, because ingress is again denied for the lover, in ancient times also, "...I am consumed by past love; its germs long embedded, half-contained, have grown virulent again .There is no hope for me. I turned away four thousand nights ago, and the path was closed in by trees and brambles. ...let me live in a zone where hope is not a word" (Mohanty, 244).

After the denial of ingress, for the lover the whole world is like "... a town with its heart torn out" (Mohanty, 243). In his acute delirium his philosophy of love has totally changed, he says,

"It's love that makes the world go round!

That's bullshit! ...

I have found that love's a pretty poor forecaster.

Passion's a prelude to disaster. (Mohanty, 221)

In this context Hoshang Merchant has expressed same views in his poem "My Sunset Marriage" that "Hell is hard and inflexible like love" (MSM, 187). So now Vikram Seth himself is not far behind in his views on love he says in his poem, "Soon" that "Love was the strange first cause/ That bred grief in its seed", (TCP, 172). Again Seth in his poem "Summer Requiem" says that even the fruit of love is bitter and stone like, "Since there is nothing left but this,/.../ Only the stones are left, the nuts inside bitter" (SR, 1). Now the heart of the lover has turned to a "stone" and in it remains, "bitterness" only. With this bitterness in his heart, he just finds that love is mere physical attraction and is based on sexual pleasure only, in this context Hoshang Merchant says that,

Love is an in and out

In love there is an up and down

No one is known to make love

On his feet
 We lie down
 Above /below
 Over /Under
 geometry
 of the soul
 the mind
 the body submits to it
 it is only a metaphor. (CW, 113)

Now love for him is nothing except, "... an eternal going-out to the place of execution" (MSM, 42). With the end of love in his life, now nothing remains in his life, except darkness. In his poem "Can't" Seth says,

My love has gone. What do I have instead?-
 ...
 The dreams I dreamt have filled my soul with dread.
 The world is mad, there's darkness everywhere. (SR, 12)

Immune to love-pangs now and in his complete hopelessness, now he, in his poem "Fellows' Garden" says,

O mighty loves and griefs long gone,
 Why won't your details linger on?
 Why should it be that I recall
 Beech, beast and mallet – and that's all? (SR, 9)

Here he just want to recall the heart's/soul's age old friend nature, with its happiness, rather than painful love. In his utter despair and depression he does not want to face the light even and want to live in the darkness, it is in the poem "Dark" by Seth, where he says,

For spring, for dawn
 Against the stun of light.
 Let it be. Let it grow.
 Let there not be light. (SR, 54)

For a separated/rejected lover now, "Death becomes an ally to circumvent the tyranny of fate. In fact, Death is his best friend and fate, his enemy"

(Biswas, 29). Now delirium has engulfed his heart and soul and death seems the only saviour to him. In his poem "The Yellow Leaves" Seth says,
 ...
 What is this heaviness that won't unclench my heart,
 My work by day, my spirit nightly?
 ...
 Nor is the darkness new, nor this un giving game
 This waits till it or I am finished. (SR, 24)

Death, is the only way for a lover now to save himself from the pangs of love, despair and many other results of broken love. It is in the ironically titled poem, "Bright Darkness" where poet says,

My hands dissolve in water.
 My body wastes away.
 The air drifts past and through me
 Each night and every day.
 Bright darkness is my comfort,
 Dark daylight is my friend,
 And even I can't reckon
 Where I subsist or end. (SR,20)

Now everywhere, darkness is his friend, except it he does not like anything. Finally he says that he will die unfulfilled, and with his death everything will come to an end. In his poem, "Which Way" poet says,
 ...
 For now I see
 The sky in tatters-all the clouds awry
 And soon I will not see the sky.
 It will be closed, I will be dead
 And all I wish to say will stay unsaid. (SR, 46)

Love hurts too much. The story of love ends in frustration, despair, and delirium. Finally nothing good remains for the lovers except despair, delirium and death. But the fact is that the unfulfilled love always creates history and remains alive for the immemorial times, yet to come. The stories of Mirza-Sahiba, Laila-Majnun, Sree-

Frahad, and Saleem-Anarkali are some best examples. Not in this mortal world but they surely meet in the immortal world of souls.

Technically, Vikram Seth's poetry resembles some of the best productions of the English tradition. "Seth's poetic temperament, in conjunction with his poetic sensibility, is in evidence even in this maiden work. The predominant mood in which these poems were written is one discoloured by disappointment in love, but the poems are remarkable for the courage they reveal, inherent in the acceptance of life as it is, and the effort to go on with it in spite of setbacks and heartbreak (Gupta, 16). Sensitiveness to the emotions and various aspects of love, his relation to nature as a mirror to his emotions, with distress and pain in love are the frequent phenomenonena of Seth's poetry. Mainly his poems are, "related to love and relationship, to nature, and to feelings of distress, pain and death at one level, and happiness, playfulness and a sense of relaxation on the other" (Mohanty, 69). Such type of variations in his poems, provide pleasure, belongingness and reality to the readers, which makes them to return again and again to his poetic-world.

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