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A Telescopic Vision of K.V. Dominic's Poetic World through *Cataracts of Compassion*

Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh

Assistant Professor,

Department of English,

Maharaja Harishchandra P.G. College,

Moradabad, affiliated to M.J.P. Rohilkhand University,

Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India

Email Id: dksinghdharmendra@gmail.com

ORCID Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1333-810X>

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Abstract

An attempt to present the poetic world of a particular poet particularly based on a particular volume is thought to be a herculean task. Can it be possible? is the question. Generally, the poetic world of a poet is known or understood with the help of the close study of his all works where his all feelings, passions and emotions are reflected vividly and variously. There is a saying in this world that possibility resides in impossibility and hither is our ray of hope as the work of a poet is the result of all the generative energy that he possesses. Time, place and position are also the dominant deciding factors in shaping the poetic world of a poet. None can prevent him from the above said things. The other thing is that feelings, passions and emotions are the recurring things that recur in each and every work of a poet in various forms. This is why, here, a little step is taken to have a telescopic vision of his poetic world through his particular anthology *The Cataracts of Compassion*. Its possibility is to be seen in an affirmative way as without any major distinction the mind, psyche and tendency of a poet

is present in his all works. Miniatures always present the giants i.e. they attribute the real and ubiquity of a poet is known to all so there is no harm to have a telescopic visions of Prof. Dominic's poetic world through the *Cataracts of Compassion*.

Keywords: Communism, Symphony, Renaissance, Indo-English Poetry, Stratum

Kolkata (Calcutta), the birth place of Indo-English poetry, the nurturing ground of the entire poetry of Pre-independence period, is now called a city of dreadful nights, a dying city and a city without future. Calcutta where the first ray of Renaissance touched the pious feet of Mother India (Bharat Mata) is now lying on the ground. Calcutta, the pious birth and work place of Derozio, Toru and Tagore, could not escape from the iron clutch and stony heart of the invading time and policies like Nalanda of Rajgir and Taxila of Gandhar. Calcutta, where the roots of the poetic memosa was planted and where its green creepers (shoots) came out on the shore of the bay of Bengal, could not treasure its faced of grandeur and greenery of literary and philosophical world . With the passage of time, the poetic memosa of Indo-English poetry left its rooted ground Kolkata and shifted to Bombay (Mumbai) with the view of making its nesting place for a while. Hither it came into the prime of its life in the gardening of Ezekiel, Ramanujam, Kamla Das, Mahapatara, Pritish Nandy, Arun Kolatkar and others. But this halt was for a while as after the days of Emergency its creepers began to swathe the limbs of the whole India pulling down the brazen gates of its ivory tower. Leaving its specific venue, it has been omnipresent throughout the country. Now, each and every state of it (India) has its English poetry.

What to say of irony of time and place! It has been and seen in the history of the world but history repeats itself with the passage of time. Time is fleeting even though it leaves its foot- prints on the sands of the barren terrain. India has been the country of the poets, thinkers and philosophers continually. History itself is its witness as ancient and medieval India was and is the land of Adi-Shankara, Ramanuja, Buddha, Mahaveera, Chanakya, Kalidas, Banabhatta, Aryabhatta, Soor, Kabir, Tulsi, and Meera and so on. All the sages and seers of this pious country irrigated this land with the water of their knowledge. They clothed it with their visions and ornamented it with the rare gems of pious virtues. Time ceaselessly writes the history of a country. History is called the biography of a nation while literature its autobiography and poems nothing but its memoir. Thank God! Our country has ever been merry and fruitful. It has never been barren. It has its Galibs, its Raskhans and its NIGHTINGALES.

Prominent among the recent voices from the different parts of the country are Vinita Agrawal, Arundhati Subramanyam, C. L. Khatri, Bipin Pastani, Dalip Khetrawal, S. Padma Priya, Rajiv Khanderwal etc. But one of these recent voices who is hailing from Kerala, *God's Own Country*, is K.V. Dominic. He is one of these renowned contemporary Indo-English poets and most *bona fide* and erudite philosopher-critics of India. He tried and is trying his hand in the field of English poetry, criticism, short story and editing. He had been editing *IJPCL* (International Journal of Post colonial Literature) from 2001 -11 (so far as, by now he has been the author and editor of more than 40 books) and has been the editor and

publisher of the international refereed biannual journal *IJML* (International Journal Of Multicultural Literature) and editor-in-chief of the Guild's International Refereed Biannual Journal 'WEC.' K.V. Dominic is one of those a few foot-prints that are made on the terrain of Kerala, the native place of Adi Sankara. His foot-prints are going to change into hallmarks in the history of English writing in India soon, particularly.

As a poet, Dominic has seven collections of poems by now and this poetic pilgrimage of his starts with *Winged Reason* (2010), a maiden book of 39 free verses dedicated to his father and *Write Son, Write* (2011) is his second collection with single but longest poem in 21 sections. His third collection is entitled as *Multicultural Symphony-A Collection of Poems* which heralded in 2014 with 47 poems in number dedicated to his bosom friend and chief motivator Sudarshan Kcherry. 2016 that pushed him to the apex of glory, was his very fertile and productive year in which fell his *Contemporary Concerns And Beyond* with 38 verses composed in 18 months from 2014 and *K.V. Dominic: Essential Reading And Study Guide* with 34 poems in number. The *Cataracts of Compassion* is his 6th poetry collection consisting of 34 verses in number. The latest collection of his poems is *Musings on Covid Pandemic and Beyond* (2021). It is the seventh collection of 43 poems penned on various subjects but chiefly on COVID-19. Whatever he wrote, he wrote in the white light of truth –real and reality with facts but without any fiction- not in the red light of passions and emotions as he pervades every word he wrote. A cursory glance over his poetic oeuvre reveals that his poetry is nothing but a prism through which when the various rays of feelings, passions and emotions pass, it reflects the various colors of his visions and thoughts. This reflection of his visions of various thoughts is seen on every page of his works vividly without any partiality.

His poetic world has no boundary. One can get what one wants; one can seize what one was searching for and have the miniature of this whole giant world in the form of his eye-catching (bodacious) and heart-stealing (gratifying) volume of verses. If one has no time to study his all collections, one is not to be worry as one can study his volume *Cataracts of Compassion* as it is the miniature of his rest volumes of verses. If one peeps through this telescopic anthology of Dominic, one will have the glimpses of his each and every verses and collections. It seems that this volume is a cylinder filled with compressed gases of various verses written on the various subjects like the rest volumes. Through it the poetic world of Dominic can be peeped.

Cataracts of Compassion is the 6th collection of Dominic's poems entitled with the suggestion of the renowned philosopher-critic-poet Dr. Ramesh Chandra Mukhopadhyay. This collection of his poems is the garland of 34 fresh flowers bloomed with the dew of yore (Enlighten Us Lord Buddha) and the rays of the upheaval of the contemporary fierce sun of the present India and its society. The title of this volume is so attractive and enchanting that it steals our eyes and soul to go (it) through as a whole. This volume presents all the holes of our Indian society in an Ezekielian way. The root word of the title of this volume is 'Compassion', the heavenly quality that man lacks presently. It seems that Dominic has a mirage of seeing cataracts of compassion in the wasteland of the brave new world of ours. As Dr. Poonam Nigam Sahay has written about the Compassion in the works of Dominic:

The entire world of K. V. Dominic revolves around “compassion”—a Virtue so rare in today’s world. One can almost feel a spiritual humanism enveloping all his works, be it his poetry or prose. He truly advocates the mission of devoted service to humanity. He descends from the highest stratum of society to the lowest stratum of outcasts to feel the pangs and pain of the downtrodden. He expresses the universal truth of human destiny with his poetic force employing appropriate words and images to convey his feelings poignantly and precisely. (66)

The next thing of the poetic world of K.V. Dominic is chiefly its rainbowy theme. This thematic rainbow of his is a/risen in the literary sky owing to wet and moisture of the shed tears and heat and sweat of the body and soul of the poor, exploited and the downtrodden and its seven colors seem symbolic in a negative way as here red is for danger and insensitivity ; yellow for sorrow, pangs and pain of life; green for hatred and jealousy for one another; blue for the instability of thought and action of the denizens of the country; indigo for injustice, torture and oppression done to the oppressed while violet is for hollow and pseudo spirituality of the inhabitants of the country. These colors are sometimes dark but sometimes dim in the present volume. In the Preface to *Cataracts of Compassion* Dominic himself writes:

I have been trying my maximum to avoid repetition of themes and topics in my poetry. But however hard I attempt, there are some burning issues which resurge or ruminate into my mind and again I am compelled to write on them. Poverty, religious exploitations, environmental issues, corruption in the society terror, cruelty to women, children, old and animals, gender discrimination, ageism etc are those issues which prick me very often to write more and more...(11)

“Literature is the mirror of society” is not said in vain. Dominic is a *literati* who has reflected all the rainbowy colors of the Indian society in his works. No color could escape from his eyes. In this matter he resembles P. B. Shelley, the romantic rebel of the 19th century. Like Shelley he wrote, what he saw. What he did not find, he pined for that. Shelleyian spirit resides in his works. Here, the golden lines of Shelly from can’t be missed. Mark the lines from “To a Skylark”:

We look before and after
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those
That tell of saddest thought. (“To a Skylark”—Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Same is with Dominic. His theme and topic varies but he always plays with the burning questions of the society of his time. His best poems are full of saddest thoughts.

The next key point of his poetic world is his wish for social reform. Like a barometer, he measures even a minute changing of the Indian atmosphere and forecasts the befalling catastrophe in the environment of the Indian society. Although a barometer never presents the solution to avoid the befalling catastrophe on the society, he presents. Such presentation of his is not only for India but also for the whole world as the theory of ‘Butterfly Effect’ is

common in his works. For *instance* in a poem “African Poverty” of the collection of *Cataracts of Compassion*, he writes:

How can the rich and rich countries
Waste their excess food
When their wretched siblings
Cry for just a meal a day?
When will the rich have prick of conscience
For hoarding poor’s share and wealth
And starving them to die? (26)

It is his wish for social reform in describing the pathetic condition of a young widow in the poem “I am an Indian Young Widow.” His purpose was to awake the Indian- society that was sleeping soundly in the way of Kumbhkarna, the younger brother of Ravana. Very clearly and emphatically he writes:

Hellish is the life of an Indian widow
Tragic and nightmarish if she is young
Patriarchy doesn’t allow her to survive
Eagle fly over her wherever she goes....
 (“I am an Indian Young Widow,” *CoC*, p. 39)

What to say of his thoughts about men, even though on the *canicide* (killing of a stray dog) he writes heart touching and mind blowing lines –

Cruelty thy name is man!
You have made your pets
Stray dogs struggling for life

...

And you start massacre
Killing all stray dogs labeling
Violent or man eaters
Compared to our violators

...

Multitudinous are your
Criminals and murderers
Do you kill them all...?
(Dog’s Curse on Human Beings, *CoC*, p. 32)

It’s on the *tapis* that Dominic is the devotee of Karl Marx and worshipper of the *Das Capital* but his devotion to him is true not blind. It is also truly said that no creed and no religion is bad from its very origin. It is intentionally or unintentionally polluted by/ after applying greed oriented amendments and no doubt Dominic would have studied the life history of Hitler (*Mein Kampf*) and George Orwell’s satirical allegorical fiction *Animal Farm* (1945) and Karl Marx’ *Das Capital* / *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* etc. He knew the reality of this world and its rotten religions. Like Karl Marx, he believed that religion is

the sigh of the oppressed creatures, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of the soulless conditions. It is the “opium” of the people. This is why, he writes in a verse, titled as, “In the name of God” in his anthology *Winged Reason*:

God is dethroned
In the name of God .
And human gods are crowned
In the name of God .
 (“In the Name of God”, *Winged Reason*, p. 70)

De facto, he is called a communist but his communism is ideal. He is still fighting on the behalf of the downtrodden among men but unlike the extreme communists or the leftists, he never gives a call for the class struggle. The reason is that his ‘ Red Army ’ is not the ‘ Red Army ’ of the comrades (leftists) but the ‘Red Army’ of the widows, maids, dogs, tigers, elephants, birds and so on, so it can be said that he is an ideal rebel or anarchist more than a communist i.e. an ideal communist . His poems ‘African Poverty’ , ‘Dog’s Curse On Human Being ’ , ‘I Am An Indian Young Widow’, ‘ Krishnan, the Ideal Communist’ , ‘ Circus Rani, Queen of Woes’ prove it. His poem “Krishnan, the Ideal Communist” reflects his thought of an ideal communist vividly. Where (there) Krishnan, the protagonist in Saffron dhoti stretching down to the knees, only knows and thinks Gandhi Ji as his role model. Where there is Gandhi ji, there is no room for violence. Dominic writes vigorously:

Gandhi is his role model
Whom he calls Indian Marxist
Leads very simple life
Krishnan tells the world:
Satvik karma has a happiness
And it is the best happiness...
 (“Krishnan, the Ideal Communist,” *CoC*, p. 45)

Nature and its beauty in various forms have been the content of the various poets of the various languages with its literature since the immemorial history of the literature of each and every country of the world and Indo–English literature has not been aloof from it. When we talk about the treatment of nature and its beauty in the poetic world Dominic, particularly in *Cataracts of Compassion*, We find it belonging to the family of William Wordsworth and P. B. Shelley, Kalidas and Tagore etc.(As a votary of nature, Dominic too is close to them) .To Dominic nature is not only a procession of seasons and seasonal fruition like Wordsworth but also it is the eye of all the things into which the observant soul can peer and behold the spirit that inhabits all the things.

The poetic world of Dominic points out that nature toils continuously for the purpose of serving others with its music and song and tone and mirth vividly but man that is self-centered by soul, greedy by nature, and victim of gross – materialism by intention is not happy at all. He has been wounding and injuring it for ages. No balm can cure its wounds. Man is encroaching on it and enforcing to leave its masters (birds and beasts) their dwelling place that is nature.

When we have a deep study of Dominic, we find a synthesis of Wordsworth, Shelley, Kalidas and Tagore. Like Wordsworth, he too, endows nature with spirit and like Shelley, he goes much further to provide it with intellect and his pasteurization of nature as a friend, philosopher, anchor and guide is nothing but Tagore's. Besides it, there is a glimpse of Kalidasian poetry in his versification with a deep sense of trusteeship between man and nature i.e. his poetry is the synthesis of the four streams of thoughts related to nature – Wordsworth's spiritualization, Shelley's intellectualization, Tagore's pasteurization and Kalidas' trusteeship. Although they make a confluence in his poetry, it is easy to differ and dissect them one by one like the entangled woolen yarns. If one wants to see both the Wordsworthian and Tagorian treatment of nature at one place, one can roam or wander in Dominic's poetic realm – *Cataracts of Compassion*- where he writes notable such golden lines as:

Nature is the best teacher
Modest and humble man
Learns eternal truth from it....
(Lessons from Fruit plants, *CoC*, p. 47)

And if one wants to see Shelley's intellectualization of nature, one can roam in the poem "The Groan of Mother Earth" where he very intellectually puts a question on all those harms that have been done to nature. As, this world of man and nature needs a feeling of Kalidasian trust for the co-existence of the world – a transcendental meditation of the ephemeral and eternal world. Dominic too felt it so he penned:

I can hear the groan of mother earth
Being raped by her own beloved human souls....
I can hear her shriek for help
Where they cut each her vein....
I can hear the scream of elephants, tigers
Boars, snakes and all wild animals
Man, I can hear mother earth cursing you
As Gandhari did long back to Krishna.
(“I can Hear the Groan of Mother Earth”, *CoC*, p .41)

What once Tagore said “the highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence” is also true with Dominic's pieces of poetry. His poetry teaches us to have a harmony with nature and its various objects. It seems that it is his message that he wants to deliver us.

When it is wished and desired to explore the nature and its beauty in the various forms in the works of any writer of any language of the world, it can never be complete without the exploration of knowing his / her love for birds and animals as they are the inseparable part and parcel of the nature so the odyssey that is done through the works of Dominic explores his evocative affection for the flora and fauna of his own world in which he resides. His poems “Musings on the killing of a tiger”, “Rosy Dog is Waiting”, “What's Wrong With Me?”, “Wails of Mosquitoes and Elephants”, “Dog's Curse on Human Beings”, and “I can Hear The Groan of Mother Earth” reflect his great love for birds and animals and his such

type of love and affection is vividly reflected in his various works. His works often raise voice against the oppression and injustice done not only to men but also to the birds and animals. To him, there must be a harmonious relationship between man and nature-its objects. The very title of the anthology, *The Cataracts of Compassion* (2017), is aimed at establishing a strong connection between the feeling of sympathy and the natural world, exemplified by the cataracts, powerful waterfalls that symbolize life and regeneration.(Marino,p.151) Once, in an interview, he said “Man can learn many values from animals: love, kindness, friendship, co-operation, industry, cleanliness, etc....” (Marino, p. 211); as further, he remarks, “Non-human beings are dearer to God than human beings because they do not sin against Him”. A poem (entitled as “What Is Wrong with Me”) from *The Cataracts of Compassion* clearly reflects his sympathy to animals where he says to his spouse:

What is wrong with me? / can't take my dinner
Unless my dog and cats /start dining their share
Spouse Ann repeats everyday: /they shall be served
After we finish our meals
But I can't eat when/ their stomachs are empty
Is it fault treating animals/ on a par with humans?
("What's Wrong with Me," *CoC*, p. 67)

Flora and Fauna are near and dear to him. He can't see their catastrophe. In the poem “Wails of Mosquitoes and Elephants”, a personified animal too pathetically complains to one and all against all the injustices done to them:

Pastures and thickets are burnt
Neither is there any water
Our habitats are destroyed
Roads are made through them
Vehicles hit us and kill
Their horns pierce our ears
Hunger's call leads us to your forms
That were once our pastures.
("Wails of Mosquito and Elephants," *CoC*, p .65)

As a close reading of Dominic's *The Cataracts of Compassion* reveals him not only as an animal poet like Ted Hughes (1930-1998), one of the most prolific poets of the 20th century, and rich in animal imagery , but also the real brand ambassador of the animals- 'real' because his leaves of verses are always for their well being. He observes, feels, challenges and shares all the issues related to them whether it is related to their hunger or to their exploitation or to cruelty done to them or to all the care and sympathy that they need.

Dr. K.V. Dominic, residing in India, is a famous cosmopolitan poet of the 21st century. His cosmopolitanism is not pseudo. It is real because he is without any national, racial, and religious prejudice. Like Tagore, he never leaves his root and sense of ethnic identity. He is very much a “rooted cosmopolitan”. He has equal reverence and consideration

to all the people of the world (world citizens) without any discrimination. His cosmopolitanism is vividly reflected in his interview with Goutam Karmakar when he utters:

Though I am born as a Christian, I am not tied to the practices of Christianity. I deem all religions equal. In fact my religion is universal religion, which preaches to love all creations of the world and show discriminations to none. I believe in VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM...(359).

Prof. Dominic is a 'late bloomer' in the orchard of the Muse. What though he bloomed late? He has bloomed well. He sees, observes, notices and feels all the seasons of this worldly orchard very deeply and minutely. Nothing can escape from his eyes. He looks the spring season through the filmy eyes with tears. He looks the autumn season through the filmy eyes with laughter. He is impartial to all. He is partial to none and nothing. He writes what he sees. He writes what he feels. None and nothing can stir his pen from its duty. This is why it is called that Dominic, the rebellious soul and prolific writer, is the second name of the poetic revolution. He is panacea for the bleeding minds and balm for the tranquil hearts. As the petals of the flowers spread their fragrance, he spreads the fragrance of his heart and soul through the nippy petal of his pen throughout the world. He knew so he proved that it is never too late to mend.

Nota bene is that all the pieces of Dominic's poetry beat a strong impress of *zeitgeist* advocating *vox populi vox dei ipso facto* they are *par excellence* in whole of the literary compass i.e. the telescopic vision, presented through the present paper, is that he is a late bloomer in the field of Indo-English Poetry writing from Kerala brimming with the passion of social reform, dealing with compassion and heartedly worshiping nature with a great love for flora and fauna of his realm. Besides being an ideal communist, he is a visionary poet with sparks and flames.

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