

## POETIC VISION OF PABLO NERUDA

**Goutam Karmakar**

Assistant Teacher, Department of English, Bhagilata High School (H.S),  
Raiganj, Uttar dinajpur, West Bengal, India.

---

**ABSTRACT:** *The Personality and poetry of Pablo Neruda is hard to define because sometimes it help the reader to understand his poetic vision and characteristics and sometimes it create hindrances for the readers as his poetic images changes to fit a meaningful place in the world. At the same time it is very true that very few poets are as famous today as Pablo Neruda in his life. He wrote Poetry from an early age and won prizes as a teenager. Besides he was a politically active man of the left. A close look to his 'Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair', '100 Love Sonnets', 'The Captain's Verses', 'Canto General', 'Residence on Earth' and 'Elementary Odes' show that his way of outlook, his poetic thoughts, visions, images, symbols change with the contemporary situation and mental conflict of the poet. In this paper, I have attempted to show the various modes that lie in his works with some of his eternal poems.*

**KEYWORDS:** Poetic vision, Images, Symbols, Eroticism, Contrast.

---

### INTRODUCTION:

“The poem... reflects the choices consciously or unconsciously made concerning the subject position, community affiliation and meaning making activities of self understanding represented in written language, poetic identity can be interpreted in written language... of the poem.” Hanaur,59

Along with the poets like Derek Walcott and Margaret Atwood in the cannon, Pablo Neruda is definitely a postcolonial poet who has become a prime figure in portraying the socio- political, socio-cultural conditions of his country in contemporary times. A close reading to Neruda's work show that some post colonial; issues like linguistics and cultural transpositions, loss, alienation, displacement and racial conflicts are found in his poems. Actually language and racial identity are the most important measures for an individual culture to survive and Neruda tried to show that in his poetry. Here lie3s the phenomenal of Neruda's poetic vision to the arena of World literature. He employs various images, simile, metaphors, and symbols to get his point of views to his readers-the readers of the common earth. Actually Neruda introduced himself to his contemporaries as a oet who was closer to death than to philosophy. He was also a poet who was closer to pain than to intellect and more accustomed to blood than to ink.

How far the vision of a poet can go as a representative is quite clear in Neruda's 1971 Nobel Lecture where he said that he had often mentioned that the best poet can prepares our daily bread. The best poet does his majestic and unpretentious work with golden colours. Critics have called Neruda a self indulgent writer but he was such a poet who had deep feelings for his

country, friends, readers, surrounding and he always expressed them passionately. His poems are full of easily understood images that make them no less beautiful. His poems were meant to be purgative for his readers. Each poem challenges the readers' sensibility in a special way. And the distinctiveness of his poetry lays in his representation of fractured and fragmented life and the division between mind and matter.

Neruda is a Chilean poet writing in Spanish, showing his concern with European Spain and he shares many thoughts with the Spanish Writers of South America. In the beginning in his poems extensive and vivid exploration of Nature is found. In his 'The First Sea', his passion for the Nature is very clear:

“Rapture of the rivers  
Banks of thicket and fragrance  
Sudden boulders burnt out trees,  
And land ample and lonely.” (The First Sea)

In his “Some Beasts”, he described the savage beauty of the ancient America and it was represented by several creatures that took on mythical aspects in the poem. However it is also shown at last that ultimately Nature rules us, not we rule nature. Actually from natural world he was inspired in his childhood:

“The jaguar touches the leaves  
with his phosphorous absence  
the puma speeds to his covert  
in the blaze of his hungers,  
his eyeballs, a jungle of alcohols  
burn in his head.” (Some Beasts)

His sudden shift in tone, images is found in 'Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair'. Here he wrote warm and passionate poetry with intense feeling about adolescent love. Traditionally in love poetry woman is identified with nature. But here Neruda made woman a veritable force of the universe and showed woman's body as sex object. As he wrote in Song I:

“Body of woman, white hills, white thighs  
You look like the world in your posture of surrender  
My savage peasant body digs through you  
And makes the son leap from the depth of the earth.” (Song I)

A close reading of this collection shows that it may be an erotic one but his use of language, technique, emotional intimacy made it eternal one. The ecstasies and obstacles of young love are showed by his use of vivid images. A deconstructive reading may define it from another level. As a melancholy poet, he wanted to unite with the world by sex and wanted salvation from loneliness by making love.

In “Tonight I Can Write”, we find the poet’s memories of a lost love and the pain they can cause. Throughout the poem the speaker recalled the details of a relationship that is now broken. He continuously juxtaposed images of passion he felt for the woman he loved with the loneliness he experienced in the present. The poignancy of the situation is further heightened when he realized:

“I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too”  
and equally, ‘She loved me, sometimes I loved her too  
How could one not have loved her great still eyes?’  
(Tonight I Can Write)

Neruda was too adventurous and this habit of adventure brought in his life alienation as he was unknown to foreign country, foreign language, culture, community and people in Asia. In that time it was too tough for him to compose poetry as solitude captured him very much. In such time ‘Residence on Earth (1933)’ was published with theme of pessimism, alienation, isolation and fear of death. These poems contained the nascent existentialism of that period. Chaos and absurdity surrounded him. Even eroticism was for him a futile thing. In his ‘Walking Around’ he said:

“I happen to be tired of being a man  
I happen to enter tailor shops and movie houses  
Withered, impenetrable, like a felt swan  
navigating in a water of sources and ashes  
The smell of barbershops makes me wail.  
I want only not to see establishments or gardens,  
Or merchandise, or eyeglasses, or elevators.  
I happen to be tired of my feet and my nails  
and my hair and my shadow.  
I happen to be tired of being a man” (Walking Around)

Neruda’s poetic vision was never static. Whenever change is needed, he adjusted himself with the surrounding demands. With the civil war, he witnessed death, destruction. With his entry in politics, he changed his writing style as he had to compose poems then for simple masses. As in “Madrid”, he said:

“Madrid, alone and solemn, July surprised you with your joy  
of humble honeycomb: bright was your street,  
bright was your dream.  
A black vomit  
of generals, a wave  
of rapid cassocks  
Poured between your knees  
Their swampy waters, their rivers of spittle” (Madrid)

The theme of love, the impact of war, the influence and aspects of Chile are very much present in his poetry and he synthesizes them very carefully. In his “In My Sky at Twilight”, the poor economic condition after civil war is also shown. The last two lines depict all these:

“My soul is born on the shore of your eyes of mourning  
In your eyes of mourning the lands of dream begin.”  
(In My Sky at Twilight)

His poetic vision, composition style, theme, subjects again changed in “Residence on the Earth”. Here he used many images, metaphors to show the contemporary social order with the touch of anxiety, chaos, death, his past diplomatic years. In ‘Ars Poetica’, he showed that poetry is the result of suffering resulting from the pangs of labour of a woman during childbirth who has to pass through a sort of devilish anguish and even a noise in labour before delivering baby. Actually he wants to make us realize that all youth and fresh are moving towards destruction that all battles cause. The emblematic condition of twentieth century is shown by different images:

“Between shadow and space, young girls and garrison,  
saddled with a strange heart, with funeral dreams,  
taken suddenly pale, my forehead withered  
by the rage of a widower’s grief for each day of lost life.”  
(Ars Poetica)

In “Third Residence”, the shift in tone is also obvious. ‘The Way Spain Was’, from this volume shows the condition of Spain with its past history, the chaos during civil war. Actually the death of Garcia Lorca and Miguel Hernandez gave him too much pain and the outcome was the poem. Here Neruda shows how a rich, glorious, beautiful country Spain was destroyed. Here we find a fine trace of Neruda’s poetic genius as the interconnection between the softness of the land, nature, affected people with the violence in the final image. Also he wrote the poem with a purpose as these lines show:

“Your violent and delicate vineyards  
stone of the sun, pure among territories,  
Spain veined with bloods and metals, blue and victorious  
Proletariat of petals and bullets  
Alone alive, somnolent, resounding.” (The Way Spain Was)

Neruda’s most outstanding and monumental work was the ‘Canto General’. It is a Whitmanesque attempt at reinterpreting the past and the present of Latin America and the struggle of its oppression and downtrodden masses towards freedom. In this volume we find ‘Discoverers of Chile’. A deconstructive reading shows that his use of images like Chile as an old man white beard is actually foam from the sea and mysterious kisses are the hidden natural coal, waiting to

be discovered by the colonizers. The merge of history and culture with colonial masters are shown in brilliant images also:

“The Spaniard meeting with his dry figure,  
watching the somber strategies of the terrain.  
Night, snow and sand make up the form  
Of my thin country.” (Discoverers of Chile)

Neruda’s love for Chile is also found in ‘If You Forget Me’ which belongs to the ‘Captain Verse’ collection. Actually during the civil war, due to his active participation in the war, he was sent to exile from his native country. Here he used brilliant imagery like ‘silver moon’, ‘red branch’, slow autumn and metaphors like ‘land’ and ‘roots’ in the fifth stanza:

“I shall lift my arms  
and my roots will set off  
to seek another land.” (If You Forget Me)

Neruda’s poetic vision, thoughts arrived at a new level in ‘Elementary Odes’. Here he showed a mastery of expression and imagery where he raised useful but mundane objects to sublime heights. His poetry cultivated simplicity of language and simplicity of technique. His ‘Ode to Tomato’ is a wonderful example of a poem that presents a pictorial description of a salad in the making to which a reader can add more profound meaning culled from an American culture. Each line in this poem is usually short, contains no more than one to four words:

“Without husk  
or scale or thorn,  
grant us  
the festival  
of ardent colour  
and all-embracing freshness.” (Ode to Tomato)

His poetic power was such that he linked a common element to a vast world in ‘Ode to Salt’. Here in this poem he personified the salt and created symbolism which was actually the history and its connection with the world:

“In its caves  
the salt moans,  
.  
Dust of the sea, in you  
The tongue receives a kiss  
From ocean night.” (Ode to Salt)

Neruda's poetic inspiration invested an identity on him. His 'Poetry' is the perfect example of this poetic inspiration. He does not discover his poetic talents or his interest in writing-but poetry appears, almost at his doorstep like a long lost friend. What is amazing is Neruda's deliberate inversion in the very first line when he tells us that the poetic inspiration came looking for him and impelling him to compose verse:

“And it was at that age...Poetry arrived  
in search of me.” (Poetry)

This poem is calm in the beginning but after that it gathers momentum and at last we find surrealism here:

“I wheeled with the stars  
my heart broke loose on the wind.” (Poetry)

## CONCLUSION

In Neruda's poetry there is a combination of the sensory and the natural, the subjective and the eternal, the intellectual and the commonly transcendental coupled with fear that distinguish his poetry from that of his contemporaries. In his works we can see the gradual degree of knowledge, maturity as if he has gone from innocence to experience. He is the poet of people and if we look at the mundane willingness of the readers, then Neruda certainly emerges as the favorite. Actually the human crowd has been the lesson in his life and he considers himself as a part of the masses, a leaf on the great human tree.

## REFERENCES

- Nolan James . Poet-chief: The Native American Poetics of Walt Whitman and Pablo Neruda, University of New Mexico Press, 1994
- Ramirez-Mendez Hugo. Neruda's Ekphrastic Experience: Mutual Art and Canto General, Bucknell University Press, 1999
- Batra Shakti, Three Contemporary Poets (A Critical Study), Surjeet Publications, 2008
- Hanauer, David I. Poetry as Research: Exploring second Language Poetry Writing. Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing company, 2010
- Wilson Jason. A Companion to Pablo Neruda: Evaluating Neruda's Poetry, Telesis Books Publication, 2008
- Classic poetry series, Pablo Neruda poems, Poemhunter.com- The World's Poetry Archive, 2011 (pdf)