

ISSN: 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Vol. 3 Issue 3 June 2017

Impact Factor 1.854

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

**Email : editor@expressionjournal.com
www.expressionjournal.com**

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 1.854)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132



AJMER RODE'S POEMS: A STUDY

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Abstract

In 20th century Canada remained multicultural fascination world for the world community due to liberal immigration policy, multicultural, multilingual social acceptability. As a result humanity all over the world preferred to accept Canada as their "Dream Land". Thus, Canada emerged as the rainbow-coloured nation. Indians have also preferred Canada as their "Dream Land". Thus Canada becomes "Second Home" for the large number of Punjabis, Jains, Marathis and Gujaratis. These Indians couldn't forget their homeland, culture, and their roots. By their literary works they paint their "roots", "India", "culture". Among all Indo-Canadian writers, Ajmer Rode's contribution is indeed remarkable. He is a playwright, director, translator and poet. He is writing in Punjabi as well as in English. Because of his unique contribution he is awarded by the State Government of Punjab. He is also a leading poet of Canada. Being a Punjabi, his poems remain highly significant to understand Indian's culture. In the final text of this paper Ajmer Rode's selected poems are considered for the study.

Key-Words

Indo-Canadian Writings, Migration, Label, Dalit, Suffering, Philosophy.

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Rapid transportation, fast development of technology, internet communication and democratic liberal policy of governing the nations gave the great force to materialize the concept of globalization. In 20th century after witnessing the deadly consequences of world wars and understanding the values of human life democratic political governing system became choice of major nations of the world. It is the fact that no nation has single, race, caste, class or ethnic group but more than one.

Since the 20th century Canada remained multicultural fascinating world for the world community because of the liberal immigration policy – Immigration Act 1978, Immigration and Refugee Protection Act 2002, Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2008 – and, multicultural, multilingual social acceptability. As a result humanity all over the world preferred to accept Canada as their “Dream Land”. Thus Canada emerged as the rainbow-coloured nation.

Indians prefer Canada as their “Dream Land” since 1906-7. Sikhs from Punjab were the first Indians preferred Canada as their “Dream Land”. In 1914, the ‘Komagatu Maru’, shocking incident took place. Since that time to till today Canada remains source of attraction to Punjabis. Thus Canada becomes “Second Home” for the large number of Punjabis, Jains, Marathis and Gujaratis. These Indians couldn't forget their homeland, culture, and their roots. By their literary works they paint their “roots”, “India”, “culture”.

As they settled down in the “New World” they couldn't forget their roots. Their literary creations become the canvas to paint their homeland, culture, roots and their experiences on their “Dream Land” etc.

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Among all Indo-Canadian writers, especially Punjabis, Ajmer Rode's contribution is indeed remarkable. He is a playwright, director, translator and poet. He is writing in Punjabi as well as in English. Because of his unique contribution, he is awarded by the State Government of Punjab. He is also a leading poet of Canada. Being a Punjabi, his poems remain highly significant to understand Indian culture.

Ajmer's poems are not merely presentation of simple images of his "roots" but highly thought provoking, mature and profound. For him poem is a product of deep and profound thought. Revolutionary temperament is the remarkable aspect of his poem. Contemporary issues are not ostracized by the poet. He has portrayed pictures of reality without exaggeration. His poems are suggestive and striking.

His major works are in English "*Selected Poems*", "*Poems at my Doorstep*" and "*Blue Meditation*". In Punjabi his poem collections are "*Leela*", "*Surti*", and "*Chubhchintan*". His plays are "*Nirlajj*", "*Komagata Maru*" and "*Dooja Passa*". His prose "*Vishva Di Nuhaar*" is also a remarkable work. Thus his contribution is outstanding.

Remarkable aspects of Rode's poems are they are very serious and highly suggestive. The poems can be evaluated from various perspectives. He has highlighted the contemporary issues. Philosophy of contemporary human life is presented in his poems.

His poems based on Dalit sentiments are nothing but the presentation of painful reality of orthodox Indian society. He challenges caste-based injustices. In his poem he doesn't exaggerate anything. In Indian society still caste plays very decisive role at every stage, in every field. In Indian society stigma of untouchability based hate starts before the birth of a Dalit's child. In his poem, in autobiographic way Rode writes;

"When my mother's loose shirt
could no longer hide the universe
expanding round her belly button,
someone sneaked into her womb
felt my forehead
and stamped: *achhoot*, untouchable, outcaste."¹

The poem doesn't present only Rode's anxiety but it is the worry of Dalit class. And it begins from mama's womb. It is true that caste identity one gets right from his/her birth, lives with caste and dies with that caste-mark. Caste challenges harmony and unity of the nation.

Human beings in the society are not identifies as human beings but by different labels. This label plays very important role throughout his/her life. Rode's this poem *Label* presents fact of human society. The poem is originally written in Punjabi;

"The baby
just born into this
world has been greeted,

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and well taken care of
Already a variety of labels have been
etched on him
One for race
one for color
one for religion and may
be one for a caste
At the same time he
Is told:
you are born in a
free world
Congratulations!
The baby smiles and
Accepts everything in good faith
But when he grows
into a boy and the boy
into a man one day it will
suddenly dawn on him:
nobody knows me
but the labels.”²

Thus, the poem presents reality of human society. Egalitarian concept and the concept of equality are ideally good but reality is totally different.

As a poet Ajmer composes poems on his family background. Rode’s poem on *Father* is highly appealing. Majority Dalits in rural India are either farm labourers or doing labour in their small far. Poem *Mustard Flower* ³presents hard work and sincerity of father;

“If you see an old man sitting alone
at the bus stop and wonder who he is
I can tell you.
He is my father.
He is not waiting for a bus or a friend
nor is he taking a brief rest before
resuming his walk.
He doesn’t intend to shop in the

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nearby stores either.
He is just sitting there on the bench.
Occasionally he smiles and talks.
No one listens.
Nobody is interested.
And he doesn't seem to care
if someone listens or not."

Further in the poem the poet writer's thus father is waiting from early morning to mid night. When a yellow car passes then he feels like thousand mustard flowers bloom in his mind. It reminds his hard work and company of the mustard flowers. He also remembers "Pauli" who left for Malaya and never returned home. Migration sometimes turns into painful fact. Uncertainty of human life forced a person to think about death. In this poem father thinks about death;

"The thought of death is most
interesting and lingers on
He stops talking and thinks of the
Fraser Street chapel where he
has attended many funerals:
He thinks about the black
and red decorations and
imagines himself resting peacefully,
a line of people
passing by looking at him
for the last time.
His eyes are lit. Perhaps
this is the image he enjoys most
before it is demolished
with the rude arrival of a bus." (*Mustard Flower*)

The poem presents struggle, waiting and philosophy of life. In Ajmer's poem *Remembering Father*⁴, he writes about his father "Never to school, Never to *gurdwara*, Never learnt to read, No time." With hard work and always eager to see better future of their children it is characteristic of Indian, especially Dalit father.

In poem *Waiting For Rusty*⁵ the poet present the picture of his mother;

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“The old woman
you see peering out of the basement window
is my mother.
She is waiting for Rusty the little dog
who sometimes wanders in
from the street outside.
It doesn't matter if Rusty comes or not.
what matters is the wait that
often extends to the dusk when it slowly joins
the fading shadows on the street.
At midnight Mother suddenly wakes
to chase away the cats fighting under her bed.
The noise disappears before she's up.
Slowly she comes to realize
she is in a small basement room,
not in her wide open village home
where stray dogs, cats, mice
and her own family had equal rights.

.....
The other day when I quietly
entered her room
she sat with her eyes closed
and her little book opened in her lap.
Perhaps she was pondering the couplets
of the Ninth Guru she had just read:
worldly relations are all Maya,
creation is but a bubble that rises and bursts
Rama is gone, Ravana gone,
nothing is permanent.
Union with Him is the truth,
the only truth
The noise of my steps disturbs her.
She opens her eyes and immediately
looks at me.
Her face with great poise gives into a
mother's face.
The first thing she asks me if I had
enough sleep last night.

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She still worries my habit of reading too much.
Then a flood of complaints:
Everyone is so indifferent here,
no one to talk with, children have no time,
TV all English . . .
this year she must go back to Punjab
to see if everything is all right
with our home, she must . . .”

The poem presents the old mother struggle to assimilate with the new world. Rode's poems travel from Dalit sentiments to the presentation of Indian culture. He has closely observed Indian culture and painted it in his poems. His poem *Kalli*⁶ is wonderful in a way. *Kalli* is name of a buffalo. The poet presents Indian's love for his pet animals. They are like their family members. The poem presents the picture;

“Kalli followed me 8 miles
to the market where cattle were traded
or sold like slaves.
Cows goats bullocks camels . . .
Kalli was black beautiful and six
the prime age for a water buffalo.
She was dry. Repelled bulls as if she had
decided not to get pregnant again.
Hard to afford, my father decided
to sell her. Kalli seemed to understand.
She obeyed as I led her
by the steel chain, one end in my hand
the other around her neck.
I was fifteen. Her nervousness was over
soon after we entered the market
where sellers occupied.....
Kalli sat with no emotion on her face
like an ascetic close to nirvana.
I sat stood walked around like a
neglected calf. Nobody bought Kalli.

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She followed me 8 miles back home
with no questions in her eyes.
I wasn't sure if my father was sad
or glad to see Kalli back. He just
looked at her like a family member
who had missed the train."

The poem presents pet animal owners love for his animal and with the love his helplessness and the condition of the animal. In rural India pet animals are treated as the family members. It is the remarkable characteristic of rural Indians and it is presented in a very lucid way.

Rode's poem *Spanish Banks* reminds forefathers' migration and settled down on the New World. Poem is very simple, short and appealing.

Rode's poems have philosophy of life. His poem *Take My Hands*, and *Playing with Big Numbers*⁷ are the examples. In human life "Numbers" plays very important role;

"The human mind
is essentially qualitative.
As you know,
we are easily excited by
pinks and purples,
triangles and circles
and we endlessly argue
over true and false,
right and wrong.
But quantitative analyses
rarely touch our souls.
Numbers were invented mainly
by men to trick each other.....
But playing with big numbers
could be interesting.....
Although things could be simpler on a
smaller scale. Suppose as a result
of the debt, five million children die
every year , as in fact they do,

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and each dying child cries
a minimum of 100 times a day
there would be a trillion cries
floating around
in the atmosphere just over a
period of five years.
Remember a sound wave once
generated never ceases to exist
in one form or the other,
and never escapes the atmosphere.
Now one fine morning, even if
one of these cries suddenly hits
you, it will shatter your soul into
a billion pieces. It will take
14 years to gather
the pieces and put them back
into one piece.
On the other hand, maybe all the
trillion cries could hit your soul
and nothing would happen.”

Thus, poem presents reality in a satirical way.

Thus, Rode's poems travel from Dalit sentiments to universal human sentiments. In his journey, he has also presented Indian culture. Portrayal of pain is the remarkable aspect of his poem. Philosophy of human suffering is presented in a poetic way. Simplicity with authentic emotional expression is clearly seen in his poems. His poems present his great love for India. Painfully he presents unpleasant aspects of Indian society, culture but he doesn't harshly criticize them. He wants remedy from the century old socio-cultural limitations of Indian society.

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