

Death beyond the Borders of Despondency in the Poetry of D. C. Chambial and Mahendra Bhatnagar

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the optimistic vision of death in the poetry of D. C. Chambial and Mahendra Bhatnagar, situating their perspectives within the broader framework of Indian philosophical and literary traditions. Contrary to the Western notion of death as a terminal biological event, both poets perceive it as a transformative and liberating force. Drawing upon Vedic thought, mysticism, and cultural beliefs, their poetry redefines death as a passage to spiritual fulfillment and emancipation from worldly suffering. Chambial presents death as a “friendly guest” leading to a “beautiful beyond,” while Bhatnagar views it as a source of meaning, gratitude, and existential completion. Through symbolic imagery and philosophical reflections, both poets dismantle the fear associated with death and elevate it to a realm of serenity and transcendence. Ultimately, their works shift the discourse from despair to acceptance, presenting death as an integral and affirmative dimension of human existence.

Keywords: Death, Optimism, Indian Philosophy, D. C. Chambial, Mahendra Bhatnagar

The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death.
(Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, III, I) (Davidoff 58)

Death, the inevitable phenomena of human life has always been considered mortals’ unbiased-enemy and has always fascinated and puzzled man. In Western countries, (leaving few poets) it is merely biological phenomena which cannot leave anyone destitute of it as the body is not more than a machine that has to perish someday. Some great philosophers and poets have variously pondered over it. Aristotle considered it as an essential stage to reach God, Aeschylus thought it to be the cruelest point of pain, Schopenhauer thinks it as something divine, for Democritus, a wholly biographical evolution and Robert Browning, George Eliot and George Meredith also thought so. But in eastern countries, from eons of time, death has been romanticized and is the center of Indian philosophy. The *Upanishads* are completely drenched

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in the concept of death which is not an end of life but a gateway to redemption from the worldly allurements (*Maya*).

In India, death has not been so defined; *Yogis* and saints observed penance on Himalayas for ages to merge themselves in the supreme soul (God) and several of them themselves got *Samadhi* when they found themselves worth doing so. Hindu scriptures also consider death as the threshold to enter a better world according to the previous *Karma* of man. The *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Ramayana* also consider soul imperishable. Jayram V states:

Death is a temporary cessation of physical activity, as a necessary means of recycling resources and energy and an opportunity for *Jiva* (that part which incarnates) to reenergize itself, review its program and policies and plan for the next phase of life. Each life experience on earth and each incarnation of soul offers the *Jiva* an opportunity to learn and overcome its inconsistencies and blemishes so that it can become the whole. (V)

Poets in India, whether writing in Hindi or English also inherited the same mystic tradition, folk tradition or the Vedic system of thought. Poets like Tagore, Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, A. K. Ramanujan, O. P. Bhatnagar, D. C. Chambial and Niranjana Mohanty have given ample room to death wrapped in spirituality. For them, death is not a bare biographical phenomena, it is the liberation of man from worldly pains, an unseen world which never shines with the perceptual glory of the material world. Niranjana Mohanty, after brooding over Indian myth on death rightly remarks:

Literature uses these myths and presents death as something horrible, gloomy, darksome and scornfully devilish. But yet sometimes it is an escape from the sorrow, suffering, guilt, decay and decrepitude. For those who are optimistic, it is another world that redeems man and paves clear the way to immortality. (Mohanty 104)

In this paper, the center of analysis is optimistic vision of death in the poetry of D. C. Chambial and Mahendra Bhatnagar. Both the poets have not treated death as a stranger but it is a messenger of God and a guest who is being waited from a long time. D. C. Chambial and Mahendra Bhatnagar have set aside the horrible, threatening and insecure visage of death and ecstasy to life in the fullest exposition of the principle of surrender to death. These poets do not see death as the destructor of human life but they feel devotion, humbleness and pure emotions for death which death cannot eliminate from man's life.

D. C. Chambial considers the life of man as immaterial as dust but death also reminds man his real existence and his transitoriness. In the poem 'Dust to Man', Chambial figures the before and after of man's life on earth. In the poem, 'dust' sarcastically states the 'proud man':

You're me
And again shall be me." (Collected Poems 13)

So, man is made of dust and finally he will again turn into dust and 'again lay down/on the dusty path/for the trampers/ and still be the witness/to the ever mutatine'. (Collected Poems 14) His pride along with his body turns into ashes but the soul still witnesses all the happenings and man's pride trampled by coming generations. Mahendra Bhatnagar also sees death as mutation of man's body unto dust. In the poem 'A Blow', death is unavoidable, it will come 'late or soon' and all mortals will die one day and turn into ashes. He says:

Early or late
All
In eternal sleep have to fall
Dust unto dust!
O unfortunate!
Then, why to weep? (Death-Perception: Life-Perception 92)

All the 'battering days' of man's life tease him only till he is living a mortal life. When he leaves the gross body: the worldly cares, worries, hopes and despairs lose their existence. D. C. Chambial in the poem 'Beautiful Beyond' finds that death is not a saddening accident but a world, a 'beautiful' world, an *El Dorado* which each human being aspires to have. He says:

A beautiful home exists beyond;
Without roof and without floor.
Even without the wall around
Not to say of window and door. (Collected Poems 14)

Unlike Shakespeare, Chambial also feels that man is only an actor acting on the stage of life for a certain time and when he plays assigned part, he leaves the stage and comes back into his real life.

Before coming, we have all lived.
Shall've again to go to live there
When our part is fully played
After the short sojourn. (Collected Poems 15)

Death is no more a frightening object because after dying where the man reaches, no trace of ‘Sun fire’, ‘rains’, ‘drought’ and ‘foggy freezing chill’ follow him. Death never leaves the man in lurch, rather take him too far from ‘all the hungers and all the greed’s’ and leave him on a land where ‘serene satisfaction, sans deeds/ writ large on every face’. (15)

Mahendra Bhatnagar is grateful to death because it is death that gives life the real meaning and purpose and it is death that makes “semblance between life and death”. Beauty of life also lies in death and all adornments i.e. Art, efficiency, power, mystery and hope are the beautiful outcome of death. So, Bhatnagar says that death must be acceptable to each and every human being without any grudge:

Indubiously
Transience,
Death element/feeling
Minute by minute death-tension
Are acceptable,
Gratitude
To death
Life’s gratitude! (Death-Perception: Life-Perception 2)

In another poem ‘Gratitude Again’ of the collection *Life Perception: Death Perception*, he is exceptionally grateful to death when he says that only because of death man came out of illusion and entered into the world of reality. Death gave significance to love and turned the human beings into the harbinger of human values. He says:

Death’s made life
Very beautiful,
Transformed this world,
In fact,
Into a pleasant heaven,
We learnt
The meaning of love,
Only then
True’s true,
Transformed man
Into higher beings
Than immortal god! (4)

Chambial gives a pre-vision of his own death in the poem ‘On My Death’ that how people will come and pass their judgments on his whole life in a single moment ‘free frank, and fair/that the whole of life/could not buy’. (Collected Poems 21) According to him, death is so kind and

liberal to him that without taking any price, it opens all the hollowness of life the moment when breath takes its flight. He says humorously:

Death buys for me
Without any price
A moment of hearty laugh,
A hearty laugh.
Till now
Sank and swam
In a pool of tears. (21)

Similarly, 'Proclamation' of Mahendra Bhatnagar also echoes the same idea when the poet, Bhatnagar says: 'Tell/the world-/now/Mahendra Bhatnagar sleeps!/sleeps in an eternal sleep'. (Death-Perception: Life-Perception 98) When the poet visions that death makes all the charms and magics of life meaningless and man even has no right on his own life, he becomes stoic and merrily prepares to give up every relation with beautiful home and beautiful illusory world and wishes to mingle in the soil out of which his body emerged. He says:

I sleep on the comfortable
Soil-bed!
I lose my identity
By fusing with the particles
Of this soil!
As I have accepted life.
Likewise
O death
I do accept you! (100-103)

For D. C. Chambial, death is a 'friendly guest' who comes on the threshold of a friend to wipe away all the cares and miseries. His poem 'A Friendly Guest' bears the same idea:

A friendly guest
Smiles unannounced
Minuses miseries,
Careless the wounds
And escorts on
Eternal voyage;

Death is a true judge and humble friend who in a wink invisibly removes all ethereal cares and leaves behind only some memories and 'a bag of ashes/hung from a peg-' (Collected Poems 122) and the latter is the real essence of man's transitory sojourn on this earth which is fully drenched in many proud orthodoxies. Chambial calls death his 'friendly guest' while Bhatnagar calls it fairy who beautifully allures man to its self like an agile girl playing tricks without any information and the poet also becomes ready to enjoy the childish trick of fairy death. For

others, death is the closing chapter of the book of life but for Bhatnagar, it is the time of getting totality. He says beautifully:

Of the book of life
Though art the end!
Therefore
For me
Though art the good news
Of totality!
Come
O death, come
I'm ready!
Awaiting you
I've bedecked myself,
I'm ready! (Death-Perception: Life-Perception 78)

In the poem 'Altar', Chambial addresses life as an altar, where every human being according to his merits and demerits gets the rewards but still he is not satisfied and keeps on running the rat race behind material gains. When he does not get ample reward he grumbles to God to do the things in right proportion, performs 'rituals' but unfortunately still remains unquenched and calls himself the 'victim of fate' so in such time of blackout, death is the only light that brings him out of the abysmal darkness. In another poem 'A Wish', Chambial philosophizes death and wishes to come out of all 'murky lanes', 'by-lanes', rivers growing 'jealous,' thundering and roaring and the world of eighty four lakh yonees to the world 'great beyond' where the wasteland of worldly cares, desires and aspiration may not reach. He says:

Let us, you and I,
Build a bridge to reach
The Great Beyond,
Leave behind the desert
That surrounds us.
This is a barren land
Scattered with carcasses. (Collected Poems 135-136)

Likewise, in the poem 'A Request' Bhatnagar also beseeches death to take him to his world. This time, he sees death in the form of a lady and wishes the befriend her. His dialogues with death give the impression of love talking between a lover and his beloved. He requests death to bring him to her abode. He invites her thus:

Come
Be my comrade!
If not a cohabiter
B my neighbor!

He also plays hide and seek with death and in merriment he wishes to leave the murky world behind and accompany death. So he says:

And one day
All at once
Make me accompany you
To the land of the death!
Just
Taunting and teasing! (Death-Perception: Life-Perception 80)

In 'Jungle of Hyenas', D.C. Chambial brings to light man's loose temper and his yearnings for good each moment. For him, 'anger is death which swallows half of man's life and like phoenix, each day his anger raises. He always longs for 'melody' but in turn finds only 'moans and cries' which make him more shattered. The pang of unfulfilled desire is never ending, so the poet feels that death is the best reward for the people living such a hellish life and says:

I fall and sink
Into a river full of mud
Without redemption.
Where man's machinations
Munch man into oblivion,
Death is the best reward
For one living in inferno. (Collected Poems 150)

Mahendra Bhatnagar wishes to hug death to expel the myth of Lord Yama, heaven and hell. He calls death to take him to her world so that he can unite the people living in hell for revolt against the reign of Yama and Chitragupt. In 'An Invitation', he says:

I don't acknowledge
Any Chitragupt
Any Yama,
I'll challenge them!
Just, let mw jump
Into let mw mingle
With the huge crowd of
Hell-denizens! (Death-Perception: Life-Perception 74)

In his philosophic undertone, Chambial considers end of life not really an end of life but a beginning to live another life quite different from the previous one and this cycle of life and death keeps on moving till one gets emancipation. He says beautifully:

End,
The beginning.
One continues to race in maze,
Ignorant about exit
From this chakravayuha,
Till the Light

Leads out of dark
And accompanies
To regain the paradise lost. (Collected Poems 153)

Mahendra Bhatnagar also seems echoing the same idea. In ‘The Wheel of Death’, he says that the wheel of death is very cruel in which ‘lifeless’ and ‘living’ both keep on ‘grinding and changing’ and even the natural calamities also accelerate this wheel. He says:

Invisibly
Silently
Continuously moves
This wheel of death
Uninterrupted... unchanged! (Death-Perception: Life-Perception 6)

So, with regards to death, the poetry of D. C. Chambial and Mahendra Bhatnagar sounds enjoying the somber clouds that succeed in maintaining the optimism and surrender before the Almighty. They have equalized both metaphysical and metaphorical levels of thoughts. To Bhatnagar, death comes from behind the bushes to sooth and pacify man. His feelings for death are drenched in something other than the feeling of sadness, pity, pathos and sense of loss. Apart from horrified pessimism of death, his poetry teaches to bow head before the final judgment with pure feelings of catharsis and not of despair and dolorousness. Anita Myles writes: “Bhatnagar... visualizes that the shackles of death ultimately lead to the final liberation of the soul, and hence instead of being terrorized by the idea of death we must accept it as essential part of human existence.” (Myles 97) While on the other, the poetry of D. C. Chambial is suffused with philosophical speculations of death. He does not talk about death directly but through apt images and symbols, he figures death in beautiful form and the reader is spell bound to feel the ‘beautiful beyond.’ His poems seek to raise death from despair to philosophic strength that stables the variations of thoughts about death.

To conclude, both D. C. Chambial and Mahendra Bhatnagar have successfully dealt with truth about life, death and mystic world. Both the poets have also interpreted the earth as a kind of hell where human beings are tortured and crucified by inequality, exploitation, penury, and violence. On physical and mental levels, they live in constant fear of death and they die each passing day before their actual pyre is prepared. Both the poets are far from the ‘three storied geography’ of heaven, earth and hell and feel more relaxed in the lap of death gazing the way to emancipation.

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