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Alienation and Rootlessness in the Poetry of Dilip Chitre

Dr. Rita

Associate Prof. in English, University College, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra

Abstract:

Dilip Chitre stands out as one of the most accomplished poet of post-Independence India who writes with equal mastery in Marathi and English. His poetry is deeply rooted in both Marathi and English traditions. It explores the fractured consciousness of modern man caught between languages, histories and places. Rootlessness, alienation and exile recur throughout his work as central metaphors for modern existence. Chitre's works are not merely linguistic but existential, a reflection of the modern Indian psyche torn between inherited tradition and urban modernity. Through the close readings of "Father Returning Home," "Felling of the Banyan tree," and "Lost Images," this paper examines how Chitre transforms alienation into a profound exploration of identity, memory, and spiritual belonging. The study argues that Chitre's poetry captures the paradox of modern life: the search for home within homelessness, the quest for meaning with estrangement. Finally, Chitre's art demonstrates that alienation, far from being a purely negative condition, generates creativity self-knowledge and transcendence.

Key-Words: Consciousness, Psyche, Exploration, Exile, Quest.

Modern Indian poetry in English and in translation from Indian languages is marked by a tension between belonging and estrangement. Alienation is not only emotional but it is also linguistic. The theme of alienation has been central to modern literature world wide and it has acquired special significance in postcolonial India, for in this era, the questions of identity, language, and belonging are deeply entangled. The modern Indian poet writes in the shadow of colonial history and in the light of cultural hybridity. Dilip Chitre's works emerge as a voice of profound existential and linguistic alienation. His writings symbolize a divided consciousness, a life lived in translation.

Chitre's early life shaped his sense of displacement. Born in Baroda and later moving to Bombay, he experienced both the vitality and anonymity of urban life. Later in life, he lived abroad which further deepened his awareness of exile. He once confessed in an interview, "Language itself is exile; I live in translation" (qtd in Subramaniam). This sentiment reflects his larger existential predicament: the impossibility of complete belonging in a fragmented modern world.

Bruce King observes that Chitre's poetry "projects the disjunction between inherited identity and contemporary reality, between a culture remembered and a world lived in translation" (Modern Indian Poetry in English 187). This disjunction manifests a condition of being uprooted from the familiar and thrown into an alien landscape. Chitre's recurring motifs of travel, migration and linguistic fracture embody this sense of homelessness.



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In Chitre's poetry, alienation and rootlessness are not merely social or emotional but metaphysical conditions. They arise from the fragmentation of self, family and culture in the modern world. Chitre's imagery – of trees, trains, cages and journey's – becomes a symbolic vocabulary for the modern consciousness that longs for roots.

Dilip Chitre's most celebrated poem, "Father Returning Home" from his volume of poems, "Travelling in a Cage" published in 1980 is a poignant study of urban alienation. It depicts a middle – aged man returning home from work, his life reduced to a mechanical routine.

My father travels on the late evening train

standing among silent commuters in the Yellow light" (*Travelling in Cage* 12)

The opening lines of the poem evoke a monotonous colourless world – "Yellow light," "Silent commuters." These expressions depict that Warmth and communication have extinguished. The journey of the father is not simply physical but metaphoric, symbolizing the daily exile of modern man within his own environment.

The use of image of travel conveys movement without progress. the father,

"hurries home crossing the length of grey platform.

Then hesitates at the sullen door" (13).

The hesitation at the threshold marks a psychological border between alienation in the public world and estrangement within the private sphere. Home, traditionally a site of belonging, has become a space of silence and indifference.

R. Parthasarathy rightly observes that Chitre, "turns the middle- class home into a site of exile rather than belonging" (Ten Twentieth – Century Indian Poets 45). The alienation of father is total. He is estranged from his work, his family, and even his language, for "his eyes fade homeward through the humid monsoon night" (13).

Bruce King expands this reading, suggesting that "Chitre's father is everyman of post-independence India – rootless in his own country, alienated within his own family" (King 189). The diction of the poem mirrors the emotional exhaustion of its subject. The "wet trousers cling to his shrunken legs," is a powerful image of physical decline that also symbolizes the spiritual depletion.

By focussing on the ordinary, Dilip Chitre Universalizes alienation. The weary existence of the father becomes emblematic of the modern condition. There seems to be no redemption in his return, for to him, home itself has become foreign. Lack of overt emotion reveals Chitre's mastery of restraint as a mode of empathy.

Chitre's poem "Felling of the Banyan tree" dramatizes cultural as well as ecological displacement. The poem recounts the family's move from Baroda to Bombay, and the father ordering the felling of a large Banyan tree.

"My father ordered it to be cut down



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The banyan tree was three times as tall as our house"
("Travelling in a Cage" 19).

In Indian tradition the banyan tree is considered as sacred for it stands as a living symbol of continuity, shelter and rootedness. Its destruction signifies not merely a change of residence but also the collapse of ancestral order. The act of felling becomes an allegory of modernization and urban migration.

"The banyan tree stood like a problem in the middle of our house" (19)

The banyan tree, a symbol of continuity, becomes a 'problem' in the modern city. Its felling marks the loss of rootedness, both physical and spiritual. In this modern world the sacred has become an inconvenience. E.V. Ramakrishnan notes, "The tree is both the ancestral home and the poet's inner self-its felling dramatizes the violence of modernity" (Making It New 163). The poem ends with a paradoxical image of endurances:

"The banyan tree's roots are still alive
And the leaves are growing." (20)

Though uprooted, the tree continues to live, suggesting that memory and tradition persist despite rupture. Arundhati Subramanian interprets this as Chitre's "translation of ecological displacement into spiritual homelessness" ("Dilip Chitre: A Cosmopolitan Seer").

Dilip Chitre's use of the banyan tree both in literal and symbolic sense captures the complexity of rootlessness. Modern life demands mobility, but every movement forward entails a loss. The poem's narrative tone conceals a deep emotion and its calm surface reflects the poet's attempt to comprehend the irreversible passage from the organic to the mechanical.

For Chitre, alienation is not limited to the geographical level but it is embedded in the language itself. His bilingual practice embodies what Shirley Chew calls "the double exile of Indian poets who live within the fault line between mother tongue and World tongue." (Journal of Commonwealth Literature 62).

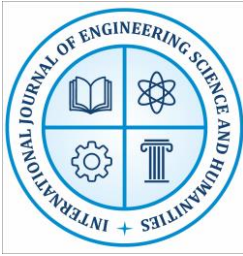
In "Lost Images," Chitre mourns the erosion of his linguistic identity:

"I have lost my mother tongue
And the spoken word of my people
In a memory of music I can no longer play"
(Collected Poems 1960-2000 54).

The metaphor of music suggests that language is not merely communication but an emotional resonance. To lose one's language is to lose one's sense of self.

Similarly, in "Travelling in a Cage," the poet writes:

"I am a traveller who moves
but never arrives." (48)



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The "Cage" becomes a metaphor for both linguistic constraint and existential entrapment. The poet's identity is perpetually in transit, trapped between Marathi and English languages, between the local and the global.

E.V. Ramakrishnan comments that "Chitre's English is haunted by Marathi syntax: it bears the scars of translation" (Making It New 166). This hybridity is Chitre's unique strength. By inhabiting the in-between space, he transforms alienation into creativity and his poetry demonstrates that linguistic exile can generate new idioms of authenticity.

The tension between languages also mirrors the psychological split of postcolonial subjectivity. Dilip Chitre's writings register the pain of this split although simultaneously it affirms the possibility of self-renewal through art. While most of Chitre's poetry expresses estrangement, it also gestures towards transcendence. His engagement with Bhakti poets reflects his beliefs that alienation can become a pathway to insight. In translating, Tukaram, a Bhakti poet, Chitre sought to recover a spiritual vocabulary lost to modernity.

In his later poems, such as "The sunflower," he writes:

I am a leaf of the universe's tree

I tremble, yet I belong." (Collected Poems, 145)

Here, alienation is not annihilation but awakening. The poet discovers belonging within impermanence. Subramaniam observes, "Chitre's estrangement is never nihilistic; it is the crucible of revelation" (Poetry International Web).

This transformation from exile to enlightenment defines Chitre's mature vision. Having confronted the emptiness of modern existence, he arrives at a fragile but profound acceptance of being. Alienation, once a wound, becomes a means of self-knowledge.

In Dilip Chitre's poetry, alienation and rootlessness are not just passing moods but are the fundamental conditions of modern consciousness. His powers transverse the landscapes of city, memory and language to reveal the human cost of modernity. Within this dislocation, Chitre discovers the possibility of redemption – not through return, but through recognition.

In "Father Returning Home," alienation prevades the daily life; in "Felling of the Banyan Tree," rootlessness marks the violence of modernization and in his work "Lost Images," the linguistic exile becomes the ultimate metaphor for estrangement. Across these works, Chitre transforms personal displacement into a universal vision of humanity's search for meaning.

Bruce King so rightly concludes, "Chitre's poetry dramatizes not despair but endurance; alienation becomes the creative energy that keeps the self alive" (192). The voice of the poet – haunted, bilingual and humane-remains one of the most authentic articulations of the modern Indian psyche. His alienation is not merely a symptom of loss but a source of artistic renewal.

The vision of Dilip Chitre affirms that the modern world, however, fragmented, still contains the possibility of coherence – if only through the fragile continuity of language and of



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memory. He so well writes, "I carry my home in my blood," Rootless yet resonant, alienated yet aware, the poetry of Dilip Chitre endures as a testament to the human spirit's capacity to find meaning even in exile.

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