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**K.V. DOMINIC'S CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS AND BEYOND:  
A CULTURAL APPROACH**

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**Abstract**

*Literature reflects the culture of a society of the period. This is quite evident from various works of art from the age of Chaucer to Shakespeare and till the modern era. The present study is an attempt to portray the cultural perspectives found in the anthology Contemporary Concerns and Beyond by K. V. Dominic, an Indian poet, short story writer, editor and critic. The anthology is the sixth collection of poems about the contemporary issues in our society. The poems in this anthology covers a wide range of subjects like challenges faced by women, transgenders, children and issues of war and peace, philosophical thoughts, social issues, etc. The research aims to bring out the culture of people as portrayed by the poet through this anthology. C. Rajagopalachari in the book Our Culture, explains culture as a social virtue, external activities and behaviour. He further states that self-restraint as an essential quality to become a cultured person. The research article highlights the above mentioned qualities as portrayed in his poems and also conveys the poet's ideals as presented in the anthology. The poems taken for analysis reflect the culture of Indian society and the evils prevalent in the country. The study also shows how people from various strata of the society interact with each other. Further it tries to provide appropriate solution to the problems faced by the people through Dominic's poems.*

**Key Words:** Culture, Cultural adaptation, Self-restraint, Women and Society

**Introduction:**

India is land of varied cultures. Dominic's through his poems portray the different cultures of India and also demonstrates his compassion for the poor and downtrodden in the society, a quality found among the humanists. Born at Kaladi, the land of Shankara, his poems also reveals that he is deeply influenced by Advaita Philosophy. The term 'Advaita' is defined as "negatively implies the negation of dualism and positively asserts the reality of non-difference" (23). The present paper discusses the cultural perspectives in the anthology *Contemporary Concerns and Beyond*, the latest anthology by the poet. Besides this, Dominic has to his credit five poetry anthologies, a short story collection and innumerable books of edited research papers on various contemporary issues across the globe.

**Culture in India:**

Culture is reflected in the language, food, art, architecture and lifestyle of people. Rajagopalachari in *Our Culture* proclaims that: "The culture of family extension can be treated as a special pattern belonging to India" (21).

The culture of our country is one of the oldest in the world and civilization in India began about 4,500 years ago as many sources describe it as "Sa Prathama Sanskrati Vishvavara" — the first and the supreme culture in the world ("Indian Culture"). As a whole, India has versatile culture followed by different sect of people. Culture varies based on religion, caste and also the region in which one lives. Thus India is a multi cultural land, where everyone lives in harmony. This multiculturalism is reflected in the poetry of K. V. Dominic. His poems deal with the symphony of nature and humans. India with its rich culture is deep rooted in religion, philosophy and mythology which is reflected in the works of many Indian writers.

**Advaita way of Life:**

Advaita could be considered as a philosophy and as an experience. This concept existed even before Shankara, but it was Shankara who heightened this philosophy.

In “*Tyagi*” the poet reveals a person who has renounced all rewards of action could be fit to be called as *Tyagi*. “*Tyagi gets Brahm Sakshatkar / Same outcome of a tapasvi*” (48) as he has only bare necessities for sustaining his life. “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*” enforces the importance of unity and integrity. Even the animal kingdom has fellow feelings but not the cultured humans. The poet vehemently criticises the selfish act of humans who,

Irrational division of classes-  
colour, caste, religion,  
language, politics, nation,  
demote love and promote hate (49)

The above lines show the narrow mindedness and selfish thirst of humans. The poet counsels the fellow beings reminding that we are dependent on plant and animal kingdom for our survival. So, we must learn to co exist with other species on earth. This emancipates the poet as an environmentalist and above all a humanist.

In “Departure without a Label” the poet is puzzled about the aftermath of death. After death there is no difference between humans and others. He elaborates on “*Jivatma and Paramatma*” concept.

#### **Family and Community:**

Western Culture is centered around individuals whereas in the East, it is based on the family as found in most of the Asian countries where people live in families where they value and respect each other. Children are considered as gift of the family. In the poem “*Child Trafficking*” Many children are kidnapped but at the same time there are also children who are deliberately sold by their parents just like the cattle. The case of girl children are even worse as they are made as sex slaves and forced into prostitution. Also the organs of children are sold. All these are due to the prevalence of poverty. The poet presents the data about people abducted in India every year. There is also an increase in the number of beggars. All these are the effects of the hard earned freedom.

According to Rajagopalachari, “*Meanness, dishonesty, cruelty: the avoidance of these three vices make culture*” (8). The poet pays tribute to the farmers, the back bones of India in the poem “*Salute the Farmers*”. India is essentially an agricultural land where people rely on farmers for their food. The poet sees farmers as “*allured by plants*” and “*their eyes are bathed in happiness when they find plant’s growth*”. The above lines clearly state that their lives are intertwined with the crops. The poet raises the farmers to the level of a mother by addressing them as “*feeders of a nation*”. Hence it is necessary for the country to care for them.

“*Aboobaker, poor Patient’s Saviour*” is also based on a news report about a man from North Kerala. He rendered service to the poor along with his wife by delivering the medicine samples worth thousands for free to the poor. Their selfless service shows people’s belief in dharma and helping attitude of Indians in general.

The poem “*Circus Rani, Queen of Woes*” is about the plight of a young woman who was sold to a circus company due to poverty. At the age of 10, her career started at circus. She demonstrates her skill before the audience to earn her livelihood. But now in her late twenties she has become ‘old’ as no one is ready to marry her. In India, marriage is considered as essential for women. It is intertwined with the culture of the country that women should not stay single and must be supported either by her father, brother or husband. Hence, Rani has to marry someone to protect her. In yet another poem titled “*Flower Vendor*” a similar idea is found where a man is worried about his unmarried daughter in her mid 30s. The poet portrays the agony of father who looks at the flowers and is reminded of his daughter waiting to be married. His painful thoughts portray the present situation in India, where wedding has become a costly affair. Another problem faced by the poor is ‘dowry’ which is still prevalent in many parts of India.

#### **The influence of Theology and Philosophy:**

As mentioned earlier, India is a religious nation dipped in theology and philosophy. Many great saints and *Gyanis* have tried to explain the way a human should live on earth through Vedas and Upanishads. It is worthwhile to quote the words of Rajagopalachari who proclaims that: “*Again the philosophical teaching by which people are brought up from childhood in the faith that God resides in the heart of every living being, cannot but have an effect on the attitude of men towards the dumb animals*” (29).

Poverty and hunger are two evils that are prevalent in the Indian Society and “Hut in the River”, clearly portrays how people are affected by poverty. The poem is based on a news report in Mathrubhumi. Due to poverty, a family consisting three girls and their was forced to live in a hut on water as they could not afford to own or rent some land. The another reason is the woman in order to protect herself and her three daughters from her drunkard husband, has secluded herself. Ironically, the poem ends with a note that it “happens in God’s own country” Kerala.

“Lessons from Fruit Trees”, proves the words of the lake poet that “Nature is the best teacher” and nature has a purpose of sustaining life in this world. The fruit trees provide a source for various lives on earth through their sufferings. Similarly, humans too should undergo sufferings in order to lead a better life.

“Brahman’s Leela” is a philosophical poem on the cyclic nature of birth and rebirth. The poet reacts, “Everything comes out of nothing / And goes back again to nothing”(16). It is analogous to “Elements of Composition” by A. K. Ramanujan where he talks about the cyclic nature of birth, death and rebirth. This poem is based on the Indian Mythical belief where Brahma is considered as the creator of all lives on earth. In general, people in India are deep rooted in Mythology, theology and philosophy which is reflected in literature of past like the works of Tagore, Toru Dutt, and A. K. Ramanujan as well as the writers of the present era like K.V. Dominic, T. V. Reddy, Ramesh Chandra Mukhopadyaya and Rita De. The poet feels that the whole universe and its function is a game of Brahma. A person who attains knowledge of Brahma will remain unaffected by the surroundings.

One can question how eating could be a bliss? The poets response is that if we feed the hungry then eating is a blissful act. This is reflected in the lines below:

#### **Karma and its effect:**

Swami Vivekanada in *Karma Yoga* states that the word ‘Karma’ etymologically could be traced from the Sanskrit word *kri*, which means to do and all action is ‘karma’. The word also refers to the effect of actions. According to him, “Everything pre exists in our mind, taken together is what is called as karma”(34). In other words, karma is the sum total of the smaller actions or works. This is the central idea in the poem “Karma is Akarma,” which talks about the dualism in life. The poet focuses on *advaita* philosophy and justifies his stance by elaborating that only God does real karmas and karma belongs to the senses which are a part of nature. *Atman*, the soul, does not perform any karma and hence the poet concludes that Karma is equal to *Akarma*. *Sankhya* philosophy as found in *Bagavad Gita* elaborates on three basic elements that decides the character of a person viz. *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Every individual is made of these elements among which one may be predominant that decides the nature of a person.

Mahatma Gandhi in his essay on Gita opines : “He who gives up action falls. He who also gives up only the rewards rises” demonstrates that selfless action nullifies one’s karma, hence the poet equates karma to *Akarma*. “A Cremator’s Struggle for Existence” is about a woman who works in a crematorium to rear her children. The poem is based on a news report that appeared in Mathrubumi on 26 July, 2015. The poem details the struggle of a poor woman and her courage at the face of troubles. The poem exemplifies the orientation of Indian families as elaborated by Shobha De, where she points out the position of the family in India: “The family in India holds a position of enormous privilege and power. In fact, so potent is its position that rivals refuse to name family members when a scandal breaks out. Actually, this suits everyone splendidly. Indians are used to covering up for many sins of family members. Elders point out, it is this marvelous trait that has kept us together for centuries” ( Sunday Times of India: March 3, 13: 14).

We read of the daughters married to short-lived idiots returning to the house and even the sons-in-law forgetting their mothers and staying back for teaching arithmetic to nieces and keeping accounts. The poem comments also on the plight of women:

#### **Non- Attachment:**

In India, culture is related to religion and environment.

“Indian Culture is predominantly self-restraint: sharing your substance with poor, chastity, the rigours of widowhood, austerity, sanyas, all - round religious tolerance, -these forms and aspects of restraint make up Indian culture, not our musical forms or *Bharata naatya*” (15). “None is born free”, is about human bondage and is on the interconnection of humans with nature. The poet ends the poem with a question:

Aren't we human beings  
Just a drop in the  
Ocean of total life?  
How can one predict  
One's trait and character? (37)

In the Chapter "The Secret of Work" Swami Vivekananda talks about the end product of work as a mixture of good and evil which in turn has its own effects as both are the result of bondage of soul and will produce their karma. Hence a solution to this is "if we do not attach ourselves to the work we do, it will not have any binding effect on our soul" (38) a solution offered in *Bagavad Gita*, which is non attachment to work. This is the theme of the poems "Mahadeva Prasad, Saviour of Deserted Girls" and "Natarajan, the Ideal Neighbour", as well as "Murukan, God of Beggars".

"An Airport made of Tears" Aranmula is a Hindu heritage village in Kerala, where the government had proposed to construct an airport that has violated the environmental requirements. The poem demonstrates how paddy fields and wet lands that provide food could be lost and more than that it would pave way to water shortage and loss of biodiversity. Survival of a culture depends on the landscape as well as other environmental factors. Hence, the project affects the culture of the people as well as the serenity and sanctity of Parthasarathy Temple. Many families will become jobless and loose their homes. So the poet concludes the poem with a warning that "Beware, Maoists are never born / They are made where injustice rules" (14). The above lines clearly portray that peace can prevail only if there is justice. Thus culture of people are dependent on the lifestyle of the people.

#### Conclusion:

As a result of Shankara's selfless effort, we have the unity of Hinduism and Hindu culture. He has taught us not only toleration but also dynamic acceptance. "Where ever there is unity there is knowledge; its fruit is concord and happiness and beneficence; and where ever there is emphasis on diversity, it is ignorance; and it results in conflict and misery." The poet does not write with the consciousness of all possible interpretations of his work. The beauty lies in that creation transcends the poet. The poems in this collection thus reflects Indian culture of self-restraint, charity, sharing things with the poor i.e dharma, etc.

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