

Transcendental Journey, Universal Empathy and Humanism: A Study of Imtiaz Dharker's *Postcards from God*

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Abstract

*Did I create you in my image
or did you create me in yours?*

— (*Postcards from God*, Question 2)

Imtiaz Dharker, 31 January 1954, an acclaimed Pakistani-born British poet, artist, versatile diasporic Muslim poet, a painter, and a documentary filmmaker, refers to herself as a 'Scottish-Muslim Calvinist.' Her poems are the evolutionary perspectives of lived and experienced stances of an itinerant lifestyle traversing between Glasgow, Mumbai, London, and Wales, framing her cross-cultural cosmopolitan point-of-view. The synchronization of her pen-and-ink drawings absolutely evidences her profound sensibility as a poet and an artist. Her poetry comes to life on paper, and her drawings reflect her poetic passion, establishing her as a 'Universal Empath' who embraces the religion of Humanism. The present research paper seeks to investigate the origins of her transcendental journey of the soul, which is revealed through mapping the roots of this journey in a world fractured by religious fundamentalism, cultural disparities, economic boundaries, and social and political displacement. *Postcards from God* (1997) serves as frantic proof bridging the significant gap between an ideal heaven and a suffering earth. Dharker's modus operandi exhibits her inclusiveness in the chaotic, violent, fragmented, and suffering humanity by sensitising readers through her poems. Her soul persistently aches, and her verses act as doorways into the lives of children, the oppressed, and slums like Dharavi. Dharker crafts poetry as a weapon to fight for the cause of humankind and human rights. Her poetry has transformed her from a fragmented, powerless wretch to an empowered, enlightened being, hoping for an unprejudiced and secular world, where love and mercy will be the religion. Dharker propagated 'humanism' as an idealistic belief in the goodness of human nature and the creation of a sound society. The mushroom

growth of the materialistic, commercial, and selfish world should be replaced by simple human values like love, tolerance, equilibrium, humanity, truth, and dignity.

I. INTRODUCTION

'Transcendentalism' etymologically comes from the word '*transcend*,' which means 'to climb over or beyond.' It is a philosophical, spiritual, and literary movement that developed in the late 1820s and 1830s in the New England region of the United States. The pertinent/core belief is the inherent goodness of people and nature, with the simultaneous existence of corrupted social scenarios contaminating the purity of individuals. This philosophy is self-driven and self-reliant, emphasizing subjective intuition over objective empiricism, and it believes that all people are connected through the 'Over-Soul,' i.e., God. Because the universe is one, this belief unites all people as one. The itinerant lifestyle of Imtiaz Dharker establishes her as a 'diasporic' poet, artist, painter, and documentary filmmaker who refers to herself as a 'Scottish-Muslim-Calvinist.' Her cross-cultural experiences and perspective paint a panorama of her lived and experienced stories. Although she herself was personally grappling with the questions of displacement and cultural identity crisis, she depicted that she criticised globalism and modern multiculturalism.

Transcendentalism, as an organised philosophical movement, originated in 19th century New England, but its core concepts already exist and are deeply rooted in Indian sacred texts. In her *Purdah and Other Poems* (1988), *Postcards from God* (1997), *I Speak for the Devil* (2001), and *The Terrorist at My Table* (2006), Dharker admits her serious concern about contemporary politics, communal atmosphere, rising heat of terrorism, and threat to cultural values and world peace.

American transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau adopted profound inspiration from Hindu scriptures. The parallel existence between Indian thought and transcendentalism is ingrained in the concept of 'over-soul' directly, mirroring the Hindu Vedantic philosophy of Brahman—the universal, all-pervading

supreme spirit. The poem *Postcards from God—I* by Imtiaz Dharker advocates this idea, as the title reflects the clear relationship between God and the individual, highlighting her ability to communicate with Him through the phenomenology of her poetry. She succinctly reiterates her metaphorical conversations with God in the following lines:

Yet, I do feel like a visitor,
a tourist in this world.
that I once made.
I rarely talk,
except to ask the way,
(POSTCARD FROM GOD-I)

The pre-creative and post-creative phases between man and God feel estranged, making it difficult to comprehend their intense connection. In the materialistic world, human beings lack emotions and feelings, which has led to a significant need for HUMANISM, EMPATHY, and SYMPATHY in modern society. God's cry can be captured in the aesthetics of these lines:

Here, in this strange place,
in a disjointed time,
I am nothing but a space
that someone has to fill.
Images invade me,
Picture postcards overlap my
empty face,
demanding to be stamped and
sent,
"Dear..."

(POSTCARD FROM GOD-I, p. 3)

The Concept of Moral Perception and Universal Humanity

Irish Murdoch, both a novelist and a philosopher, differentiates between philosophy

and literature and emphasizes the value of literature for purposeful purposes:

Philosophy aims to clarify and to explain; it states and tries to solve very difficult highly technical problems, and writing must be subservient to this aim... Literature interests us on different levels in different fashions. It is full of tricks and magic and deliberate mystification. Literature entertains; it does many things, and philosophy does one thing.

(*Literature and Moral Theory*, p.152)

The concluding lines of the *Postcards from God* symbolically represent the cross-cultural, religious, political, spiritual, and various other issues that are subsumed cross-cultural, religious, political, spiritual and many more subsumed problems in the materialistic world. The hopeless utterances of God make a plea or urge to the human beings to retain their humanness or humanity to seek solutions in the modern chaotic world and His (God's) interventions for their goodness in present times:

Who am I speaking to?
I think I may have misplaced the address,
but still, I feel the need
to write to you; not so much for your
sake,
as for mine,
to raise these barricades
against my fear;
Postcard from God
Proff that I was here.
(*Postcard from God*, p.5.)

The speaker in the above lines is God, reflecting on the displacement, human vulnerability, and religious conflicts across cultures. He feels like an outsider or visitor in a world they once understood, wandering through the streets in search of the lost promised past.

The sequel of the poem *POSTCARDS FROM GOD-II* justifies the emotional

intelligence of Dharker, in which she balances the transmedial interaction between the poetic creations and sketches, drawing and creating the three-dimensional effects of proximately multiple contextual interpretations. The drawings accompanying the poetry work are effective as gap-fillers or extended acknowledgements of the unsaid or the matter between the lines. Dharker glorifies her art in an expressive manner:

Everything starts with the image. Sometimes it is the line of a poem, sometimes as 'something I see as a visual, a drawing.' No that is not always true: sometimes a poem can start with an idea and that can in turn spark off a drawing.

An eminent critic Ranjit Hoskote profoundly admits:

A line as Imtiaz Dharker's sole weapon in a zone of assault and Dharker has used this weapon very craftily in both the mediums of art related to her. She has emphasized that art has a function in our lives and it should not be remote and esoteric. Art is not just something to store in a shelf, but something people use to enrich their world and their perceptions. (*Hoskote*, p. 27)

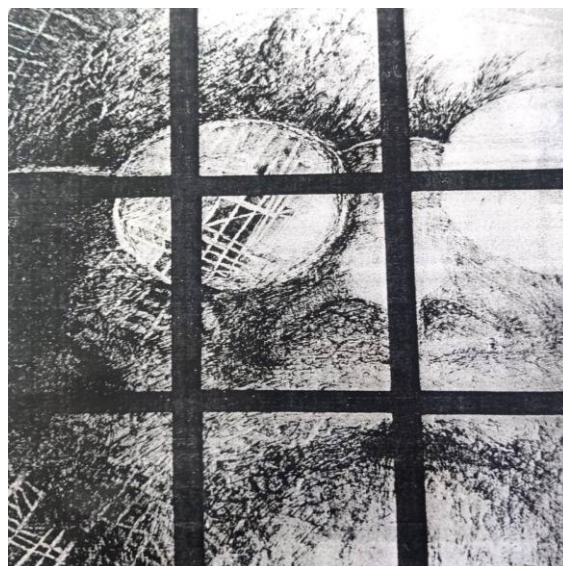


Fig.1. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

The particularities of Dharker's specific drawings in black and white for each poem suggest her ethnic mosaic delineating minute elaborations of facial expressions of God as the reactions for the acts made by human beings. The pathetic condition of God is appropriately depicted in lines:

I create the faces
that will belong to you
years from now,
waiting to be lived in, lined,
and put them on postcards
undated to avoid confusing you,
unsigned.

(POSTCARDS FROM GOD-II, p. 7)

These lines can be better appreciated under the shade of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, providing reference to the gradual fall of Adam to earth from Heaven and Satan's to Hell from earth, problematising the 'dehumanisation of humanity', aggravating God registering the 'devastation of beautiful society or world' by human beings and expecting modifications in human behaviour to be more 'humane', worrying Him and leaving Him unexpectedly helpless and frustrated. Dharker subverts the thematic concern of God by adopting an interrogative mood while narrating the catastrophe of human beings in an excruciating manner throughout each poem in every succeeding poem of the anthology (*Postcards from God*).

The collection vociferously targets religious extremism, societal intolerance, and political violence that reduces human lives to statistics. The 'postcards' symbolise the fruitless, fleeting, and fragile attempts to communicate with or locate God amidst systematic and corrupted hegemonic social, political, and religious patterns, as well as the resulting chaos and suffering from these patterns.

Dharker applies a simple, conversational tone with sharp-edged diction that strips away sentimentality; this stylistic choice is accompanied by her own minimalist black-and-white sketches, which create a dialogue between text and image, providing Int. J. Lang. Lit. Cult.

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readers with a free space for interpretation and cathartic relief through the 'suspension of disbelief'.

The poetic creations of Dharker rotate at 360° in three dimensions simultaneously; firstly, the title *Postcards from God* suggests a complaining attitude of God's registering the 'devastation of beautiful society or world' by human beings and expecting the modifications in human behaviour to be more 'humane'. Secondly, the collection treats scathing criticism of the exterminating nature of prevailing class society towards the downtrodden class, immiseration of women in society due to patriarchal patterns, and objection of poor people to socially and politically fabricated power politics by Dharker.

Thirdly, there is an intermediating or communicating point of view that centres on 'HUMANITY', which involves appropriate negotiations between God and poets on behalf of human beings, paving the way for 'UNIVERSAL EMPATHY', 'COSMOPOLITAN HARMONY', and 'COMMUNAL TOLERANCE'.

The present article, *Transcendental Journey, Universal Empathy and Humanism: A Study of Imtiaz Dharker's Postcards from God*, correlates these three points of view, transforming the world for better living through the transmediality technique of drawings/sketches to explore the optimum contextual interpretations. The complaining perspective of God can be captured through the following:

Keep the channels open.

I will keep trying to get through.

All I am is some kind of dhobi.

Every day, I take the count,

I separate the dusters from the sheets,

I beat and rinse and squeeze and pound

..... Rows of souls washed clean,

all accounted for,

spread out to dry.

(POSTCARDS FROM GOD—II, p. 8.)

The depicted lines illustrate God's acknowledgement of materialistically driven

human beings and the presence of a striking and alarming siren, which conveys the message of God's consistent efforts for 'HUMANITY' to retain its goodness. God addresses Himself as the washerman, who washes the bodies and souls of mankind in the pre-and post-conditions of life, namely birth and death. The consecutive rows of souls washed up and dried in the sun symbolise the purgation and purification of the soul by God, preparing it for the next birth or rebirth.

Iris Murdoch substantiates her moral realism, having the perspective that 'good represents the reality of which God is the dream.' She further declares:

God doesn't and cannot exist. But what led us to conceive of him does exist and is constantly experienced and pictured. That is, it is real as an Idea, and is also incarnate in knowledge and work and love. This is the true idea of incarnation and is not something obscure. We experience both the reality of perfection and its distance away, and this leads us to place our idea of it outside the world of existent being as something of a different unique and special sort.
(*Literature and Moral Theory* p. 161)

The critical evaluation of Murdoch's philosophy is exactly implemented in the poem *FRAME*, in which the picture of God is framed for idol-worshipping and putting it anywhere at home according to convenience, captures the paradoxical ramifications of His existence as a 'demonised' figure, completely actionless or crippled as His hands are tied in the frame.

They have put me in a frame
and left me here
trapped behind glass,
among the hanging clothes
and the smell of yesterday's sweat
to deal with all the demands
that wash up against me.

Can't they see my hands
are tied?

(*FRAME*, p. 23)



Fig.2. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

In the poem *PULSE*, she contrasts the themes of fragile rhythms and human connection, as her frequent depiction of physical sensations like breathing, blood, and pulse to anchor the abstract geopolitics or emotional displacement into lived and breathing reality. The modern digital technology attempts to track love, distance, and fragile human journeys. The underlying 'pulse' represents the shared, universal momentum of people crossing borders, whether literally geographical or cultural boundaries.

What does it all mean?
A space, a wall, a door,
What is there, inside,
that needs protection?

.....

The pulse crashes through the head.
Blood beats in a swollen vein,
thrashing against a guarded wall.
Bruises appear, the blow unseen.

(*PULSE*, p. 26)

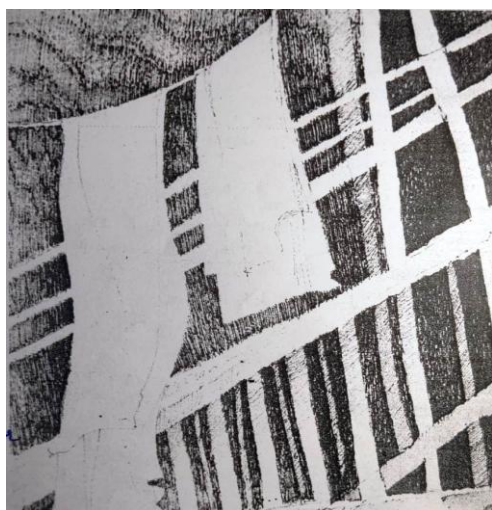


Fig.3. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

Human vulnerability, mortality, fragility of body, and the transient nature of human life are adequately acclaimed in this poem. One more poem, **ONE BREATH**, captures the parallel pain and agony in the following lines:

All it would take
is one slammed door
to make the whole thing
fall. One bottle hurled
against a wall,
to start the hammering
on the heart
and crack
the body's shell.
One sneeze, one cough,
one doubt.

All it would be
is one breath,
no more.

(*ONE BREATH*, p. 42)



Fig.4. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

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Imtiaz Dharker facilitates a stark meditation and introspection on human vulnerability by defining the fragile architecture of mundane life and enlightens the community on that how easily existence can shatter under infinite contextual pressures in life. Dharker postulates the concept of transient human existence, with the supporting philosophy of Martin Heidegger's work *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* that is cited by Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* as follows:

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.

(*Location of Culture*, p. 1)

Human existence today is characterised by a 'tremendous sense of survival, living on the borders of the present.' by which Dharker magnifies the borderline as the final one between life and death by transgressing the caste, creed, cultural, social, political, economic, ethnic or ... all other boundaries. She makes readers all over the world aware of the concept of 'cosmopolitanism of literature' or 'worlding of creativity' directly and precisely, opening avenues and platforms for all of 'HUMANITY' to philosophically rise from its bitter past and experienced historiography so that the world could be a better place to live in.

Democracy is a habit, and habits take a long time to develop. Keeping this perspective in view, the need of the hour is thus to develop communal harmony and cultures of resistance which will not deny the needs and rights of autonomous national or cultural identities, moving beyond the narrow identification categories to reach for new levels of unity which connect popular struggles of all nations worldwide with the consciousness of a new universality—the 'universal culture, aiming at perfect integration in the contemporary world' that international consciousness was also part of Fanon's vision as he bonds somehow to bind the European as well as the native together in a new non-

adversarial community of awareness and anti-imperialism.

Dharker portrays a miniature of God in the form of a female who struggles in her life to settle the distorted scattered things to create them in a 'WHOLE' or 'COMPLETE' way. Her poem, *MAKING LISTS*, explores how human beings try to control a chaotic world by organising and naming things. The gradual shift from vast cosmic concepts, such as black holes, to simple household items like groceries and a torn blouse held by a safety pin, signifies the contrasting idea of order versus chaos in this manner:

The best way to put
things in order is
to make a list.
The result of this
efficiency is that everything
is named, and given
an allotted place.
But I find, when I begin,
there are too many things,
starting from black holes
all the way to safety pins.
(*MAKING LISTS*, p. 48)

Dharker glorifies the efforts of a cocooned woman in her periphery who struggles with a positive expectation to recreate things and attempts to join the fragmented parts—the 'RAINBOW of HOPE'—for all of 'HUMANITY', inspiring the generation of 'UNIVERSAL EMPATHY' among them. Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of humanism was popularly communicated in his 1946 lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, which propounds that human beings have no predetermined divine purpose or fixed human nature.

The core fundamental perspective behind it is that human existence precedes essence, as they are born first as a blank slate and attain their identities through their deeds. Advocating the concept of radical freedom, he further asserted that 'people are condemned to be free,' meaning no God or external authority, as the Renaissance has situated the humans and world from theocentric to homocentric, and Sartre's concept establishes the entire

responsibility of human beings, what they become, and the actions they take.

The key existential and moral framework of doctrine is creating dizzying, deep anxiety felt by humans due to the weight they feel directly affecting all of them and deep anxiety felt by humans due to the weight they feel directly affecting all of humanity. The sobering realisation that God is not responsible for our deeds and that humans must take full responsibility for inventing morality contrasts with traditional humanism, which is based on an abstract, idealised view of human nature. Sartre's philosophy grounds human dignity not in divine grace, but in individual earthly actions and human subjectivity.

The fundamental gist of humanism is that man is always outside of himself, projecting and losing himself and pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to achieve. The goal of humanity according to Sartre is as follows:

To establish that there is one human history, with one truth and one intelligibility—not by considering the material content of this history, but by demonstrating that a practical multiplicity, whatever it may be, must unceasingly totalise itself through interiorising its multiplicity at all levels.

Dharker's poem ***THE MARK*** delineates God's profound desire to express His existence in all creatures' of earth, as the persona self-annihilates from God's point of view succinctly:

I contain them all.
The churning blood and heartbeats,
countless souls of men, small animals,
snakes, ants, birds, trees.
.....
Perhaps I invited this,
I have a memory of a small
white card, stamped with hope;
or was it a woman's body
transparent as a veil

that fell away to reveal
a child curled up,
contained within itself?
(*THE MARK*, p. 54)



Figure 5. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker
(Source: imtiazdarker.com)

The metaphysical interpretation of the poem reflects the Vedantic philosophy, which posits that God exists in all creatures and that all creatures exist in God. This mystical bond generates the concept of “Vasudhaivkutumbakam” (वसुधैवकुटुम्बकम्), symbolising the idea of a “global village” or ‘multiculturalism’, as experienced and lived by Imtiaz Dharker.

Being an empath, she propagates a similar theme in her poetic creations by synchronising them with her black-and-white drawings, carrying the experiences and life of Imtiaz Dharker. And being an empath, she propagates the similar theme in her poetic creations by synchronising them with her black-and-white drawings, carrying the profound emotions on paper. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha focused primarily on the accumulated experience of migrant subjects and minorities within metropolitan cultures having their histories of cultural differences; it was the experiences and perspectives of subjects who exist outside the ‘foundational frame’ of cultural identities and live within the new temporality of postcoloniality that would be reinforced.

Dharker’s poem *Namasake* contrasts the pristine paradise of Adam with the grim, harsh reality of a ten-year-old boy named

Adam living in the slum of Dharavi, Mumbai. The poem portrays the grim picture of a facade of subjugation as social commentary on urban poverty, lost childhood and systematically structured exploitation. She subverts the mythological legacy of Adam, the first man created in Eden, contrasting it with a ten-year-old boy who is labouring endlessly and prepping food while she engages herself in waiting for his mother as a result of a curse, like poverty.

Dharker applied the raw, unvarnished descriptions like ‘drooping eyelids’, ‘cooking pots’, and ‘pigs that root’ to reflect harsh economic realities rather than abstract sympathy. The filth, squalor, sordidness, destitution and wretchedness are expressed like this:

Adam, your namesake lives
in Dharavi, ten years old. He
has never faced the angels, survives
with pigs that root
outside the door,

.....

follows his mother to the hotel
and waits, his eyelids drooping,
while behind the wall he sells herself,
as often as she can before
they have to hurry home.
(*NAMESAKE*, p. 64)

Adam’s Daughter, by Imtiaz Dharker, is a poignant and stark portrayal of childhood grinding poverty, as the poem focuses on a three-year-old girl who embodies the generational suffering of the dispossessed. The poem reveals the raw, unpredictable struggle for basic survival. Food is scarce, fleeting and dependent on the meagre earnings of rag-picking or collecting scraps. The insecure, fearing social scenario highlights the shared, quiet despair in the bond between mothers and their daughters in impoverished conditions. Dehumanisation and exploitation of humanity are evoked by the use of the word ‘Adam’.

In her poetry, she juxtaposes the idealised divine creation with the grim reality faced by child labourer who refuses to be exploited the suffering, but truth and

conditioning the reader to witness the disturbing cruelty of a world denying the basic necessities of life.

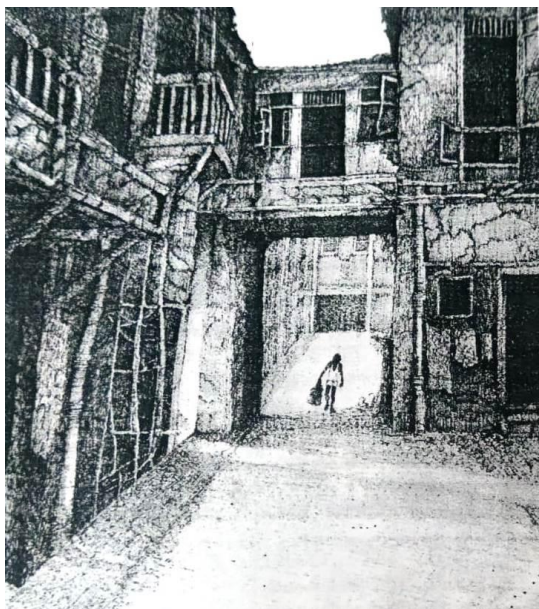


Fig.6. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

Her eyes is watchful, twisted
bird-like at me, her mouth
busy at the bread,
teeth frantic at the crust
as small animals
worrying the dead.
At three years old
she has seen enough
to live in dread.
(ADAM'S DAUGHTER, p. 67)

The poem can be interpreted under the insightful parameters of *Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, with a foreword by Edward W. Said, claiming the breaking out of the standard Marxist modes of the productive narrative. Subaltern studies have now changed the rubric of 'confrontations rather than transitions.' The subaltern have been trying to perceive the task of acknowledgement of cultural consciousness to justify their existence. Spivak observes the strategic use of positivist essentialism in a practically visible political interest, and she registers the spectacular presence of the subaltern in society by interrogating a famous question in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* The essay is lexically dense and convoluted.

The essay argues the philosophy of Foucault and Deleuze, claiming oppressed people or subjects can speak and act and be known for themselves, is problematic because of the presumption that the world can be changed for the better through the actions of this subject without intervention from elsewhere.

The poem **WAIT**, by Dharker, personifies life as a voyage from 'womb' to 'tomb.' The moment of birth is like the revelation of the ultimate knowledge of life; as life progresses, there are multidimensional experiences that result in satisfactions and repercussions at different phases of life. The poem is a powerful exploration of identity, politics, and religious constraint, as well as the reclamation of personal power against institutionalised domestic violence.

This work gives voice to the 'psyche' of women, highlighting how both God's expectations and those of His devotees are being questioned during the current gathering, as God observes His representations—portraits, pictures, and images of every individual—displayed on the walls of mosques, dashboards of taxis, theatres, dolls, and more, which register the absurdity of His existence. God's self-explaining answers are expressed in the following words:

I am a flame, a shining light,
I am crowned with thorns,
Everyday, in ways that startle me,
I am reborn. (FACE, p. 37)

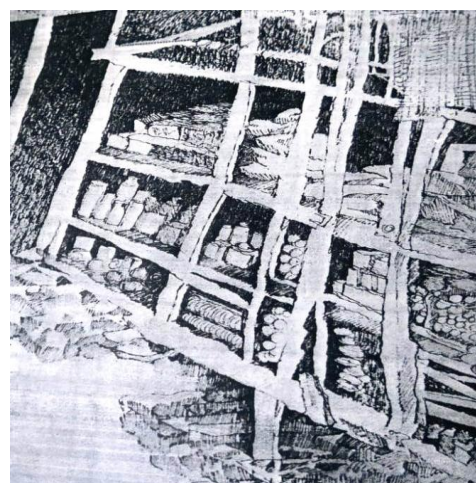


Fig.7. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

The above lines glorify the philosophy of transcendentalism, its acceptance, acknowledgement, participation and inclusiveness from both God's and human beings' sides. Human beings' good deeds are like the stimulants from God's realisation of 'Rebirth'. In the poem *After Creation*, Dharker explores identity, existence, and the shaping of human life as a dynamic, persistent, and spontaneous flow of colours on the canvas of life.

The gradual shifting of life's idealistic aspirations into realistic representations teaches human beings to be more humane, resilient, multidimensionally cultured, and self-driven in life aspirations into the realistic representations teaches the human beings to be more humane, resilient, multidimensionally cultured, and self-driven in life. God's agony in the following words can be captured as:

I had hoped
these things would
work themselves
into some kind of order.
when I began
it was a simpler world.
Things, perhaps, got out of hand.
(*After Creation*, p.39)

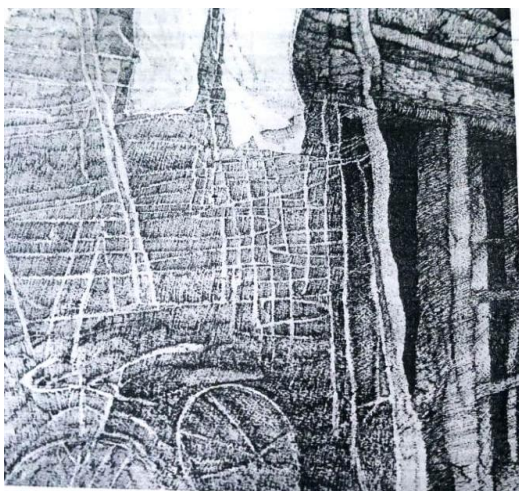


Fig.8. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

The helpless, crippled assertion of God directly impacts the responsibility of human beings. The next poem under observation is

LIVING SPACE, searching for self, existence, identity, and word of freedom.

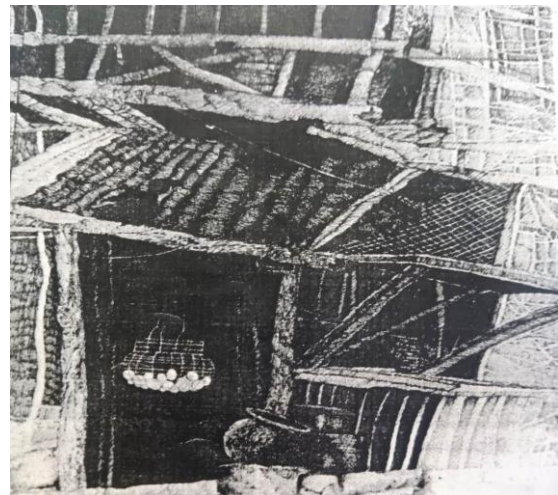


Figure 9. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker
(Source: imtiazdharker.com)

There are just not enough
straight lines. That
is the problem.
Nothing is flat
The whole structure leans dangerously
towards the miraculous.
Into this rough frame,
someone has squeezed
a living space
and even dared to place
these eggs in a wire basket,
fragile curves of white
hung over the dark edge
of a slandered universe,
gathering the light
into themselves
as if they were
the bright, thin walls of faith.
(*Living Space*, p. 41)

The poem depicts a very scattered, shattered, and confused panorama of life as God's existence and credibility are in doubt and humanity's faith is shattered. The 'placing of eggs' suggests the reunion or reformation of cosmic energy. The self-illuminating light is required in each and every human being to be

a torchbearer in society for the progressive gestures of life. Spivak, a feminist critic, observes for the subaltern, women, and minorities:

The question of 'speaking us' involves a distancing from oneself. The moment I have to think of the ways in which I will speak as an Indian, or as a feminist, the ways in which I will speak as a woman, what I am doing is trying to generalise myself, making myself a representative, trying to distance myself from some kind of inchoate speaking as much. There are many subject positions which one must inhabit; one is not just one thing. (p. 60)

Moral philosopher and humanist writer talks about the rationality of emotions, has been a central issue through her work. Spivak claims:

Emotions, she claims, are not just the fuel that powers the psychological mechanism of a reasoning creature, they are parts, highly complex and messy parts, of this creature's reasoning itself. How we see things and make sense of things around us has much to do with our emotions: our attachments, fears, longings, etc. In this view, the human world is not a collection of facts which are available to us through detached contemplation. Detached contemplation is at worst a fiction and at best an approximate ideal; emotions are an indispensable part of how the world appears to us.

(Nora Hämmäläinen p. 34)

IN MY IMAGE, she depicts a suffocating woman by posing questions about fundamental philosophical themes and explaining how humans create a divine aura and mystic presentations through their flawed reflections. She outrightly rejects the dogmatic depiction of God and self, and she probes the power dynamics of creating, challenging the credibility of divine ideology or its mere refurbished image to provide justifications for Int. J. Lang. Lit. Cult.

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their own societal prejudices and orthodox beliefs.

Dharker questions religious fundamentalism and human ego by highlighting how female devotees invoke God's name while ignoring the truereligious fundamentalism and human ego by explaining the female invocation of God's name by the human devoties and ignoring the real virtues of compassion, brotherhood, equality, and social justice. The poem provides the transparent relationship between the creator and the created and clarifies the behavioural patterns of them with violence, corruption, power politics, strategic attempts to exploit others to attain the so-called pseudo-power, if conceptualized in the metaphysical aspect.

Dharker, being the prominent voice against patriarchal and institutionalised contracts, dismantles and recreates the conceptual frameworks to seek justice for women as human beings. The pathetic mundane agony of a poor wretched woman is presented in poem with these magnificent lines:

I watch the woman.
She moves about the cluttered room
her clothes coiled around her,
hissing against her limbs.
Her bangles make small, sharp,
falling sounds.
She measures water carefully from a pot
clanking steel and aluminium.
As she pours, she pours herself.
.....
she becomes something more,
than herself, a bright column
shimmering to the floor,
(*IN MY IMAGE*, p. 51)

The above lines concern the very ordinary imagery of woman and giving the gestures of God's helplessness and crippled features but capable of making them from the vicious circle of poverty, drudgery, and squalor.

There, and yet not there.
She is the running stream.
She is the deep well,

the unquiet sea,
The resurrected shore.
(*IN MY IMAGE*, p. 51)

The concluding lines of the poem are positive and provide the hopeful rainbow of her phoenix-like characteristics, as she is dynamic and ready to resurrect from her own ashes.



Fig.10. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazharker.com)

Another poem entitled as *TRUST* captures the unwavering faith in God's existence in following manner:

'In God We Trust.'
This is the best
that God can do—
hold out a hope
of being singled out and blessed
while men insist
that 'God is Great'
and hurtle optimistically
to meet their fate.
(*TRUST*, p. 52)

American philosopher Martha Nussbaum explores the significant idea of moral incommensurability, which highlights that fundamental human values, goodness, and virtues are plural, knitted together heterogeneously, and cannot be measured, compared, or weighed against a single common scale (such as utilitarianism or pure reason) without losing their own qualitative worth.

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The essential virtues that are central to this research article include love, duty, friendship, democracy, and human rights. She advocates that all types of religious, social, communal, economical, and cultural disparities at national and international levels can be resolved through ethical action in the required contextual scenario with situational flexibility and perceptive deliberation rather than the mechanical application of a single universal rule.

Dharker satirically interrogates the problems of violence, terrorism, corruption, patriarchal strategies, communal strife, humanistic and feministic issues, diaspora and displacement issues, and cultural and gender politics through her poetry by the intermingling of three platforms simultaneously. One is the poetic creativity, pen on paper; secondly, her perfect harmony of transmediality, or the black and white sketches tracing her emotional empathy, enriching her poetic expressions; and thirdly, her own inclusiveness during her creations that all accumulated experiences of a cross-cultural identity of poet are well exhibited in her works.

The notable aspect of her poetry is the transmedial interaction between the written verses and the accompanying drawings. Marsha Kinder (1997) had introduced the concept by providing a link of transmedia intertextuality. The core feature of transmediality lies in the transgressing of boundaries between media. According to Chandra K. Narayan:

Imtiaz Dharker is almost alone among her poems having a highly sophisticated sense of line-in poems and sketches. She is good at both. The drawings that accompany most of her poems are designed to better understand the poem. It urges us to read the sketches and scan the further. (p.17)

David Langdon analysed this aspect in following words:

An imaginary, or constructed, world can range from a complex allegory utilised within a rhetorical argument such as Plato's *Atlantis* or Thomas More's *Utopia*, or they may be little more than a children's toy. But all imaginary worlds possess one thing in common: all have been definitely created by human knowledge and intelligence, utilising tools that can be visualised, replicated, and, in turn, studied. (Langdon, p. 17)

Corruption in the corridors of politics due to the allocation of power to the corrupted people is precisely captured in the poem **SEATS OF POWER** in the following lines:

There is a great shuffling
In the corridors of power,
.....
Greetings are exchanged,
.....
Speeches are read.
A few points made.
Somewhere else in the city,
a blade finds flesh.
Here, in this quiet, civil room
permission has been given
for the carnage to begin.
(*SEATS OF POWER*, p. 78)



Fig.11. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

The poem entitled, *1993* desperately seeks for the humanity inculcation and natural goodness in human beings. The

opening lines of the poem are majestically expressing the utter need of peace and brotherhood succinctly:

We have been bullied into silence.
The things we want are clichés;
Peace and brotherhood,
sanity, the goodness in ourselves.
What kind of words are these
to play with in this age
of fire and blood?
(1993, p. 82)



Fig.12. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

Poem *Untitled* from **Postcards from God registers** the lurking fear and deep-rooted agony of the human beings who are persistently searching for the universal communal harmony and apathy in society in order to establish universal brotherhood in the entire world:

This is not an abstraction,
I am trying to tell the truth in simple words.
At night I am torn out of sleep
into the smoke of reality.
It's not Bombay that burns,
but this specific child
screaming behind a bolted door;
this particular man on fire
trapped inside his locked car.
(*Untitled*, p. 98.)

The above lines are expressing the utter reality signifying the title *Untitled* that is without the designation of identity and

knowledge itself. The insomnia in the human beings who are victimised and can be in the future trapped also in different suffocating situations. The victim then presents the imaginative position of peace and love.

I wish these were imagined things.
I wish I could put them
safely in another poem,
reconcile them with this
paper and its pen
so I could never smell the burning
or hear the breaking glass again.
(UNTITLED, p. 99)

The persistent trauma, agony and fear in the minds of victimised figures have left them in a catastrophic state. They are praying and seeking blessings from God for the non-occurrence of such things.

CONCLUSION

The transcendental journey of Imtiaz Dharker accomplishes her task of sensitising the creator/God to the existing modern materialistic problems of human beings, suffocated and congested by norms through those at powerful positions or in politics. She creates her poetry for the acknowledgement of all such problematic aspects and seeks solutions through Murdoch's philosophy of reconstructing the substantial self and restoring a moral philosophical reliance on the moral significance of introspection.

Sequentially there will be an upward movement of reconstructing a common reality which is just, real, objective, and ethical, which the substantial selves need to make sense of in order to live a pragmatic and fruitful life. Next, the upward movement during the striving of moral persons towards the good motivates them to the constant pursuit of what is better and the ideal beyond the flaws and incompleteness of the actual world.

Dharker establishes the most essential and fundamental aspect of the study of literature is to understand the human situation. She agrees with Murdoch's concept of striving for universal 'EMPATHY AND

HUMANISM' as the emotionally charged search for the unifying goodness in the plurality of the human world:

The continuous operation of spiritual energy, desire, intellect, love as it moves among and responds to particular objects of attention, the force of magnetism, and attraction which joins us to the world, making it a better place. (p. 178)

Dharker successfully knits the fabricated [world] with her poetry with suggestions for the words 'HUMANE,' 'LIBERAL,' and 'UNIVERSAL EMPATHY' in her poem, *Minority*, she concludes:

And so I scratch, scratch
through the night, at this
growing scab of black on white,
She glorifies the art of literature and
writing:
Everyone has the right
to infiltrate a piece of paper.
A page doesn't fight back.
And, who knows, these lines
may scratch their way
into your head—
through all the chatter of community,
(*Minority*, p. 103)

She completes her circle of this journey from minority to diasporic to cosmopolitan writer and filmmaker, an established literary figure, persistently theorising the morality with realistic presentation and, as an intellectual activity, perpetually recreating its own initial questions and, as a result, being in constant flux. Hence, Ronald Barthes, the theorist of intertextuality, problematises authorship by defining the writer of a text as the orchestrator of what he refers to as 'already written' rather than as it originates:

A text is a multi dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations... the

writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original.

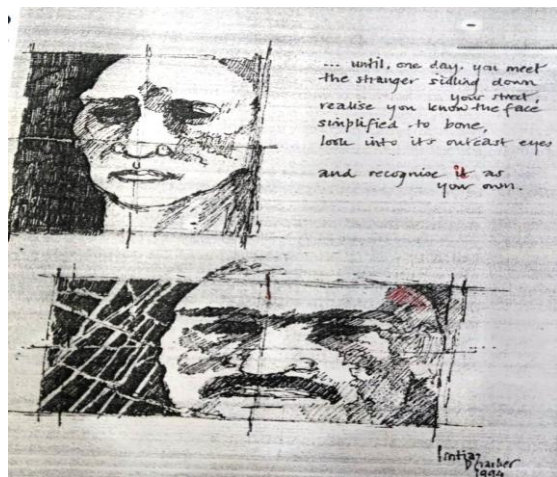


Fig.13. Illustrated by Imtiaz Dharker (Source: imtiazdharker.com)

Objective of the Paper

The objective of the present research paper, *Transcendental Journey of Universal Empathy and Humanism: A Study of Imtiaz Dharker's 'Postcards from God'*, creates a pragmatic approach of moral philosophy in the contextual use of literature.

- Practical Implementation of Transcendentalism in Literature and Mundane Life to Seek Resilience and Enlightenment in Society to make it a better place to live.
- Establishment of the Sovereignty of Goodness to promote 'Liberty,' 'Equality,' and 'Fraternity' in the entire world.
- The expansion of horizons to establish multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism for universal humanity.

Literature Review of the Paper

The present research paper has been systematically analysed to identify thematic and critical gaps, with enunciative and pertinent discussions on the primary sources. The paper entitled *Transcendental Journey of Universal Empathy and Humanism: A Study of Imtiaz Dharker's Postcards from God* attempts to search the roots of her transcendental journey of soul through the mapping out of issues caused by religious fundamentalism and cultural disparities.

Dharker's *modus operandi* exhibits her transformation from a powerless wretch to an empowered, enlightened being hoping for an unprejudiced and secular world where love and mercy prevail. The research analysis of this paper includes the following primary resources:

- *POSTCARDS FROM GOD* — Imtiaz Dharker
- *Literature and Moral Theory* — Nora Hämäläinen
- *COLONIALISM/POSTCOLONIALISM*—Ania Loomba
- *LITERARY THEORY*—Saugata Bhaduri and Simi Malhotra
- *A Glossary of Literary Terms*—M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Eleventh Edition
- *The Location of Culture*—Homi K. Bhabha
- *THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO POSTCOLONIAL LITERARY STUDIES*—Edited by Neil Lazarus
- *Beginning Film Studies* — Andrew Dix

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