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The Real and the Mythicized Function of Word in the Work of a Modern Indian Poet

Abstract

The study presents an analysis of the communicative function of word in contemporary Indian poetry. With reference to Jerzy Smolicz's concept of *core values*, it discusses several examples drawn from the poems of Ashok Vajpeyi with the aim at showing that, in the context of a multicultural and multilingual society, the language of contemporary Indian poems (in this case written in Hindi) not only remains in itself a core value, but it also becomes the prime carrier of axiological senses.

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Introductory remarks

At the beginning of the 1970s, an Australian scholar of Polish origin, Jerzy Jarosław Smolicz, began to formulate a theory based on the observation that some cultural values (that is, as he explains, meanings shared by group members) were more important than others for the solidarity and survival of a given cultural group. He named these *core values* because he found them pivotal to the life of any studied group, and integrating for the culture as a whole. According to Smolicz:

Core values can be regarded as forming the most fundamental components of a group's culture. They generally represent the heartland of the ideological system and act as identifying values which are symbolic of the group and its membership. (...) Core values are singled out for special attention because they provide the indispensable link between the group's cultural and social systems; (...) Indeed, it is through core values that social groups can be identified as distinctive ethnic, religious, scientific or other cultural communities. (...)

In considering the nature of core values in a particular culture it is important to remember that more than one core value may be involved, and that it may be possible to establish a relative hierarchy of importance among them. (Smolicz 1999a: 105–106)

In his research, aimed at understanding cultural and linguistic pluralism (primarily in multicultural Australian society), Smolicz employed concepts and methods of Florian Znaniecki's humanistic sociology. He argued that for most (though not all) ethnic cultural groups, their own distinctive language was a core value. In other cases religious values were linked to the group's core. Although Smolicz's focus at the time was on ethnic cultural groups, he recognized that the term could also be applied to other kinds of groups at various levels of social organization (Smolicz 1974, 1979, 1999a, 1999b). What is more, while formulating his conception Smolicz gave significant consideration to the question of the relationship between a group and an individual.

In an ethnically plural society, — writes Smolicz — cultures of both the majority and minority groups constitute pools of cultural values upon which members can draw to formulate their own *personal cultural systems* (...). In this way members select some specific parts of their group's heritage by juxtaposing them with the values of other groups, and reformulating them in a manner that they judge appropriate to the circumstances in hand. (Smolicz 1999: 262)¹

¹ More about the concept of “personal cultural system”, see: Smolicz 1980, 1983.

This essay is an attempt to apply Smolicz's concept — the result of an extensive study of multicultural and multilingual Australian society — to determine whether the language of contemporary Indian poems (in this case written Hindi, one of the languages of India) could be the prime carrier of axiological senses². Certain similarities resulting from the fact that both Australia and India are multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual, allowed for the application of Smolicz's conception to the following study. The analysis included selected verses of Ashok Vajpeyi³, a poet, whose work could be classified as modern, and as such — according to Smolicz's findings — it is also a link between the past and the present⁴, whereas the argumentation was based on two suppositions:

- A. If a group identity is constructed on core values, every human — in constructing his own identity — can be presumed to relate to such core values by his own set of values. Therefore, the world created in the poems could conceivably stand in the place of a micro-world of a social group.
- B. The role of the respondent's statements, which created the basis for Smolicz's findings, here will be replaced by the statements pronounced in the poems⁵.

Keeping these two presuppositions in mind it would be justified to address the choice of the work of this particular poet, which provided material for this study for the three following reasons. Firstly, because a methodological principle could be discovered in the analyzed poems. Secondly, the poet has a clear poetic or even philosophical strategy based on positive

² It is worth noting that the typical for India multilinguality makes it impossible to treat language as one of the identifying values which are symbolic of the group and its membership simply out of definition. In the Indian Subcontinent all members of a given ethnic group do not necessarily speak the same language and Indian culture (treated as a "unity in diversity" phenomenon to use the expression of Jawaharlal Nehru) is closely linked with all the languages and dialects spoken in the Subcontinent, therefore there is no danger for undermining the role of Indian cultural tradition by using one language over another, as well as there is no possibility of ascribing a privileged position to any of the Indian languages regarding its integrative function in Indian society. Paraphrasing a viewpoint of Larry Kimura (presented in *Native Hawaiian Culture*, Washington, D.C.: The Commission, 1983), in whose opinion language is the key to the aesthetic culture of a nation, it could be stated that Indian aesthetic culture most certainly opens with a number of keys.

³ Ashok Vajpeyi (b. 1941) is a Hindi poet, critic, translator, editor. He authored 15 collections of poetry and many books of literary and art criticism in Hindi and English. He is also editor of several prestigious journals and a promoter of young, talented poets, critics and artists.

⁴ Here it is worth noting that the term 'modern' with relation to the work of Ashok Vajpeyi is not used by me to falsely dichotomise the Hindi literary world into "modern" and "traditional", for as pointed out by J. J. Smolicz: "Modernity is in fact a value-laden term which has an implication of positive evaluation of virtually any innovation", however, "it is erroneous to regard tradition as invariably hindering social change since, in a society with a long established civilization, resilience depends on new developments being incorporated into traditional values. At the same time, a tradition can only survive the vicissitudes of time and continue to flourish if it accommodates itself to the present" (Smolicz 1999: 258). Furthermore, Smolicz defines tradition as "that part of the heritage which is being actively evaluated by those living today, i.e. it is that part of the heritage which excites feelings of approval and disapproval in the current generation by involving it in an act of identification or dissociation with predecessors" (Smolicz 1974, quoted after: Smolicz 1999a: 260).

⁵ This supposition could also be supported by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's statement, who in his book of essays, *Prose of the World*, discussed the origins and source of the power of language. While describing the ability to transcend any given meaning of language, he says: "In that moment, something has been gained once and for all, founded forever, and it can be transmitted the way past acts of expression have been (...) but because our present use of language will be repeatable as long as the same language is in use or scientists are capable of restoring it to the present" (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 41).

categories of values, in which the poet's word — inasmuch as imagination — plays the role of the carrier of these values, creating one space for both the meaning and the substance of the message. And thirdly, because of the way in which the author himself defines the ultimate goal of his poetic language.

Additionally, both the place and role of Vajpeyi's oeuvre in Indian literary tradition constitute yet one more, integral reason for making this choice. His poetry belongs to the *Nāī Kavita* ('new poetry') movement, the beginnings of which date around the late 1950s — early 1960s. Since then, the poetry written in Hindi broadened its scope of themes, to be able to include the entirety of an ordinary person's life-experience. To achieve this goal, while treating their own poetic tradition with respect and admiration, the poets of *Nāī Kavita* searched for new ways of expression and a new poetic medium which would allow to convey the poetic message not only to the intellectual elite of the society, but also to ordinary readers. Changes in the poetic idiom, also formal experiments which were undertaken lead to the introduction of free verse, then already dominant in European as well as North American poetry. Following the natural development of the 'new poetry' movement, Vajpeyi's works combine tradition and modernity on the level of surface utterances as well as on the levels of deeper references. Indian tradition here is treated selectively, but in such a way that it contributes to the texts' tissue of meaning. Extensive knowledge of Anglo-Saxon literature and Mediterranean cultural tradition is also a feature of this poet. Among other qualities, it is this strong awareness of so-called Western literature, especially poetry, visible in the poetic approach, that makes his works attractive for a reader (or a translator) brought up in the European sensibility. In fact, from the point of view of the poetic form Vajpeyi employs in the vast majority of his works, the analysed poetry can give an impression of being much influenced by the modern poetry of the so-called West. However, as much as its 'western' form most probably cannot be disputed, its contents — expressed though the medium of the Hindi language — remain deeply set in the context of Indian cultural tradition⁶.

The problem of the function of word in these lyrical works becomes a complex, multilayered theme. Its complexity results mainly from the multiplicity of functions of a word itself: the aesthetic expressiveness of a word, meanings conferred on a word, meanings of a word in relation to things or notions, the relationship of a word to another word and, finally, a word taken as literary material, seen in the spectrum of the author's self-consciousness.

Regarding their artistic form, Ashok Vajpeyi's approximately one thousand poems⁷ are structured in *verse libre*, within which all the senses of the individual words might be read on the levels of both the surface and the deep structure. And yet, Vajpeyi formulates his aim of practicing the art of word clearly — as can be seen in two short quotations. The first verse,

⁶ This feature seems typical not only for Vajpeyi's poems but for the major part of modern poetry written in Indian languages in general. Perhaps because of this dichotomy, as well as through the influence of 'western' criticism which accompanied the foreign literary works reaching the Subcontinent, Indian literary critics and theoreticians, while referring to modern Indian poetry, have been using such terms as "metaphor," "simile," "allegory," "ellipsis" etc. in their English form. Moreover, since the very beginnings of modern Indian literary studies (this is approximately from the 1940s–1950s), in the books of literary theory and criticism printed in Indian scripts, these terms quite often remain in Latin alphabets. Generally speaking, the Indian scholars studying contemporary literature have not yet created an approach independent from the methods invented in the West which would exclusively fit contemporary Indian poetry — an outcome of the native literary tradition and Western influences.

⁷ For an extensive analysis, see: Czekalska 2009.

“that words can save from temporality” (*God*)⁸, describes the existential and eschatological dimension, whereas the second — implicates the value and the finality of the function of language understood as a way “towards the tranquil and pure word” (*Searching for a name*)⁹.

The manifold theme of word

The theme of word is constantly present in the poetry of A. Vajpeyi from the very beginnings of his creative work, and it constitutes a vast territory of his meditations¹⁰. In the introductory phase of his writing, the poet seemed to have treated the matter of word playfully, with joy, and perhaps even carelessly — like in the poem where he light-spiritedly reveals:

My words
I myself don't know
Where they are
(*Absence*)¹¹

Whereas in another early poem — from the debut collection of 1966 — he formulates the following statement:

I will gather my words like butterflies
(*Poet's preface*)¹²

The image of a poet with a butterfly net is somewhat archetypal, as is the astonishment with the existence of words. However, similarly to the astonishment with the existence of the beauty of the world, it is the very origin and the source of all creation. With time, the network of meanings and senses, in which the poet gathered the words, slowly became filled with the knowledge about words and their purpose and, finally, became “a burden which can never be made less heavy”¹³.

Overall, the entire body of work chosen for the present analysis, studied from the point of view of philosophical concerns — always present in the poems, taking the form of existential questions, images, metaphors, cultural allusions — is clear evidence of the fact that in these poetic reflections the function of word comprises two interrelated aspects: word in relation to the author's consciousness and word in relation to the mystery of existence. Consequently, the main purpose of word — understood as a poetic entity that constructs and constitutes the spatial world of the poet's thought — would be the usage of it on the level of ordinary life experience, within one language and one cultural tradition. This purpose implies the problem of both perception and individual creative freedom.

⁸ “(...) ki naśvartā se bacā sakte haim śabd” (*Īśvar*) (Vājpeyī 1986). Unless otherwise acknowledged, all translations included in this article were prepared by its author. Since the article is written in English, in the main text the English renderings of the selected fragments of A. Vajpeyi's poems are used. However, the analyses refer to the original contexts and meanings of the quoted poems, therefore the original lines are given in the footnotes.

⁹ “(...) kiśi śānt aur bhole śabd kī or” (*Nām kī kboj mein*) (Vājpeyī 1984).

¹⁰ More on the subject of word in Vajpeyi's poetry, see: Czekalska 2004.

¹¹ “mere śabd / main nahīm jāntā / ab kahām haim” (*Anupasthiti*) (Vājpeyī 1966).

¹² “(...) ham titliyon kī tarah naye śabd liye” (*Kavi-naktary*) (Vājpeyī 1966).

¹³ “kabhi kam na paṛnevāle śabdon kā bojh” (*Sāb kuch chorṅar nahīm*) (Vājpeyī 1991).

The poetic praxis of Vajpeyī's work, his use of the word in the form of modern verse, leads to a point in which the three goals: 1) expressing the 'self'; 2) expressing the very own vision of the world; 3) reaching in poetry the highest possible level of consciousness, meet as a union of the author's self-awareness and the universe. So, in a manner of speaking, what happens in this poetry could also be described as a state in which "Between God and the world, between the Absolute and life, the conscious Being and the psyche, there is an unequivocal identity of nature; not an opposition but, as it were, a superposition of planes" (Tucci 2001: 1). Numerous examples found in the studied works support the idea that the poet's interpretations of the relationships between the Absolute and life (*honā*, 'being' — in the language of this particular poet) constitute a thematic axis, a network of core values, of the analyzed poetic oeuvre.

The real function of word

The creative act of word has a dualistic structure. It is an act of the will of the deep 'I' manifesting itself in speech and also an act of manifestation of sense that interferes with the beyond-verbal beings. A word — which is expressed or written down — interferes by its mere semantic and extra-semantic existence with the beyond-verbal space which originates in the depths of a given "I" and, through perception, connects itself with another "I", hence with every potential "you". A word written down, so in a sense incarnated in letters, or shaped in a sound, is enduring, seems to last beyond time. Therefore Vajpeyī states:

words between us
flare up, burn, turn into ashes
(*Words between us*)¹⁴

And from his beliefs about the function of language, the poet draws the following supposition:

words protect us from falling down —
having no weight they fall
on the conscience.
(*Words protect us from falling down*)¹⁵

This statement about words falling on the conscience directly introduces the problem of values. The remark that words have "no weight" should of course not be understood literally, since metaphorically it relates to the material lightness of sound. The weight of words falling on the conscience enriches the poem's ethical dimension. The words can interfere with life itself:

on the wrong path
words unexpectedly get into our shoes
and pierce as nails —
they cannot stop us

¹⁴ "śabd hamāre bīc / sulagte, jalte, rākh hote haiṁ" (*Śabd hamāre bīc*) (Vājpeyī 2004).

¹⁵ "śabd girne se bacāte haiṁ: / ve bhārḥīn girte haiṁ / anta:karaṇ par" (*Śabd girne se bacāte haiṁ*) (Vājpeyī 2004).

yet if they are stubborn enough
they can make us change our path.

*(Words protect us from falling down)*¹⁶

The fact that words behave as living organisms (even though sometimes they are as dead as nails made of hard metal), in the light of the above quotations seems rather obvious. Words do take part in our existence in our symbolic journey, or path, of life. The next part of the same poem also refers to a path understood as a symbol:

words hard as gravel, as stones
crumble and turn into sand
they spread softly
so that while falling down
we would not feel the fall.

*(Words protect us from falling down)*¹⁷

The hardness of words comes from their meanings (e.g. the hardness of the word ‘no’, or the word ‘wrong’), the softness of sand on the other hand — implies the servient function of words in mitigating the despair and grief that accompany our journey, our fate. Particularly in view of the fact that the verb “fall” could be understood here at least in three different ways: in a physical sense, in a moral sense but also in a sense of the metaphorical, final fall from life to death. The work of words is constant and endless. It remains even beyond the eschatological horizon of man:

They all left
trampling down, destroying everything
they made sure that nothing was left intact.
Then as a worm from under a heap of dried leaves
appeared a word
and of a tiny morsel of earth in its mouth
and a blade of grass created a beginning.

*(Beginning)*¹⁸

The possibility of merging different levels of existence and different psychological states in a spiritual experience causes boundless sadness, which is an extra-semantic dimension of this poem, not written down, yet possible to be sensed. On such a background the saving function of word becomes equal with creation in a universal sense. For to whom the word revealed itself? To the poet, to the other “I”, to the world understood as a relation between a human and another human, a human and the earth, nature, sky? Whatever the poet’s intention,

¹⁶ “kabhi-kabhi jab ham salat rāste par hote hairī / śabd jūtorī ke andar acānak ubhar āī / kīl kī tarah gar̥te hairī: / ve hamerī rok na sakērī / par itnā jatlā zarūr dete hairī / kī ham kisī aur rāste bhī jā sakte hairī” (*Śabd girne se bacāte hairī*) (Vājpeyī 2004).

¹⁷ “kañkar-patthar kī tarah bhārī śabd / apne ko piskar ret banā / aur bichā lete hairī / tākī ham un par jab girehī / to coṭ na lage” (*Śabd girne se bacāte hairī*) (Vājpeyī 2004).

¹⁸ “ve sab cale gae / sab kuch ko raundkar, dhvast kar / āśvast kī unhomne kuch bhī akṣat nahīm choṛā. / tab sūkhī pattiyoṁ ke dher merī gum hue kīre kī tarah / ek śabd āyā / aur usne apne murīh merī thoṛī sī miṭṭī / aur tīnkā uṭhākar racne kī śuruāt kī” (*Śurnāī*) (Vājpeyī 2004).

he endowed the word with the features of a living organism of almost the lowest status (of a worms) for which it was enough to mix together (most probably with the use of saliva composed of water and some chemicals) a little morsel of earth in its mouth (a word is born in the mind but it is pronounced through the mouth) and a bit grass (it also a common plant of an insignificant status) to create a life. In this poem A. Vajpeyi touched the problem of the source of life and the problem of the existence of life beyond life's end. The latter being the most important issue in the Indian tradition. He touched these issues with a seemingly empty poetic form yet with utterly condensed contents achieved thanks to the choice of words.

Great philosophical traditions portrayed the way from anthropology to mysticism, to cosmology, to the union with the ultimate Being, with the Universe as a ladder leading through asceticism or devotion towards self-fulfilment¹⁹. In the analyzed verses that ladder is built of words:

A word
I weld with a word
I build
a ladder
in eternity.

(*In eternity*)²⁰

In a different poem from the same collection, the poet states that “language itself is infinity”²¹ and he turns this statement into a poem's title. Whereas the work *In the bones of the ancestors*, also of 1986, contains the following observation:

we take out one word
and the whole syntax of the previous century
gets disturbed

(*In the bones of the ancestors*)²²

¹⁹ Even though its interpretation does not belong to the main stream of discussion in this article, more attention should perhaps be given here to the symbol of a ladder. Universally read, the ladder symbolises a connection between the world of matter with the world of the spiritual. The statement in Hindi which brings about the image of constructing a “nasainī / anant mem”, translated literally as “ladder / in eternity” (and not — as the stereotypical expression would have it — “to eternity”), allows for an interpretation different from the commonly recurring motif of climbing a ladder to heaven or, in other words, achieving unity with the spiritual part of the self. In the poem, the speaking subject — placed at a given point in time and space, in eternity — is setting the way in search for the inner self. The ladder in the poem is not, however, constructed of two vertical uprights and a certain number of horizontal rungs, yet it is in the process of being structured from words. Rungs-words placed horizontally could lead the way on a spiritual journey upward, a gradual ascending one step-word at the time. The symbolic meaning of this image applies as much to Indian as to Western cultural tradition, since both of them see the human development as a gradual process, a journey upward, though with many rests and pauses. The rungs of the symbolic ladder (here made up of words) are there to provide the support and strength needed to take the next step upward.

²⁰ “mainī śabd ko / śabd se pharīsākar / banātā hūm / nasainī / anant mem” (*Anant mem*) (Vājpeyī 1986).

²¹ “bhāṣā ekmātr anant hai” (*Bhāṣā ekmātr anant hai*) (Vājpeyī 1986).

²² “ham uṭhāte haim ek śabd / aur kisī picḥlī śatābdī kā vākya-vinyās / vicalit hotā hai” (*Pūrvajom kī asthiyom mem*) (Vājpeyī 1986).

The poem which immediately follows *In the bones of the ancestors* in the same collection, and is also dated 1986 brings yet another proclamation:

words touch the meaning
(*Because you are*)²³

The proximity of these four poems, all of which were published in 1986, without any doubt indicates also a certain continuity of thought.

The mythicized function of word

The above quotations induce one to believe that the moment of creating the world in words and beyond words is the aim of this poetry. The self-realization of his own language used as a means to express thoughts seems to cause the poet's conviction that word has the power to establish new forms of existence for anonymous beings. An example of such a state of consciousness is the poem titled *There is something* (from the collection *The Other Name of Hope*, 2004):

There is something which has no name
not restricted by colour
seen by no one
touched by no one
it is that what I call —
my voice is like
its name, colour,
shape, touch²⁴.

The poem is not dated, which is rather telling in the case of a poet who reveals the years, days and sometimes even the hours of writing his poems (as in the *Avignon* collection). Yet this poem is written neither to commemorate nor to celebrate a moment in a longer or shorter meditation, but it embraces a permanent, immanent state of consciousness, that determines the treatment of language, its purpose. The poem refers to the author's principal attitude regarding the function of language with relation to his artistic technique. Therefore, in this case a date would be an inadequate manifestation of circumstances.

The durability of this state of consciousness, which is an intellectual transposition of the psychological predilections of the poet, seems to be the very basis of his poetic philosophy. If in this philosophical attitude one can hear the historical echoes of Indian thought, they most likely originate in the philosophy of language. Also, it cannot be ruled out that these echoes in the analyzed work are the constitutive part of the poet's idea about the function and the purpose of poetic word. In this context it is also worth pointing out the example of manifestation of a deep 'I' in this poem ('my voice'). 'My' — meaning individual, not

²³ "śabd chū pāte haiṁ arth" (*Kyonki tum ho*) (Vāṛṇeyī 1986).

²⁴ "kuch hai jiskā koī nām nahīṁ, / jo kisī rangsūcī meṁ śāmil nahīṁ, / jise kisī ne dekhā nahīṁ, / jise chū nahīṁ pāyā koī — / maiṁ use pukārtā hūṁ: / jaise merī āvāz / uskā nām hai, rang hai, / dr̥ṣṭī hai, sparś hai" (*Kuch hai*) (Vāṛṇeyī 2004).

belonging to any convention, to any historical style, to any epoch from the past. My voice is my poetry, my personal thought, belonging only to me, to my *psyche*, to my mind, my imagination. This manifestation of individualism leads the reader's thought towards both the history of modern, twentieth-century Hindi poetry and the history of twentieth-century European poetry. Interpretation is possible simultaneously in both the directions. In the same poem let us also pay attention to the word 'like' (जैसे), a conjunction that connotes similarity. A modern poet can identify himself with the world in no other way but through word. He does not describe the outer world, only its attributes (colour, shape), through his touch he confers his voice on it (sanctioning the magical power of word) and in this way he gives it a name. These are the extreme possibilities of language and on these borderlines the magic power of poetry comes into being.

To depict in poetry all that was visible, beautiful, real or ideal was the objective of older literary conventions and served the didactic not the cognitive purpose. The modern poet avoids description, avoids logical causality, employs the poetics of fragment. His objectives are not so much searching for something new, but for that which is invisible, unknown, which "has no name". "Modern poets — observers Hugo Friedrich — like to emphasize the inherent ambivalence of human speech in order to elevate poetic diction beyond utilitarian language. And they do so much more often than earlier poets did" (Friedrich 1974: 122). A. Vajpeyi is one of those poets who — to quote Friedrich again — "are seeking a kind of transcendence of speech" (Friedrich 1974: 116). While calling that "which no one has seen", that "which no one can touch" and conferring on this "that" his voice for the purpose of shared existence — A. Vajpeyi reaches towards the most ancient desire of mankind: the desire of transcendence, of unity of one being with another. The same is also confirmed in the second part of the series *Alone again*, in which the desire to encounter another form of being takes shape of the following reflections:

Does a falling leaf know it's going to die?
In simplistic times, does a difficult word know
that entering an abstruse poem will be its end?
Wandering in the ruins of a raga,
does a note recognise its own fading away?
What doesn't exist has many names
fading, absence, end, closure, mortality, death
But everyone remembers its existence
no one experiences it's not-being²⁵.

The poet expresses the axiological truth about the universal function of word in an even more visionary manner in the following verses of 1989:

as the radiance of her body
the splendour of her face
the astonishment in her eyes

²⁵ Transl. Arlene Zide & Teji Grover. "jharti hui patli janti hai ki vah marne ja rahi hai? / saralikrt samay mein kathiin sabd janti hai ki / ek durbodh kavita mein uska jana uska ant hai? / rag ke khandahar mein bhatka gaya sur pahchan patla hai ki yah / uska lop hai? / jo nahin hai uske ka nam hai / lop anupasthiti ant samapan mrtyu avasan / par sabhi uske hone ke yad karte hue / ko bh nahin jo uske na hone ko vyakt kare. / na hona bhasa ya kavita mein sambhav hi nahin hai. / samay se bahar madam rakhna bhasa se bh bahar jana hai" (*Baburi akela*) (Vajpeyi 1992).

in the sky
the word will keep reverberating
not shelved.

*(The word will not be shelved)*²⁶

A word written down, so in a sense incarnated in letters, lasts longer than even the deepest 'I', it has the quality of timelessness. Because — according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty — “the moment the first «human» signification has been expressed, an enterprise has been embarked upon which surpasses our common prehistory even though prolonging its movement. It is this conquering speech which interests us, for it makes institutionalized speech, or language, possible. Speech has to teach its own meaning to both the speaker and the listener. It is not enough for speech to convey a meaning already given to either side. Speech must bring meaning into existence” (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 141). In this sense the poetic speech of A. Vajpeyi can be understood both as a core value constitutive for the identity of the poet and as a carrier of other core values symbolized by words. However, it also remains the tool for creating new realities.

Conclusion

The language of the analyzed poems suggests a certain metaphysical content, resulting from the poet's main obsession: celebration of existence and at the same time celebration of (poetic) word. As a result of such duality, word (language) should be understood as a factor participating in the celebration of both the existence and itself. Metaphysical suppositions arrange themselves into two parallel spheres, mutually creating the content.

The first sphere would be the language itself, and within it all the individual words, in which the poet dwells, as he auto-ironically states, “turned into a composition”²⁷. Language “is infinity,” *ergo* the poet dwells in infinity. Poetry is “melted” into an alphabet, identified with language. This is why all the functions of word, presenting the existence and assessing it, encompassing all the recorded existences, all the chains of letters, words and sentences, became a part of infinity. From this perspective poetry conquers the time of individual life. The act of contemplating²⁸ a moment becomes the point of intersection of time and thought. The act of celebrating poetic word — an act of creation of the poet's spiritual world frozen in language, beyond time. The second sphere would be the poet's main obsession: all that was, all that is, and all that will be and this sphere cannot be perceived but through memory, intuition and imagination. The ultimate moment of experiencing this obsession is the moment of death, here also only imagined and hypothetical, however inevitable. This projected moment of the end of earthly

²⁶ Transl. Vijay Munshi. “uske deh kī dyutī-sā / uske cehre kī ābhā-sā / uske netrom ke cakit āścary-sā / antariks mem / sugbugātā rahegā śabd / sthagīt nahīm hogā” (*Sthagīt nahīm hogā śabd*) (Vajpeyī 1991).

²⁷ “(...) mem ek adhēr kavi, / binā thake-hāre aur binā kīś kāyar ullās mem śāmil huā” (*Apne sarhe cha: mabine ke pote ke lie ek yuddhit*) (Vajpeyī 2000).

²⁸ Contemplation understood as human ability of uttermost importance. In her essay *The Needs of the Soul*, Simone Weil states: “The contemplation (...) of the beauty of the world, and (...) the unrealized beauty to which we aspire, can sustain us in our efforts to think continually about that human order which should be the subject uppermost in our minds” (Weil 2000: 94). She also discusses the matter of contemplation in her *Lectures on Philosophy* by saying that: “(...) contrary to what is commonly believed, the contemplation of particular things is what elevates a man (...)” (Weil 1995: 59).

existence in the poet's reflections is a bridge between two words: being here and being "there", expressed in many compositions. Because of this reoccurring theme, every now and then the analyzed poetry becomes both proximate to transcendence, and close to the mystery of existence²⁹. The unity of the two above-mentioned spheres, expressed through words, reveals how in the process of experiencing life, a word can linger on the metaphysical.

Even the few quotations cited here show clearly that the causative function of word plays the key role in the analyzed poetry. It opens its internal spheres as well as reveals the ontological status of the employed word, its meaning that is "entirely definable through the vocabulary and syntactical relations of the conventional language" (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 3). The power of language "lies entirely in the present, insofar as it succeeds in ordering the would-be key words to make them say more than they have ever said, and transcends itself as a product of the past, thus giving us the illusion of going beyond all speech to things themselves, because in effect we go beyond all given language" (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 41). In the poet's imagination, a poetic word which allows one to "step beyond time and transcend the language"³⁰, is a pure phantom of expressiveness treated by the poet as a means to convey his own vision of the world and, therefore, also as a means of communication between the poet and a reader.

The study of the poems seems to prove the hypothesis that the ultimate goal of the poet's word is man, a human being transcendent in his consciousness, in a world of his own which unites and salvages the two vital components of human experience. The inner, psychological and intellectual world and the outer world — which is being observed both as a being and as an experience of being — meet only in the poet's word and in this word they reach unity and salvation.

The extent to which the poet's thought remains within the themes, and his unvarying manner of perceiving himself — or, in a broader sense, of perceiving a man belonging to Indian culture of the second part of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty first century — provides evidence enough to claim that the axiological message conveyed in these works meets the criterion of long durability, so important for Smolicz's concept of core values. The whole poetic space on the other hand, its imaginary territory, rests on the inner intention of the deep 'I', on the language's grammar and semantics, and yet includes areas belonging only to the realm of the "grammar of imagination"³¹, poetic imagination.

In the context of both Jerzy Smolicz's core values theory and the above quoted examples, it is possible to conclude that the language in these poems, studied on the level of axiology, performs two functions: the real and the mythicized. While performing its real function, language in itself remains the core value which fulfils the requirement of lasting beyond time, beyond geography and history. In its mythicized function — language becomes the prime carrier of axiological senses — or, using Smolicz's term, of other core values — that could be defined mainly as 'faith', or 'religion' or perhaps even as the major components of a particular cultural tradition from which the studied poetry originates.

²⁹ It seems apparent that the poet regards the language, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, "as a fabulous apparatus which enables us to express an indefinite number of thoughts or objects through a finite number of signs chosen so as to recompose exactly everything new that one may wish to say and to bestow upon it the same evidence as the primary designation of things" (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 4).

³⁰ "samay se bāhar kadam rakhnā bhāṣā se bhī bāhar jānā hai" (*Bahuri akela*) (Vājpeyī 1992).

³¹ In Polish: „gramatyka wyobraźni”, a title I gave to a selection of A. Vajpeyī's poems published in Polish translation in 2008.

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