

## Concepts of Confinement in Anand's *The Living Splendour*

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### Abstract

The present study gives a close reading of some of the selected poems of the living Indian poet, Anand. His collection of poems, *The Living Splendour* (2017), touches on different dimensions of a modern man's life, including personal and public lives. This study argues despite its apparent celebration of splendor, the collection is replete with concepts of confinement. The paper extracts these concepts to support the main argument of the paper. It goes by selection and reads the poems that conceptualize confinement in various aspects of life. The concepts show not only Anand is well aware of the restrictions of his context, but they also evince his inconsistencies. The fluctuations are symptoms of the (post)modern indeterminacy from which he has not remained immune.

**Key words:** Anand, concept, confinement, India, modern

### Introduction

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Jernail S. Anand is the living Indian poet who has been quite prolific in poetry. He has different volumes of poems, each of which has its own style and perspective. Like any other man of letters, Anand writes and while writing plays with and draws upon potentials of English language. The present paper argues Anand's collection of poems, *The living splendor* (2017), develops out of basic concepts of confinement. The paper analyzes some of his poems in the light of these concepts, extracts them, and interprets them. The concept of confinement is presented through some lexical triggers.

The collection encompasses a wide variety of themes and deals with different dimensions of life, ranging from the most personal aspects up to the most public ones. The concepts of confinement can be regarded as the cementing devices that interlink different subject matters together in order to produce a more comprehensive vision of the poet's persona.

The present study goes by selection; it chooses the poems which bear more central concepts of confinement. The concepts are metaphorical as they draw upon the embodied experiences that we get even before learning language. The paper provides a close reading of the selected poems and tries to show the various topics the concepts encompass.

## **Analysis**

The first poem in a collection functions like the beginning paragraph in a prose work. The first poem is titled "Her" which is a possessive pronoun for which one cannot find any referent in the body of the poem. This creates both semantic and lexical tension in the poem and reveals the latent tension within the mind of the speaker. Grammatically, the poem is titled "Her", but this title remains unspecified all through the poem. However, the poem itself gives us a hint as to the referent of the title as well as the character of the speaker.

The speaker of "Her" talks of what would have happened to him if he had not experienced love. Therefore, "Her" refers semantically to the beloved who is addressed directly in the poem by the use of "you". The speaker is the lover who is expressing his sense of gratitude to the beloved for giving meaning to his life by her presence. The concepts that abound in this poem are body-based such as "body is a cage in which is /imprisoned not only the soul/ but also winds and sunlight / which are restless for release" (p. 15). Another case is about the mind which

the poet applies to the heart as well, “human mind is a container/ which if turned too hot/ breaks its walls/ and runs amuck” (p. 15).

The poem conceptualizes love as a retaining force that keeps him in check and thus confines him; therefore, the speaker describes himself as a “violent volcano” (p. 15) on the point of explosion. But with the arrival of the beloved all his energy has been directed in a constructive way, setting him “poeticizing” (p. 16). The poem ends with his sense of gratitude to the beloved, “for retaining in me,/ my ‘self’, my ‘soft self’,/ and setting me dreaming” (p. 16). Such a poem with the expression of gratitude at the beginning of a collection somehow resembles the collection to an epic which by way of convention starts with an invocation of a muse, a god, a goddess, or a thanking note to a supernatural being.

In “A prayer to the lost souls”, the speaker conceptualizes the whole world as a prison made by the civilized man. He conceptualizes the earth as a “village” which is “on fire” (p. 19). The poem presents the destruction and devastation civilization and science have done to humanity and human society. Addressing the scientists and learned men, he states, “How can you turn your back / on the evils in society” (p.19). Therefore, the poet calls the scientists to help the earth out.

The other poem in which one can find central concepts of confinement is "Beyond elements". Here, the poet identifies with the famous Frankenstein, the monster that turns against its creator. Thus the speaker poses as a threat to the creator's freedom. In other words, the speaker himself conceptualizes confinement, "Are you not afraid of me?/ Is there one night/ You have slept in peace?" (p. 26).

The next poem is "Before it happened" which is thematically opposite to the previous one. In this poem, it is the creator that confines the speaker, "Here I am; / caught in a spider's web;/ Whom I always regarded as God" (p. 27). The feature that turns the creator into a restrictive force is his neutrality, "his eyes turned away;/ No promise, but certainly /An element of disgust" (p. 27). The creator's sole reaction to the speaker's objection is, "He simply smiles,/ And leaves me to my destiny" (p. 28).

The other concept of confinement appears in "Walls" wherein the walls are imprisoning the speaker. In this poem, directly addressing the walls personifies them. The significance of such personalization lies in its giving a forceful presence in the life of the speaker. This significance can best be felt in the emotional reaction the speaker had against the walls. Thus the poem starts with his hatred, "Walls,/ I hate you because you divide / Man against man" (p. 36). However, this hatred does not remain with him permanently. Gradually, he changes his stance toward the walls, finding that they accord him a sense of security for their inclusiveness. Thus he revises himself, asking, "Walls, why I hate you?" (p.36). Therefore, in his revised view, the concept of confinement turns into a vision of safety which he adores, "I love these doors/ closing which I feel safe/ Against tempests and lightning" (p. 36). Significantly, the same means of security defines the borders of identity for the speaker and thereby proffer a sense of possession to him. In this stage, he claims his properties, stating, "And within these doors,/ This kitchen, this bed, this family woman,/ And these kids – all mine" (p. 37). That the changed stand toward something can be interpreted once as a prison and another time as a supportive factor shows the arbitrariness of interpretation.

The next poem to analyze is entitled "You, you, you" which has some feministic overtones. It thus conceptualizes confinement in gender-oriented stance. The beginning of the poem represents her both as a heroic figure and a victim: "The great human being / who happened to control the earth and the sky/ who was the center of /all attraction" is the woman who has been dominated by the society of men. (p. 40). The woman is presented as a victim to nonsensical laws of men that have enslaved women under the beguiling rubric of civilization.

"Divided" centers on split identities of a man living in a demanding society. The poem conceptualizes the society as the confining force in a man's life. The poem divides the identity of a man in a quite scientific manner, "There are two persons /in just one form;/ one existing for you /and the other living for me" (p. 45). The contrast he sets up between the two opposes the conformist with the nonconformist dimensions of his being. Thus the social codes, demands and norms conceptualize the sense of confinement in the poem. What the speaker favors is the nonconforming side of his self rather than the socialized aspect. The description of his favorite side shows how the other side is confined; he is told not to "respect these borders. . . loves life

and breaks norms" (p. 45). At the end the poet speaks in a Freudian key tone, assigning the greatest importance to the non-socialized self,

The two never come together

your man is just tip of the iceberg

the real man lives with me

like waters under the frozen ice. (p. 46)

In "The deserted well", the poet deconstructively compares love, hatred, and hope to wells. The poem posed another concept of confinement in this poem by making people as barriers against using the well of love. The poet says no one "dares" to drink from the well of love, since "anyone who sauntered close to it /was spotted by the people/and brought to the well of despair" (p. 47).

In "Looking back in despair", the desperate speaker conceptualizes death as the border that restricts his existence. The phenomenon of death marks the end of a stage in his life, "now when I find the border/ I look back" (p. 53). In this poem, the speaker finds his own self, his wishes, desires, and hopes as real barriers in his life.

The speaker of "Fear" finds himself confined in the pangs of dread. Thus the poem gives an emotional side to confinement, "Fear has gripped my veins;/ and tears choke my breath" (p. 60). He does not specify the source of fear, but he generalizes it to anybody else. This is a shared fear that restricts everyone. When he writes, "Killers are at large" (p.60), one can guess the fear may come from terrorist activities that have become rife these days and deprived common people of their security. This gives a political side to his poetry.

The other poem that similarly and directly deals with political issues is entitled "15<sup>th</sup> August". This poem addresses the *status quo* of modern India after gaining its independence from the colonial domination of Britain. The bitter political truth is that the colonizers have been replaced by Indian rulers who similarly deprive people of their freedoms, "they have robbed us of our wealth/ and filled Swiss banks" (p. 113).

In his other poem, "Lamps: Reflections on Diwali", the speaker takes the bodies and walls as mere appearances that block the real light from being seen (p. 85). Confinement is conceptualized in the darkness that blocks the inner light from getting illuminated. So the poet sets aside the world of appearances which can be painted and instead favors the confined light inside, "We are particles of light;/ Darkness dwells in our minds/ O lamps! Haunt them out" (p. 86). Thus this poem gives a philosophical dimension to the concept of restriction.

The succeeding poem centers on the real Diwali which is a celebration of love and light. In the real Diwali, the speaker invites his addressee to care for the deprived and the ignored, "Let us rise from darkness / and move into the light taking along/ millions in whose lives there are no lamps" (p.87). Despite its promising tone in the power of man to change his and others' destinies, the poem does not extend beyond its own borders as it is immediately followed by "The hyphenated universe" which affirms man's confinement in the hands of fate. This poem speaks of a submissive outlook that neutralizes any attempt to make the world a better place, "Everything/ is cast in a destiny / tailor-made for it" (p. 89).

The poem that most directly and forcefully deals with concepts of confinement is "Trapped". The speaker poses different issues and takes at times contradictory stances toward them. For instance, he says "I am the real master;/ and also the real slave of my doings" (p.98). For him, every action and non-action is trap from which he finds no way out. The philosophizing speaker defines destiny in a way which is in contrast to his previous notions in the other poems. Destiny is made out of man's own actions. There are not determining or supernatural forces to shape man's fate. People create for themselves their own destinies (p.99). Therefore, he finds "nothing like malignant/ in the cosmos". Every good or evil comes from man and his own actions or in-actions. People are then entrapped by the fate they make for themselves.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of concepts of confinement in the selected poems evinces the various fields upon which the poet touches. There can be found no consistency among the stances the speaker takes. Sometimes he is full of hope for change, challenge, and creating some new order of things; some other times, he feels defeated in the web of destiny from which he harbors no escape. Some

poems show him a man full of love and hope to break the barriers of mortality, and at other times he just lapses into moments of submission, disgusting himself and his life.

One thing is clear and that is the poet is aware of his restricted state in different phases of life. But his response to these barriers is not a consistent one. This perplexes the audience who comes to his poetry for fishing something out.

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### References

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