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Exploring the crossroads of destiny and defiance through existential and cosmic dialogues in what the universe confides

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Abstract

Krishnaa Rani Dash's poem "What the Universe Confides" is investigated here as an important piece of contemporary Indian English poetry, particularly because of the way in which it blends a spiritual epiphany with existential probing. The poem shows the human struggle to master fate while exercising free will through a complex interplay of confusion, loneliness, transgression, and cosmic revelation. The study puts the poem into the context of existential poetics, relating it to postmodern resistance, modernist ambiguity, and romantic individuality. In addition, it infuses the poem with its spiritual meaning by connecting its themes and imagery to universal metaphors like whispered confessions, crossing at twilight, and "roads less travelled." The study also highlights Dash's stylistic devices enjambment, symbolism, and the changing voices that together determine how the reader accesses the poem's many meanings. Through intertextual conversation with Frost, Camus, Tagore, and Rumi, the research shows the power of the poem to cross philosophical and cultural borders. Finally, the study illustrates how The Universe Confides situates Indian English poetry within an active global discourse by formulating a poetics of resistance and choice.

Keywords: Existential poetics, spiritual epiphany, intertextuality, stylistic devices, cosmic revelation, philosophical borders

Introductions

Objectives of the study

- To read What the Universe Confides as a spiritual and existential poem
- To examine the stylistic and structural tools that support the subject concerns of the poem and to explore its intertextual resonances with Frost, Camus, Tagore, and Rumi.
- To contextualize the contribution of the poem to contemporary Indian English poetry

Need of the Study

The present study is a product of an earnest wish to bring the literary and philosophical importance of modern Indian English poetry to the attention of the world. 'What the Universe Confides'. by Krishnaa Rani Dash is a collection of poems in which the reflections of an enlightened human mind and existential analysis come together to create a voice that is culturally specific and simultaneously universal. The research is undertaken to bring to light the extent to which Indian English poetry engages itself in intertextual discourse with traditions of world literature from Romantic solitariness to Modernist indeterminism to Postmodern affirmation by examining the theme-structure of the poem involving choice, solitariness, and resistance.

Literature Review

Indian English poetry, without losing touch both with local religious traditions and the global discourses constituting 'world literature', has emerged as an active site of existential and philosophical research. According to Sudhir K. Arora (2016) ^[1], a reader of ancient Indian poets like Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore's writing and appreciates the intellectual and cultural richness of some of these long-forgotten and possibly less-appreciated poets today -- they compose incredibly rich and equally cosmopolitan and metaphysical works in their reflection on human reality. Arora says that English-language poetry in India has gone through a process of becoming a world-language: from a linguistic creation of colonial

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mimicry to an Indian style which is sent back from the colonized to the colonizer. The modernist movement in Indian English poetry is expanded in Gaddala Subbarao (2023) ^[2], who points out how poets like Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das brought new existentialist themes like disenchantment with city-life, crisis of identity, and alienation to the way they expressed their thoughts in their poems. Insofar as they complete this picture, these selections suggest the richness of Indian English poetry, which marries spiritual yearning, existential resistance, and intertextuality to produce a literary tradition with universal relevance.

Positioning Contemporary Indian English Poetry in the Landscape of Global Literature

Contemporary Indian English poetry, which occupies a special position among the poetic conversations of the world, strives to strike a balance between modernist and postmodernist tendencies with indigenous cultural tradition. As a result of the colonial experience and the subsequent aftermath, poets have articulated feelings of alienation, crises of identity, and philosophical inquiry in a specifically Indian but also universal vernacular (Mehrotra and Kolatkar 2004) ^[6]. The interaction with existential questions, with spirituality, and with cultural hybridity marks the shift from early nationalist issues to a more cosmopolitan poetics. Indian English poetry was a thoughtful way of reconciling tradition and modernity for Nissim Ezekiel and A. K. Ramanujan (Askari 2023) ^[5]. Third, scholars are starting to recognize the role Indian English poetry plays in producing a "poetics of strangeness," where metaphors of region acquire a universal significance through symbolic resonance (Mehrotra & Kolatkar, 2004) ^[6]. In this way, Indian English poetry, which narrates stories of alienation, defiance, and transcendence, is simultaneously a contribution to world literature and a resurgence of ancient intellectual traditions. The status of such poetry within the international context makes it a significant source for the emergence of cross-cultural existential and spiritual discourse (Roy 2017) ^[4]. Krishnaa Rani Dash's 'What the Universe Confides' is thus one such contribution to this larger tradition in that while speaking of fate, choice, and cosmic disclosure, it does so on a note that resonates not only with Indian sensibility but also with universal human concerns.

Statement of Focus: *What the Universe Confides* as a Poem of Existential Philosophy, Spiritual Revelation, and Defiance of Destiny

Krishnaa Rani Dash's *What the Universe Confides* is a powerful example of contemporary Indian English poetry because of the way in which the poetics of the work are simultaneously existential and spiritual in their rebellious import. "I am the one who has learnt that thing: / How, swirling vision back and forth, took the road less travelled by; / As the Difference shall tear the womb of scorns," the poem "Swirling vision back and forth, took the road less travelled by; / As the Difference shall tear the womb of scorns" dramatizes the dilemma at life's crossroads. The existentialist is always haunted by choice and responsibility, and the speaker of "The Feud" is both courageous and afraid (Yadav, 2023) ^[7]. As the poet exclaims, "and gazed again through the ethereal bend, / watched the hours tick by," the cosmological and spiritual elements of the text are foregrounded, bridging temporality and transcendence, and

echoing Indian philosophical notions of fate, karma, wisdom, and knowledge. However, the poem also calls for resistance against 'wanton, wild waves' and for perseverance despite tumultuous difficulty, and it rejects submissive acceptance of fate. This poem's movement between respect and rebellion situates it in dialogue with a tradition of Indian poets who seek to use the strength of the creative will to push against the reign of fate while considering the realities of the spiritual (Roy 2017) ^[4].

Research Question

What the Universe Tells Me is a philosophical story about people and how they cope with unavoidable loneliness. The research question is: "how does the poem develop a poetics of choice and of estrangement, of cosmic disclosure?" Crossroads, encircled by sharp thorns throughout, is the price you pay for a transformative journey that is also horrible: where being alone is a sin and a gift. The form is analogous to the ways in which Indians think of the universe in sacred terms (Mehrotra and Kolatkar 2004) ^[6]: in the sense of something told or taught to: "For they, who walked fearlessly all alone, / Indeed heard / What the Universe confides!"

The Poem in the Tradition of Existential and Spiritual Poetics

Locating the Poem within Global Existential Discourse

What the Universe Confides is the result of a tradition which takes existential concern to be something more than intellectual abstraction; it is subjective fear. As I suggested, Indian English poetry, which has only recently thrown off its colonial moorings, has tended to draw rather uncritically upon the "inner life" so celebrated within Western Romanticism and the modern cosmopolitanism that it pioneered as a redemptive and emancipatory response. Yet it's also radically present-day: contemporary Indian poets like Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki Daruwalla share the modernist's fears and alienation and evoke a plight at the heart of all our humanity. Through unabashed confessional verse written in Italian American dialect, Dash's speaker sits "at the Crossroads" where he or she must confront existential issues of choice, fear, and orientation to the cosmos. It locates this anxiety in existential Indian and universal metaphysical images and voices, ridden with human anxiety, and in dialogue with voices from existential French writers and Romantic and modernist poets elsewhere in the world that have agonized over the dilemma of choice. As the process of discovery of the spiritual is grouped together with other existential questions, so poems which are continuously, perpetually, in motion open themselves to a form of spiritual transcendence. Its twists and turns and digressions, are manifestations of existential discontent. So, existential questioning is understood in this poem as something which ranges from interior questioning to dialogical questioning with the universe.

Comparative Anchors: The Romantic 'I', the Modernist 'U' and the Postmodern 'R'

The first is the lyrical position that Dash espouses, which he sees as an affiliation with aspects of Romantic individualism: self-definition and autonomy, together with creativity and passion expressed through feeling. In their bid to break free from the social and cultural confines, as well as their ideological capacitance, post-colonial poets of the

English-speaking world have followed the Romantic predecessors in their glorification of the individual and the individualistic (Rani, 2024) ^[8]. In this case, that trajectory is positioned to reflect the legacy of Romanticism in the metaphor of the individual speaker setting out for the 'road less travelled.' And yet the poem, simultaneously, is modernist: in its (possibly vague) undecidability, in its restlessness, dis-ease of a Mahapatra, a Daruwalla kind-in which the existential dislocation results in the breakdown of a unitary person (Criterion 2023) ^[9]. The division of self is strengthened with reference to the phrase wandered and wandered and wandered a number of times in the poem. Furthermore, an irrefutably post-modernized mode of thought emerges; the vulnerable individual is stripped of human subjectivity, certainty of narration refuses itself, and death and chance are legitimated. Instead of resolving the question, the poem entertaining a resistance (one of the hallmarks of postmodern indecision) If Vasari say they overcame "wanton, wild waves," that was less a victory than a matter of survival.

How "Roads Less Travelled" is Not Really a Metaphor

The generalizing prowess of the metaphor allows for a widely diverse readership to interpret the poem from widely different cultural contexts; and in this case, the nature of transformation that the poem celebrates evokes what we might term an Indian sensibility, suffused with cosmic grace and metaphysical militancy. Hence the shield, oriented as Rani (2024) ^[8] explains it, multi-semantic symbol of culture and the freedom of the individual, which he places in the context of the reading scheme located in post-colonialism, that is in the reading of the Romanticism as reinterpreted. With the metaphor, the writer evokes a cosmopolitan movement of the spirit and urges an anarchical freedom in a new existential dimension. So the renamed road becomes both literal and metaphorical, a path not avoided, but potentially human, existential, spiritual, and cosmological in its cultural reach.

Thematic Excavation of the Poem

Defiance or Fortune: Poetic Celebration of Human Will Above Necessitated Fate

This is a very, very different picture from works of capitulation; a beautiful picture of the power of human spirit, set forth by similes of struggle ("burning sweat drop", "lush lanes", "rushed sun"). The resistance is an earthy, corporal hard-headedness, not proud, and not triumphal. Even though there may be no future for his or her Lucy, by

describing himself as taking 'the road less traveled' the speaker takes control of his or her destiny. Thus the existential drama of nihilistic helplessness is inverted in the denouement of the poem and the positive human drama of radical determination, agency, and steadfastness is asserted.

Solitude as Strength: The Courage of Walking "Fearless All Alone"

In this sense, the speaker is brave in the sense of saying he or she can be lonely, not just endure it but know that he or she can say he or she can be "[f]earless all alone." Alone is not synonymous with empty space; on the contrary, it is the opposite - precisely because being alone is being receptive, that is, being able to listen to what "the Universe confides." The traveller wanders through "labyrinths" and "twilight" and draws energy from within himself as he becomes the self-who-is-not-socially-tempered. Wandering and wandering and wandering expresses not only existential exhaustion, but also stubborn perseverance. Solitude provides access to facts for which otherwise we hear none in the commotion. In this context alone (in the immediate sense in which there is a close dialogue with the cosmos) is meant. So loneliness becomes power (a place of Being rather than non-being), and man is prepared to carry and bear what all the universe can offer him.

Cosmic Confession: The Universe as a Revelatory Entity That "Confides" in the Voyager

The world as confidant, not an unfeeling bystander, is likely the most dramatic topic of the poem. It is the Universe that becomes agent in the final couplet, "For they, who walked fearfully all alone, indeed heard / What Universe confides!" Whoever dares to go alone can receive the secrets of the universe. The confession of the universe is that cosmic truth is not hidden but is there for those who are courageous. Thus, the poem turns the existential pain into an experience of revelation, and the traveller learns the secrets of the universe as he faces storms, crossroads, and lonely nights. It describes the cosmos as personal, responsive, and alive, not distant or cold. By means of this the poem combines the spiritual and existential, locating human disobedience within a responsive cosmic disclosure rather than against cosmic insensitivity. The last admission is a lyrical affirmation rather than a moralistic instruction: the cosmos speaks to us when we learn to take "the road less travelled."

Table 1: Thematic Spectrum of What the Universe Confides

Theme	Symbolic Imagery	Philosophical Implication	Literary Echoes
Crossroads	Thorned paths	Existential dilemma	Frost, Eliot
Fortune & Defiance	Tempest, waves	Human agency vs fate	Milton, Camus
Solitude	Labyrinth, twilight	Heroism in isolation	Emerson, Tagore
Cosmic Confession	Ethereal bend	Mystical revelation	Rumi, Whitman

Stylistic and Structural Strategies

Symbolism of periwinkles, labyrinths, and tempest as extended metaphors

Symbolic pictures are used as a theme in What the Universe Confides. Pequenies remind me of small but sturdy life - sweet flowers clinging to each other, giving strength in a time of need. These snake-like pathways of life's struggle

and the self continue to be named "crossroads" and "labyrinth," among other things, and reshaped in an increasingly fanciful manner. Treating the Prose Poetry as "psychological grandeur," Heaney comments that it "deepens when the journeyer makes his gradual way across the intricate maze, his imagination increasingly piqued to weigh the evasive tides of life" (13). The tempest is the

adversary: "pressing forward the tempest" as something the speaker must always act against. These symbols echo those that Frye identifies as archetypal symbols in literature (Frye, 1957) ^[11] and combine to describe a journey that is both internally complex, externally conflictive, and spiritually aspirational.

Enjambment and repetition as reflections of restlessness and persistence

Enjambment (lines that do not end with a period or other punctuation mark) is used throughout the syntax of the poem to signify the story and emotional impetus. With its sinuous cadence, "wandered and wandered and wandered," for example, elicits the restlessness and relentless quest of the speaker while attaining conclusion through stoppage rather than being achieved. Enjambment as a poetic figure for ongoing life despite ambivalence also refers to the existential need to continuously draw on, in Preminger and Brogan's (1993) ^[12] terms, 'the continuation of tenant, dread,

and progress of meanings without consummation' (p. 363). The repetition of "wandered and wandered and wandered" also has the additional effect of giving the speaker even more force, as both a metric fulcrum and as a sort of thematic punch-line.

Interplay of voice: personal lament, cosmic whisper, and philosophical dialogue

Private monologue and resonance with the stars ebb and flow throughout the poem. The inner lament crossing the craggy and bleak lines of ill-will is most probably that of self-sickness, involving also an anatomical depiction of the man's weariness: "rolled the dejected eyelids up." On the other hand, the words are heard; the echo of the celestial whisper becomes a voice each time, emanating from something further away in the celestial sky, suggesting movement even further-a structural euphemism to signal a passage from grief to confession, from self to universe.

Table 2: Stylistic Techniques in the Poem and Their Functions

Device	Example	Function
Symbolism	"Crossroads, adorned in edged thorns"	Moral dilemma
Enjambment	"Wandered and wandered and wandered"	Restlessness, continuity
Personification	"Fortune's defiance"	Humanizing fate
Allusion	Road less travelled	Intertextual dialogue with Frost

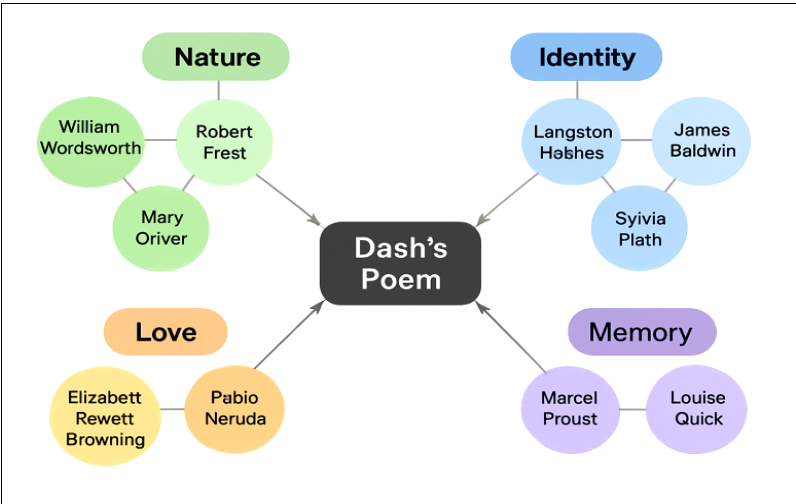
Intertextual Dialogues

With Robert Frost: Choices and Their Aftermath

Dash only quotes from Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," on which I touched in the last poem, which had the traveler cradling "two lives, good or ill," in his hands when he stood beside the "yellow Wood" and contemplated other paths: "For the difference open ravenous mouth of scorneth womb: swirling vision backwards forwards, took the road less travelled by." In What the Universe Confides, Frost's metaphor is rammed into sharp relief and put to work in a furnace of existential and emotional cost. There is physical and forceful decision-making here (tear, not just set apart), rather than quiet meditative reflection.

With Tagore and Rumi: Spiritual Transcendence and Cosmic Intimacy

Khabara is like a poem by Tagore or Rumi in which the sacred displaces himself and becomes entirely subjective; the intimacy of the cosmos is poeticized. With regards to love, it is said that "a love which devastates everything except the 'Everlasting Beloved'" (Rumi, Masnavi), while with regards to knowledge, it is said that "true knowledge is that which sees the unity of all things in God" (Tagore 1913) ^[15]. In the last lines of Dash's poem, he says, "For they who dared to be alone-perhaps it will be only one-whatever that was, be they a child, a woman, or a man, indeed heard what it is that the universe confides!" We are reminded of Tagore's mystical fusion of self with other, as well as Rumi's melting into the sweetness of love.



Source: Dash, K. R. (2023). *What the Universe Confides...* [UGC-NET 2023, GATE 2024].

Fig 1: Intertextual Map of Literary Dialogues in Dash's Poem

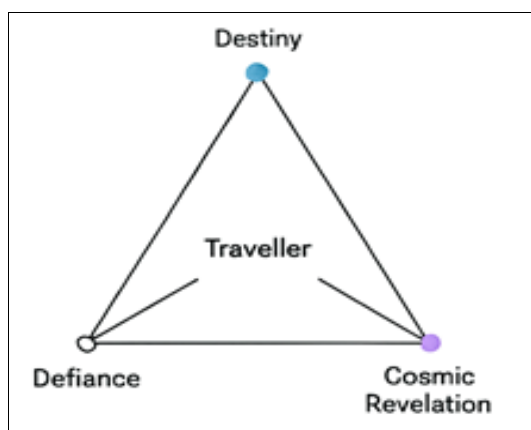
Philosophical Dimensions

Poetic Embodiment of Stoicism: Confronting Pain, Tempest, and Solitude

It is human to suffer; to suffer well is Stoic. Alone, the poet becomes a storm-watcher, suffering his pain as baptism instead of a punishment. Pain is not avoided but embraced in the silence of the inner mind and transmuted into verse that neither complains nor begs. Bell (2020) ^[18] writes that voluntary engagement for the common good gives suffering purpose as opposed to suffering without purpose. The Stoic poet writes sentences that suggest resiliency, not flight. Even if the storm is raging and loneliness is bearing down like the freeze of winter, the verse is still determined. The stanza becomes a shelter, and the ink becomes salve. Stoicism is presented here in lyrical form as a discipline of the heart, not a philosophy, in which loneliness is seen as a mirror rather than a blank and suffering as a teacher rather than an enemy. Yes, the poet goes off alone, but always for a reason.

The Metaphysical Imagination: The Universe as Interlocutor in Human Struggle

If anyone studies stars, the poet's metaphysics is the telescope, and the poet sees through stars not merely at them. Rather than a wallpaper for human drama, the universe becomes an interlocutor in the furnace of human drama. It hears in the echo of our desire; it responds in riddles and speaks in silence. For John Paul (2022), the intellect is the capacity that attempts to reach not only to know but also to touch the cosmos. In their philosophical meditation, the poet enters into discourse with the cosmos and does not look for answers. The poem then becomes a séance of the sublime, in which sorrow is universalized instead of individualized. The stars see, but they do not feel sorry for us. As a result of such witnessing, the poet turns to resonance instead of resolution for comfort. Thus, the scream of the poet is not lost but becomes absorbed in the constant clamor of existence, and the metaphysical imagination becomes a bridge between the finite and the infinite.



Source: Stern, J. (2023). The art of solitude from Modernism to Postmodernism and beyond. *Ruch Filozoficzny*, 79(4). <https://apcz.umk.pl/RF/article/download/56250/40388>

Fig 2: Conceptual Model of Destiny, Defiance, and Cosmic Confession

Critical Implications

In *What the Universe Confides*, poet Krishnaa Rani Dash builds a metaphysical tapestry in which, instead of simply narrating a story of the soul, she intellectually explores it. It is the poem's failure to resolve ambiguity or sentimentalize pain that gives the poem its existential poetics. It is located instead in the tension between human longing and cosmic indifference. This is in line with the evolution of Indian English poetry, which, as pointed out by Arora (2016) ^[1], has outgrown its colonial imitation phase and acquired indigenous metaphysical profundity and become a medium for in-depth intellectual exploration. Dash's poem is meant to be understood, not saved. The existentialism in this poem, its karmic crossroads, and its dharmic problem-solving are Indian thinking and not Western mimicry. It helps to institutionalize a tradition in which poetry serves as a forum for ontological resistance a poetic refuting of destiny and silence.

With delicate dexterity, Dash's poem shifts through the eras of literature. The traveller's sense of loneliness is the type of Romantic melancholy a sort of melancholy that Keats and Wordsworth wrote about in which nature is both a friend and a mirror. The crossroads and the winding waysides, however, speak of Modernist fragmentation uncertainty and estrangement, the fragmentation of grand narratives. But the final ascent is definitely postmodern: self-consciously ironic, sardonic, and tough. According to Othman (2025) ^[21], Romantic seclusion was a launching pad for reflection, while postmodern resilience put the self back together with rebellious elegance after being ripped apart by the uncertainty of modernism. Indian English poetry is located as a universal medium for reflection because of its philosophical ambition that transcends boundaries of geography. Within its references to fate, agency, and universal discourse, it is situated among a philosophical discourse from around the world.

Conclusion

What the Universe Confides is arguably the finest meditation ever written on how people make decisions, how they feel alone, and how they push against the Flow of the Universe in a wasteful and futile manner. This novel uses vivid imagery of crossroads, mazes, and storms to retell the tale of a man trying to find his way out of uncertainty while making the last stand against what fate intends for him. Apart from the fact that the poem has a single rhyme scheme, it is also what may be referred to as a spiritual poem because the universe is personified as a friend who speaks to the lonely traveler. It is the celebration of stamina, courage and the transfiguring potentials of the will to survive, which, in its unyielding resistance to cosmological inevitability, must transition from being the harbinger of death to becoming the bearer of life. It should simultaneously be a fascinating resource for understanding the response of contemporary Indian English poets to the local and global textual traditions they draw upon, and an original forum for the casual reader of Indian literature to comment on a wide variety of literary and philosophical questions.

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