
Poetry in the Eye of the Storm: A Critical Study of *Vortex: Poems for a Turbulent Age*

Prof. (Dr.) Seema Sarkar

Navyug Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Lucknow.

Article Received: 17/11/2025

Article Accepted: 18/12/2025

Published Online: 19/12/2025

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.12.268

Abstract:

This article undertakes a critical and comparative study of *Vortex: Poems for a Turbulent Age*, a bilingual cultural collaboration between British poet Michael Forester and Indian poet Sankar Sarkar. The collection responds to contemporary global crises—war, political decay, capitalism, moral fragmentation, and identity fragmentation—through two distinct yet converging poetic sensibilities. Situating the text within the tradition of socially engaged English poetry, the article explores themes, language, form, ideology, and transnational poetics, comparing the poets with major figures in English literature such as W. B. Yeats, Wilfred Owen, T. S. Eliot, Allen Ginsberg, and postcolonial Indian English poets. The study argues that *Vortex* functions as a poetic document of conscience in an age of turbulence, reaffirming poetry's ethical and political relevance in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Contemporary Poetry, Political Poetry, Transnational Poetics, Crisis Literature, English Literature, Postcolonial Studies

Introduction

The twenty-first century has observed unprecedented turbulence marked by war, religious extremism, political variability, ecological crisis, and moral exhaustion. In such an atmosphere, poetry often becomes a site of resistance, reflection, and ethical cross-examination. *Vortex: Poems for a Turbulent Age*, co-authored by Michael Forester and Sankar Sarkar, emerges as a powerful literary response to this global condition.

The title *Vortex*—a careful variation of “vortex”—suggests circular motion, disorientation, and frame-up, capturing the lived reality of modern humanity. This anthology is not merely a collection of poems but a **transnational poetic dialogue** between the West and the East, foregrounding shared anxieties while preserving cultural specificity. The work stands firmly within the heredity of English literature that views poetry as a moral and political act rather than a purely aesthetic exercise.

Literature Review and Critical Context

Socially and politically committed poetry has a long and distinguished history in English literature. From **William Blake's prophetic indignation**, **Wordsworth's humanitarian concern**, **Yeats's apocalyptic modernism**, to **Wilfred Owen's anti-war realism**, poets have steadily responded to moments of historical crisis.

Modernist works such as **T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*** articulate civilizational collapse, while post-war poets like **W. H. Auden** and **Ted Hughes** explore political guilt and existential anxiety. In the postcolonial and contemporary period, poets like **Nissim Ezekiel**, **A. K. Ramanujan**, **Mahmoud Darwish**, and **Allen Ginsberg** challenge dominant narratives through linguistic disruption and ideological critique.

Vortex inherits and extends this tradition by combining Western protest poetics with postcolonial urgency, thereby creating a hybrid poetic discourse that speaks to global rather than national crises.

Thematic Concerns in *Vortex***3.1 Turbulence, War, and Political Violence:**

War and violence are vital to Forester's poetic imagination. Poems such as "*Draftsmen*," "*Just Doing My Job*," and "*Requiem for the Third Millennium*" expose the moral emptiness of institutional power and ideological justifications for violence. His work echoes **Wilfred Owen's** belief that "the poetry is in the pity," while also adopting a contemporary global perspective.

Sarkar's poems, on the other hand, represent violence as systemic and internalised within democracy, capitalism, and social structures. Poems like "*Nude Dance*," "*Shame*," and "*Politics*" depict civilisation itself as complicit in brutality. His approach aligns with **postcolonial protest poetry**, where violence is not episodic but structural.

3.2 Capitalism, Democracy, and Moral Decay:

Both poets' critique capitalism as a eroding force. Forester's "*Land of Hope and Glory*" dismantles the myth of national prosperity, exposing inequality and state apathy. Sarkar's poems intensify this critique through grotesque metaphors, portraying democracy as hollow performance and capitalism as sexual and moral exploitation.

This thematic convergence places *Vortex* alongside **Marxist cultural critiques** in literature, where economic systems are seen as shaping human consciousness and ethical collapse.

3.3 Alienation, Identity, and Existential Crisis:

Alienation—individual and collective—is another leading theme. Forester's poems often adopt a reflective, narrative tone to explore emotional isolation, failed relationships, and ageing, reminiscent of **Philip Larkin**, though with greater political engagement.

Sarkar's existentialism is more visceral. Poems like "*A Half Man*," "*Onion Peel*," and "*Vortex*" depict identity as fractured and unstable. His metaphors suggest that selfhood dissolves under the pressure of modern systems, echoing existentialist and postmodern concerns.

Language and Style

4.1 Michael Forester's Poetic Style:

Forester employs clarity, irony, and narrative precision. His diction is accessible, yet charged with moral urgency. He frequently uses historical references, satire, and restrained lyricism to indict power structures. His style resonates with Auden's political intelligence and Heaney's ethical seriousness.

4.2 Sankar Sarkar's Poetic Style:

Sarkar's language is argumentative, experimental, and deliberately unsettling. He uses repetition, explicit imagery, and syntactic rupture to shock the reader into awareness. This stylistic aggression aligns him with **Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*** and radical postcolonial voices who reject linguistic decorum as a form of resistance.

Comparative Analysis: East and West in Poetic Dialogue:

One of the most significant accomplishments of *Vortex* is its **dialogic structure**. Rather than juxtaposing two isolated voices, the collection allows them to converse. Forester's measured critique and Sarkar's explosive intensity together create a comprehensive representation of global crisis.

This collaboration rip to shreds the binary of East and West, suggesting instead that turbulence is a shared human condition. In this sense, *Vortex* exemplifies transnational English literature, where English becomes a medium of global ethical discourse rather than imperial inheritance.

Poetry as Ethical and Political Intervention:

Vortex reaffirms poetry's role as an ethical force. Like **Adrienne Rich**, both poets view poetry as an act of responsibility. The collection refuses aesthetic escapism and demands reader engagement. It does not offer solutions but insists on recognition, making discomfort a moral necessity.

In an era dominated by digital noise and performative activism, *Vortex* restores poetry's function as witness and warning.

Conclusion:

Vortex: Poems for a Turbulent Age is a significant contribution to contemporary English literature. Through the balancing voices of Michael Forester and Sankar Sarkar, the collection captures the chaos, despair, and ethical urgency of the modern world. Rooted in the traditions of political, protest, and postcolonial poetry, it simultaneously extends those traditions into a global context.

This anthology stands as a reminder that poetry, even in an age of turbulence, remains a vital tool for truth, resistance, and human conscience.

References:

Blake, William. Songs of Experience.
Eliot, T. S. The Waste Land.
Ginsberg, Allen. Howl.
Heaney, Seamus. The Government of the Tongue.
Owen, Wilfred. The Poems of Wilfred Owen.
Yeats, W. B. The Second Coming.