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VerbalArt

A Global Journal Devoted to
Poets and Poetry

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EDITORIAL

This issue is somewhat late and it is a common phenomenon for the most of literary journals. Reason for them may be genuine or lame. You may call it either in our case but we were busy in renovating our website and making it responsive i.e. a single website that adapt itself to any screen size thus making it easy and simple to use on a mobile, tablet and desktop.

While editing a journal it's really a challenge to put it together free from any flaw and fallacy. In pursuit of doing so, since last few issues, we have started sending draft PDF copy of the journal to its contributors so that every contributor should go through his/her on piece(s) and report us for error if any. And it really seems working and has brought about significant improvement in minimizing the error of the manuscript.

Close on the heels of its publication we would bring out the next issue of our sister journal, *Phenomenal Literature: A Global Journal Devoted to Language & Literature*. It is scheduled to come out by 31 Mar 2017. You are requested to spread the word about it among the members of your literary circle. More information on its submission guidelines can be obtained from its website at www.phenomenalliterature.com

We are standing right at the threshold of a New Year and pleased to introduce new issue and innovated website on this very auspicious occasion.

Wish you all happy reading and New Year ahead!

– **Editors**

CONTENTS

Editorial	3
------------------	---

POETRY

PCK Prem

- Painting of a Priest 9

Sunil Sharma

- The Smile of a Girl-child 11

Bibhu Padhi

- Things Come Together 12

Harshal Desai

- Transcendence 13

Dr. Asha Viswas

- Silent Communication 14

Amarendra Khatua

- Infidelity 15

Saloni Kaul

- Kindness Unexpected 16

Parminder Singh

- The One from the East 17

Kanjalochan Pathak

- Glass Pieces of Dreams 19

Dr. K. V. Raghupathi

- My Trunk Box 20

Shernaz Wadia

- Are You or Am I? 21

Dr. Puneet Aggarwal

- Unconditional 22

Bishnupada Ray

- Isthmus 23

Zahra Ramezani

- Savior 24

Pete Mullineaux

- Small Hungers 25

Cui Yuwei

- Sounds 26

Steve Klepetar

- I too 28

Mark A. Murphy

- Dream Ontology 29

Sandeep Kumar Mishra

- Hope 30

Laverne Frith

- Somewhere in the Estuaries of the Mind 32

Fabiyas M V

- Indo-Pak Border 33

Lynn White

- Tell Me, Mirror 35

Michal (Mitak) Mahgerefteh

- This Morning 36

Kenneth P. Gurney

- Rehearsal 37
- Reversal 37

Deeya Bhattacharya

- The Forbidden Tree 38

CRITICAL ARTICLES

C.L. Khatri

- Prism of Prison: An Overview of
Prison Literature 39

Mousumi Guha Banerjee

- 'Smiles, Tears, of all My Life!' – Love as an
Epistemological Question in the Poetry of
Elizabeth Barrett Browning 58

Subas Chandra Rout

- Revisiting and Revaluing Nature:
An Ecocritical Study in Frost's Select Poems 71

ESSAY**Gary Beck**

- An Assertion of Poetry 80

INTERVIEW**Dr. Rita Nath Keshari**

- Interview with Dr. K.V. Raghupathi 84

BOOK REVIEW**Chandra Shekhar Dubey**

- Book Review of Sheojee Tewary's
Poetry Collection, *Journey Within* 94

Chandra Shekhar Dubey

- Review Article of David Pike's
Poetry Collection, *The Strand* 99

Dr. Santosh Alex

- Different Hues of Life: Review of
Ra Sh's Poetry Collection, *Architecture of Flesh* 104

Dr. Vivekanand Jha

- Poetry of all Reasons-n-Seasons:
Atreya Sarma's Book, *Sunny Rain-n-Snow* 107

- Contributors 111**

POETRY

PCK PREM

Painting of a Priest

He naively moves about in traditions,
deep in a crawling mall
when structuring magic wands with vowels,
leads to defeat truth of a definite hunger,
as water salty visits land to choke,
and sing glory of man observing everyone
but here, nobody is solemn in pursuits.

A priest at a church works as a thief
in hard times,
one sees the holy man drafting a note
of neurotic suicide in the temple
when gods in stones shut eyes at night,
as priests go naked near the balustrade
facing the ringing bells
and wrestle in whispers
with damsels chilly.

And women with twigs of flowers
and no germinated carnations,
extend a plastered smile with incense
and tell that the naked priests are not thieves.

Godly looks with many zinnias in the eyes,
and fragrant roses in tray
emit infected dribble to alienate,
parsons and *babas* of asylums
nay *ashramas*,
for they are no longer holy
as preaching gets murky with each word
because orphans, widows and the elites
look unsound and decrepit.

He burns incense, rings bells
and tastes marijuana and chants *mantras*
in a *yajna* but refuses entry to deities.

SUNIL SHARMA**The Smile of a Girl-child**

Your smile –
Like the dazzling
Thousand suns
In the vast skies,
Radiating the milky ways
With their bright rays,
The teeth
Set in a small mouth,
Flashing white,
In a dark face;
You are the gift of a caring god,
To the entire earth,
Without you,
The creator,
Nothing happens;
Let you keep your innocence
And wide grin
The way they are now,
Without suffering
Murder or rape,
In a brutal world,
Where,
Growing up
Or,
As a trusting child,
You will know
To be a girl/woman
Is no
Longer safe.

BIBHU PADHI**Things Come Together**

I wonder if the trees and hills,
the distant towns and forests
were not in me, always,
just as I am, their growth
taking place in me each time
I heard their names.

A farmer tills his field
somewhere in my mind
and doesn't know how to read;
he has to be told again and again
how things grow.
And, at the end of it all,

he might just smile
and go back to his work.
And yet this mind feels
the exact pressure of his
plough on the furrow,
his moist hands, his sweat. He hasn't
grown. He doesn't need to know.

Where do things grow? Do they
grow at all? They change
their names, I know.
Perhaps all growth is just
a change in names, no more.
Is there anything more
to what one is, here and now?

HARSHAL DESAI**Transcendence**

I yearn for more than just your looks
Were that all that I wanted in life
i would live with a deep void
sweet, I want all of you
hold you, twirl you to the music.
those hypnotic eyes pull me
one step closer to your bosom
swift shivers run through my spine
eager to see destiny's flow
definitely rare this friendship between you and i
until harmony of mind, body and soul are felt
clearly between the whispers of our breath
Enveloping us with the divine itself
you approach closer to me, and I
open my arms to hold you closer
under our eternal bond we will always love

DR. ASHA VISWAS

Silent Communication

As my mother lay dying
I sat beside her for
Five days and five nights.
I fed her as she must have fed me
When I was a child.

I often would bend my head
To listen to her word fragments
And sentence crumbs.
The third day they put a tube
Into her nose and I was deprived
Of the feeding I loved.

Still, her eyes and the look in them
Seemed to reassure communication
She seemed like an answer
To the unuttered cry of my soul.

AMARENDRA KHATUA**Infidelity**

You said, you are a married man and
Opened your lips to kiss me. I probably
Did not utter a thing. Then kissed you at

That moment, an absent face tore like a
Bunch of origami roses of crisp handmade
Paper, before we kissed again. The arena of

Hungry shadows danced around us in open
Carousal. Did I acknowledge the rippling face
Of falling sparkles! The contours of many

Preserved moments that I lost for counting
The beads of cloying hunger? Now the pages of
Family album miss few favourite photographs

Where my eyes are aglow with seeking
Prescribed identifies and my days are
Not replete with broken punctured reflections

Of mine haloed by falsetto desires.

SALONI KAUL**Kindness Unexpected**

The rainbow hangs around the bend quite like a lazy lout
All handsomely dressed with its message quite unclear
With little to do all day long but preen and pout
Drawing attention by its calculated gear.
Eerie the silence vast that grips the scene,
The fir tree arms like unchanging angles neat measured;
Like puzzle mix unending urgent or routine
Its strict solution must appear for it to be treasured.
I sense they lurk somewhere in this taut measured frame,
Like tune that's almost there 'neath contrapuntal screen.
The answers to my pressing needs in full glory aflame
Ought to sail up any moment to be clearly seen.
The rainbow hands me all seven colours like coins on palm,
To fir tree puzzle I then turn to stake my claim as alms.

PARMINDER SINGH**The One from the East**

None may be able to recall now.
It had happened long ago
when I left the village
to find work in the city.
Someone stood in the corridor
with appealing eyes,
probably wanting me not to go.
But the pangs of hunger,
want for occupation
are sinewy, stronger
than the tender, unsaid
call hidden in the chinks of
the bangles of a kohl-eyed
newlywed.
The blanket of time
blinded euphoric possibility
year after year.
Lost in the reveries of tomorrow,
today was split into two –
a part gone in earning, the other in
grabbing some sleep to get ready
for earning yet more.
Today, when I visit the village,
the sari-clad woman
has started looking
more than mine,
my father's wife.
What did I do to my life?

I leave for the city
and look behind.
There is none standing in the corridor
hoping that I would stay
a little longer.
There is a long list of demands
that have started turning into needs.
The whistle of the train's engine
reminds me of the sleep I need
to be ripe for the work waiting for me
tomorrow.
I close my eyes,
coil myself in the blanket.
The berth becomes my wedding bed.

KANJALOCHAN PATHAK**Glass Pieces of Dreams**

When you walk around, dear, please be careful:
Your feet can get hurt
by the glass pieces of a million broken dreams
that lie scattered all around
hidden under the grass of sighs and tears.

When you walk around, dear, please be careful
your feet can stumble and slip
on a thousand roads and streets
that got abandoned in different points of life
that too lie scattered all around,
covered with the grass of sighs and tears.

Who knows one of them could be mine too
Even too many

DR. K. V. RAGHUPATHI**My Trunk Box**

In my house there lies a trunk box
occupying three feet by two feet space in a corner
faded, rusted and wounded
that was gifted to me while I was eighteen
by my father who passed away eight winters ago.
It's now antique but very much Indian with grey
jammed with memories –
decades of letters, envelopes stuck with all different kinds
of stamps,
album of my yoga postures, old photos, blurry photos,
three full manuscripts and an incomplete manuscript
typed on Facet typewriter that was gifted to me by my
maternal uncle
to flourish with my writings that fetched me no returns
so far,
notes scribbled on pieces of paper, now brittle
two mementoes.
When I open it, the hinges squeak like a treasure chest.
I carried it whenever I moved my house.
Now it lies in the silent hiss of space covered with a white
loin cloth like a coffin.
It is alive with me as I am alive.
The box is so dear to my heart
that I hardly said 'yes' to scrap dealer.
Any one doubted its existence
could walk into my house and see
the centre stage of my life.

SHERNAZ WADIA**Are You or Am I?**

Where have I not looked for you
'You' the many-named, nameless evader
I sought you in flowers and in birdsong,
I trudged along winding paths, hoping
you'd surprise me at some lucky bend
sand tickled my toes and slipped
slowly away from under my feet
did you too slither away with it?
Every path, every trek, each journey I made
has brought me back like a returning wave
into that silence within where I belong
a silence that bursts with the energy of love.

DR PUNEET AGGARWAL

Unconditional

The mind races across the transparent window
He, who holds my mind; beholds my thoughts
Rendering my escape; a thought impossible.
I cherish the past, nurture the present
He, who subjugates the present; dictates the future
A future as unseen; a patch incapable.
Annoyed, reverence is paid to the forgotten
The forgotten love; with Midas touch
A love once touched; is now unconditional.

BISHNUPADA RAY**Isthmus**

a cold swirl catches up the land
a penguin boat floats near the ice wall
a dry wind blows the year round
the grassland sways in the rhythm
of an avenging memory

here the rugged north meets the draped south
upon a bridge of floating stones
a long distance polar express
has just crossed it
shaking the rigid hands of a compass

the undecided fingers are unwholesome
around the loose libidinal centre
like the floating lumber from a wreck.

ZAHRA RAMEZANI

Savior

It's raining, drops hit in my peace
These drops on my face like a kiss
Makes me wet of memories in the past
These last tears on the ground fall so fast
Makes me burn easily in your eyes
My red tears to this rain will disguise
For this pain is vanished in my cries
I will fly with my wings in the skies
I'll be there when you come in sunlight
It's when you want to set all things right
I will be free of sins, bright and bright
Join to you and your love in the light

PETE MULLINEAUX**Small Hungers**

Your bare foot beneath the table brushes mine;
a moment ago they were kicking sand along
the beach – but now we sit in a café,
our necks at rest against a rise of pebbles,
the surf pulled up to our chins –
gulping back the raging sea, each wave
an onslaught of wet delight; clinking of cutlery
like loose metal fastenings on ghostly
masts and flagpoles.

In truth it had been a grey affair: low-tide;
cold, misty – the pebbles laced with tar,
so instead we have the comforting heat,
clear water in a jug; having made short work
of the starters, we mull over the main course,
the glare of the white cloth blinding
us to reason – our ravenous toes
scuttling to make sideways love
on the ocean floor.

CUI YUWEI

Sounds

I like the night
for every sound
disappearing in the day
returns

outside my door, someone folds
his umbrella before
ascending the stairs

my neighbor's doorbell
rings now and then

the wild cries of cats scratch
my window

a humming freezer

herbal tea poured
from the plastic bottle

the clock ticks at bedside

I bend down, feel phlegm
rolling in her throat

stars and plants
grow in silence beyond the roof

lying on my side, I hear
one of my breasts
tenderly press
against the other

STEVE KLEPETAR**I too**

have a secret history, a self
I keep locked away in the dark
where it feeds always, trolling
the waters, a shark gliding,

striking at shadows that flit
near the surface of memory
and thought. Every night I check
under the bed, in the closet,

making sure the cage has held.
My wife laughs on the telephone.
She tosses her hair, speaking
to friends with her whole warm

body, tanned hands dancing in air
as she cradles the phone beneath
her chin, the pull of her lovely
voice dragging me back to light.

MARK A. MURPHY**Dream Ontology**

We have fought both succubus and incubus,
battled the all-powerful
thought-demon, being driven insensate
by our own eternally recurring nightmares
from which there can be no repose.

Even dream-writing we're driven to question
our basic assumptions about reality.
Is death the end we have dreamed of
or merely the beginning of another dream?
Do you know you're dreaming?

To dream is to be, to be is to dream.
And there can be no dreaming outside the box,
only a nothingness of other boxes
we cannot gain access to,
other dreamers dreaming the same dream.

When will it end? When will it all end?

SANDEEP KUMAR MISHRA**Hope**

Day always meets the night
The sun meets the cloud
When families are snapped apart
When every fall is loud
Despair sits like a gloomy pal
If your destiny becomes your foes
Hateful thoughts enwrap thy soul
A bowed head and lowered eyes
No one sees your soulful rains
Hope is the balm to all frenzied pains
All treasure can be taken away
But cannot rob you of the hope
A hundred universe roam you may
But all your heart is its scope
Hope, perches in like a kite
Only sings when you cried
If there is scarcity of light
It is gold mine in your yard
After a wailful black night
Day break wondrously clear bright
But soar not too high, skies are tall
Because stormy clouds are near
They press you back, it will be great fall
Remember, when hope fall no one hear
The ruin is within to clear
If running out of hope, you borrow

It is a timid friend, cruel in his fear
Erase your sorrow, sweet will be morrow
Every bough waits bloom to bring
Hope gives you chance of second spring

LAVERNE FRITH**Somewhere in the Estuaries of the Mind**

fertile thoughts reside, waiting
for the right time for their germination,

for the wash of waters to complete their cycles.
I have an idea it might be soon. I have seen

the clouds register their findings, combine
messages into codes. But I have learned

enough about patterns not to be deceived,
all the while knowing that every nook

and cranny has its time. And in the tide pools
the conscience of the sea awaits,

having its own collusion with time, always
needing to have an ally on its side.

The tide pools hold some of the sea's secrets:
the broken shells, fragments of Echinodermata,

hapless kelp, and every kind of algae without
a home, as the sea continues to tell its stories,

if for nothing more than to free itself, to return
every iniquity it has had to hold.

FABIYAS M V**Indo-Pak Border**

Soldiers strengthen the fence of iron wires.
Border looks like a fair face, disfigured by
smallpox. Virus is still active. Infiltrators
crawl through the mist into India's heart.
They are brave, but brainless.

A myriad of men waste their sweat in the
nearby militant camps, while wheat farms
lie locked with weeds. They harvest tears.

Machine-guns and mines can never sooth
stomachs. Both sides spend millions on
missiles, when many starve and struggle.

It's midnight, yet guns roar again, sparks
of pain fall down.

This side loathes green, and the other side,
saffron. These are everybody's colours. Alas!
Soldiers and citizens are conditioned.

I say, 'I'm Indian.' You say, 'I'm Pakistani.'
When'll we say, 'We're men?'

Stop production of widows and orphans;
invest in the infrastructure.

Remember, once we're one. We've to share
and care again. We've to barter the unwanted
with the wanted. Life rusts in revenge and rivalry.

LYNN WHITE**Tell Me, Mirror**

Tell me, Mirror, which face do you see?
Is it a pale face, fairer than fair,
unsullied by sun, moist and unlined,
unblemished by wind.
Glowing white,
white as virgin snow unbroken by footprints.
Or is the glowing skin wrinkling, textured,
the shining white greying.
As time has passed has it picked up some dirt,
with some stories in passing.
Maybe it's darker still in places
as the whiteness adds colour.
As it melts away like the snow
to reveal the treasures
and textures beneath.
Tell me, Mirror, which face do you see?

MICHAL (MITAK) MAHGEREFTEH

This Morning

I woke up in a cloud of enlightenment!
rocking myself to ancient rhythm
to experience what cannot be explained
futile verses in a mount of dust

I watch them lift their chins at my
presence longing for adore an echo
to my vulnerability and discomfort

prayers reject scenes imbued with
beauty want to confront forgotten
riddles vibrating through making
my ache an intense thirst for words

KENNETH P. GURNEY**Rehearsal**

As much as my mouth and lungs practice,
no two breaths turn out identical.

In your absence my heart beats twice as fast,
just so the bed feels the proper number of thumps at night.

My marrow now inserts love into the walls
of each new blood cell
so love becomes a matter of my biology
rather than a function of my erratic limbic system.

Reversal

I once thought the air belonged to the birds.
I never paid a single penny in rent for all my breaths.

Last year, I changed my mind
and decided the air belongs to the winged-insects.
I never signed a lease for all my inhalations or the words
my voice thrusts into the ether.

Yesterday, I began to wonder
if I should charge the air a fee
for the carbon the air receives when my lungs exhale.

DEEYA BHATTACHARYA

The Forbidden Tree

The tree grew in my mind
against the backdrop of time
severe in form and
delirious in content

The forbidden tree
That grew in the summer
of my mind
disoriented, spoke ill-luck

The bare branches of the tree
indulged in whispers
of lost love and fondness

It grew intense while I
caressed its empty limbs
around my neck and
spoke to each other of draught.

CRITICAL ARTICLES

Prism of Prison: An Overview of Prison Literature

C.L. KHATRI

Prison Literature is one of the emerging sub-genres of fiction, poetry, drama and non-fiction prose in the fast evolving world literature eager to take into its ambit everything that existed, exists and is imagined to exist or is likely to exist. It has emerged as a discipline of literature owing to homogeneity of its character – substance, tone and mood – and physical condition of its genesis. Whosoever the author is – African, American, European or Asian – and in whatever jail he/she might have/had been lodged in – his prison experiences are of similar nature – inhuman, torturous, filthy, dehumanizing and arbitrary. So the experience of incarceration and its creative expression follows a predictable pattern helping the critics theorize Prison Literature. The objective of this paper is to present a philosophical and theoretical perspective of the subject and a brief historical overview.

The dynamics of the prison world lies in its being a microcosm of the larger prison we are living in with deceptive freedom. Prison doesn't simply mean iron bars and brick walls; it means impingement on one's physical and mental freedom, dislocation from social, cultural and political life and gradual conditioning of inmates in the state's colonial design, or to use Foucault's theory enunciated in *Discipline and Punish: The*

Birth of the Prison, it is a coercive agent to submission and discipline through punishment. He says “prison is a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals. To experiment with medicines and monitor their effects. To try out different punishments, to teach different techniques” (Foucault, 203-4). Corinne Rostaing defines prison as a “place of detention, materialized by a fixed space and a bureaucratic organizational apparatus”.(Qtd. K Satchidanandan,³) The prison inmates consist of political prisoners, criminals, simple law breakers, economic offenders and under trials who are not convicted but languishing in jail and then infants and minors who are circumscribed to accompany their parents. The treatment meted to them can be classed in two groups:

- (1) Political prisoners like Tilak, Gandhi, Nehru and others who were better placed and used the solitude of cell for writing and meditation. Aurobindo had ‘Narayan Darsan’ in Alipore jail, Tilak wrote *Gita Rahasya*, Gandhi wrote *My Experiments with Truth* and *Hind Swaraj* Nehru penned *Autobiography*, *Discovery of India* and *Glimpses of World History*. They are neither jail experiences nor written with a prisoner’s point of view. They are rather the best use of solitude of the jail that could have been any place. This poses a question whether such writing bearing no imprint of incarceration can be categorized as prison literature or not. As *Oswald, Eirwen Elizabeth* argues that for a work to be considered as belonging to the corpus of South African prison literature, it must be about the writer’s personal experience of prison. If it applies to South African Prison literature it can also apply to American, Indian or any other country’s Prison literature or it may lead to the case of several variants of Prison literature.
- (2) Common political prisoners, criminals, outlaws, and others for whom jail brings nightmarish and horrible

experiences. In colonial period they served to provide an additional bonded labour to industry and the state because in most such cases the human body was supposed to be the only property accessible for confiscation. Postcolonial critics view this as an alliance of economy and politics giving rise to political economy. However, coercive detention waned later on with the rise of free market economy. So the coercive detention branched out into corrective/ reformatory detention while the former retained a subdued position. But even in the latter case it is always the body and the mind of the prisoners which are subjected to corrective measures for submission and docility.

Howsoever different the two may be the experience of denial, confinement and seclusion is the same. Prison has also been used in modern times as an ideological apparatus for conversion and suppression of dissent. However it has always been endeavored by the enlightened ones that physical detention doesn't lead to mental detention or mental slavery. As Richard Lovelace writes:

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage:

Lovelace wrote this memorable poem "To Althea from Prison" in 1642 in the prison he was locked in on charges related to his passionate support to King Charles I. However, Lovelace was released and Charles was executed.

The prime motif of prison narrative is this consciousness that through body it wants to colonize the mind, and when the mind is colonized, language, culture, history and creativity are colonized. To write is to resist this design and finally to subvert. Writing for the prisoners is also cathartic. In fact they can't keep the experiences of the prison to themselves despite the disinclination to talk about them. One way to get rid of the

humiliating experiences is to release it by writing or telling and another way is to divert the whole attention to something else. The former process has in all ages produced remarkable writings in all genres. K Satchidanandan writes:

Each of these periods has produced an interesting corpus of prison writing of all genre: autobiographies, memoirs, letters, poems, stories, documentary writings, meditations and the like. James Joyce had once said of writers, 'Squeezes us, we are olives'; and here were periods when writers were squeezed to yield their best or prisoners were squeezed to become writers. (Satchidanandan, 5)

If incarceration turns one into a writer or an artist, it can also reduce one to the state of recluse and insanity. He further makes a valid case when he says that prison writing "interrogates the kind of 'modernity' that we have constructed, as the prisoners view our reality from the point of view of the victim of the legal system modern societies have given to themselves." (Satchidanandan, 6) However we should not forget the differing view in which convicts are not always victims. They may be victimizers of the legal system as well as of their dissenters or opponents.

A prison in any case develops a microscopic vision to look at the world around as is evident in Nehru's microscopic observation of the surroundings in his essay "Animals in Prison". A prisoner adopts the perspective of an outsider for his creative response to the prison world where he finds himself at odds with the suffocating physical space with overcrowded and filthy living area, hierarchal states among the prisoners, exploitation and quarrel within, the protests of the rebels, friends turning traitors siding with the jail authority and kids developing myopic vision and adults develop affinity with the trivial – living and non-living things. At the same time they may view the outside world with the perspective a prisoner. As Tom Wicker, an American writer puts it, "They disclose the nasty, brutish details of the life within – a life the authorities

would rather we not know about, a life so far from conventional existence that the accounts of those who experience it exert the fascination of the unknown, sometimes the unbelievable.” He also notes that “what happens inside the walls inevitably reflects the society outside.” So not only do readers acquire a sense of the world inside the walls, gaining insight into the thoughts and feelings of prisoners; they also gain a clearer vision of the society which exists outside the prison walls and how it treats and affects those whom they place within. Tom Wicker described prison literature as a “fascinating glimmer of humanity persisting in circumstances that conspire, with overwhelming force, to obliterate it.” (Wicker, 288) The history of prison literature dates back to the Bible:

I was a stranger and you took me in:
Naked and ye clothed me: I was
sick and ye visited me: I was in prison,
and ye came unto me.
-Bible: Matthew: 25-35-36

A brief chronological overview of canonical prison writings cutting across genre’s division will put in place the tradition of prison literature down the ages with its variants and it will help in evolving the theoretical framework for prison literature and its relations with Colonial and Postcolonial discourse. It will also help the subsequent jail writing to place itself somewhere in this tradition – resistance, submission, escape, ambivalence, coercion and correction.

European Prison Literature

Among the early canonical prison writing reference can be made to St. Paul the Apostle who wrote *Prison Epistles* in 62 AD during his incarceration in Jerusalem for his passionate sermons of Christianity that turned the local Jewish authority against him. He was taken to the nearby town of Caesarea and imprisoned there for two years. During this time, he wrote four

of the famous Epistles that appear in the *Bible's New Testament*: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* written in jail in 524 AD is said to be "by far the most interesting example of prison literature the world has ever seen." He was imprisoned in 520 AD for attempting to reconcile the Roman Catholic Church with its Eastern Orthodox rival. In 15th century Sir Thomas Malory well-known for his *Le Morte d' Arthur*, a prose romance about a semi-mythical King Arthur, presents an interesting case of prison squeezing a prisoner into a creative writer. Malory was a convicted criminal – thief, kidnapper and rapist. He wrote *Le Morte d' Arthur* while sitting in London's Marshalsea prison. He never did end up being brought to trial. Instead, 'he was sprung from prison in 1461 when Edward IV ascended to the throne.' Marco Polo, the Venetian merchant, found time and inspiration to dictate his travels to China to Rustichello da Pisa while both men were prisoners of Venice's rival, the Genova Republic. *The Travels of Marco Polo* describes his adventures along the fabled Silk Road. Miguel de Cervantes was held captive as a galley slave between 575–80 because he failed to pay the debt and from this he drew inspiration for his novel *Don Quixote* (1605). The novel, conceived in debtor's prison, proved such a great success that many critics consider it the first modern European novel as well as one of the finest novels ever written and one that brought him economic freedom. Sir Walter Raleigh was a famous courtier in the English queen Elizabeth I and got reputation as a merchant, explorer, writer and poet. But he lost favour with James I who shortly after the ascension sent him to jail on the charge of treason. Sir. Walter wrote his *History of the World volume I* during the 13 years he spent locked up in the Tower of London and later on he was executed in 1618. Prosecution on the ground of religious bias has a long history in western history starting from Jesus Christ himself. John Bunyan and Martin Luther were the victims of the same voice of dissent. John Bunyan was a Puritan dissenter who was persecuted for his

religious beliefs following the Restoration of the English monarchy in 1660. For a decade Bunyan spent much of his time in jail where he conceived and wrote major part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a narrative designed in an allegorical mode portraying "the trials and tribulations of a Christian trying to live a righteous life in a decadent world." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was the President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a civil rights organization that had been working against racial segregation in Birmingham. On April 12, 1963, he was arrested for violating prohibitory order against public demonstrations and was lodged in the Birmingham jail. He read a public statement issued by eight white Alabama clergymen condemning his civil disobedience methods. In response to this he wrote "Letters from Birmingham Jail" which is held as "a spirited defense of civil disobedience that makes a strong argument that people have a moral responsibility to break unjust laws."

Two well-known dictators in the European history Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler had their autobiographies written in jail. Napoleon dictated his *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte* while being exiled to a small island of St Helena off the coast of West Africa during the last phase of his life. In 1923, Adolph Hitler and 2,000 Nazis marched through the streets of Munich to take over a political meeting being held at a beer hall there. Hitler was charged with treason for his role in this abortive revolt and sent to Landsberg Prison in Bavaria. He used this solitude to write his autobiography entitled "Mein Kampf."

The Irish playwright and poet Oscar Wilde was convicted of homosexual acts with the son of an English aristocrat named Lord Alfred Douglas in 1895 and sentenced to two years of hard labour in Reading Gaol. "De Profundis", published in 1905 after Wilde's death, is a moving letter to Lord Alfred which he wrote in prison. The "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus", the ruminations of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein

on the relationship between language, science and reality was written in a prisoners' war camp during the World War I. In 1945, a Red Army soldier named Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn was arrested for writing critically of Joseph Stalin in a private letter to a friend. Solzhenitsyn was sentenced to eight years of forced labour in a Siberian camp. He took notes of his prison camp experiences on whatever scraps of paper he managed to find. He was released just after Stalin's death in 1953, and nine years later, following the cultural thaw under Nikita Khrushchev, these notes were published as a novel entitled *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. In 1970, Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Another important Russian political leader and writer is Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938). "In the last phase of his life, he was imprisoned by Stalin for his radical activities and during the period from March 1937 to 1938, Bukharin produced four book length manuscripts and the *Prison Poems* is the last production of all these manuscripts. In these 180 poems, Bukharin has evinced his ideas about time, politics, people and state of Russia as well as his deep love for Anna Larina, his young wife who had to suffer separation of Nikolai Bukharin on account of his imprisonment." (Singh, 116)

Like Malory, Jean Genet, the French writer, was a petty criminal who was constantly in and out of prison on charges of theft, use of false papers, vagabondage, lewd acts and similar offenses. Dostoyevsky, a celebrated Russian novelist, was arrested on the charge of conspiracy against the Russian Government as he criticized Russian politics and religion in his write-ups. He was sentenced for four years of exile with arduous physical labour at Katorga prison camp in Siberia. He collected his experiences of incarceration in *The House of Dead*, the first published novel about Russian prisons. Genet described his prison experiences in his celebrated debut novel *Our Lady of the Flowers* written while Genet was serving a sentence for burglary.

American Prison Writing

Prison literature written in America is of particular interest to some scholars who point out that pieces which reveal the brutality of life behind bars pose an interesting question about American society: “Can these things really happen in prosperous, freedom-loving America?” Since America is globally reputed as being a “democratic haven” and the “land of freedom,” writings that come out of American prisons can potentially present a challenge to everything the nation was founded on. Jack London, a famous American writer who was incarcerated for thirty days in the Erie County Penitentiary, is an example of such a challenger. In his memoir “Pinched: A Prison Experience” he recalls how he was automatically sentenced to thirty days in prison with no chance to defend himself or even plead innocent or guilty. While sitting in the courtroom he thought to himself, “Behind me were the many generations of my American ancestry. One of the kinds of liberty those ancestors of mine fought and died for was the right of trial by jury. This was my heritage, stained sacred by their blood...”. (Penitentiary, web page)

It is painful to note that even in this post-colonial age majority of prisoners in America are Afro-American, Negro and other non-whites. The number of women has shot up to ten percent of the jail inmates in America of which two-thirds are non-white. Recently the activists of #BlackLivesMatter campaign argued with Bill Clinton that “his 1994 crime bill resulted in mass incarceration of African-Americans, giving the US the dubious distinction of having the largest prison population in the world.” (Sunday Times of India, Patna, April 10, 2016) These prisoners come from different backgrounds and are treated differently in jails. Most of them are impoverished; some are part of organized social and political protest and resistance, while some others are suspects of sedition and treason. A few of them have been writers and artists who told their stories of incarceration that largely formed part of

political resistance. Writers of the world have shown their concern for the prisoners and the American chapter of PEN launched Prison Writing Program in 1971 and in 1973 it started annual prison writing contest. This prison writing was also viewed as a potential for subversion by the authority and repressive measures were taken against it from time to time. Inner city riots and prison riots in 1970's in America exemplify the volatile situation prevailing in the jails. In 1977 "Son of Sam" law was promulgated in New York making it illegal for convict authors to collect money from the writings. This was aimed at keeping American people oblivious about the jail reality. Kate Richards O'Hare, a socialist prison writer in early Twenties dedicated herself to exposing the horrible conditions of prisons in the USA. Donald Lowrie's *My Life in Prison* exposes the same. Similarly Robert E Burns brings to light the slavery system in prison through his memoir *I am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* which was subsequently made into a movie. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) was said to be the first full-length memoir of an African-American convict who was hanged the year it was published. Such writings had exerted deep impact on prisoners who were inspired to pen down their experiences even though they were not writers. Chester Himes is a typical example of a robber turning into short story writer. Nelson Algren, a product of Texas jail is another writer of this nature. Their maxim was "All you had to do was tell it like it is." This creative attempt made the outside world more aware of the jail reality and of the fact that those who are behind the bar are not necessarily villains of the society. Prison writings drew the sympathy of the people and in seventies and eighties they were extensively published in newspapers, magazines, chapbooks, paperbacks and found their place in movies, too.

Another aspect of prison is the fertility of solitude that it provides. Whether the writers were prisoners of war or victims of bigotry, the solitude and lack of distractions have produced many a great book. From Henry David Thoreau's thoughts on

civil disobedience to O Henry, Ezra Pound and e e cummings we have a range of writers whose great mental escapes from incarceration resulted in some of their most insightful and profound works. William Sydney Porter was a Texas bank teller who was found guilty of embezzlement in his bank in 1896. But he fled to the Honduras to avoid arrest where he began writing short stories. The phrase “banana republic” first originated in one of these short stories. One year later when he went back to America to see his ailing wife he was arrested and subsequently convicted. While in a federal prison in Ohio he continued writing short stories and getting published, acquiring quite a reputation as a writer with his finger on the pulse of the popular imagination. Porter assumed the pseudonym O’Henry to conceal his identity as a felon.

Ezra Pound, an American expatriate and mentor of T S Eliot was arrested on the charge of sedition from Italy in 1945. He was kept in US military camp in Pisa where he wrote some part of his *Pisan Cantos*, a controversial but celebrated lyric poetry. Another trend setter poet of America, e e cummings during World War I refused to condemn the whole of Germans as barbaric and inhuman while working in France as an ambulance driver. Consequently he was arrested on the charge of espionage in 1917 and kept in POW camp for three and half months. His novel *The Enormous Room* is based on this experience though it was not written in the period of captivity.

African Prison Literature

Prison literature finds its most poignant articulation of horrid condition prevailing in jails in the writings – novels, plays, poetry and non-fiction prose – of African writers be it Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria or any country of this continent. It is so prolific that no study of African Literature can be complete without giving proper space to Prison Literature. What is more important is that it forms integral part of struggle for freedom, decolonization and resurrection of its history and cultural

identity. At the same time it also depicts socio-political, economic and cultural development in the continent that includes the ‘turbulent times with some of freedom fighters turning into oppressors and using the same methodologies to suppress dissent.’ It offers an alternative, unofficial and more honest narrative of prison to counter the official narrative propagated by the state to cover up state sponsored violence and victimization. What Prof Abdilatif Abdalla, the first political prisoner and writer in post-independence Kenya, describes in his diary is a specimen of common experiences of African writers in jail:

“A sudden, frenzied and unusual search in my cell. I didn’t know exactly what they were looking for. But they found leaves of toilet paper I had written a poem on. They confiscated all the 14 verses of my poem Kamliwaze (Go and Comfort Him). It is a pity I’ve lost it, especially that I had memorized only the first four stanzas of it. The rest is now gone and lost. Fortunately they couldn’t find the other three poems (Nshishiyelo ni Lilo, Tuza Moyo and Jipu), which I had wrapped in a plastic paper and tossed them in my urine pot for “safe custody;” and also the two poems (Siwati and Mamba), which were dangling on a blanket thread outside my cell window. But I doubt if they will be able to make out the meaning of the poems. Even if they will, I have 1001 alternative interpretations for each one of them.” (Flashback: May 22, 1970. prison-literature-in-east-africa. Web page)

African writers have expressed their most bitter and agonizing experiences in all genres. The Prison literature is resource to know how they fought against Apartheid, where the continent has come from and reached in its quest for justice, upholding the rule of law and ensuring that the fundamental human rights are respected. Most of their writings can be called confessional and are in direct mode. Theme or realistic and direct expression of bitter truth is more important for them than artistry or stylistics. “Nigerian author Ken Saro-Wiwa was

executed while in prison. He wrote there *Sozaboy* about a young naïve imprisoned soldier. Iranian author Mahmoud Dowlatabadi wrote the 500 page *Missing Soluch* while imprisoned without pen or paper, entirely in his head, then copied it down within 70 days after his release.” (Wikipedia/prison literature)

Ghana’s first president, the late Kwame Nkrumah wrote his autobiography while imprisoned in James Fort Prison in Ghana, by the British colonialists. J.M. Kariuki was amongst the first Kenyans to capture the horrid experiences of incarceration in his non-fictional account *Mau Mau in Detention* way back in 1963. Gakaara wa Wanjau, an acclaimed writer documented his experiences in ‘the British corridors of silence in his book, *Mwandiki wa Mau Mau Ithamerio-ine (Mau Mau Author in Detention)*’. The most famous of these writers is Ngugi wa Thiong’o who was detained for his community theatre activities in Kamirithu in 1977. He stumbled upon a non-physical prison, namely language and decided to defy it as he had done the physical. While imprisoned in Kamiti he wrote *Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary*. He defied the subordination of physical prison and found refuge in Gikuyu in which he wrote *Caitaani Mutharabaine (Devil on the Cross)*. Even otherwise his English language bears the imprint of his mother tongue and culture.

Other Kenyan writers who have made significant contribution to this field include Maina wa Kinyatti for his poetry book *A Season of Blood: Poems from Kenyan Prison (1995)*, his day-in-day-out recollections, *Kenya – A Prison Notebook (1996)* and a third one that details events covering his arrest, torture and imprisonment called *Mother Africa*, Wanyiri Kihoro for his prose work *Never Say Die*, confessions of erstwhile crooks like John Kiriamiti’s *My Life in Crime*, Kiggia Kimani’s *Prison is Not a Holiday Camp* or Charles Githae’s *Comrade Inmate*, Karuga Wandai’s *Mayor in Prison* and Benjamin Garth Bundeh’s *Birds of Kamiti* in which he

describes prison as a totally new world “of prisoners, of warders, and of the tragic twist of fate. It was a world in which either the spirit was completely broken and degraded, or true courage was born”.

“When you enter this place”, writes Bundeh, “You have to forget everything about the outside world. The dungeon becomes your home and you must survive...and like Stone Age man, we create fire in these caves... It is a place where the basic instinct of survival reigns supreme.” He poses some hard hitting questions that the human right activists across the world have been raising in their plea against capital punishment: “I wonder, should any human being be allowed to condemn another human being to death? Should one form of killing be lawful and another one unlawful? Should the law be allowed to take away that which it cannot create? Is there any correlation between the execution of treasonous, murderers or violent robbers and the number of crimes committed? The gallows in Kenya, the guillotine, the electric chair, and firing squads elsewhere – are these deterrents?”
(Flashback: May 22, 1970. prison-literature-in-east-africa. Web page.)

The development of South African Prison literature can be mapped from Herman Charles Bosman’s *Cold Stone Jug* (1949) to D M Zwelonke’s *Robben Island* in 1982. Apartheid Government in South Africa had imprisoned several writers and let lose the cruelest torture that could have been imagined in jail. Writers like Dennis Brutus, who wrote *Letters to Martha*, Nelson Mandela who spent the 27 years of his life in jail wrote his autobiography *Conversations with Myself*, Alex La Guma and some others had to face the music prison for their struggle against Apartheid. Alex La Guma, a prominent novelist of South Africa has seen torture face to face in and outside prison and wrote *The Stone Country and And a Threefold Cord* under house arrest from 1962 to 1965. Similarly Jack Mapanje from Malawi, Kofi Awoonor from Ghana, Sherif Hatata and Nawal el Sadaawi from Egypt and the first African

recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Prof. Wole Soyinka have all been prisoners at one time or another. Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian poet and Playwright wrote *The Man Died* in prison giving a pathetic description of prison life. Almost the entire African literature of colonial and racial experiences can be called prison literature in a sense in which prison was the microcosm of a larger prison, the continent in which the natives have to fight for free space in their own countries.

Indian Prison Literature

The prison literature in India constitutes a voluminous bulk of writings comprising mainly non-fiction prose – letters, diaries, essays, autobiographies, memoirs-and poetry and has a history stretching from Freedom Movement to Emergency and afterwards. Though I have taken up Indian Prison writers here reference to Aung San Suu Kyi's *Letters from Burma*, *Freedom from Fear* and *The Voice of Hope* can be made in this context as political prison writings giving voice to her long and sustained struggle for democracy and freedom from despotic reign.

During Freedom movement besides Gandhi, Nehru and Tilak, Shahid Bhagat Singh presents a strong case for study. He used to read a lot and write notes during his captivity. These notes became 'part of national folklore because they were jotted on foolscap sheets of papers and were later on published as 404 pages of *The Jail Notebook*. The *Notebook* was received on 12 September 1929 when an agreement was made between the hunger strikers and Special Jail committee.' Another notable prison diary entitled *Rajaji's 1920 Jail Life* is by Rajaji, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi. He also wrote *Chats Behind Bars* at Vellore Jail. These chats are his well thought out essays on different subjects like caste, untouchability, religion etc. *Rajaji's 1920 Jail Life* is factual writings of day to day life in the Vellore Jail. He was arrested for participating in Satyagrah movement launched by Gandhiji. G.S. Balram

Gupta lauds him for his scathing criticism of Margoliath's biography of Mahommed. He boldly writes "If a non-Muslim cannot write a good biography of Mahommed, much less can a total unbeliever." (P-116)

In India Cellular Jail in Andaman & Nicobar had acquired notoriety for Britishers' brutality and prison slavery. It was meant for patriots who were considered anarchist by the colonial rulers. One such patriot was Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay, brother of Aurobindo. He was sent to Cellular Jail in December 1900 after being convicted in Alipur explosive case. He underwent the fire of hell in that jail for about 12 years. After his release he wrote down his memoirs in Bengali *Inrbasiter Atmakatha or An Autobiography of an Exile*.

During Emergency most of the opposition leaders were sacked in different jails and some of them like Jaya Prakash Narayan, the vanguard of the Total Revolution and Morarji Desai wrote diaries and other prose works. J P wrote Prison Diary during his incarceration from 21st July to 4th November 1975 in Chandigarh Jail. He decided to write in these pages one thought everyday about the people's movement and taken together they constitute his total view of the movement. Interestingly on 9th September 1975 he wrote a poem 'My Life':

Life is full of failures,
Whenever success approached
I pushed them away from my path!
What it tomfoolery then.
No
My definition of success and failure are different.
Ask history whether years ago
Could I not have become the Prime Minister?
But for me a revolution-researcher
Some other paths where acceptable, visible
Path of sacrifice, of construction
Of struggle, of total revolution.... (Qtd Moorthy, 27)

In the post-emergency era the practice of arrest, detention and conviction by framing frivolous charges of sedition and treason

or on suspicion of terror link under normal law or draconian act like POTA continued and is continuing even today. This period has produced a large bulk of prison literature which deserves exclusive study in the present socio-political context. Reference can be made to K.V. Ramana Reddy's *Detenue Diary*, Varavara Rao's *Sahacharulu and Captive Imagination: Letters from Prison* (2010) and *Colours of Cage* (Poetry book), Mary Tyler's *My Years In Prison* (1977), Iftikhar Gilani *My Days in Prison* (2005), Anjum Zamarud Habib's *Prisoner No. 100: The Story of My Ordeal in Indian Prison* (2011), Chetan Mahajan's *The Bad Boys of Bokaro* (2014). Mahajan's revelation is worth quoting to understand the mechanism of Indian jail. He writes:

"Corruption is rampant; if you have money, you get anything. Prison guards and cops are part of the game. Jail officials use the powers vested in them to make money. Those who can't pay suffer. Some inmates are so poor that they can't even pay for their bail – so end up being in jail needlessly."

He adds:

"The jail doctor is a fraud. He never touches a patient. Never picks up his stethoscope or looks into anyone's eyes, ears or throat. He sees about 30 patients in 30 minutes."

He concludes,

"A realization for me is that even now, we all live in a jail at some level. That is the jail of the limitations we put around ourselves. And we all have the potential to gain release from that prison if we can start thinking a little differently about life." (Six prison-books from India, picked by Arun Ferreira <http://booksy.in/2014/10/03/>)

Today Chetan Mahajan is a free man. He is CEO of HCL Learning. The legal proceeding against him was quashed in March 2013 but the burnt he bore will always be in his memories.

Paul Gready says that, “the word is a weapon that both inflicts pain and secures power. Prisoners are relentlessly rewritten within the official ‘power of writing’... Within this process the prisoner’s sense of self and world is undermined, pain is made visible and objectified in writing and converted into state power [but] prisoners write to restore a sense of self and world, to reclaim the ‘truth’ from the apartheid lie, to seek empowerment in an oppositional ‘power of writing’ against the official text of imprisonment” (1993: 489. Qtd by *Oswald, web page*). The same power has been wielded by the prisoners across the globe for different reasons, with different perspectives inviting serious study in this new and emerging categorization of literature, its relation with the theory of domination, capitalism, colonialism and postcolonialism. Words become cathartic, a psychological tool to retain one’s sanity. At times words gushed out as in the case of African prison writers. Prison literature also aims at upsetting the stereotypical assumption about the jail inmates who are viewed as devoid of moral, human, intellectual and literary qualities. Word is power (Word is Brahma) for both, for those who have conditioned our views about prisoners as a class of culprits and for the prisoners who took up the same tool to answer back the state agents and thereby they often bring in fresh insight into the dark life and help us understand them not clinically but psychologically, sociologically and humanly. This brief survey vindicates the fact that the law of treason and sedition has been rampantly misused by the states world over as a tool of domination to gag the voice of dissent. Second point is that the prison has failed to fulfil its conceptual objective of correction and hence outlived its utility in its present form and seriously needs to be addressed.

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**‘Smiles, Tears, of all My Life!’ –
Love as an Epistemological
Question in the Poetry of
Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

MOUSUMI GUHA BANERJEE

The world waits
For help. Beloved, let us love so well,
Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work,
And both commended, for the sake of each,
By all true workers and true lovers born.¹

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was impeccable in her judgement in considering the ‘gospel’ of *Aurora Leigh* as having a resemblance with the compositions of Emmanuel Swedenborg, the eighteenth-century Swedish philosopher and mystic. His pivotal assertion that ‘the joys of heaven and eternal happiness are from love and wisdom and the conjunction of these in usefulness’² is what both Aurora and Romney concede at the end of the novel-poem. Aurora is awakened into a Swedenborgian understanding in *Aurora Leigh*:

Art is much, but love is more.
.....
Art symbolizes heaven, but Love is God
And makes heaven.³

Through a number of rhetorical detours, the poem progresses towards a consummate proclamation of the Swedenborgian ideology with Romney and Aurora appearing at a felicitous conciliation, which offers us with a vision of a New Jerusalem revealing itself through a culminating beatific realization:

new hearts in individual growth
Must quicken, and increase to multitude
In new dynasties of the race of men;
Developed whence, shall grow spontaneously
New churches, new economies, new laws
Admitting freedom, new societies
Excluding falsehood: HE shall make all new.⁴

Hence Barrett Browning deploys the theme of love by indicating the overwhelming transformation it can usher in society. This act of thematization of a hitherto unconceived metamorphosis through love also entails an underlying significant motif of an intellectual and emotional *avant-garde* movement in which the poet zealously participates and in the process removes all 'falsehood' and distortion that the society is afflicted with. The poet works towards heralding a 'perfect noon'⁵ and therefore echoes the Swedenborgian belief in 'love' and 'wisdom' and their manifestation in 'use':

Love and wisdom without use are not anything; they
are only ideal entities; nor do they become real until
they are in use.⁶

To Aurora, the fully-bloomed poet in the Ninth Book of *Aurora Leigh*, art is the abode of God and love 'makes heaven'.⁷ Love is idealized as an instrument of reformation that has the power to 'blow all class-walls level as Jericho's/Past Jordan',⁸ on the one hand, and on the other, an unthinking form of love is rejected with much disparagement. Earlier, in the Second Book, when Aurora declines Romney's proposal of marriage, she objects and puts forward a sceptical assessment of women who wilfully and injudiciously accept love as having a noble objective:

Women of a softer mood
Surprised by men when scarcely awake to life,
Will sometimes only hear the first word, love,
And catch up with it any kind of work,
Indifferent, so that dear love go with it.

I do not blame such women, though, for love,
They pick much oakum;⁹

The act of picking oakum draws our attention to the exercise of undoing the sewing of old rope that is to be assorted with tar, which in its turn, would be used to fill cracks and seal joints in ships with caulk. It involves a debilitating exertion which causes the fingers to bleed, a kind of activity often assigned to prisoners and dwellers of workhouses. This, according to the poet, is the fateful consequence of women who give themselves away thoughtlessly to love thereby suffering a life of utter subservience and thralldom. Barrett Browning clearly advocates here the idea of 'most serious work, most necessary work',¹⁰ but she, on the other hand, disparages the domestic serfdom that often supplements marriage. Aurora, in this sense, does not repudiate Romney's love, but rather his offer of being an associate worker. She thus breaks in with 'quiet indignation':

You misconceive the question like a man,
Who sees a woman as the complement
Of his sex merely. You forget too much
That every creature, female as the male,
Stands single in responsible act and thought
As also in birth and death.¹¹

As a result, Aurora's later declarations that she had been inconsiderate and heedless in not acknowledging Romney's love earlier seem to be contradictory with such scarcely disguised immoderate remarks of indignation:

O Romney, O my love,
I am changed since then, changed wholly,
If now you'd stoop so low to take my love
And use it roughly, without stint or spare¹²

These discrepant notions of love as a gateway to enslavement on the one hand, and on the other, as the Swedenborgiantrinitarian concept of 'use' associated with 'love' and 'wisdom', that a thinking and intellectual woman adheres to, reveal the

anxiety of inconsistency in the woman poet, since she realizes Love as both a divine state of human existence and an imminent hindrance to the poet's aspirations to create. In a letter of 1846, Barrett Browning revealed to Robert Browning:

I did not go out yesterday, and was very glad not to have a command laid on me to go out, the wind blew so full of damp and dreariness. Then it was pleasanter to lie on the sofa and think of you, which I did, till at last I actually dreamed of you falling asleep for that purpose.¹³

The London weather being damp and cold, Barrett Browning submerged herself in quiet contemplation and, as a sequel to her thoughts, the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* resulted for which she is so admired, appreciated and honoured. Composed during the period of their courtship, these sonnets move between real experience and dream in the manner in which the poet takes pleasure in her state of trance in rambling between the inexorable reality of London's tempestuous weather, resembling that of her life, and the fascinating vision of her love for Robert and of his for her. The rubric of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* derives from a two-fold origin. Browning frequently alluded to Elizabeth as 'my little Portuguese' because of her swarthy complexion. He was also fascinated by her poem, 'Catarina to Camoens', whose subtitle reads thus: 'Dying in his absence abroad, and referring to the poem in which he recorded the sweetness of her eyes'. Hence, sentiment and emotional fervour are entwined with the rather unusual sobriquet.

Dorothy Mermin and Angela Leighton¹⁴ have both addressed the predicament entailed in unravelling the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, considering it to be an unequivocal array of autobiographical renditions of artistic candour and truthfulness. Mermin maintains that the sonnet sequence reveals the 'emotional and intellectual complexity, the richness of reference, the elaborate and ingenious conceits, and the

subtle ways in which images are used both for their emotional power and to carry an argument'.¹⁵ The discernible expressions of sincere and unfeigned love subsume an intellectual pursuit towards a cognitive understanding so as to fathom the depths of love that thematize the sonnets. The poet is here concerned with a philosophical consideration of the entire epistemy of love and with identifying the relation between love and introspection, love and consciousness, love and sensibility, and love and self-knowledge.

Barrett Browning's conception of love grapples with an insurmountable predicament of the woman poet, analogous to the experience of Aurora: 'I must analyse,/Confront, and question'.¹⁶ The *Sonnets* too are nonetheless indicative of a keen insight of the 'song I struggle to outbear/Through the portals of the sense'.¹⁷ The contemplation of the woman poet is amply evinced from the initial stanza of the prefatory sonnet:

I THOUGHT once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years
Who each one in gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young.¹⁸

The poet was engrossed in her rumination on the 'antique tongue' of Theocritus, when suddenly she perceived the enigmatic presence of a mystifying 'Shape' uttering in a masterly intonation:

'Guess now who holds thee?' – 'Death',
I said. But, there,
The silver answer rang, .. 'Not Death,
but Love.'¹⁹

The poetic consternation reveals itself when the musing poet finds it almost impossible to express the voice within:

Look up and see the casement broken in,
The bats and owlets builders in the roof!
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
Hush, call no echo up in further proof

Of desolation! there's a voice within
That weeps ... as thou must sing ...
alone, aloof.²⁰

This stifling sensation causes a discomposure in the poet so much so that she has to endeavour hard to give expression to her own voice. The song of love characterized by imperfection and non-consummation precipitates in the anxious poet a feeling of chagrin emanating from what she conceives of as incongruous love:

O Beloved, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating
grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in vain, ..
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy
face.²¹

From these starkly irreconcilable thoughts arises a dilemma in the woman poet, which again seems to be immutable and, at the same time, unfathomable. The malediction of such an 'unaccomplished fate' gradually eats into the vitals of the poetic self and its 'heavy heart' torpidly goes deep down into 'thy calmly great/Deep being!':

My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst bid
me bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly great
Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it, mediating

Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.²²

The poet's perception of love is nonetheless characterized by 'the silence' of her 'womanhood' and 'a most dauntless'²³ voicelessness. The strength of her sensibilities lies in the 'muteness' and 'whiteness' of her 'letters' lying on a piece of 'dead paper'.²⁴ The poet meditates in tranquillity and feels 'that

doubt's pain', wishing her beloved 'to love me also in silence, with thy soul'²⁵:

My letters! All dead paper, .. mute and
white! –
And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands which loose
the string
And let them drop down on my knee
to-night.²⁶

The poet, like a 'vanquished soldier' yielding 'his sword', would 'lift' herself from 'the bloody earth' and say: 'Beloved, I at last record,/Here ends my strife.' She desires to 'rise above abasement at the word' and 'make thy love larger to enlarge my worth'.²⁷ Hence, we find that for Barrett Browning love and contemplation are not contrapuntal themes. They stand for each other and in relation to each other and involve a mental activity requiring profound reflection. She perceives love in her thought and ruminates on it till she becomes 'Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy'.²⁸ To her, love is possible to be felt 'without a word'.²⁹ But a poetic angst is palpable from what the poet-lover solemnly urges her beloved to do:

IF thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
'I love her for her smile ... her look ...
Her way
Of speaking gently, ...

The poet is certainly apprehensive of love temporal and transient and beseeches her beloved to 'love me for love's sake, that evermore/Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity'.³⁰

Having borne the anguish of the 'doubt and dread' of 'the silver iterance', she decides to 'drop a grave thought' and 'break from solitude':

I drop a grave thought – break from
solitude

Yet still my heart goes to thee ... ponder
now ...
Not as to a single good, but all my good!³¹

The poet-lover associates love with grief and is of the opinion that grief is more daunting than love's ordeal. She has grieved so much that to love is almost inconceivable for her. Hence, having awakened from sedate introspection, she earnestly appeals to her lover to open his heart wide for her:

If to conquer love, has
Tried,
To conquer grief, tries more ... as all
things prove,
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.
Yet love me – wilt thou? Open thine
heart wide,
And fold within, the wet wings of thy dove.³²

The whole intrigue of love is inseparably wrought with 'doubt and dread' and the poet is now vocal in articulating the distortion of 'thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit', and endeavours to redeem herself from her 'doubt's pain'³³ and the anxiety of unconsummated love:

It is that distant years which did not take
Thy sovranity, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to
undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to
forsake
The purity of likeness, and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless
counterfeit.³⁴

The culmination of all the themes embedded in love's manoeuvre is to be traced in the celebrated forty-third sonnet of the *Portuguese Sonnets*. Here love serves, for the poet, as a means towards reaching 'the ends of Being and ideal Grace'.

Passion, grief, smiles, tears – all epitomize love eternal, love immeasurable and love immortal:

I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's
faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, – I love thee with
the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! – and, if God
choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.³⁵

In *Victorian Women Poets: Writing against the Heart*, Angela Leighton postulates that Elizabeth Barrett Browning 'learned early to distrust the iconic postures of romance in favour of a socialized and contextualized account of desire'.³⁶ This is truly characteristic of Barrett Browning's epistemology of love, where there are indelible footprints of sociological and experiential connotations. Love is rarely non-representational and metaphysical, but is rather a spatio-temporal reality being circumstantial and participatory in nature. Its actors are the mortal beings who either shape it or are shaped by it. As a matter of fact, women in the nineteenth century conceived of love as a clear and palpable reality of experience which more often than not steered towards the institution of marriage and, if not, towards an eventual decline from honour and reverence:

It is this sceptical awareness of the sexual politics of sensibility which marks out Barrett Browning's poetry from that of her predecessors. Love, in her work, is not a sacred ideal, removed from the contingencies of the world, but is dragged in the dust of that reality which was itself so hard-won an experience and a theme for her.³⁷

This 'dust' of 'reality' is felt particularly in Barrett Browning's ballads which show the hazard involved in irascibility and lack of equanimity in women who, much in the manner of 'women

of a softer mood', are 'surprised by men when scarcely awake to life', and have their lives relegated to picking 'much oakum' since upon hearing 'the first word, love', they 'catch up with it any kind of work,/Indifferent, so that dear love go with it'.³⁸

In 'Bertha in the Lane' and 'A Year's Spinning', the two female protagonists have been denounced by their lovers who remain non-existent in the poems. In the first poem, the heroine lies on her deathbed and discloses to her sister, Bertha, that her death is ushered by a distressed heart. She had overheard her lover Robert avowing his love to her more attractive sister in the lane. But still her love stands unwavering and she hears the resonance of his footsteps at the door. She eventually dies, being afflicted with the pangs of unfulfilled love. She refuses to admonish either Robert or Bertha for exchanging the word that she 'heard/What you wished me not to hear.'³⁹ She, on the contrary, blames her own imperfection as a woman:

Do not weep so – Dear – heart-warm!
All was best as it befell:
If I say he did me harm,
I speak wild, – I am not well.
All his words were kind and good –
He esteemed me! Only, blood
Runs so faint in womanhood.⁴⁰

'A Year's Spinning' narrates the tale of a deserted woman, a spinner, who bears her lover's child which has died and whose 'silence' makes her 'groan'.⁴¹ She bemoans, in the way the deceased sister in 'Bertha in the Lane' does, not to vent her desire for vengeance but to express her dejection about the debility of women harbouring fallacious assumptions of a glorified romantic love. These are the notions that incapacitate 'women of a softer mood' who are inevitably driven either to a life of picking oakum, or to death. She is now destined to reach the relentless end with her 'spinning' 'all done'.⁴² In 'The Romance of the Swan's Nest', the way in which self-deceptive

and self-depleting love afflicts is even more poignantly delineated by Barrett Browning through the narrative of Little Ellie, who 'sits alone/'Mid the beeches of a meadow,/By a stream-side on the grass'⁴³ conjuring up an idealistic lover for herself and expressing her somewhat unrealistic dream as an iconic representation of valorous and knightly love of a ritualistic intrigue. In this reverie, she fantasizes herself helping him to have a glimpse of 'the swan's nest among the reeds'.⁴⁴ But while she has been journeying in a trance, the swan's nest becomes forsaken and the eggs morselled into pieces by rats. Little Ellie's dream of showing her imagined lover 'that swan's nest among the reeds'⁴⁵ has been smashed to smithereens:

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,
Winding up the stream, light-hearted,
Where the osier pathway leads –
Past the boughs she stoops – and stops.
Lo, the wild swan had deserted,
And a rat had gnawed the reeds.⁴⁶

Hence, the act of spurious idealization of love results in betrayal and disillusionment in the lives of 'women of a softer mood'. It is the aftermath of such disenchantment in love that constitutes Barrett Browning's thesis in these ballads. They show that unthinking love can have drastic consequences both in the lives of women involved in the action as well as on other women associated with them. The sociological aspects are undeniable here and their unbending desire to consummate their lives by interlocking themselves injudiciously in mindless schemes of love thus brings about perilous consequences. In her ballads, Barrett Browning situates love in a 'male economy of social exchange' and a stringently defined male power structure. Marjorie Stone thus discerns the concerns of 'gender inequities' in Barrett Browning's ballads in the following manner:

In her ballads of the 1830s and 40s, [Barrett] employs the starker power structures of medieval society to

foreground the status of women in a male economy of social exchange, and to unmask the subtler preservation of gender inequities in contemporary Victorian ideology.⁴⁷

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- ⁷ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, Ninth Book, p. 535.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 216.
- ⁹ *Aurora Leigh*, Second Book, pp. 397-8.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 398.
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- ¹⁸ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Sonnet I, p. 318.
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- 41 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'A Year's Spinning', IV, p. 302.
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Revisiting and Revaluing Nature: An Ecocritical Study in Frost's Select Poems

SUBAS CHANDRA ROUT

The humans are violating the laws of nature. The retribution from the biosphere arises in the form of extinction of species, hole in the ozone layer, global warming, acid rain, famines, droughts, hurricanes and tsunamis etc. In ecology, man's tragic flaw is his anthropocentric vision. The present era witnesses man's compulsion to conquer, violate, exploit and domesticate every natural thing. Contrasted to biocentricism, the man-made potential horrors are nuclear holocaust, poisoning radiation, oil spills, toxic waste and destruction of tropical rain forest, depletion of green cover and so on. Thus, the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment is ecocriticism that becomes a theoretical discourse negotiating between human culture and nature.

The application of such study in Robert Frost's poetry revalues nature as something pure, untouched, sacred living entity that nourishes human mind and body. As a major American poet, Frost occupies a unique place of distinction at home and abroad. Possibly, his poetry keeps distance from greedy, rapacious industrialism and competitive commerce. It is rare to locate environmentally disastrous lifestyle consumerism in his artistic output. Besides, his eco-friendly creative quality portrays the landscape not as 'toxic riskscape' for consumerism and capitalism, rather the landscape of flora and fauna. Perhaps, his poetry denounces America's mechanistic modernism and materialistic culture. Surprisingly, when the whole continent was running after 'Dream to Success',

creating ecological crisis and disfiguring nature as a 'toxic waste dump', in the mean time Frost's poetry was designing nature as a space of purity incorporating an attitude of reverence and humility. In fact, most of his poems mirror the glorification and beautification of nature.

A Boy's Will (1913) is ecologically shaped to relate the seasonal cycle of nature, starting with a subdued enjoyment to the autumnal mood, changing through actions and images of winter, spring and summer. Such study needs to be examined in the present context of climate change and global warming thereby reestablishing man's relation with nature. On the other hand, when the Americans were not paying attention to the consequences of industrial emissions damaging the earth's basic life-support systems, at the same time Frost was in search of life –sustaining air in the lap of nature. However, heavy toxic waste due to industrialization was damaging the entire ecosphere. The area was turning into 'Valley of Ashes'. For accumulation of wealth, the Americans were less concerned about the global catastrophe by compounding environmental problems and depleting green cover: "Still, if this study has suggested anything, it must be that what we need is a radically new symbolic mode for relating to 'the fairest, flute fullest and pleasauntest [land] of all the worlde', we can no longer afford to keep turning 'America the Beautiful' into America the Raped" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996:178).

The poems in *A Boy's Will* primarily reveal the depths of Frost's roots in the New England countryside where he farms his own land for many years. In his farming, there is no environmental degradation although the absolute silence of nature gets disturbed by the whispering of scythe which has been mentioned in "Mowing". By contrast to Frost's farming is Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). The use of new organic pesticides such as DDT, aldrin and dieldrin, according to Carson, led the way to a serious threat both to wild life and to human health: "In her environmental classic *Silent Spring* from

1962, Rachel Carson theorized ecological subjectivity, responding to the massive use of DDT as agricultural pesticide. Carson identified DDT as a particularly dangerous chemical moving through the ecosystem and human bodies" (Westling, 2014:185).

Through recognition of pollution from pesticide does not get a room in an intimate knowledge of the life of Frost's farmer. On the contrary, the New England countryside heightens Frost's pastoral art that defies toxic consciousness thereby "...the pejorative sense in which 'pastoral' implies an idealization of rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship" (Garrard, 2012:37-38). In Frost's farm and farming, there is labour and hardship but no implementation of technology or pesticide. Besides, his work examines the reciprocal relationships between humans and the land.

The poet's mood to *North of Boston* (1914) is conducive to environmental well-being. The hills and dales, rivers and forests, trees, flowers and plants, animals, birds, insects, seasons and seasonal changes etc. are the recognizing agencies in nature contributing to a sustainable ecosphere. In "Mending Wall" the poet writes: "He is all pine and I am apple orchard/ ...Not of woods only and the shade of trees". Here, the speaker's attitude is a sort of elemental force in nature that draws human beings together, denying all boundaries of caste, creed and religion or the boundary between haves and have-nots. The distinction among humans sometimes leads to the systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans thereby environmental problem arises: "Eco-socialists argue that class inequalities influence the experience of the environment" (Nayar, 2015:247). The speaker of the poem is a young man and his neighbor is an old farmer. But the expression of pine and apple is purely the poet's ecocentric vision. Frost's purpose is to portray a problem and examine the many different and paradoxical issues it involves. The clash between the speaker and his neighbor is obviously two opposed points of view. Man

makes the boundary but nature tears it down. In this sense culture and nature are opposed. "If society seems afflicted by a divisive individualism, then the 'natural' expresses the counterweight of community...if society seems aggressively instrumentalist and materialist, then the 'natural' may be celebrated in terms of more selfless values" (Clark, 2014: 18-19).

Beautiful adoption of nature-description provides a potential boost to ecological sense in "The Mountain". The natural scenes and sights are minutely observed by the artist: "When I walked forth at dawn to see new things,/ Were fields, a river, and beyond, more fields:/ The river at the time was fallen away/ Good grass-land gullied out, and in the grass/ Ridges of sand, and driftwood stripped of Bark". Such description articulates an environment-friendly culture. "Yet it also, just as emphatically, envisions this ideal as a beautiful and just relation between human beings and the natural world" (Borlik, 2012: 177).

The poet's sensuous enjoyment of the scenes and sights, sounds and scents of nature in "After Apple-Picking" ecologically establish the authentic relation of humanity and the earth. The speaker goes on to speculate: "Essence of winter sleep is on the night, /The scent of apples; I am drowsing off". The 'scent of apples' induces the 'essence' of sleep. From deep ecological perspective, it is fundamental interconnectedness of life and natural features: "...man lives from nature, nature is his body, and he has to maintain a proper relationship with it or die" (Nayar, 2015:247). On the other hand, the apple-picker's care for apple is less anthropocentric and more biocentric vision. The drowsiness that the apple-picker feels after the completion of the task is also associated with the cycle of seasons. Thus, from apple and apple picker, there is a contemplative pastoral vision that shapes a symbiotic relationship between man and nature. "The emphasis of pastoral has generally been on the impact of the environment

on the human rather than the other way around”(Huggan & Tiffin, 2015:16).

Mountain Interval (1916) takes its title from the side-hill New Hampshire farm. “Birches” published in the *Mountain Interval* attunes to ecological perception of the narrator. Swinging of birches in rain and ice-storm contributes to aesthetic beauty. Such beauty dies in the dull and drab reality of industry-discharged biocide. It is rare to locate aesthetic pleasure in ecocide. When the wind blows, the birches swing up and down and the ice on them shines and glitters. They appear turning into many-coloured beauties as the rays of the sun are refracted in passing through ice. In other words, “Aesthetic atmospheres are inseparable from the fact that the human body, as a part of nature, participates in the showing and letting-be-felt of things in their multiplicity and varied tonalities” (Clark, 2014: 82).

Besides, the ice is shaken down as the sun rises above and grows warmer. It falls on earth covered with snow. Such view seems as if the central dome of heaven has cracked and the earth is covered with heaps of broken glass. Hence, the artist says: “Earth’s the right place for love,/I don’t know where it’s likely to go better”. The poet’s love for earth is pertinent. Possibly, Frost has presumed that the earth is the only place for existence of life thereby “...the earth is alive in the same sense that human beings are alive” (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996:256).

Unlike Frost’s earth, today’s earth gets threatening from global warming, climate change and nuclear hazards. Instead of Frost’s honest farmers, there is the role of corrupt capitalists. The countryside beautification has transformed into exploitation and operation with new technology and more industry. His extensive knowledge of trees, flowers and grasses forming the idyllic value has turned into the apocalyptic vision of agro chemicals and pesticide applications. Frost’s earth delights the mind and endears the heart but now it has invited

to a harsh and unpredictable ecology. Such reverse is logically justified on account of economic globalization and corrupt civilization. On the contrary, humans should keep in mind: “We are part of the earth and it is part of us” (Garrard, 2012: 134).

New Hampshire (1923) constitutes another kind of poetic taste of big business, more commercialism and more materialism. “I Will Sing You One-O” explores the ‘ghast heights’ of the sky underpinning the loneliness and isolation of man. In “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”, horse stands for materialistic view that has very less connection to share with the enjoyment of natural beauty. However, “We have seen that his special way of depicting nature is a means of dealing with the problem which science posed for the modern poet. It therefore appears that his pastoralism provides a means of dealing with a similar problem. It is that of preserving within the disorganized world created by science the sense of order and unity a meaningful life requires” (Cox, 1962:185).

West Running Brook (1928) has, to some extent, ecocritical application in its delineation. “Tree at My Window” examines the superiority of man over nature. There is more anthropocentrism than biocentric stance. “Acquainted with the Night” brings out the disinterested and detached life in the city, where each one lives within his own shell. Such living is a contrast to life in nature. However, city-life lifts one to some place beyond nature, from natural habitat to a ‘planned habitat’.

A Further Range (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942), and *Steeple Bush* (1947) etc. claim to have ecocritical study. “Two Tramps in Mud Time” illustrates the sensitivity of the artist to the beautiful and bright in nature. He also notices wildflowers, brooks, trees and birds. Such sweet, delicate things stand out against the sombre background of the physical world. As an observer, Frost describes the pure and tender images of nature for the possible purpose of creating harmonious relationship between nature and human culture: “In other

words, the very mysteriousness of nature contributes to the independence and, presumably, the self-awareness of the observer" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996:353).

From day to day, America got more industrialism and consumerism. Such resulted in disintegration and declination of agricultural way of life and countryside beauties. In "Directive" the poet mentions: "There is a house that is no more a house,/ Upon a farm that is no more a farm". Capitalism and commercialism pave the way to encourage industrialism. Such capitalist structures posit ecocide." After becoming completely ensnared within the megamachinic grids of global production and consumption...Nature is turning into 'Denature'. Much of the earth is a 'built environment', a 'planned habitat', or 'managed range' as pollution modifies atmospheric chemistry,..." (Clark, 2014:06).

Reconsidering Robert Frost's art, it could be presumably articulated that his ultimate and ulterior preoccupation is to encompass and to integrate a balanced and harmonious relationship between man and nature. Hence, by injecting ecocritical vision into his poetic output otherwise relates to revisit and revalue the significance of nature in the context of present era. The problems of extremely increasing changes in global climate and the plight of animal communities require a profound insight and reevaluation of Frost in order to gain environment consciousness.

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ESSAY

An Assertion of Poetry

GARY BECK

More than fifty years ago, at the age of sixteen, I began writing poetry. My first efforts were imitations of the Romantics; Shelley, Keats, Byron, my favorite, who brought order and structure into my chaotic life. School so far had been depressingly sterile, offering me little in the way of knowledge that I could not glean on my own, even less exciting was the pathetically sterile challenge of learning. So without a guide to direct my efforts, I plunged into the English Classical poets, having already read diversely in English drama and American fiction. I had memorized large chunks of Byron, Grey's *Elegy* and many others who delighted me, which was consoling as I struggled to find my path. After careful reading and evaluation of my poems, I found that I appreciated the developmental process, but concluded that they were wanting in originality. I burned them ceremoniously and reassuringly, this did not launch a career of book-burning. I did not regret their destruction and never looked back and said: 'If only I had saved them'!

I moved on to reading the American poets and devoured Eliot, Pound, Cummings, many others, who I found more timely than their English predecessors, sometimes almost as elegant, but never as beautiful. Beauty seems to be less compatible in the torment of the industrial age. Then, at the age of seventeen,

I hitchhiked to California. I lived in San Francisco and discovered the Beat poets, who were just erupting in the formerly more tranquil landscapes of literature. I admired their vitality, but was turned off by their colossal naiveté. One of their loudest voices proclaimed that he saw the best minds of his generation destroyed by madness. I knew the best minds of my generation were preparing to send men to the moon. An immense and irreconcilable difference of opinion. Their movement offered me no safe harbour.

For the next few years I kept the semi-noiseless tenor of my ways, finding college almost as drab intellectually as high school, with virtually everyone focused on career. Whatever happened to the love of learning? Several slightly compatible companions helped keep me anchored, which let me endure in the wilderness of poetry. I, an emperor of impracticality, wanted to be a poet. I dreamed of tasting the immortal fire. I was ill-equipped for the academic environment, the protected haven of many poets, so I wandered aimlessly in an unknown land. One of the few benefits of my education was enough mastery of french to read the symbolist poets, then the more moderns, particularly Mallarmée and Apollinaire, from whom I rediscovered the invention of free verse. (French also allowed me in later years to translate Moliere for my theater work.) I read more and more of the younger American poets, looking for kinship. At the same time, I read the Russian, Japanese and Chinese poets, always feeling that the language barrier mandated translations, which altered the fabric of the writing. I began a search for my natural voice, an aspiration that imposed strenuous difficulties, since I was on my own and had to reinvent the wheel daily, a complicated task when working without blueprints.

The more American poets I read, the less connected I felt to their concept of poetry, however much I admired their artistic accomplishments. I saw a world aflame with constant upheavals, disasters man-made or natural, and progressively

more destructive violence. Yet I found poets increasingly seeking esoteric metaphors, cherishing style above substance, placing form above content. Suddenly, all the poets were college graduates, many with advanced degrees in the field of poetry. I definitely did not belong in that company. I was the classic loner, but was sufficiently self-sustaining, or ego-driven not to seek entry into the networks of poetry. There was a corresponding classic irony. I, the consummate outsider, had been a theater director for most of my adult life. I had started in theater at the age of seventeen in San Francisco, plunging into an arts discipline that mandated group involvement! I found a curious symbiosis to the world of poetry, since I translated and directed the classics, as well as writing and directing new plays that dealt more and more with political and social issues. My poetry began to reflect the broader range of world problems, with the subject being my primary concern, not the expression thereof. This further distanced me from the practitioners of the art of poetry.

As the years went by, I found myself more concerned with the message, rather than the 'poetic' quality of poetry. I saw the arts begin to turn progressively inward, not in the nature of profound meditation, or seeking deeper understanding, but more in the aspect of flaunting personal agonies and confessions. This is what our culture has wrought. It satiates the consciousness with an endless stream of pictorial imagery that stupefies the visual sense and degrades the uniqueness of verbal description. So poets, increasingly shunted aside by a growing public preference for non-stop tv, turned to baring their guts in anguished revelations of childhood abuse, or indignation for their neglected feelings. This type of indulgence and I are incompatible. To me, poetry is greater than my personal sufferings. I feel there should be room in the chambers of poetry for alternatives to academic products and disclosures of angst. I have chosen my own direction and have evolved to expressing thoughts and feelings about issues. And if I may

have abandoned metaphor and simile, it is not that I despise them, but I must deliver what I believe to be a necessary blunt message. In an age of increasing insecurity and danger, we must still cherish poetry. But the guardians of the gates of poetry should allow examination of the problems of the world, with direct communication, in order to extend the diminishing influence of poetry on the events of our times.

INTERVIEW

Interview with Dr. K.V. Raghupathi

by

DR. RITA NATH KESHARI

Rita Nath Keshari: Your bio data indicates literary criticism theories, Aesthetics and Indian Philosophy as your prime areas of interest. Did you proceed from one epistemological field to another or did all these areas appeal to you simultaneously?

Raghupathi: In fact all these are interlinked. One who has good grounding in philosophy can understand and appreciate theories, aesthetics and literary criticism better than the one who doesn't have. This is my experience. One may differ with it. There are several concepts in theories that come close to Indian philosophical concepts. Only the nomenclature is different. Anyway, this is my experience. I have moved from philosophy to aesthetics to literary theories.

Rita Nath Keshari: You claim that you began writing seriously from 1985 onwards. Was any particular incident or personality responsible for this?

Raghupathi: No particular writer has ever influenced me so far. I read all and I don't take anyone as my inspirer or role model. My experiences are my sources of inspiration. Writings came to me naturally without any volition. I never

wanted to be a writer in my life. But when the writer was born in me I embraced him in all humility. Why should I resist something that is natural? I never underwent any training nor did I receive any diploma or degree in creative writing as is the practice in the west. In fact, this was not my desire or ambition before 1985. My desire was to become an IAS officer. You know that was the passion for those who have completed post-graduation in universities. Even today this ambition is nurtured by students. Look, this desire was planted in me by my father who wanted to see me as an IAS officer. But destiny willed it otherwise. Also let me add something interesting to it. Between 1982 and 1990, for nearly a decade I was undergoing a turmoil within me. Call it spiritual. Hence, my writings during this period carried a lot of philosophy and transcendental elements.

Rita Nath Keshari: Would you like to share with us your experiences relating to the publication of your first poetry collection *Desert Blooms* (1987)?

Raghupathi: You see, when I began writing, it sounded poetic. My friends seeing my writings called it poetry. Again, here too, I never wanted to be a poet. It just came like that. Look, I never showed my writings to anyone for comments. I edited and reedited by myself. I typed the script on my typewriter that was gifted to me by my maternal uncle. At that time there were no computers. I began contacting publishers in Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay. No one had replied positively. I was disappointed. Nevertheless, I was determined to see my writings were published. It was at this juncture when all my attempts became futile, I came across a poetry collection published by Writers Workshop in Calcutta. Look, all this had happened on its own. I never, I mean, consulted nor discussed it with any one. You know the world is indifferent, hostile and envious. In those days postal mail was the only means. Internet had yet to take

its light. And I wrote a letter, introducing myself and my work to Professor P. Lal who was then heading this publishing house that was started by him only. After two weeks, I received a letter written by him in calligraphy, asking me to send the manuscript. Accordingly I sent and after a month, I received a crispy letter stating that he had gone through my writing and was impressed by its lyrical quality, diction and feeling. At the end he expressed his willingness to take up its print under his banner on condition that I should be able to meet one third of its production cost for which I would receive a certain number of copies. He mentioned the total cost of production in bringing out my book as Rs. 9000/- and my contribution was Rs. 3000/-. At that time I had no money to meet this requirement. It was then I showed this letter I received from Professor Lal to my friends and teachers who in turn liberally contributed. I sent this collected money to him, thus I got my first work published. When my first book came out, it was a joy for me, and I gave a complimentary copy to all the donors. Thus the writer was born in me and I never looked back and my journey began and I am in it.

Rita Nath Keshari: Your creativity ranges from fiction, shorter fiction to poetry. Do you decide which genre to express yourself in or, in a quirky manner, does your inspiration select the genre on its own?

Raghupathi: This again has a story. When I first wrote it came out in the form of poetry. It was poetry, and I continued in this genre for three decades. Interestingly, during that period, I attempted novels, and I wrote three novels in heat. All these novels which I had written three decades ago did not see the light. With my first novel, *The Invalid* I tried all publishers in India and abroad. It was turned down. Disappointed, I locked the manuscripts in a trunk and I did not destroy them. Three decades after I unlocked the trunk and removed the manuscripts on the

advice of my close friends. Once again the travails started. But finally I succeeded in publishing the two with Cyberwit.net, Allahabad.

Rita Nath Keshari: Fiction-writing demands a plurality of selves from the writer. For example, when he writes about an employer and his employee or about a man and a woman he has to switch class as well as gender identities to create an aura of authenticity. What is your opinion?

Raghupathi: You are right. A writer's job is difficult at this point. He has to perform several roles, I mean, he should get into the shoes of several characters drawn from different strata. He should be omniscient. That is why he is called an artist.

Rita Nath Keshari: What is the dominant political ideology you subscribe to both in your personal and creative life?

Raghupathi: I am sorry, I don't subscribe to any ideology. Writers are artists; and they should be above all these things. They are not to be compartmentalised. They should be free from ideological commitments or political affiliations. Then alone can they write judiciously and dispassionately. This is my perception. One may differ with me.

Rita Nath Keshari: With so much of intolerance towards freedom of expression abounding in India now what is the strategy that writers can adopt to protect their writings?

Raghupathi: Yes, this has been the subject of serious discussion now going on in our country. Let me speak out my mind. One needs to distinguish two things here, freedom and freedom of expression. Artists need absolute and unconditional freedom to create. This is guaranteed in democracy unless it is a totalitarian country. But, when it comes to expression, one needs to be a little cautious. One can present the human condition or plight without stigmatizing or castigating a particular clan or society. This

is where the Existential writers have succeeded superbly. Most of the controversy of this sort is centred around the vernacular writers. Beyond this I do not want to reflect further.

Rita Nath Keshari: Two of your poetry collections *Voice of the Valley* and *Wisdom of the Peepul Tree* were both published in 2003. This is a rare feat for any poet of any age. Moreover, the two were republished by Authorspress with the distinguished poet PCK Prem's foreword for each volume. Would you like to elucidate further?

Raghupathi: "*Voice of the Valley*" was written around 1989. It was a quest for pure wisdom. I did not give it to Writers Workshop. My idea was to start my own publications. So, in 1991 I published this work on my own with the title "*Voice Eternal*" under the banner "Nirvana Publications". Offset printing was introduced in my native town, Tiurpati at that time. It was a boon for the writers. Though it was expensive in the beginning, I did it. I brought out 250 copies on a trial basis. You know, interestingly, this book fetched me Michael MdhudsonDutt Award from Kolkatta in 2000. Later, I realized my limitations in promoting my own works. So, I gave this book with a modified title, "*Voice of the Valley*" along with my similar work "*Wisdom of the Peepal Tree*" which was conceived at Dhvanyaloka, Mysore while I was holding H. D. Thoreau Fellowship in 2000 to Minerva Press (India) Pvt. Ltd. But the publisher had wound up this publishing house and disappeared. Later I thought why I should not bring them out once again as I have found from a number friends that they had not known such books were brought out by Minerva Press in New Delhi. This prompted me to bring out another edition with Authorspress for which PCK Prem has written a Foreword.

Rita Nath Keshari: You are also into translation. How do you handle the problem of translocation of culture while juggling with words?

Raghupathi: I have never been into translation.

Rita Nath Keshari: How difficult is it for a poet, especially from remote areas of South India, to get published from metropolitan India?

Raghupathi: That is indeed difficult. I was not born in an elite class, you know that kind of class circle which has its own influences in the metropolitan cities. I was born in an ordinary class structure, and I never had any public education as most writers living in metropolitan cities seem to have. Certainly it is extremely difficult for the writers born in ordinary middle class families and especially for those in the remote areas of South India. This was the condition three decades ago. Now, technology has changed this scenario. Everything is accessible through internet. One need not feel defeated here.

Rita Nath Keshari: As an academic, do you think students and research scholars evince more interest in poetry than general readers? Certainly, poetry requires a little more formal training for getting appreciated, isn't it?

Raghupathi: You are right. Poetry writing or poetry reading is not everybody's cup of tea. Poetry reading requires special sensibilities. Readers need to be trained. Unless they have these sensibilities, they may not appreciate the spirit in poetry. It will be a boring job.

Rita Nath Keshari: *Echoes Silent* (1988) is a single long poem which reflects your general disillusionment with the education system in India. Now after almost three decades do you perceive any change in the system? Or are you still in love with silence?

Raghupathi: Only the knowledge has exploded. The disillusionment continues, and I am comfortable and happy in my silence zone.

Rita Nath Keshari: Is your poetry volume *Images of a Growing Dying City* (1989) inspired by any particular city

or are you trying to convey the paradox of growth and decay of the present urban scenario? Are you trying to tell us that the real India is visible only in her villages?

Raghupathi: This particular collection is not of any city. But, certainly, it represents all cities and I have conveyed that paradox of growth and decay in all cities. I still hold the idea that real India is visible in her villages.

Rita Nath Keshari: *Samarpana* (2006) carry fifty poems which were written while you were holding H.D. Thoreau Fellowship at Dhvanyaloka, Mysore in 2000. These poems reflect your inner tranquillity and deep gratitude for your host institution. Would you say that a poet, cocooned in such special retreats, escapes his inner turmoil? If so, does patronage of this kind act as a palliative for him?

Raghupathi: In fact if one is left to himself/herself he/she can find answers for several questions and the turmoil. Solitude, I love most in my life. I can reflect and meditate.

Rita Nath Keshari: In your collection *Orphan and Other Poems* (2010) you seem to have rather negative opinions about the impact of globalisation on the Indian scene and the prevalent mindless consumerism. Do you suggest any remedies?

Raghupathi: I don't have any instant remedies. I mean, in strict political and economic sense. The best remedy is turn to yourself, from the outside. You will find answers when you turn inwardly. But, we seek answers from outside. That is the problem, modern man is facing. For everything, he seeks outside, other than himself/herself.

Rita Nath Keshari: *Between Me and the Babe* (2014) is your latest collection of poems. You ponder simultaneously on the chequered pattern of life's joys and sorrows. Would you say that you feel more involved with the world around you now and optimism leads you on?

Raghupathi: Right from the beginning I am an optimist, undoubtedly whether on doubts it. My involvement outside doesn't mean that I have done away with the inner.

Rita Nath Keshari: As a critic, you endeavour to focus on those poets who deserved recognition but were not favoured by circumstances, (e.g, GopalHonnalgere, T. Vasudeva Reddy, and the poets studied in *Brave New Wave: An Anthology of*). What are your points in their favour? Do you have something of the zeal of F.R. Leavis in you?

Raghupathi: Call me an alter ego of F.R. Leavis. I don't mind it. This is your perception. Ultimately one has to see the realities. The poets included in this anthology have never received attention from the world, especially the academic world; and they have been marginalized in the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Hence, I have brought out this anthology with a difference.

Rita Nath Keshari: You have been writing extensively on Indian women poets who express themselves in English. Your focus is more on the India-based women poets who appeared on the literary scene from the eighties onwards. Do you plan to continue with this literary group or do you wish to shift your focus now to mainstream Indian English poets?

Raghupathi: A poet is a poet. The distinction of one being a male poet and the other a female poet exists incorrigibly for the academicians. I am not an academician in that sense. But, these women poets have been marginalized for long, once again in the politics of inclusion and exclusion. They too are human beings. They too have a voice. We as human beings need to listen to all. This perception has prompted me to lend my hand to this group of women poets. Fortunately, the times have changed. More women writers are coming out, and the number of coveted international

awards they are bagging is a clear testimony of this. It is indeed a good and positive development.

Rita Nath Keshari: You have won many distinguished literary awards. Which one do you deem as the most significant one?

Raghupathi: These literary awards have never downsized my personality that is being a writer at the core. I am happy at myself first as a human being, then of course as a writer without these awards and distinctions. I mean, the recognition is slow. But it matters little for me.

Rita Nath Keshari: Your first novel *The Invalid*, according to your statement, took thirty years to see the light of day. In the meantime, your reputation as poet and critic was growing steadily. How did you cope with this situation where you were acclaimed as a poet but ignored as a novelist?

Raghupathi: I have already explained. First when writings came to me, I was born with poetry. Novel has carved its niche in the middle. I tried to be a fiction writer. This I have never succeeded. I have given the reasons for this. Hence, I have been comfortable with my first genre, poetry, for nearly three decades. Now I have started another new genre, that is, short stories under the inspiration of Dr.P.Raja.

Rita Nath Keshari: Your first novel *The Invalid* and the second one *The Disappointed* form the first two parts of the tetralogy you plan to compose. What factors helped or hindered you to compose the second novel?

Raghupathi: Nothing hampered me. You see, it was happening on its own without my volition. So, why should I stop it? Let it flow, and be freed from it. That was my attitude. Hence I never gave any credence to the idea that my first novel had not been published, so I should stop it. That is rather stifling your creativity.

Rita Nath Keshari: Does the forthcoming novel *The Rebel* also share some of the features of the first two? Do you feel that you have further honed your aesthetic craftsmanship?

Raghupathi: It too depicts the human condition in a different manner. I do not know how it would be in future. Nothing is certain.

Rita Nath Keshari: Since you are a voracious reader and a distinguished academic your exposure to world literature must have been really significant? How much of it has influenced your thinking and writing?

Raghupathi: They are two inseparable. There is a perfect coordination and harmony between what I think and what I write and what I live. There is no dichotomy.

Rita Nath Keshari: Literary festivals are gaining popularity all over India and are attracting corporate sponsorship in a way unimaginable even twenty years ago. Do you think that they can build bridges between both the veteran and the amateur?

Raghupathi: Definitely. But these literary festivals should not become stereotypes. Unfortunately it is happening, the way these festivals are being organized.

Rita Nath Keshari: What projects are you working on at present?

Raghupathi: I would like to focus my attention on women poets, bringing them out in series, their complete works or their select writings for posterity. This is one project I am at it. The other one is I have been editing the marginalized poets. So far, I have brought out two, Gopal Honnalegere and T.Vasudeva Reddy. More such ventures will come out in future.

BOOK REVIEW

Book Review of Sheojee Tewary's Poetry Collection, *Journey Within*

by

CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

Journey Within, Conversation with God, Sheojee Tewary, Thomson Press, India Ltd, Faridabad, 2016, pp. 176, Price: Rs. 395

Sheojee Tewary is a prolific writer in Hindi, with many publications to his credit but his venture in English poetry says Mr. Tewary, "is more passionate and intuitive". The poet seems to be fully immersed in his thoughts which he seeks to investigate in the process of learning, to express himself in another language, and describes the journey lending a new voice. As the journey progresses, the reader is startled by poet's act of self-reflection, exploration and reinvention. The poet plays subtly drawing with his words, symbols, allusions and metaphors a great mosaic of God's glory defying the barriers of language. "Journey Within" is collection of 29 poems organised around diverse aspects of God, his creation, relationship of God with his created beings, soul, dualism and Brahman (the ultimate reality). Structurally the whole collection reads like a long song written in praise of God, his immensity, universality and illumination of the self. The book

is remarkable for its inherent mysticism, spirituality, emotive language, waves of emotions, philosophical enquiry and simplicity of language. The poem begins with the idea of God and successfully demonstrates that God is the ultimate reality with which the self seeks union. A.W. Tozer in his classic book on attributes of God, writes "Man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion ever been greater than its idea of God". Poems like "Journey Within", "The Mesmerizing Eyes", "God's Love" echo the greatness of non-dual, indivisible, pure consciousness of incorporeal infinite being. To quote the poet:

"O Vishwaroopa/All pervading, universal form!/I behold
you in endless form. /I see neither your beginning/nor
middle nor end."

The poet further explores the human consciousness of world, its transient conditions, frailties and limitations against the infinity, immensity and pervasiveness of the pure consciousness. Overwhelmed by the glory of God, the poet surrenders to him like a child. Here he plays the chimes of the Advaita philosophy of Shankaracharya. His consciousness merges with the consciousness of God and he becomes one with him.

The songs of Sheojee echo the musical vibes of soulful melodies of Whitman and Tagore in its epiphanous experiences and reflective tone. Poems like "Mesmerizing Eyes", "God-Realization in Mystic Ways", "Hide and Seek", "The Life" (Pranvayu) . "Illusion"(Maya), "Meeting God" and other poems describe God as Brahman, the ultimate reality, as described by the Advaita and other Hindu scriptures. It is basis of all awareness and source of all bliss. The poet begins with the consciousness of the material body, contemplates on the self and merges his consciousness with the higher consciousness and then he comes to self-realization that divine and the individual self are not different, but are inextricably related to each other. The poet feels the presence of God in all human

acts, in work, sleep, sorrow and all circumstances and finally “...I see you in my journey within / I used to hear your voice in silence”. In this journey the poet feels the comfort of his company everywhere. “God’s Love” celebrates this spirit of comradeship which is central to this poem “In my inner journey, / I feel the Lord is near to me / And so I pray; / “O my God! / Supreme commander of my soul / whenever I meditate / I find your reflection /..” This poem and many other poems in this book give a loud and clear message that a heart filled with love of God secures all powers therefore, one should redeem one’s life through love of God. Let love become your life-breath and the sole goal of your life.

In songs titled “Maa Kali”, “Saraswati Vandana” and poems such as “Rainbow Life”, “Invocation” and other poems where the poet profusely uses the allusion of Kali, Saraswati, Rama, Krishna and Siva, he borders on qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja and Madhav who maintain that Brahman though non-dual, pure consciousness transforms itself into God, universe, and the world of souls and that transformation is real. The God is the whole and the individual is part of that whole. The bondage is due to alienation of the self from the God. These poems seek redemption of the soul through devotion. It is also ingrained in the philosophy of the Gita where Krishna prescribes three ways: Jnana Yog, Bhakti Yog and Karma Yog, for salvation of the soul and merger with the ultimate truth. The poet expresses his thoughts in multiple forms such as prayers, songs, dialogues and monologues. He creates a deep sense of immersion and submission through his rhythmic voice. He strikes a note of trance like Chaitanya’s devotional voice, uplifting the readers from mundane to the sublime, carnal to spiritual and ephemeral to eternal. In Sheojee’s all poems there is incessant longing for meeting with the God. This relationship assumes different forms well-known to Indian literary, religious and philosophical schools of thoughts. The chemistry of this relationship, is that of God and devotee, master and servant, lover and the beloved, light and darkness. Here, one can notice a meeting

point of finite and infinite, which to believe him, is the main theme of his poetry.

In his introductory note titled "Why Journey Within" to this book, Sheojee Tewary writes about his revelations felt within "I felt various types of vibrations from within, I heard conversation of soul to soul mate. I also heard the conversation of power to super power. Where I tried to find the meaning of "I" and tried to realize the non-duality when both become one." "Illusion" leads the readers to the Advaita philosophy of Maya formulated by Shankara "Braham satyam, jagat mithya" (Brahman, that is ultimate reality, is only truth, and the world is an illusion). The poet begins by asking a question to God "*Is this world an illusion (Maya)?*" The poet traces it in phenomenal developments of nature and finally find himself trapped "*in the net of...illusion*" and prays, "*O my Lord!/You come yourself /and release me from the clutches of your Maya/...Without you,/ I become restless like a child*".

In "Meeting God" the poet feels the presence of the God everywhere and in everything. This poem is remarkable for its epiphany.

Sheojee's poetry is simple, metaphorical, metaphysical, philosophical and universal in its appeal. As a perceptive reader and student of literature and language while reviewing "Journey Within", I unconsciously explored the limitations of poet's newly acquired language. These could be amply discerned in the replication and interpretation of ideas of Kabir, Dayanand, and translation of many aphoristic statements taken in verbatim from the Upanishads, Vedanta and Hindu scriptures. To illustrate it. I quote from "Meeting God":

"It is love of God/...this is not an item of the market to be sold/It is not available in the market..."

The examples can be multiplied. The nuances of the rhythm, imagery, verse form, language are inevitably lost in many places. In such cases, the readers are left with mere statements either too prosaic or too poetic without being poetry. His

language is simple, verse is free, images are largely drawn from life, nature and cosmic reality. In his expressions, one finds ultra-modern idioms and phrases, fusion (of Hindi and English) words, phrases and Hindi lyrics too. In effect, his whole approach is apotheosis mood and mystery. His philosophical musings run from first to last page of this book. I recommend this book to all lovers of poetry and Indian philosophy. The price of the book is worth nuggets of gold in it.

Review Article of David Pike's Poetry Collection, *The Strand*

by

CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

The Strand, Poems 2007 to 2011, David Pike, Ligden Publishers, UK, 2012, pp.66, Price (UK): 4.99 Pounds

The Strand by David Pike, is a collection of his poems, which takes the readers to a poetic errand where natural and rural, urban and mundane, serenity and cacophony intermingle to create a world of human condition. What strikes most about variety and richness of David's poems, is his meticulous eye for details, objectivity of observations, synthesis of concrete and abstract, natural and mundane with philosophical undertones. Flicky Harrison rightly observes in the blurb of this collection "From the mighty majesty of Shakespeare, the brooding passion of Byron, it is always poetry that tells a tale of our time. Here is David Pike's new book, we have delightful set of pictures painted with words." Indeed, Pike is a master painter with homely tools, picturesque words and myriad colours of imagination. He creates scintillating pictures out of words and gives his observations a kaleidoscopic vision'. Pike is not only a chronicler of mundane objects and events but a gifted poet who uses his "faculty of imagination" (Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*), to weave them into an artistic pattern with sharp images and internal rhyme. In "Foreword" to this collection Ronald John perceptively suggests "He makes significance out of the everyday, that both tell something about them as well as revealing a deeper insight into their and their reader's humanity."

“The Strand” is a collection of 65 poems varying in themes, tone and ingrained consideration of class and culture. These poems depict numerous themes varying in magnitude and intensity viz natural and rural, nostalgia for the past, birds and landscapes, unwanted pregnancy, cosmetic surgery, vicissitudes of daily life, ironic observation of English life and challenges and strains of modern life. The first poem titled “Goodrington” beautifully captures the rugged beauty of the natural world which stretches over “*Dark orange sand*”, “*sloping land*”, “*cliffs more shed into sea*”, “*to the south Devon coast*” where tourists hang around. In this poem the serenity of the landscapes meets the wanton gaze of the tourists, “*pale coloured buildings*” cloak the “*higher green*” breaking the sublime serenity of the nature. These are the striking images bubbling with informative insights and torrents of internal rhymes. In another poem “Brixham”, the poet captures the mundane daily chores of life and breathes into them an ecstatic rhythm. Here one is overwhelmingly struck by a range of lucid, beautifully drawn pictures coloured with romantic imagination. The opening lines present sights and scenes with conciseness and cadence of masterly verse:

“Small pastel coloured houses / in terraced rows / with narrow channel streets / are pebble-dashed or spilled / on to a hill / in seemingly random fashion.”

The title poem “The Strand” is an example of Pike’s natural gift for fusing the commonplace observations of natural world with the temporality of human conditions. The tourists holidaying on the coasts, have been portrayed in all their falterings and demeanours vividly. These lines open the readers to the experiences, observations and voices of Pike unveiling the historical and cultural location of people, “*Plodding on in the bustling sea-side town*”.

“Their clothes are dated / but that doesn’t matter / you could say faded / jaded, not smart / they ghost around / unnoticed by most / as people kaleidoscope / in and out of focus / talking, squawking / with endless chatter...”

Pike's meticulous eye for detail can be seen in this elegiac quality of the aging holidaymakers and their dogs "...a small brown dog / alive but resembling / a stuffed toy, at heel / trundling on / as if on wheels". The poem sketches the bizarre human activities lending them deeper insights. The poet uses sharp images, ironising the situation lucidly and wittingly. In "Freezer Dip" and "Silica" the tussles of mundane world have been ironically transformed into comic strips. Other poems in this collection titled "The Carracks", "Portland", "The Hollow Way", "Carnell Trees", 'Heliograph' and "Lesser Spotted" paint landscapes, trees, rivers and coasts organized around themes and ideas of free world of nature. These poems take shape in an intellectual milieu and discover the manifestation of abstract ideas into philosophical strains like that of Shelley. These poems emphasize the autonomous world of nature without indulging into the particularities of social and co-modified actualities. However, that doesn't mean complete negation of city specific culture rather representing them through adventure, romance, holidaying spree exuding humour and bonhomie. "Carnell Trees" laments loss of natural resources caught into historical pace of urbanization in elegiac strains:

"...Carnell trees / that mainly in later years / succumbed to Dutch elm disease". "Sound Bites" presents nostalgic view of the poet in the wake of modernity and technological advancements, transforming the archetypes into modern symbols.

This poem seeks to establish the anthropological notion of evolution. The poet is comforted by the spirit of essence;

"...ancient trees smoulder below / places that remain / long after the seers have gone, / the essence is left, rightfully there / whispering in your inner year... / it belongs, / timeless, living on / in weathered sarsen stone, / that wind and rain / have known / for a millennia."

"Smiling Eyes" presents a beautiful picture of hectic, unruly crowd of the city mellowed by traffic rules. The poem unfolds its theme with the opening of the traffic light cataloguing the crowd as "rag taggle mob", "haphazard way", "a platoon of

cacophonous buffons” lurching “*out of tune*”, “*out of time*”. The poet manifests his poetic brilliance in use of free verse, internal rhyme and chiming devices which give this poem an elegant modern flavour. Usages like “*mardy folk*”, ‘*random foot*’, “*discordant trill*”, “*terra, terra boom, boom boom*”, “*sonic fart*”, “*miss-firing dustcart*” “*braided hats*” are not only suggestive but effective in associating the theme with words powered by internal rhyme, flow, cadence and onomatopoeia. One can read into his verse the poetic exuberance of Dylan Thomas and Walcott. Like Dylan, Pike is worth to be noted for his original, rhythmic, ingenious use of words and imagery. He is closer to Walcott in post-colonial notion of eco-poetics and mimicking the sounds of nature and human activities by creating the poetry of resonance and sounds. “*Wooster Sauce*” is a brilliant example of Pike’s experimentation with sounds internalised in his rhythmic voice and poetic reflection. It seems a great deal of technique has been used in construction of sounds that suggest cultural location. Constructed words like “*toddle pip, toddle-loo/cheerio*” suggest non-sensical chimes “*pip pip, yar yar nip nip and a wo-dee wo/ching ching, dry gin /...resounding whacko*” and in the last line “*toddle pip, toddle-loo/ cheerio*” as the poet says are “*oodles of time*”. Walcott wrote “...to be true to the internal tone of reflection you need to know the exact measure of the sound you are reflecting”. Pike knows it very well.

The other significant poems in this collection titled “*Tea*”, “*Morning TV*”, “*A Likeness*”, “*Boxes*”, “*Old Fashioned Way*”, “*Into the New*”. “*Frezer Dip*” and “*Wooster Sanca*” present commonplace daily chores of English life with felicity of expression, humour and irony. We have here, the cluster of images that are continually put into relation with one another. In “*Tea*” he captures the commonplace vicissitudes of life of English man, his struggles and disgust. The protagonist finds a solace in making tea as he returns to routine chores of life: “...*a time to make tea, / de-louse the dog / go to the zoo, / or something equally inviting*”. In “*Morning TV*”, Pike presents

the paradox of human relationship in ironic tone with tinge of humour. The whole poem runs in the direct narration. It is massively preoccupied with question of individual human relationship. Here Pike dramatizes the situation ironically.

It has structure of a dramatic monologue and climatic and anti-climatic situations. The poet gives the reader a narrative of attitudes and values of modern society and mechanized attitudes of individuals who prioritise their whims and fancies over mutual relationship. There are other significant poems in Pike's magnificent bouquet which present a panorama of British life-style, décor, fashions and pomp and shows. These poems are rooted in the modern world as they voice the mundane and material realities, tears, sighs and furs of the living and thinking beings. To Pike poetry is natural, a way of life and art that uplifts, ennobles, amuses and fills with optimism. It is an antidote to ennui and curses of modern life. These lines from "Laughing Giraffe" explain the poetic mission of Pike:

*"Write something pleasant/write something nice /
...optimistic subject.../ write something uplifting/
beguiling...laugh and amuse /and have a good go/if
that doesn't work/return to what you know".*

In the book under review the bright and sombre, light and serious, dry and humourous, natural and material go hand in hand to weave a world of lived realities. From first to last poem there is apparent buoyancy, pace and rhythms which keep the readers absorbed. His poems are simple and accessible to readers. He makes the readers feel with him the world of his observation. "The Strand" pulsates with heartfelt bustling of the poet with musical vibes. Pike observes that there are things that happen in our mental lives that could be reducible to our sense of perception as we can observe every day in our conduct.

I recommend this work for every student, teacher and lover of poetry.

**Different Hues of Life:
Review of Ra Sh's Poetry Collection,
*Architecture of Flesh***

by

DR. SANTOSH ALEX

***Architecture of Flesh A Collection of Poems* by Ra Sh
(Ravi Shanker), Published by Poetrywala, Mumbai,
Pages 79, Rs 225/-, 2015.**

In the last decade or so thanks to the world of internet, desktop publishing and small press production, poetry, as even the newspapers keep telling us, is once more a widely practiced and popular art form. Inferior anthologies tend to be like collapsed caramel puddings: a sploshy leak at the base which is unpleasing to the eye, and grainlessness between the teeth which spreads uneasy on the palate. In other words, a significant failure of form and substance. "Architecture of Flesh" the debut collection of poet and translator Ra Sh published by well-known publisher Poetrywala, an imprint of Paperwall Media and Publishing, Mumbai, fortunately is not a collapsed caramel pudding.

Ra Sh touches upon various topics and issues through the poems. The title poem "Architecture of Flesh" portrays the plight of women in our society especially dalits. Dalits and adivasis account for about a quarter of the Indian population, they are the primary victims of the ongoing development process. Dalit women face the worst expression of caste and gender discrimination. Violence is used against them to reinforce caste and gender norms. It is socially legitimized through the impunity which the perpetrators enjoy. The

perpetrators use their socio-economic and political power to silence dalit women in accessing justice.

You run the country from the city
 You have nothing to fear.
 You have brains. You have malls
 You have the metro and Parliament.

Denial of justice to dalits and adivasis and violence directed at them continues in India today despite official policies and declarations to the contrary. Considerable physical violence is inflicted on members of these deprived and marginalised communities as substantiated by official reports. Policing, far from being 'the professional imposition of a coherent moral consensus on society' is an intensely political activity with policemen often facilitating and participating in the violence not just against these communities but against minorities, other weaker sections and women. Look at these lines

In Gajapati, you
 are flesh, pounded into the black
 soil by booted pricks with brass buckles.
 exhibit numbers one not not to nine nine nine
 'Rogue tribal cunts' scooped out with
 The state's excavators.
 But, you are safe in the city.

Ra Sh expresses his anguish wherein women were raped and killed by security forces. He sympathises with them for the heinous crime.

In the poem "Stilled life" Ra Sh expresses his agony over the felling of trees. He names those trees which are not mere trees but were a part of Kerala's culture and milieu.

What was that tree,
 Memory fails,
 Puli, maavu, njaval, vaka
 Ilanji, teakku
 Aanjili, arrayal, koovalam, kanjiram
 Pala, ambazham, veppu, chandanam?

The fact is that many of these trees do not exist today. The poet laments the felling of these trees.

Another poem “Homing” speaks about the monotonous life we lead. “Nakli Nakli girl” is a nostalgic poem on childhood which most of us relate to. Whereas in “Dog day” Ra Sh sympathises with the pet animal dog. This poem throws light on the killings and atrocities done to dogs in the light of the events where stray dogs attacked people.

The anthology has many poems that are experimental in nature. Experimental poetry makes a special point of innovation, sometimes in the belief that current poetry is stereotyped and inadequate, but more often for its own style. “A to B, B to A, A & B”, “Warm is the war” and “Ka Kha Ga Gha” can be read on those lines. Here are the lines from “Ka Kha Ga Gha”

Ka Tvam Bale?/Who are you girl
Kanchanamala/ Kanchanamala
Kasyaputri?/ Whose daughter?
Kanakalatayah/ Kanakalata's
Kim te haste?/ What's in your hand?
Thalipatram/ A palm leaf.

Normally in poetry wherever words or phrases from another language is used the poet uses foot notes to explain the same. Ra Sh doesn't go with the traditional way and prefers to use the transliterated version of the sanskrit word in this poem.

In this collection, Ra Sh presents life with all its abiding features of haziness and spontaneity as a continuum where he confronts readers with copious forms: nature, God, religion and humanity. Thoughtful and reflective, his poems carry experiences of different hues of life. Revelations through these poems reflect on bigger and more versatile issues of life which have their own scheme of dispersal that is left to every individual to decipher and grapple with and finally to go with or without these dispersals.

**Poetry of all Reasons-n-Seasons:
Atreya Sarma's Book,
*Sunny Rain-n-Snow***

DR. VIVEKANAND JHA

***Sunny Rain-n-Snow*, U. Atreya Sarma, Partridge India,
2016, ISBN-10: 1482868547 | ISBN-13: 978-1482868548,
pp.158 , Rs 399/\$ 9.99 | Kindle Rs 169/\$ 2.54 | Flipkart Rs.
360 | EBOOK (Google Play) Rs.118.30**

The debut but an outstanding poetry collection of Atreya Sarma features sixty-three poems, divided into twelve sections, written mostly in free verse excluding rhyming endeavours in nine limericks, a sonnet, a ballad and a ballade. Known for editing, translation and book reviews this maiden poetic endeavour has added another feather in his cap and now he has cemented his place in the ever widening list of Indian English poets.

It is believed and observed that poets have a great passion for playing with words in the backdrop of imagination and creativity. In pursuit of doing so they make use of rhetoric, various figures of speech, ornamental and flowery words. As a result, using them in language becomes a habit and part and parcel of writings. Atreya Sarma too is not far behind in doing so and seeing the quantum of such devices here it would be pertinent to discuss only one figure of speech. He has taken the help of a host of alliterations to express his highly charged and deeply buried emotions, anguishes and feelings. Noted below are some of the plausible and cursory selections:

‘WWW: Woman’s World of Woes,’ ‘colourful cosmic
cornucopia,’ ‘top tranquility,’ ‘mushrooming mobile

towers,' 'metro marquee,' 'waiting waxing-gibbous-moon,' 'baby in a bathtub,' 'charmed by the chirrups,' 'the salubrious sunny-soaring-sylvan breath,' 'on the beach of semi-silvery sands/Shells and pebbles picking up,' 'duty at the dusk,' 'a worthy wreath of words,' 'a blooming baby is born,' 'This labial liaison!/ What a connubial celebration!,' 'Dream of diurnal dynamics,' 'A single sweep of sword,' 'words are damned duds,' 'mass-migrate thousands of miles,' 'sensitivity stupefied by seismic strokes,' 'Swimming snare,' etc.

Despoiling of nature by evil mongers and mining mafia has become almost every day news and this theme is aptly exploited in the poem, 'Hills.' The poem is pithy but pregnant with prolific thoughts:

God turned
All hardness
Into hills

Harder-hearted man
Entered
And began blasting them

The poet has suitably and adequately delineated the various facets of nature with 'pennant of pride.' He is found to be shedding tears of joy in the summer in the poem 'Oh, Emperor of Seasons!' In 'Terrace of Twilight,' "Blithe boys howl, bowl, and bat in their narrow-streets." Lightning which is defined as a sibling of cloud "comes along/ And helps her with his dazzling torch" ('Cloud's sibling'). And the poet feels "like a baby in a bathtub," 'In the bosom of a breezy hill.'

The poem, 'Lip-lapping' is potent enough to stir the passion that got dormant on account of day to day drudgery, depression, stress and anxiety:

They bite mine, and they crush mine
They extract the juices, they release the juices
They quaff the juices, they drain the juices
They gulp the juices, they discharge the juices
They charge the juices, they recharge the juices

The love and passion gradually achieving its climax, which results in:

Lips full, what a pull!
This labial liaison!
What a connubial celebration!

Themes of love and various 'Faces of friendship' are delineated in all shapes and forms. Despite mixed blessing of various 'Relations & equations', two lives 'Made for each other' sings of two bodies breathing and sighing through single heart. Here is an example of reciprocal relations being depicted, propelling one to whisper, 'Ah, what a friendship!':

Giving is your nature, taking is mine.
Isn't then our friendship mutually fine?!

Treachery, falsehood and dishonesty have become the order of the day. Evils have no boundary and they are scattered in abundance in all parts of the world. Truth is panting under their ambient condition and it has simply become:

... a casualty
Where minds and hearts refuse to meet,
Where artifice and interests
Glibly play their role.

Words in isolation don't make much difference but it is the power of association and juxtaposition that counts and such distinction makes someone eligible for an author, a scholar or a poet. The dog is beautifully and succinctly summed up in the poem, 'Unpaid watchman.' The title itself speaks volumes about the subject:

Yet he wags his tail in gratitude
And stays a lifelong shadow –
That free unpaid watchman
The simple dog.

Whether the poet has been a student of science is not revealed through his projected biography but some of the poems or

stanzas depict that he has been in good rapport with the topics of science and technology as he asserts whether, “Hardware or software or sciences/ They are the undisputed leader!” ((‘Shalom! Shalom! Shalom!)). Titles of poems like ‘Baby relativity,’ ‘Human orbits,’ ‘Phantasmagoria,’ ‘Vertigo,’ and ‘Orectic oddities’ too certify this fact. The following passage from ‘Shalom! Shalom! Shalom!’ bears some popular terminologies of physics:

Small, yet beautiful; tiny, yet mighty;
Very ancient, yet ultra-modern!
Forced to be centrifugal ...
And two millennia later
Resolved to be centripetal!

In the light of manifold and comprehensive themes, the book under review is not only a volume of poetry but can also be called a complete collection of a poet. Very few and far between are such slim volumes as Sunny Rain-n-Snow covering such a wide subject of feminine issues, nature, permutations and combinations of day to day life, spiritual and romantic love, technical and non-technical objects, priceless possessions of Indiana and Americana, social pros and cons, subtle and obvious expressions, occasional and frequent voices, metrical and non-metrical forays, prologue, monologue and epilogue, etc.

History of literature witnesses that the first or second volume of a poet who earned name and fame in the arena of poetry is generally spent in experimentation with metrical composition, lure for language and passion for literature. In contrast to this, Atreya Sarma has shown a great deal of maturity in this debut volume itself. His poetry covers a myriad of themes and draws its subject from all walks of life, acknowledging the fact that he is widely read, travelled, creative and ready to take up any literary challenges cropping up from the wear and tear of time and thus making him a pioneer in shielding and safeguarding poetry from the burgeoning influence and menace of internet, electronic, social media, scientific and technical innovation and invention.

CONTRIBUTORS

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