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VerbalART

A Global Journal Devoted to
POETS AND POETRY

A Peer-Reviewed Print Journal

Vol.- 7, Issue - 1
April - June 2023

Chief Editor:

Dr VIVEKANAND JHA

Associate Editor:

Dr RAJNISH MISHRA

Review Editor:

Dr CHANDRA SHEKHAR DUBEY

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POETRY

AMTHEYST

Conversation with the Devil

cross-legged on the Victorian velvet chair
in awe of high ceilings and swirling chandeliers
made me flash back to mother's music jewel box
that lifted open to a pirouetting princess ballerina

the intricate design of the Persian art that layered
the accent wall had brought a halo of tranquillity
to the stodgy aristocrat air like a mandala in a temple

suave in his Attolini suit with a 1930's demure
gold cufflinks engraved with the letter D but
he left me wondering why the hands on his
waistcoat pocket watch had not move past three?

lingering between the living and the dead
I rejected the priest's hell renunciations as
highly inappropriate for this was not the time
to start making enemies, overwhelmed with
curiosity I stared into his silver fox eyes and
asked "so, what are you offering?"

the clock ticked from three, I chose heavens peace
but I will always remember that conversation

ANDREW SCOTT

Away From Here

See the conflicted look in your eyes.
What to do next, follow the head
or let the heart lead the way.
Emotions can cloud everything.

You see that you want to leave
the place you are in now.
Unhappiness lines your eyes.

No one to talk too, to truly share
those feelings and aspirations
locked away for a tomorrow
that may be never seen.

I am not a saviour, a simple man
with an open heart, hand
that is willing to share with you
and give with all my spirit.

A chance is all we need
to have our own time
in a place away from here.

ANNA BANASIAK

The Waves

I'm watching
Slow string of time
Going into non-existence
of the rhythm of the ocean into the future of the past
my thoughts drift away there
where the word became body
my soul soars high
darkness
absorbs fears and anxieties
I close my eyes
only the echo of God is heard
among the waves

AVDHESH JHA

Urban Culture and Value

With the growing needs and the limited capacity of the cities,
It is the increase in the proportion of people and manipulation;
The culture with existence of capitalism and readiness to do or die;
Unaltruistic; urban culture is the culture of unlimited limitation.

With the culture of technology, it is adding to the concentrations of power,
With government capitals, corporate headquarters and the high profile;
With economic culture and the only culture of investment and returns,
Weird; urban culture is the culture of position and power in a while.

With innovation and technological advent, it is culture of new opportunities;
It is the culture of adding to life style with networking; branding and adaptation;
With entertainment; outing; organising; creating norms and its unadherence;
Beyond understanding; urban culture is the culture of shorts and imitation.

With strength in extravagance; carelessness and social networking;
The unprofessional professionalism, it is lack of indemnity and humanity;
Prone to risk; it is being unnatural and individualistic; the culture of mask;
The culture of who cares; Urban culture is the culture of lack of serenity.

The culture of affaire, feebleness, unhealthy competition and comparison;
Being needy and shabby within but luxurious, lazy, lavish life style and alike;
It is the need of autonomy; the culture of drinking, smoking and fake cheers;
Amusing and abusing; Urban culture is the culture of life based on others like.

Being dissolute, impatient, nuclear, hypocrite; insensitive for others and self;
Star gazing, unaffluent, difference in action and words and show-off is urban value;
Liability, flaneurity, controversy, tinselry, self-absorbed is wealthy urban value,
Receptive and deceptive; The life of fake world is the urban culture and value.

BARBRA NIGHTINGALE

My Brother's Knife

is made of exotic wood from Africa.
It must be oiled, buffed to a savannah glow,
never machine washed, always by hand.

My brother's knife is made for chopping,
slicing almost transparent onions and cucumbers.
Even tomatoes, it's that sharp.

My brother's knife has not yet harmed me,
but its potential is exponential
to the thinness of my skin.

My brother's knife is mine, given as a gift.
It does not have a thirst for blood,
the violence of rivets or honing the blade forgotten.

My brother's knife has no intention
of hurting you, but if you come at me,
this knife will mess you up.

BEVERLY MATHERNE

Haiku Poems

Poem 1

In my garden in summer
what I thought falling blossoms
was snow.

Poem 2

In summer sunset
tiger Lilies
ignite.

Poem 3

Along snow bank
beneath broken ice
daylilies long for sun.

Poem 4

Meadow of trillium
along M-28. Red
bloom ablaze.

COLIN JAMES

**The Local Arrives Screaming
Metal Brakes on Metal Rails**

I booked a romantic getaway
at an exotic spa.
Your husband followed us
like an imperative.
Left little signs
that he was around.
Chewing gum wrappers
and matchsticks with erections.
Found it difficult to concentrate
gawking through the jealousies.

DANIEL THOMAS MORAN

Falling in Love, Again

Romance is a package,
neatly wrapped to
conceal its contents.
It leaves us to judgements,
on but only the face of it.

Lovers ever wishing to be
all lovers might wish for,
We struggle in dimmed light
to make out its features.

They say that soulmates
are found, not in the wilds
of distant shores and skies,
But in the places within the
longing limits of heart's reach.

Yet, we will swim in the scents,
Harken to all the syrupy songs
of newborn love and longings,
Dancing the dances of angels.

Until comes the certain evening,
when we can focus clearly, within
the penumbras and withering light,
understanding it is time, again,
to go.

DANIEL THOMAS MORAN

To a Man Who Was My Father

28 April 2019

The day they
buried you,
I stayed away,
in a place safe
and far removed.

That morning, I
went out to wander,
among the lenient slopes,
which cradle a place
that is my home.

It was that time, to
remove the leaves that
had succumbed last fall,
collect the twigs shaken
loose by the callous winds
of a long winter.

Such sweet drudgery
is essential, to unfasten
the useless past, and clear
for spring's children,
a path to the sky.

DUANE VORHEES

Tell Me. Are You Sure?

I wonder if once half our limbs were wings, like a fowl,
or if they all had thumbs once. Or is that only now?
The asker wants to know.
Do we see us in mirrors, or need a fluoroscope?
Are lovers on the level or are they on a slope?
This doubter wants to know.
Was Tigris always Tigris or once was it Paradise?
Was Jesus a carpenter or always just a christ?
This skeptic wants to know.
Are the answers on the internet? Or in ourselves?
Or should I communicate with oracles and elves?
This searcher wants to know.
We learn through maturity? But ages are cages....
Or from these ancient books of fingered, faded pages?
Don't we all want to know?

GARY BECK

Solution

Social Engineering
is a skilled activity
that can manipulate the news,
present fake facts as truth,
deceive the passive public
into believing the big lie,
and completely fool us
so we don't know what's real.
Yet it can be a tool
to help us get along
with bosses, managers,
in personal relations.
So it is up to us
to learn what is,
perceive what isn't
always trying our best
to improve our condition.

H.L. DOWLESS

Born A Traveling Man

I was born a traveling man,
But now I'm having thoughts of settling down,
I've hung out on golden sand,
I've drifted all around.
In many a stream for gold I've panned,
I've moved from town to town.
I've rolled to get away from the police,
I've been from sea to shining sea.

I'm thinking more of finding a small house
Somewhere on the edge of some town.
Maybe I can drive an airport shuttle bus
Hauling other drifters around.
Then I can labor from day to day,
Having what I need,
Until I've been there twenty years
And I finally make it into the grave,
Then such shall at long last be the end
Of this traveling man's history.

I grew up being mother nature's child,
Taking my game, fish, and fruit from the earth.
I dwelt in the backwoods for quite a while,
I suppose knowing this is good for what it's worth.
I've worked at least a hundred jobs,
Moving from town to town.
The clothes on my back is all I've got,
But I'm wealthy in the many unique experiences I've found.

Now I'm tired and sixty years old,
I only want to rest,
No longer can I tolerate the heat and cold,
Nor can I pass any arduous test.
This little house not far from the sea
I've found,
Is the perfect one for me.
I can find my grits and coffee here in town,
Or stop at the small shop on front street,
Where life proceeds without much sound.

J.T. WHITEHEAD

From “The Second Book of Job”

LVIII

One Job watched the snowflakes fall, innocent enough, being delicate, “pure as snow,” angelic, fluttering, living soon-spent lives, returning to Earth. He said, “I know, I know,” as if speaking to them. “I fall, and I’m looking to find a new home, too.”

He shoveled the driveway. He shoveled all he could. The sidewalk, even. You *know* . . . you know how it is, like solving a puzzle all night, in a zone, focused, forgetful.

He’d lost a lot, but not life. Now snowfall, symbolizing dirt at a burial, was something he fought, until out of breath, never quite knowing he fought against death.

J.T. WHITEHEAD

From “The Second Book of Job”

XVIII

One *Job* had faith, another had the Law, another a Spirit that did not show. A Higher Power is not enough, though. Consider the life of Vincent van Gogh, and then again, maybe it is enough just to believe. What then becomes the stuff on which Life itself depends? One's own gaze, canvass, a pair of shoes, sunflowers?

Grace is not something one captures with the brush. And it took a telescope to confirm
the firmament's spinning and swirling rush of life light years away.

Job grew un-firm.

Job hungered. Lost his ear. Grew paranoid. Lost his mind.

But he *saw* life in the void.

JOHN GREY**The One Who Remembers**

She's the last one alive who remembers.
Her hair is grey and shining.
And her skin is barely wrinkled,
a rose-pink that's also petal-soft.
She gets around with help of a walker
but her mind requires no assistance.
She remembers. And her lilting voice
speaks of long ago as if it's happening now.
Photographs can't take me back in time
but she can.
And my own recall stops somewhere
in the middle of my first school year.
With her assistance, I can work my
way back from there,
down branches of the family tree,
right to those outer layers of the trunk.
Thanks to her memory,
I've added some history to mine.
When her tongue finally goes mute,
the stories will still resonate.
I will be the one who remembers
that she remembered.

JOSEPH HART

Maxx

When the little kitten
Sticks his nose into my nostril,
Bites my ear
Or sleeps against my chest -
I think there is a God
Or maybe love
Or maybe something.
But what's the use?
We're aging anyway.

K.V. RAGHUPATHI

Learning

I watched my mom in stitched saree
cook when I was a school-going.
Only by watching and doing
can you learn and grow,
she told me before burning firewood.

Years later
separated from home
I stumbled
when I cooked,
but mom's words in my ears
ringed like temple bells.

Now I make my own
to differentiate from others
every item, and eat
sharing partly with my visitors
the birds and squirrels
that frequented my house.

KARLA LINN MERRIFIELD

First Friday in February

Ten songs to no one later
a blushing first-quarter moon
dips below the mangroves
as rapid-fire fireworks closed the rodeo

Ten elegies for no one later
Venus and Mars reflect in ripples
on a slow tidal river otherwise invisible
as muffler-free dragsters scream

Ten dreams of no-one-I-know later
Orion and Cassiopeia shine their stories
across the Milky Sea to our solar system
as tonight's ten sirens slaughter ten secrets

LES WICKS

A Plan

Tobias will build a forest
for the wallabies to graze
for him to raze.
He is the world to himself... a symphony.
Pipes wheeze up,
strings fret about within their housing,
orchestras of glut have no choice.
They will all get out again
cuddle & infect a whole new audience.

Crash music, a hat of horrendous hymns
seven deadly viruses
as the ocean rises to take a bow.
We beg Tobias to give us more
that has been the answer for centuries
&repetitive behaviour is the hallmark
of robust mental health (?)
plus a great (if one-tracked) memory.

LES WICKS

Apologies

Avoided every exercise
until I shuffled like a lego volcano.
Now I stretch & twitch 'till
I wake up or sleep.
All my beloved drugs gave me up.

Someone said take silence instead –
let the gyruses mellow, even out.
Discovered my voice had fallen to a croak.
Told one's voice is just muscle & intent
use it or lose it.
So I train, dialogue with the lords. *No!*

MAHATHI

I Wait With Smiles

Into my dreams he comes and hugs me tight.
When I awake, he slips into my heart.
He flashes like a star at dim twilight
and at midnight dips like a meteor hot.

On moonless nights while walking all alone
pensive; deep dwelling in his thoughts, I feel
his hands around my waist... smell his cologne
and sense his slowly grasping bosom steel.

I ask the glow'ng fireflies, beseech the deer
and beg the owls standing on sandy mound
whether they saw my beau, afar or near
and eavesdrop for his silent footsteps' sound.

He's miles away, I know behind my piles
of muse. I feign poise veiling fading smiles.

MARC ISAAC POTTER

Regret

The sadness, agitation,
Regret -
There is rape in your future.

Yes, it is extremely creepy for
Me to say so.

My wife went to a women's retreat,
(There is a rape in your future)

One all retreat leader asked the room.
"How many of you have NOT been sexually assaulted in some way?"

In the room of about 150 women,
2 women raised their hands.
(This is a true occurrence - it really happened)

My wife and I have 5 daughters,
There is a rape in our future,
More than 1
More than 2
I am crying over the pancakes
As our girls come out of their
Bunk beds for breakfast.

MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON

Bowl of Black Petunias

If you must leave me, please
leave me for something special,
like a beautiful bowl of black petunias –
for when the memories leak
and cracks appear
and old memories fade,
flowers rebuff bloom,
sidewalks fester weeds
and we both lie down
separately from each other
for the very last time.

MITHIL JHA

Right or Wrong

With perspectives being situational,
Doubtful is absoluteness of truth;
For every enemy there is a friend,
And in every enemy there is a friend;
For every enmity there is a reason,
And for each time there is a season;
For each vice there is a virtue and
In every wicked there is a wise;
Being two sides of the coin, both,
The good and bad sail together;
Only fact is the perspective,
The situation and observation;
Just as 6 from one side
Remains 9 from other side;
As well, the fictitious direction
And the idea of our existence.

NELS HANSON

The Shadow

Out of office and ready
to move on for
some other kingdom
in the morning light
Confucius cast a shadow
across a yellow field of
flowering yarrow and
the next day and years
after that the shadow
remains, each day a little
darker but still silent as
a ghost about to speak.

NGO BINH ANH KHOA

The River that Once Was

What used to be a humming beast
That slithered near the town,
Within whose hue of sun-soaked blue,
The fishes swam around,
Is now a silenced, barren corpse,
Of water all devoid,
With cans of tuna tossed away
Stuck to the land, destroyed.

NGO BINH ANH KHOA

Revival

A burned-out phoenix
from out its ashen remnants
regains the heavens—
the way my racing heart soars
the first time your lips touch mine.

NOEL KING

Matriarch

My oldest was born on the 14th of October,
I ring him that day.

My second came out on January 4th,
I call him every year.

My third arrived the last day of December,
she's usually here for New Year.

My fourth was a tough one, in heat, July 15th, my sister,
their aunt helped, took to the beach with one, two and three.

My fifth was a still-birth, 12th February. We called her Valerie,
I take her flowers on that date.

My other children have children
these days, and I must recall their birthdays

and sometimes, sometimes but not always,
they remember mine on December 25th.

PARINITA RATNAPARKHI

The Rainy Season

The Rainy season,
Drizzling water
Drops of rain,
For seeds, the drops of life
For water bodies, the time to rejuvenate.

The rainy season,
Drizzling water
Drops of rain,
For saplings, the hopes to grow
For creatures and creations, the time to delve.

The rainy season,
Drizzling water
Drops of rain,
For Earth, Ahh! The cycle of season,
For life, the cycles of colors and shades.

The rainy season,
Drizzling water
Drops of rain,
For existence, the essential phenomenon
For God, the phenomenon of art, beauty and expression.

PATRICIA NIKOLOVA

No Darkness

lately i think of you as i sit by the riverbank
but there is no river

you and i salute the trees in the forest
but there is no forest

then we feed our bread to birds
but there is no bread

then happily we're back home
but there is no home

then we hold our little child
but there is no child

seated then, we dine on words
without a thing to say

then in the gloom our shadows merge
without any darkness

without darkness

no darkness
there's none

PETER J. DELLOLIO

Scrambling Antique

Scrambling antique fetid baked *Now, Voyager!*
I go into a blissful trance when I am on a beach.
Gladiator briefcase not very nocturnal penguins riot.
The silence of the night is mystical.

PRASANTA KUMAR PANDA

A Memorable Question on Mother

When you were there
We always felt
You loved us more than you're capable of.

Nights were short
As you'd see us as soon as possible for you in dawn.
Days were short
As you'd wish we're home at the end of the day.

Keeping us as we should have been as your children was more
than a ask.
Yet did we ever try to keep you in place you deserved when you
were there;
And now when you are no more to say anything about it as
consolation!

What we're now and what you did for us to be us now
Makes sense to us now.
But what happened to you then we could not know.

When you're no more;
We remember you,
But can we say
We remember you more than we are capable of!

RAKESH BHARTIYA**Toxic Men and Women**

One may be as harmful as carbon dioxide
Another may be as dangerous as carbon monoxide
No scientific data of world would reflect that
No social survey anywhere could reveal that
Year after year, everywhere, all such toxic men and women
Full of bad conduct, bad behaviour and bad intention
Suffocate and even kill lot many good men and women

All within the four walls of home or work-place
They exist, roam, conspire and cunningly operate
They rob good men and women of peace and happiness
They are the source of much of their unhappiness
Year after year, everywhere, these toxic men and women
Suffocate and even kill lot many good men and women
The symptoms of heart-attack, hypertension etc. are illusory
Innocent and good people are actually killed by toxic men and women

O wise men with impressive degrees in science or sociology!
Do accept your limitations on not recognizing this criminology
All your data, studies, research etc. are just imperfect
Your theories do not reflect this branch of criminology
Open your eyes! Come out of your air conditioned chambers!
Look at the disturbing truth within homes and work-places
Year after year, everywhere, these toxic men and women
Suffocate and even kill lot many good men and women.

RAKESH BHARTIYA

My Best Friend

You can't be really blamed if you can't correctly guess
After all, that type of concentration is difficult in this mess
It keeps me grounded well, very very close to reality
It helps me in assessing my life in its totality
Amongst all shouts of praise driven by selfish interests
It whispers in my ears the futility of those noises
It travels with me when I am climbing the hill upbeat
It also travels with me while I go down in an insulting retreat
Finally, let me introduce to you my best friend named Pain
So persistent, so consistent and ever so present friend Pain.

RICK HARTWELL**Granddaughter's Bad Hair Day**

Again, the family seems embalmed by rain;
not a funeral, just frozen inertia. Gray day,
lowering clouds, sheets of rain beating
staccato rhythms on the roof and leaving
river runnels on the window panes.

Sidewalk smell of rain insinuates itself
through the door, opened as the granddaughter
readies herself for the dash to the car,
disclaiming loudly of the disaster that will befall
her extended, braided hair and befoul her makeup.

An hour of preparation, ruined in a moment;
she will add these to the reasons to hate school.
I tell her that some like their women spritzed,
but she doesn't find this funny at all as
her face becomes streaked with rain,

as if she were crying, and the windows
in the neighborhood appear like the eyes of
leering faces mocking her teenage humiliation;
just another Monday to start the new week and
anger the minor gods of emerging adolescence.

ROBERT L. MARTIN

My Seat in the Sky

With my arms reaching up over head,
I can feel the clouds sleeping in their bed.
I can smell their sweet breath so fresh aloft,
Up through the effervescent air so soft.

I can see winding meadows below so clear
From my lofted chair with heaven so near.
I can see the trees as if they're my children,
And the dark forests as if they're my friend.

I can see rising rivers as if they're a brook,
A behemoth as a sheep with a timid look,
A hurricane as a sea of slow revolving pearls,
Or a tornado whittled down to a gentle whirl.

Mother Nature is amidst
The taming of the tempest,
From where I can see
From my seat in the sky.

ROBERT L. MARTIN

Chameleon Clouds

Clouds change from the rising sun
into the sunset from their day on the run,
and colors bleed into colors
like chameleons just like their shifting mothers.

Nature's a painter with an iridescent eye
at the easel looking out at the inconsistent sky,
the moving waves of the drifting clouds
and the colors they keep as they stop to browse.

Beauty is in the sunrise as the day begins
and in the sunset according to earthly disciplines.
She changes colors that enchant the heart
and keeps the rage from coming apart.

Clouds are like chameleons with colors that shift.
They float up above the hills and forever drift.
They are like a kaleidoscope that never settles down,
changing colors and keeping off the ground.

I looked to the sky this morning and lo behold
a purple cloud that changed to gold.
And then the sun moved in a westward direction.
Then it turned red before the sun kissed the ocean.
Then the cloud turned black beyond my sight
and became a mystery of the cryptic night.
Yes there is magic in the skies there is.

ROGER G. SINGER

Resurrected

you gave me voice
under a ceiling
of stars
where I spoke
the breath
of your name
onto the waves
nearby
as we sat
beneath a
flooded moonlight

where I always
see you

RON SAMUL

Dreams of Icarus

I told you
the sun was absent
in my dream sky.

Without opening your eyes,
you said, "That's okay,
you're just different."

I've dreamt of whales
breaching upon rocks,
dying in low moans,

Of apocalyptic skies
refined in pixelating hell fire.
We all choked in the plume.

In scenes without the sun
everyone knows what happened
in dreams they weren't in.

If I can stay,
tease out why
I dream dim dreams,

I might attempt
something beautiful,
something conspired,

And act on a deceit
that will finally
crack the ceiling.

Rising up in the murk, I razor cut
a hole in my subconscious
to give those sad fantasists illumination.

I won't survive, slashing and stabbing,
recoiling back and landing sullied and broken,
in a ray of sunlight, so long denied.

I will look up, as the crowd gathers to hear
my last words, "That's the sun."
They will look sad and say, "We know."

SALONI KAUL**Celebrations all on in Earnest**

In each and every lifetime there appears that phase
When all your yearnings get granted like matters drilled,
Your far-flung dreams realised in minutest days,
Your impossibly distant whims and fancies all fulfilled.
Then towering tallest mountains all say 'yes',
Red blue stars grant boons in a silvery twinkle,
Even coral pink sandy deserts with happiness acquiesce
And all the firmaments above benediction sprinkle.
Inaudibly they then agree with all you have to say
As though they've never once opposed or contradicted you,
Not once, not twice, all turned their back the other way,
Believe me, this that happens all at once is all true!
Forget forgive the past misgivings when this moment lands,
For only celebrations galore are in store for you right where you
stand.

SALONI KAUL

Converse all Along

In moments all tender inalienable
Draw me incontrovertibly aside
Away from company where vulnerable
Joys sorrows out of thought and usage here reside
As inconspicuously we both talk
In indeterminate unassailable seclusion
To easily arrive taut as a tight-rope walk
At these linked inextricably threaded indisputable conclusions.

Allure me on to those highest of planes in fable
Effectually alone unparalleled
And audibly say all the lofty things ineffable,
Decorously already all feasible, hand-shelled
In manner reasonably acceptable
To the total reserved exclusion laudable
Of all else.

SAM SMITH

Mock Sonnet 34

On night shift I recognised their voices in their snores.
The makeshift rehab unit was three terrace houses
knocked together, sets of stairs kept either end and
making it difficult to monitor. I'd listen from
the office below to footsteps above shuffling and
creaking to the lavatory, its whooshing flush
and the cistern's gurgling refill, shuffle and creak
back, bedroom door clicking closed. On that mixed
unit I'd re-listen. And to be certain I'd go up one set
of stairs, take a quiet walk through the long corridor,
come down the other stairs. Wasn't only the few women
my concern: while in the world outside men having sex
with men was now tolerated, in there, given all their
vulnerability, any pairing could be seen as exploitation.

SARAH DAS GUPTA

The Unquiet Grave

Beneath the green there is no rest,
The fields of whispering grass
 he hears no more.

Seasons with drifting snow,
 Or burning suns
Springs of bursting buds and early blooms
 he sees no more.

His garden neglected, gone to seed,
 his wine undrunk.

SEAN BECKETT

After a Funerary Inscription

WHAT A SON SHOULD DO FOR A FATHER
THE FATHER DID FOR THE SON

Well on my way to getting us both lost,
Dad gently suggests that I use my phone.
He's right. I've been betrayed, again, by mossed
liars hiding behind their own stiff cones--
these cedars have no shame. And Dad pretends,
when I explain, again, for the fourth time,
my current life plan as our new trail wends,
bends, and warps every way but a straight line,
that it is news to him. Encouraging
me with quiet, listening ears that I,
forgetfulness aside, could flourish in
life. Even if I can't read a map right.
We find the parking lot; he drives us home.
I continue telling him things he knows.

TONY CURTIS

Last walk at Lydstep

The village is locked-down
but only I can tell tonight, I'm the only
witness to the dark, still lane and the closed pub.
From across the fields I can hear the sea.

Lights glow in a few homes, but the swings
and tennis nets at Celtic Haven Holidays
are slack and unused, the freshly painted
houses and stable blocks will be empty this season.

The place had been a turkey farm which supplied the *QE2*
and my mother; each Christmas for two decades
she'd drive up to us with a bird on the back seat.
Mum died years back and the house sale's going through.

Eleven years ago to the week, Withybush Hospital,
in her ninety-first year. As it should be.
Her heart gave out as ours dare not do
with the hospitals full to breaking now.

So many stars tonight in a perfect, black sky
that brings light from dead worlds and past times.
And stars at my feet – the first flush of wild garlic
with its fresh stink of sweet/sour breath

announcing the cruelest month.
My aunt Annie, the Pembrokeshire charmer,
would have been out foraging and wrenching them up
to gather the bulbs for potions and cures.

Warts, agues and women's troubles: for pennies
she ministered to family and neighbours.
A farm girl before the First War, the plague of 'Nineteen,
then an ex-soldier's wife, a smallholding near Kilgetty.

There's the Plough, Orion's Belt, the North Star,
and countless others I don't recognise.
No winking lights from the transatlantic planes,
now we are shrinking into ourselves, cancelled flights,

the world curling back into itself
for safety, and in fear.
This is the reckoning point, the date,
all manner of events and lives will be defined by this year.

Though the fields at the back of us are newly ploughed,
a flurry of gulls and crows jabbing at the fresh worms;
this afternoon there were hens let loose and scattered
across the empty road. One perched on our wall.

This county's a long way from anywhere,
and closed to visitors now: the police run checks.
Our Headland's been an Iron Age promontory fort,
a narrow strip to defend with the sea at your back.

In the war mum's friend Reg had held a rope
over the edge near Whitesheet Rock above the crashing sea
for school mates to raid the crevice nests for gulls' eggs.
'Big and rich, but tasting of fish. Still, we was so hungry.'

BOOK REVIEWS

1

Songs of Immortality: A Hymn to Humanity

ABU SIDDIK

(Songs of Immortality| A Collection of Poems | Hemanta Pramanik | Authorspress, New Delhi, 2020 | ISBN: 978-93-90459-93-3|Page: 114| INR: 295 |\$ 25)

Hemanta Pramanik is a widely published bilingual poet, short story writer, editor and translator from West Bengal, India. His keenness of observation, his sympathy for the working masses, his lucid language, and his belief in humanity and the “multi-ethnic diversity” of India (“Intolerance” 52) make his debut collection of poems, *Songs of Immortality* a pleasing experience. It is his silent protest against the current culture of money, the market, media, and sex. Dr Katta Rajamouly in his Foreword rightly said, “This collection reflects the truth that he has a sensitive heart to evince his concerns for society through the medium of creative writing” (10).

His collection has altogether 70 poems of plural taste and dimension. The book is dedicated to “all the working-class people of this world.” In the Preface, the poet says:

Songs of Immortality are the songs of eternal labour of the working-class people on this earth....people of the lower

strata of society, the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden, the exploited, the discriminated, the backward and the marginal still endeavour to relish the taste and flavour of happiness in life out of their day-night slavery and diligence....they are the wheels of civilization and the backbone of mankind. Their works in the farming lands, the industrial areas, in mines, in construction sites, in transportation systems, shops and workshops and even in contracted slavery in domestic houses and mansions bring no tears in the eyes of the rich and the powerful....my heartfelt musings on them are really a tribute to their lives and relentless service to humanity.

The poet has said all that needs to be said. His cause, his moral vision, his sympathy for the underdogs, his pains and hopes in a rapidly changing India where the gap between the hoarders of wealth and the millions of Indians who are living on a paltry income is ever widening, make him a poet of harsh reality. A casual look at any of his poems makes one realise that he is not writing for pleasure-seekers. His poetry speaks – speaks for the toiling men, women, and children – speaks for “Truth against lies”, “Warning any danger distant”, “Illuminating the world thoughts/ As do the bright sunrays,” (“Poet” 82).

On Nature

He has categorised the poems into four broad areas – Nature, Mankind, Love and Almighty. His 13 ‘nature’ poems strongly appeal to our five senses. Seasonal vagaries and their effect on people’s moods, the sky, the moon, the rain, the flora and fauna of Bengal villages, and festivals of Bengal have been keenly observed and portrayed with his customary ease and grace. His lines, “When Nature is playful with rains,/ Water flows through earth’s pores and veins,/ Greenery follows here and there/ With others we have joys to share.” (“Nature in Rain” 31) are a source of joy for the elderly and the children alike. His imagery, “The large Simul tree beside the way/ Standing alone like a

maid,/ Being robed in flowers unnumbered/ To welcome Spring" ("The Beauty I Admire" 37) or, his portrayal of the Autumn, "What a fantastic sight/ of the sun's dazzling light!/ Reflected on the blue sky,/ heaps of cottons fly/ above the trees' headlines," ("Autumn" 36) or, his capture of an evening scene, "This time the vermillion glow in the west/ Hiding our nearest star beyond the horizon,/ Tired wings in groups come back to nest in haste." ("Evening Bliss" 33) – all are so dear to the nature-lovers. We find a Wordsworthian sensibility, Keatsian beauty, a Blakeian song of innocence in this section.

On Mankind

Burning and cross-cutting issues of child labour, migratory mass, dehumanization and objectification of women, sorrows of our elderly citizens, terrorism, falsity and cunningness of our race, masks we wear in our public and private dealings, intolerance, violence, riots, rapes, the barbarity of machine age, etc. have found a befitting place in the section. His depiction of "the pale faces of humanity", the poor, "The guinea pigs they are/ in the labs of greed,/ from the eagles' clutches/ never they be freed." ("The Poor" 49), his anxiety for the migratory workers "Wandering the pale faces of humanity,/ From arid deserts to lush plains", "Life beating in hungry stomach", "Trudging legs on endless miles" ("Migration a Curse" 51), his worries on "fraud, unrest, disharmony" ("Intolerance" 52), his thoughts on rape, "They are the inhumans./ How many Nirbhayas could/ In exchange in their lives/ Satisfy their ungratified lust!" (Who Deflower Women" 57), his stand against patriarchy, "You see me a woman,/ not as a human./ Come out of patriarchy....We are complementary." (Woman also Human" 59), his views on modern-day parenting, "New-born is weaned,/ service the rival./ Mothers pursues identity/ keeping children in crèches" ("Trends" 61), his pains in watching "the soil marked with/ bloody footprints of war,/ in garden and park, playground and

school” where “Terror strangles a child” (“Endangered Childhood” 62), his compassion for the elderly, “Old age resembles a yellow leaf/ among the green, tender leaves/ yet to fall on the ground.” (“Old Age” 64), his musings on death and doomsday, “A ‘last day’ appears/ in everyone’s life,/ to sleep forever” (“Last Day” 68), his lines on the memory of his mother’s death, “After her incineration I envision/ Her presence in soil, air and water,” (“Memory her Name” 80), his love for the little ones and his cry against the war and destruction, “justice and peace desired/ war-play not required/ let this world of ours be/ of little boys ever free.” (“Little Boy” 78) make him a poet who is deeply immersed in the everyday reality of the world. The poet sees the myriad ugly and violent faces of the world, and he records his pains and helplessness, “the final journey exceptional/ Unnoticed and unsung/ Life fallen as a yellow leaf” (“Funeral of a Lay Man” 71). The poems in this section deserve special attention. Poet’s anger, frustration, boldness and bitterness mark the texture of each of his 38 poems. In numerical consideration, poems under this section outnumber the poems included in the rest three sections. The message is clear. He is not an escapist who remains blind to the raging issues of the world. He is a concerned poet who writes not for aesthetic pleasure, but for a cause – his commitment to champion the greater cause of humanity.

On Love and the Almighty

“Love” section with 11 poems and the “Almighty” section with 8 poems, however, heal the poet’s wounds. “Love, the panacea for life, in the turmoil/ Helps us survive in a world devoid of faith,” and his advice to people of all religions not to seek gods in sacred houses, such as, temple, mosque or churches only, “To realize Him is simple/ Close your eyes and look into the heart”, (“Realisation” 113), fills poet’s anguished heart with love, hope, and renewed claims of universal humanity. His world is

inclusive and tolerant, “I wish a humanitarian great being kind/
to races and creeds, also tolerant and glad, in days of intolerance
to love and bind/ on earth all human beings born of flesh and
blood/ as saviour new who would redeem mankind/ from sins
by tiding love as sweeps a flood.” (“When the Saviour Redeems
Mankind” 108). The poet is a believer who believes in the
healing power of the almighty god, whose ways are merciful to
all. Odds are there, but they will pass, so the poet believes. Thus,
the songs churning the dire distress of the world conclude with a
happy note for humanity. Let us dream, for we know if dreams
die, life is a barren field.

Commentary

Pramanik’s *Songs of Immortality* reminds me of William Blake’s 1794 book, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* which shows two contrary states of a human soul. It also reminds me of William Wordsworth’s 1807 “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” where the poet sings, “Thanks to the human heart by which we live,/ Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,/ To me the meanest flower that blows can give/ Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.” Blake has created his moral vision out of established Christianity. Wordsworth has found bliss in the trinity of Man, Nature and God. Pramanik sees and records the wrongs around him, and finds solace in the ways of the almighty god. He is far away from the thoughts of the existentialists and absurdists like Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Donald Barthelme, and Eugène Ionesco, to name only a few, who find no meaning in life, who believe in a godless world where there is no essence for existence.

The poet could have been more careful and thrifty in his choice of diction and usage of words. He could have profitably used internal rhyme, alliteration and other rhetorical devices to lend a sing-song appeal to the poems which are, in fact, “songs”

of immortality. However, because of his innate belief in humanity and his sympathy for the underdogs that are imprinted into the texture of his poems, the collection deserves a wide readership. In an increasingly violent world, it needs to be proactively read.

CONTRIBUTORS

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34. **Ron Samul** Ron Samul is New England based novelist and poet. His fiction has appeared in *Liturgical Credo*, *Outside In Magazine*, *SNReview*, *Inquiring News*, *Library Journal*, *DiveIN* and other online media. His novel *The Staff* was shortlisted in 2017 *Del Sol Press First Novel Press*, and was an International Book Award finalist in 2019. The Staff is available in print and ebook format.
35. **Saloni Kaul**, author and poet, was first published at the age of ten and has stayed in print since on four continents. As critic and columnist Saloni has enjoyed forty five years of being published. Saloni Kaul's first volume, a fifty poem collection was published in the USA in 2009. Subsequent volumes include *Universal One* and *Essentials All*. Saloni Kaul is also an accomplished broadcaster, writer-producer-presenter with innumerable documentaries and features to her credit.
36. **Sam Smith** is editor of **The Journal** (once '*of Contemporary Anglo-Scandinavian Poetry*'). Author of several novels and collections of poetry - <http://samsmithbooks.weebly.com> - he presently lives in Blaengarw, South Wales, and blogs here - <https://thesamsmithcom.wordpress.com/>
37. **Sarah Das Gupta** is a retired school teacher in Cambridge, UK. Her work has appeared in magazines published in US, UK, Canada, India, Mauritius, Croatia.
38. **Sean Beckett** is a poet and performer living in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, Canada. A recent Robert Pinsky Global Fellow, he has performed or published on four continents.

39. **Tony Curtis** was Wales's first Professor of Poetry. He has published eleven collections and has won the National Poetry Competition and the Cholmondeley Award. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. His first novel *Darkness in the City of Light* was shortlisted for the Paul Torday Prize by the Society of Authors in 2023. www.tonycurtispoet.com

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