

BOOK REVIEW

Singh, Prabhat K. *Indelible Impressions* (Poems). New Delhi : Authors Press. 2015. Price : Rs. 195.00 pp 69.

Indelible Impressions is a collection of poems that communicate the poet's experiences treasured from a variety of situations and events of life. They remain indelible in the reader's mind too. They include common as well as uncommon impressions and reactions to the everyday experiences. They may be described as entertaining (The 'Jaab' Show) or descriptive (Dev Deepawali), or mystical (The City I Am Stationed In), or thoughtful (What an Enigma !). While going through the poems, the reader may feel tempted to pause for a while and muse on the pictures described or reactions given by the poet.

The poems cannot be labelled out as humanistic or multi-cultural or socialistic or devotional or naturalistic or dialectical or ironical, but touches of these thematic patterns are sprinkled here and there. There is something that restrains the idea of light categorization of the poems owing to the personal touches that emanate from the poet's style and phraseology. References to mythological figures and events add to the poetic richness and enjoyment. Many expressions, lucid and forceful, remain present in the reader's memory long after a perusal of the poems. They are such as "pleasures of dying in coffee cups measures the profits of death" (In Sessions of Dying), "the mystic whispers of self and soul". (The City I Am stationed In), "Where the city dates with the country" (In the Land of Kangaroos), "I have treasured in smile bitter sweet gifts" (Musings of a Retired Professor), and "I am a bohemian filled with sheer human curiosity" (In the Land of Kangaroos). These poetic phrases invite comparison with lines such as T.S. Eliot's "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" or Shakespeare's "Our little life is rounded with a sleep". Figures of speech like allusion, metaphor, onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance and irony enhance the beauty of the poetic style. Above all, there is a kind of felicity of poetic expression that is felt and enjoyed through all the poems.

Reviewer : Dr. Braj Nandan Sahay, Former Professor & Head, P.G. Department of English, Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya

Singh, Prabhat K. *From the Banks of Phalgu*. New Delhi : Authors Press, 2022, Price: Rs. 295/\$25. pp. 80. ISBN 978-93-5529-446-3.

From the Banks of Phalgu is a collection of 46 poems by Dr. Prabhat Kumar Singh. Dr. Singh, an academician, critic, bilingual poet, and translator, is Professor, Department of English, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya. Formerly, he was

Professor & Head, Department of English & Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi and Pro Vice Chancellor, Purnea University, Purnea.

Throughout his academic career he has been devoted to the service of English literature. But it is quite obvious from the present poetry collection that he has a deep interest and insight in the study of myth and culture of the nation that he belongs to. His poem “Never a Bad Time for Poetry” reminds me of Derozio’s “Poetry” where the poet talks about the creative power of poetry, the imagination and fancy of a poet, and how that fancy leads a creative writer to present his feelings:

Now in the deep recesses of the sea,
And now to the highest Himaloy it mounts;

with his subject matter which can be

Gazing on beauty’s lip, or valour’s brow;
Or rivalling the nightingale and dove
In pouring forth its melody of love...

his “Immortal harpings – like a seraph’s lyre.” For Dr. Singh too, any matter can be a subject for poetry, be it the painful incident of the tragic killing of a crane by a hunter, the incident which moved Valmiki and inspired him to compose the great epic *Ramayana*; or the battlefield of Kurukshetra that led to the creation of *Mahabharata* and *Bhagwadgita* which reminds one of the great Hindi poet Sumitranandan Pant :

Viyogihogapahlakavi
Aah se upja hoga gaan,
Nikalkar aankhon se chupchap
Bahihogi Kavita anjanaan

But for Dr. Singh poetic creation is not a product of bad times only:

The sweet songs of death or the sour odes
of life – both manifest the selfsame power
of poetry packed in words worthy
of being read, re-read.

The poems “Darling Daughter I” and “Darling Daughter II” are worth mentioning owing to the fact that these poems highlight the poet’s concern about female community. The interesting point is that in these poems he does not talk about common women, but about women from our scriptures like *Ramayana* or from *Bhagwat Purana* which highlights the birth and childhood stories of Lord Krishna and tries to show how women are placed in these works. His reference to Shanta, Dashrath’s daughter not having been given a place in the Ayodhya temple is a

mark of interrogation on women's issues. "Darling Daughter II" poses another question:

But when will they rescue the unsung,
 unglorified? Replace in their song,
 'Yashoda keNandlala'
 by 'Yashoda ki Nandgopa'

Both these references show his awareness of all females – timeless and classic. We almost never come across the mention of Shanta, Dashrath's daughter who was adopted by Lompad, the King of Anga, in any of the Ramkathas. Nandaja, the daughter of Nanda and Yashoda who was born to save Krishna from Kansa, is known to be residing in the Vindhyaachal mountains as Vindhyaasini Devi where hymns are sung "...in her praise for healing and redemption." But the poet's query:

Blessed indeed was Yashoda
 as foster mother of Lord Krishna,
 but did she ever meet her darling daughter
 nurtured for months in her womb?

creates a shiver and one is bound to think again about the place of women even in the holy scriptures.

In continuation with the aforementioned two poems comes the poem "A Woman Having Dreams" where he projects a modern woman who though quite aware of the harsh and crude realities of the modern societal thought processes, is self-determined in the choice of her "earth and sky" – a very true and close observation of the male-dominated society. In "Love That Wasn't Love" the woman knows that the true love is missing from her life, and she feels cheated throughout her life. Even then she moves on with her "forgiving tears" and the poem ends with a question if ever she would get a shield for "her wound-prone soul...?"

Poems like "The Teacher's Trial" and "University of New Fame" are sarcastic of the present-day education system and the scenario that prevails in this circle, while "Pentathlon" and "Human Sensex" are again projections of modern-day politics and power. Poems like "Chanting Mantra in the River" and "The Doer" do substantiate the religiosity of the poet whereas "Tomorrow May Start Without Me" is a promise to oneself :

... why give up? Working is keeping
 the wheel of life in motion
 and it ends with :
 Life has all compulsory questions
 to be answered till the sunset,
 under the invigilating eyes
 there is no scope.
 This reminds me of Robert Frost's

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

“Territories Depopulated” is suggestive of the ecological imbalance and “In Companionship” that of devoted conjugal love which represents no doubt the Indian sensibility of the poet. How the world was aghast with Covid-19 can well be seen reflected in poems like “The Corona Kiss”, “Bizarre Times” and “Lockdown Sympathies” which carry the expression of bitter experiences of all, all over the world during the distressing times. His “Postmodern” where

Culture of disobedience booms
like the windmill, quietening
is knocking at the wood.
Whims and exaggeration in customs,
Conducts and beliefs are mass models
In panorama of anarchy.

reminds one of Yeats’s “Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world”. His “Good Morning Metro” too is a representative poem of the modern-day life.

After undergoing different kinds of experiences, the poet is forced to go into “Meditation” at the end where he uses

... the distress
or sadness gifted by all those
who never love, only use, discredit
and discard.

for self-purification under the blessings of the only visible deity, the Sun and proceeds on the path of his *karma*.

I appreciate his poetic journey because the poet very well catches the sensibility of the time both on the level of content and language which is well reflected in his poems. On reading of the book, it becomes obvious that the poet is not only aware of what is going on in day-to-day life events in India and abroad, but he also has an awareness of Indian myths and scriptures which is a typical characteristic of an Indian author. To my mind, the most remarkable feature in his poetry is that though the poems are of varied nature related to – history, the great Indian epics, religion, present-day politics and education, women’s distress, ecological imbalance, postmodernism, and what not, the most appreciating feature is that with these diverse subject matters he has artistically been able to create a homogenous whole.

Reviewer : Dr. Nibha Singh, Professor and Former Head, P.G. Dept. of English, Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya