

The Criterion

December 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

Vol. III. Issue IV

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

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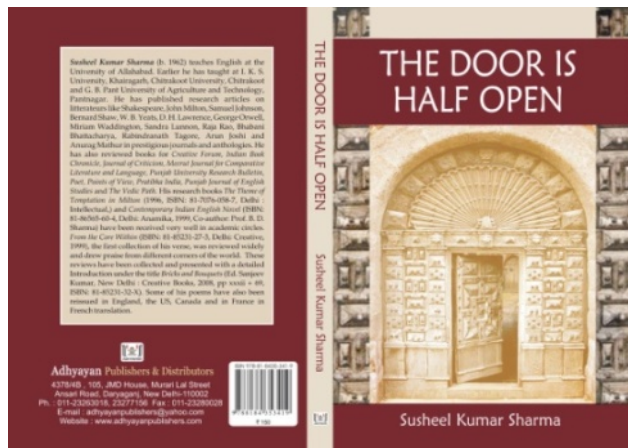
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Susheel Kumar Sharma, *The Door is Half Open*. New Delhi: Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors. 2012. ISBN: 978-81-8435-341-9. pages 141, ₹ 150.00/US \$ 10.00 /UK £ 15.00

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The Door is Half Open contains 52 poems, some of which focus on the harsh realities of life, some on the casualness of life while some others just deal with the bonds in life. The book opens with an invocation to the goddess Ganga under the title ‘Ganga Mata: A Prayer’.

The poet asks for the blessings of the goddess of purity and serenity to grant him success in his work by saying “Allow me to have my way, O *Suranadi*! Grant me my wish, O *Girija*!” (p. 2). Like the continuous and uninterrupted flow of the Ganges the poet’s thoughts flow in this and other poems. One will witness mythological contexts in the poet’s references to Lord Hanumana’s Big Temple, Magha, Kumbh, Bhagirathi, Bhishma’s tale and many others in this poem. The grandiloquence of style gives the poem an epical status. Traditional images are beautifully contrasted to the modern ones. The poem, thus, ceases to remain a simple and traditional prayer and becomes a piece of post-modern literature where various sorts of contrasts and collages are present. The poems in the collection are the representations of modern scenario and conventional themes.

The use of innovative similes in ‘Spineless –II’ and ‘Agony’ gives the poems a metaphysical touch. The poet perhaps accepts Bruce Prescott’s view: “No one image or metaphor

is adequate to describe conscience” and therefore makes an effort to describe conscience in ‘Spineless-II’ by comparing it to several living beings like a cat, old father, pigeon chicken and non-living things like pudding, computer screen, electric bulb and dew drops etc. The twelve similes in this poem thus become metaphysical conceits as one has to exert one’s mind to find a correlation between the apparently unconnected objects from various fields like science, nature, eatables etc and conscience. Contemporary ‘crisis’, ‘shattered dreams’ and ‘dilemma’ of the past century can be witnessed in some of the poems. The collection inspires the readers to take a step and ‘meditate’ ‘across the Lethe’ ‘in the lap of nature’. The book shows the glimpses of a ‘struggle’ through the agonies ‘from left to right’ to get ‘heavenly love’ or ‘colours’ in life. One will find a perfect blending of materialism, spirituality and transcendentalism in these poems. These poems are Indian in essence yet modern in style.

Some poems in the collection symbolize negativity and emptiness of modern material life through the heaps of the negative images that evoke the feelings of *jugupsa*:

...the intact skulls of the
Young innocent children are found
In the big drain behind the house,
When the mutilated organs of the
Young are found
Choking the drain across the door (p.56)

‘Nithari and Beyond’ is a parody of Kalidas’s famous poem *Meghaduta* where *Megha* (a cloud) is sent as a messenger by Yaksha to his beloved wife to convey his deep pangs of love. Which way will be traversed by the cloud and how he will identify the exact place of the wife has been described by Yaksha. Kalidasa gives a glorious picture of the then India, of her beautiful and bountiful land, buildings, rivers, mountains and people etc in his description. In the first stanza of ‘Nithari and Beyond’ a reference to all this has been made. But in this poem it is Yaksha who is travelling and has to identify India, at the behest of the narrator, on account of all negative

aspects of Indian life. The sarcasm of the poet is at its best when the narrator sings, “I love my Indiiiaa...” (p. 57). One wonders at what good is there in this country for which one should love this country so much so that even the delicacy, softness and the carefree attitude of childhood have been lost and their place has been taken by the horrors of death in this poem. Susheel showcases an alternative realistic picture of the blunt and brutal reality of the Indian society in contrast to that presented by Kalidasa.

The affairs, psyche and political scenario of the country have been described in the poems like ‘Agony’, ‘Democracy: Old and New’, ‘For A Bride Who Thinks of Suicide’, ‘Nithari and Beyond’ and ‘Poverty: Some Scenes’. India is considered to be a developing country, but who is developing in reality God only knows – the ground reality remains that the rich is becoming richer and the poor, poorer. The poet has brought the deplorable condition of the society particularly that of the human beings to the fore:

Hunger doesn't
Trouble me anymore --
I now know how to fight street dogs
After a *brahma bhoja*
In any locality. (p. 37)

There is a startling variety in the poems in the collection both in terms of the subject-matter and style. The reader will sense the epical status in one poem, metaphysical twist in the other, fine blending of reality and imagination in the third and so on. Even the glimpses of family bonds and relationships in the present time have been highlighted in the poems like ‘Vicious Circle’, ‘Memories’, ‘O Beloved’, ‘Granny’ and ‘Relationships on a Holiday’ etc. ‘Agony’ deals with the heinous crime of a gang rape; the victim suffers the pangs throughout her life and becomes just like a bird in cage, who is alive but all her spirit is lost and there is no hope of life. One will find new variety and style in this collection of poems which is commendable and worth reading.

The poet has drawn the readers' attention to two overwhelming ills of the contemporary society i.e. female feticide and corruption. It is a matter of shame for a country like India where goddess Durga, Kali, Saraswati are worshipped but their images, 'female foetuses', get aborted. A female child is discriminated against and is not at all welcome in some parts of the country. The poet brings out rootlessness, hollowness and hypocrisy of the society in his poems beautifully. 'For a Bride Who Thinks of Suicide' presents frustrations of modern age, futility of life and the miseries of newly-wed brides who are burnt, hanged or drowned on one pretext or another. They endure atrocities of the time and there is no way out for them. Not only the present condition of women is clearly described but also the tortures and pain which she suffers, the mental agony she undergoes is portrayed in a sympathetic tone.

Poems like 'Colours' and 'Heavenly Love' are entirely different from the other poems as they despite being romantic in character are sombre in nature. These poems are full of vibrant life and are kaleidoscopic in nature as they describe the beauty and spontaneity of nature. The dance and joys of leaves, blooming of flowers, flights of butterfly, the moments of happiness are expressed through the wings of poesy. The transience and temporality of life is beautifully explored in the poems. In 'Heavenly Love' the chirping of birds, the ripples of rivers, the buds of roses, the blades of grass all depict the scenic beauty of nature in a typical Wordsworthian style.

The book has an elaborate and lengthy section called 'Glossary' which will enable the readers to understand connotations and denotations of the words related to Indian life, traditions and customs and myths. The third section 'Afterwords' contains the views of six eminent critics, poets and scholars on the contents of *The Door is Half Open*. It would be interesting for readers to come across various interpretations of the poems by persons from different corners of the world. Gavriel Navarro appreciates the poet for his 'command of language, engaging wit, breadth of

detail and scope, touching familiarity.’(p. 131) Kenneth Lumpkin remarks that the poet ‘manages to blend not only cultural traditions but also the micro with the macro.’ (p.134). It should be noted positively that the collection of poems opens a new door for modern poetry.

The poet with the help of his deep psychological insight and keen observation uses traditional and modern imagery in the poems. The poet has drawn themes from various fields; the titles are catchy and express the main themes well. This book presents a journey which starts from prayers to goddess Ganga then travels through various routes with ‘Dilemma’, ‘Shattered Dreams’, ‘Crisis’ but the poet decides to take ‘One Step Together’ to end ‘Grief’. ‘Memories’ take one back to the phase of ‘Tiny Tots’ where the world was full of ‘Mangoes’, ‘Gifts’ in the ‘Lap of Nature’ and one finally finds a solace in ‘Liberation at Varanasi’. The book contains various ‘colours’ of life which will definitely be appreciated by the readers of different hues and tastes. The poet has put his heart and soul to present a new variety of poems whose purpose is not only to delight but to instruct as well. Thus, it will not be wrong to say the poems in *The Door is Half Open* exemplify that ‘a pen is mightier than a sword’.

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