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Book Review

Book's Title: *So Many Freedoms*
Writer: Karanam Rao,
Publisher: Notion Press, Madras,
Publication Year: 2013
Pages: 71pg.
Price: 150/- Rs.

Reviewed by
Dr. I.Venkateswarlu

The boom of publishing industry, in recent years, especially the mushroom growth of dot.com websites, has given poetry enough space to get the prominence it deserved. And poetry, of all genres, has not only found a scaffold but also a "voice" that's pronouncedly prominent. While traditional publishing houses have woefully lagged behind the literary scene that has shifted its attention more to fiction and non-fiction than to poetry, some of the publishing houses that are newly established have taken over the old publishing houses, and boldly published whatever that came their way. One such publishing venture is Notion Press that has gone on record publications of poetry.

Karanam Rao's anthology of poems "So Many Freedoms", needs much critical attention not only for its thematic gravitas but also for its bold experimentation in style and syntax. Making the maximum use of "verse libre", the poet regales in the free flow of emotions that range from the recordation of matter-of-fact realities to the metaphysical innuendo of suggestions that are neither obtrusive nor deterrent, but succulently subsuming. For instance in the poem "Alone", there are ruminations on the 'facticities' of life. Deprived of sleep, in seamless night, the poet thinks of metaphysical reality." Alone, / in the seamless night / caught like a sinner / in the act of sinning.", and ends up with a ballast of emotional feeling, in the last lines "The day breaks / with a heavy thud / and the poet subjects himself to "purgatorial cleansing". Such is the emotional over plus that one gets to experience.

Some of the poems like "Another Country" and "In Chicago", the poet articulates his angst against the alien culture that denies him a rightful intimacy for, "it erected impregnable walls" that prevent cultural assimilation. These poems are acerbic, bordering on unrelieved cynicism, and look towards a desire for cultural assimilation. As an academic, Karanam Rao seems to have attempted a closer subsumption of both American and Indian traditions of writing, while the sensibility is rooted in the native, Indian tradition. The style and syntax that are rather finessed and resilient go with the heavy influence of contemporary American poetry, while the easily flowing syntax of thought and conceptualization evidently bear the stamp of Eliot and Cummings even as the tone remains caustic and abrasively recondite, like Eliot's. For instance, the poem "In Chicago" amply testifies to the impaction of the western poetic tradition.

Similarly, in another of his poem "Freedom", which is short and pithy, the poet evokes the spirit of "freedom" which is both a coda and a quintessence of the entire oeuvre." armed with an array of honed metaphors / I strutted the freedom

streets/of a poem/if only to know/that freedom comes with a high price.” It is this unfettered’ freedom’ that becomes the ‘ tone of voice “ of the whole gamut of Karanam Rao’s poetry. But there are a few typos and errors in composition which could have been avoided had the anthology been pushed through scrupulous editorial chores. Otherwise, it is a happy addition to the corpus of Indo-English poetry that’s commensurate with western poetic tradition, judged by whatever critical canons one chooses to censure it with.