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An Interview with Dr. Ampat Varghese Koshy, a Poet from India

Dr. Ajit Kumar

Dr. Ampat Varghese Koshy, a poet, was born in 1964 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India. He has a diploma in education and a B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in English Language and Literature besides two certificates, one from World Bank/Urgent Evoke in social innovation and one in pedagogy from America. He writes poetry, criticism, theory, fiction, plays and non-fiction. He has published six books so far, of which three are on literary criticism and three, poetry. He was nominated for the Pushcart Prize for Poetry 2012 by Camel Saloon. A Treatise on Poetry for Beginners was included in the best reads of 2012 by Butterfly and the Bee. In 2013 he was in the highly commended poets category for the year in the website Destiny Poets UK. He used to write a column for Plum Tree Books UK. He has been published in India, UK, USA, Australia and Canada mainly. His poetry collections are *FIGS* (1991), *2 Phases: 50 poems* (2012) with Gorakhnath Gangane and *Soul Resuscitation* (2012) with Angel Meredith. The first one is entirely by himself and the other two are collaborations to which he has contributed twenty five poems each. His poetic style is unique, original, different, deep and attention grabbing.

Dr. Ajit Kumar has interviewed Dr. A.V. Koshy on July 3, 2014 online. He shares his experience and ideas on being a poet. His words and emotions show that he wants to weave the true image of the human world in his poetry. He answered each question frankly, with great patience.

Ajit Kumar: Sir, I am curious to know about the early days of your life and educational background!

A.V. Koshy : I grew up in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, Ajit. It was a nice small sleepy hamlet and I consider it as the best place on earth, even now. It was and is a cross between a village, town and city. The best thing was in my time it had three great libraries, namely the Public Library, the British Council library and the University library. The BCL has closed down now. I studied in Nirmala Bhavan School (then co-ed), St Joseph's HS (which was only for boy's), Mar Ivanios College and the Institute of English, University of Kerala. While my education was desultory, the amount of knowledge on books and movies I could gather in Thiruvananthapuram was phenomenal.

Ajit Kumar: When did you start writing poetry ?

A.V. Koshy: My first two poems were written at the age of five. One won an international award. It was the Shanker's International Award for Children for Arts. Years later, at about eleven, after younger my sister's death, it was poetry I tuned to to express my grief. I somehow found my calling to be that of a writer, wrote short stories, essays , a novel, won prizes etc. but in Pre-Degree a great teacher and writer called Nakulan taught me

Keats' Ode to a Nightingale and it became settled in my mind that I should become a poet.

Ajit Kumar: What do you like to read ?

A.V. Koshy: I like to read the best in world literature, old stuff. The Bible, Dostoevsky, Beckett, Dickens, Shakespeare, Eliot, Joyce, Tagore, Tolstoy - all remain my favourites. I like reading everything but the best draws me most. In any genre, whether humour, detective writing or anything else this has always been so.

Ajit Kumar: Do you think that authors or poets living in books can bring an impact on one's life ?

A.V. Koshy: Definitely. Keats changed my life. His Ode to a Nightingale did. So did Byron, Shelley, Coleridge and Wordsworth, not to mention Yeats, Pound, Eliot and Auden. So did a character called Scaramouche in a historical romance called the same name by a French writer called Rafael Sabatini. Edmond dantesin Alexander dumas' Count of Monte Cristo changed me too

Ajit Kumar: Do you think that Indian poetry in English stands somewhere as compared to the Western poetry?

A.V. Koshy : Doubtless. Right from the beginning we have had good poets like Derozio, Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt and Tagore and there have always been good poets and great poems. Arun Kolatkar is simply marvellous. So is Jayanta Mahapatra. They rival any poet in the West. I myself have written poems I am not afraid to show anyone in the world. There are many others too. If we follow the work of writers like Jeet Thayyil and Philip Nikolayev who did a lot of anthologizing for Blood Axe we can get to know and read many of these poets including Nissim Ezekiel, Keki N Daruwalla, Adil juyssawala, Pritish Nandy, Kamala Das, R K Parthasarathy and so many others. I know young poets who write great poetry even at present like Meena Kandasamy, Reena Prasad and several others like Atindriyo Chakraborty.

Ajit Kumar: Sir, do you think that poetry is the best form of literature to express the true emotions of the heart?

A.V. Koshy : I do not think so but for me personally I express the emotions of my heart best in poetry. The Romantics agree with this notion you have just expressed but novels and short stories also can be as powerfully expressive as can drama.

Ajit Kumar: What was the most inspiring factor behind composing 'FIGS'?

A.V. Koshy : Figs is a young man's attempt to be heavily modernist and minimalist and experimental about about a hundred years after Stephen Mallarme's Un Coup De Dis. It is a work that explores meaning in the word and very single or individual word centred and has more value for me as a record now than perhaps as good poetry. Yet I am not ashamed of it as a starting point as it was a serious attempt to write differently from what was around then. It was influenced by Beckett and has in it only ten poems.

Ajit Kumar: That's interesting ! only ten poems...What ideas worked while going for a collection of ten poems only...I mean did you limit the concept ?

A.V. Koshy: I was working on difference and taking the best and being minimal , I was concentrating on the word and that alone. Finding words within words, it was not Joycean or Beckettian, it was implosive, an implosive examination poetically of what words could do or could not attain to IN THEM, so I had to use abbreviations, blanks, numbers, everything. Robert Kroetsch would have understood. No one else did except a few friends.

Ajit Kumar: How did you manage to complete your two other anthologies with other poets?

A.V. Koshy: They were easy in one sense. We were all writing a lot of poems and found publishers ready to give us a try. Gorakhnath and I were staying together and he writes some pretty powerful poetry while mine just flows and I felt we should do something together so we brought out this one book together called 2 Phases: 50 Poems with the help of Brian Wrixon, a Canadian publisher. At around the same time Angel Meredith who writes in rhyme wanted to team up with me and following the same pattern we brought out a book of twenty five poems each. I am proud of some of the poems in both these collections. My poems are limpid free flowing expressions of my feelings in free verse and subjective masterpieces at their best in these two collections. One also includes the poem I became famous for which was nominated for the Pushcart in 2012 called O Rumi/ a Shayari of Sorts.

Ajit Kumar: Where do you get your maximum love from...I mean your readers?

A.V. Koshy: The love comes mostly from readers in India and even abroad who love reading poetry in English. Many have come to me after reading a poem saying your poem made me cry, your poem made me laugh. That gives me a lot of satisfaction. Nothing counts except that readers love my poetry.

Ajit Kumar: Could you please share the central concept of your poetry.

A.V. Koshy : Poetry used to be the queen of the literary arts. It is a high calling and a poet is like a demi god of creativity. Being aware of this my poems try or I try in my poems to be

universal making the central concept the idea of touching on everything under the sun but in a way that it moves the reader intensely.

Ajit Kumar: Whom do you admire the most among poets and why?

A.V. Koshy: Shakespeare probably, I have never seen such wizardry or mastery either of words or images or of ideas and characterization.

Ajit Kumar: Where do you find poetry in English going ?

A.V. Koshy : It has become content centred as there are many causes nowadays or form centred due to changes in technology but I feel that only the best and most powerful poets and poetry is going to survive anymore as it is a lost and dying art, basically. This will come about only through much effort and partly by destiny.

Ajit Kumar: I assume you are writing a new collection of poetry now. Can you please share something about that?

A.V. Koshy: I am hoping to work on a collection with Gorakhnath again and also on another one with two powerful women poets, namely Pramila Khadun and Bina Biswas. The latter one may be earth shaking, in the sense it may include my best poems.

Ajit Kumar: What makes you to work with the women poets like Pramila Khadun and Bina Biswas ?

A.V. Koshy: The passion in them for poetry searches me out as I have the same passion in me for poetry. It may not be about gender difference but about finding a similar resonance somewhere, in our approaches to Romantic poetry. To imagery, to language.

Ajit Kumar: Sir, where does your poetry originate from?

A.V. Koshy : It is a gift and originates from God in a sense but I am inspired by love, death, women, significant incidents, sadness , melancholy, grief , great art , poems ,poetry, being human , nature, the earth, universe, sex, romance, family...

Ajit Kumar: Who are your target readers?

A.V.Koshy : Everyone.

Ajit Kumar: Have your personal experiences influenced your writing?

A.V. Koshy: Yes, everything I write is autobiographical, as you will see from my themes like sorrow at death, love of family, love, autism, and many other things

Ajit Kumar: What are your major concerns as a poet ?

A.V. Koshy: I want to write poetry that is as burning as the paintings of Van Gogh, that speak to human beings of life in an unforgettable way, in a universal way, for all time, to all people, so I guess my only major concern is Life. My poems are deeply ontological ultimately, but I seek to find the truth by exploring the relationship between man and woman in all its nuances, mainly.

Ajit Kumar: Do you write every day?

A.V. Koshy : Yes, no day goes by without my writing several poems at least.

Ajit Kumar: What would you say has been your most significant achievement as a poet ?

A.V. Koshy: I think some of the poems I have written which has been taken and published in/by Camel Saloon rank with the best in the world. I would consider that and my prolific nature as a poet by which I keep producing excellent poems count. But my real contribution is my style and uniqueness, of course, my seeking truth using poetry as a vehicle while not compromising on its beauty

Ajit Kumar: What aspects of your poetry do you enjoy the most ?

A.V. Koshy : In order, its depth and music and visual nature. My poetry is great to read aloud, to think on and lovely to imagine.

Ajit Kumar: What are your future plans as a poet of English ?

A.V.Koshy : I am interested in encouraging young and/or unknown poets, if they are worth knowing. I am working on brining out an anthology to this end called rejected.

Ajit Kumar: Let's say, there comes a school of poetry, how would you contribute to that organization?

A.V. Koshy: I cannot belong to any school if by that you mean something like the Surrealist school of poetry but if you mean school as in a university of poets I'd love to teach creative writing there!

Ajit Kumar: So do you mean A.V. Koshy is ready to contribute whatever he has learnt in being a poet and teacher ?

A.V. Koshy: Of course. I give everything to poetry so want to give it all to others too as a teacher!

Ajit Kumar: Your message to your readers?!

A.V. Koshy: Thanks for support by reading but my greatness will be if each of you can talk of what my poems mean to you individually and in clusters, to all and sundry. Each poem has as many meanings as there are readers and only that makes me great.

Ajit Kumar: Thank you so much Sir !

A.V. Koshy: Honoured to be given this opportunity, dear Ajit!