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## Multicultural Moves of a master craftsman

**U Atreya Sharma, *Sunny Rain –n- Snow, An Olio of Poetry for Pleasure. Partridge India (2016). 137pp. ISBN Soft Cover 978-1-4828-6854-8***

**Reviewed By  
Dr. Gagan Bihari Purohit**

Michael Foucault's dictum "What is true for writing and for love is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know where it will end." assumes that writing, love and life are eternal pursuits. One has to participate in the process to experience the charm of all three; U Atreya Sharma seems to be a fitting case for such a worth exercise.

Eliot in his famous and popular essay "the Tradition and Individual talent" substantiates the view that a poet draws upon the tradition profusely, and carries forward his mission by mixing it up with his individual talent. Taking cue from Eliot one could safely conclude that U.A. Sharma's poetry is a happy amalgam of both tradition and talent. Art and experience come together for expression in a scintillating way. His pithy and precise expression with a penchant for poetic devices like alliteration, pun, paradox and metonymy, besides the usual simile and metaphor take the reader on a heavenward ride giving the heaven-on- earth feeling. An ardent and sensible aficionado cannot but immerse in a Wordsworthian reverie of "what wealth the eternal show to me had brought" ("Daffodils").

Friedrich Schiller, a poet, playwright, philosopher and historian in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) argues that "Disenchantment of the World " has set in to mark a shift from the holistic world view propagated by Ancient Greek ethics to a fragmented characteristic modernity. The concept gets further boost by German sociologist, political economist and philosopher, Max Weber in his famous lecture entitled "Science as a vocation", when he refers it to mean scientific revolution of the world. In *Readings and Commentaries on Modernity* (xxii-xxiii), Weber explains concept as "an ever more wide-ranging understanding of world's occurrences and events by reference to empirical observation, mechanical principles and physical laws rather than to the magical and supernatural powers of spirits, demons and gods". Disenchantment springs from rationalization and intellectualization which seeks to understand the workings of the universe in terms of forces which are internal to it- forces which are humanly controllable by rational calculation to a reasonable extent. That is, proof and verification are important elements of truth finding to the earlier notion of preconceived intuition and faith. Against this backdrop, one would love to read U Atreya Sharma's *Sunny Rain –n- Snow* (2016). Its subtitle *An Olio of Poetry for Pleasure* does contain the pleasure content for fun and profit, but like Robert Frost's definition that a "poem begins with delight and ends with wisdom", also contains enough slice of life and staple of thought for a strong moral bearing.

U Atreya Sharma's debut but no less engrossing collection, *Sunny Rain –n- Snow* reveals in such a sort of world view in ample measure where empirical, pragmatic and progressive understanding of life has been emphasized over a taken-for-granted world order. Thus it hovers between the borders of mundane and metaphysical. A new insight and fresh approach into life has been the forte of Sharma from the very beginning and the first poem down the line exhibits such a beautiful message to people in search of a composite value system in a family set up. Writing off the old monolithic world order where the husband enjoyed the bulk of rights, "A housewife's Lib" reveals the truth that sharing humanity has come here to stay. Rather than paying lip service, serious soul-searching is the need of the hour in order to bring wife and husband on equal footing. There is nothing new in terms of the theme, but Sharma injects new blood into the body of the poem by simply understanding the minimum that a husband can afford to make his wife happy. The clear and candid lines "Care for me / the way you care for yourself" (3) is Sharma's simple funda for woman emancipation. From the simple strand the movement is sharp, when we come to witness a subtle and incredible experience in "Crush and finish it!" How an illegitimate infant receives a rough deal at the hands of society, receives grand reception here when the poet empathies with the innocent infant by taking the sacrifice into a higher plane. This is exactly where the poet goes into divine plane with a worldly medium. Consider these lines: "Lo! Jesus sacrificed himself for the posterity: / Here the offspring is sacrificed for the parental sin"(4). The optimism of the poet gives a good treatment to an otherwise heinous and heart breaking incident. The poet takes the scale of poetry to a heightened level in the first section where the plight of women in general has been the theme. But what stands out in this section is the cosmic significance to which the poet likens the plight of women folk. Furthermore, Sharma believes in radical life style based on pragmatism which is why we have resorted to the Weber connection. Any other poet would have ended up with the plight sequence from which women in society suffer; but Sharma's significance as poet of high moral order lies in the fact that he tries his best to give a cosmic and god like significance to women, who really deserve to be there, as is the case with "WWW: Woman's World of Woes": "Then why worship distant angels unseen / When we have the woman on this earthly scene" (7). The new insight about an old issue is what one gets from the one and only U.A. Sharma. The reader is being deceived by a computer website code at the beginning of the title but when we read between lines we come to know what bleak fate is in store for women world over. Similarly a mother's sacrifice for her children, "I'm your mother, after all/ for your happiness, I will live or die" (9), heightens a very typical Indian concept of mother being a sacrificial goat for children's all round well-being.

The second section "Facet's of Nature" does not lag behind in intensity and appeal; rather it serves as an implied warning for mankind that it is high time they rescued themselves from the self inflicted nihilism. The very first poem explains in plain language, a rare virtue in Sharma's poetry, how hard-hearted man has not paid heed to disastrous consequences blasting hard rocks for his personal use; implicating an obvious downward march. The aesthetic pleasure one derives from a natural occurring is put in a fix by a mundane activity of public use for profit and

pleasure. The poet's longing to be one with nature comes handy for present plight of modern man in killing the nature's abode.

Things may not change at all but one can pin hope on the hoary tradition of natural democracy to strike out a sane balance between busy schedule and soothing song of an "invisible cooing *koel*" (18). The gentle breeze, homeward bound birds, and "doles of doves" come as a much needed respite from the subtle and complex modern life trajectories. The natural set up provides staple of thought for the poet's muse in a stiff opposition from mundane realities. The eco consciousness of the poet has a strong character that goes a long way to compensate the worldly worries as well as a human concern for the loss of natural base which has received maximum focus in the section.

The third section is loaded with philosophical overtones as an attempt has been made to unravel secrets of life. What could be a better beginning to comprehend the philosophy of life had it not been for "Iron maiden" which deals with philosophy of pain being hailed as the only truth of life: you cannot wish away pain, a part of life; so why not better learn to grin and bear?" (27). In "Phantasmagoria" time has become ripe for exploiting an intensely personal and private moment when the poet feels "I felt the thrust of her finger / probing into my cheek" (28). Later the evocative and emotional experience becomes poignant when the ordinary beginning accepts a universal challenge to arrest effectiveness of fast moving time:

Again time stilled  
in a space-less limbo...  
now a hazy shift  
in the phantasmagoria...(28)

The great prowess and stature of the poet gets a superb display when he describes an intensely personal experience without a hitch or scratch being projected in the first instance. He has stated higher truths of life in simple and logical lines which speaks about the ability of his poetry to attract readers' attention in the love-at-first sight mode.

The poem "The mermaid" deals with courage and conviction of a girl from an under privileged background to enjoy and rejoice with limited access and depleted economy. What stands out is the freedom and innocence of the girl which exults in merry making, be it the sun or the moon. The evocative lines vindicate our contention that she is totally in control of what is happening around her, notwithstanding the problems of the adult world. Mark the freshness and appeal of these lines:

The Sun had made a deal with her:  
His first shine should smile on her.

Humming a lilting folklore song,  
she hopped and skipped and danced (33)

It sets a right precedent for the cause and cure of woman emancipation, hatching no conspiracies whatsoever, simplicity and innocence being the hallmark of easy and durable solutions of such depilating problems concerning women in a patriarchy driven state like India today.

In the “Americana” section, the very first poem prepares the readers for the “land of opportunities” and the splintered value system put in place there. A balanced comparison emerges out of the grueling session where our oriental value system is upheld against loss of values and moral back up. The aptness of description and felicity of expression of the following lines prove our point in ample measure:

Well...  
That’s how we play the game of hearts  
There with a pack of cards like that;  
and here like this in the real life (41).

The image “a pack of cards” leads us to the climax of such a comparison where the stakeholders need to undergo live initiations into the world of life management in a morally feeble scheme of things.

To immerse in the world of rhyme, meter and rhythm is to devour U Atreya Sharma’s Poetry. One representative poem “My swan queen” relishes all the contentions made in favour of the poet. It would not be a mistake if parallel comparison is made between William Wordsworth and Sharma for accents of Daffodil description are pretty discernible in the poem. One stanza would be handy to prove the virtue and vitality of a true creative genius like Sharma:

But...  
As I sight you sail across like swan queen enchanting  
In your sheer grace into the bliss of my heart for you throbbing...  
I can’t contain my desire; I can’t wish away my longing  
To draw you into my ardent arms with fervor  
And lock you up there in love for ever and ever (47)

The sightseeing has given the poet “flash of that inward eye”, in the manner of Wordsworth, to treasure the incident as a substitute for worldly worries. The scene has gone deep into the calm recesses of the heart that it would not be that easy to lose sight of such a gem of experience from the memory for a long time.

Come the “Romantic Peeps” section and we are elated with tinge of humour that Sharma has in his creative armoury in the form of “Ouch, a forced bachelor” cast. Sharma saves this precious occasion for getting rid of the serious stuff of earlier sections. Or else how could one account for such a lighter stuff? Mark the lighter stuff that proves more than handy for every serious or silly occasion:

Jackets, muffles, warmers and sweaters

Comforters and so also heaters

Can only ward off my outer cold.

How to cool within my flames untold? (71)

The plight of bachelors has been explicated with no hard stone being turned which would definitely boost the confidence of the depleted lot; they can take a sigh of relief reading such nuggets of knowledge with fun and fervor.

The peak of the section ”Reflectively Yours” seems to be the cast of a man against his ambience, against his very survival in the pithy, alliterative and epigrammatic lines of the poem “Man.. Powerful or Powerless? One cannot have the actual experience unless and until he or she grasps and devours the true meaning of the lines:

Make feverish forays into forests impenetrable,

Ferret out flora-fauna facets,

Mince the minuscule molecules into atoms

Subatomic particles cause fusions, fission –

In a quest to create, recreate, counter- create,

Be defiantly omniscient, omnipotent (82).

In the mad rush for success and achievement, man has made mess of ecology and the immediate environment pushing his present and future life in peril. Eco critics would jump into the fray that Sharma’s poetry can be read from ecological perspectives; they are probably right as the poet seems to have an open mind and willing ear to take cognizance of our immediate

surrounding and the problems related to it. Access to lines like “Avaricious man mined the deepest bowels of / the earth; undermined his future to perdition” (82) add further authentication to our premise.

In yet another poignant and evocative poem, Sharma has given his verdict against the hypocritical standards of men, with a mild sarcasm, though: if truth is not causality now, than nothing is. The lines from “Truth- A Causality” clearly exhibit our point:

Truth is a causality  
Where minds and hearts refuse to meet,  
Where artifice and interests  
Glibly play their role (88).

Indeed, the hypocritical man can have no marriage of heart and minds; the harmony would be missing as he can cheat others but not himself, selfish interests being causality here.

Similarly, remaining sections “Social Bristles”, “Tongue-in Cheek”, “Occasional Voices” and “Metrical Forays” have all the ingredients of being simply superb but space constraint has accounted for being selective to consider only one stand out stanza from the section, “Tongue-in-cheek”. The curse of fetal killing upon the mankind is the greatest challenge today which has not been spared by the critical and perceptive eyes of the poet. A rather long poem “Femmes fatales” has all the answers:

“you should suffer  
a thousand lives  
for genocide...,”  
curses another throng (111).

On the whole, the volume is replete with scores of examples which give us a feel of Sharma’s agile and active world where a reader can only be a silent spectator keenly observing the spectacular show of an eternal delight. While for other debutants it is no easy push over, for Sharma to achieve such poetic distinction is like a child’s play. The volume is indeed a riveting read for both a lay man and the serious reader; the former for pleasure and the later for acquiring nuggets of wisdom.