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Mind Unfettered: Parbati as a Collage of Dissensual Poems

**Reviewed by
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Imagine a scenario where the whole world is a flesh trading market. While some are the prominent bidders, some are involuntarily turned as the auctioned objects. What is strikingly obfuscatory is that the bidders, the buyers and the objects at sale are all humans. Yet there is a discord inside this apparently linear narrative. Some of those at sale refuse to be objectified and constantly resist to be defined coarsely as “flesh”. It is a world where values are shifting; identities are at stake and under the stronghold of hierarchy, someone or the other has to betray/manipulate its rigidity to turn it upside down and (de)construct themselves into an array of whole new beings. Hence Varsha Singh’s book *parbati- the traitor and other poems* comes into being as a collage of reflections on bodies/flesh with Parbati as ‘the traitor’ who jeopardizes the market policies of the flesh market. The cover picture of the book teases out an unknowable sort of self formation, bringing in her purview her body, her leafy adornment, her appearance and eco-critical judgement- everything as questions posed to the society and the reader.

Interestingly, the function of clothing has been invested with a distinct role in the poems, and it is gradually shifting. As we will come to know, it is a masquerade for violence as well as a veil for those whose voices are stifled behind it.

The genesis of the modern Parbati is out of the flesh market where she refuses to be torn apart, stigmatized, labeled and rises above the bustling crowd, which is why one needs to look at the cover picture intently before delving deep into the lines metamorphosed into the very self of the defiant woman, her desires, aspirations and woes pitted against the dingy flesh market of the world.

Parbati is a story of release from an impasse, an awakening from the listless world touching upon the personal histories through a poetic lens. The recurrent restlessness of the country out on the streets awaits a disaster in the beginning lines of the book as the poet muses-

“... he pumped
and thumped the flesh
even after she turned azure,
while a wolf watched from
faraway, greedless.” (‘Bloodied’)

As has already been noted, clothing has a unique function here. The words such as ‘stitching’, ‘rafoo’ come frequently into play. Clothing refers to the tattered body beneath the cover, a mark of shame that society incurs upon itself by oppression. The voice of Parbati- one that is steeped in dissent and anger- is heard, and thereby her poetic ovulation becomes a weapon for ‘stitching’ and ‘stretching’ the tattered body and soul for healing.

In the poem called ‘Flock of Buyers’, we are left wondering whether it is really possible to buy back our dreams at the market where they once got lost, with the price we are ready to pay to the same mongers. Or does it lead to another illusion?

Buying something is obviously putting in risk one’s trust and laying bare one’s vulnerable self. This is how the buyer her/himself becomes subject to the bidding. So the mongers “take the body/she lays... she dies!”

Our consciousness, it seems, is risked furthermore as it is regulated by what our bodies desire, putting ourselves as mediums of purchasing what we can use as further mediums for buying carnal pleasures and so on. But it is primarily the mind and not the body that resists to our being as mere bodies or ‘aflesh’:

“I find no escape
from the frozen world,
... and turn my body
into flesh, stoned
since ages now!” (‘Frozen)

Such a consciousness necessitates the charting of a history of a different kind- something profoundly personal, which is how one whole lot of a collectivized personal history is recorded- history that the body forgets but the mind unravels in its lacunae.

Stephen's introspective reality in "Ulysses" is one such a history which he is trying to forget yet somehow cannot let it go. Likewise, Parbati's history is a consciousness she has to bear. So has the society to bear the guilt in its politics of erasure. However much feigned sanctity it upholds, each time the proclamation from a Parbati will puncture a hole into it for the sake of history.

However, physical elimination looms large because of those who seek to oppress the individual quality. Remember Gauri Lankesh? Yes, physical termination of a landscape or a body is the ultimate kind of violence they exert by bringing down the hitherto extant sources of historical significance to pieces and replacing them with misleading narratives. Our bodies/landscapes are a text. So making sure no future generations read them is actually a tactful way of emptying out the consciousness/history-

"The farmland...

It's a memory now.

I stand now

in a metro city

...soaked with spikes

of numerous spite." ("The Aura')

'Venom of Partition' hits deep as it calls for an answer asking the readers if it is at all a good idea to get rid of the good will in the (post)partition era(?) Partition of the mind wreaks havoc. Here everybody has different alignments, adherences and vested interests to serve. Our unities seem improbable in the face of chauvinism/jingoism which are hailed undisputedly as true nationalism whereas intolerance towards the minorities is rife, turning them into 'traitors'. In this mayhem, who is going to hear the good sense call out-

"How would you see the faded sky

they gleam no more, the silver clouds

they give no visions to breed a song

the jaded throng is drenched to dupe.” (‘Epistle to Gurudev’)

Imagining a world with myriad possibilities, the poet visualizes that what make it all the more beautiful are the shards of truth that we all carry in unison and see in each other’s notions born out of the need to reconfigure our own bits of “The Moon City” with the same elements that ensure our existence, irrespective of what religions/politics we carry on with. Hopefully, *parbati –the traitor and other poems* will be one hell of an adventurous ride.