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Memories of the Heart: Poems of Bibhu Padhi and Malsawmi Jacob

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Creativity is an aroma of a poet's heart. There is the pleasure in the recognition of an enlightened moment in poetic creation followed by a heightened awareness and sensibility. Poetry's task is to reconcile us to the world of experiences where all-pervading loving togetherness can exist. The poet is an ardent artist of words and phrases. At times, Bibhu Padhi's poetic pool is redolent with a hurried system of questions and answers:

Words have ceased to arrive
at your doorsteps, as they used to. ('Returning' 128)

For Padhi, all poems are doors of the mind. The poet shows us the steps of a ladder of time. Time flies around these poems:

The crows sit over yesterday's
dead fish(.) ('Sea Dream' 15)

Poetry saves a man from moments of frustration and dejection. Mundane wishes come and go. A poet has a sensitive heart to feel all these arrivals and departures of wishes and dreams:

Every lost thing is imagined
and wished for— ('Sea Dream' 15)

For Bibhu Padhi, only the senses are moving among the objects of senses. Thought is a mental act. The poet wants to sign in the peace accord of minds with a whirlpool of images of varying nature. Man lives with dreams, dreams for a better tomorrow. For the poet, absences stay in the midst of dreams resulting in attitudes and actions:

The smell of salt and lime
rolls over the sand and the sky



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dreams of sea rise

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all about me, as I stand. (27)

Padhi's musings are often short, compact and witty. There are some long poems in between. Some poems show the poet's vast knowledge of life.

Poems in this collection are not just the experiences and realizations of life, the poet rather moves towards aesthetic celebration, not just physical, but spiritual. The poems are to be appreciated for their rhetoric. The poet uses a variety of linguistic devices to convey his reflections:

Summer: I shall not
call you now, when
the erratic February
rains here. ('Summer, Dhenkanal' 102)

Rain has a soul. For Padhi, each small rain drop sings. Rain binds myths in coastal Odisha. All leading poets of Odisha write about rain and rivers. Padhi's poetic sensibility navigates on hearts that comes out of the rains to the sunshine to soothe his sores.

The poetic self of Bibhu Padhi generates meaning out of dry, repetitive and prosaic terrains of life's daily acts where imagination conjures up mysteries of the heart. Most of his poems are collage of ideas effortlessly streaming from lived moments of creative pulls. Touching is knowing. Padhi is a psychological poet for whom each touch is different, more than the objects:

Touch. You can feel how
the touched words pulsate within you. ('Returning' 129)

Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, two culturally rich towns come again and again in Padhi's poetic canvas:

It is noontime
in the old town. ('A Bird About to Fly Way' 110)

Among the many talented poets of Odisha of the past and present it is an obvious fact that Padhi's poems strike a distinct note, his poems significantly break free from the overwhelming compulsions that prudes and purists the defining routes that poetry must track to remain truly poetic.

This is where everything ends,
Love. ('Betrayed' 138)



Odisha is the land of Jagannatha tradition. Jagannatha in a local legend was a tribal deity who was co-opted by Brahmin priests. The theology, rituals and nuances associated with the Jagannatha cult combine Vedic, Puranic and tantric themes. The sap of history of the land of Odisha is a long pedigree:

Such are the turns of history
that what is forgotten by most
is what troubles the mind (.) ('Looking Back' 92)

Indian poetry in English shines with showcasing a wide spectrum of natural resources, cultural diversity and linguistic plurality. Multicultural India is ethnological wonderland. Threads of Indian ways of life and society are the reservoir of poetic inspiration. Creativity is an aroma of human heart. There is the pleasure in the recognition of a shared moment in poetic creation followed by a heightened awareness and sensibility. Poetry's task is to reconcile us to the world. Malsawmi Jacob is a member of that rare and wealthy heritage. Ranging from the lyrical and sensual to the harsh and plucky, from the personal to the political, to poems about nature, the poems in *Four Gardens and other poems* are infused with rich mosaic of imagery, cultural nuances, social ethos, group laments, angst and reconciliation that confront both particular and imaginary circumstances in the daily acts of life. Her earliest exposure to poetry was in Mizo language, her mother tongue. The fact that Indian English literature are a product of a multilingual, multicultural and philosophical mélange cannot be overlooked. Today Indian literature reached at the apex of creation with the contribution of regional and national writers. Later, studying English literature, some of Malsawmi's favourite poets were Blake, Keats, Shelley, Yeats and T.S. Eliot. As an adult she grew to like Emily Bronte, G. M. Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath and Pablo Neruda.

Like Pablo Neruda and his counterparts, Malsawmi Jacob's poems shimmer with an atypical sweet touch of simplicity, openness and lucidity that mark her poetic idioms subtle, specific and razor-sharp where the poetic corpus retains as an inviting discourse. A couple of months ago I had an opportunity to read Malsawmi's novel *Zorami*, set in the peak of the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement that began in the mid 60s and ended in mid 80s. The insurgency affected every Mizo, whether in or out of Mizoram. They call it '*ram buai*,' which means 'disturbance of the land.' Violence erases our shared humanity.



Malsawmi drums up optimism. *Zorami* ends with a prophetic note of hope and renewal of humane feelings:

The flowers appear on the earth;

The time of singing has come(,)

Spiritual epiphany is the key factor in the protagonist's inner healing. Malsawmi has a poem entitled, 'Zorami' in this collection where the link is established. In the poem, 'Zorami' she vigorously asks, "Waiting for another *thim zing*?"

Thim zing is a time of total darkness in Mizo myth.

Themes connect genres. There are seven sections in this 'moments of passion'; all parts are planned and organized so well that the entire corpus looks like a well-knit exotic fabric. Titles of sections are loaded with meaning. Malsawmi's poems address the crisis of identity and the continental trials and tensions that are an integral part of contemporary living in cultural spaces irrespective of physical geography and cultural positions. Her musings range from identity crisis to peace in the land; dislocation to rehabilitation; death to life, and life's small acts to roadside roses. She doesn't give up dreaming, even when she accounts for the river of life passing through a gutter. She blurs territorial engagements with the state and looks at the stars.

A writer is a global citizen these days. Experience of a writer determines her range of subjectivity. If the experience is varied, it helps. We cannot deny the intermingling of thoughts, contexts, engagements and concepts of these writers, which make them unique. They are aware selves who can think beyond a definite territory and geographical plane.

Malsawmi is an avid lover of territorial peace and in-group fraternity:

No hurting no killing in this country

the place only for lovers of peace."

In Section 5, "Angst" some poems read functional:

"Why have you gone political?"

they ask, "Why don't you just do

your thing?

Poetry benefits societies. Malsawmi Jacob is aware of her literary and cultural roots. She is a socially committed artist, and she refers to her land and people, trauma her people experienced



during the days when vultures had full meal to 'keep up continuity'.

Love is a companion of the poetic soul. The poet wants to sign in the 'peace accord' of minds:

Ah, wonder of wonders!

He's here among us standing with us!

Saying "Peace to you, I am

with you always.

P. B. Shelley said, "Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted." Bullied at school and expelled from Oxford, Shelley's personal life was distorted but the poetry he wrote was a mirror which beautified the his distorted life. Similarly, Malsawmi aims at a beautiful nation-state where people can live safely celebrating life's feast together. "We contain multitudes," wrote Walt Whitman, Malsawmi has poems on 'identities', 'home' and 'roots'. Identity of a person is a marker for the part of one's overarching self-concept and identification. It is an affiliative construct. The image of self we develop from membership of social groups. Many poems in the collection are rich in aesthetic responsibility towards life, contexts and manners of the time.

Malsawmi's willing leap into the pool of nostalgic past creates a sense of 'presence' through the poetic metaphors of 'absence'. The haunting presence of the metaphor of 'death' invests his poems with a sense of mystery, a sense that is indefinable, and non-negotiable by biological experience.

The river has a soul. Malsawmi, like many other poets from the North East India digs out magic in Nature, verdant with myth and dense with longing. Her poetic sensibility navigates on hearts that comes out of the rains to the sunshine, in search of poetry of the world:

Cleansing river will wash her wounds

healing balm will soothe her sores

she will be renewed restored.

Mamang Dai, a fellow poetess from Itanagar in the North-east Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh in 'Small Towns and the River' expresses:

Small towns always remind me of death.

My hometown lies calmly amidst the trees(.)

For Mamang, each small rain drop sings. For Malsawmi, 'tiny flowers I bring adorn your crown'.



Rain and rivers give the vital dose to Pablo Neruda to overcome all kinds of solitude and anxiety. Malsawmi, an ardent lover of rain and rivers which bring a promise of renewed vitality, wants to purify the inner psyche of her people. Her aim is to achieve cleansing of the minds by purgation of pent-up emotions. The poet registers her faith, hope, dreams, and cultural memories again and again by subtle imagery, metaphors and folk myths of her homeland. Nothing charges the imagination more actively than poems on beauty what poets of all ages haunt in the purlieu of thoughts on banks of the 'river of no coasts':

Gem of rarest beauty
calls in waking dreams
morning sunset moonlight
still black night
so I must set out in quest
leaving all I own.

There is an indomitable gusto that invites a reader or a sensitive mind to Malsawmi's first book of poems, *Four Gardens and other poems*. She is all set to blaze the trail of splendour and majesty with her poems, which move the keys of human hearts, hard hitting and ethereal.

Works Cited

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