



POETRY FOR REFORM: SUSHEEL KUMAR SHARMA'S "THE DOOR IS HALF OPEN"

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Every poet lets us listen to his heartthrobs for our heart-responses. It is his primary goal and bounden responsibility to describe events, incidents, experiences, dilemmas, problems, etc that he glimpses and witnesses in life. Poetry is his medium and spectrum he expresses through, and weapon and organ he fights with for the aimed reforms and desired solutions. It rises from the reality and the actuality of life in the way the plant rises from the ground of truths to bloom the flowers of facts. Prof. Susheel Kumar Sharma employs it with dexterity and perfection to mirror his feelings, ideas and observations in life.

Prof. Sharma starts his collection of poems, "*The Door Is Half Open*" with the crest-like poem, 'Ganga Mata- A prayer.' The poem marks epic-like statures and characteristics. Its central and pivotal character, the river Ganges is prayed and portrayed in the manner of invocation:

O Ganges!
The dweller in Lord Brahma's *kamandala*
The abider in Lord Vishnu's feet
The resider of Lord Shiva's locks
... ..
The mother of brave Bhishma
O Ganga Maiya!
Homage to thee.
Accept my obeisance
O Punyakirti!
... ..
I want to sing your praise
Like a tortoise in your water
I want to play in your lap
Like a dolphin in your floods
... ..
In an island created by you.

The invocation is so elaborate that it echoes his ardent adoration and deep devotion to the sacred and holy river Ganges:

I am told
On the confluence, though vast,
No bathing *ghat* can be had
You keep changing your appearance—
Thousands you have in a day.

The character of Ganga Mata is a deity to be visited and the Almighty to be worshipped by Mainaka who 'comes daily to have/Your darshana and a holy dip'. The poet identifies with the deity, 'I just want to live and die by you'. He glimpses her by his heart:

When I stand here
To have your *darshana*
I see only white and green waves
Piercing into each other.



In the praise of the divine features and heroic stature of the deity with infinite synonyms and epithets: ‘Adhvaga’, ‘Alakananda’, ‘Amar Sarita’, ‘Gayatri’, ‘Nandini’, ‘Jahnavi’, ‘Purna’, ‘Punya kirti’, ‘Punya’, ‘Mandakini’, ‘Pavani’, etc. He extols highly about her long heroic journey ‘annual pilgrimage’ which is ‘Like light into darkness/ In a cloudy sky’.

He further recognizes and reveres the Ganges for her free flow and gay dance:

Flow freely again
Overflow again
Dance rhythmically again
Be not bound by embankments and dams.

For him, the Ganges is Ganga Mata, the Almighty and the Benefactor and she is mighty in flow and benevolent in actions. He addresses her:

You silently
Crush stones and push sand under
Your gorgeous feet
To help man raise
Buildings to touch the sky.

The river on its annual pilgrimage flows in its own pace and course and helps flora and fauna as described by Tagore in his poem, ‘Thy Gifts’. Prof. Sharma portrays the action of the river in ‘Rivers’: ‘A river cools/The Scorched earth/ By laying her arms around it.’ The poem is full of Sanskrit expressions and quotations; synonyms and epithets to mark the grand style of Latin expressions of the epic. The similes he uses are very apt for vivid descriptions:

I want to sing your praise
Like a tortoise in your water
I want to play in your lap
Like a dolphin in your floods.

Prof. Sharma enriches his poem to be a poem par excellence by describing rituals like Havan, a purifying ritual and fire ceremony; Holi, a spring festival; Magha, a festival for the saints to participate in from various parts in the month of Magha; ‘langar’, a community meal for all to dine together irrespective of any social barrier and reflect the sense of humanity for oneness of mankind.

The poem ‘Ganga Mata, A prayer’ stands flawless, for it entails moralistic approaches to redeem the woes and throes of mankind with the sacred waves of the Ganges by insisting on *Shantih* in the realm of humanity:

I want the world
To be rid of corruption
I want the world
To be rid of pollution
I want the world
To be rid of degeneration.
I want the world
To be a home for all
I want the world
To be a wonder for all.

The poet feels agony at the degradation of virtues and degeneration of values: ‘The wonder that was India’ with ‘freedom’, ‘humanity’, ‘prosperity’, ‘liberty’, ‘equality’, ‘fraternity’, etc. Now



they are obviously absent and conspicuously missing against the wishes of the poet. He shares his feelings with the deity, Gang Mata in the form of questions in infinite:

Are you testing the patience of man?
Are you displaying your displeasure,
O Kirati?
How can a mother be so cruel
O *Adrija*?

As stated by Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India*, 'The Ganges... has held India's heart captive...' As a poet of conviction and man of patriotism, Prof. expresses his poignant desire for the revival of the past glory, 'to be wonder for all'. He firmly believes that Ganga Mata is not just the Ganges but the symbol and the incarnation of Bharat Mata:

I just want my Ganga
To be my Ganga.
... ..
Yes, India is one!
United we stand,
Divided we fall.

Prof. Sharma is a humanist in general and a patriot in particular. He wants to 'see the world/ To be a home for all'. The poem, 'Shattered Dreams' (12) reflects that he nourishes aims and cherishes dreams to be fulfilled but does not want them shattered or crumbled down:

My imagination came falling down
Like the World Trade Centre"

As an adorer of Ganga Mata with her course, he wishes her not to change her splendor and wonder; power and bower; flow and glow, name and fame, etc. He finds changes against his wishes and addresses her with his deep feelings:

O Adhvaga
I find you feeble like a spine.
... ..
Your curing power seems to have failed
Your life giving force seems to have dried.

He further puts forth his unbearable anguish before her a long series of questions on the lapses against his wishes:

Where is your ravine?
Where have the rabbits gone?
... ..
Have you tolerated it all, O Saritamvara?

As a poet and man, he wants to see his homeland in the unrivalled position and unmatched glory. He cannot think of any decline and downfall of values and virtues, but he witnesses blemishes like corruption, pollution, and degeneration. His earnest wish is to see his motherland free from such evils. In 'A Poem for My Country', he has clear-cut reflections about India: 'The land offers you a sight of your choice--'; and Indians: 'Believers of Various faiths/ Users of so many tongues... But a mantra/ practiced by one and all.' Another poem entitled 'Democracy: Old and New' presents the real picture of democracy in the mood of displeasure of the poet as it fails to bring about progress in terms of liberty, equality and fraternity and goes contrary to the concept of democracy:

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The scorching sun has turned my
Hair grey;
It attacked the head first
Now the entire body is its target. ‘Passing By’

Life turns not only ephemeral but also futile in the disruptive forces of time and it is an undeniable fact, open truth and bare reality. Dreams in the realm of facts shatter and make man rise to realize the futility of life:

I had built castles of my dreams
On the sand dunes of a desert. ‘Shattered Dreams’

Man resorts to the futile exercises to evade the futility of life and find remedies:

I got out to the dream of down stream
Where I throw in eternal sleep
To awake floating on a fresh dream. ‘Dwellings’

Prof. Sharma loves humanity as a humanist. He observes the sufferings of his fellow beings and makes the readers share those feelings. He records the incidents and the happenings in society as he has commitment towards poetry. He wishes the due punishment given to wrong doers and sinners and feels sorry for the helplessness of invisible gods in this regard:

Like a helpless woman
Gang raped unconsciously again and again
Loses her natural vision
Just stares into the black sky above—
Perhaps praying to the invisible gods
To send some bolt
(Which never comes)
To identify and punish
The guilty. ‘Agony’

As a man of humanity, he feels pity on a pretty, gay butterfly when it was found crushed on a table:

O butterfly
Reminded me of the beauty of the innocent girls
Going to school on the reopening day
The enchanted patterns of design on your body.
... ..
Alas, the laughter has gone
The spark has gone
The chance of another Adam
Being tempted has withered. ‘Agony’

Like Wordsworth, Prof. Sharma is a lover of nature. His nature descriptions are so graphic and vivid that his readers share his sheer joys on his visit to nature. The poem, ‘In the Lap of Nature’ reflects his love for nature and expresses how he gets engrossed into the beauty of ‘starry night’ that draws ‘the craving moon’ into the drawing room for his bliss:

I hold on—
Stretch my arms
To bring you to my folds.



... ..
I remain absent
I have to defy the law of gravity
To kiss you on your forehead
And make you sit in my pearls before you
I have to cast my pearls before you
And weave my dreams around you
To be away from the frigid earth.

To have bliss, he goes to the realm of fancy with the contact of nature:

Suddenly, I entered a cloud,
My joy knew no bounds;
I was enveloped by purest of vapours
Soon I was seen rushing towards the sky
Eager to touch the Sun.

In 'Mirage', he expresses his special attraction and liking for the moon. He wants to go to its beauty to quench his thirst:

The heaven is not to be polluted
With your odours.
Your dust
Doesn't match the dust there.
... ..
You've to be taken to the moon
To quench your thirst
In the heavenly abode.

Prof. Sharma reads the cyclic pattern of wearing leaves by trees in spring and studies animal and plant nature in terms of human nature in a satirical way. The ant, the tree, the cow, the grain, etc serve mankind and prove to be far superior to man:

The ant—
A small one, black in colour,
A microgram in weight
Runs at a speed
High than that of a jet,
... ..
The tree—
Huge in size, that
Sheds its leaves
Sprouts again this spring
To provide shelter to the
Homeless birds,

The cow—
Indian in size, Red in colour
Heavy in white udders

The grain—
Minor in size, unimportant in colour
Less than a gram or two in weight



Sprouts to make a field green
To feed the hungry. 'Gifts'

Natural objects like flowers, butterflies, the sun, the moon and the cloud leave the poet attracted to their beauties in bounty: The dancing of 'yellow leaves' on the trees fills his heart with joy:

The sight was captivating
As your colours and the backdrop of the flowerbed
Presented to my mind what
Must have been the Garden of Eden 'Colours'

As a poet and man, he shares the tears like sorrows of the butterfly in quest of beauty and in thirst for honey from flowers. When it is crushed, its beauties are lost:

The chance of another Adam
Being tempted has withered. 'Colours'

Like AK Ramanujan and Kamaladas, Prof. Sharma portrays his autobiographical element to express his whims and fancies; sentiments and feelings; memories and recollections; doubts and dilemmas; realizations and confessions; isolation and association; tears and smiles, etc. He refers to his relations and their traits and temperaments. In 'Dilemma' the portrayal of his great grand father and his grand father who was raised to a rich position like a prince and his father who was not being raised as per his father's wish:

People hated my grandpa
For he held his head high.
... ..
The most interesting ones were about
His own self and his father.
... ..
About my father
Who couldn't be raised
As should have been--
Holding his head high
Despite being poor. 'Dilemma'

He describes his own sulking nature in 'Camouflage', his daughter and son for not looking alike in 'Inquisitiveness' and his son who 'used to/ Soil the mattress/ But you never minded it' in 'Memories' like AK Ramanujan's bed wetting grand son in his poem 'Obituary'. He presents the picture of the house he lived in:

I have started
Living in the home of despair
For the house of hopes has been shattered
By volleys of jealousy. 'Dwellings'

He ascribes this state to the cobwebs of enemies, dangerous curses of holy men, etc. The memories are connected and related to his house and penury-stricken family, 'ancestral house', his breakfast and his 'arousing anger' due to blood pressure on some occasions:

The tree of money sheds its leaves
For Autumn had come
But spring could not. 'Dwellings'



Today I've seen a brick come out of the wall
In the ancestral house in the ancestral street.
I tried to fix it without cement, but it came out--
I somehow saved my foot from being hurt. 'Granny'

I salt my breakfast with tears
That ooze on the peeling of memories

When the butter of praise
Fails to soothe me. 'Dwellings'

My blood pressure shot up
And I lost my vision.
... ..
Think of me
How miserably I spent
My days and nights
Without you and the world around! 'A Wish'

The poet conveys his ultimate advice and confesses his heart-felt feelings to the readers to—

Let your days with
Those around be
Peaceful, harmonious and soothing! 'A Wish'

Prof. Sharma, as a poet and man, has sensitivity to human suffering and states that man should be in quest of goals to be away from the jungle, to quench thirst, to satiate hunger and to rescue a drowning child into a river, etc. He feels that eradication of poverty is a must as narrated in 'Poverty: Some Scenes.' For him, the sight of the people in penury is the most agonizing scene:

When somebody opens the tiffin-box
And someone else just stares at it
With the hope of one morsel in one's mouth.

In society today, the suicides of brides are quite common as a blemish on the part of society. Brides are welcome in the wedding not to be killed. They are meant for the joy of life and the perpetuation of the race:

A bride belongs to a groom
She is a flute to be played on
She is a harmonium to produce a rhythm
She is a synthesizer to modulate a discordant note
She is a tune of a young heart,
Full of music and meaning,
Signifying harmony. 'For a Bride Who Thinks of Suicide'

The poem, 'Agony' reflects his appeal to people to rescue a woman from being raped, a bird from being caged, a small girl to be helped to hold her pen, etc. He cries hoarsely for his helplessness in the eradicating of the evils today. The feelings he has are inexplicable:

The poet is crying for words,
Clad in unblemished white
Saraswathi does not oblige.
She is busy raising a golden peacock. 'Agony'

As a poet he feels sorry in 'Purgation' for 'Swelling problems on and on, all around' and appeals to the humanity to—

Be your own Buddha
Be your enlightened soul
To realize the reality
And to shun
Whatever is false. 'Hope Is the Last Thing to Be Lost'

He wishes to be amid people with no social barriers: colour, caste, creed, age, sex, culture, -isms and ages. He wants an ideal society to be established for the oneness of mankind, freedom from corruption, pollution and degeneration to enjoy the wonder of humanity. He has the vision of reviving the culture and the heritage of India's past for the mission of establishing peace.

Prof. Susheel Kumar Sharma deserves encomiums for his wide-ranging themes dealing with life in general and the life around in particular, in his book entitled *The Door Is Half Open*. He portrays the themes in snapshot details and presents them to the readers to share his feelings like WH Auden and other Leftist writers and using 'you', the readers. He would have used 'we' like Philip Larkin and other Movement Poets to share his views to the readers and the poet, himself. The titles of all poems are very apt, appropriate, and relevant to echo the subject contrary to the title of the volume. The title '*The Door Is Haft Open*' is suggestive of the opinion that he is shutting of the door from the back with a view to allowing no evil to enter or he is opening it wide to welcome all values and virtues to his homeland for the revival of wonders and splendors of the past. As a poet of devotion and man of conviction, he craves for perfection in his motherland and the world, 'a wonder for all'

Bio-note:

Dr. Rajamouly Katta, M.A., M. Phil., Ph. D., Professor of English by profession and poet, short story writer, novelist, writer, critic and translator by predilection, has to his credit 64 books of all genres and 638 publications of poems, short stories, articles and translations published in journals, books and anthologies of high repute. He has so far written 3672 poems (including 1512 haiku) and published them in 22 anthologies, 200 short stories in 9 anthologies, 9 novels 27 skits. Creative Craft of Dr. Rajamouly Katta: Sensibilities and Realities is a collection of articles on his works. As a poet, he has won several awards and prizes in Poetry Contests. He is the Editor-in-chief, Creative Crystal Publication, Dallas, America.

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