



An introspective look into Rajiv Khandelwal's Crystalline Tidings

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Abstract:

"CrystallineTidings" a collection of sixty five poems penned by Rajiv Khandelwal, one of the globally known Indo-Anglian poets of honour and accomplishment of contemporary period and published by Ukiyoto Publishing, India, is like a torch to lead us all along the track of sensitive poetry or the poetry that aims at seeking the meaning of life with stresses on socio-cultural dynamics and existential dilemmas of modern times. He has excelled in the task of regenerating sense and conscience of what is beautiful as well as dutiful about the world in all these poems that are marked with symbols, similes and mellifluous metaphors.

Key words: Childhood Memories, Love, Religion, Humanism, Covid Time, Social crimes, Death and Emptiness

Main Paper:

There are both short and long poems with deep layers of meaning that can only be guessed from reading in between the two lines. The poems included in the present anthology are based on various themes like Childhood memories, Human concern, Ethics, Morality, Night syndrome, Love, Romance, Nature, Introspection, Curses of War, Ageing, Faith, Covid time, Political concern, Elegy, mysticism, realism, spiritualism and so on that affect and effect the flow of life everywhere in the world. Most of the poems are marked with metaphors and similes with evocative meaning. Let's read them one by one.

The collection opens with the poem "The Tea Mug" that revolves around the sweet childhood memories of enjoying Tea in a loving mug till it cracked. Exuberant ecstasy in sipping the deep liquid inside it has been caught fine nostalgically as seen from the following-

"The yellow rim
Reminds
Of freshness
Of the sensuous lips
That once used this mug."

"Deschooling" is another beautiful poem depicting the stress free childhood. Golden period of life found in the tension free childish sports and enjoyed like free birds may be perused from the following-

"If we simply re-learn to laugh like a drain
For no visible reasons
And release ourselves
From society's unseen shackles without strain
And re-gain the freedom to do whatever we desire
Without the burden of reason that adults acquire."

The collection includes a number of love poems. The romantic thoughts of the poet are best expressed in the poems like "Shades of You", "Archive", "That Evening" and so on. Let's go through the following-



“She was wearing
Pink matte lipstick
The one that you know
I love so much seeing you wear it

...

In every woman I happen to view
Shades of you
You alone!’ (Shades of You)

“...darling, leave without worrying
For I have sealed all doors
Flared out all the host demons
Swayed by Eros.” (Archive)

Thoughts of death, disease, decay developed as a follow up of ageing are scattered sporadic in some poems like “Whispers of Departure”, “The Grey Silhouette”, “Solace”, “The Wait”, “A journey Unfolding” “Reality Construct-1”, “Reality construct-2” and so on. Let’s study the poem “Whispers of Departure” as a specimen. Witnessing the embracing of death as swiftly as the fleeting existence of a baby mice, of a paralytic patient with multi organ failure and the impact of this pain of bereavement has been portrayed fine as seen from the following-

“The pervading
Vacuum
Brings to naught

...

Find solace in the poetry of sorrow
Where whispers of departure linger.”

In the poem “The Wait” the helpless waiting for sure death followed by a series of incurable ailment developed in old age has been penned fine as seen from the following-

“None of the present clan
Could muster the strength
To assist
Remove the life-support-system
And allow the candle to snuff out
Agonizingly
Minutes passed
Into hours and then into days
All
Kept waiting.”

The poem “The Grey Silhouette” is another good poem that deals with old age complications. Problems of the old age like decline in blood flow to the brain, attack of diabetes etc as well as the memories of the sweet old days have been delineated fine in this poem as seen from the following-

“Grey is fighting for survival
Silver seems to be timing its arrival.”

The poems “Reality Construct-1” and “Reality construct-2” not only highlight old age problems but also bring into light the great lapses presently going on in the health care systems. Scams in medical bills for indoor patients with caring family has been highlighted fine in the poem “Reality Construct-1” as seen from the following-

“He still could not figure out
How his son was billed a hefty amount



Without even the operation happening
...
He resolutely adheres
The current times, loaded with scams
Are now, not what they used to be in his days.”

In “Reality construct-2” great lapses of vigilance and attention to the patients admitted in ICUs without caring family have been shown prominent as seen from the following-

“I am confused and disoriented
No one can enter ICU
With food
No one asks for incentives
ICUs are CCTV covered
Believe it or not
In the ICU
I have lived
What I have gone through.”

In this collection of poems, the poems like “Grief’s Encounter with the Beyond”, “Turned away, Turned within” and so on are reflective of his thoughts unbounded by material interest, and rather these are drenched in spiritualism. The talk between the living and the deceased is penned fine here in the poem “Grief’s Encounter with the Beyond” as seen from the following-

“In eternal repose she lay
A world beyond my mortal grasp
...
The same pants for three days now
Shave, change your cloths, my love
Carry on with life, I am beside you.”

“Turned away, Turned within” is another beautiful poem dealing with sublime spirituality. The denying of helping hands to the needy is an easy exercise but getting set as a needy before God is a natural development as seen from the following-

“A divine whisper asked
When I would be a source of joy to others
When would I embrace empathy?”

The burning social problems and crimes like rapes, mob lynching do not go unnoticed by the poet. In the poem “In a free country” the poet deals with this serious problem. Hapless and helpless condition of the poor Indians at the hands of the moneylenders has been touchingly described as seen from the following-

“He thought of his unlettered wife
Pregnant with his second child
And his sweet ten year old daughter
His old palsied father
All being roughed up by the loan shark

...
The man lay dying
Not even realizing
That in all innocence
He was
At the wrong place
At the wrong time



In a free country.”

“Do Lawyers Have Daughters?” is another such poem wherein a vivid pen picture of crimes or rapes that kills peace of mind of the people and questions the conscience of the lawyers who advocate the perpetrators is drawn brilliant. The same may be perused from the following-

“Lawyers still resort to tricks of their trades
To delay legal justice”

Quite a few poems are about the memories of panicky quarantine period of the covid 19. The poems like “Death of a Parent”, “Abandonment”, “A Woman’s Tale of Sorrows”, “The Isolation of Friendship” and so on bespeak the same. Let’s peruse it one after another. In “Death of a Parent” the pains of survival during Covid time that restricted movement of human beings even on hearing the death of the closest person like father are showcased fine as seen from the following-

“ Covid restricts
Intercontinental movements
Due quarantine rules
...
And I lived the loss
Felt by a paralytic
Who literally has his body.”

Naked exhibit of abandonment of morals and values at the spate of corona has again been penned bright in “Abandonment” as seen from the following-

“As the world knew
About the catastrophic powers of Corona
...
So they abandoned
Morals and values
 Like one leaves cattle
 Due to scarcity”

“A woman’s Tale of Sorrows” is again a heart touching story of utter helplessness of someone who lost her husband during corona period. The reality of social ostracism during Covid time and grief of loss of husband as well as boycotting by family for inter caste marriage nicely penned here as found from the following-

“Through the tears and torment,
She knew not what to do
But like Savitri
She had her Satyavan-husband’s head on her lap
In a lover’s doleful embrace.”

The theme of war and peace has been nicely dealt in the poem “Vested interests”. Here the vested interests of profiteering by sale of deadly arms at the gross disrespect of humanity resulting in loss of lives are pinpointed fine as seen from the following-

“Vested interests
Plan a planetary cemetery



More deaths
More retaliatory weapons needed
...
Who cares
For human misery.”

The blend of humor, ethics and corruption is inducted artistically in the poem “Cultural diversities”. Here corruption in high levels or justice on auction is penned fine as seen from the following-
“People in some countries
Can yet be stunned
When one of their politicians
Executes a fraud
And donates
A passel of money
...
To find
Justice was on bid
Charges could be diluted
And dropped.”

Poet’s concern for surrogated mother is seen in the poem “Baby factories”. Here the theme of exploitation of the poor women renting their wombs for commercial considerations is portrayed vivid as seen from the following-
‘... you shouldn’t die on the operating table
Or to unregulated medical methodology
When you rent your womb for commercial considerations
...
And improve loved one’s living condition
At the altar of surrogacy”.

Marital relation is weighed fantastically in the poem “Faith”. Comparatives between arranged marriage and love marriage are nicely drawn here with similes and key to success in marriage pointed out as seen from the following-
“Success in marriage
Lies somewhere
In the fine balancing
Of the unread book/s.”

Poets are generally good philosophers too. Khandelwal is no exception. The poems “The Burdened Tapestry of Memories” and “Bequest” are replete with philosophical thoughts. The call for withdrawing self from carrying unnecessary loads of memories-real, imaginary or false and instead getting set to enjoy the present consciousness is reflective of his philosophic entity. The following may be perused in this regard-

“Who do I hold accountable
For schlepping the weight
Of the tapestry of memories
Real, imaginary or false ...” (The Burdened Tapestry of Memories)



His mystic self is traceable from the wandering of his mind in exploring the truth of life for a pleasant stay in the present than getting disturbed by the past's embrace and future's worries as seen from the following-

“Live in the present like a sunflower following the sun
Do not let the past's embrace hold you back
Or allow the future's anxious whispers to haunt.” (Bequest)

Just to be brief, as a master craftsman dealing with myriad themes as evident from travels, travails and troubles in life, Rajiv Khandelwal, has not only brought haloes and glows to modern Indo-Anglian poetry but he has excelled in the task of regenerating sense and conscience of what is beautiful as well as dutiful about the world as visualized from the poems marked with symbols, similes and mellifluous metaphors. Majority of the poems included in this collection belong to the Indian soil in general and in global perspective in particular, especially with regards themes that transcend time and space. The entities of the realist, the humanist, the spiritualist and the wordsmith are combined in Rajiv Khandelwal who happens to have carved a niche in world literature with his magical power of words and logical deduction on Indian thought processes, offering panacea to tide over odds with nods of humane sense drenched in philanthropic fragrance. Readers, it is believed, will again be gifted with a microcosm of poetry like the ones from ‘A Monument to Pigeons’, ‘Dwelling with Denial’, ‘A Time to forget’ etc to the present collection, titled ‘Crystalline Tidings’.

Works Cited:

Khandelwal, Rajiv, *Crystalline Tidings*, Ukiyoto Publishing, India, 2025

Bionote:

A science graduate and a retired Accounts Official in Indian Railways, Biswanath Kundu (b.1963) is an author of fifteen books, seven of them being books of poems.

His poems and articles have been published in different prestigious anthologies and internationally famous journals. His latest book titled *Critical Sensibilities: Insightful Appraisals*, published by Authorspress, New Delhi is a collection of literary studies and reviews of different books including ones of poets from Punjab, Kerala and Sikkim. He has co-authored two books of criticism with Dr. Ramesh Chandra Mukhopadhyaya.

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