

Teasing Clues of Life

Review of: Chittaranjan Misra, Jaydeep Sarangi and Mona Das. 2019. *Resonance: English Poetry from Poets of Odisha*. New Delhi: Authors Press. ISBN: 978-93-89615-03-6 (Hardbound). 187 pages. Price: INR 300.

Indian English poetry is no more a toddler: it now has reached its heyday of youth. One can hear its resonance from the poets of Odisha. *Resonance English Poetry from Poets of Odisha*, edited by Chittaranjan Misra, Jaydeep Sarangi and Mona Das ushers in a mood of enchantment, whilst the poets of this anthology grab attention with their poise and expression. In this volume, the expression Indian English Poetry “can be viewed as an ongoing juxtaposition of conflicting ideas related to ‘cultural diversity’ of the country and ‘cultural difference’ as a globally accepted marker of identity” (6). In the Introduction, the editors write: “Poetry from Odisha can be seen as an attempt at a metonymic exposition to Indian English Poetry seed of this idea has resulted in this anthology. Odisha as a state remains fairly low-key not only outside India but also within India. There is no understood Odia identity say in the manner of a Bengali or Punjabi stereotype, which almost defines an Indian due to a lack of any other established identities. In a way, this benefits the Odia poet or to be more accurate, the poet from Odisha, to maintain a neutral gaze and bringing objectivity to their writing” (7).

The sense of location that the Odisha English-language poets construct is about cultural specificity refracted through the poets’ sensibility and power of fashioning imagery. Since many of these poets are bilingual authors writing in Odia as well as English, their works in both languages signify a rootedness, while opening out to the world. The anthology also adds established and new voices from Odisha, and outside the state and the country too. Most of the poets here have been published widely and have earned an international reputation. The editors have gracefully added a few poems in memory of those they have lost.

Bibhu Padhi is one of the most formidably intellectual poets of his generation, with outstanding achievements. His poems “Night sounds”, “And then Darkness,” and “Trust” straddle a mind-boggling canvas. In “Finding and Losing”, he writes: “I’m alone, and the usual doors / of escape are shut and sealed, / as though they were meant /for somebody else’s life” (26). Here each word is a world that resonates and leaves a fine aftertaste. “Guitar” by Bipin Patsani reminds one of David Russell playing the guitar live, as the poet writes “Are you not a meeting place of voices? / In you I hear the roar of the sea / And the quiet storms above; / In you only, in unlimited space I move/ And meet eternity” (28). Deba Patnaik’s “Death is not Dying” tugs a chord in the heart. He explores memory and desire through

the lens of loss and despair. The grief is beyond personal: “Who says death is lonely? / Living is” (36). “Memory is a treacherous rainbow-arch /to blind alleys – unending, serpentine. / Memory is a shadow-play tricking us into believing.” This approach aims to arrive at propositions that locate poetry as an archive for memory. Chittaranjan Mishra’s “Winter” bridges the past and present memories. The technique of the movements in the poem is melodious, innovative and touches the readers with beautiful oscillations of keynotes “I never thought / This rustle of leaves / Would remind me / Of their absence [...] “I never thought / This winter/ I would trail/ My wild shadows/ On the moonlit shore” (43). “Self” turns out to be a many-layered conversation in which the poet explores an audacious range of virtuositities, his curiosity about various aspects of self stirred by intense exchanges and his understanding of melody, rhythm and movement of life/lives enhanced by the interface.

Chinmoy Jena in “October” writes about light, shadows and simplicity of life. Dilip Mohapatra in “Suffering” writes “Pain defines and claims its territory /sometimes overtly/ sometimes surreptitiously/ through pangs of labour [...] “Suffering is only the/ flip side of joy /and bliss /just like the flowers and the thorns/ bitter and sweet coexist” (55-56). In suffering, there is no firm figure, nor a clear ground. Suffering remains as a nagging thorn in one’s life. Durga Prasad Panda in his poem “Today” leaves teasing clues of the role played by media and its aftermath. “Strangely no one was hacked / to death/ despite speaking the truth fearlessly /. Today was a perfect day /. Today/, the newspapers of the country / were on a day’s token strike” (61). Itishri Sarangi dedicates her poem “The Catharsis” to the it will be gang-rape victims, she writes: “My innocence is killed, my femininity stripped / Crumbled and trashed / The evil destroyed me” (65). The poem is textured by a smart weave of verbal and physical play. It opens up possibilities of finding a new vocabulary for the mutilated gendered body.

Jayanta Mahapatra has made Cuttack in Odisha (Orissa) a significant place on the national literary scene, which dates back to his publication of *Gray Book* and *Chandrabhaga*.¹ Being the first Indian poet to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award for his *Relationship* in 1981, he is an iconic Indian poet. He has received global attention for his inimitable style in the use of English. In “The Road”, he speaks of a journey he undertook to have a handle on some of the unknown dynamics of life. The road, however, has changed: “It’s not the road anymore / along which my mother sent me on errands [...] The one I have taken now /appears to fill me with purpose and strength /. But I do not know if it is the happy

¹ *Chandrabhaga: a Magazine of Indian writing* (2000-) is an online magazine which appears twice a year (Summer and Winter). Jayanta Mahapatra is the Editor and Rabindra K. Swain the managing editor.

one” (67). The poet heaves as he stands in front of a monumental gateway of the temple of life, and he thinks of ‘home:’ “Something slithers past as I watch /, from the garden someone left behind in my heart /. I try to think of home./ I come upon tracks of tall pylons in the dust” (67). Jaydeep Sarangi weaves an arboreal yarn around Jhargram with its dense forest and red soil. As one reads the lines, the mind is full of tranquillity and calm and is far from the maddening crowd of the suffering city. “I’m from that forest land. / My laurels are made of leaves. /I am fast losing my green leaves / Or only coming to what is really my own. / Jhargram – /This is where everything ends in love”(69). “Another day in Kolkata” deals with the fast-changing demography of Kolkata: “Chances are she’ll lose the dream / Settle for fast-growing metro links, high sky rises. / Knight Riders fan the tempo, / The fire of Bangla poems doubles the impact” (70). Kumerandra Mallik instead describes sleepwalkers ‘looking for the roadside to divinity’ (76).

Mamata Dash beautifully pens the life journey of a girl who has travelled alone on a luxury boat waiting to sail to the other side in “Alone on a Luxury Boat” (78-79). Mona Dash’s concern in “Language” is to dredge out if possible, the ‘truth’ of ‘identity,’ a ‘truth’ manifested in trauma and desire, a truth that baffles the symbolic order of language itself. “We made our changes, we learnt our lessons, /our tongues remained the same / foreign words our own” (90). Nandini Sahu in “Who Says Death is the Only Truth” critiques those who wait only for death, and questions whether people can make their music of life or how capable are they in augmenting the civilization. In “Bridge-In-Making”, she writes “Poetry in English is like a passion for empire building /. It’s the subaltern speaking /the words pleading to be universally, intently heard” (99). She reflects upon her past, in the light of which she tries to illuminate the present. A very important *modus operandi* adopted by Sahu to solve the resistances of her cultural third space is, therefore, to decipher her present predicament of anxiety with the help of her mnemonic reservoir to find a real identity. Namita Rani Panda as a woman gazes back and reclaims the space that is denied to a ravished woman/en to burst the bubble around toxic male hegemony in “The Plead of A Corpse” (107).

Niranjan Mohanty is in search of a stony blueprint which mesmerized the world long ago and is continuing to do so in “The Sun Temple at Konark” (109). Prabhanjan Kumar Mishra also speaks of the wonder called Konark. Pradip Kumar Patra wants to “walk towards the horizon / With the quest of our own” (124). Professor Himansu S. Mohapatra in his essay “Showcasing Odia-English Verse: Pitfalls and Prospects” affirms: “from Jayanta Mahapatra and Bibhu Padhi to Shanta Acharya and Rabindra K. Swain have paid attention to the diction of their poetry. They have perfected idioms that are supple and resonant.” Saroj K. Padhi in “Daughter” speaks of how a daughter can with her Midas’ touch transform

the angst, worries, pain and sufferings into tranquil gold. Swapna Behra in “My Sagacious Dreams” glides nimbly over the frets of life sans any kind of visible effort or scrapping.

Resonance: English Poetry from Poets of Odisha looks far beyond geographical boundaries and extend the field of vision to include resonance of life. The hope is that the researchers, scholars and readers gain fresh vestiges of poetic perception through the anthology.

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