

*Book Review***Lalit Mohan Sharma. *Imaginary Knots: Poems***

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*Poetry of Twilight Vision***Dr. Jernail Singh Anand**

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Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end, says Virginia Woolf. And the poet's vocation is to charter this irregular flow of life, and try to inject meaning into the anarchic, and if possible, order the chaos.

In the ordered universe, only man is an aberration. He is in fact an organized chaos, working hard to rework his own pattern and trying to find meaning in jumbled existence. Catch a thread in a jumble and you can unknot it by and by. But human mind is a jumble which knows no easy solutions. The unrest, angst, the stir that marks human mind at this juncture of existential history of mankind is what makes the warp and woof of Dr Lalit 's poetry. If poetry is an image of our lives, his poems go a step forward and present not only the outward image, but also lay bare the inside corrosion suffered by the human soul. The most corrosive of all elements is the passion for greed, more and more, and a complete lack of sensitivity towards others who might suffer when we blow our trumpet.

The poet calls himself the poet of twilight hours, when nothing seems to be certain, a polarization of possibilities assaults the world of make-believe, we must cultivate. A poet, he thinks, is like a singer with a massive orchestra. Further he says, it is a poet's whole life that orchestrates the writing of a poem.

Poetry is always a momentary expression, although it leaves a lasting impact. Moreover, the intrinsic unity of a poet's work lies in the fact that each poem is like a bubble formed from his imaginative structuring of reality. Even if written at different times, the poems have an intrinsic coherence of a poet's philosophy and faith.

It is a surprise, and no surprise too, that at the entrance of the cave, we meet the description of war. Is it like the first scene of a Shakespearean play, which foretells us what is going to be



happen in subsequent acts? The poet appears to emphasise the fact that war is a permanent condition of life. When there is no war, we are preparing for it.

As we enter the terrain, the poet recapitulates the past, and compares it with the present with a classic balance of perception. His maturity of outlook is felt in the choice of images here. In the poem “There was a Time’, the poet talks of the soft wisdom which was a part of the living pattern. This is how our daily life was in itself a lesson in love:

*Our kitchens rolled chapatis
First one for the cow,
The last for the dog
Bread kept for birds on the roof
Water bowl lay in the patio.*

What was so natural, was lost as times changed, and now, we have to teach this soft wisdom in special classes on moral science, because it is no longer a part of the natural behaviour of humans.

While the world is busy in creating emotional disorder subsequent to physical violence, as it happened in Kiev, the poet finds this emotional anarchy as a point of departure for men to diverge into aesthetic intuitions of love. It is a great achievement of the modern civilization, that though man has not grown wise as he should have grown, yet internet has brought us close to each other, and we can easily feel the pain, and get united against aggression of any kind, anywhere in the world.

The poet turns reflective and nostalgic too, but from this past, he brings up wisdom which informs man’s future too. Here is how he exhorts mankind, in apparently innocent actions which add up to contribute to human joy:

*We need to preserve
Small little acts of life
...
Forget not the gratitude to a good meal
That uplifts you out of a soul’s fatigue.*

Dr. Lalit is not unaware of these strange times when people ‘Invent what was not intent/Recycle the alphabet/To interpret the facts/Suspect the names and fame’ and when everything is suspect in the times of deepfakes, he comes up with a solution: intrinsic wisdom. He asserts: ‘In stranger times folks rural/And urban have more faith/In raw and personal wisdom. This is how he celebrates the intrinsic wisdom of mankind, rather than the acquired wisdom which flows in the veins of modern civilization. His take on ‘Virtual Friendship’ is quite interesting when he says: “Such are friendships in urban plateaus/Imagination feeds on whatever feeds it”. The



idea of being in love, with a virtual friend, which gives a quantum jump to creativity, may be a virtual affair, does not qualify for being watered down.

‘Tripping the Wires’ takes us back to love which is now available only virtually, but the poet very poignantly states: “Distance dwarfs not desire/Shy lips may regret silence/A tree’s loyalty to the roots/Also plays host to birds.” These lines suggest a life lived in loyalty, giving birth to sons and daughters and remaining loyal to the roots... so much is compressed in these four lines, which is so characteristic of Dr. Lalit’s poetic art.

‘Grains of Gold’ is a poem rich in ancient wisdom. “When we learn to forgive ourselves/We begin to forget sacks of miseries.” I wonder this great wisdom can be said so fluently, and with such simplicity. We do not forgive ourselves, that is the root cause of misery. How man is ruled by his wishes, which turn into fantasies and overwhelm you with a wakeful agony?

*Wishes flutter like fantasy
And the phantasy-fuelled desires did
Overwhelm me with a wakeful agony
That often left me almost vanquished.*

The ‘Space Shrinks’ is poet’s agonising view of modern life, how space for man’s humanity joy, happiness, peace and goodness has shrunk. This is how he indicts the modern civilization:

*Nightmares haunt day-time dreams
Space shrinks as time seems to blink
And disorder is the order of the day,
Injecting malice minute to minute
Cultivating the habit to hate
Mechanical the lives,
Unconscious of human rhythm
In thought in word and in action.*

Yet to see so bold a condemnation of the life we are living, and in such powerful words.

‘Rude of Remembrance’ sweeps one off his wits when the poet diagnoses the individual’s tendency to forget and forgive, and the collective memory which asserts itself to revive those wounds time had given to mankind:

*Remembrance invokes
Hatred for community.
No matter what people
No matter how long have been neighbours
No matters bonds of how many generations
When hatred as such turns in –
To compulsions of collectivity.*

This poem makes me breathless. And I am on the breaking point. These words are too much for a sensitive man like me, although I know such sensitivity is an official crime in these times:



*But beyond the walls of my home I hear
 Strange oaths worse than swear words:
 Solemn invocations to kill,
 To wipe out a community
 Lest one day not far away
 Lest one day not far away...*

This poem projects the sickening mentality of the upcoming world. It is not India alone, but the entire world community where individual joy has become the fodder of collective hatred, and this hatred has behind it a call back to fundamentalist culture.

Poems like 'Impasse' 'The Amphitheatre' 'Summer of 2023' impress upon the reader poet's strong reactions to the happenings on the psycho-political screen. It is not possible for a poet to remain immune from the tragic events happening around him. If he does not comment on them, or ignores to appease or please, it is a betrayal of the Muse who has invested him with prophetic powers. 'Safely ensconced are men at the Centre/Perilous it is for those at the periphery' sums up a fact of our lives in which those who control are not the ones who suffer too. The poet is thoroughly aware: "Anywhere and everywhere/When the innocent suffer/Not one will be spared/Assure choked throats". The satire is too apparent in the last line which makes fun of the political leaders who assure justice to the masses who have suffered because of their insanities. Talking of the parade of naked women in Manipur, the poet is unsparing, not only towards the dispensation, but towards the whole human race:

*Shame isn't forgotten
 And is never forgiven.*

These words which will keep running in the memory of the present generation move deep into the consciousness of time. These events have the potential to stay in the memory, like the heinous crimes of partition. 'India at seventy 6' 'Two Thousand Twenty Four' show how the poet cannot keep his lips shut at acts which have unnerved the people who believe in religious and political sagacity and who want sane behaviour from their leaders:

*How shall stand
 The commoners
 As one dressed
 In royal attire
 Decides once
 To prostrate full length
 In the new-built temple.*



These lines are not only metaphorical, but also take a physical dig at the person involved in this exercise, and the image of ‘standing by commoners’ and ‘lying prostrate by the leader’ – shows a contrast at many levels.

Poems like ‘Forget Holiday’ symptomize the great sense of empathy that the poet holds for the deprived sections of society. Poems like ‘My Obsessions’ open the pages of the personal diary of the poet, and are dipped in deep passion:

*Passions I loved and in plenty
Ignite no less in year seventy.*

True. Very transparent. Someone owns a cubicle in his heart, and no cubicle is safe in the mind, busy with flights of the butterfly. I leave some of the poems untouched here, so that the reader could have a feeling of freshness touching them raw and unattempted.

In conclusion, I can say that *Imaginary Knots* by Dr. Lalit Mohan Sharma, no doubt introduces itself to you in the dream mode [‘Imaginary Knots’], it actually is a poet’s way to make you encounter reality after etherizing you with a calculated statement, as a surgeon, before surgery asks the patient, ‘what is your name?’ to ensure he is under the influence of anaesthesia or not. We are treated to a variety of hot topics, ranging from the personal, to the social, the political, and finally, the philosophical and spiritual. Art not only sublimates life, but also supplements it. *Imaginary Knots* perhaps relate to those aspects of the life described here which do not take place in real life, but which happen in the mind of the poet. As a whole, this is an important work which is unsparing in its critique of modern times, and establishes Dr. Lalit Mohan Sharma as a satirist with an unrelenting and uncompromising passion for the holy grail.

Imaginary Knots

I

*Time ploughs the mind, winds blow,
God's spies and secret messages
Flow in and stir the poems of revolt and
Walk the road to protest the status quo.*

*Who's up or who's down,
Who's in, then who's out,
Such mundane matters
Can be of minor relevance.
If the meanest man doesn't
Get his share of benefits*



Even if he is last in queue?

*Neither love nor freedom
To be flaunted as a brand!
Not through governance
Or by the manufacturing,
Citizens could be treated
Like school kids, trained
In fundamentals of rules
Of conduct and courtesy.*

*Men and women in streets
Move with ragpicker's bags.
Celebrities and politicians
Hold rod-handled brooms,
A nation seems on a move
As in one collective effort!*

II

*What, if so poor a man as the poet is,
Who can't sing of the dreams he hears
In the blood-soaked words of the men
Who dared to challenge the Coloniser
And stood for fraternity and freedom!*

*If beliefs of fraternity evolve
Not with more faiths than one
And social fabric is not woven
With a variety of rival colours,
You slide back to feudal times.*

*A cribbed mind is left sulking,
A ready mind is just waiting
To ripen the very native hue
Into a waking intelligence!*

*Projecting a man as larger than life,
A mortal as immortal in his life- time,
And to publicise an orator as an oracle,
Such are the ways to shackle the mind,
And to run, as if, a three-legged race
While rest of the world runs on two feet
And you tie yourself in imaginary knots.*

