

Deeply Touched**Contemplation – Enduring Indic Predilection in Literary Endeavour**A Study of the Diaspora Indian, Rajender Krishan's *Solitude and other poems***Dr V.V.B.Rama Rao***I don't write. I do not sit down to write or force myself to write.**It just happens perhaps when something touches me deeply.*

(Rajender Krishan to a critic's query about poetry and poetic art)

Rajender Krishan's poetry as of now is not voluminous. A Diaspora Indian, he published his first collection of sixty poems only this year but he has the makings of one who would soon make a niche for himself in the temple of our literature of contemplation, cerebration and the concern for higher values in the context of alarming decadence and degeneration in the contemporary conditions in our country and in man in general. A poet with deep understanding of our native ethos, customs, beliefs and candid righteousness, his poems have the fundamental love of mother land. Looking in and looking around with an understanding of what is higher and skyward are literary pursuits. The seriousness of the poet's pursuit is evidenced in the illustrations by a like-minded artist who obviously thought deep while giving the poems a thought provoking and meaningfully text-related line delineations.

Solitude is *ekaanta*, a condition with not just the feeling of a loner. This is something that touches one deeply. Solitude is about the singleness of a cerebral feeling, the feeling of being in an island where the mind places or finds itself. Thoughts move and oscillate with a special kind of intensity moving in all directions. The movement is not that of a pendulum and for that reason it is felt in a myriad ways. This is the feeling of the speaker in 'Solitude'. Describing solitude is not easy, its nature is elusive.

*Untiring is the phenomenon
yet unruffled remains the witness
to this incredible marvel
of pristine amusement.(p4*

The feeling of amusement or even joy is singularity. But then there is a mysterious, mystical kind of freedom experienced.

*I cannot let go
this singularity of life
where I experience
the essence of freedom
in the association
of your perpetual presence.(p.4)**

The titles of almost all the poems are in a single word. They deal with the primary, inherent and basic things. Right in the beginning there are Breath, Speech, Words, Hunger, Lines (on the brow and palms), Cross Roads and Realization: all very brief and very telling. Breath being natural and without volition, why should there be castes, creeds, and isms and restrictions?

*Why then
my earthly existence
is fenced
by the dogmatic rules, rituals
narrow boundaries
dividing sectarian borderlines
conceiving
chaotic disharmonies?(p.6)*

The Masters proclaim and everyone is aware that one should speak harmoniously and should remain peaceful. But the questioning poet asks himself:

*When will I embrace
the wisdom of this science?(p.8)*

Mind-boggled Rajender questions himself: 'What I Am?' He is basically a thinker, not a questioner. He has a way of thinking of the great minds and particularly his grandmother whose picture is on his work table. The Maharshi went on and on with self enquiry. Rajender's cerebration leads to 'what I am'. In self-enquiry, he looks deep inside into himself. He thinks of *praarabdha* among the trio of *praarabdha*, *sanchita* and *aaagaami* the three causes of individual human condition as per one's own *karma*. Karma is thought about and its inexorability of causation of the individual actions and feeling that cause happenings. Cerebration makes the individual realize that it is not freewill but preordination according to one's own thoughts and deeds. The poet understands the belief of the system with wisdom. Drawn by the creator the lines decide the patterns of behavior. The poet says:

*Whatever is
it is my own doing
That's why
on a chosen path
the lines on the soles
keep treading and digging
The labyrinth of life
-Maya--
In quest of Nirvana.(Lines, p.12)*

This leads to 'Realization'

*Tidal festivity
is the Genesis
of the act
'I' dissolve
and realize
the eternal Self*

*Hari Om Tat Sat
Formless fathomed (p.14)*

'Crossroads' is illustrated with two faces of man – eyes looking this way and that. Only ancient, everlasting wisdom resolves the enigma:

*I take refuge
in the gleaming eyes
and serenity
of my grandmother
framed in the photograph
that adorns my work desk*

and the lesson is:

*So awaken arise
make no compromise
Cognize and discriminate
before it becomes too late
Listen to your inner voice
And make the right choice
For, your chosen path
will be the preamble
to your final destination.(p.16)*

Present action is the soil of karmic today. 'Words' of the elders kept in the mind's treasure trove are the guidelines for safety and welfare for ever:

*Kabir said, 'Beg Not'
Christ said, 'Cheat No'
Amma said 'Hate Not'
Abba said, 'Worry Not'
Simply tread the properly chosen path
Sensing failure, 'Fear Not'.*

And then there is the most valuable piece of advice in the final line.

"Conform, Talk Not." (p.18)

The 'predator' is just one: TIME. It swallows one and all, all in His TIME. The symbol of Peace is the Dove. Unperturbed, it becomes prey to Hawk. But by the eternal predator, Time, it is devoured too.

The poet in deep cerebration cannot help questioning and it starts with 'What I am?' Relationships which are with humane feeling, with concerns lead to the mind-boggling worrisome question. Cerebration leads to faith in the Supreme Being. Godward cerebration is the quality of the one looking within more than around with a bubbling passion in the reams of ideal constantly mingling in the eternal circle outside the ordinary, mundane and ephemeral. Ideas and feelings are hugged for it is felt as the association with the everlasting, never ending presence. This intimacy with the one within, the unique oneness is solitude.

*What am I?
 A confluence of epithet
 that defines my identity
 discernible with relationships
 giving me a semblance of
 a son, brother, husband, father, uncle
 colleague, friend, enemy, neighbour –
 an earthling, Indian, Hindu
 or just another somebody
 a mere nobody!
 What really I am?
 (p.26)*

Being philosophical, the prime tendency in his nature, he writes a poem 'Tat Tvam Asi'. This *upadesha vaakya* among the many *mahaavaakyas* in Chandogya Upanishad stemming from Samaveda is life's basic fundamental truth preached to Man. *Tat* – that brahman – *twam*- you –*asi* are. This grand declaration makes the poet mull looking into himself as if to establish it within himself. He sees in himself a twin, who is a wanderer. The wanderer revels in total freedom with the conviction that the transient must pass.

*When I ponder
 in comparison
 I enviously ask
 why I'm not like
 the Wanderer*

I hear my Twin's echo

*Look beyond
 the dichotomy of life
 Tat Tvam Asi (p.39)*

The twins are one and man within himself may be many but in the ultimate, absolute reality is all one, the *brahman*. The poet has the understanding of the absolute reality too. Pensiveness in the poet is seen and appreciated by the knowledgeable. It is ignorance to erase it as pretence.

Poetry should have a purpose. Art is for Life and to promote significant, meaningful living. The poet is pertinently aware of the prevailing social actuality. 'The Hindu Obligation' is a poignant disapproval of the mindless felling of trees:

*And on my first 'Lohri'
 when I was barely 4 months old
 Wood equivalent to one big tree*

Was burnt

Blessed was the male child!

... ..

Son,

Cry Not

But remember

Your Hindu obligation

Of planting and growing more trees (p.32-34)

'Physics& Social Chemistry' bemoans the loss of basic values of kindness and compassion:

Society

hoodwinked

and disillusioned

is being brokered

into bonded slavery

instead of

embracing

universal freedom. (p94)

'The Changing Face of Man' compels us to think of Indic pantheism now miserably beguiled. Every animal and vegetable kingdom adapts to mother nature's ecological laws but the superior being MAN does not. The poet is languished:

Alas!

The chosen one

Said to be created in His own image

Riveted by narcissistic temptations

Of lust and greed

Stands inexorably beguiled

By brutal forces ...

... desecrating the Garden of Eden. (p96)

The New Year's Day is a day of festivity. It is a day to remember promises made and a pledge for doing good and great things. Here are the poet's ideas:

Imprinted on the timeline of ebbing 2012

Are gruesome memories of ghastly hate

Yet, the rising tidal waves usher in

Arrival of the vibrant New Year date

Reaffirming and living our pledge

To love and protect all, far and near

Treating every one with reciprocal dignity

Will erase ugly blots of yester year.(p.122)

Over population is a menace threatening total destruction. The poet with painful concern says:

*Depleting rapidly are the forest covers
polluted with filth are the sacred rivers
wildlife habitat has become disturbed
fearing extinction species are perturbed*

*Ecology, biodiversity are brazenly exposed
wasteful consumption cunningly reposed
Imprudently proliferates man's greed*

Ah! The arrogant, ignorant and deceitful creed.(p.126)

The poet is heartbrokenly aware of the recent happenings. Keenly observant with heart in the right place, the recent occurrences send twangs of excruciating pain into the feeling heart. 'Death in Kindergarten' is about a maniac's shooting spree and rampage in a school room.

*The maniac's psyche
nurtured on hatred
that breeds violence
arising reflexively out of
divorced parental apathy
the social fabric,
domestic abuse
angst
or*

*the American Gun Culture
that's gone out of control? (p.112)*

Fervently described is the devilishness of the hoodlums. The poet describes how lurking restlessly like wolves the rapists' gang operated:

*Alas!
At the nadir of heinous impulses
The precept of culpability
Grows lifeless
In a deteriorating social order.(p.114)*

In India heinous crimes are committed and 'The Prologue of Change' is a blood curdling example of Nirbhaya, the pseudonym of a young woman raped in the capital of India. The young one became an object of every thinking one's pity. Says the poet:

*She is gone
Justice remains languishing
in commissions and inquiries
o crumbling institutions
nurtured by corrupt officials
ude the façades of feudal democracy*

*thriving deceitfully
oppressive intimidation.*

*Will this be another saga
that will terminate inconsequentially?
Will such maniacs walk scot free
to recreate the scene again?*

*... ..
She has died
to become alive
in the hearts of the youthful
revitalized and fortified
as the prologue of change! (p.116)*

The poet finds the incident impossible to forget and says in another poem: 'Misanthropists':

*Nirbhaya
the symbol of awakened consciousness
will not relent.(p.128)*

Dictatorships are always repugnant, any where, any time in the modern times. The unseen, unscrupulous power hungry money bags come into power somehow. It is an attitude that needs to be erased from the devilish. The constitution is there and is supposed to be revered and strictly adhered to. But this is what the poet declares with derision and contempt in a peroration:

*...And "we the People..."
suppressed and scared
carrying the burden
of a dead soul
kept glorifying the devil!*

*Who said
Dictatorship is dead?(p.118)*

A devout thinker with Godward cerebration Rajender explains how a *raga* is born:

*The surveillance of eyes
is alert to witness –
Shiva's subliminal glory;
The breath orchestrates
for the voice
to articulate word;*

*And, when the mind
seated on this confluence*

*governs with discipline;
The Sovereign manifests
A Raga is born (p.30)*

About the devastating hurricane Sandy the devout poet thinks deep about creation and the Supreme Being in the poem 'Sandy's Tandava':

*What a shame
That all this while
I thought, understood
Aham Brahmasmi (p.108)*

Man's helplessness is abysmal but nature it is that he thinks he knows all. Even then, the poet reveals his conviction in the poem:

*Man will persevere
and rejuvenate as survivor –
The phoenix
will rise from the ashes
Resurrection
will take place again (p.110)*

The poem 'Buddha' reveals his disgust for the desecration and demolition of the Bamiyan monuments of worshipful faith:

*So frustrated are we
as Taliban
that by using
lethal ammunition
we mock our manhood
by attempting to
destroy
A silent mountain
That symbolized
Compassion, Love, Brotherhood and Peace. (p51)*

Intense cerebration makes intercourse a blessed act:

*A moment
that dissolves
the subjective "I"; and
the objective "You"
And gets defined as
Shunya*

Beyond logic

*beyond doubts
beyond
The cosmic edge (p.54)*

Righteousness and rectitude are requisite values for the humans. The poet thinks of Deepavali. The festival of lights is to know the flame within the human. He thinks of the *arishadvargas*, the six deadly evils known as enemies, *kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, matsarya* and emphatically declares:

*Unless I as an individual
am not able to conquer these passions
until then
I cannot celebrate
Diwali –
'the festival of lights'. (p.56)*

Dovetailing belief and myth the poet remembers Vetala the vampire and the King Vikramaditya:

*Awaken from slumber
O Vikramaditya!
Pick up the sword of discrimination
sever and annihilate
the ghastly parasites of the past.*

*Liberation from yesterday
should become the path
to the doorstep of Salvation*

The journey must start now. (p.48)

There are poems about his mental makeup and personality. 'On Being a Mother' makes him remember a writer who answers a question about her not sending a new post.

He is touched with her reply about her confinement and subsequent delivery. He goes on record:

*I rejoice and pray
that may the mother
nurse her daughter
and provide the best;
passing in flying colours
the parenting test (p.88)*

In 'Her Poetic Self' he writes:

*It's through
her devotion to poesy
that our scattered thoughts*

*become a bouquet of verses
what we see on Boloji
as poetry. (p.90)*

Sensitivity, impressiveness, sensibility and delicacy are the traits of Rajender's poetry. The economy of his expression and elaborateness and intensity of cerebration linger long in the readers' mind. Last and the most important is the poet's attitude to the much misused, misunderstood and cliché ridden idea of love. Ideal love is blissful, sublime and divine as sung by this lyrical poet.

*O beloved this togetherness
is a mirror in which I experience
communion, ecstasy and Love.
With you I am not myself. (p.60)*

'Nirvana' which the poet pointed in a note is absolute peace is presented to begin with, as a dialogue between two blatant speakers followed with the talk of 'I', the speaker. In Buddhism it is freedom from endless cycle of birth and death and consequent misery and suffering. It also means salvation or *moksha*. It may be considered as a state of freedom from oblivion to pain and suffering in the external world. The poet considers the title as an equivalent of absolute peace. There is a dialogue between the concupiscent and voluptuous. The 'I' is the speaker who listens to the dialogue. Suffice it for the reader to consider these as the three voices. The first two voices are those of the scabrous and scatological. The speaker 'I' is intellectual: not lewd but chaste. The 'act' is described elegantly and sensitively. It would be necessary to quote the poem at some length:

"May I kiss?"

"Where?"

*"Where the lips part
And the juices flow ...
The source of all creation."*

"You mean yoni?"

*I part the lips
with my lips
as the tongue went aflame
in the flowing stream
of wondrous love
and crystalline splendour
That ocean of love
immersed my very being
..... ..
Yet we did
merging together*

*in passion
melting together
in mutual bliss
and relished it too.*

*Fulfilment expressed itself
in silence
and only
listening to the rhythm of
calming heart beats
moaning breaths
wrapped up naked
under a single sheet
I with my beloved
ecstatic and complete
fell into an unruffled sleep. (p.66)*

The purpose of the poem, perhaps, is to bring out the chasm of difference between concupiscence and bliss; between the prurient and the sacred, between the corporeal and the spiritual. The two in dialogue obviously visualize cunnilinctus alone.

In Rajender's imagination and poetic expression there is a firm conviction in our ancient, Indic wisdom and tradition along with a broad and extremely sensitive modernity which has a deep understanding of contemporary actuality with concern, pain and disgust. It is with this mental makeup that he conceives and describes love as a splendid tingling in 'Journey':

*My toe thumb
Etching on the sandy tract below
the contours of a boat
that I believe
will carry me
to those
out stretched arms
that will envelope me
with love
and I become alive again.(p.68)*

In "Naivete' twinkling eyes, throbbing lips, emotions oozing are talked of and blushing beauty is deified:

Ah!

*These inviting expressions
defining Love*

*as the only universal language
 encourage me
 to share my poesy
 in tranquil unison
 each time
 I knock your door. (p.70)*

There is a poem 'Sandbanks':

*Unsung
 eternal lovers
 – the sandbanks –
 stand apart
 giving space
 and their unseen union
 sings the melody
 of unbound joy
 (p.74)*

In 'Reflections' talking about what they call it marriage, home and Love the circle going round starts afresh at the starting point again:

*Beloved!
 Will you marry me,
 Again?*

'Who is Valentine? Tells us:

*To be in love
 "I" need "You"
 You who becomes
 My mirror own

 Then "we" wonder not
 Who is Valentine?
 Because, we are
 the Valentine.(p.80)*

In 'Love Song' the blissfulness of the one word is explained:

*In unison
 living
 and being loved
 to the ecstasy of
 universal symphony. (p.84)*

The Hindu, you can say Indic - to exclude religious connotation - ethos permeates not just our epics alone but all serious writing of our litterateurs. There are certain eternal values derived from the matrix of national ethos. Nativism is a concept that is derived from this broad concept of our innate thinking processes. While the Western theorists of literature related their propositions and theories to all art

forms, our aestheticians, sages of yore have been theoreticians basically with a strong metaphysical stance. They had *aadhyatmic*, altruistic considerations relating and applying them to literature. They called literature *saahitya and saaraswata*, that which is salutary and that which is the blessing of the goddess of learning. The readers find in Rajender's work the basic tents of Nativism.

It is important to write about the innovative illustrations for poems. Simi Nallaseth deserves acclaim for illustrating Rajender's poems. Lifeblood of a poet's imaginative work, a poem needs to be read again and again. The task of the illustrator is manifold. The poet's understanding is to be deciphered and gone into in depth for illustration. Normally drawings and paintings are understood by the one who sees them, but never explained by anybody, not even the painter. Recently I reviewed a work of fiction where the writer used the drawings of an artist Ed Barker, in the US. I wrote: "The essay can not be rounded off without an appreciation of the sketches enriching the novel. The drawings leave some clues making the novel more powerful. The sketches are born as images in a dream.... As to how these images are realized, the artist tells us that he is just not sure. 'I just watch and wait for something to happen ... and something always does.' The drawings are expressionistic, and some even surrealistic, showing a highly personalised vision of the female nude.... The incidents in the chapters after the drawings have no clearly indicative relationships but it is natural since the novel and the drawings are not planned together at all."**

Illustrations in *Solitude* can not always be explained. They add to experience and understanding. The frontispiece is a milch cow, women inside, bell hanging from the neck and someone shaking it perhaps with mellifluous musical sound. This added to 'Solitude' could be a pleasant reminder of the human and the cow, the divine, always construed as mother. Looking inward in solitude makes one see, feel and realize many a thing. Breath is initially god given with no human volition and is deftly illustrated with facing one another, the newspapers and the mother at the end with kids hither and thither. 'Realization' is illustrated as a duo in embrace that is floating and there are bubbles – all very suggestive. The most beautiful and imaginatively expressive is for 'Her Poetic Self'. The swan (*hamsa, atma*), the soul is between the cupped hands of god with many eyes. The figure of a demure woman behind the swan is suggestive of the soul and god. It takes a long time to understand this as all the poems of the poet Rajender Krishan. The more the reader thinks, the more would he be able to understand and appreciate. The illustration for 'Physics and Social Chemistry' with butterflies, maidens and humans lying down one above and another below, a person with a conical cap with a bell at its top and a person in hoopla. The abstractions in the illustrations are a treasure trove in and by themselves. The poems need to be studied slowly fathoming the depths suggested by the poet and shown in illustrations. Line drawings of naked figures in supine postures, hands and eyes shown again and again are scintillating and suggestive.

Works cited

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*Page numbers refer to the text Krishan Rajender, *Solitude and other poems*, Cyberwit, Allahabad, 2013