BOOK REVIEW: TO WHOM I RETURN EACH DAY

POEMS BY JAYDEEP SARANGI
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Indian poetry in English has an extensive and rich tradition dating back to pre-Partition days. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio being the first poet in this lineage, Indian poetry in English has travelled far and, that too, quite successfully. It is interesting that Bengal being the cultural and intellectual hub of the country possesses an illustrious list of poets who made significant contributions in this genre of writing.

Beginning with Derozio there are poets like Kashiprasad Ghosh, Rajnarain Dutt, Soshi Chunder Dutt, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo who have left considerable impressions in this field of writing. Comparatively recent names include P. Lal, Sudeep Sen and Anuradha Bhattacharya. Contemporary poets with Bengali roots include diasporic writers like Basabi Frazer, Debjani Chatterjee, Sidhhartha Bose apart from poets like Sanjukta DasGupta and Jaydeep Sarangi who hail from Kolkata and have left indelible marks in Indian poetry in English.

These poets employ English to suit their needs keeping the Indian context in mind. ‘English is no longer the language of colonial rulers, it is a language of modern India in which words and expressions have recognised national rather than imported significances, alluding to local realities, tradition and ways of feeling. Such Indianisation has been proceeding for several generations’ (King).

Jaydeep Sarangi’s collection of poems To Whom I Return Each Day is a perfect example of this spirit of Indianisation of English language. The references and allusions to Indian epics and myths, for instance, ‘Yudhisthir’ in ‘the Other Side of Silence’ or ‘Hanuman’ in ‘I Drink Your Face of Beauty, Kangchenjunga’ keep the poems linked with Indian culture.

Sarangi is versatile and deals with various themes in his poems, the most significant being his concept of the role of a poet. In several of his poems he emphasises that the poet’s ‘words are milestones for generations’ (“Translator of Hope’) and poets are the harbingers of peace in society:
Poets are humanists
Who break walls

They will pay you back
In words, words and volumes of words
For peace of the land and mind (‘The Trusted Army’)
Time and again the poems bear witness to Sarangi’s focus on the importance of history and memory in shaping human psyche:
My home is my lost home, I return
To my home, each night (‘The Shrine of my Past’)

This ‘return’, as the title of the poetic compilation suggests, is a return to history, a return to the fond memories on the shores of Dulung and a return to all the inspirations from different spheres of life who largely contributed in shaping the poet’s personality. He returns to them ‘after the busy hours of the day’ (‘Lord of Lords’)

Being a post-colonial writer Sarangi searches for his identity through his poems: “I’m black, brown, white and yellow” (‘There was Light’) and invokes the poets across shores to be his inspiration:

Will you be my body,
A full stop? Even a dash?
Can I work through you
My dear poets? (‘I’m that Semicolon’)

The poet’s range of images and rhetorical usage is commendable. There are several images drawn from nature as ‘rain’, ‘water’, ‘bird’ and ‘river’ while unconventional metaphors as the pen vomiting ‘indigestion of.. mind’ (‘The Red Diary’) engages the attention of readers.

Sarangi’s poems are infused with a spirit of indomitable optimism, a spirit that is a dire need in today’s world of cynicism and distrust. He dreams of a world full of peace and love, a society blessed with cultural amalgamation without any differences and prejudices:

My friendship with other camp
Keeps up hope for survival (‘Translator of Hope’)

His choice of diction, diversity of images, profundity of thought and the philosophy of love and cultural harmony create a poetic world which is pure and uncorrupted,
a world that provides a beacon in the midst of the frets and worries of this world.

Reference:

King, Bruce (1987). Modern Indian Poetry in English. New Delhi: Oxford University Press