

Sarwar Morshed, *Depoeticized Rhapsody* (Academic Press and Publishers Library, 2016)

Sarwar Morshed's (un)poetic universe ranges from some Mediterranean Turkish sea beach to the Bangladeshi river-bed of Naf and in between lies the drowned body of a poem. Yes, waking up amidst a series of grave humanitarian crises of the present world order that is laden with newly reinforced forms of xenophobic hatred and geo-political power games, the biggest challenge for us is to compose or appreciate a poem. But just the way poetry had proved wrong the prophecy of a deeply agonised Adorno and survived Auschwitz, this time it survives the exhausted footsteps of the mass refugee exodus worldwide. In Sarwar Morshed's 'diachronic collection of poems' that he wrote 'over the last two decades' in order to get himself some cathartic relief we witness such a fallen world. The microcosm of the Morshedian (de)poeticised universe snapshots almost all the aspects – from local to global – of infernoesque human misery. In that sense, it's a rhapsody, as the title aptly suggests, not singing the glory of some 'la la land' but lamenting the miseries of postcolonial hinterlands marked by 'carbon footprints' and 'surgical strikes' caused by the neo-coloniser power-regimes. Again, it is 'depoeticised' as it renders everything around us poetic, that is in reality prosaic and non-poetic. As if it is meditatively targeted to the world audience to register and make sense of what 'new low' we have collectively come down to. In doing so the spectrum of Sarwar's poems on one hand, deals with international issues like those related to United Nations and SAARC(The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) policies, ISIS(Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) aggression, Middle Eastern crisis etc. On the other, he narrows it down to the 'Village Politics'. It casts a geopolitical gaze and exposes the international 'green gurus's' and 'liquid Messiahs's' irresponsible use of and almost maddening obsession with carbon credits, fossil fuels:

Measure you may the enviro-crusader's carbon footprint
 As he globe-trots piling credits on his obese carbon profile.
 Never mind, in exotic locations on eco-holiday does he relax,
 Ready is he to depocket valuable dollars as carbon tax.

(‘Portrait of an Envirophile’)

Again, in the poem entitled ‘In Praise of Hydrocarbon’ he writes,

In B & B and Co. flows the blood of Volpone,
 Around the seven continents and five oceans they alone
 Understand the ‘battle-worth’ of Hydrocarbon.
 Hence, launched the duo thousand ships
 To abduct this ‘Liquid Helen.’”

By ‘B & B and Co.’ he boldly exposes the mindless greed of world leaders like George W. Bush and Tony Blair and their ilk. Maybe the latest one in line would be Donald Trump. When it comes to such bold stances on the hypocrisies of the oil- worshipping world leaders Morshed spares none. He blatantly criticises the politico-militarist moves of ‘Rogue States’ who under the

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garb of bringing civilisation to several geopolitically crucial regions, actually bombed the countries. He also criticised Israeli oppression on Palestine and UN's utter silence on that. Invoking the ethico-moral death of the democratic spirit of the UN, he writes in the 'Requiem for U.N.'

This genocide-friendly unity of nations
With extra-care tending
The weeded garden of poison-trees.
When Hutus and Tutsies blood-bath
The UN closely observes the situation,
When Israel unchilds, unhusbands and unfathers
The Palestinians, the UN
Appeals to both the parties to exercise restraint
When Myanmarese exterminate the Rohingyas
And the West-engineered Arab Spring
Has torn the Middle East asunder,
The UN condemns and condemns and condemns!

Along with U.N., Sarwar takes a dig into the moral bankruptcy of SAARC. He criticises how the organisation is all about the two big nuclear super powers – India and Pakistan –and is solely dominated by the former. He also pungently criticises the terrorist organisation IS, synonymising it with a poisonous serpent whose hissing adds to the 'sumnam malam' of the world.

Morshed indeed, deploys the device of poetry to address each and everything that bothers his sensitivities and makes his heart bleed. While writing about them, his stand, of course, has been that of a pro-subaltern poet-rebel. Be it taking up the issue of some local heinous crime against the 'RMG girl' in 'Cry No More Penelope', or paying tribute to the victims of Nimtali Fire tragedy in 'Nineveh Lands on Nimtali' or speaking for the rights of the most disadvantaged pleb-citizens, his poems reflected a deep sense of empathy that is aware of the 'poetic injustice' around the world. For example, in poems like that of 'Orang Bangla' he addressed the deplorable plight of Bangladeshi migrant labourers who migrate to Malaysia in search of livelihood putting everything at stake only to be subjected to a life of absolute slavery.

Apart from mourning the abuses of power worldwide, another crucial theme of Morshed's poetry is to lament and mock at once the phenomenon of, let us say, 'digitisation of human emotions'. In poems like 'Texting Tears' and 'SMS' he amusingly documents his displeasure regarding the changing pattern of expressing human affect. It seems as if Morshed's poetry is very much aware of the FAANG (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google)-zeitgeist of the world and struggles to come to terms with the capitalist onslaught on human psyche. But this struggle never loses its humour. Neither does it fall short of wit. On a lighter note, he entertains the reader with a brilliant sense of mock-epic mannerism evident in his poems like that of 'Ode to Bodna', 'Portrait of a Bibliophile' etc. In fact, he knows the exact recipe of how to make a cool mocktail out of humour and seriousness to get his reader high to the exact extent that would enable her to appreciate the poem-message. For example, his hilarious tale of a Bangladeshi

‘formalin baba’ in the poem called ‘Formalin Baba: An Unpoetic Tale with Poetic Justice’ is extremely amusing. Again, his (mock-)epic handling of the same theme in the essay entitled ‘Bangladesh: The Formalin Republic’ and suggesting as to why US should spare countries like Iraq and search for WMD (weapons for Mass Destruction) in the fruit markets of the ‘formalin Republic’ of Bangladesh since the latter’s heavy use of poisonous chemical in food industry make us go *rofl*, at the same time compelling us spare some thought on the barbaric acts of the ‘rogue states’.

Apart from its witty usage, Sarwar’s poetic diction is marked by his obsession with neologisms. Often the diction is unpretentious and aim at achieving a cut-throat honest chilling effect. At times, the straightforwardness of the poems is such that it problematises the distinction between the ‘prosaic’ and the ‘poetic’. In other words, he further blurs the shadow line between the two.

While reading Morshed, one may feel the provocation to hear the undertones of a typical Ginsbergian, Beat generation style ‘Howl’ing. He addresses the issue of international organ trafficking, in poems like that of ‘To Currency’, ‘Banking’ ‘Xenotransplantation’. An active reader of his poems can pit this phenomenon against the growing racialism worldwide at present and see for herself the intended irony underneath the thematic arrangement of Morshed’s poetic scheme. Also, Morshed laments the blatant molochisation (reification in a Ginsbergian sense) or ‘mortgagging of human soul’. Alongside, traces of Eliotean love for allusion and references to a lot of things ranging from Greek myths to the vernacular, ‘Bodna’ can be found. Just like Eliot, Morshed is aware of the human decadence and ethical bankruptcy of the current world order. To conclude, reading Sarwar Morshed holds renewed significance in the wake of the current Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh’s role in this concern. Both in his collection of essays called *In the Castle of My Mind* (2015) and in his poems in *Depoeticised Rhapsody* he bravely talks about the postcolonial refugee crisis in general and Myanmar’s Rohingya crisis in particular. Such necessary enunciation brings in the element of pragmatism in the aesthetics of his poetry.

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