

Bibhu Padhi, *Sea Dreams* (Authorspress, 2017)

India has been the home to great poets and seers, writing in Indian languages including English. And in India we find that creativity is an aroma of a poet's heart. There is the pleasure in the recognition of an enlightened moment in poetic creation, followed by a heightened awareness and sensibility. Poetry's task is to reconcile us to the world of experiences where all-pervading loving togetherness can exist. The poet is an ardent artist of words and phrases. At times, Bibhu Padhi's poetic pool is redolent with a hurried system of questions and answers:

Words have ceased to arrive
at your doorsteps, as they used to. ('Returning', 128)

For Padhi, all poems are doors of the mind. The poet shows us the steps of a ladder of time. Time flies around these poems:

The crows sit over yesterday's
dead fish. ('Sea Dream', 15)

Poetry saves men and women from moments of frustration and dejection. Mundane wishes come and go. A poet has a sensitive heart to feel all these arrivals and departures of wishes and dreams:

Every lost thing is imagined
and wished for – (15)

For Bibhu Padhi, only the senses are moving among the objects of senses. Thought is a mental act. The poet wants to sign in the peace accord of minds with a whirlpool of images that vary in nature. Men and women live with dreams, dreams for a better tomorrow. For the poet, absences stay in the midst of dreams, resulting in attitudes and actions:

The smell of salt and lime
rolls over the sand and the sky
dreams of sea rise
all about me, as I stand. (27)

Padhi's musings are often short, compact and witty; at times interspersed with longer poems which all attest to the poet's vast knowledge of life. Even so, the poems in this collection are more than the experiences and realisations of life. The poet rather moves towards an aesthetic celebration, not just physical, but spiritual.

The poems are to be appreciated for their rhetoric and the variety of linguistic devices used to convey his reflections:

Summer: I shall not
call you now, when
the erratic February
rains here. ('Summer, Dhenkanal', 102)

Rain has a soul. For Padhi, each small rain drop sings. Rain binds myths in coastal Odisha. All the leading poets of Odisha write about rain and rivers. Padhi's poetic sensibility navigates on hearts that come out of the rains, and into the sunshine to soothe his sores. The poetic self of Bibhu Padhi generates meaning out of dry, repetitive and prosaic terrains of life's daily acts, where imagination conjures up mysteries of the heart. Most of his poems are a collage of ideas, effortlessly streaming from lived moments of creative pulls. Touching is knowing. Padhi is a psychological poet for whom each touch is different, more than the objects:

Touch. You can feel how
the touched words pulsate within you. ('Returning', 129)

Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, two culturally rich towns, appear again and again on Padhi's poetic canvas:

It is noontime
in the old town. ('A Bird About to Fly Way', 110)

Among the many talented poets of Odisha, past and present, it is an obvious fact that Padhi's poems strike a distinct note. His poems significantly break free from the overwhelming compulsions that prudes and purists determine to be the defining routes that poetry must track to remain truly poetic.

This is where everything ends,
Love. ('Betrayed', 138)

Odisha is the land of Jagannatha tradition. Jagannatha in a local legend was a tribal deity who was co-opted by Brahmin priests. The theology, rituals and nuances associated with the Jagannatha cult combine Vedic, Puranic and tantric themes. The sap of history of the land of Odisha has a long pedigree:

Such are the turns of history
that what is forgotten by most
is what troubles the mind. ('Looking Back', 92)

Jaydeep Sarangi