

***Time Whispers in My Ear* by Aju Mukhopadhyay, OnlineGatha, ISBN:
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Reviewed by

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Whenever I go through *Contemporary Vibes*, I often come across a poem of Aju Mukhopadhyay, distinct in tone and tenor, lucid in expression and weighty in thought and meaning and so has the distinction of being among those few modest poets who are though unique in every sense of the word, excessive humility propels them to keep themselves in low-profile.

It is not for nothing that Aju has won some prestigious awards for his poetry both in India and abroad. He has eight books of poems in English and two in Bengali to his credit. His poems have been published in 24 anthologies



that include an anthology of poems from India as well as from Australia titled: *Poetic connections* and *The Dance of the Peacock*, published in Canada. Despite occupying an exalted position in the esteemed Indian and foreign journals, websites and e-zines, in anthologies of contemporary world haiku and also of Modern English Tanka, his poems find a significant place in the 'Best Poems Encyclopedia', Poetas Del Mundo (Spanish), World Poetry Yearbook, World poetry Society, World Haiku Anthology, Margutte (Italian), Sketchbook(US), Syndic Literary journal (US) are only some magazines and journals, though more could be mentioned.

It is only after making great strides in the field of poetry that Aju has sent me his latest anthology titled, 'Time Whispers In My Ear' for review. After going through the anthology, I found that it is thought- provoking and educative as it has enhanced my own knowledge at least of geography and history. Beneath the poet's simplicity of expression one gets to see

ideas and thoughts that are universal and that clinch the wise, the philosopher and the intelligentsia—all alike. It is a style that is transparent like a clear, still or flowing stream through which its bottom could be easily seen.

Some prominent features whereby I'm struck by the anthology are: nature, pictorial quality, lyrical melody, psychological perception, highlights of corrupt scenario, moral philosophy and a strong sense of justice. However, almost all poems are shot through and through with the strong element of humanism, compassion, love and hope. As a champion of the underdog, the poet directly and sometimes indirectly conveys his deep concern for the poor, the weak and the downtrodden. Through the anthology the poet has expressed his discontentment, anguish and dissatisfaction, sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly with the ailing, corrupt and seemingly irredeemable system. It seems that I would be able to illustrate the poet's thoughts and feelings effectively, more precisely and clearly only through vital quotations from his anthology.

The highly pictorial nature poem, 'Time Whispers in my Ear' (p.11) also assumes a psycho-philosophical form as it progresses. In this, natural movements in nature are silhouetted against time, presenting exquisite Keatsian pictorial quality and sensuousness that are reflected in the lines like: 'susurrus over the vast undulating grass/tumbling of water....cracking of billy meandering streams/flowing of molten lava down the ravine/spewing of ash.....spread of forest fire....spreading rapidly with the wind....rains...rolling of water bodies....seeds sprouting, trees growing and dying.....sibilation of nature's shifting phase;/nature is at work...in every pore and cell.....' Such keen and intense perception of nature quite aptly and naturally seeps into the poet's sub-conscious mind wherefrom instantly generates psycho-philosophical ideas vented metaphorically: 'time whispers in my ear/that with nature it flows with all its belonging/to the events forthcoming/while consciousness keeps its progress in everything/constantly rolling towards the future.....that past never sits in its forlorn chair/but leaves its essence for assimilation....that the ethos of the bygone ages, their zeitgeist/can never be recovered by any strategist'. This fluid philosophical perception gets intensified by modifying and upgrading Blake's highly popular imaginative verse with sharper insight: 'To see the world in a grain of sand'. For Aju, 'the world may be seen in the grain of sand/but the flow of sand is constant;/infinity may be guessed in the palm of hand/but it cannot be gripped by any standard;/time whispers in my ear/that everything passes on forever.'

‘The Day is Lost In The Shimmering Twilight’(p.50) is a didactic poem replete with various objects of nature and derives its strength from its well-knit, metaphorical and highly picturesque qualities. Its lyrical beauty is further enhanced by a strong sense of natural justice, imparting to the gist of the poem a rather logical and universal meaning: ‘The opaque and dark evening sky/without a particular hue, defy/the reign of the Sun as it goes to set/and pulls the erstwhile bright warm day straight/into its mysterious unfathomable womb. These metaphorical lines have been aptly brought vis-a-vis ‘those who rise up with renewed oomph/at the prospect of devouring the evening young.....sink eventually into its hazy darkness....’ Likewise, ‘....those who never look at the hieroglyphs/of the evening sky in obscure light/pulling the day into its hold aright/and the majority of sheep/who never realize that the day.....is kept at bay/to be lost forever into the unknown fold...live the useless life of ignoramus.....condemned like a Sisyphus. The image of Sisyphus reinforces the effect of the comparison. Sisyphus was a cruel king of Corinth who offended Zeus and so was condemned to roll a huge boulder up a hill in Hades forever only to roll it down on nearing the top again. How a day is born to die in no time is explicated metaphysically by the ‘holocaust of time’ with exquisite poetic dexterity. ‘The day in the shimmering twilight/in its ever hopeful flight/into the mysterious womb of time/never to be reborn after melting of the time.’

The poet also views nature in all its mysteries and complexities. The unique and mystifying nature of Nature is vindicated through the poem, ‘Bumblebee Bamboozles’ (P.106). With his keen observation the poet discovers how a bumblebee violates the aerodynamic laws and bewilders even scientists by moving swiftly with light wingspan while carrying ‘its heavy body weight’. He finally concludes the poem rather wisely by hinting intelligently at the very abstruse nature of Nature:’there are laws beyond assumption/More wonderment at every step beyond our horizon,/Nature has more in store/To shock the recalcitrant science’. Through picture making quality the poet at times, perceives nature from a philosophic angle as ‘At the river bank’ (p. 97) evinces. Through his picture-making quality, the poet presents a vivid picture of stillness and calm that has been silhouetted against the movement and din of life which also marks the philosophy of a chosen area of the poem: ‘And quiet flows the river/without a ripple or shiver/trees stand windless/not even a whiff in space/no leaf shakes, no sound,/fishes are sleeping...halts at the bank of the river....’

The poet’s heart often unconsciously goes out to the suffering, uprooted and agonized humanity, revealing his profound sense of justice, humanity, love, compassion, empathy, sympathy, anxiety and concern for the entire suffering mankind. ‘In Reasonable support of

the Hazara people' (p.55), the poet's sensitive soul could hear the anguished cries of the Hazaras, 'a distinct ethnic group' of Central Asian Afghanistan, '....relocated in other countries due to persecution and fear/though they've every right to live in their land as live the others.' He first speaks of natural justice, 'all living beings are born with equal birth rights/to be taken care of by the Mother Earth/none has the right to dwarf or cull others/unless it is Nature's spontaneous action.....'Finding the helpless Hazaras, hapless with no help conceivable from any corner of the earth, he exhorts his fellow poets and humanity in general to relieve their wretched condition and alleviate their agony: 'It is the voice of the Poets, voice of Peace, voice of Love /for the Hazara people, appealing to all who have been/so far persecuting them, appealing to all humans throughout/the globe to put a stop to it mainly because we're humans.....Rise up brothers toembrace brothers/be humane, not just dogs.' To reinforce this idea the same theme is however, taken up in 'The Uncivilized' (p.61) wherein 'Uigher, a nomadic pastoral tribe/of Turkish origin in Xinjiang,/ find it difficult to survive/squeezed out by the Han Chinese...to kill the Tibetan culture, depopulate, destabilize/the peaceful Tibetan Buddhist race.....'Further, 'Creating tourism and villa in the land of Jarawas/leads to the extinction of the aboriginals'.

Man's greed and loot that traverse from sea to earth and thence, to heaven, is all brazenly ceaseless. Natural reserves, like oil, coal, gold, minerals and all woodland treasures are plundered inducing ecological disaster first and its wrath, later. Horrific and unabashed tales of loot and pillage, sometimes even in the name of God and religion, could be witnessed in all ages. Infusing poetic beauties into his bitter satire and irony, the poet explicates his expansive idea satirically thus: 'Wherever minerals, oil or woodland treasures are found/men run to acquire the wealth profound/extinguishing the pristine flora and fauna/and the indigenous people, Nature bound,/in Amazonian, Peruvian forests, hilly belts in India/in Indonesia, Philippines, Canada and Africa,/Moving into galaxies, to the north and south poles/plundering the reserves of the earth and heaven—feel victorious, but the soil they stand on shifts/for their pollutive role in human lives--- civilized people are the most uncivilized.'

In 'The Adivasi (p.62) man's greed, cruelty, selfishness, deceitfulness and exploitation are graphically elucidated : '...greed/ For gold flashing in their eyes, swooped with guns/And swords like human hawks on unknown land... Columbus with Bahama Arawaks/And other tribes of Caribbean islands,/Cortes in Peru with the Incus,/The English settlers in America/With many tribes including the Pequots/And with many others in Australia/Following James Cook's visit in the year/1770, so savagely/Behaved with all the

unarmed innocent Adivasis of the foreign lands who welcomed them,/That made them ride the rough roller coaster/ To embrace certain death and devastation/ Original Americans were pushed/ From eastern Atlantic to the western/Pacific for burial in the ocean. 'Most tragically,' All such indigenous human beings/Who were so devastated, sold and killed/Were cultured and civilized, lived fulfilled'. Despite the painful and shameful fact that 'over the corpses of tribes wealth' was 'made/In socialist, capitalist countries, it becomes a farce when some misguided terrorists shine...' even today. And it is deeply pathetic that the Adivasis are not lauded though they displayed unexampled determination and strength of will by not yielding to the callous invaders even after being threatened, converted and brainwashed. Further, advasis being the 'first born on earth', are the most original inhabitants, it would be totally absurd to 'ogle at jarawas,/Oldest Andamanese, like the beast in cage'. It is also ridiculous, rather a 'puffed up farce' to declare 'International Day of/World's indigenous people' by the highest/World-body...'leading globalization to become a rather permanent 'stain on human glory'. The long thought-provoking poem finally ends with the externalization of the poet's deep sense of justice supplemented by a bit of relevant counseling. He affirms that if the aboriginals were to be removed, it should have been done with their consent and they 'must be compensated/Be aware man, awake; Honor Nature/To be honored by it, to live better'. 'Fall of a Habitat'(p.107) is another moving poem that explicates how man has shattered the joys and dreams of 'lion-tailed Macaque, giant Malabar squirrels', 'nilgiri langurs' by usurping their natural habitat. Instead of sharing their habitat, mankind, consisting of 'adventurous, profit monger and corrupt', rape and ravish 'nature they live' as 'coffee, tea, rubber and minerals have stolen men's hearts'. The evil in modern man is thus, sketched tellingly and effectively with certain historical facts and instances by the poet through many poems.

The poet, however, does not remain focused on the darker aspects of life for, for him, every cloud has a silver lining. 'A Woman Savior of Mankind' (p.13), is a beautiful, but pathetic poem based on the sacrifice of a 22 year old café-worker who 'rising to the occasion' saved '...children and half-dead sea farers' when the South Korean boat drowned. The poet becomes most lyrical while expressing her act of sacrifice: 'Igniter of the sacrificial fire/With the fire glowing within her;/Inspired by the Divine will and bliss/She lives in man's heart for her selfless sacrifice.' Sacrifice, humanity and best human values comprise the essence of the poem, proving how hope is still alive and perceptible in this hopeless world. In 'Hope' (p.47) the poet rests his entire poem on hope 'even amid terrorism and destruction'. He confidently asserts: ' a hope growing within/that catastrophe will not happen'. In 'Nuclear the Evil Force'

(p.84), after describing the after effects of atom bomb, the poet instills a sense of hopefulness among humans by stressing how 'Karma may be uplifted by human wisdom/To defeat the evils of life like nuclear fission/To keep high the flag of freedom'. In 'Nelson Mandela...Victory' (p.14), sublime values, relentless human struggle and all humanitarian traits are displayed most spontaneously by Nelson Mandela, the former president of Africa and the Noble Prize winner for peace. For a great freedom fighter, an ambassador of social peace, a strong man with iron will, 27 years of 'jail was nothing to him' whose 'patience and perseverance with persistent resolution/were the basis of his lifelong struggle...he was unconquerable....' His death in 2013 at the age of 95 sparked mourning around the globe.

Again in the midst of rampant corruption and evil, the poet discovers great humanitarian souls like 'Sri Aurobindo' (41) who '...was a lotus born in mud, away from the mundane scene', yet 'the cascading Supramental light...touching the sky kept its foot on earth fixed'. It is the divine perception of the poet itself that enables him to see how God sits in the body of his seer poet whose face reveals 'the eternity...Out of intense love for men he sat away from eternity'. But, all the same, the poet does not lose sight of 'Small fries in shallow water and surface gazers/were lost in his fathomless water.' The poet further illustrated his positive traits in 'A complete human being'(p.44) to underline how he evolves certain qualities to enable himself to serve the cause of suffering humanity: 'The inner being pushed him from one to the other theme/He was a poet, revolutionary, yogi, journalist, writer and thinker...' Likewise, in 'Buddha Purnima' (18), the poet delineates Lord Buddha's 'sympathetic attitude', his 'benevolence', message of 'love and peace; desire-less boon' that touch 'our soul/is not an enigma'. The poet's eulogy of all these icons is not only appropriate, but also commendable. He could foresee a beacon of hope even where there is pitch-darkness which also vindicates his bi-focal vision.

A philosophically moralistic poem, 'Pray that you Play your Part Best' (p.33) has a lot to teach to mankind. The poet stresses how humans are mortal and how death equalizes all, 'but blinded by pride' men 'do not see the beyond'. Further, 'the world would not have progressed without death.' As a deist he wisely goes on to say 'If you cannot admit God, do not explain it away in Nature's way' and like an innocent child 'pray that you can play the part best as you are assigned'. By implication the poet means that one should conduct oneself well without allowing one's moral certitude to collapse. Corollary to this is 'United in Camp-fire' (p.34) that elucidates unity, harmony, peace, love and universal brotherhood. The poet explicates the oneness of humanity lyrically, symbolically and picturesquely: 'we live in camps, united in

camp-fire/for the world is a field of our sojourn divided in camps....'The poet finally advises us to shed 'pride, domination or diplomacy' and 'embrace all with pure love/for that is the only sovereign unity'.

Some poems of Aju are also infused with deep human psychology, he at times, project the inner workings of the sub-conscious mind. In 'Invisibly with me' (p.24) memories of idle days with certain variations—sweet, bitter and sour creep up on the poet's psyche while taking tea. The poet lyrically expresses his thoughts that meet his heart 'in various ways/flowing over me, through me/coming out of the doors of the body and behave 'differently at different times... nature changes seasonally, endearingly, roughly, lovingly...presence constantly....' 'Invisible yet perceptible' (p.23) is infused with subtle psychology covering a wide range of human existence and activities with present, past and future, all merging into one: 'Age is pushing them with feet/as they try to rise from the subconscious deep/the relationship, physical vital mental/heterosexual or asexual or obscure camaraderie/ passionate quagmire from the oblivious memory....' 'Inwardness' is also written in almost the same vein, fusing present, past and future into one, covering a broad spectrum of activities and bringing many layers of consciousness into play '...Of time past in bitter-sweet taste/In erotic sense, with pain or pleasure/Fear of the unknown, hope for the future,/Alone yet in company....'

The anthology, hence, is the most explicit manifestation of the psyche of the poet. Doubtless, Aju carries a fertile and vibrant psyche that brims over with ideas, feelings and thoughts that are sometimes weird, sometimes brilliant, sometimes abstruse, sometimes mystical, sometimes deep, sometimes rational, sometimes fanciful, sometimes psychological and sometimes philosophical. The anthology also covers almost all gamut of human thoughts and emotions and serves as a sumptuous mental and emotional food for the entire literati all over the world; posterity will also surely remember him as a great poet.