

### *Shimmer Spring: Prose and Poetry*

Presented by Kiriti Sengupta. Kolkata and Delhi: Hawakal Publishers, 2020, pp. 124, INR 2500.

Priyanka Tripathi & Debashrita Dey

Where's the light, the light?  
Ignite it with the fire of longing  
The lamp is there, but no flame  
What is this doom on my brow?

— Rabindranath Tagore, Song 49 (*Gitanjali*)

The Covid pandemic has propelled mankind to edges never imagined before, and looming uncertainty has raised the question: 'Where's the light, the light?'<sup>1</sup> In such times of despair and ennui, when one tries to cling onto every iota of hope, while grappling with an invisible enemy and one's helplessness, literature has unfailingly emerged to 'illumine our faculties.' Kiriti Sengupta's editorial work *Shimmer Spring: Prose and Poetry* (2020) is one such engaging pursuit which, with its shimmer, acted as a respite in the 'prevailing darkness' when society's pulsating cadence was affected by the imposed restrictions that confined us to our four walls. The anthology of prose and poetry by the award-winning poet, editor, and translator brings together the works of several authors from various parts of the world. It intrinsically attempts to strengthen human bonds through rhythmical poetry and prose amidst moments of predicament. The stirring articulations by known and budding writers make the readers realize that the freedom to express enables 'light to play in our lives in ways more than one' (p. 5), and the artistic renderings by Pintu Biswas and Bitan Chakraborty touch our sensibilities with their evocative choice of colors unfolding as a treat to our 'eyes and senses.' (p. 10)

The introductory poem, 'Troth,' by Sengupta himself bears witness to the essence of a conjugal pledge in married life that makes us correlate as to how love can create 'miracles' in the contemporary times, when

disjointed lives under the grasp of physical distancing, have effectively striven to find alternative ways of staying connected with their loved ones. Akhil Katyal's poem, 'An Evening Walk,' is a tribute that extends solidarity to a young activist, Natasha Narwal, charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for inciting communal violence and taken into custody by the Delhi Police in 2020. This poem makes one aware of how administration can take recourse to muzzling the aspiring voices of such student activists, thus recalling Mahasweta Devi's phenomenal statement of how a 'society that gave the dead the right to live and denied it to the living.'<sup>2</sup> In his following poem, 'A Quarrel Can End in Two Ways,' Katyal mentions 'two kinds of light' (p. 18) that always remain functional — the Sun's emission traversing to Saturn and the glitter of a firefly that breathes life into a rainforest, thereby hinting at the question raised in the introduction to this collection, 'How do we perceive light?' (p. 5) An illuminating light also emanates from the 'moll' who, carrying an unborn child in 'the dark of her womb,' walks through the mist in Basab Mondal's 'Fetus' with the 'half-ate moon,' (p. 35) the sole witness to her glow, in a society that relegates her existence to the dark corners.

Poetry, with its revitalizing power, experiences both the portentous as well as the unremarkable of our times, as befittingly captured by the acclaimed poet Alan Britt in 'Ode to a Poem' where he mentions how a 'poem recognizes itself / just before its expulsion / from solid terra firma / and keeps on dreaming / a new sensibility.' (p. 21) Poetry speaks to us in a rhythm that happens to be the most instinctive to our existence. The light in its embracing nature is perhaps the source that keeps the *dargah* (Sufi shrine) in Ammar Aziz's 'The Dargah at Night' lit even in the 'absence of light' (p. 23) and makes

\* Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, IIT, Patna

the *mujawar* (caretaker of the shrine) forgive the heinous act of a young invader whose bloodshed resulted in the penetrating silence at the *dargah*. One is also reminded of the 'holy nimbus-myths' in Jhilara Chattaraj's poetry where the 'cold/luciferins illumine god's halo' (p. 53) and the 'shabby faces' of the *Bauls* in Milan Mondal's poem who enchant us (p. 72). Again, the light that rests in such dark crevices, 'incapable of hiding/Springs to shimmer,' (p.100) liberates every being from their underlying 'murkiness,' writes Tawaz. History makes its 'former self' perceptibly felt in Anannya Dasgupta's 'At Lucknow Regency' and resonates with life under the 'roofless sky,' making her realize how mistaken she had been in 'ruining with the dead' (p.25).

Mamang Dai, in 'The Tree with a Thousand Flowers,' ruminates on the rain that seeks to 'transform some sad absence' (p.70) and leaves us pondering if faith was more significant than hope (p. 70). The 'ordinariness' of life also harbors 'regermination, rejuvenation, nirvana' in Sudeep Sen's tribute to Kathak dancer Aditi Mangaldas (p. 113).

Bausdhara Roy's 'Reflections' on love beautifully demonstrates how 'In love, all becomes shared,' thus rendering it difficult for a soul to decide 'what is left' when love is lost. Reminiscing moments of togetherness whose 'nameless bits' spin in 'memory's beam,' (p. 37) Jagarai Mukherjee exclaims how 'The trivial/matter of you not being there' (p.51) urges one to trace the invisible presence of the former love with an interest which, despite being 'detached' is not 'dry.'

Perhaps 'sometimes/one belongs without belonging,' (p. 85) writes Sanjeev Sethi, with memories remaining 'radiant' in the mindscapes, that continue to haunt us with their iridescent glow. Such recollections might flash upon us on a disheveled night or in 'midsummer rain,'

relocating us to the 'bygone days,' writes Devika Basu in her poetic pieces. Echoes Joan Kwon Glass in 'Paris, June 2017,' where her most poignant memory circles around the flight of the pigeons beneath the Eiffel Tower, as their wings unfurling, resembled the 'collective breath/of every mother giving birth.' (p. 56)

Every city accommodates the 'invisible' that comprises 'many sounds/ many bodies,' says Tim Kahl in 'Vague Interlude' and extends his warmth to the unheard animals that seem to be 'speaking to us all along.' (p. 107). In her prose piece, Gayatri Majumdar underlines holistic existence where 'we can accommodate each other in this shared dream' (p. 45) and not treat birds/animals as our adversaries in the game.

'Shimmer Spring' encourages us to rekindle the light seated within ourselves even when art mirrors life—reflecting the grim picture of the pandemic on stage and prompts the older self to cognize the 'new skin' and reap joy from every evanescent moment. Springing up from the 'stillness of becoming' and clasping onto hope in trying times is invaluable to one's survival. Thus, like Sudeep Sen, one should acknowledge the epistemic account of the truth that 'Life's dance continues — with or without us — / only in the understanding of what is, / is there freedom from what is.' (p.97)

## Notes

1. Rabindranath Tagore: Gitanjali. Translated by William Radice, New Delhi. Penguin Books. 2011: 5
2. Mahasweta Devi: Mother of 1084 (Hajar Churashir Ma). Translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay, Kolkata, Seagull Books. 2014: 115