

Book Reviews

Excavations, S. Ramaswamy, Bangalore: CVG India, 2015. Pages 232.

The book contains twenty essays on a variety of topics representing different cultures and traditions across continents but the undercurrent of Indian approach to different literatures is prominently displayed.

The first essay on 'Vagartha' explores the Indian concept of the word conceived as *Para, Pashyanthi, Madhyama and Vaikhari*. The subject is vast and deep but it has been superficially treated. The content is informative as well as a little propagandist. But it also gives a chaste view by quoting Eliot on how word and meaning cannot dance together. The big question ever remains which is first, word or meaning, i.e. whether the need to express a meaning forms a word/ language or the language/ word takes us along to discover its meaning or both flash in the mind simultaneously. The conclusion, however, is interesting as it follows the *Advaitin* line of thought that words move and finally dissipate in silence.

The second essay on 'Indian Literature in English Translation' gives a long list of English translations of Indian writings but does not point out that because of the vast difference between Indian and British cultures the translations could only be approximate but not faithful as it normally happens in translations. Since a language carries the spirit of culture to which it belongs, it is unlikely that the target language would also possess identical cultural nuance. The essay is very informative and a good resource for prospective researchers. The writer being a Kannad writer himself devoted more space to Kannad language in which he mentions the name of S.L. Bhyrappa, the most translated contemporary Indian writer. A brief analysis of his works and the author's observations do impress the reader. But I failed to understand as to why he should lament the 'non-recognition' of Bhyrappa (by way of Nobel Prize) by the West. He must understand that it is an instrument of the multinationals, just to popularize their way of thinking under the cover of transparency. A few Indians who had been given some prizes by the Western countries had only indulged into denigrating Indian culture and society just in the name of presenting surface reality. Exhortation to translate as much as possible is a good advice to readers who have literary taste and want to keep themselves busy in such activities.

'...Trees in Ancient Indian Literature' begins with Englishman's concern for conservation of environment and soon takes up the Indian sensibility regarding trees and environment. That India has been an environment conscious country since time immemorial has been well presented. Trees have been not only a source of life supporting phenomenon but also they have ever been a source of enlightenment and they have a spiritual significance but this is possible only in India. All literatures, *the Vedas, Upanishads* and epics of India highlight this aspect.

'Bhakti Movement and Literature' is an example of Pan Indian cultural tradition from *Upanishads* and *Puranas* to different literatures in Indian languages. Natraj or dancing Shiva is a symbol of self-realization personified. The Bhakti movement consistently displays a journey from the concrete to the abstract, the very essence of Indian tradition. There is focus on Bhakti of Shiva and that too as is observed in the southern states

only. But, if the writer had also included other streams of Bhakti, for example Krishna or Durga, it would have been fairly comprehensive.

Nehru's personality was charismatic and multidimensional. He was loved by the masses. The writer mentions only Kannad literature wherein sentiments for Nehru find elaborate inclusion but quotations in Kannad are unintelligible to a non-Kannad speaker. Naturally they are unable to appreciate the true import of such references to Nehru.

The sixth essay on S.L. Bhyrappa's novels is a well-constructed rich tribute to the great author. The first two paragraphs display Bhyrappa's depth of understanding of the Indian ethos, wherein true advaitin character of Indian sensibility is exemplified. He has successfully characterized that life is barren without musical element which is part and parcel of every character in Bhyrappa's novels sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously. The author has tried his best to vindicate that Bhyrappa's novels are a great example of aesthetics in literature.

The essay on Kathleen Raine highlights an Indian approach to Western text. It's a homage not only to Raja Rao but also to 'the India of the imagination'. This is an impressive piece of writing that holds a promise to prospective critics and writers as to what should be an Indian approach to other literatures. Other essays like 'Indian Literature in English.....', 'Gandhi- Tolstoy Correspondence', 'Immigration and the Indian Diaspora', 'The Upanishads and the Bhagwadgita'. ' Tagore's 'Sanyasi', a Sanskrit Translation', 'Tradition and Transformation in French Canadian Writing....', 'Modern Sensibility in European Lit....', 'Feminine Figure of Divinity....', 'Individual Identity in Relation to Tradition' are more superficial than appealing. They are short in length and they give an eye-view, no doubt, but they explore very little and do not lead the reader to a definite point of view. However, the essay on 'Japanese Drama and Theatre', 'Humanism in Mark Twain....' do contain some relevant information and also present a critical assessment. 'The One Life: Coleridge and Hinduism' is also a good essay that highlights the Western interest in the Indian cultural tradition. Similarities between Coleridge and Indian thought surprise as well as inspire the reader. It gives a brief list of Western poets/ writers who made some notable contribution to translation of Indian texts into English or elaborated Indian concepts in their own style.

Finally the Presidential address is a befitting homage to the memory of teachers like Prof P S Shastri and Prof S. Ramaswamy and a rich tribute to Anand K Coomaraswamy, who with his unified sensibility brought about a change in the Indian perspective and gave a truly integrated vision of life in literature and literature in life across cultures of East and West, ancient and modern. The speaker displays a truly Indian mind well-versed in culture and tradition. The range of his knowledge covers continents with diverse cultures from ancients to moderns. The essay speaks about *Preyas*, *Shreyas*, *Para*, *Apara*, etc in literature and finally arrives to discover the reality of existence dispelling ignorance and realizing that he is one with formless, fathomless solitude.

What is constantly irritating and absolutely disgusting is bad composition, unnecessary use of capital letters and printing errors throughout the book. The style of writing is reflective and less descriptive but at times it comes closer to a dialogue with

the reader. The book is an example of bad proof-reading and publishing. I wonder why Prof S Ramaswamy had to choose such publisher.

A. K. Awasthi

December Poems, Ranu Uniyal, Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 2012. pages 60.

Prof. Ranu Uniyal whom I personally know, is a pleasing personality with a highly sensitive heart of a poet. The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, U.K. in Sept. 2007 issue, praised her first book of poems *Across the Divide* as "a mosaic of sublime feelings expressed with great creative energy". On a personal note, I must confess that I fell in love with the book 'December Poems' at the first sight when it was offered to me by Dr. S.C. Hajela for a review. The green hardbound cover with a beautiful cursive font mesmerized me instantly. The presentation of the food increases the appetite and entices the food lover to enjoy it. The same happened to me and I really savoured every dish (poem) delectably.

The very first poem 'Krishna to Kaunteya' takes the reader to the battle field of Kurukshetra where the great *Shrimad Bhagwad Gita* came into existence. A beautiful oxymoron in the last line of the first stanza unravels the philosophy of life in the words of wisdom uttered by Lord Krishna – *Death in life and live in death*. The fourth line of the second stanza motivates the learner to move to the path of knowledge with an ardent heart – *the tree of jnana stands rooted to the earth of bhakti*. Our religious feeling reaches the ultimate height of emotion with the preachings of Krishna to his *sakha* Arjuna to remove the fetters of Maya and delve deep into His Soul and feel the eternal joy – *Sat Chid Ananda*. The transcendentalism, the art of living is beautifully presented in these twenty lines.

'Behind the Periyar' directs us to the modern man's loneliness and alienation. 'The Library' reminds us of the importance of books and reading together, meeting point of intellectuals, now converting to e-books. 'Delhi is not for burning!' sketches the recent picture of unsafe Delhi with the metro culture and active political throbbing. 'Invigilation' presents truly the change of time in the world of education. The Guru-Shishya culture inculcating the seed of goodness as God has converted to the shortcut of powerplay and fame. We, the teachers have a role to play but truly a few, nowadays, have the courage to stand for truth. It's a mirror to society of professionalism and saleability. Nice sarcasm in *Who am I writing these lines for?... and Poets are not meant to be heard anymore* and *women have never been good at jokes*.

'Daddy' initiates me to the movie of Mahesh Bhatt- 'Daddy' and Anupam Kher playing the title role as a singer and the poem also sketches visually a pianist. The lines crooning in my heart –

Aaina mujhse meri pehli si surat maange,

Mere apne mere hone ki nishani maange.

'Ahilya to Ram' and 'Realization' explores the aspect of feminism in different dimensions. 'Requiem for the living' pours out the emotions of the poetess for her father whom she adores deeply. The symbolic presentation of 'Earth', patiently bearing