

Book Reviews

Coolie the Sovereign, Dr Boyi Bhimanna. Translated by Dr T. S. Chandra Mouli. Published by Boyi Bimanna Sahithe Peetham, P.S.Telugu University,Hyderabad, 2012. Pages 102, ₹ 75.00.

Coolie, the Sovereign (KuuliRaju), a political play in Telugu was written by Padmabhuashan Dr Boyi Bhimanna and translated into English by T. SaiChandramouli. Dr Bhimanna is a great literary luminary on Telugu literary firmament. His contribution to Telugu literature is immense and highly respected. His creative genius works includes *Paleru*, *Adikavi Valmiki*, *Veda Vyasusudu*, *Raga Vaishtam*, *Raabhilu*, *Gudeselu Kaalipothunnaiju* among others. They made great impact on Telugu speaking people. His extraordinary genius can also be measured in his metrical poetry, lyrics, free verse, drama and literary criticism. He is considered a socialist because throughout his life he wrote for the upliftment of Dalits of his region. He has dedicated the play to Sri Vemula Kurmayya Garu who was the then Minister in composite Madras state.

Dr T. SaiChandramouli is a well known figure in the literary world. Hailing from Hyderabad, he is a poet, translator and critic who published several anthologies of literary criticism and poetry in English. His translations of Telugu fiction and poetry have extensively published. His translation of *KuuliRaju* into English with the title *Coolie, the Sovereign* is a great tribute to the Telugu legend, Padmabhushan Dr. BoyiBhimanna.

Coolie, the Sovereign (KuuliRaju) is a political play but it can also be termed a social play with a purpose, as it deals with the upliftment of the most marginalised class, Coolie. Dr Bhimanna wrote the play in 1942 and staged it with the title *KashtaJeevi*. It was also serialized in the weekly of the time *Navajeevan*. After that underwent modification many times and finally acquired an absolute form with the title '*KuuliRaju*.' It is a reputed play which was published in 1948 in the regional language, Telugu and now it has been translated into English by Dr Chandramouli.

Dr Bhimanna was deeply involved in the upliftment of Dalits and this concern of his is reflected in all his mythological and social dramas. Being a reformer, he was greatly inspired by the views of Mahatma Gandhi that a Dalit lady should be the President of India to substantiate the term 'freedom.' Further he was greatly influenced by the philosophies of Marx and Lenin.

Dr Bhimanna was a firm believer of social realism which he felt would be possible only when the Coolie acquires power to govern. The play, *Coolie, the Sovereign (KuuliRaju)* depicts the struggle between 'the haves' and 'the haves not' as on one side there are the exploiters, the landlord and their cronies, and on the other side one finds the marginalised class, the agricultural labourers who subsist on meagre earnings. These two are the warring group and their struggle can be termed 'dharma yuddha' in Hindi.

Madhu Murthy is the male-protagonist of the play, who after the completion of his studies comes to the village and is shocked to know the travails of the working class to

which he belongs. The two female characters, Paramjyothi and Mithra tell him how the working class is exploited. These two progressive women offer lasting support to him in his movement against exploitation. Madhu Murthy gets a very good opportunity to serve in the Government sector but he declines this golden offer and devotes his life for the welfare of the coolies.

The Coolie Union realized that the only means to get justice and end all sufferings is to clinch power to govern. For this they contested elections and were fortunate to win handomely. Premkumara, the landlord's son who was of progressive nature also supported them raising his voice against his own father. After their triumph, the young lady, Paramjyothi was elected as President of free India. With this the welfare of the downtrodden and marginalised class began and the lands of the landlord were given to them.

This drama sends a very strong message to the audience that 'strength lies in unity.' By extension it offers illuminating solution that if all the exploited classes stand united and fight against tyranny they accomplish ultimate triumph and can also capture power to govern. Though it is a social and political drama, one may also call it a poetic play. Although it is not like T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, the playwright has used poetry at many places to delineate the feelings and attitudes of the characters and the situations. The playwright also employs traditional folk art form of the Telugus alone, known as *burrakatha*. The English version, *Coolie, the Sovereign* carries all ornaments of *Kuuli Raju* like crisp dialogue, songs, prayers, sloganeering, metered poems, love lyrics, bhajans etc. As stated rightly by him, it seems to be a difficult task for the translator to carry all these traditional Telugu elements into an alien language like English. Kudos to him for undertaking such a tough venture.

The play has been divided into Twelve Acts, depicting the great struggle of the marginalised sections of the society in a heroic way. In translating it, the translator has tried to retain some original expressions in Telugu, which is the source language of the play. As he says:

"Retention of the original flavour of the source text is an essential feature of any translation. Literary translation differs from translation of documents. Creativity, an asset and an impediment, aided by intuition enables a translator render justice to the task undertaken."

Dr Boyi Bhimana Sahitya Peetham, P.S.Telugu University took up the project of getting the works of the playwright translated into English. This play in English version was launched on the occasion of the Hundred and second birth anniversary of Dr Boyi Bhimanna. T. Sai Chandra Mouli pays tribute to him through this translated text of *Kuuli Raju*. It is a must read play for people interested in Subaltern or Dalit writings and literature in Translation.

Shamenaz Bano

Deluges: A Collection of Poems, Varsha Singh, New Delhi: GNOSIS, 2014. ISBN 978-93-81030-68-4 Pages: 82, Price: 195.

Being the land of great minds and fertile brains that moisten their beloved soil in every field from the antiquity; from the romantic poetess Toru Dutt (1856-1877) to the

post-colonial eclectic writer Arundhati Roy, India has been representing English Literature with an overflowed basket of multifarious themes in every genre. The Indian English literature is sprouting rapidly on the landscape of world English literature. The tsunami of young Indian English writers is quite furious that it has not left any theme or genre unshaken. Thus, when one reads Varsha Singh's *Deluges: A Collections of Poems*, one is confronted with multiplicity of themes that the book harbours within itself.

Varsha Singh, born and brought up in Dhanbad, Jharkhand, is a young Poet, Translator, Reviewer, Scholar, Editor and Blogger. She is hovering over the literary planet with her angelic wings of Hindi and English. Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee, the Indian English poet and Chief Editor of Authorspress, says, Varsha Singh is a scholarly Editor with wise head on young shoulders, in her poetry, set out to explore her mindscape, her roots and experience above all as a woman and then as a human being, in an attempt to gather into unity the various lives she has lived with her negative capability in the no less huge span of her poetic landscape. The *Deluges: A Collection of Poems* is her debut collection published in the form of a diary with all the dates mentioned along with the verses in which the pieces were written. Basically, it is a personal noting of a girl becoming public for the readers, to whom the poems belong after being published, as the author says.

The collection begins with a poem "Something Between" much provoking in nature where a reader feels that every word is unveiling his/her day-to-day encounters, "Moonless nights/ Days sunless/ dreamless sleeps/ waking truthless/ Freedom freeless/ bondage useless". The narrator of the poem swims in the modern world's sea of meaninglessness, where everything is drowning meaninglessly. Unlike Rabindranath Tagore's famous poem "My Heaven" in which he tries to establish an imaginary heaven, "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high/ Where knowledge is free/ Where the world has not been broken up into fragments/ By narrow domestic walls, the poet does not run away from the harsh realities of the unkind world. She unpacks a new theme on the every page of this collection. Sometimes the reader sings with the narrator on the bitter tunes of life, sometimes dances in the glen of nostalgia. The reader enjoys a new theme in its very second poem, "Childhood Poeticized". The theme is crystal clear from the title of the poem but its beauty is deeply hidden in its diction which she has used flawlessly. In the poem "Warmth of Yours Unfolded Letters", narrator feels warmth in a chilling winter night with the letters of her/his loved one. The narrator feels that the words float intensely, "before my eyes/ within my heart/ lightened as a beam/ ardent and keen!" The art of imagination is at its peak in the whole collection. The intensity of imagination is so high that one is bound to fly where the poet wants her/him to.

The collection flails to its new marvelous themes. Being a girl from India's coal capital Dhanbad, she comes with an exact depiction of her birthplace. The poem "The City of Coal" is a real picture of the city which is in the good books of Indian government only for its resources. The satirical beginning of the poem demands much more from the throned gentlemen of the city and the country. With the theme of alienation as it beats as, "The city of coal/ has numerous/ diamonds/ hidden/ inverted/ crumpled/ noticed/ unnoticed", the poem is a kind of U-turn from the romantic themes. The

reader does not remain indifferent to the bemoaning tone of the poem. In fact, the poem is short and hardly runs on the whole page but is sharp and long-ranged.

The poetess is fully conscious of what she is attempting to convey to her readers. *The Deluges: A Collection of Poems* is a breath of fresh air in the Indian English poetry. What one creative mind experiences in his/her life, gives it an undying shape on a dead blank paper as it has been shouldered by the poetess herself in the opening page of acknowledgements, "This collection is a mélange of my poetic inspiration drawn from various spheres of life, emotions and thought process". The intrinsic value of the book is that a reader gets all frying themes in a single pan. The poet has not excused even the voluptuous and erotic imagery. When a reader goes through it he/she can smell of Kamla Das. The poem "Tranquil Attire" is a kind of high-voltage conductor. She does not resort to oblique or indirect references to love-making. She unveils the saying that, "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and let loose a series of emotions like this, in the poem, "Amorous warmth/ canoodling brinks/ leaving the marks/ of intimate doting!" The poem is short but its effect distracts a reader from within because her imagery has a strong sensuous quality. The directness of her voice led to comparisons with the most controversial Indian English poetess and short story writer, Kamla Das. But poet's love for the lover is merely soul-based rather than physical, which she decodes in her next poem, "Synonym-less", "I tried exploring/ synonyms for you.../ but you prevailed the one/ inevitable.../ single soul/ dwelling in this heart..." Some poems of this collection are laden with pleasant euphony, which a reader wants to swig all at once. The poem, "My Mighty Gulmohar" cannot bid adieu to its reader without taking him to the heights of that pleasure which one gets from the Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils". The narrator of the poem rejoices its colourful company, "I spend my days watching you/ from windows, doors and balcony/ The green leaves you drop on me/ and romance with your red flowers". Its imagery and the diction are too mesmerizing that a reader is led to heavenly sensations. There are poems with some serious themes like, "Nature's Return" – a very successful serious attempt where the poet onslaughts on the misdoings of a greedy human against nature. The poet solemnly comes against the human being for all the ecological disturbance and imbalance which the whole world is facing. The gust of dust/ The filthy smoke/ The wound of woods/ In nature's food...!, these are the opening lines of the poem which carries the message that what man does against the nature, nature repays the same. The whole collection comes with a new message and pleasure on every turn.

The thirst is unquenched because the paucity of time and space does not allow me to delve deep into the deluge of emotions. It would be a great suggestion for the readers to get drenched in the sanguine emotions of rain which is being stored in the *Deluges*, the appropriately titled book.

Waseem Majid

Black Lotus: Telugu Dalit Women's Poetry by T. Sai Chandra Mouli, New Delhi: Adhyaayan Publishers and Distributors, 2014, Pages 78, Rs. 195/=

This slim volume of twenty one original, translated poems of Telugu Dalit Women's poetry, is a worthy testimony to the editor's potential of being a keen observer of life. The editor, T. Sai Chandra Mouli, is a poet, translator and a critic. He is a fellow of

Dialogue: A Journal Devoted to Literary Appreciation

Vol X No 1 June 2014

Royal Asiatic Society, Great Britain and Ireland. This book is undoubtedly an excellent endeavour where in the editor travelled extensively to contact Dalit women who have contributed in some measure or in ample measure. Quantum is not a yard stick, but the effusive responses and spontaneous recounting of incidents make this book all the more engrossing to read and ruminate on. The importance of this seminal book can be understood from the fact that there is not much evidence of anthologies of poetry collectively published by Dalit women in Telugu.

Dalit women in India may be compared with African American women in America and aboriginal womenfolk in Australia, as they all pass through the same process of discrimination, victimization and brutalization of their souls. Women in certain tribes in Africa suffer no less. The book under review tries to illustrate the deplorable conditions in which Telugu Dalit women live and make an effort to express their deep rooted agony and seek justice for themselves. In fact, this book is a modest attempt by the editor to render poems written by the Dalit women into English for assessment of the discerning. It is hoped that this initiative may trigger further activity in this arena of study.

Dalit literature has provided Indian literature with hitherto unknown experiences, a strange sensitivity and diction, a totally unknown protagonist, an alternate viewpoint and a new expression to suffering and a strong desire to revolt. Common people began the language of entitlements and rights due to the emergence of a democratic form of governance. New writers emerged from various sections of society. They presented in their writings, their own language, environment, condition and issues. Dalit literature attracted considerable discussion because of its form and objective, which were different from those of the other post-independence literatures. It gained acceptance and is being appreciated slowly yet steadily.

Dalit poetry has drawn attention with strongly worded stunning pictures of dreadful discrimination. Whatever might be the tone, mild or sharp, ferocious or highly confrontational, it is written with a specific purpose, to sting the complacent and the leering into active thought. The idea is to focus attention on the despicable reality, poking them in their ribs to intense soul-searching. The poet stung like bees and danced like butterflies. Flattened nose, black eyes, smashed heads testify to the violent, uncontrollable fury let loose by the wounded pens of the oppressed poets. Quite unsparing in their attack, they sought to register their agony through powerful means of protest and poetry.

Women in India as elsewhere have been treated as a commodity. Though they played a vital role in domestic and social activities they had been mercilessly relegated to a secondary position in a patriarchal society. What is conspicuous in the poetry of the Telugu Dalit women is that they always choose and maintained a specific and different path, idiom and experiences portrayed were typically feminine. Prior to 1940, not many women were educated. Some learnt Christian hymns, and expressed their creative force in a spiritual manner. From 1890, evidence of such poems is available.

In the book under review, the editor who fortunately is a translator as well, has translated the work of Twenty one Telugu Dalit Women's poet into English. Prominent among them are Philip B. Gnana Ratnamma [1890 - 1960] who was a teacher in

Guntur and wrote devotional songs and hymns. Her songs are much revered by Christians. Likewise, dedicated writer Vesapogu Gulbanamma [1905 - 1971] was born in Warrangal and was a pastor when women were not permitted. Her hymns were highly inspirational. A careful perusal of Aadi Hindu Movement in Andhra Pradesh reveals that women along with men took active part in creating awareness among people. Rajamani Devi, Eswari Bai among others took leading part. Many Dalit poets took part in freedom struggle and spread the tenets of Gandhism. 'Veenavani' Theresa Devadaanam [1937 -] was born in Guntur and was a teacher for a long time. She took part in freedom fight and she wrote socially relevant poems and articles extensively. In her poem "Eradicating Untouchability", one notices Dalit women reflecting upon the impact of Ambedkar's work, indicating a changed socio-political outlook. The enlightened poets realized the value of vote in an evolving democracy and exhorted all to use the power of their vote decisively to end untouchability and gain respectability for themselves and the work they do.

Further, Geddada Kasturi [1949 -] too, took part extensively in social reformation programmes. In her poem "Politicians", she talks about exploitation, domestic oppression, sexual harassment and other issues. Similarly, Balijepalli Vijayalakshmi [1960 -], in her poem "Revolution", portrayed oppression of women in office, at home and in society. She tries to educate Dalits and others to be pragmatic and understand various strategies employed to keep them blind to realities around. Jaajula Gowri [1967 -], is a known activist in Dalit movement. Her short stories are as well received as her poetry. She threatens to take law into her hands if oppression continues. Gogu Shyamala [1969 -], is a full time activist in Rythu Coolie Union. Under her leadership crimes against women of all hues were taken up by many organization. Likewise, Dr. Challapalli Swarupa Rani [1980 -], is a highly accomplished lady credited with bringing out a volume of poetry, a representative work of Dalit women's poetry. Her powerful poetry reflects the self-respect of Dalits and the need to assert themselves. In her poem "Forbidden History", she takes up the issue of "Basivi's". In some part of Karnataka state there is a practice of tender aged girl children from Dalit families forced to become "Basivi's", pleasure givers to village men.

The book is a welcome addition in the Telugu Dalit Women's Poetry and is a useful reading for serious researchers and human right activists. The book with an impeccable cover-design and fine printing is a must-read for every poetry lover at least from the subcontinent.

Deepak Kumar Singh

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