

Compassion, Delicacy, Devotion and Femininity: The Achievement of Sukrita Paul Kumar

Dr V.V. B. Rama Rao

Abstract

Creativity and vivid imagination go hand in hand. Sukrita Paul Kumar is a poet with multifaceted creativity. Acquisition of knowledge, thoughtfulness, a high level of learning (teaching leads to this) and the heart in the right place are assets for the creative artist – primarily a poet. Sukrita has a wide range of travel experiences and she acquired the skill to know of people in different fields of life in different nationalities. She did not leave out even folk lore, the area which requires great effort to obtain. She acquired the gift of painting from her dad. The reader finds novelty in her work be it poetry, painting or exploiting travel experiences. Her poetry stands testimony to this rich acquisition. Great poetry and even simply good poetry lends itself to interpretation and exegesis. Compassion, delicacy and devotion are the basics of femininity. This article is an attempt to show case all these.

Key Words: Imagination Experience Poetry Painting

Eko rasah karuna yeva –Bhavabhuti

In the process of writing
I am ahead of myself always
And there's no look back

The rest of the time
I am stalking myself
And there's no looking ahead

The issue is
That of keeping pace. (Sukrita)

Sukrita, born in Kenya and travelled to and fro Mugabe and Mumbai, saw and experienced a lot removed far from the shores. The addition to her collection *Untitled* at the end of the book speaks of her varied accomplishments and distinguishing qualities. Daughter of a reputed writer/painter herself, Sukrita took to academics, poetry and painting as a duck takes to water – not a cliché here. Reading her poetry needs our hearts in the right place. To put it in other words, it is like glancing at the sea where the shore is

nowhere in sight – wondering at the ebb and the tide in the vast ocean.

To begin with *Untitled*, the book, needs no title since it is a communication of the pulsations in the heart and brain, deep, captivating and more importantly path-breaking. Her poetry is inward-looking, searching for the shores, looking up at the sky and losing one's self in thought. Thanks to her educational and other various qualifications, she has penning experience which included the paint and brush too. She worked and participated in literary festivals in India and abroad. She is recognized and worked in literary organizations like ICCR, Sahitya Akademi, Bharathiya Jnaanpith, Poetry Society of India and some universities also.

Untitled is her collection of poems which was published first in 2014 and a little later *Ink and Line*, another collection with painting and poems in the same year. The publishing house Vani published her *Dream Catcher* along with slender little

one of the title Behind the Poems first in 2014 and later reissued in 2016.

'The Art of Wearing Bangles' is the first poem. There is a connection between the art of writing poetry and loving and wearing bangles. Both have significance and finesse. Pleasure and a symbol of pride and satisfaction are all there in wearing bangles. Here is what the poet has in her mind: The blank page bears words

With the fondness and patience
Of girls wearing glass bangles
One by one, carefully and gently

... ..

They are not to dangle lose and wide
Or remain too close and feel the skin

Let them take over the throb
Jingle in glee, glide into action
Tune in to the dance
of a poem
on the page. (p.11)

The other poet Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India wrote about bangle sellers. But here is the poet singing about the jingle and glee too.

The words in the poem have to come in like breathing in life. They gallop too like a trained horse which cajoles the rider with enthusiasm. The poet suggests to the writer to get on to the saddle and reach out to those 'still' words that fly the rock of silence which lies in wait. One has to soar high and higher:

From the black holes
Of the universes, seen and unseen,
Through meteor storms and
Somersaulting planets
The hand has to appear pointing

This way
That way

(How to Begin, p.14)

Conceiving and delivering a poem is one great act of enlightenment, a matter of delicacy.

The poet sees in Aurangabad, a place of worship, Sulibhajan Temple. Temples are the sacred gifts of a person who gave to man the soul-elevating contemplation called tapas. The poet pays a tribute to the seer:

Sulibhajan

The sacred gift of
Tapasvi Aiknath,

... ..

Here, in complete isolation

Outside time,

Dogs and stones create
Fellowship in suffering and joy...

(pp, 15-16)

The poet has many an arrow and many a bar in her flowery quiver of enlightenment, wisdom and the peace that passes understanding.

Ideas, feelings, emotions, compassion and *ardrata*, get mixed up raising treasure troves for the poet and through her the understanding and appreciative reader – from Vasco de Gama, Quit India, Spices and pepper, along with tales hidden in layers and layers one over the other, lower and lower and higher and higher. There is glory in the poem 'Liberation at 'Kappad, Calicut' Kozhikode if you please.

Each wave on this beach
Brings a throb from the
Heart of the Indian Ocean
Sighs from history

... ..

Tales hidden
Layers on layers
Spilling over
Bleeding on the sands and
Washing away at once. (pp18-19)

The poet was the guest editor of a poetry session on the University of Hawaii and the poem 'Ambers in the Pacific' is about the mythology of their islands: M?ui, the ancient chief is the culture hero who appears in many genologues. Kumulipo is the son of Akalana and his wife Hina. M?ui is cognate with M?ui, the Hawaiian island. The poem refers to the myths which make enticing reading. (It is interesting to note that this poet guest edited Crossing Over a special issue of a journal Manoa of the University of Hawaii in the U.S.)

Islands with white shores
Combating tiger waves
Islands held in Kumulipo
The Creation chant
In multiple rainbows
That Hina climbed
To reach the moon

When the moon is full
They see her
In the tides that rise

They hear her
In the rumbling belly
Of the dormant volcano.

Mauna Kea . . . (Ambers on the Pacific,
pp. 20-21)

The poet is fond of mythology, folklore and belief. 'The Strange Gift of Sharad Poornima' is about Hindu feeling and belief. The poem describes both...feeling

From the centre of the earth
It rose as a streak of lightning
And entered the soles of my feet

.... ..

and thought:

The bright ray of the sun
Pierced the dark clouds
Broke open my head

Settling in the cage

Whiffs of reason and logic

Filling the cranium

Stretched in anguish as if

In search of madness ... (p.23)

Himachal, Kashmir, Valley of Flowers,
Line of Actual Control are described in a
poem with a clear imaginative, poetic
vision. In 'Out of the Box' another world
was seen beyond stars. That this world has
worlds

beyond the stars

I did not know.

.... ..

Bits of truth buried

in the graveyard of words

rose as if from the vaults

in the bottom of the sea

like fireflies

lighting the dark shores of life.(pp.24-25)

'Meta Cacophony' is a poem about words
and their myriad powers, effects and
meanings. Words could be weapons

Hurled to hurt, to cause pain

Even to kill

Over and over again.

..... ..

Words are winged tools

of communication

flying and merging

into the black hole of silence

deep in the centre of our galaxy.

(pp.26-27)

A poet has mastery over words. Only poets
know how best to use what words at what
time. The nature and quality of words are
multitudinous and not many are
cacophonous.

Good poetry lends itself to interpretation
and explanation and leaves many things
only to the ability of the reader to

understand. Sukrita is of the stature of great poets. 'Mountain Nights' is about fear, dreams and feelings of anxiety and even a kind of neurotic outburst. It is surrealistic; at times the big thud on the roof

That cracked the rocky silence
Of sleep day after day
Was that of a flying fox
with wings that do not
carry its weight into the firmament
Not combat mountain fog. (pp.28)

There is horror, real horror, in human acts in 'The Hazara Poem'. Screams of Hazara captives sold as slaves in 1893 in Afghanistan brought the following idea:

Birthing and dying sounds
incubating and gestating
babies born in anguish
and the emerging poems
paving the way
to dreaming
the dreams of homing...(p29)

The poet is an intellectual, a spiritualist, and essentially a woman and she goes on citing instances of the fiendish behaviour of inhuman demons.

'The Myth of Recreation' is again about horror. There is reference to Columbus landing on the shores. A series of references to horror take us to the devilish human cruelty.

Every inch savagely cultivated
Beauty a metaphor of atrocity
Moments of joy
Pumped from the lungs on ventilators
Men and women in love
their hearts beating on pace makers (p30)

Mithila, the land of Janaki, the Ganga, Patna and raising questions with images and metaphors are here in the journey by team boat into the throbbing heart of Bihar. The poet goes fast deep inside the

sloughs and scales the peaks too and the more the reader reads her poems the more the vastness increases filling his heart.

The idiom and the turn of expression become unique when compassion and kindness bring out the feeling of basic humanism. 'What am I to her and she to me' talks of the growth of intimacy and relationship. In 'Seven moons away is when I met her' – see the expression of moon – not a day in travel. The speaker of the poem sends up a prayer:

I hear, you are from Delhi
-the city of power-
get me shelter
get me food and clothes...(p.32)

and then this happy ending:

what has woven those threads between us,
do our ancestors awaken each full moon
to connect us
she calls me and I rise to walk tiptoe
on the rays of light
and embrace her. (p33)

Many tales, many feelings and many experiences are told and retold in many languages described in the Folk Lore Society of London. The fast shifting scenes, the men and women and their languages are evocative in the poem 'A Tale Untold'.

Some of the poems take a little time and careful study to understand and appreciate. Here is the sum and substance of Sukrita's thought in her poem 'Where Shall I Write'. I quote the poem in full:

Where shall I write
the paper twists in pain
all space is in awkward crinkles
Where shall I paint
The canvas fills
with sighs and whispers

As I lift those brushes
 I carry the cross
 nailed by
 Unborn poems, aborted paintings
 Neither living
 Nor dead (p.48)

There are very small poems that display
 her mindset which I must include in full to
 do justice to the very unique poet who
 called them 'Some Little Ones'

Terror struck bees
 Buzzing in harnets
 Yellow sun
 shooting out of black clouds (Some Little
 Ones, p.57)

.....
 Buddha
 in
 grey stone
 Melting
 in
 White peace(p.58)

....
 Through the stillness
 of my walk
 The forest dancing
 in foggy silence(p.59)

.....
 A scream shooting through
 the eye of the needle
 The baby
 is
 born.(p.60)

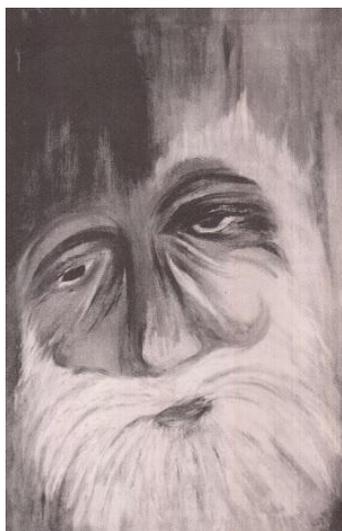
What glorious thoughts and how well
 expressed! Melting, white, peace are key
 words for a galaxy of thinking.

Sukrita's paintings like her poems need
 quite long spells of time to look deep to
 have a glimpse of her personality. The best
 way to peep into her mind is to spend
 hours looking at the paintings and
 guessing the nuances of her imagination.
 Eliot's *Wasteland* had to wait for exegetes

to lift the curtains of the poet's thinking.
 Sukrita's many poems need exegesis. This
 poet is enchanting when understood with
 her references and dedication to the great
 women saints, Lal Ded (Kasmiri Shiva
 Yogini), Akka Mahadevi (of Kannada
 desa) and Andal of Thiruppavai in
 Tamil. Painting and Poetry going together
 hand in hand is the latest addition of
 another genre of imaginative creativity and
 ebullient enthusiasm. A few moths I came
 across a volume of poetry and painting by
 poet Preeta Chandran and painter Saxena
 Pankaj Kapur. (*Book Review of 'The
 Painted Verse', 'Brave and Brilliant
 Beginning' published on Jan 24, 2016.*)
 The creation 'Ink and Line' is the creation
 of painter Sonnet Mondal and poet Sukrita.
 To call it a handiwork is a travesty of
 justice, if not a farrago of nonsense -
 remembering Shakespeare. This book is
 published by Authorspress, New Delhi, in
 2014. The blurb makes it very clear that
 the paintings do not illustrate the poems,
 nor do the poems describe the paintings.
 The readers are told brusquely in the
 blurb: *We form clusters in mind and move;
 perhaps one among the crowd will find the
 point in the ring for us to flee tangentially.*
 One can declare this collection sixteen to
 the power of sixteen – paintings illumining
 the poems and poems going up in power or
 even the other way round as per one's own
 preferences. There are sixteen paintings of
 Sukrita on the left and sixteen sonnets of
 the renowned poet Sonnet Modal. Neither
 the paintings nor the poems are titled –
 perhaps leaving that to the reader's own
 idea and taste. Sonnet Mondal needs a
 little introduction to new readers of poetry.
 Mondal is the founder of the *Enchanting
 Verses Literary Review, Pismatic
 Celluloid and Diorama of Three*

Diaries published by Authorspress, New Delhi. Sparrow Publication brought out his '21 Line Fusion Sonnets of 21st Century' and six other publications are also there. Among other things he is enlisted as the First Indian writer to write a new type of sonnet poetry. Mandal is known by the name of Sonnet, his poetic form.

For fear of running the risk of prolixity, this article confines itself only to two poems carried on the right and two paintings carried on the left. Though the poems are not titled the reader may take a look at the titles chosen by this writer. Possibly, the first poem may be titled 'The Sainly Face'.



The speaker of the sonnet says this:

*The saintly face will be recalled
when atheists come nodding
their belief-less heads in accord
with slokas, laid down eternally
in scriptures, engraved by sages;
Their sacrifice for the survival
of faith stretches flaccidly
as the wrinkles of my old face.
They will discard flags of innate
egos, flowing down through rivers,
melting from a squeezing protest
against harmless Gods, smiling off
the spring of my face, with this beard,
lying like a nest of new birth.(p.17)*

The speaker is a decrepit old person. He is intensely humane. He speaks of faith and genuine belief of real religion. Scriptures talked of as *slokas* are of times by gone with the pith and marrow of real wisdom run out or evaporated. Stone edicts only show the remains of letters and cannot instil the spirit of religion which is only faith. The word 'flaccid' is chosen with poetic imaginative, vision. Sages engraved words but the stone hearts do not digest them. Flaccidity is shown on wrinkled face. Naturally wrinkles are the effect of discarding, throwing away, or erasing *ahambava*, feeling of 'myness'. It is natural that in ripe old age the feeling of myness is usually thrown off. But this requires faith which is a form of deep understanding. Heartless are people with hearts turned stony. They are not godly. The long beard flowing down is indicative of maturation shown in the painting. Serenity and wisdom (real old age) make one realize that letters on edicts on stone alone are not real belief in goodness alone which gives one the peace that passes understanding.

The painting shows this visually and the poet conveys what the painter had in mind. It is understanding and goodness that should be the qualities of the really grownups, the old ones. The old man in the paintings is respected. The 'they' in the poem throw away their egos, their protests against Gods (gods are harmless – doing on the best to be done, doing only good). The picture can be taken as an illustration of what the poet had in his mind about the saintly face.

Any way the blurb has already said that poem and the painting are autonomous. There may or may not be any one to one

relationship between the two. Here is another painting.

The possible title for this sonnet could be 'Search Endless'



*We have lost ourselves to the rush,
to the word 'futility' and
all those social building blocks which
lie bearing a facade to
derail a normal going life
into a never ending ring,
leaving a zero, for us to
be realised at the dead end.
Still we run from daybreak to dusk.
Our whims are stronger than failure.
We form clusters in mind and move;
Perhaps one among the crowd
will find the point in the ring
for us to flee tangentially. (p.39)*

It is a large group of people bundled together. The group is in search. Futility of the building blocks which are a facade and derail normal going life. The never ending ring only leaves a zero. There is nothing seen at the top, the end of the ring. Only there is a dead end. Even then the group goes on running from dawn to dusk. The group realizes that their whims are stronger than failure and hence they huddle forming clusters in mind and go on moving. Still there is a hope. Perhaps one in the group will find a point for all of them to flee tangentially. This is only one

way of seeing the painting or understanding the poem. Readers are kings.

Sukrita published her 'Dream Catcher' first in 2014 in two volumes, one in the normal 1/8 demi size and the other 'Behind the Poems - Dream Catcher' in the fancy 1/16 size. She wrote in the first book "Poet as Dream Catcher" the meaning of the title and revealed her idea and its purpose. The Obijwe, natives of North America and their Midewiwin Society, are respected as the keeper of scrolls of events, oral history, songs, stories and memories etc. They believed that the dreams we have while we sleep, are sent by sacred spirits as messages. According to their belief in the centre of the Dream Catcher there is a hole. Good dreams are permitted to reach the sleeper through this hole in the web. As for the bad dreams, the web traps them and they disappear at dawn with the first light. For some, they try to determine what messages are being passed on to them and what the message represents. The poet states that the poems came from her sojourn in China etc are 'sieved' from her memory of some odd dream-like reality. Published first in 2014 and later issued again in 2016, the books reveal a lot of the poet's mindscape and her ability to scale and stay at the heights of creative imagination.

Faith leads to devotion and compassion leads to femininity. All the four are closely related. In 'Dream Catcher' we see seven paintings and read forty poems. Some have titles and some don't. Poems in Tsunami Snap Shots are not titled and they are very short and very telling.

'The Woman with a Baby' is about Nature, a mother's feeling. There is a mention of

many nations but the basic insight is just the same.

Tiny movements rising
in our bellies,
fish churning the ocean,
birds flapping wings in the skies
and eyelids, drooping and batting heavy,
to enter
or exist the bliss of sleep. (p.12)

For one immersed in the study of nature China, and Tai Chi are places among many. 'Tai Chi' has this for the reader to think about:

High strung and pulled to the
Roots in the eyes of the other
Stillness finely balanced
On the thread of their version. (p.13)
'Heights' is a very brief but very intensely
imagined reality;

The Seventh floor
Tells Buddha's tale
Above desire, above suffering
One day I was born
One day I shall die, (p.15)

Mother' touch is incomparable – it is divine. In 'The Mad Woman on the Avenue of Stars', the Chinese woman is viewed thus in the poet's mindscape:

Chinese wrinkles
Giggling and breaking into
shimmering creaks
And vales twinkling
The old woman tearing her hair
Squealing in Cantonese glee
clearing cobwebs of silence
that masks multitudes
amidst din of stars. (pp. 20-21)

Only an extraordinary poet can write the last three lines.

There are twelve snaps in 'Tsunami Snapshots'. In 'The Chinese Cemetery' this is about a child's exit:

In *The World of Suzie Wong*

Consumed the baby,
And then lapped up
-the letter of introduction-
"To whom-so-ever it may concern:
Flames are messengers
Carrying the known
To the unknown
Life afterlife. (p.23)

The grimness sends shivers down our spines.

'Tsunami Snapshots' are brief heart rending sighs, not mere poems without titles:

When the waves
relented and brought
the baby back on
the shores
snakes took over
and created a lap
of poison
to keep death
out of boundaries. (25)

There is another snapshot, if it just that one:

The dog is
God
Dragging the child
Out of tsunami thunder
Licking the wounds
And restoring sanity in nature.
But that dog is
Not God
-he saved
this child
and let others perish. (p.27)

The devastation and the horror are maddening.

The sea is called Kadalamma, Mother Sea, *kadali* is sea and *amma* is mother, in Telugu. The cataclysm and catastrophe were hell bent on devouring all and everything;

But today the sea
Swallowed her children
Her womb bleeding
Kadalama had betrayed
Her trust. (p.33)

'New Life' explains tsunami, the Japanese word:

Sucking in
Frolicking humanity
With the first cry
Of the baby,
They named her
Tsunami. (p37)

'End from the Beginning' is about Mohammed bin Tughlaq who remains in wilderness and jungle books. There is the poem 'Tughlak' where we read this:

Disengaging from
Barani's diaries
Ageless
Friendless
.....

His steps measured and heavy
Inching towards
The ocean of meaning
where sanity drowns
And madness
Triumphs. (pp 45-46)

The drawings in this book are of varied numbers, perhaps of sari *pallus*. There are twelve poems on snow in 'Winter Poems at Minnesota' in their various avatars.

Black snow on the road
Is treacherous
as the white night
At full moon
Snowflakes in mid air
Looking for the ground
To settle or
Melt away. (p.53)

This poem is subtly suggestive

Snow women
Lonesome

on the white streets
of the white continent. (p.57)

Then this is the state of penguins

Emperor penguins
Hold their babies
in their body folds
through months of
Arctic blizzards

Ruling with

Power over the universe. (p.62)

The poet describes how the Dream Catcher holds her under its power. Just a few bits for a sample:

Each time I came home with a bagful

Of dreams

That drip through the day

For me and all

Each night

I wait for a new dawn. (p.65)

'In Corpses' dedicated to Kavita Karkare the poet mourns pitifully:

You stood still
By the side of the
Bulletheaded body
of your husband

You

More dead than he (p.66)

Of the mourning over various holocausts in Partition, Gujarat etc there is this question

Can language combat reality,

Rid one of

Memory? (p.68)

'My Lost Diary' written in words in which the alphabet soaked heavy with phantoms and angels there is this:

Hai Ram

At war with the whole world

And with self

Stuck in the sticky cobwebs here (p.73)

The last section is adorned with the painting of a six piece *pallu*, if it is that

really. The first poem in this section is 'The Chosen One'. It is about monkeys and chestnut trees:

Roots in knots
The tree barren
Is silhouette in moon light
Has monkeys in it
With chestnuts
As if
between their teeth. (p.88)

The poet has a special knack of looking around and within and beyond the situations and happening in the world with men and women seeing what they are. Sukrita's poems live long being

remembered by soft and tenderly sensitive minds. One last word about the little book , 'Behind Poems – Dream Catcher'. This may be taken as the poet's *apologia pro vita sua*. Here are a few of her statements in 'Other' and 'I':

'The blank sheet stares back at me in defiance each time I sit to write a poem.' 'Other' (p.8)

'I urge all words to vanish into their sounds and merge into the total experience of the poem'. 'Other' (p.11)

Works Cited:

1. Sukrita Paul Kumar *Untitled* Authorspress, New Delhi 2015
2. -do *Ink and Pen Paintings* (along with Modal Sonnet's poems) Authors Press, New Deli, 2014
3. -do- *Dream catcher* Vani New Delhi ,2014 and 2016