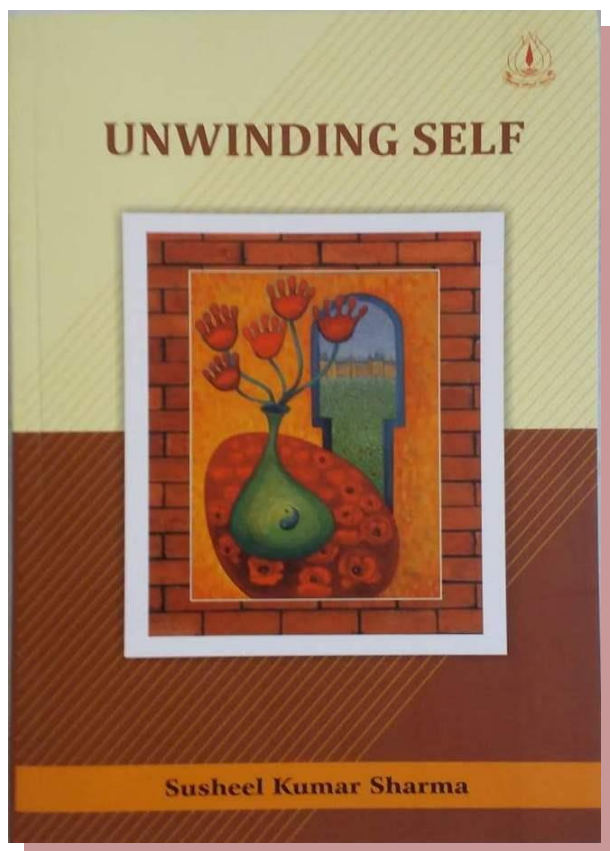


Review

Susheel Kumar Sharma's *Unwinding Self* (Poetry), Cuttack: Vishvanatha Kaviraj Institute, 2020, Pages 152, Price: Rs.250.



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Prof. Susheel Kumar Sharma's *Unwinding Self* is his third collection in three sections consisting of 42 poems in 65 pages, a "Glossary" of the Indian terms used in the poems and the "Afterwards" in 36 pages. Giving the "Glossary" in 29 pages is really good and appreciative, for, all the readers may not be familiar with some references and allusions which he has employed in his poems. This is followed by "Afterwords" written by an Indian and 6 foreign critics. This is also a good addition, for, this collection of poems. The poet takes us confidently to his self – to unwind himself - to know about the poet's mind and heart.

The poems are on multiple slices of his self, which help us to understand, evaluate and appreciate the poet.

The very first poem, 'Snapshots' is (from his mobile phone) about 15 pictures. From the first stanza, it is clear that he is a believer in God. "We are God's creation". (p. 1) The poem ends with the query, "Where is Bhagiratha?" History records Bhagiratha as the King of Ayodhya who brought the celestial Ganges from Heaven to the earth. The poet is highly religious minded which will be learnt when one goes through his poems like 'Durga Puja in 2013' and 'Me A Black Doxy'. He writes in the former poem, "My soul longs / To be with my mother" (p. 5), and in the latter one the poet says that he is Lord's faithful bride. A true devotee will presume 'Nayagan – Nayagi Bhavam' i.e. God is the man (hero) and the devotee, the woman (heroine). This trend can be seen in Andal who fell in love with Lord Perumal and Radha with Lord Krishna. In 'The Soul with a New Hat' he writes, "My next life will be decided / By my Karma or / By my devotion to / The cathedral." (p. 62) In 'Akshya Tritya' the poet tells that everyone is waiting for this day for, it augurs prosperity, hope, joy, success which never ends. Why this day is very special? It is "the birthday of Lord

Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu... . On this day Ved Vyasa began reciting the Mahabharata to Lord Ganesa. The river Ganges descended on the earth. Sudama visited his childhood friend Lord Krishna in Dwaraka and received unlimited wealth. Kubera received his wealth and position as the ‘Lord of Wealth’ and [the] Pandavas received ‘Akshya Patra’ gift from Sun God” (p. 89).

‘A Family by the Road’ poem is both religious and philosophical which ends, “I am Shiva / *Shivoham*.” (p. 73) *Shivoham* means again I am Shiva taken from Shankara’s *Nirvana Shatakam/ Atma Shatakam*. It refers to ‘I am not bound by anything, be it physical or mental. I am the blissful consciousness, I am Shiva’. When one repeats this, one can experience a state of detachment and the feeling of being free.

Great writers and their works influence Susheel Sharma. When he read the American Poet Langston Hughes, a leader of the Harlem Renaissance who practiced Jazz poetry, Sharma gave birth to a lengthy poem ‘On Reading Langston Hughes’ “Theme For English B” ’ in 156 lines. It is autobiographical too. It ends with a philosophic note. “It is better to face. / A challenge and change. / Than to burden with a life / Of self – guilt” (p. 11). ‘Chasing a Dream on the Ganges’ is both geographical and autobiographical. The poem ‘Buy Books, Not Diamonds’ is ironical and personal. Most people are mad after jewels and diamonds and believe in purchasing them. The poet is a man with a difference. He asks, “Why should I buy a diamond ring?/ A diamond is just carbon/ Hardened to the core./ Hard enough to cut glass”. (p. 67) When hunger is not dispelled what is the meaning in the search for diamonds? Here one can see his ironic attack on the mad lovers of diamonds who are very much materialistic.

Surroundings make poets to write memorable poems. ‘Coffee’ records how it stirs his memories. Any use in coffee drinking? “I have stopped asking silly questions./ I have learnt to live with it” (p. 76). ‘The New Age’ is about a classroom which does not bring happy associations but the bitter ones. ‘The World in Words in 2015’ in eight parts presents different scenes – the world having four major colours. “Bright radiates like God / Dark absorbs like evil / Brown resembles devil / Yellow is Mammon” (p. 29); about petrol and wine - about the hungry and thirsty; “Don’t be poor in spirit / Don’t lose your heart” (p. 32); is about the longing of loved ones, about raids taking place; about joining a party, about dreams small and big and the need for equality in a Democracy. The poem smells sociological.

Nature inspires everyone. Even ‘A Pond Nearby’ can influence the poet in a different way: “Will the pond be a river ever?” (p. 36) It can’t. In his poem, ‘The Kerala Flood 2018’ he records his various reminiscences, especially if help comes from outside the country:

Help is coming from Emirates.
The argumentative Indian is busy
Debating the issues as ever.
Some say any help is welcome.

Some say only good help is welcome
 Some say help only from [the]
 Good is welcome.
 Some say it is vile and be stopped.
 Does a victim have a choice? (p. 56)

‘A Gush of Wind’ is Susheel Sharma’s ‘West Wind’ where he inscribes, “Is it so difficult to live with a new odour?... / Let the wind gush into my room. / I am not afraid of it” (p. 75)

‘Connaught Place’ is a well-known business centre in Delhi, all know. When people frequent this place for buying their needs, the poet goes there as a vagabond: “Like a vagabond, I have / Wandered here year after year./ Looking for lessons, home and friends.” (p. 83) Is this not something novel?

Some great personalities too, S. K. Sharma’s pen has touched. The poem ‘Ram Setu’ is historical, religious and a tribute to the late president Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. The last poem, ‘Stories from the Mahabharata’, in 25 stanzas of 3 lines each records the epic very microscopically and brilliantly.

On the whole, one can have a great satisfaction after going through Susheel K. Sharma’s *Unwinding Self*. More than poetry, there is history, geography, religion, philosophy, sociology, allusions and ethics in his poems as though one consumes a grand poetic feast. Simplicity in poems, thy name is S. K. Sharma. Well written (conceived and begot poems). Expecting many more poetic feasts / parties from his facile pen!

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