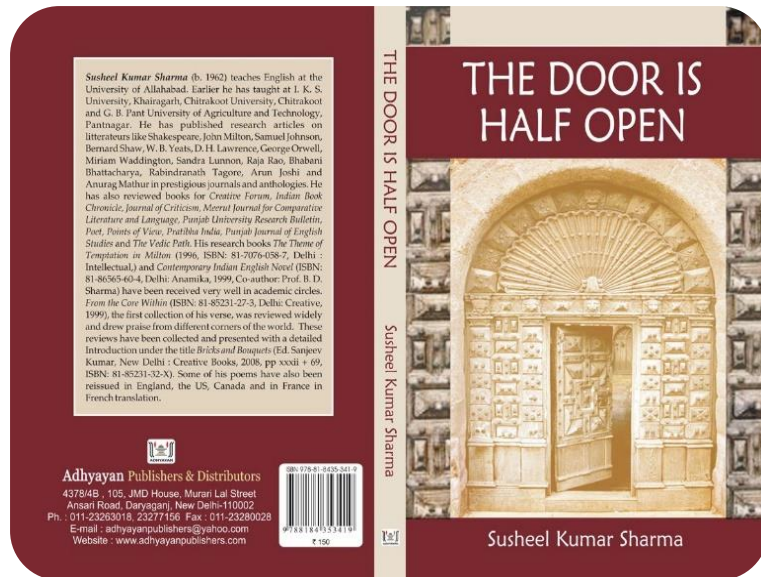


Susheel Kumar Sharma's *The Door Is Half Open*. New Delhi: Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors. 2012, Paperback, pp. 141, Price: ₹ 150, US \$10, UK £ 15, ISBN: 978-81-8435-341-9.



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Susheel Kumar Sharma's *The Door Is Half Open* with its three distinct divisions presents a collection of more than fifty poems along with a glossary and afterwords. Each of the poems reflects a conscious and deliberate choice of the poet regarding the selection of his poetic subjects which does not only lead to the production of empathetic or romantic imageries but also affects the reader more on a cognitive level. All of these poems are very mindfully crafted to showcase an unending odyssey of self-exploration and the continuously changing identificatory processes in Indian writing in English, which has uniquely crafted a distinct space of its own. The poet, Susheel Kumar Sharma has expressed his thoughts through the looking glass of the everyday lives of a common man who is sometimes fragmented from within and seeking for salvation and sometimes just a flaneur traversing in and through the curious corners of sorrow, love, hatred, confessions, dejections and confusions of the everyday life. One of the primary tasks of a poet is to create a distinct archipelagic space where the readers or listeners, irrespective of their class, creed, gender and community, can transport themselves in search of universal values. Prof. Sharma has represented such aptly composed poems in this collection which transparently reflect his experimentation with words and language, philosophical allusions, and much obviously a keen sense of Indianness.

The collection has been initiated by a resounding invocation to the river Ganges – ‘Ganga Mata’, the eternal symbol of the Indian culture, history and identity. “Ganga Mata – A Prayer”, is a poem with its wide-embracing attitude towards such an Indian identity which is diversified, pluriversal, zestful, potent and thoughtful. The resemblances and traditions that are attached to the very image of the river Ganges has been aptly projected by the poet as he has reflected a constant process of everyday yearning to become unified with the ‘ultimate’ or the ‘whole, the base of which the entire Indian philosophy is centred. The symbolic river is endless and ceaselessly contributing towards and witnessing to the changing dynamics of culture and civilization where individuals, as well as collective emotions, are in constant play with the idea of progress. The narrator in this poem has somewhat directly stated the objective of becoming attached to the essence of such a river which is eulogised in multiple cultural and mythical spaces occupied by the Hindu deities and legends. Therefore, he has chosen simple and undeviating images of association that are bringing a sense of fulfilment to him.

I want to sing your praise
 Like a tortoise in your water
 I want to play in your lap
 Like a dolphin in your floods
 I want to ferry people to your banks
 I want a small moorage
 In an island created by you. (p. 1)

Simultaneously, the narrator’s conscious resentments have been reflected in his utter disgust against the technocratic impulses of modernization as he asks a series of questions to the constant flow of the symbolic river about the ways it has survived countless transitions but still being the source of constant inspiration.

Who has put you in chains, O Amarapaga!
 Who has stopped your flow, O Purandara!
 Who has dumped his waste in you, O Sursari!
 Who has diverted your way, O Bhagirathi!
 Why have you accepted it all, O Tridhara?
 How have you tolerated it all, O Saritamvara? (p. 4)

The narrator has set here an intense motif of exploring the individual as well as the collective alignment of consistencies and constraints with that of the predominant Indian culture which is caught up in a fragile matrix of development. Prof. Sharma’s use and modulation of language expand the conscience of the reader as his lyrical spontaneity shuffles through the superficial alleys of the modern world.

I don’t want to bombard
 The world with poison;
 I don’t want to be a Blair
 Or a Clinton to enchain the world.
 I just want my *Ganga*
 To be my *Ganga*.

Om jai Gange mahajaiiii...! (pp. 6-7)

Prof. Sharma, with utter optimistic fervour, wants to keep the soul of this symbolic river intact, i.e., the soul of his nation while shoring aside all the cataclysms and politics of disruption that has taken place so far throughout and across its banks.

In the next poem, “Spineless-II”, we see the poetic voice becomes much more personal and sometimes confessional. The narrator’s conscience has exploded here much in a ‘Dylan-esque’ fashion as he mentions the outcome of it in places such as ‘busy highway’, ‘fog enwrapping city’, ‘electric bulb’, etc.

My conscience
Is like my cautious drive
That leads to an accident
On a busy highway.
...
...
My conscience
Is like an electric bulb
That glows whole day
On the night-post. (p. 10)

Like Bob Dylan’s mid 60s songs, his conscience is trapped in a liminal phase of ‘becoming’, neither dwelling on the past nor being able to get attached to the present. He has reflected over this liminal struggle also in the poem ‘Dilemma’, “Is it really possible for one/ To remain poor and/ Also to hold the head high?”. In his poem “Saviour”, we see an almost magical realism when the narrator describes his mirthful existence after entering inside a cloud – “suddenly I entered a cloud, my joy knew no bounds” – such inferences place the reader beyond the territorial spaces of their imagination.

The poet has displayed a strong socio-cultural awareness while dealing with issues like grappling with anguish, poverty and discontent. In his poem “Poverty: Some Scenes”, which is divided into eight parts, the narrator creates visual parlance of the condition and state of poverty across various levels in the Indian reality.

I wanted to distribute fruits
To the hungry.
But, they had been driven away
By the police
To make poverty invisible
At important places.
Unimportant places can be ignored
During counting heads. (p. 35)

Throughout this book, the poet has widely embraced the idea of a ‘whole nation’ or whole India and this holistic attitude has dexterously crafted his mental map of the nation. Such an idea of the nation does not only critique the pseudo-democratic ideals of the state but also

encounters all the socio-cultural and political dirt and squalors from everyday perspectives. Therefore, Prof. Sharma's India is colourful, thoughtful, tolerant and wise on one hand, and vulnerable, poor, alienated and fragmented on the other. Another of his poem entitled "Inquisitiveness" projects a delightful homely spectrum where the author's inner longing for his native land becomes transparent. Here the poet has emphasized the utmost profundity that can be generated from the most innocent inquisitiveness which often gets ignored in the Indian parental environments.

I brush their hair in bed.
 Both of them fall asleep.
 Tomorrow once again they'll ask
 Questions – difficult questions.
 It is now a usual story. (p. 28)

The poems like, "Camouflage" and "Dwellings" are one of the finest examples of the construction of the 'self' between the daunting unison of memory and time. There the poet permits his readers to see through and experience the real condition of homelessness, to perceive the state of a void but still being an optimist at the end. He has placed himself amidst the swirling human existence but still being concerned about the condition of being 'strange' on the road;

For Autumn had come
 But Spring could not
 Locate my home.
 Laden with colourful leaves
 Hope passed by like a stranger on the road.

The collection ends in a very cyclic fashion by asking for 'moksha' or liberation at the 'ghats' of Varanasi. The narrator turns to the ancient city of Varanasi and its age-old cultural traditions and especially to the banks of the river Ganges from where the eternity can be spiritualized, the dynamism can be justified and new resolutions can be recreated. The narrator thinks that the city of Varanasi carries the undying spirit of the 'river' that floats across all the dialectics of time and space. Hence, once again, he has chosen his destination with conscious choice where the aspect of 'ending' of any sort of venture of human life proceeds to a new beginning;

Brings me to thy lap O Varanasi!
 I ponder, I stare, I wait
 I hold my breath, I look within
 When I see lit pyres
 I chant
Om Namah Shivaya. (pp. 91-92)

Overall, this collection of poems is unique in its use of rich and descriptive language and has become extremely useful with the glossary explicates the translation of all the Sanskrit and other important key words. Apart from being allusive and metaphorical in approach, the completeness of a poet depends majorly on the communicating process between the poetic

self and the reader. The contemporary Indian English poet Susheel Kumar Sharma retains a stronghold on that very ground of communication which leads to open the doors of perception to his readers where they find themselves rekindled with radical and everyday observations on 'being' and 'becoming' of the individual as well as the collective human identities.

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