

***AJU MUKHOPADHYAY'S LATEST SHORT STORIES:***

***REVIEW BY SUBHADRA MUKHERJEE***

Aju Mukhopadhyay. The Secret

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“The Secret” is AjuMukhopadhyay’s latest book of short stories published in 2019. One is drawn to the book at the title – The Secret. Life is full of secrets – who doesn’t have a few secrets – and who wouldn’t like to know a few secrets? And as the author says – “there are secrets hidden in secrets like darkness covered by darkness.” And he explores some of those in these stories.

The reader is in for a treat of varied tastes of stories & story-essays from this collection of 15 stories. The author writes about various topics of interest – Forests & wild life, the ill-treatment of Tibet received from China & how peace has been made, the Bengal famine & the political disaster of our country, the lake district & the inspiration from Wordsworth, family dramas caused by fatal flaws, Adventure, the other world, the past & its ways of living!

The author is a man of this time. Born around independence, he has been a witness to the demise of the Indian dream. Brought up and educated on the ideals of Sri Aurobindo&Subhash Chandra Bose he has been studying in the daily newspaper the systematic destruction of India. Well read & well informed, he has seen how the politicians have stabbed the land & its people for their petty personal gains. Frustration is natural in these circumstances, but there is hope too as our gurus have always pointed out. The author’s love for nature & wildlife creates hope in him that human beings will learn to be more balanced & take the right decisions towards nature & people.

“The Secret” is the story of a family with an illegitimate daughter – how the parents hide her identity from society for ever and how they are quite pleased when she disappears. Meanwhile, their own son refuses to care for his mother when she’s ailing & alone, while the illegitimate daughter freely provides for her step mother – the irony of fate! And all the more interesting is how the author discovers the girl and what a turn her life took!“Life Nostalgic” is a story about the past – the different ways of living that are so jarring to us now. “They came down from the roof of the world” is a historical story of the Tibetan people, exploring closely their loss and dreams. Yes he meets his niece without ever imagining the dark secret of her birth!The kindest

relationship is explored here between 75-year-old Rani & 70-year-old Yeshe who sing kirtans to Krishna together. "Flood changed the flow of her life" is a story of natural calamity & disaster and how poor are created in our country for the benefit of politicians.

There are many stories that explore the extreme of human behavior – Digambar in "Compromise" is willing to make any compromise for his personal gain of an easy life. Shreya in "Suicide on a moonlit night" is ready to go to any extent even of extremity pushed by her jealousy & possessiveness. And the character of Sopan in "the Secret" is like a character out of existentialism – he lives for himself only without past or future. "Chased in turn" is a powerful story about a boy who stands up against senseless violence revolting out of the perverse web of fear that violence creates.

There are also a few hair-raising stories which will leave you questioning and perhaps you will agree with the author when he says – "Don't you sometimes see things beyond what you see with fleshy eyes?"

"In the company of William, Samuel & Dorothy" is a story essay of the author's visit to the lake district and the inspiration he still carries in him from that visit. The stories about forests are vivid and recounted with a love of the wild that is unmistakable. As we know, every day in India forests are being systematically destroyed. In "How fast man adapts to changes, how fast he forgets his past" the author describes how the forests of Jharkhand are turned into desert – a stark reality one hardly has the strength to bear! "Jungle dream" is an adventurous story about an encounter with poachers. And the author has a victory here as he is able to save the life of a buffalo! In "The ways of living", the author expresses his wonder of the animal & human world after an almost mythical sighting of a pangolin. "Neither a utopia nor a dystopia" expresses the author's disgust of modern ways of living that encourages waste of resources, which in turn destroys Nature.

In these stories and ruminations, the author explores the dark secrets of human perversity which displays itself through jealousy, laziness, violence and prompts men to behave in unkind, selfish and cruel ways. "Road to the Future" is a telling historical narrative making a bridge between the past that the author knows and the future that is to come. After examining the human & the

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world condition, this story makes peace with the way things are & looks forward with hope to a brighter future.

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