

THE PAINTED LIFE...VERSES THAT BREATHE

SHALINI SAMUEL, SHADES PUBLICATIONS, BHUBANESWAR, 2016

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Reviewed by Manzar Imam

The Painted Life...Verses that Breathe, is a collection of poems on a variety of themes like Fashion Trend, Facebook love, poking, blogging, intrusion of privacy, forest conservation, poverty, flood, dowry, disaster relief, life of the wife of a social worker, etc. This is poet Shalini Samuel's second book after *Singing Soul*. What makes this collection enjoyable is the expression of pain in a polite way that the reader may find compelled to think over. It is the young poet's civilized protest against everyday forms of cruelty, hatred, injustice, torture, violence that make life miserable for men, women, children, animal and the nature.

PAIN AND PROTEST PAINTED IN POETRY

Poetry may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, remarked T. S. Eliot.

The above remarks of Eliot echoed in my mind while reading *The Painted Life...Verses that Breathe* by Shalini Samuel. Picking up ideas from the everyday life and clothing them words to present how you feel is not an easy task. But, Shalini (as she prefers being called by her first name) seems to have mastered the art of expressing the oft-forgotten lessons that daily events offer each one of us.

Chronicling the changes of modern day life and correlating them to raise issues that concern the larger society is the job both of the poet and the politician. However, while the politician raises issues to widen his constituency, the poet does so to stir the human conscience and penetrate his mind.

Shalini's writings stir the conscience to pause and ponder about the demands of New Age and the damages that negligence causes to love, life, liberty, climate and environment and, to humans and animals.

In Disaster Relief dedicated to the survivors of the massive Nepal Earthquake, the author paints her anger:

I don't want
Your media coverage,
Your used clothes,
Your diplomatic encroachments,
To rebuild myself.
But a helping hand
To lift me up again!

In Dowry, she registers her complaint against the age-old painful custom in the beautiful six-line poem:

With a handy smile,
Midst jewel clad attire,
She covers her sadness.
Behind the natural flowers,
Gleefully adoring
Her bridal braid.

The Painted Life is a civilized protest against everyday forms of cruelty, hatred, injustice, torture, violence that make life miserable for men, women, children, animal and the nature.

There is a kind of sophistication, grace and dignity in her protest which is reflected in selection of words and idioms of expressions. Choosing for her poetry new and contemporary themes like Facebook love, poking, blogging, forest conservation, flood, disaster relief, life of the wife of a social worker; all make interesting reading to attract new generation of readers.

Painted Life is Shalini Samuel's second book after *Singing Soul*. What makes this collection enjoyable is the expression of pain in a polite way that the reader may find compelled to think over.

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought, as P. B. Shelley said, the sweetness of Shalini's poetry lies in the elegant articulation of grief over breaking of promises, intrusion of privacy, brokered marriages, the cities being rendered lifeless and the absurdities of life itself. Wisdom flows in Life – A Journey:

Tunnels may come and go,
But the train keeps moving forward,
To an unknown destination, far away.

Humiliated Sonless Womb is filled with angst about the social stigma attached to a woman for giving birth to a female child.

Born Again, Every Dusk Promises a Dawn, Moon and Me, Wedding Gift, Trail and Dowry are reflective of the young poet's power of imagination and art of expression.

This collection of 99 poems makes compelling reading and stands true to what the author promises to be 'the verses that breathe'.

Bio

Manzar Imam is a freelance journalist based in New Delhi. He is pursuing Ph.D. in International Studies from the Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi and is also doing an online research-oriented program on "Advancing scientific and theological literacy in madrasa discourses", part of the Contending Modernities initiative of the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA. He divides his time between writing and research and follows his heart to celebrate India's diversity of art, culture and tradition.