

Jaydeep Sarangi Ushers ‘Green Stories After a Monsoon of Hope’ :

Santanu Halder in Conversation with Jaydeep Sarangi

Among the galaxy of Indian contemporary English poets, Dr Jaydeep Sarangi is shining in the poetic firmament like a bright star. His poems lift the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar. His pen chronicles a new history of the downtrodden oppressed people, his personal pangs and sorrows, his day to day dullness of life as well as his happy celestial days of life. It spotlights on the several issues of the rural life and his childhood lonely days, his grown up memories and his days amid the urban setting. Hence, his words have special gusto. The bard, sings the song of the native people and its surroundings in full throated ease. The magic spell of poetic words move us, make us think and carry us into a different world where the celebration of nature, the lives of the common run, their culture, rituals everything are permanent. Garlanded with beautiful imagery, symbols, simple dictions and heart touching emotions, the bard poetizes his spontaneous flow of powerful feelings in his gem like poems. Riding on the vehicle of his imagination, Dr. Sarangi envisages life, its form and shape and identity in the form of poetry which gives the reader an unspeakable joy. He is a true poet, a poet to the backbone, every inch a romantic as well as a realist.

Dr Jaydeep Sarangi is a bilingual writer, academic, editor, translator, academic administrator and the author of a number of significant publications on Postcolonial issues, Indian Writing in English, Australian Literature and Dalit literature in reputed journals/magazines in India and abroad. He is the mentor of many academic and literary peer reviewed journals and has been taken the editorial board of several refereed journals in India and abroad. Dr Sarangi has delivered keynote address in several national and international seminar and conferences. His Bengali book of poems, “[Lal Palasher Renu](#)” has been reviewed extensively. His latest book of

poems is "*From Dulong to Beas*" (New Delhi,2012). Dr. Paula Hayes (USA) in her Introduction to the book comments, "a few of Jaydeep's poems reach toward asking metaphysical questions." Professor Dora Sales of University Jaume I ,Castellón, Spain comments , "As we all know, India has a rich literary tradition. JaydeepSarangi is a splendid member of this endless family. Truly, a poet of note."Dr Sarangi's poems ,articles and reviews have appeared in different refereed international journals and magazines in several countries.He has guest edited two successive issues for muse india on marginal literatures from the Eastern India and the North East.He has been invited as resource person/writer in several universities in India and abroad.

Santanu Halder in conversation with the great poet and writer Jaydeep Sarangi.

SH: Sir I came to know that you passed your childhood days very lonely. There was a deep silence in your house. Would you tell a bit more about your childhood days.

J.S.: Thank you Santanu for asking me about it. Most of the interviewers ask me this question. It's very interesting! Childhood memory is frozen deep in the mind and we carry the childhood image till we breathe our last. The same is with me.

My mother was not well and upto my class ten, there were hardly days when my mother could stand firmly. I had a brother...very loving brother name Sankar. He died very early in age. So I was all alone with my father because most of the time my mother was on the bed. But I am blessed with some rare friendship. But in the house...a big house..but there was no one to share thoughts with me...no one to play with me. I enjoyed the deep silence. But Sourav, Surojit, Supriyo, Rajib- there are so many good friends of mine. They are now settled in abroad. And I remember my happy time with them. I enjoyed preparing myself of my own. It had positive and negative sides. Things became sweeter later on. But, it is a miracle that now my mother is as fit as myself. So I am really happy. The journey that I had in my childhood, I look back with very happy pleasant memory because I was very attached to my father very much. I used to wait for my father to come back from his office .And these days I was fascinated by

cricket. I remember when I was possibly a student of class one or may be two in 1979, Indian Cricket team visited Australia and they played match in Melbourne and won that match. Kapildev played an important role in that decisive match. He became my childhood hero and remained so during the rest of his cricketing days! I could follow even Australian English when I was in class one or two. Though I was a small tiny boy then, but I can tell you ball by ball details of the matches. So it was something memorable and cricket gave me a lot of company. I used to listen to the commentary because T.V was a remote possibility in rural Bengal in those days..So when I look back ,all these things contributed extensively in my formative days of life; my golden past!

Sir you once said that “Titas,my daughter is a hurricane who sets the contrast to my childhood days”-will you explain it Sir?

Titas is a hurricane because people say I was very obedient and calm in my childhood. I had very silent, concentrated mind. I used to get up at 5.30 in the morning. I had a very strict and disciplined childhood. I used to study without instruction from anyone around. But Titas,my daughter is the cynosure of our eyes. She has everything- her parents and grand parents, playmates. She can play with everybody. If we compare our childhood, one completes in the other. She is a little naughty genius! I celebrate her childhood. She is always engaged in activities. Therefore, I must say she is a hurricane and I love it.

Sir,we know that apart from being a critic,a sociolinguist, an editor,witer of nearly 29 books on several issues,a short story writer,a reviewer, you are a famous poet. Would you tell us what sort of things a poet should keep in mind before composing a poem?

Very difficult to say.... Some schools think that poetry comes from within. A poet should not think of a particular issue or subject before he/she engages with. There is another school that believes that poetry is an act of commitment. We are not here to judge which one is to travel in future but poetry for me is an engagement that invites you to react with certain things of life. We are not divorced from life. We all have our cultural, linguistic and social roots. My tradition and roots in rural Bengal is the sap of my poetic zeal. Small rivers and life associated to the sweet and silent flow of these rivers are my poetic passion. One

of the reviewers has made an honest observation by calling me ‘Bard on the Banks of Dulong’. If my social experiences come back through musing ,shall I be considered a situational poet? Poetry survives in stead of all mechanical, prosaic, hectic schedule of the day because it restores peace and order in mind. If that is the ultimate, if it is an experience or it is an exercise of truth that we cannot act out in daily performance ,let us celebrate this art form.

What according to you is a good poem?

If it unfolds the hidden truth of mind through a discourse that engages reader and if the reader wants to come back to the poem again and again, that is a good poem. Actually it is very difficult to say what is good or what is bad. Margins overlap! But if it gives you a sweet note to your ear and if it impresses you as a thought pattern, it may be a good poem. But in a way, all poems are good and all poems are bad because one should not categorize one as good or bad. These terms are value based. It is more subjective than objective. The openness of a poem is a beguiling parameter of truth!

Why do you write poetry?

Possibly, because I cannot tell the truth face to face and poetry is an avenue that unfolds me and my internalised thought patterns. It makes things open for the readers. So if you interpret in a particular way, I will say, there is a possibility of interpreting it in another way. Due to the interpretative autonomy, a poet has the licence of unfolding the heart successfully. I know it sounds paradoxical. And possibly it is an exercise that gives me an unfathomable joy...the joy that beats drum in your heart...the joy that makes you dance. It is a celebration of my commitment, my engagement, my philosophy and your living totality. I write because I am happy with it. I’ll continue writing as I experience a calm and peaceful mind while writing. It saves me from wear and tear of daily mundane exercises which I do as I have no option to say NO.

Do you have any message to the emerging poets?

Poets should read more English poetry and poetry in different languages translated into English. I think one should read the traditional stuff as well as unconventional stuff. Because who knows any pattern can touch him to the maximum. Not only in English poetry, but also in regional languages. India is so richly diverse and regional literatures are potent, sound and very

competent. At the same time ,one should read translations into English like Greek translations into English. I would recommend each one should read Pablo Neruda, Federico García Lorca and **George Seferis**. So one should cultivate the habit of reading, habit of rhythm. Reading and rhythm should tune the ears to perfection. As for myself, I am grateful to Jayanta Mahapatra, Bibhu Padhi, Niranjan Mohanty, Keki N Daruwalla, Nissim Ezekiel, Tabish Khair and almost all contemporary Indian English poets with whom I am associated with. I read new poetry from Australia, New Zealand, Africa, Latin America in English as well as in translation. So, the only suggestion is to read more, learn more, adapt more, tune ears and then come to writing.

“Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood” so said by T.S Eliot-what is your view on that tag?

Yes I fully endorse the great poet T S Eliot. People say poetry is an open ended text. And a genuine poem is something that has a message which is easy to access and I am really happy to note that it is a product of happy mind. It may happen also that a poem may come out of a sad incident but it is the very production of a mind that is engaging, the mind that is moving and poetry connects minds. It is an artefact or it is a body of discourse of mutual communications and understanding between the poet and the reader. Poetry has a social function apart from its aesthetic value.

Tell a bit about your short stories?are you going to publish them in future in the form of a book?

Together we, Dr.Sunil Sharma of Mumbai and me edited one collected contemporary short stories that came out a couple of years back. May be in future I can think of a collection. But at the same time there is a possibility of publishing India-Australia short story collection in recent years. We are looking forward to a publisher in Australia. We are already in it. The initial words are going on. May be sometime in 2014, when the present commitments will be less ,I can think of it.

Sir,do you have any plan in future to write novel or your autobiography?

Novel is a genre all we know. I have already wrote a Bengali novel when I was a student of graduation named Mouno Kokil(Dumbed Cuckoo) that never appeared in print. And about autobiography I think over it may be in some period of time in future. But now I am preoccupied

with other some things. So I don't know possibly at this point of time whether I will be able to write or not..

Tell us a bit about your maiden collection of Bengali poems, *Laal Palasher Renu*?

Laal Palasher Renu is published one and half years ago from Kolkata. My friends, academics, my mentors insisted me to come out with a volume of Bengali book. It is about traditional whirl pool of thoughts, small events in life, and how people shoulder the pains of others. I am moved by the suffering lot. There are small rivers which flow gently but we never talk about that. We talk about the Ganges, Kaveri and Brahmaputra. But how many of us are familiar with Dulong. It flows through the tribal villages. It holds the tradition so that things cannot fall apart. My maiden collection of poems is about the celebration of the local in Bengali tongue.

Your famous poetry book is "*From Dulong to Beas*". Tell a bit about it

The preface *From Dulong to Beas*, is written by Prof. Paul Hayes, USA, and the comments on the back cover by Mamang Dai, the famous poetess from the North East India, Prof. Murli, Head of dept. of English, Pondichery University, Patricia Prime, the famous poetess from New Zealand. It has been reviewed extensively in India and abroad and many national and international journals and magazines, in web journals-both in electronic format and print. I am grateful to all the reviewers, to my all academic fraternity for their reception of the book. There are poems about Myths, Legends, celebration of the small, the small things happening everyday, Life under stress, Relationship, etc. There are some poems in it which are located in the continent of Australia and New Zealand. There are references to the Maoris of NZ and the Dalits in India. It is a cultural exercise and social engagement. I will be happy, if the readers are happy about it. Most of the poems included in this collection are short lyrics in free verse. They are written in deceptively simple style which is conversational.

Would you tell us about the importance of the river Dulong in your poetic journey .

My choice is deliberate because as a postcolonial critic or as my engagement with marginal discourse, I like to celebrate the small. If we look into the geographical territory, the big rivers are celebrated and respected widely. But small rivulets, rivers should be celebrated in a manner to engage oneself with rural India. And the temples near the river Dulong like Kanak Durga Temple in Chilkigarh, the tribal culture associated with the river, I found everything very engaging and I

want to transmute what I have experienced with the big reading community through this global language. So, Dulong is the metaphor of celebration of the local in a global tongue.

Niranjan Mohanty, Jayanta Mahapatra, and Bibhu Padhi- they are three Indian English poets with whom you are personally acquainted with. How did they influence you?

All three are great poets. Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the major Indian English poets the country has ever produced. He created his own idiom and we follow the footprints. Bibhu Padhi is an interesting person; loving caring man with great poetic skills. I am fascinated by his thoughts and engaging discourse. Niranjan Mohanty died quite early in life and that was a personal loss to me and the personal loss to each member of the poetic community. They are the three titans of Indian English poetry. What I really like that they have created their own space from the eastern part of India. They have showed that Indian English poetry is not only the exercise of metro cities but also relatively smaller places like Cuttack, Bhubaneswer, Berhampore(Odisha). So relatively smaller towns produce great poets and they hold the canon of Indian English Poetry and my personal engagement with all these three make me multiples. They are my longstanding support. I miss Niranjan Da a lot. He was a great man, great soul and a great poet. I remember him in the dead silence of my silent days.

I know personally that your next poetry anthology will be published soon. Would you please tell a few words on your forthcoming poetry book and its title?

The title is SILENT DAYS. I have a plan to release it in Australia when I will be there in this summer. This collection will be a bit different from my earlier one because things develop and the poetic self evolves in years of experience. There are several things associated with the book and I am really happy. I am honoured and humbled to share with you that the reception of my earlier book was overwhelming and I am overwhelmed by the support and cooperation that I received for *From Dulong to Beas*(2012). I remain grateful to the publisher, Authorspress, New Delhi for elegant production of the book. Sudarshan ji is almost like my elder brother in Delhi. I'm grateful to him for reasons more than one.

Sir, you write poems in Bengali and English? With which language you feel most comfortable during the time of composing poem?

It is a very interesting question because if we look into Indian English poets, there are so many, I can remember who talk about the linguistic dilemma they come across. In this context I refer to Niranjana Mohanty's poem where he refers to his language as half Odian and half English. I may also refer to Kamala Das' poem 'An Introduction' which rightly sets the linguistic diversities of our country. I write with the language I am comfortable with. I write with the language that has the flavour of myself. My writing is roaring to a lion, or twittering to a bird. When a bird twitters nobody asks "are you comfortable with the language?" So I write with the language that I have. Regarding acceptability, appropriateness and grammaticality we can debate with. But I am comfortable with what I am engaged in. So regarding language I do not have problem with my second language English and I don't have any problem with my first language which is like my mother's milk.-BANGLA. I am happy that I can use both languages together as a bilingual product of a typical Indian society

Since so many years you have been working on the Dalits or the marginalized people of our state and outside Bengal also. Why are you working on them?

I think it goes back to the year 2006 when I started working on the marginalized writers because I came across with certain good corpus of marginal discourse from Maharashtra and Gujarat through my academic friends. Immediately I could trace a sound militant body of discourse from West Bengal. I edited the Dalit writings of Bangla in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Literature* from Kerala long ago and that was my first engagement with the Bengali Dalit writers writing for quite sometime. It came out from Kerala and it became an engagement for me. Now it has become a mission of life. To be with them, to shoulder pains with them or may be it is a sphere through I can go back to our roots. I do not know why I am engaged with it but I am happy about what I work with the Dalit writers of India. I find them fascinating. I am not afraid to face the truth. And I am not afraid to unfold their truth in whatever small and humble way I can. So, now it has become a commitment- a journey we will travel together. I am happy to announce that there is a sound corpus of Bengali Dalit Literature and it exists with authority.

\Will you tell us the contribution of the publishers to your writing?Would you like to mention any name in this regard?

I think publication is a mutual venture between a writer and a publisher. I've always come across good souls whom I respect a lot. I don't want to mention any name in particular. But,I'm happy with them. They are good friends. I don't consider the situation as bleak as some of my friends think.

Sir, would you share with us one of your recent poems?

J.S.:

Flight

-Jaydeep Sarangi

Why should I be the rock?
Like the reckless flow
I would gush unstoppable.
Immovable, thick, stagnant knowledge –
You remain so.
Why do you dream
To make me your mate?

I Will stretch the windy wings
Would dance the stormy play
As the withered leaf.
With your glares and distractions...
Why do you come to trap me?

May golden grains shower

From your fist to golden fields
May my wings get drenched
In the in the sky-rending monsoons.

This interview is already appeared in boloji.com and became most popular news of the day in merinews.com....

About me

A teacher by profession and a poet at will- Santanu Halder was born and brought up in a small town named Bongaon, near Kolkata, West Bengal. He has done M.A in English Literature and teaching university students for 6 years. A scholar, a translator, an interviewer, and a bilingual poet writing in both Bengali and English, Santanu Halder has already authored three books, these are - (1) "American Literature" for WBSU Students, (2) Old English Literature in a Nutshell and (3) a book on translation. Mr. Halder, a life member of Guild of Indian English Writers Editors and Critics, has been writing since his school and college days. Few of his early poems have been published in college magazines and little magazines. His poems have been published in UK POETRY LIBRARY, in poemhunter.com, in boloji.com, in Brain Wrixon's books from Canada, and many other national and internal magazines and journals. He is one of the editors of The Fountain of the Muse, founder of English Poetry All Over the World Group and one of the founder members and Joint Secretary of SPELL (Society for Poetry, Education, Literature and Language) in Kolkata. His first book of poems *Bonsaied Rhapsodies* will be published soon.