

A GIFT FROM LAKES

By Durlabh Singh

It has been a long and tiring journey in the coach and my legs were cramped. It was a relief to leave the vehicle and stretch my body. It was refreshing to breathe again the cool mountain air.

Though the main part of my journey was finished, I still had to cover another few miles, by a mini mountain vehicle, which was not due till about two hours hence, as this kind of service, was sparse, due to lack of regular passengers. I decided to walk through the coach station and then on to the town, to pass away those tedious waiting hours in observation of fellow passengers and the throng of the tourists who come in droves, every summer to sample outstanding scenic beauty of the region.

People were milling around and some were doing window-shopping. The high street was crammed with souvenir shops displaying arts and crafts of the region and especially of the Lakeside town. It is a common urge among the tourist to pick some tangible memento of their stay, to take back home and thus savour the pleasant sensations and memories associated with their sojourns in the district as to while away those dark winters evenings at home.

When they come over here there is always an air of expectancy among the visitors. Everybody is looking for a scene, a beauty spot which will send perhaps shivers of unknown sensations along their spines and would remain with them perhaps rest of their lives. Sometimes the unexpected coincided with their secret desires and when this happened, it took a semi permanence place among fleeting moments of their fleeting lives.

It may be a romantic notion but even romantic notions have their place in our lives. The normal routines of life do not allow any multidimensional sensations to intrude into our pragmatic views. We are so accustomed to follow our preconceived ideas in day-to-day life and in our

practical attachments to mundane ensue. These drive away any strong emotions dealing with uncommon aspects of human existence. We are apt to live our lives in a very disciplined way dictated by needs of our habits.

Back to the bus station where more tourists had arrived with their multiple cameras hanging around their necks, men with walking sticks and shoes. Small statured females with big rucksacks at their backs looked as if they would be toppled over any time by their loads. My attention was drawn to a man with three different cameras; a metallic case and a heavy stand folded under his arms. I introduced myself and we began to chat. He was called Alan and was going past my intended hostel, to his destined locality. He intended to walk all the way to his destination. The evening light was fading and I reasoned with him to stay overnight in the town and travel the following morning, as it is always dangerous to walk those narrow hills under the cloak of darkness. I did not know whether he took my advice. Soon my bus arrived and I was on my way to my destination.

My ride in the small van was very bumpy due to zigzagging mountain paths and as I reached the final stop there was just fading light of evening still lingering on, which was a good thing as I had to climb a steep hill to reach the top where my hostel was situated.

At last I reached my hostel and after unpacking, I rested a while until I felt pangs of hunger. I went into the kitchen area to prepare myself a meal. I warmed the cooked vegetables, which I have brought with me, and then toasted some slices of bread and it all smelled good. I also made a hot cup of tea and took the things to a table by the window to eat my food in comfort.

Through the window you could see the range of mountains outlined against the twilighted skies. Those seemed to usher in a vastness of space beyond their silhouetted forms. One could loose into that vastness there was an outer and inner silence, which took away one's trivial concerns for life, momentarily.

As I was eating two young girls came and sat on the nearby table and we started a conversation. They were about seventeen. One was brunette and the other a blonde. The brunette was called Janet while the other was named Amelia. There was something extraordinary about their presence. They were gentle creatures and an airy tenderness exuded from them and which enveloped me in its fold. I felt in touch with inner dimensions of life, in a sort of poetical musings. We talked about different things until it was time to go to bed and I bade goodbye to them as they were leaving for their onward journey very early in the morning.

I was very tired myself and soon went into a pleasant deep sleep. I woke up at about six in the as the rain was pattering the roof tiles. I decided to stay in the bed till the breakfast time.

I had my breakfast later and the rain has stopped and sun was shining in all its glory. I went out to explore the surroundings. There was a rivulet beside the hostel full of white gushing waters and hurrying downhill with all the music of its hastened tunes. It had branched itself into various arms as to hug numerous pieces of strewn rocks. Polished pebbles smoothed by its touches were scattered all around its path.

The rivulet invited me to listen to its symphony for a while and so I sat on a boulder to listen to its watery music and soon realized that it had so many tonalities within its musical compositions. One had to listen carefully to appreciate that variety of tones unlike the man's stereotyped mind, which only can appreciate a single tonality.

I went down the hill into the valley. Suddenly I felt a burst of sunshine filling the valley and enveloping it into a sort of celestial grandeur which reminded me of certain paintings of old masters with their breadth of subtle beauty. I was enjoying that breathtaking panorama.

Beyond the valley there was a rocky precipice where light played its dark symphony of silence. The cries of the birds filtered through, arousing strange emotions within one's heart. The valley was strewn with many boulders with whimsically carved rocky shapes just like an open art gallery. I started viewing one by one, those interesting exhibits.

These ancient monuments of withered faces were creating in me wonder, solace and inspiration like some high art. Grey and faint yellow boulders against the green background of hills were fascinating. Those looked like some early cubist paintings with their tight geometry.

The sun began to create in me dreamy sensations and I decided to lie down on the grass to savour those. A flock of sheep were grazing on the slopes and soon came down to examine me, sniffing around as to make sure that I was not a hidden danger to them. I slept for some time under the warm sun and then got up to explore other beauties of the valley. The tops of hills looked inviting and I decided to do some physical exertions by climbing those and thus spent pleasant time till it was time to return to the hostel.

As I returned, I found something unexpected. Amelia and Janet had returned and were in tears. As I approached them, they nearly fell into my arms crying. Somehow I comforted them and asked them to relate as to what had happened.

Amelia and Janet had started early in the morning when it was still dark and cloudy. It has been raining all night and the ground was wet and slippery. They had to cover a few miles to reach the adjacent hostel where they were spending another night. They were hurrying as to reach that destination before lunchtime.

Amelia was walking in the front and suddenly she heard a scream behind her and to her horror found that Janet has slipped from the edge to sloping ground beneath stretched over a precipice.

Her feet were dangling over the precipice and she was just holding onto to a stump of a tree. Amelia suffered a shock to her system and became hysterical and started screaming too.

Janet was holding on with all her strength and told Amelia to cry for help. Suddenly time stopped and only thing she could hear was her scream. Somehow she took control of herself and shouted for help.

Like a miracle someone shouted back and told her to hold on. Suddenly a man appeared with a coil of rope around his shoulder and slowly calmed down the girls. He instructed Janet to hold on to the rope and eventually pulled her over, beyond the imminent danger. It later expired that he knew me from his meeting with me at the Lakeside bus depot when I persuaded him not to start on his walking journey that evening. He must have taken my advice and delayed his departure the following morning. His name happened to be Alan.

I marvelled at the coincidences of chances of in our lives directing our fates. If I have not started by chance a conversation with him, Janet might have slipped down the ravine to her death. Hearing this my eyes became moistened; I reckoned it to be moistures of joy. The girls were sitting snugly out of danger. I looked through the window and the hills and lakes waved at me. I thanked them. It was indeed a gift from the lakes.

BLOODY FOREIGNERS

It was Saturday evening and throngs of crowds were milling around in the center of the town, in anticipation for the pleasures of night – drinks, violence, food or anything else available even sexual indulgences.

The long rays of the setting sun were pouring down the streets to paint the mean streets into crimson and blood red.

He was walking down the high street on his way to take an underground train. People were shouting at each other in elated fashion of angry tones, which soon turned to racial abuse with filthy undertones. Being a minority he felt nervous and frightened.

Suddenly he heard behind him shouts of racial taunts. He ignored it and quickened his pace to get away from those people. The voices followed him, followed by sounds of big running thumps on the pavement.

He turned around and saw a party of youths of mixed sex, a gang on their abusive spree.

Someone stuck him hard from behind and he fell forward hitting his face on hard pavement stones. He felt taste of blood in his mouth and penetrating pain in his face and elbow. He felt dazed, disoriented and sickened.

Before other expected blows, he managed to get up and confronted his attackers. Nothing mattered now but to confront those animals and to shower his pent up indignation on the abusing parties. He fought back and lunged in his rage and managed to bring two of them down and he wrestled with the attacking members.

The party felt slighted and in revenge. All of them started hitting and kicking him. A blonde girl did a sort of war dance wriggling her body and shouted

“ Kill the f--- bastard, kill the bloody foreigners" He was thrown into the ground again with sudden thrust of attackers. Blows and kicks came from all angles and he felt nauseating pain and felt his bones cracking under their fierce attack. Someone managed to hit him between the eyes with a metallic object and a he felt a paralyzing daze in his brain and passed out.

When he came around after an unknown lapse of time and found himself crawled on the pavement. Crowds were still milling around and nobody paid any attention to him.

A gruff voice came out of the sky and he saw a burly policeman standing over him and ordering him to get up. He tried to explain to him in his choked voice about his attack but he was told by the policeman that he was just a trouble maker picking up fights with decent people and furthermore he was obstructing the pavement and if he did not get up immediately he was likely to be charged with an offence.

He felt broken and asked the policeman to take him to the hospital pointing out to his blood soaked garments.

The policeman told him to go home as he had no time to waste on such trivial matters and that he had more important things to do. He felt bruised, slighted, with inner tremors of humiliations.

He got up and staggered to catch a train for home from the nearest station.

POETICS OF NEW IMAGERY

The robotic element of our mind tends towards readymade and automatic responses, as it saves us from any intellectual labours. It venerates the conventional, the established, and the cultural norms, which have been given the establishment's seal of approval.

This conditioning process renders most of the poets ineffectual, as not to seek new venues in the contemporary poetics and just produce that imagery which is only variations of the established patterns. Even if a poet produces something new, it will be met with hostility or lack of understanding by critics, public at large and by the sanctioning peers of the establishments. This mode of poetical insensitivity and lack of any creative intelligence is very common in our society.

No wonder in such sterile surroundings, no new imagery has much chance of taking roots and a poet of some substance will look for new soils where his creations can take roots and grow. Such soil is conventionally called the 'imagination', which is considered to be a region unrelated to common way of thought but which is the soul of the things and the ground of spiritual happenings.

A poet has to look out for such a rare happening and when it happens, he should be ready to receive these and give them a material form in the shape of writing and this is a difficult process to accomplish as these images have wings and difficult to trap in a cage of poetical accomplishments of real depths.

Among many faculties of human mind, rationality is one such faculty and very good at keeping us going in a life - plain sailing as it does not allow the other faculties of imagination to intrude into its territory. On the other hand the faculty of imagination has its own control and does not

allow any intrusion of rational faculty as it will only harm its natural growth and thus bar any developments of our spiritual consciousness.

GROW FINGERS

And I grow fingers and thumbs to write more
The verses that do not follow straight lines
But zigzagging under the open skies
In chromed yellow sunlight
In canopy of the trees
Of the emerald green.

Deserts there are, heat exhausted creatures
Which demand to know the arrival of dawn
Within the hot sandy dunes loneliness resides
Seized in sounds of silences the wind sighing.

Winters I have seen , in interiors of people
Where motions are frozen in frigid bonds
And down pours from dark clouds echoes
The deaths of the moths on the frozen ponds.

Today I speak from depths of the being
From slits in roofs , from broken charades
From blood soaked minds under the bullets metallic

Or women singing their songs in mud soaked paddies.

Run with syrup on my parched lips
Or disappear in the immensity of the seas
Rain forested creatures wormed of nights
In wakeful of the myths for mutterings in dawn.

Looking at the above verse from un-poetical view point, will not make much sense to ordinary reader but to a poetically refined, it will convey a word of new sensibilities, multi dimensional being, telling us about both inner and outer realities. It does not run away from the unpleasant realities of our world: its violence and its indifference to living creatures. It is a true realism and not the false idealism of conventional expression. Here so called imagination has combined true elements of our existence in the form a creative mode.

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It has become now a days a fashionable to reject rhymed verses and opt out for the free verse but results have been disastrous and you will find most of such poetry as only prose cut into lines, there is no poetical sensibilities involved and most of such matter is without any deep contents or rhyme. When you read it, it is as blank as any rhymed poetry with 'rat' and 'cat' rhyming lines. What to do to make these palatable? Here poetics of new imagery may come to rescue.

PASS YOUR HAND

Pass your hand over
The face where I suspect
Some salamander song
Of passions and dreary touch.

Eternity to the eyelids
And dark blossoms to the lips
The perspiration on the brow
When changed to the petals.

Passing your hand over
The face do not bare
Cold paled bleached air
The long turrets
Flayed apart
By finger butts
Sweet as a lark.

Born of waters I was
The child sprung of earth
Taught by the winds
A fearless song
Sought by the multitudes
The thistle and the rose
Nor did a beggar sworn

The fervours of venus or saturn
The proud spirit only did stare
Face to face in the darkened pattern.

Bio:

Durlabh Singh is widely published author based in London. He has published number of books of poetry, short stories and other fiction. He is also an artist and his artworks are in private & public collections.