

BOOK REVIEW

A DOOR SOMEWHERE? BY JAYDEEP SARANGI

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Reviewed by Patricia Prime

Jaydeep Sarangi is a distinguished Indian author and poet. His previous collection of poems, *Silent Days* (2013), was well received.

In *A Door Somewhere?* Sarangi offers a wide range of moments, perceptions, experiences and memories, always felt and personal. In these poems one's appetite for India is awakened early and plentifully fed by Sarangi's use of words, expressions, mythology, temples, deities and more. The ring of the title alerts us to the sense of something waiting behind the door, and Sarangi invites us to open the door and step inside to see what is on offer. I'm impressed by the poems that conjure a torrent of images, invigorating the reader, making every image fresh.

His is an elusive poetry, often working through clusters of images without obvious connection but relaying a mood or an emotion as we see in the first poem, "Prayer," a poem for the poet's mother in which the house has one deity – the poet's mother, who knows his every heart beat:

She wonders
Why do I return to her each day.
In homely quiet, beside the lantern.
She can listen to my heart beats,
The rise and the fall
I follow each time.

A recurring theme is the passage through life, from the birth of poetry in the poet's youth ("Baby Growing in a Poet") to the poet's daughter "who kept talking / about magic of land" in "Small Things in Life" - to relationships as seen in the poem "Relationship," where the poet's relationships are not necessarily with people but with the gods and nature:

My relationship lotus for Lakshmi
Peacock for Kartika;
Braille for the blind;
Raindrops for the thirsty earth
One looking after the other,
A soft touch somewhere

Predominantly, the reader is offered short poems capturing an impression, a thought, and an experience, something seen or pondered on. Often enigmatic and suggestive, despite the simplicity of their subjects, these short poems are slivers of the poet's life. They are never boring, but modest in their claims on the reader. They are also highly controlled and worked out in short lines. The poems are unrhymed, the verse is free, but they are rhythmically and phonologically neatly shaped pieces that sing as well as record. For example, this is from "A Mirror": where a simple moment, between father and daughter, is transformed by the poet's attention to detail. The moment is transmitted through song.

I am forty
My daughter traces
A few white lines on the head
Like the cap of experience.
My days are longer than nights
Words don't rain surprise
As the Cuckoo is dumb

Without much senses.

Sarangi's language exists in the here and now, to be enjoyed for the way it makes ordinary things happen, indeed, a little beyond the ordinary. Look at the pertinent detail in the poem "Caged Bard," a poem about a rickshaw puller, Manoranjan Byapari, writer of Bangla novels, stories and autobiography, who discovers in the streets where he works beauty and co-operation among the struggling groups of desperate humanity:

Long struggles
Demystified Byapari of false honours
of the caste-ridden society
He discovers beauty in working class,
Cooperation among have-nots,
Humanism in rebels
Simplicity of outcastes.

All the poems are generously peopled, action-packed vignettes that bring life to people, places and simple things, such as the inkpot in "In Memory of an Inkpot":

Like Dinosaurs
You belong to past.
We have forgotten to talk
About you
How you are
When we seldom write with a pen
Or a pencil.

The inkpot is now a thing of the past, brought to life again by the poet, to reveal its past glory and usefulness.

These poems, to me, are small rebellions against the mundane, spreading their inspired influence into the wider world, mingling historic and contemporary details. Thus he writes in the fine poem “For Neruda” of the love when feels for the departed, who are no longer with us but whose spirit remains forever in our minds:

There is no I or you,
One reflecting the other
The shadow and the soul
June trembles like a butterfly
Spring is plentiful with gifts.
Loving ones never die
People play with their shadows

and of the goddess Kali in “The Dark Mother”:

She is the most fearful
Of Mother Goddesses.
As the legend goes, in the battle,
Kali was destroying everything she could see.

It is a collection full of personal experiences, we visit the riverbank where the poet’s mother is to be cremated, the Sun temple, Chinar and Pondicherry. “I look forward meeting you / As the winter sails through happy months,” he says in “A Letter to God,” and we feel as though we have met the poet by reading his poems.

In the “The Sun Temple” he writes that “Relics of past unnerve me,” but in this beautiful poem we see the beauty of the temple with its carvings, sculptures and statues. Here, we see that the temple is a “door somewhere”, providing a gateway to history, “where / Past talks through archaeological wonders.” The title of the book is contained in the poem” A Door – Somewhere?” with its adage: ‘After every war /Someone has to clean up.’ (Wisława Szymborska). How true this is today, with all the destruction we see around us of countries, cities, families and lives. The poet asks a pertinent question, which we can only hope and pray about:

Each time I read history
I find a door somewhere
Past talking to present.
Something else is yet to happen, only where and what?

The final poem, “Someone Waits for Me,” tells us that “Roads take us to a mystic land / Where shadows meet” and this is a collection which does take us to a land of mystery, of surprises and is witness to some of the difficulties of modern life. It ends:

Among birds of sing. Blood leap through his heart.
So many trains whistle. They never stop of Jhgram.

It’s a fitting finale to the poems in this book, as the poet tells us that spring and the birds always return despite the passage of time and any difficulties we may meet in this life.

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Bio:

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