

***FAITHFULLY, I WAIT: POEMS ON RAIN, THUNDER AND
LIGHTNING AT JHARGRAM AND BEYOND BY JAYDEEP SARANGI.***

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By Anisha Ghosh (Paul)

Jaydeep Sarangi, bilingual poet, translator and editor comes up with his sixth collection of poems *Faithfully, I Wait*. The subtitle of the collection “Poems on rain, thunder and lightning at Jhargram and Beyond” mystifies the reader with its realistic ring outbalanced by an air of abstraction – as the mention of a geographical location often in news for its weather conditions of heavy rains with thunder and lightning in the subtitle does locate the work in concrete lived reality, the ‘beyond’ which follows does contribute a quality of airy unreality to it.

Sarangi the poet who has always vocalized his commitment to developing a indigenous creed of poetry avoiding any referentiality to or derivative connections with the western poetic traditions, despite his cross over projects and literary connections, comes up with a new definition of poetry in this volume. In the author’s preface he describes poetry as a dream, a young, beautiful and lonely maiden clad in the soft glow of evening sun that comes to him. Poetry to him is liberating, absolute freedom is nothing but a dream and so is poetry and the poet wants to be a part of this dream, no matter how miniscule a part that maybe. Poetry, then, is a dream of a higher and better order, it is utopian, idealistic as Sarangi’s poem “Free Bards” claims through its faith in the poets as people paying back to the society, working for the betterment of the world. Is the ‘wait’ in the title, then, for the arrival of that utopic order? Is the waiting worth it, or as absurd as Beckett has presented it to be? Does this utopian vision somehow sever the ties with the lived reality, thus de-contextualizing poetry, in an altogether different way from what new critical school has tried to do?

Faithfully, I Wait is a collection of fifty-four medium length poems in free verse and the idea of continuity runs through the entire volume. There are poems such as “Dulung” or “Beyond the Wall” that have echoes of the previous collections; the metaphor of wall runs

through many of the poems in this volume just like its immediate predecessor *The Wall and Other Poems*. The first poem of the collection “Love and Longing at Jhargram” is about connectivity with one’s roots as the poet epigrammatically asserts that wherever one goes one can never drift away from one’s origins: “My laurels are made of forest leaves” (Sarangi 7). Poems like “For my Ancestors”, “Dulung”, “The Mango Tree” allow the poet to relive his childhood and ancestral history; his nostalgia adds the glamour of romance to the rivulet, the mango grove, the red soiled and wooded landscape transforming them into something more than just geographical markers. The poem “Temple Kanakdurga” is more about the emotions invoked by the temple in the poet than about the temple or its temporality. The poems are often interrupted by snapshots of those rustic terrains of the poet’s longing for the past – the patch of greenery, the Kanakdurga temple – which again brings us back to their geographical reality and presence. In the poem written for Derek Walcott “It Always Rains in that Green House” the poet crosses geographical borders as well as borders of thought as he travels from Jhargram to St. Lucia (a country in the Caribbean from which Walcott hails), from Dulung to Di Hong, from the Ganges to river Yuna, on what Keats would call ‘viewless wings of Poesy’.

The poet’s reflective mood persists throughout the volume, especially in the poems about poetry, though the focus is more on what poetry means to him or how he perceives this art form than on the poetics and aesthetics of the art of composition. In “Poems” the poet sees poetry coming out of life, in each day that passes between life and death. while in “What is Poetry” he calls poetry to be a movement in him:

Poetry is that movement in me
A free leap
Something like crossing the bars
of so many segments. (Sarangi 25)

Creative process is for Sarangi the poet a series of affects and the poet a repository of myths and epics, legends and history; poetry is political which gives rise to revolutions, just like the creative process creates undulations inside the poet. In “A Semicolon” he calls his poems “Half poems” (Sarangi 30). The poet himself is a semicolon, and so are his poems – “half poems” – which indicates that poetry to him (like modernism) is an unfinished project. A

sense of incompleteness breeding a certain kind of dissatisfaction is central to this poem. Tension is generated by the sense of incompleteness and the urge for fulfilment, and this tension is vital to the creative process:

I can't be a half line. I see you blessed
In another terrain. North Kolkata house.
You come and go
Like butterflies, smiling. Playing.

Will you be my body,
A full stop? Even a dash ? (Sarangi 30)

In "Diary of a Scribbler" writing becomes an insight; it is spontaneous and free flowing. "Food for Poetry" brings the abstract and the concrete together as in one breath the poet maintains that the resident of the body, that is soul, does not need any food and that "where there is food, there is violence" (Sarangi 48). The central argument (if we may call it so) of the poem is a bit baffling as the poet never intends to clarify when he is talking about food for thought and when about food for body, but it is not the job of the reader to look for intentionality after all – we moved a long way from that kind of a reading practice, thanks to Wimsatt & Beardsley! It is the carnal image of violence juxtaposed with food that betrays its association with food for body.

A similar juxtaposition of the mundane and the fantastical is to be found in "Stories of the Bard" a poem where a lot of comings and goings between a dream world and reality, romantic inspiration and its fading away into the noises of daily life confuse the reader, with no surprises at the end, thus leaving the reader anguished, frustrated, like the 'bard' in the poem. In the second poem of the volume "Free Bards" – pun intended with 'bards'/'birds' as spirit of freedom – Sarangi sees in the poet immense possibilities of turning the existing order into better one. Free as s/he is, the poet can cross the borders, break the walls between people and nations, between man and nature, they are the messengers of peace:

Poets are humanists,
Who break walls, build up roots

In silence. Sign peace accord
With owners of law
Rulers of the code. Frontiers of
Several environmental zones. (Sarangi 9)

Along with the forest imagery and the metaphor of the ‘wall’, the metaphor of ‘waiting’ runs throughout the volume. The title poem “Faithfully, I Wait” making its appearance only on the fifty-eighth page of this eighty-three page long collection makes the phenomenon of waiting structurally explicit. In “Intimate Time” it is the ‘waiting’ of the “countless untouchables” (Sarangi 18), silenced in history, for a shoulder to lean on, while in “How I Wait”, the waiting is more personal. The poem opens with the mundane act of waiting for a train performed by a daily commuter to work which eventually changes into the waiting of an urban man both a part of and yet apart from the everyday city life. Towards the end of the poem waiting becomes more philosophical as the man now waits in the journey of life for what is beyond: “Perhaps, my life is a road. I wait.” (Sarangi 40). In “Waiting for Words” the poet talks about senility and creativity – both as acts of waiting.

Apart from poems of nostalgia and longing, poems about the poetic inspiration and what the creative process means to the poet, the role and function of the poet, there are poems of social realism and ecological concerns in this collection. In “Elected Babu” the poet satirizes the current state of politics and the corrupt non-committed politicians, and in “Living Green” which begins with an epigraph from John Keats, “The poetry of the earth is never dead” (Sarangi 63), Sarangi takes up the alarming issue of global warming. The poet’s thematic range is wide, though no stylistic experimentation has been attempted in the present collection. The simple language of the poems, all medium to short in length, the poet’s conversational tone with minimum rhetorical flourishes makes *Faithfully, I wait* an accessible and easy read for the interested reader.

Bio

Anisha Ghosh(Paul) is the former Assistant Professor in the Gyan Jyoti College, Siliguri. She is working as Junior Research Fellow in University of North Bengal. She can be contacted at anishaghosh8@gmail.com.