



Vol. 10, No. 1

**CLRI February
2023**

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Book Review of Dr. Manas Bakshi's *Dream India, Dream* by Dr. O. P. Arora

Dr. Manas Bakshi is one of the leading poets in the world of contemporary Indian English Literature. *Dream India, Dream* is his latest offering to the lovers of poetry all over the world. It is a magnificent collection of fifty-five beautiful and rich poems, like a sweet bouquet of captivating, multicoloured flowers. Manas Bakshi is a sensitive poet who penetrates deep into men and events around him and brings out their essence

to the surface. His reach is monumental; nothing escapes his inner eye, and thus the collection presents so much variety that the reader is baffled. As he proceeds from one poem to the next, he is struck with awe at the horizons of Bakshi's poetry. What mesmerizes him even more, the poet is true to his conscience; he doesn't mince words. Every line comes straight from his heart. There are no curtains here. He fulfils the responsibility of a great poet, to bring out the truth and enlighten the world. Above all, there is spontaneity in these poems. They flow like a river, smooth and swift, turbulent at times. Nothing is forced here. Beauty of great poetry.

The title poem in the collection, 'Dream India, Dream', truly a dream poem, exhorts people to go on dreaming good things that India might achieve one day, to meet their expectations, to 'change things for the better'. The dismal and distressing conditions of our existence are so shocking and well-known that the poet does not even bother to paint them as he thinks the canvas would look all black. Dreams of betterment come from the snippets of a minister showering 'reliefs for drought or flood-victims' from a helicopter, people raising very weighty questions in a feeble voice in 'fear of being hamstrung or lynched', the Digital India dream, Swachh Bharat dream, the lot of the maid in the slums or of a hawker on the street etc etc. The poet is pained to find that most of the dreams remain only dreams. In reality, nothing changes:

Maybe only after an insurgent outburst

*And a gagged scream from a broken-wings
progeny,*

*Reality turns different—it remains only a dream;
(80)*

Like every sensitive poet, Manas Bakshi is pained to find the hopes of the people turning into despair and frustration.

There are quite a few other poems in the collection which depict the misery and suffering of the poor and the destitute. 'Anecdote Unprecedented' is a beautiful poem which expresses the naked reality of the life of the poor. Poverty in India is so stark and depressing that 'roti' is the only question for most of the people. To them democracy too means only 'roti', freedom too signifies only 'roti'. Anyone who provides them bread is their god and they are happy to vote him to power. All else for them is meaningless. To hell with democracy and 'spiritual salvation'.

Religious fanaticism has, as explicated so well by the poet in his forceful poem, 'Sham', played havoc with the concept of democracy which has lost its sheen and empowerment to the people because of religious intolerance:

Some compartments

Of the Democracy Express got derailed

Taking a massive toll! (34)

'Break Dance of Democracy' is another great poem that indicts the 'vote-bank-politics' which thrives only on poverty and illiteracy (35). The poet painfully realizes that it is now only ' a shadow of democracy' (35) and the great ideal was lost in the power-game.

Like all great poets, Bakshi searches for human values in the glittering world of materialism where, to his utter dismay, he finds only selfishness and callousness.

'All That's Needed' is humanism where ' a human tree' should sprout to embrace and hug every human being. Then only love will turn life into a new meaning, worth-living (36).

The poet bemoans the fact that Big Business and consequent mad urbanization have devastated the simple self-sufficient lives of the rustic poor. ' A Poem in Protest' evokes the simmering discontent of the common people at turning the 'village market' into a ' shopping mall' where they lose the ' freedom to marketing or bargaining'. The poet is agonized to see the sufferings of the farmers who have to resort to hunger strikes and suicides because of the proposed draconian laws whereby their lands would be easily taken over by the corporates. Their anguish and helplessness

... sparks off the spirit to fight

Squatting at Singhu

Defying the bite of coldest nights. (77)

The picture of the farmers protesting at the borders of the capital is not at all edifying.

' O Mother India' brings out the pain and bitterness of the sensitive poet at the most horrible fate that the farmer who cannot pay back the crop loan meets. He commits suicide by consuming pesticides while his daughter is gang-raped and brutally murdered. The farmer who feeds the entire country is treated so ignobly and shabbily that the poet is pained to ask as to when the conscience of the nation would awake to realize the inhuman treatment meted out to the provider.

Environmental degradation is one of the major concerns of the human race today. Climate change has caused havoc in

the entire world. Sensitive people all over have raised their voices vociferously, and yet the powers that be have not woken up to the alarms. They may slumber over the issues, but the poets would go on beating drums into their deaf ears. Manas Bakshi's ' Seeking Human Face' reminds the people of the ' colours of life' that used to enchant their spirits and they would dance at the gifts of Nature. Man's greed has ravaged the beautiful Nature and destroyed the life-giving forces like trees, forests, rivers etc. and disturbed the ecological balance. The poet cries out in agony:

*Dark ambience,
Blank canvas
Seeking face
Human face. (25)*

Man has ceased to be man. Greed has maddened him so much that he indulges in self-destruction. What a pity! Man has indeed become horrendous and has lost all sense of being a responsible human.

' In the Offing' paints the picture of an immoral and corrupt man who has polluted the entire fabric of social and moral life. His mind has vitiated the atmosphere so much that his demonic actions have become the norm. His moral sensibility doesn't even revolt against the heinous crimes of rapes and murders of teenage girls. Even animals would be shocked at man's degeneration and degradation.

'Confronting Covid—19' is another powerful poem that indicts man for not learning anything from the tragedy of Corona virus that has played havoc with the entire human race.

Despite Nature's assault and warning, and man's terrible suffering, man remains the same old, selfish beast. He never goes within and realizes his follies and corrects his ways. Instead of spreading love and affection, and trying for spiritual grandeur, he arrogantly spreads hatred and violence all around. Man has degenerated and fallen into the abyss, nothing can ever save him. His materialistic greed has made him insane, and all his actions for his so-called 'progress' go anti-Nature. What can Nature do then? It has to maintain the balance at any cost. Left to man, Creation would be wiped out in no time.

'Reciprocal' is one of the finest poems in this collection as it celebrates both man and woman in equal proportion and complementary to each other. Here woman is not raising slogans of feminism as is customary these days. She knows that real love and 'fulfilment in life' require a 'bonding of two minds' and thus she declares: " I am incomplete / Without You." (57) Understanding and respect for each other are essential for creating a harmonious and loving relationship. The greatness of Bakshi lies in his rising above the gender-fad and presenting a workable understanding for a happy relationship.

' An Empty Photo Frame ' is a very touching poem wherein the poet juxtaposes the empty life of the woman with her most precious possession, empty photo frame, which once had a photograph of someone " whose smiling face / In her frame of mind / Makes his presence still felt." He is the one who, she "believes, invigorates her skeletal existence" (18). The frame thus becomes the sole source of her living, and makes her happy, and she wants it to be burnt with her body after her

death as it would make her happy even after her death. Love is multi-dimensional; in its ethereal form it rises above the physical and flows through your veins and arteries. No, you cannot touch it, you can only feel it. Only the person who feels the ecstasy and the pain of love even when the person is no more with her can appreciate the depth of the happiness that this empty photo frame gives to the woman in the poem.

Terrorism has plagued man for the last four decades and has rendered life so fearful and uncertain that it has become difficult for man to breathe free. You are at the mercy of these traders of death, and their whims are so unpredictable that you are not sure of the next moment. Every corner of the world is affected by this new mania of terrorism. Manas Bakshi has painted a dreadful picture of the terrorist attack in 'Pulwama', so vivid in the memory of every Indian, and has sought 'revenge' for the same. Revenge from whom? The invisible faces!

'Soul of India Survives' is a magnificent poem which affirms Manas Bakshi's faith in the values India stands for—religious harmony enshrined in Tagore's ideal of the true 'Religion of Man': "Singing the eternal songs of life / Imbued with a devotional lore" (82). He points out that today's fight is not between mythical gods and demons, it is in fact between the "suffering humanity / And the animal-like human beings", the latter spreading the venom of "communal hatred". Bakshi is pained to see

Ruthless bloodshed

Full of animosity, intolerance, wrath and hate

To bring our own ruin (83)

in place of our long-cherished ideal of ' vasudhaiva kutumbakam'.

Bakshi exhorts people to follow the great souls like Krishna, Mohammad, Buddha, Nanak, Jesus if we wish the soul of India to survive.

Those who love poetry would find *Dream India, Dream* a very exhilarating experience. It is a joy to find your own self expressed so beautifully, so succinctly by the poet. When the reader identifies himself with the ideas and ideals of the poet, he leaves the book with a feeling of ecstasy and catharsis.

Reference

1. Bakshi, Manas. *Dream India ,Dream*. Dey's Illuminate Publication, Kolkata, 2022.

Dr. Manas Bakshi

Dr Manas Bakshi (Kolkata) is an author, poet, critic, reviewer and short story writer.

Dr. O. P. Arora

Dr. O.P. Arora is a well-known poet, novelist and short story writer and holds a distinctive place among contemporary Indian writers in English. Arora has a Doctorate in English Literature from Punjab University, Chandigarh and has taught in Delhi University for over three decades.

His poems have been published in many leading literary journals, magazines and dailies and have been generously included in the prominent anthologies. He has four poetry anthologies The Creeping Shadows, Embers in the Ashes, The Edge of the Cliff, and Pebbles on the Shore to his credit.

His last novel The Silken Traps has been critically acclaimed as a true portrayal of contemporary Indian social scene and a great work looking at human relations in a novel way.

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