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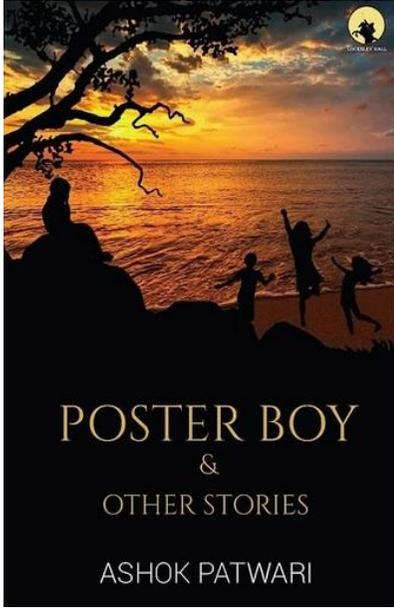
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Book Review of Ashok Patwari's *Poster Boy And Other Stories* by Dr Anmol

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"There is a purpose assigned to my life and I should not let it go astray!" (Nirvana, 78)

Poster Boy and Other Stories is a collection on vibrant subject-matters written by Ashok Patwari in an elongated



span of time. The author is a paediatrician by profession and writes in his leisure. He is a polyglot; tested his hands in English, Hindi and Urdu with equal magnitude and relish. Some of his famous works are *Turquoise Tulips* and *Down Flows the Steam* (in English), *Behta Paani*, *Ehsaas* and *Waapsi* (in Hindi) and *Kuch Lamhey Kuch Saayey* and *Dastak* (in Urdu). He received 'Delhi Urdu Academy Award' for *Kuch Lamhey Kuch Saayey* in 2015. The book ***Poster Boy and Other Stories*** is a

recount of the edifying ethos and state of affairs that the author witnesses; especially the incident of tsunami of Andaman Nicobar in 2004 apart from it the ugly face of terrorism, cultural idiosyncrasies in the country are of major consideration. The non-fiction speaks on diasporic ambience of rural India and many more through nineteen well knitted short stories.

Poster Boy and Other Stories is a fascinating anthology of short-stories on diverse interests and indigenous themes that opens with ***Poster Boy***. Ravi, the protagonist of the story is a member of a relief team sent by *Sahayak* -an NGO to Andaman Nicobar Island after two week of the hit of the Tsunami. Ravi shocks to see the intensity of the tsunami and destruction caused by it. He meets an orphan, Bijoy a five years old boy who have lost his parents and kiths and kins and no one of his survive is alive in this callous tsunami. Ravi develops an empathy with Bijoy and tries to hook up with him

to alleviate him from the loss. The elocution of words like 'Robot' and 'Zombie' are pertinent to express the inner turmoil of the boy who is unable to justify this act of God. Later his joining of the sport and making of 'sand house' is an excellent example of blossoming of hope in human heart. The story exhibits the human vulnerability and resilience to nature calamities. The minute details of the incidents, emotions and reactions- all are aptly penned by the author.

The second short story- **Consignment** takes the readers to a different zone altogether. It opens with the incident of slaying of the terrorist Mushtaq Ahmed. Mushtaq Ahmed who was trained and rammed into flames of terrorism by Buda Baba; Buda Baba is the central figure, a self-edifying character. The entire feat of the story gyrates around him. He has insatiable desire to mobilize Kashmiri for a single purpose; he wants to convert community rebellion into people's movement for liberation of Kashmir. He has been conflating the emotions of the young men of Kashmir. Mushtaq Ahmed was the latest victim of his wicked design. Salim has been chosen the next for the purpose. Salim wants to become an engineer but Buda Baba has ulterior motif for him and for many youngsters like him. Buda Baba is shown a big manipulator of the Kashmiri sentiments. The usage of Urdu diction makes the story more conceivable and effectual. Apart from it, the story is full of connotative conceits and metaphors as well.

The next micro-fiction titled as **Curse of the White Devil** is about occultism and the supernatural hex. The action takes place at Montego City in Jamaica. Joe, a minibus driver takes the passengers on sightsee of Montego City. He amuses everyone, explains them the archaeological and contemporary backdrop of the city. He describes the story of Annie Palmer who used to live in a big house, 'Rose Hall Great House' which is now ghostly. The story is not altogether an eerie one; it also contains lofty humours and amorous. It speaks of the four killings by Annie Palmer. The story also raises some factual

about socio-economic and Physical detail of the country. The ambience and atmosphere get its ghoul shape when one of the passengers, Peter had an ethereal trance of drowning. This incident chases him day after day; he feels insomniac about it. A woman has been trying to kill him in his recurring dream. He fails to cope with it; visits psychiatrist but still out of concord. On one moment of epiphany, he comprehends that the woman is none other than his own wife, Sara. Consequently, he hires Joe to spy his wife's activities. Joe at the outset finds that the person is cranky and suffering from apparition. But later he deduces that Sara may be intriguing something against Peter. The short story ends up in the discovery of that Peter has been suffering from 'Delusional Disorder' and has suicidal tendencies.

A Tale of Two School Dropouts is a flash fiction that depicts the psychological department of two dropout school boys- Munna and Bunty who have been failed for the last two years in 10th standard. Consequently they have been debarred from many privileges. They start pilfering money to meet their daily needs by concocting story of cock and bull whenever they are sent to buy household things out from the market. This short story track-downs the construction of children's persona and their credence system with special reference to Munna and Bunty on being neglected. New circumstance after being dropped out from the school exposes them to thievery, drug and fraud. The story ended up in a conflict between Bunty and Munna on watching the first -day -first -show of a new movie.

Miracle of the Holy Powder depicts the scenic beauty of pristine and unadulterated mountainous vicinity of Simbai in Papua New Guinea visited by Ricky. He was so stupefied with panoramic ambience of the place. Jim was guide to him; he was an expertise and well-versed in locale dialects. Ricky enjoyed the picturesque beauty of hills and the enriching traditions of the tribes reside in the area. The short story has paranormal conceits and touch of occultism. Ricky pretended

Jim that he had been given holy powder to safeguard from evils and ghosts. The holy power is in fact crushed-powder of quinine tablets. He saved an old man's life that had been contaminated of Malaria by giving him this holy powder without shaking his beliefs. The short story mocks the disbelief and superstitions which have been prevailed for centuries among many tribes.

Mom, You Don't Lie is one of many wonderful short stories that reflects the emotional reliability, gullibility and disbeliefs of juvenile world. It is written in first person narrative; the protagonist suffers from a progressive disease that is called Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy; that affects his capability to climb. He becomes inept and starts thinking about the proclamations made by his mother about him; the claims which were taken for sure as mother never tells a lie.

Mr B- is a short story about an octogenarian's portrait from a viewpoint of a child who finds Mr B more fascinated and tempted as he comes closer to him. The story conveys the deep implication that knowledge should be unrestrained and more communicative. Mr B is a polymath and profoundly rooted in life. Initially the boy took Mr B as a man of few words and recluse but gradually he finds Mr B relatively different person. The story expresses the analogy between the perceptions of adults and old to see and act upon the facilitation of life.

Nirvana is altogether more diverse and distinctive short story of this anthology. The allusion of Siddhartha's *Mahabhinishkramana* in pretext to the preparatory interval when Siddhartha took the great decision for the great departure is more alluring part of the short story. An equivalence has been set where author describes that he would not have been plummeting for the thirst of *Nirvana* like Siddhartha and would like to remain in the martial world to enjoy its mundane mendacities. But later, the author describes that suffering is the essence of life and we can't escape from its rate. Human beings are mortal; they are subject to death and

decay. Though life is so complex to comprehend sometimes we find life the curse of Sisyphus; yet it is a meaning perpetual journey from birth to death. In the journey we undergo for many experiences that lead us to wisdom and make us more mellow and mature.

Padma is a fable that is indistinguishable to *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling to some extent. It depicts the world of wild creatures; Shera, Padma and Raju. The next short story entitled, **Pujari Ji** is a short story of remorse and repentance. Pujari ji had committed a sin and in due course, he turned into a good person but the commit in past has been haunting him for years. Pujari ji meets a person who has been in jail for rape and murder of a girl. The execution of the prisoner is fixed and Pujari ji has been preaching him for days. The story expresses the ragging battle between crime and punishment.

Retreat is a narrative of three graduates from the Massachusetts Institution of Technology; Hitoshi Matsuno, Philip Smith and Ajay Chopra.

"Nobody is small in this universe.

Even the wishes of an ant reach to heaven,"

(Retreat, 106)

Hitoshi Matsuno and Philip lost Ajay Chopra in the terrorist's attack of 11 September 2001. It was really a hard time for them; especially for Philip who strongly believed that man can control his destiny and verve. He suffered eternally on this loss and set out in search of meaning of life by breaking the bourgeois' way of life. He observes whatsoever he comes across in his pursue; he remains receptive to new knowledge and truth. He synchronises, synthesizes and yields a new understanding. His myths busted of that man is the master of his destiny. Philip took the journey to Kedarnath where he separated himself from other pilgrimages. The final scene of the short story is of mystery that remains unsolved and

unresolved. Philip disappears in the deep forest of Kedarnath leaves behind some remnants.

Robinhood of the Chiterakoot takes us to a burglar, Raghu. He was a son of Dacoit Shamsheer Singh who was killed in police encounter. Consequently, Raghu has to stay away from the school. He also chose the profession of a burglar but his encounter with his teacher saved him.

Rooting for Roots is a reflective description of an old man who hails from a small town Sopore in Kashmir and now lives in Delhi for his business purpose. He develops finicky affiliation with an airhostess of Jet Airways as he was usual commuter of the destination from Delhi to Bangalore and Pune. He is nostalgic about his native place Sopore and old Delhi as well.

Bhagavad Gita says death is like removing old clothes and putting on new ones; then why worry about where you change your clothes?

But then I wish to make this change in my ancestral land...Sopore

...But I know it will remain a wish... I cannot fulfil it... (Rooting for Roots, 130)

The narrative technique of stream of consciousness has been applied in this short story for effectiveness in deliverance.

Surrender is a psychoanalytical interpretation of Kausalya's experience of married life. Nita is a Postgraduate Student of Social Sciences and working on a project on 'Women'. She visits Kausalya and asks certain questions prerequisite for her project. Kausalya is indisposed to answer many questions as if these questions are like an intervention to her private life. Most of the questions seem to be directly related to her life and she refuses to answer them. This short story exhibits the inner turmoil of married life of Kausalya.

The Accused is a story of an octogenarian Gouri Shankar who is accused of false charges of molestation and sexual assault on a young girl of nineteen years, Pinki daughter of Bimla Devi. Bimla Devi has been a domestic helper at Gouri Shankar's house for last many years. These false charges prove nails to his coffin. The old man couldn't stand them and lost all hope and zeal to life.

The Birthday Bouquet is a poignant short story that exposes the emotions of an old fragile mother who stays in an Old Age Home being discarded by her only son Anil who lives in New York. She assumes that she could be with her son in this old age. She remains in seclusion and always imagine coming of her son. The next short story entitled, ***The Blind Spots*** is an autobiographical account that speaks about the spots we never give our attention and emphasis but they matter a lot. We live in compulsions, too much with meaningless possessions. So called new world entails more indulgent without ethics and sacraments.

The Fragrance of Mustard Leaves is a short story of dislocation of an Indian origin family and also takes up the identity crisis of a girl, Jas (Jaspreet) who lives in New Jersey with her parents. She is her papa's baby and follows him in letter and spirit. She avoids her kiths and kins especially her mother as she thinks that her mother is old fashioned. She wants to live like Americans. She loses her father in 11 September 2001. Her mother returns to Hoshiarpur (Punjab) but she doesn't. Later she follows her instincts; she finds sense to be an Indian. The short story reflects that we can't ignore our ancestry, it has its roots in our psyche; we remain linked to them somehow.

The Last Telegram is the last short story of the anthology. It exhibits restiveness of Kashinath who is at the verge of retirement from the Indian Postal Services. He finds an undelivered telegram before his retirement but he doesn't derelict his duty and delivers it but he was 10 days late. All the

short stories are well interlaced and synchronised with day to day facet of life. The tome is written in assortment and provides multiple themes. It is like a trail that passes through many beautiful ventures and junctures. It would be no exaggeration if the book is alleged for a garland of many beautiful wild flowers well knitted in synchronization.

“Nobody is indispensable, and that men may come and men may go,

yet life goes on with its own pace” (The Last Telegram, 189)

Title: Poster Boy and Other Stories

Author: Ashok Patwari

Available: [Amazon](#)

About the author: Dr. Ashok Patwari

Dr. Ashok Patwari is a Pediatrician by profession and a creative writer by pastime. A former Professor of Pediatrics at Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi (India) and Research Professor in International Health at Boston University School of Public Health (USA), he has also served the World Health Organization, which gave him a unique opportunity of traversing the world and an exposure to a wide spectrum of social issues and events which often jiggle a creative mind. Ashok was born and brought up in Kashmir. Published his first Urdu short story when he was 19 years and later published his work in all the leading literary journals.

About the reviewer: Dr. Anmol

Dr Anmol, a juvenile research-scholar of Himachal Pradesh University and presently working as a Lecturer in English in the Department of Higher Education, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh, having 08 years of experience in teaching. He has attended several workshops on Literature & Languages and presented his research papers.

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