

GOUTAM KARMAKAR INTERVIEWS DR. T. VASUDEVA REDDY

Goutam Karmakar interviews Dr. T. V. Reddy. Reddy, as Nissim Ezekiel, is said to be a gifted sculptor. He chisels his poems with the deftness of a master craftsman. In this conversation, Reddy discusses about his poetry which is richly varied and stimulates our senses that tries to create the basic human feelings.

Q1. Goutam Karmakar: Sir, tell us a bit about your family and educational background. Sir, does your surrounding work as a source of inspiration for you in writing? Do any of your childhood memories have any impact on your writing?

T V Reddy: I was born and brought up in a village near Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh (India). My father was a schoolteacher. We belong to a middle class family. After finishing M.A. in English in 1966, I joined as a Lecturer in English with Govt. Degree College at Chittoor in A. P. I got married in 1970 and I have two sons and a daughter. I retired as Principal of Govt. Degree College in December 2001. I was UGC National Fellow and Visiting Prof. for two years.

My village is surrounded by hills, forests, green groves and rivers (Monsoon Rivers). Right from my childhood days, I was brought up in the lap of nature. As I live in the midst of nature, I am extremely inspired and influenced by nature. Some of the scenes and situations that I had seen and experienced as a school-going boy certainly do have their impact on a few of my poems.

Q2. Goutam Karmakar: Sir, have you been inspired by any writer? What are the books that you want to read time and again?

T V Reddy: As a student and teacher of English literature, I was naturally inspired and influenced by Shakespeare, the famous Romantic poets, the three great Victorian poets, the Augustan satirists and a few modern poets like T S Eliot. As a matter of fact, it was my father who seeded the basic interest in poetry in me.

I love to read Shakespeare's major tragedies, some of the short poems of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats many times over.

Q3. Goutam Karmakar: From which age did you begin to compose poems? And what is your definition of poetry? What are the dominating themes and issues you have raised in your novels?

T V Reddy: I attempted writing poems from my high school days. My poems were published in College Magazines when I was in college.

It is difficult to define poetry. By and large, I can venture to say that poetry in general is an expression of one's feelings, emotions and thoughts, heightened by inspiration and higher imagination presented in an orderly way with musical quality and imagery.

Generally, I prefer to write on rural and social themes, the loss of values in life in general and the degeneration in all walks of life. Moreover, as a responsible citizen, I want to hold a mirror to the reality of social life and expose the all-pervasive evil of corruption that has crept into every field of human life.

Q4. Goutam Karmakar: What are the unique features that distinguish you from other contemporary Indian poets writing in English? Sir, are you aware about the contemporary Indian English poetry and poets? Whose poetry among them do you want to read?

T V Reddy: Genuine presentation of rural life and constant crusade on corruption largely distinguish my poetry from those of others. Satire is a potential weapon, which I frequently aim for correction and in this aspect also my poetry can be distinguished. If poetry fails to reflect social awareness, it becomes a weak force.

Since I was a student, I have studied Indian poetry in English. Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are truly great poets. Among contemporary poets in Indian English I K Sharma, D H Kadi, D C Chambial, P C K Prem, Manas Bakshi, Saleem Peeradina,

Prof. S Radhamani Sarma, Dr. S Padma Pria and many others are there.

I have studied the poems of most of the contemporary poets. My exhaustive work "*A Critical Survey of Indo-English Poetry*" has been recently published by AuthorsPress, New Delhi. If you go through it, you will get a comprehensive picture about Indian poetry of present time in English.

Q5. Goutam Karmakar: Where does the Indianness lie in your poetic collections? Does your poetry serve any purpose for the betterment of society?

T V Reddy: It is not fair on my part to speak on my poetry. It is for you to decide with your objective assessment the nature and quality, merits and demerits of my poetry. However, Indianness can be felt in the choice and presentation of the theme and on the treatment and technique.

Q6. Goutam Karmakar: You are a poet, novelist and critic. How do you make a balance of doing versatile works? In which form do you want to be remembered prominently among your readers, as a poet or as a novelist and why?

T V Reddy: Indeed a very tough as well as tricky question. First, I started writing poems and my first collection of poems *When Grief Rains* was published in 1982. Then with my village background, I thought of presenting a genuine picture of the poor farmers and the village life as it was; though some writers already attempted on this aspect, I felt they lacked first-hand knowledge of the village life.

With this earnest urge, I wrote my first novel *The Vultures*, which was published in 1983 in Calcutta.

Generally when a writer writes a book, whether it is poetry or novel or play or a critical work, he likes to be remembered for all his writings. It is up to the readers to decide and it is their choice how they remember a writer.

Q7. Goutam Karmakar: What are the dominating themes behind your *Melting Melodies*? Where lies the significance of this title?

T V Reddy: *Melting Melodies* was published in 1994 by Poets Press India, Madras (now Chennai). Nature, rural themes and corruption at various levels including higher centres of learning are the main themes I have dwelt on.

Keen observation of nature around us fills our heart with an inexpressible joy sending tender ripples of soft music soothing our minds, which lingers in our minds for long as melting melodies. The object of nature may be a dam on a river running between two hills or mountain streams hopping and dancing in zig-zag paths from the upper areas down the hills or the beauty of the village background with hills, rivers, clouds and coconut trees or a charming rainbow or some other situation.

Q8. Goutam Karmakar: A lot of your poems have been explored from feminist point of view. How have you projected woman in your writing? Do you want yourself to be called a feminist?

T V Reddy: I have written neither from male nor from feminist point of view; I have written purely from humanistic point of view. Man and woman are two wheels of a cart or cycle; they need each other and one needs the other's sympathetic understanding and loving compassion and cooperation. Mutual trust and whole-hearted love until the end should be there. This is what I tried to project.

Q9. Goutam Karmakar: Irony, humour and violence are seen in your writing. In this regard, do you want to be called yourself a postmodern poet? Your writing seems to be a lifelong quest for peace. How do you justify it?

T V Reddy: Yes. Satire, irony and satiric humour are there in my writing, but not violence. Virulent and violent satire may be there, but there is no place for violence. When there are ills and evils at a large scale in the society, first they should be exposed and then corrective or remedial measures should be taken. Satire is the age-old intelligent poetic device or mechanism, which comes to the rescue of the poet or writer in exposing the unethical practices. I don't consider it a post-modern feature.

These are all meaningless divisions because poetry is a single ceaseless stream flowing with crystal clear waters of reality and imagination, consciousness of the self, the society and surroundings. In my view, there is no such thing as old or modern or postmodern; they have severe limits and they are all narrow divisions. Life is a continuous process, but every writer belongs to a place and lives in a

period. The surroundings and situations have their inevitable impact on his mind and heart. After all, we are all human beings living in a society. I am a writer with social consciousness. That is the fact about me.

Yes; my life, life of every person, life in general, human or non-human, needs peace. Since time immemorial, man's life has been longing for peace—domestic peace, social peace and peace for the mind and spirit. I tried to articulate the same in my recent poetry anthology *Quest for Peace; A minor Social Epic*. Without peace, there is no happiness; without these two, realization is not possible.

Q10. Goutam Karmakar: A close reading of some of your poems from *The Fleeting Bubbles* can be termed as classified pieces of social criticism. Do you agree with me? What are the contemporary social issues does your poetry raise?

T V Reddy: It is true; some of the poems are pieces of social criticism, but not all the poems. While some poems reflect rural landscape, a few present the stark reality of the present-day social life and atmosphere; some are purely romantic in their theme and treatment, while a few are on the spiritual aspect. For the most part I tried to give a genuine picture of the village life and the depressing situation of the poor farmers who are not able to make their both ends meet on account of the sky-high labour cost. Some of the social issues I have taken up are: scarcity of drinking water in villages, excessive commercial attitude in the hospitals, exhibiting false prestige in the

name of birthday parties, dowry issue, depressing situation of the poor widows and rampant corruption in the political field, particularly at the time of elections.

Q11. Goutam Karmakar: Do you consider a poet a social reformer? Do you think yourself as one? How far do your novels and verses work as the medium of social reformation?

T V Reddy: Primarily a poet is a poet, not a social reformer or preacher. He writes to express his feelings and thoughts. However, a poet is a member of the society and as such he is always aware of the social surroundings and the environment in which he lives. This automatically influences his mind. Life in the society, situations and experiences in social life become natural themes of his writing; it may be a poem or novel or play or short story and in all the works of art, life in the society gets reflected. From the ancient epics and great tragedies down to the modern stories and novels and plays, the same pattern is bound to be there. Literature gives at once delight and instruction. When society is very much corrupt, the writer has to present the same reality however unpleasant it is and by exposing the ills and evils of the society, people become more conscious of the enormity of the evil, which has a purging effect on their minds. Thus a good piece of literature, both directly and indirectly, shows the right path of life and aims at correction and tries to improve moral standards of the society.

This is what I have done in my poems and novels and short stories. I have tried to expose the cancer of corruption that has crept into all walks of life with a view to correct it. My work ends with exposing the evils and throwing light on them. Then it is left to the discretion of the reading public to reform or not. Good of the society is the desired end.

Q12. Goutam Karmakar: Realistic sensibility is beautifully blended with romantic spirit by you. How do you make a balance between romanticism and realism? Are you a romantic or realistic by nature? Give your arguments, sir.

T V Reddy: As I was born and brought up in the midst of rural surroundings rich with nature's plenty I am inspired and influenced by nature. Belonging to a middleclass rural family, I have seen and experienced the agony and the anguish of the life of a poor farmer who has to depend for farm work on undependable workers who more often indulge in exploiting the situation as a result of which we the poor farmers are reduced to abject poverty and thrown into debt-trap. This is the reality whether one accepts or not. That is why life is a wonderful blend of moments of romantic imagination and hard realism. This is what I am as a writer and a social being. I might have worked as a college teacher, but I can't give up the small piece of our ancestral land. We can neither fly always in mid-air nor can we relish to be tied to a pillar planted firmly on the ground. Our life itself is a balancing act, isn't it? I hope I have made the point very clear.

Q13. Goutam Karmakar: What are the poetic devices you have used in your poetry? What role does emotion play in your poetic creation? Have you ever come across any problems and confusions like writer's block while writing?

T V Reddy: This is for the reader or the critic to answer.

To a large extent, poetry mirrors one's thoughts and emotions. Successes and failures, delights and disappointments in life do have their impact on the mind and in turn they generate their corresponding impressions, feelings and emotions; some have the power of vibrating the heart, some remain as thoughts and memories depending on the density and intensity of the felt experience. Some find immediate expression in the form of a poem, while some find their place in writing at a later time. This is my experience.

After all, English is not our mother tongue; everything said and done, it remains a foreign language. While we write in mother tongue sometimes we wait for the proper word or phrase; then when we write in a foreign language like English it is natural that sometimes we search for the proper word. When great writers faced this difficulty, what are we before them? To say that we have never faced such a difficulty amounts to self-deception. Sometimes we have to write and re-write and make a few changes. It is inevitable.

Q14. Goutam Karmakar: Your poetry presents the wide spectrum of Nature. What is your philosophy of Nature?

Your poem presents the actual scenario of life of Indian villages?

T V Reddy: I have tried to present multiple colours and shades of nature in my poems. I love nature and I like to paint nature in most of my poems. Whether we like it or not we have to live in nature and with nature. Therefore, it is our duty to preserve the purity of nature. By harming nature, we would be harming ourselves. Already we have done greater harm and it is time to protect nature so as to protect the human race. We are children of nature and nature is our mother, guide and philosopher. In short, I have tried to present the real life of our villages in my writing.

Q15. Goutam Karmakar: Loss of moral and social values make you feel anxious and worried as seen in your poetry. Do you agree with me? What kind of utopian society do you dream of?

T V Reddy: Yes; I agree with you. Everywhere in the contemporary society, we find the tide of corruption rising high and threatening the very fabric of our normal life. To think of Utopia is to live in a dreamland. We have to make an all-out effort to root out corruption; it is not so easy in this land of corruption. We make an earnest attempt to expose it and to bring a gradual change. It is also not so easy, because our political system and democratic set-up is like that. When leaders themselves indulge in all sorts of corruption what is it that can be done by common people like us? But we can't remain as mute spectators either. We

have to make some beginning; that is what I am doing in my humble way. As far as possible, let us try to build corruption-free society or society with a less degree of corruption.

Q16. Goutam Karmakar: You are a keen observer and you have a deep psychological insight. How will you justify this? Your poems are charged with intense humanism. More than a poet how far do you consider yourself as a humanist first?

T V Reddy: Being a little shy and sensitive person from my early days, I have been a keen observer of nature and human nature. My roots in village are largely responsible in shaping my personality and in observing men and matters from a deeper level.

I always strive to observe human values in my everyday life and I believe in moral values. I try to present the same in my poems; without human values life becomes a curse and it is of no use.

That is why I wish to be a humanist first and last. Life is primary, while writing comes only after that. If a writer wants to write he should be alive and as long as a man is alive he should lead a moral life and he should be a humanist. World will be fit for living as long as we are humanists treading the ethical path.

Q17. Goutam Karmakar: Why are you so harsh and cynical towards political leaders in your poem? Death, poverty, pain, cultural decadence are some of the central themes

of your poetry. So if I tell you a pensive poet then how will you justify it?

T V Reddy: I am not harsh; I am realistic and impartial in my depiction of the political scene and political leaders. Nowadays we don't come across statesmen, we see only politicians who always have an axe to grind. Can you show me one MLA or MP who has not amassed wealth to the tune of hundreds and thousands of crores? But I don't find fault with them. The society by and large is responsible. We want all concessions, all sorts of reservations and all freebies. Some political leaders are clever guys; they rightly feel the pulse of the masses and liberally shower what they want. Even now most of the votes are won with currency notes and barrels of liquor. That is why, to win in election they spend a minimum of fifty to hundred crores; usually it exceeds; when we spend we naturally expect good returns. That is the political game; but they exceed the reasonable limit. Their motto seems to be: 'Make hay while the sun shines' or till the sun shines and is ready for coronation. Whether one accepts it or not this is the truth; truth is always bitter, isn't it? The country as a whole suffers from leadership bankruptcy.

In some of my poems, I have referred to death, poverty, pain and cultural decadence. It is true; these are the eternal issues which the vast majority of people face and experience in real life. I want to be faithful in what I express. I am not cynical; I am speaking the naked truth.

What I have seen all these years, I have expressed in some of my poems. When I write on certain truths that are inevitable components of life, how can I be cynical? I accept life as it is, conscious of its dark clouds and lights. As humble men with our limits, we sometimes feel depressed, but the next minute we reconcile ourselves to the situation accepting our lot and reposing our faith in the Supreme Lord.

Q18. Goutam Karmakar: Some of your poems are metaphysical in nature. How far do you consider yourself as a metaphysical poet? How far Indian philosophy and religion influence your writing?

T V Reddy: As I am now in the seventies, it is natural that I devote on metaphysical and spiritual themes. Right from the beginning I view from spiritual angle and now after my retirement I devote most of my time in reading the Bhagavad Gita, some of the Upanishads and Sri Aurobindo's spiritual poetry. In fact, I am not a metaphysical poet in the conventional sense. But eternal truths are there in our scriptures and the Gita is the best aid to lead us to spiritual light. Our Sanatana Dharma is the most ancient way of moral life, most comprehensive and synthetic, integral and inclusive, with compassion and catholicity of outlook. Constant reading of the Gita has its undeniable impact on the mind.

Q19. Goutam Karmakar: What kind of future of Indian English poetry you can see? Poetry is less popular now-a-days and attracts little attention from people in general.

According to you, what are the reasons behind this? As a poet and professor, what are the suggestions you want to give?

T V Reddy: In this age, science and technology is getting all the importance and is given tremendous boost, while liberal studies are thrown into the backburner. Management gurus are steering the course of modern life and so market values occupy the foremost place while moral values are totally ignored. Indeed it is a very bad trend and it does not augur well for the wellbeing of humanity. In this situation when literature itself has lost its value who will care for poetry? Naturally, poetry is very much neglected. In this computer age, time is very precious for the educated people; they don't find time to read poetry. Poetry-reading is a leisurely affair and to read a poem one should have poetic temperament and aesthetic bend of mind which is deficient in the youth. When moral values are respected, only then people can nurture love for poetry.

Q20. Goutam Karmakar: Do your readers expect dramas and translation works from you? Can you discuss any other future projects of you with your readers?

T V Reddy: As I am primarily a poet and novelist, readers do not expect any translation from me. Creation and translation are two different fields. I do not like translating books; moreover, to translate a book from some other language one should have equal command in both the languages, which I don't claim.

I am working on a fresh book of poems. I hope to complete it soon and see it published this year.

Q21. Goutam Karmakar: What will be your advice to all the newcomers in the arena of Indian English poetry? What will be your message that you want to give to all the poetry lovers and moreover to the mankind in general?

T V Reddy: For all promising poets my only advice is to maintain poetic quality and the spark of poetry in their poems. Nowadays writers are not concentrating on the quality. By scribbling a few lines, one cannot call it a poem. Most of the written pieces that are now published in the name of poetry are not poetry at all; they do not bear even any remote resemblance to good poetry. All writers cannot be poets. A good poem at once delights and strengthens the moral sinews of the readers and a poet should strive to fulfill this higher goal.

Goutam Karmakar: Thank you sir for sharing your views and thoughts with me.

T V Reddy: Thank you, Goutam for such insightful observations. God bless you.



Dr T Vasudeva Reddy

(M.A, Ph. D) worked as Lecturer, Reader, and U.G.C National Fellow & Visiting Professor. He retired as Principal of Govt. Degree College in 2001 and later as Principal of Post-Graduate colleges.

He is a renowned poet, critic, and novelist of international repute. His poems have appeared in various journals in different countries. He is the subject of doctoral dissertations and research papers.

Reddy received several awards namely the Awards of International Eminent Poet in 1987, Hon. D. Litt. from the WAAC, San Francisco in 1988, Best Teacher Award at the College & University level from the Govt. of A.P. in 1990, Best Poetry award for his third poetry book *The Fleeting Bubbles* from Michael Madhusudan Dutt Academy, Calcutta (1994) and the prestigious U.G.C Award of National Fellowship in 1998.

He received the international Award of “Excellence in World Poetry” in 2009. He is now Hon. President of Guild of Indian English Writers Editors and Critics.

His biography figures in the American Biographical

Institute (N. Carolina, U.S.A), International Biographical Institute (Cambridge), Reference India & Asia (New Delhi) and Sahitya Akademi (New Delhi) among others.

Reddy's works include the following.

Poetry anthologies

1. When Grief Rains (New Delhi, Samakaleen Pubs., 1982)
2. The Broken Rhythms (Madras, Poets Press, 1987)
3. The Fleeting Bubbles (Madras, Poets Press, 1989)
4. Melting Melodies (Madras, Poets Press, 1994)
5. Pensive Memories (Madras, Poets Press, 2005)
6. Gliding Ripples (U.S.A., Baltimore, Pub. America, 2008)
7. Echoes (N. Delhi, Authors Press, 2012)
8. Quest for Peace (N. Delhi, Authors Press, 2013)
9. Golden Veil (N. Delhi, Authors Press, 2016)
10. Thousand Haiku Pearls (N. Delhi, Authors Press, 2016).

Novels

1. The Vultures (Calcutta, Golden Books, 1983)
2. Minor Gods (New York, 2008).

Criticism

1. Jane Austen: The Dialectics of Self-Actualization in her Novels (New Delhi, Sterling, 1987)
2. Jane Austen: The Matrix of Matrimony (Jaipur, Bohra Pubs., 1987)
3. A Critical Survey of Indo-English Poetry (N. Delhi, Authors Press, 2016).

Grammar

1. Advanced Grammar & Composition in English (Hyderabad, Commonwealth Pubs., 1996)
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