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Ranu Uniyal's Poetic Stories Weaved in Time

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The learned professor of a university, Ranu Uniyal, is a scholar and has published some scholarly books besides some edited ones. Her first book of poems, *Across the Divide*, was published in 2006. *December Poems* is the second volume of her poetry collection, published in 2012. Though December is a very cold month in Lucknow, a north Indian town, there are reasons for her to celebrate this month for jubilation in her life. "We dance and dance until the wee hours in the morning / Well that is what December nights are for? (Winter Blues/ 25) For her it is "A time to celebrate and the time to venerate Looking ahead" (December/ 29) Elsewhere it is "Everlasting Moment's Bliss" (December/ 30)

Apart from the December episodes hidden in her life, the poems here are not disjointed single pieces of ideas and experiences. There is an underlying unity and continuity of experiences in these ebullient poems of joy and grief and passion through which one may get an idea of the flow of a poet's life in her youth, education life and ahead of it in love and lust, frustration and despair; a fair looking damsel as she was. Somewhere it is a look back at her life's half forgotten days and an effort to fix the life's moorage somewhere in maturity, in trying to find a solace in it through reasonable adjustments; not just poems but a weaving of underlying stories wrought in prose poems with rhythm and joy even out of temporary failures. These are mostly poems of relationships though not necessarily aimed at conjugal ones or amoral only like that of Kamala Das.

A number of poems are relating to the memory of the poet's father with whom she had a close relationship. She also remembered the others like her friends and the children, Guru and the God. In all this is interwoven the tale of a woman. So we never forget that the poet is a woman.

It is difficult to say when the orgy of December happened for it is difficult to extract an exact confession of it from the poet's mouth but it must have happened for a short while the aftermath of which is felt throughout her poetry. Hurt as she was many times, hurt was her womanhood which she never forgets to depict.

At twenty-two impatient with time and men
Remind me of my one and only adventure-
Which had it survived could have been my raison d'être.
(Winter Blues/ 25)

Then begins her agony of retrospection, ". . . and I naked with longing / and love am unable to forget your promise." (Intuition/39)

"Between us nothing changed / Only dreams were difficult to follow" (In friendship/40) And then comes in train what are expected of such a position in life. After the exuberant December nights were long gone she says, "But that was twelve December ago

Now, "With my worn out hands / I hold the delicate flab of your cheek . . . It seems odd and I find it difficult to explain why / There are only circles under your eyes / And my lips have slaughtered all craving for a kiss." (Yesterday no more/ 21)

And more, here she finds none but a ghost.
In the pliant dark I stretch my hand to
get a feel of you and am horrified to see
the insignia of a ghost pushing me under.

(As beautiful as ever/ 33)

As it happens, she describes her experience with asperity, “Women are vulnerable to death and crime. / So easy to crush her with the grief of her shame. (Invigilation /14)

Finding an analogy she relates her position through the life of some women of the Indian mythology like Ahalya and Draupadi.

How easy to hurt the woman who was cheated by gods!

....

I carry within a heaviness that has curled with the weight
Of their angry feet and elsewhere sticks like an old habit.

(Ahalya to Ram /16)

I am a woman
annihilated,
circulated,
confiscated.

....

The forests are empty.

The palace is burnt.

The cities are dead.

The Kurukshetra is barren.

(Draupadi/ 52)

Comparing herself to Persephone, the Greek Goddess, she perceives herself a total failure in love-life, as in “A Woman has no dreams”. Remembering Kamala Das she writes,

Are they all the same the men we loved?

The one who promised and walked away

And the one who married

And the one whose seed I held inside

With such unholy patience of longing.

(Women to Women /35)

Growing among the hard hearted men she has grown to a stone being hurt by them constantly (Stone and I /52). She advises others to abide by the usual norms of life according to the more, to be at the feet of the Guru, to be happy, to believe oneself not just a body but a soul. (At fifty /48)

Coming of age as a dignified lady the poet adjusted her position in life realising that all this turmoil of the body and passionate expenses of life are after all passing phases. She adjusted herself in family life and has been following the traditional religious life with Hindu beliefs.

From all this world of love and frustration and adjustments in life she suddenly bursts forth with a divine realization, “And then suddenly when I came upon you in my heart / I was delighted beyond words, beyond all dreams / For there you were . . .” (Dear Me /32).

Abraham Lincoln, the greatest of American Presidents, delivered a proclamation establishing Thanksgiving as an American Holiday in 1863. It was a Thursday which the President venerated on many occasions. Richard Salva, the author of a book on Lincoln titled, “Soul Journey: From Lincoln to Lindbergh” claimed that Lincoln was a Hindu Yogi in a past life which was based on a statement by Paramahansa Yogananda. It has been claimed that Thanksgiving has a Hindu origin. Uniyal writes a poem titled, “Thanksgiving” (38). It is full of humility and gratitude towards God who has been carrying her throughout her journey in life up to a state of bliss.

The two poems as above with such piece as “Prayer” (47) are intellectual exercises based on religious beliefs. “Angels at Pyssum” (54) written in the same vein is little ambiguous. “The

Prayer will be my song” (43) convey a very positive faith and confidence, strongest among these groups of poems.

This seeking shelter under the umbrella of God is a traditional posture, a part of her adjustments at a later stage of life away from the ebullient youth. Here Ranu comes to grips with Kamala Das.

It is easy to “fit in” unlike Kamala Das
who refused to belong and glistened
with her poems prickly and shiny as her nose pin.
She said it all while we sat and endorsed.

(Gift from an artist/ 55)

In this poem she advises her friend to soak in the joy of being to find oneself everywhere, lulling the children and fitting in with the situation. In the end she realises a very precious gift of life,

Life is precious and only love
can take its place on this earth.

(Before the storm/ 57)

But let us not be confused with the word love for here the love is not that pinpointed love for the lover of a youth which she expressed so meaningfully, “Everywhere, it is you and suddenly no image is without you.” (Between Us /24) Here the love has expanded its horizon to embrace many more persons and things in life including the divine. Ranu Uniyal has loved life with passion and has seen it from different angles, aching and suffering as she was. Finally she came to some adjustments with life’s changing circumstances and has found solace in God as it is futile to expect it from anybody else. Her poems with interwoven stories draws a reader close to her poetry.

Work Cited:

December Poems. Ranu Uniyal. Kolkata; Writers Workshop. 2012

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