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Poetry of a Natural Feather: A Review of Saroj Padhi's *Monsoon Memories And Other Poems*

Saroj K. Padhi, *Monsoon Memories And Other Poems*, New Delhi: Author's Press, 2018.

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Reviewed by:

Gagan Bihari Purohit

Nature appears to be the chinks in the armour of humanity in the wake up of climate change and various threats being posed by the ecological challenges before man. It therefore, becomes imperative on part of man to treat the concerns of nature to be a powerful rallying cry that man understands the peaceful coexistence of nature not as a source of generosity but as a sheer and rare necessity. There is often a worrying concern with regard to what constitutes an ideal relationship between nature and man, what the priorities are, how the rifts could be mended, and how the desired level of sustainable ecology could be achieved. Moreover, the absence of an amicable ambience between two warring parties, lack of clarity in recognizing and attempting to solve the gray areas placing sacrifice far above the self-serving aspirations and above all, the human and non-human considerations have complicated the already aggravated situation further. The simple fact that the man-nature face off is a relative and continuous concept rather than a discreet one would go a long way to solve the impasse it has turned out to be.

Against this backdrop, seasoned campaigner Saroj Padhi's ninth collection of poetry, *Monsoon Memories and Other Poems*(2018) comes out as a certain relief emphasizing the man-nature continuum concept. Padhi has done a commendable job of negotiating between man and nature giving a fair degree of the poetic personae's penchant for nature, and natural flavor in every worldly happening. The very first poem, "A Cool Old Flame" sets the tone of such an impeccable relationship with nature which has turned out to be the alter-ego of the poet. The esoteric concepts are dealt with poetic dexterity when the cool wind "sprinkles Love's sweet smell" to counter the foul frame of a flame that the poet is subjected to in the society. That Padhi is trying hard to cope with the existential angst is explored in the poem "Aching Soul". The probing mind fails to come to terms with the ways of the new world which is at odds with nature lovers where "dull repetitions" have made a hell out of life. The poet wails of the missing "bliss



of innocence” in “A Creeper” where nostalgia has become the forte compelling the poet to ponder over years of unsuccessful foray into the journey of life without “quicksands of life. “Across the Kathojodi Bridge” offers a delicate contrast between the life in society with that of the nature. The early morning experience beside the bridge seems innate to the poet for releasing “deadly anguish” of the night. The poet suggests alternative approaches to life to address worries of the day to day lives by simply turning to nature. The picturesque beauty and graphic description of the scenic charm conjures up fresh impetus in the readers’ mind to last at least whole day long defying stress and strain with pleasure and purpose.

The poem “Adolescent” offers a different taste for the reader presenting the tale of an anxious and arduous adolescent, gradually gaining access to the adult world steadily climbing clusters of experience dwelling upon nature’s well deceptive guise. Mark the ending where desires give way to experiences in an informal way:

desire is quietly born
to fill all bosoms with honey of love
that overflows in dreams of buds
my supple mind so densely to adorn! (21)

The pure pleasure of shutting the door of childhood and opening up another world leading to the youth often brings home the message that the poet is capable of communicating strong and subtle emotions in simple but effective way. The paroxysms of rage owing to daughters disobedience has been cooled down calmly by the innocent and “accented” expression of the “tiny tot of six. The simple funda she offers for solving a frequently occurring negative emotion by pointing at the basic reality that a man is first of all himself than confirming to other multiple avatars is significant in the context of the poem. Innocence versus experience syndrome is the key here to understand how the anger is being calmed down by a simple remark. What separates Padhi from others in the arena is this uncanny knack of exploring subtle experiences in a simple and suave manner. The poet’s creative urge is being stimulated by the child’s astute ability to grasp the essence of life in an innocent manner; mark the poetic sojourn, “I thought how beautiful life can be in eyes of innocence” (24). Life’s lessons are picked up through the simple eyes of the child.



Padhi seems to be a poet of rare perspicacity when using personification as a poetic device he draws our attention to plastic debris. Neither the “molested dusk” nor the “raped night” has any respite from the” thunderous vehicles”. The economy of precise expression marks steady progress of Padhi’s mature poetic prowess; the “red bones of the uncanny truth” only bear witness to “liquor bottles broke head in the hands of the uncouth”. The poetic persona does not approve of ugly squalor of “the place got littered with plastics and burning cigar stubs” signaling danger of an irreparable measure with “my heart lost the regular throbs” (26). The poetic agenda of man-nature continuum is put forth strongly looking down upon the brazen facts of man nature face off. Examples of similar paradoxical axioms galore throughout the collection; in the poem “A Thorny Bush in Ravine” the persona urges its readers to give up the pleasure principle in order to accommodate nature in its usual mould.

Contemporary acclimatization of myth of Konark, river Chandrabhaga and Dharama in the poem “Black Pagoda at Night” starkly point out pompous humility and its obverse, arrogance of humanity towards non-human considerations. Padhi’s proverbial good humour is being exploited in the best possible manner here. The rampant farmer suicide, college ragging and “brutal homicide” are brought forward to lay bare the empty promises which involve life risk of common folk. The poem provokes an outcry of high order about the contemporary crisis that grips our society with an iron hand.

In a poem like “Bunch of Words” Padhi thinks very highly of nature as he looks up to natural agents like “heaven’s rainbow”, “eternal spring” as powerful poetic tools to unfold the “beauty of life after death” without adhering to “time’s sting” (33). He tries to dispel doubts from the readers’ mind that nature has lost its sting in an anthropocene age. Moreover, the poet tries to admonish humanity to fall into the line of the ecological needs as the increasing encroachment over the later has left man high and dry in his own domain.

Padhi’s patriotic fervor comes to the fore in a poem like “Call for Freedom” where a probing question “... where is that promised freedom?” leads to an uncertain reality where “...democracy is caught in a conundrum!” and “... a miniscule celebrates its benediction / but citizenry is yet to rise from stupor of contradiction! (34). Whether it is the stark satire of “ Behind Durga Puja” or in



vigorous search of “life’s new definition” in “On the Eve of Diwali” or still the significant sojourn for “a song of spring time love” in “December”, Padhi’s apt perception stands out.

Three title poems about “Monsoon Memories” keep contemporary vibes afloat. Deliberate pun on the word “Katak” delineating “callous cattle” indifferent to “loud horns and hoots”; graceless “sandal-smitten Babas” representing “a thousand year jaded body” of ancient historical city of Cuttack; desiccated rivers “digging their own grave”; poet’s diary offering “beautiful lie of love” lyrics when two lovers are seized captive “under the cloak of guilty love” – are surely additions to the poetic agenda of finding solutions to burning contemporary issues. While the second of the monsoon series poems harp on serious subjects like “fundamental fanatics” and rampant sexual perversion, the third steals the show as the poet stands as a pale “polestar” being a party to the “corrupt pattern”.

The series of rain poems also turn to nature for seeking solution to every scathing contemporary issue at hand. In poems like “Narcissist Rain”, “Peace Pagoda”, “Triple Talaq, “Morbid Mobiles” Padhi’s “quick wit and ready repartee” is amply displayed. It seems that in the worthy hand of Padhi man-nature conundrum is resolved for once and all. The unscrupulous man being up against a revengeful nature is no more a new normal now.

Certain prosaic and jargoned expressions can be done away with resorting to a strong mythical, cultural and natural undercurrent. Similarly clichéd monotony is well looked after by use of ingenious imagery and recurrent alliteration attracting attention of the reader throughout; prevalent presence of natural agents only helping assimilation of loose ends further. Very often a thought crosses in readers’ mind that Padhi’s poems remind us of a Jayanta Mahapatra in the making. No wonder, the collection deserves to be a prized possession of every conscious cognoscenti of poetry.