

## Book Review on *Snapshots from Space and Other Poems* by Dr. Ketaki Datta

Naina Dey's *Snapshots from Space* is a rare collection of poems which caters to the thirst of poetry-readers of all ages and spaces, provided the reader possesses a sensitive heart, a comprehending within, a god-created creature, who is supreme among all His creations, having sufficient intellect to get a feel of the universe he lives in. In fact, the poet, a noted academic and a creative writer, makes it clear at the Preface that,

*"The poems are the outcome of my observations of and responses to nature, people, as well as the animals which come in contact with the human world. While some poems are vignettes of everyday existence, other attempt to delve into the psyche of the lonely individual in an uncomprehending society. In these poems, myriad emotions come together—fear, anger, frustration, cruelty, insensitivity, disillusionment, shame, loss—with the underlying current of hope, the desire to live, to love and be loved, the individual's ability to overcome odds, undying innocence, and the desire for an unsullied environment."*[p.9]

Hence, Dey is quite clear about her aim and the target audience who would love her poems and the persona of the poet reflected in the poems. She has classified the poems under four divisions: Past, Present and Future; Dreams; Men, Women and Other Animals; Miscellaneous. In the first section, five poems are there, namely, *Snapshots from Space*, *The Seer*, *Cloudburst*, *Solitude* and *Nun Day*. In almost all these five poems a journey through the passage of Time, a foray into Eternity, soul-searching, a need for viaticum for the inner being on its long journey through this earth, a stock-taking of life being lived through hours of 'perennial solitude' [*Solitude*] a labored wait that churns many a thing at one go: 'the struggle of the shark and the barbel', 'shadowy apparitions...on...fissured walls', 'a dog howls...for Noah', [*Nun Day*] ends in 'waiting for the world to end'. The diction of the poems in this section is poignant, gravid with meaning, images are implicit as well as suggestive and leave many queries whose answers remain intertwined with the lines itself.

The poems contained in the section, Dreams, namely, *Waves*, *The Waves Floweth Under*, *Haiku*, *Broken Dreams* [March 2012], *Murder Most Foul*, *The Visitors* transport us to a world where Eliot-like semiconscious or supra-real or even surreal manifestation of 'reality' gains layers of meaning, presence of a dead soul though forever 'alive' ['baba', for sure] at the back of the poet's mind like Sylvia Plath, or a lover's haiku, seeming like 'a golden fly snapped up by a slithering tongue' [of a lizard?]*—*all stay side-by-side, in the same world where "time past and time present are contained in time future".

The words have music as well as discordant notes, heightening the surrealistic effect of a dream-world, it seems:

The waves gleam in moonlit darkness  
 Advancing with greater determination  
 Fear mingling with despair  
 Tentacles grip me whole  
 Slithering from every side  
 Corroding like guilt conscience  
 My life dances before my eyes  
 Like a murderer in glee  
 Painting the sky red....  
 —The Waves Floweth Under

In the third section *Men, Women and Other Animals*, Dey includes twelve poems like *Abuse, The Death of a Dog, Madwoman Dancing, Flood, Another Grill, The Cockatoo, The Three Budgerigars, Vote, Woman in Prayer, To Gerardo Sangiargio, The Doll's House, The Dog*. In all these poems, Dey captures slivers of existence, of both men and animals. In *The Death of a Dog*, she satirizes the calm of nature as well as that of human society even after 'the furry carcass' lies on the road, who had been 'run over the previous night.' Even this society remains unperturbed, 'unusually usual', when a 'madwoman dances' cocking a snook at the sanity of it. In *Another Girl*, Dey is critical of this society again, in which, a nubile girl cries out in protest:

Cut off my feet father  
 While woman fly to space  
 You think of dowry, wife-beating, feticide  
 Miniscule columns in posh dailies  
 So that no girl may ever be born again.

The last section, *Miscellaneous*, comprises eight poems: *The Grassy Hollow, All in a Day, Morning Raaga, Down the River Ganga, Just a Reflection, The Goddess and the Tramp, A Hymn to Gopala, Shantipura*. Dey raises her voice of protest to crescendo in *Just a Reflection*, where she demands a unity of all in feeling the 'troubled times', but, we always are happy with the news-clippings brought to us either in print or at 'news at nine'. At least, we stay unscathed in the four walls of our room, unfazed by the perturbations stirring the world around! In *The Grassy Hollow, All in a Day, Morning Raaga, Down the River Ganga*, Dey etches pictures of different snippets of existence. In the remaining poems, Dey is placid in her tone, adept in painting the nest of a bird on the canvas or 'our Shantipura' which 'wakes up to the crows' call'.

As a debutante, Naina Dey deserves special applause for weaving a world in which man coexists peacefully with animals, woman carves a niche in an otherwise predatory world governed by men and the world of nature having an ameliorating presence adding soothing balm, healing all kinds of wounds- mental or physical. Dey's collection is a must-read for young and old, academic and nonacademic alike.

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**Naina Dey** is a critic, translator, reviewer and creative writer. She has authored several books and her works have appeared in newspapers, anthologies and academic journals. She was awarded the "Excellence in World Poetry Award, 2009" by the International Poets Academy, Chennai in 2009 and was a member of a team of young Indian writers to be felicitated jointly by Sahitya Akademi and Visva-Bharati University on the occasion of the 150th birth centenary of Rabindranath Tagore in 2010. She twice won the Heart-Bytes poetry contest conducted by Sacred Heart College, Kochi. She has been anthologized in *Roots and Wings : An Anthology of Indian Women Writing in English, Kerala and The Dance of the Peacock*, Hidden Brook Press, Canada.

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