

Prabhat K. Singh

So Many Crosses

(Poems)

821
Si 64 S

Foreword by **SHIV K. KUMAR**

In 821

Si 64 S

So Many Crosses

(Poems)

Other books by Prabhat K. Singh

CRITICISM

- * *Realism in the Romances of Shakespeare*,
Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1993
- * *Dynamics of Poetry in Fiction*
(Foreword by Dr. C.D.Narasimhaiah, Mysore)
Pencraft Publications, New Delhi, 1994
- * *The Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond (ed.)*,
Pencraft Publications, New Delhi, 1995

NOVEL IN TRANSLATION

- * *Raat Ke Ajnabi (Two Novellas)*
— Hindi translation of Ruskin Bond's *Strangers in the Night*.
Atma Ram & Sons, Delhi — In press.

So Many Crosses

(Poems)

Prabhat K. Singh.



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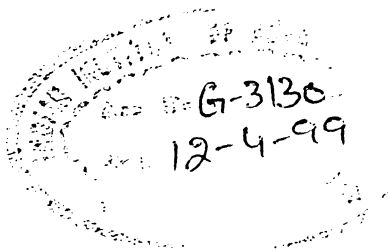
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For
Prabha

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The Quest, The Literary Rainbow

Shiv K. Kumar

Ph.D. (Cambridge), FRSL

Foreword

I have great pleasure in writing a few words about Prabhat K. Singh's first collection of poems *SO MANY CROSSES*. What has impressed me about his poetry is its urbane tone, its playful irony and its authenticity. Unlike most new poets, he never lapses into making plain statements about life, because he knows that poetry is essentially a dramatization of thoughts and emotions.

But above all, it is Prabhat K. Singh's imagery that strikes one as being ingenious and innovative. Take, for instance, his poem "Gaya" which seems to be a symbol of the dichotomy between illusion and reality. 'It's a city... of river without water, / hills without plants / and men without minds.' This is where 'tea' is 'tinctured with opium waters.'

There is not a single significant aspect of life that this poet has not touched upon – be it political, social, religious, literary or emotional.

I can prophesy that in view of his commendable talent, Prabhat K. Singh will soon be recognized as one of our promising new poets.

Dec. 8, 1997.

Hyderabad

Shiv K. Kumar

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IMAGINATION

Wanton rain
with welter of emotions
in lyric restlessness
causing ripples in a calm lake.

Chasing butterflies across
the purple haze of mountains
it roams the meadows green
in moments stolen from sleep
and merges with the deep sea
to enthrall the tides
caressing the shore.

Pensive it moves clattering
over the empty plates
and begging bowls
in roofless slums
curtained with rags,
or refugee camps
in tattered tents
bearing racial tags
to awaken souls in slumber
to the sounds of hunger.

It also waters anger
of shrubs running riot
and slings mud squelchy
like Tories and Whigs
when hooked on politics.

AIR CRASH : NEW YORK

Stirred deep in the planted heart
a ball of fire
in the sky,
east of 'Kennedy International',
darting splinters —
flesh, bones, knapsacks, steel.

The soul of the maiden explorer
discovering burns over the belly
of the Atlantic — bleeding twelve nautical miles
off the Long Island coast —
asked himself in daze :
'Is this the path I had traversed ?'

THE TWICE BORN RAPE

Circling her round
behind the temple of order
like eagles wheeling
a desolate virgin village
they held her captive
in their cactus arms
ravaging in turn
all sacred territories till dawn
and left her blistered
all over the thighs
by drops of acid-rain
gleaming white
in the sunlight.

The old father fastened
to a pole nearby
weeping blood
throughout the ritual
(sprinkled with screams and howls)
gathered wreckages
for god's perusal,
but a wind from the summit
wiped all the testimonies out
and dropped paper pills
bearing mahatma's smile
to heal all wounds.

DEMOCRACY INDIA, 1996

A beautiful woman
with braceleted arms,
anointed forehead
and unclasped incense hair
around bejewelled neck
bleeding flowers of AK - 47.

Blistered knees and toes,
honeycomb breasts
and wounds at the
thighs and the
navel, scam skirted,
oozing pus and

white vultures, in the banquet,
wolves and crows
eating flesh and pecking
at the ivory bones
in the neon darkness of
post - Independence glare.

ROSEMARY'S FASHION FRESH

Camilla was crowned
in the "Beauty Contest for
Just Married"
on the simple ground
that the Bishop of the
Roman Catholic Church
while performing her wedding
in her skimpy bridal dress
from 'Rosemary's Fashion Fresh'
instead of saying
'the body of Christ'
said, 'Christ, what a body !'

So, shun all worries
and buy from 'Rosemary's ...'

EARTHQUAKE : UTTARKASHI

The planet swung abruptly
like a cradle at night
with insurgent rocks
playing brazen notes
over the trumpet
like a violent hail
casting handgranades.

Multiple cleavages
showing demon's jaws agape
engulfed houses, trees,
humans and animals
while the sky remained hard
like a helmet of steel.

Below in the valley
the dogs discovered
under banyan roots
bleeding in the air
the frozen flesh
of a mother and her child
whose tears, still warm,
were held in the dimples
of his maiden smile.

The lonely survivors
wrapped in gloom,
as pervasive as coastal humidity,
are still awaiting
the night's departing
in the rising of the morn.

IN THE BATTLE FOR BREAD

Crouched under a hot tin shed
a ghostly creature
with skin dry like autumn leaves
and bones dry like dry twigs
waiting impatiently
for his turn to descend
in the python's belly.

Using shovels and mattocks
as weapons in the battle
for his daily bread
he gets at the treasure
hidden in the dark pits
and offers the world in crisis
what they call 'black diamond'
in exchange for silicosis.

With the doctor's refusal
to treat him again,
for the X-ray could not
see his pain,
he now coughs up at night
blood in the sunless slum
waiting to be caved in
and buried
in the grave he has dugged.

GAYA

A holy city widespread
with filthy drains and murky lanes
coiled round the shrines
where angels fear to tread.

Lord Yama's choicest piece of land
for His gala show every year
where guards at the outposts
collect tolls,
sniffers move whoring about in the streets
while their masters keep
entertaining the guests lured
by the ageless glimpses
of the facades
of temples and pagodas.

In and around
the dry river bed
of the Falgu,
dimpled and gurgled
with inward mirth
at the feet of Lord Vishnu,
ceremonies continue
round the clock — divine agents
for 'generous tips'
feeding hungry souls
through mystic communions
between the dead
and the living who seek
peace eternal
for their forefathers.

This ancient demon king's
is a progressive modern city
for it has made
blackouts, strikes,
murders, extortions,
daylight dacoities
and grabbings of property
its hot favourites.

Not content with
Tilkut and Anarsa
(its age old delicacies)
its innovative tongues
have also tried
sweets made of milk-soaked blotting-papers,
tea tintured with opium waters
and even dishes enriched with human flesh
— all hitting
the headlines of the press.

'It's a city', they say
in a jocular vein,
'of river without water,
hills without plants
and men without minds'.

But the truths have altered over the ages
for people do get potable water
tested, perfumed and filtered
through many a micro-bowels;

trees have covered
the naked hills
pregnant with explosives
but decorated with messages

of peace and kindness
clamped along paths
like milestones;

and the city has
in its vicinity
a University fighting
with darkness of minds
near Buddha's seat of enlightenment
burning bright
in the lotus flames
of leaping controversies —
red, yellow and blue.

HOPE

A 'belle Dame sans' sorrow
with a rainbow halo,
flower in the smile
and fragrance in the breath,
dream in the eyes
and dance in the motion,
chirping like a bird
and restless like a whirlwind,
looking across the horizon
and wandering like a cloud.

DESPAIR

A nude model sitting cross-legged
in a scanty room (half lit
by the anaemic shaft of the street light)
of a congested colony
with half empty glass of whisky
and a crushed marijuana stuffed cigarette
burnt to earth's end
between the fingers
and staring at the broken mirror
on the wall
with a dark fixture
in the vacant eyes.

CHOPPING OF TREES ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS

An assembly of birds
in rage — minhas, sparrows, parrots,
nightingales, crows and cuckoos —
was locked in a hot debate
for their sanctuary was ravaged
the other day
by a band of invaders
while they were on flight.

A delegation met the crusader
who talked across the table
flanked by his guards
and the chief of the 'Operation Chop Off'.

His master's voice broke open
the argument — 'Why have you made
so much of hue and cry
over a trifle ?
It's a drive for the better
like the anti-encroachment one
running in the city.

'Stark stems with iron hearts
are preferable to shady groves
in this age of global insecurity.

'See, how formidable they look
in their bald heads
as sentinels at the porch.

'And what good are these nightingales,
minhas and cuckoos
loitering around,
holding amorous parleys
under the greenwood trees
and fanning indiscipline on the campus ?

'while the crevices of the giant building
are starved for
a hot embrace of the sun.

'What you call a 'lethal dressing'
would fetch more coins to the coffer
than flowers in the garden
and help generate internal resources
to clear dues longstanding
of the gardeners and other staff.

'And how could
you dare dispute
the authority that bears
the stamp of the parliament of seers
and brought off with the experties
of a botanist ?

'The owl now
will keep hooting clear
atop the Humanities Block whole night
comforting the crown
lost in dreams
at the other end of the territory.
Peace is supreme
— don't you agree ?'

Silenced and dismayed at this
spirited aggression
the birds moved out,
held a condolence meeting
and resolved to move
the supreme court of Nature
hoping
that the bleeding trunks
of the axed trees
will sprout leaves
and green thoughts in green shades
will echo in the garden again.

METAMORPHOSIS

On watching the protest-march
of a group of college girls
holding banners and bottles,
glasses and placards
against use of portraits
of topless waitresses
in ads promoting sale
of whisky
a teetotaller
went tipsy.

'Have you consumed liquor ?' the wife
asked with quiver
holding the hand of her
tottering husband.
'You must have spent
the money from the master lent
for school-fee, rice and rent.'

'Oh, no, my Sweetie,
it's now cost free', he spoke
with faltering beats,
'the women of the ads
have descended in the streets.'

THE COOLIE

Battling for his daily bread
from morn to night
in the market lanes
he takes his back-breaking toil
carrying gunny bags
gagged with grains.

Living on breadline
he allows his blood
to pass into others readily
and keeps moisturing illusion
for they put him
on sedative each time
relieving him
of the grey pain
of rheumatism
rising in his blue veins
preventing his back
from bending.

He comes home riding
on country liquor
each night to fly over
his infant's cry
and his third woman's choicest abuses
(bouncing off the walls)
that she hurls at him
in hysterical bouts
for not satiating
her young lust.

GOD PROSPER YOUR AFFAIRS !

Unable to endure
mistrust any more
a Pekinese abandoned
in self defence
his manna-tongued mate
in her summer late
for she always said
that she would have none else
ever in her bed
while her lascivious lips
kept slobbering all through
over the luxurient lust
of street Romeos.

At the final parting
he wished his darling,
frowning at him downstairs,
'God prosper your affairs !'

THE TELEPHONE

Tender passions riding micro - waves
travel across the continents,
exchange pleasantries,
announce datings
and lull the lovers to ecstasy.

Sensing silent steps
of the underworld,
passing coded messages
to the Interpol,
waking drousy matrons
and doctors to duty,
invoking local police
and municipal authority,
imploring time keepers
at the railway enquiry,
feeding chewing gums
to the hungry press,
settling accounts
for favours done,
threatening righteous people
and mediamen,
dictating decrees
at midnight,
securing support
for the losing govt.,
and briefing the commission agent
are some of its favourite pastimes.

But last night

it sucked woeful tears
and poured molten pain
into the ear —
'Father's funeral awaiting his dear' —
and slipped off the numb fingers
leaving its torso dangling
like a dead fish
in the air.

IN ALL FAIRNESS

On charges of using
unfair means in the exam.
a candidate arrogant
was caught and sent
for a suitable punishment.

The candidate
in defence
counter-charged
the machinery
with a breach of agreement
and dared the authorities grim
to take action against him.

Sensing connivance
the authorities weighed
the charges as equivalent
and in all fairness
released the candidate
detained in the office
and issued the invigilator
a show-cause notice
for being tactless
in tracking down the chit,
and failing to overlook
the examinee's ogling
at his neighbour's answerbook
and thus inviting
for the establishment
both unwanted trouble
and embarrassment.

LAW AND ORDER

'That we make laws
and you obey orders
is a memorable equation
for each administrator'
— said the Legislator
to the new S.P.
of the old city.

'Yes, of course', pat came the reply
of the young upright officer
'we must work in unison
for better law and order'.

A few days later
in a mid-night raid
the officer nabbed
some muffled men
sharing booty
of the train dacoity.

On interrogation third degree
they confessed their crime
and one of them
led him to the shrine
across the hill
where the Lord Protector used to hold
his special courts with fallen angels,
and in chambers underground
have each night
his bouts afresh
of fish, fowl and flesh.

'How dare you lay your hands, Mr. S.P.,
on my noble men of proven loyalty
and hold them guilty
under sections so dirty
of the Cr. P.C. ?' — greeted the officer
a voice on the microphone
both authoritative and mighty
which he soon recognized
without much difficulty.

A tearing chill ran down the spine
and made the officer quiver
like a peepal leaf
before the Chief
for he was asked to explain
his conduct of arresting those men
he was obliged to entertain.

'Have you forgotten',
boomed fresh accusation,
'the favour done
in getting vacated
your prolonged suspension ?

'Your posting here was a choice of mine,
a pure gift of nature divine
to boost your morale and revitalize
your economy crippled and nerves depressed.

'But you proved yourself
both ungrateful and brutish
to your true friends
and well-wishers in crisis.

'It's also a matter awfully serious
that a police officer
is impudent to a law-maker,
and is so foolish
that he's beaten up his master's men
black and blue
at a time
when his promotion is due.'

Shock therapied by the orphic voice
the 'upright officer' nodded his head twice
and in a shortwhile from then
freed the 'noble men'
and in place of them
chargesheeted the guilty guys
who had refused to oblige
the Lord Protector of sacred ties.

The following day
at the headquarters
a long pending file
was cleared with a smile
granting higher cadre
to the select officer
for translating into action
the doctrine of law and order.

FANTASY

A boring machine,
silent and subtle,
cutting without pains
into deeper layers
of human consciousness
and bringing out streams
of thought and feeling —
strange, sweet and fresh.

AT A GOVT. HOSPITAL

I witness the battle lost
each time I open
my rear window facing the CASUALTY

A victim friend
gasping for breath, last summer,
was rushed in
with cries, sighs, sobs
of his kith and kin
tearing the air,
on wheelies
driven through the corridors
by muffled angels.

The Lord, they say,
of the kingdom of kindness
with the snake playing around his neck
moved off his throne
with royal steps and
giving a majestic touch
to the guest
whispered something
to the neighbouring deity
in a language
which only they could understand.

Attendant fairies
in snow-white robes
sprang into action and
pushed into the dying veins
drops of nectar

preserved with care
from threat of time and
recycled in public interest
against courtesies extended
to their fair band

while the God of the netherworld
kept smiling in a corner
to find his accomplices
discharging their duties
with dedication.

In a shortwhile from then
the welcome guest
was ejected into the space
on a shuttle leaving behind
a pall of gloom
through which glitters —EMERGENCY SERVICE
like the red flames
of a pyre burning lustily.

A WOMAN PREGNANT WITH A QUESTION

Deposited on a bed
in the maternity ward
a heap of flesh
breathing fear
in her banana skin
changing colour
with the ripening of
the lump within.

Six strangulations
in six successive years.

She is awaiting a treble
to succeed the hapless basses
for who would sing the dirge
at the family funerals ?

DREAMS MELTING IN THE DUSTBIN

A pair of doves
with hearts in love
flew out of the nest
on the native ground
to breathe their last
in peace profound
with their only son
settled in London.

Crossing seven seas
on the wings of hope
they cuddled their own
flesh and blood in exile
who welcomed them
with a practised smile.

He offered them pastries,
cakes and coffee,
took them for a ride
to Trafalgar Square,
helped them stroll
over busy London Bridge
and brought them with care
to the cabin upstairs.

Faced next morning
with a toothless crowd
whose knockings they took
for the drumming of doors
by their son's kids,

they felt bewildered
among the strangers
waiting in the corridor
for acquaintance
with the new-comers
to their " Help Age Home".

Caught in a poisonous
mould of despair
they wait in vain
each weekend
for their son's return
and watch their dreams
melting in the dustbin.

HI-TECH JUNOS IN WAITING

Queued up
to the portal doors
of a city club
enlightened souls
in jeans and sarees
chuckling to themselves
over the pamphlet
they 're reading —

"Brides of the world
and ladies of fashion,
we bring you NEWS
of unaging passion
for now, if you please,
may hire from us
surrogate mothers,
rich breast - feeders
— both in one
or separately
on promise
of anonymity.

With footfalls approaching
of the twenty first century
we offer you glory
of a Hi - Tech Mother
without giving suck
to your baby dear
or bearing the burden
of unwanted pregnancy.

Now no more threats
to your telegenic faces,
your sharp cut figures,
your youthful graces;

no swollen bladder bursting
no pains of labour,
no wrinkled sacks hanging
no scratched pelvis for ever,
you may continue to prefer
lips and palms
to boneless gums.

So hurry - up, ladies !
join us this instant,
your favourite club —
"Stay Fit : Cybernetic" —
and get on rent
breasts and wombs
intercontinental".

AT THE MEDITATION CENTRE

Ascetics in blood red robes
with cowries and many - hued gems
in mystic threads
around neck and arms
counting rosary in the corridors of peace.

'Enough is enough.
We won't allow any longer
our shrine to be
in captivity' —
they keep intoning, like parrots,
with brooding eyes.

'It's high time for us
to patent our Lord
as Rama was patented
by the Hindus, Mohammad
by the Muslims and Gandhi
by the congressmen'.

'If our Lord said —
Peace unto all —
wasn't it only for all
who joined His fold
and vowed to uphold
all that He told ?'

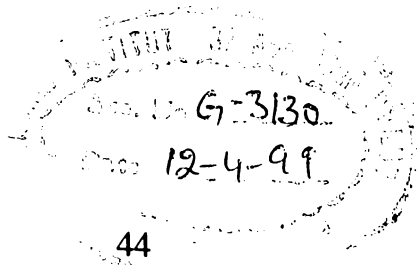
'Let's replace
'Peace unto all' with
'Fast unto death'
for elections are round the corner'.

SIXTEEN YEARS GONE

Sixteen years gone
in bouts of passion,
we haven't met
as yet.

Exploring each other's continents
we did zoom in
at points of self-negation
but missed ourselves somewhere
in the arid zones outside
where we heard voices, both
familiar and alien — old man's
coughing, baby's cry,
neighbour's moaning, ...

Hoping against hope
we are in search of each other
in the riotous rush
of broken shoes and sandals,
torn school bags,
uncleared bills,
empty porridge cans
and half empty phials
of haematinic syrups
in our little home.





So Many Crosses with foreword by Shiv K. Kumar, a distinguished scholar and a celebrity in Indian Writing in English, is the first volume of Prabhat K. Singh's poems. It is the outcome of his painful vigils kept over the affairs of life in the contemporary society. Intense in feeling and authentic in

voice these poems release an aroma of pain caused by the cactus spines of varied nature.

Critic, translator and freelance writer **Prabhat K. Singh**, M.A. (Goldmedallist), Ph.D. is Reader in the Post-Graduate deptt. of English, Gaya College (Magadh University), Gaya, Bihar. He has been putting his best into teaching for the last over seventeen years. Dr. Singh has four books to his credit and several research papers published in prestigious literary anthologies and journals. His volume of poems in Hindi is also under publication.



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