

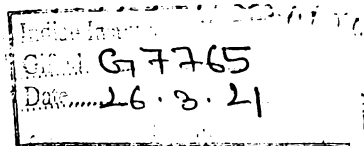
The Wall
And Other
Poems

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Jaydeep Sarangi

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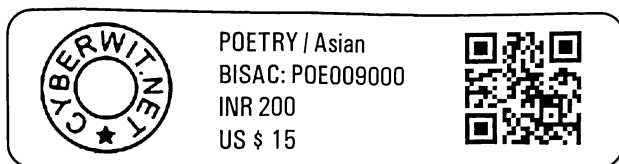
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*To all good Angels
Who refill the ink
and
guide our thoughts...*

Foreword

Jaydeep Sarangi is an intrepid writer and has published widely. His new collection of poems adds to his already well established reputation. *The Wall and Other Poems* is the result of two years of composition and the volume embodies the influence of Dalit and Bengali writers on whom Jaydeep has been working or translating and his wide reading of the work of English and European writers. His over arching metaphor is borrowed from Robert Frost – it is the wall which keeps in or keeps out our neighbours – and provides the unifying strand to this volume which is about many related things. He can write about the Ichamati River which dramatically dissolves borders created artificially by history, with two nations dividing a single people, the Bengalis. Jaydeep understands Bengali pride and culture and is pained at this division. “We are twins\Our veins have one blood”, he writes movingly, and elsewhere he says that this is a case of two histories with one country. His poems are about bridges which will unite people and broken relationships. He writes in English no doubt but is aware, like AK Ramanujan, that his inner forms are Bengali, while his outer forms are English and European. Can there be a Bengali poetry in English, wonders Jaydeep. His own poetry exemplifies this possibility and his English poems embody a Bengali sensibility. Jaydeep’s poems have solidity of specification and he is as comfortable with large abstractions as he is with particular matters. A poem about the Snake Goddess Manasa, presiding Deity of disease and small –pox goes hand in hand with poems about the food habits of his compatriots, the smells and sights of his land. The human connections are what matter. He has an emotional poem to his Mother who has taught him the letters of the Alphabet which now has mutated into songs. Language makes everything possible and as a writer he is on the side of inclusiveness, acceptance and has a wide sympathy for the commonalty of mankind. The particular moment

and its momentousness is important for Jaydeep and he asserts that all bridges are open, for such is the power of poetry. This is reflected in the images he can come up with predictable regularity like the one of an airplane landing which is like kissing a new land. Jaydeep's identity is linked with Calcutta and he wistfully speaks of each pillar in the buildings of this hoary city as whispering a story of anguish and neglect. His mute neighbours interest him as do the stories told at the wayside tea stall. He prefers the good old fashioned letter, the epistle, to the email perpetration of our younger generation. His sympathy is wide and he shows a healthy concern for the literature of other lands because he works on the belief that what can one know about Bengal who only Bengal knows. Thus while he can write a poem referring to Sunil Gangopadhyay or Sharan Kumar Limbale, he can also take his inspiration from the European poets and the South Americans. Jaydeep lives locally but thinks globally. This collection is a valuable addition to our tradition of Indian Poetry in English and I commend it to the reader.

Mohan Ramanan,
Professor of English (retired)
University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad.

Acknowledgements

“If there is any substitute for love, it is memory.”

–Joseph Brodsky

I collected my poems written over a period of two years at different places under different moods, assembled them when I was working for three other books involving translation from Bengali to English. One of these books was an autobiography of a Bengali dalit writer/activist born as a Namashudra in Khulna and had come to India as a refugee. He writes since he believes untold stories of the dalit Namashudra settlements need to be represented, their culture and deprivations, strengths and struggles in all their history needs to be comprehended by mainstream readers. Another one was the translation of select poems of Subodh Sarkar. He reminded me of the literary, socio-political tradition of Pablo Neruda, Nicanor Parra, Roberto Bolaño and other leading Chilean poets. Many of his recent poems moved me deeply.

I was also translating poems(and songs) of Kazi Nazrul Islam for IC-Nazrul, Dhaka. I don't know whether subjects of these writings made an impact on my poetic idiom. My first visit to Taki, an India-Bangladesh border area on the banks of the river Ichamoti made an impact which I realised later on. I was astonished to see how a river separates two brothers when the fountain of their blood is the same. Suddenly I realised, “There is no way we can begin to understand what Partition was about, unless we look at how people remember it” (*The other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia). The plethora of scholarly studies, essays and stories focused on the Partition of Bengal have tried to analyse the countless aspects of this signal event. I'm familiar with some writers who engage us with their experiences in refugee camps and later on their assimilation and appropriation with Bengali

Bhadrolok tradition. Some of my poems in this collection spin around these issues. The beauty of a poem is born out of a rich sensibility of the mind. Writing is inside out in words.

Years back I read Binoy Majumdar, Shakti Chattopadhyay and Malay Roy Choudhury of the “Hungryalist Movement” (In Bangla Literature) in the 1960s. The energy of these poets was hysterical. In September 1964 some of its leading members were arrested. Their poems came directly from the heart. Reading these poets was almost an act of mental conversion to this brand of literature. I feel writing poetry is a movement: within and outside. Thoughts float at random. At times, poets are synonymous with activists. Walls collapse with their hard hitting hammers. Their words are more powerful than missiles. Poets are rooted in life’s daily acts. For me, writing poetry is planting saplings for tomorrow. Poetry rice cultivation, like rivers. The trees in bloom do remind me that I have a duty to perform.

I express my deep love and gratitude to all my fellow poets, friends, relatives, colleagues, teachers, students and family members, especially my parents, wife and daughter who inspire me to write. I acknowledge all the editors who have published my poems and anthologized at different parts of the globe.

My poems in this collection have been published or are forthcoming in journals and anthologies in India, China, UK, Australia and online. I thank the editors of the journals/magazines like *muse india*, *Gnosis*, *Writers Editors Critics*, *The Challenge*, *Virtuoso*, *Voices Across Generation*, *Contemporary Vibes*, *Indian Literature*, *JSL*, *Indian Journal of Aesthetics and Literature*, *Kavya Bharati* (India), *Mascara Literary Review*, *Beyond the Rainbow*, and *Nimbin Good Times*(Australia) for publishing my works in varying forms.

I am grateful to Rob Harle, a soul maker from NSW, Australia for designing the cover of the book within a short notice. My sincere thanks to Professor John Thieme and Professor John Stevens of UK for their

valuable comments and guidance. I thank Prof. Fakrul Alam of Bangladesh, Dr Heather Taylor Johnson of Australia and Kiwi writer and editor Sue Wootton for their kind words for the collection. The book wouldn't have been a reality without their continued support and concern for my works. No word is sufficient to express my gratitude to Professor Mohan Ramanan of Hyderabad Central University for the valuable *Foreword* of the book. Edyta, my Polish friend, has written a review for the book to connect this collection with the previous one. I remember my long sessions with her on the banks of Wislok. I am immensely grateful to noted poets and scholars—Keki Daruwalla, Dennis Haskell, Jayanta Mahapatra, Bibhu Padhi, Usha Kishore, Bashabi Fraser, Sanjukta Dasgupta, Sunil Sharma, Patricia Prime, Mamang Dai, Tamaso Lonsdale, Patrycja Austin, Gopikrishnan Kottoor, Jayanthi Manoj, Lakshmi Kannan, Paula Hayes, and Rizio Yahanan who actively stood beside me and made this volume meaningful. I thank all esteemed reviewers/critics of my previous collections for whom I stand where I am now. I am fortunate that all good powers help me when I write.

Finally, I thank my publisher for taking up the responsibility and publishing the book so elegantly.

Happy reading...

Kolkata

May 3, 2015

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Friendship beyond Borders

Walls stand up and shake hands,
Crossing borders of the mind
And then, two hands extending a friendship.
Dawn seeds from the meetings and round tables
Resolutions pile up. Frescoes on the walls.
Prosaic congress to decide on its fate.

For once, let us forget time.
Let us wear the sari in the same way
And join Tagore
Amar Sonar Bangla
And *Jana Gana Mana*
With expressions.

The salt of tears is a fixed deposit
In memory. Long cherished hours are dividends.

Note:

Amar Sonar Bangla is the national anthem of Bangladesh.
Jana Gana Mana is the national anthem of India.
Both these anthems are written by Rabindranath Tagore.

The Other Side of Silence

I am a juicy fruit, voluptuous and campy, one might say
'Exotic', I am a native here.

My lips have stories
Some stories you like, some you may not.

I bring storm with me.
My loaded metaphor
Gives you frowns even on a sunny day.

I never played tricks,
Never played dice like Yudhisthir.

I experience equal consequence
In Syria or in any big democracy.
I confuse *Zenana* with *Mardana*, rise early
To wash the asylum grime
In the land which is not mine.
Frozen memories stored in the name of peace.

Lamp posts
Console me like an old mother. Caring all the time.

Note: Yudhistir lost his kingdom and brothers when he was cheated and
defeated in the game of dice in the epic *Mahabharata*.

Zenana are the inner apartments of a house in which the women of the
family live.

Mardana are the outer apartments for guests and men.

Sailing through Ichamati

We are a very old wall,
Useless at times. Sometimes forgotten.
People don't want us anymore
In need of no repair, we struggle.

History books record tears on our bricks
Long languishing hours, deep sighs
Smoked around us.
Policies and principles ruled our lives
When the country was young.
We, only we, have forgotten the language of surprise!

Ichamati is the corridor
Into things we can design.
We are twins.
Our veins have one blood
Even when we are separate souls on map.

Note: Ichamati is a river that separates India from Bangladesh.

Waiting

My thoughts are now
Waiting. Half sought things are
Recalled, and stored
In life's dark and wind blowing.
My cherished dreams
Usher monsoon of hope
When life whisks on a chariot.

I sit with the priest who keeps talking
About perfumed mystery of the land, I wait
Till the temple gate is half opened.
Small birds twitter, one or two fly away.
Forest paths are muddy.
Herbs have their festival. Each small rain drop sings
In aromatic springs that never pass.

I'm a visitor. I've come to wait.
I wait for the rain to be over. I wait
For words to come from within. Feelings deep.

Aphrodite Near the Banks of Dulung

She arose from the sea foam
With her foot resting on a tortoise.
Lady of Cyprus is more terrible than
The Egyptian snake goddess Wadje.
Can anyone stare at her?

Folk goddess of snakes- Mansa
Tribals worship in mud huts.
Sage Kashyapa taught her alphabets
Doesn't mind if worshipped by Hindu lower caste groups.
For infectious smallpox, chicken pox.

Oja-Pali rests solely on its myth.
Her beauty never misleads men to many roads and lanes
Every household on the banks of small rivers and
Water bodies see her in a sari. Talking to local tribes.
She is never jealous of Aphrodite
Her skin is not white like her .
She has no muse in English
Only a few know her. Talk about her.
Offer puja to her on auspicious days.

She visits simple huts near the forest
On the banks of Dulung
When frogs are out in the rain. The place is muddy.
Snakes rule a slippery world.

Note:

Oja-Pali : musical folk theatre

Stories Beyond the Wall

Dark night kindles the chamber of thoughts
I never know where I roam.
A full day drags me back.
Possibly, a shadow in the back
The other half of a lighted discourse.

Growing night has stories to communicate.
The lonely lamp post is its guard.
Some mysterious designs
Shadows of something
Make a clean sweep.

Green shower of leaves record their fall
When breeze take them all on its way.
Each rainy moment has a context
Others hardly believe what one experience.
Some truths die hard, each *dupatta* has a story
As others find them not happening.
Dark night has its rise and fall
The clock is heard louder
From the other side of the wall.

Notes:

Dupatta : It is most commonly used with salwar kameez and the kurta.

Full Story

Each small moment has a life for itself.
Preparing the self for reviews and comments
When face book friends wait for *likes*,
I arrange my own room of thoughts.

My clock has a mad run. I gallop through all rough gates.
Prayers upon prayers, it is another ritual
To sit for poems, sometimes translations from Bangla
Discovering beauty in the suffering lot,
Life sketches of a rickshaw puller
And a refugee friend.

A wall between two of us—two separate rooms.
We narrate two histories within one country
One excludes the other. Only the wall knows the whole story.

Bio data of a Poet

An earthquake or Tsunami ,
A poet is always at the desk.

Words and music flood the world,
Walks through the mud.

He holds the world in one hand.
Shakes it
Rubs it
Crushes it
He takes the skin out
With both hands.

A Doorway near Vistula

Someone told me near the river Vistula
A ruler of the tribe of Lechitians
Prepared a stone
A door of a city.

Each stone scripted stories
Of the Wawel Hill
Wisla murmurs its recorded silence.

When I pass through the Basztowa Street
My mind connects with a sovereign nation.
My friends remind me how they are connected
With my Sindhu land. They visit the Ganges basin
By walking pass Vistula
When unknown birds twitter. Heavy hearts cry for their families.

Rivers carry water
Channel minds; roots of civil societies,
Rice civilisation.
All bridges are doors
From separate lenses. All hearts are red.

Winds of Past

There are no stars to-night

But those of memory.

(from 'My Grandmother's Love Letters' by Hart Crane)

Why are you looking at me with tearful eyes again and again?

Stare me no more with tears rolling down your eyes.

Don't sing a farewell song

With your throat wet in tears .

If you have suppressed your wounds by smile these years

Today, smile only. No elegy to write at this hour of bidding adieu.

One eye is covered with black glass.

No star smiling. Only a mirror reflection of

Time shared.

I wish love kisses eyes of a face about to cry.

I see that no heart cries in emptiness.

Every departure announces another arrival.

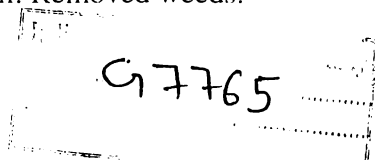
The Wall

*“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it(.)”...Robert Frost*

Years back I got a paper. Eagles had their party
To build the wall
Between the minds, rivers and mountains.
We fought against each other, ramp shows
On different grounds. Wrote history of the other. Slogans.
Burned flags and showed our back. Organs of the senses
Had a festival. Cock fight.
Things were loud, noisy. Mothers had their nerves
On the mouth. All shattering.
A shadow is the best of mates.

Time ran a full circle
Clouds dispersed. It rained.
Our souls were heavy with memory
Had one story.
Life had a new course. Perspectives became global
Neighbourhood friendly. Parrots flew over the border. Mutual concern
Respect for legacy cooled down hot blood.

Someone asked me to renew the contract
With renewed energy and hope .
I followed the rhythm. Kids swam across the rivers.
Between the flags I made
Corridors on the wall. Removed weeds.



Enclave dwellers want their rights. Land Swap Bill paints
Faces with hope to nowhere people.

I was all night awake with the wind. Closing its eyelids
My heart leaped up in a miraculous fabric of light.

Wisdom

The immature think
Knowledge and action are different, parallel lines.
They read books. Never act. Sleep well.
They dream of transgender. Become pregnant.
Only with high, colourful thoughts
Cross the Bosphorus strait. One leg in Europe and one in Asia.
Fire bellied toads look good.
Their dry, rough, wart skin
Do ever come to any good?

The wise treat them as the same. Count beads
for the gypsy goddess.
They campaign between the stars. Between clock hours.

Green Garden

This green garden of colours and sounds, has been
Our teacher and the head of the family of
Shadows and sicknesses. River Vistula gently murmurs nearby.

Long cherished hopes, heavy hearts
Wet in rain. Some castles for knightly banquets
Kiss our senses. Blood run wild.
It has some native plants, taste buds leak
Reminded of honey bees have their days with
Herbs and flowers.

Black Hole

Shall I pass you a hammer?
Do you want me to carry it for you?
Write a letter
Script your letter on stars.
When you go out for hunting
I'll hold the hammer for sometime.

You break all norms
With one strike. I follow.

You paste white powder to paint your black body
I'll hold the hammer for you.

The hammer rules the day.
A sinful mind becomes a rose
When a hammer kisses its petals.

It creates a black hole
Where all bodies have motion.

A flash of light is the dazzling Sun
When a blanket covers the earth. A night prospers with respect.
Somewhere the systems are in reverse order:
All eyes on the black hole. Life springs from there.

Translator

I am that link; a purpose.
I posses
Uncanny powers to breathe life,
To transfer images and idioms
From one code to another.
I change dress code, wear *kajal*
And gloss my lips to look deshi.
My tanned skin glows red in Oxenaforda.
As the wind blows old tales make me blush. I write for Bengal tigers.
My brown skin dazzles in white.

My friendship with other camp
Keeps up hope. Elephants dance in jazz.

Yellow pages from the diary
Exalt in a lithe summer dance.

Insomniac

Did you borrow my sleep for months?

My lonely nights

Walk between the falling stars.

I listen to light footsteps, thin drizzle.

I read *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

My mind walks through a lonely road.

Nights grow deep.

Did you borrow my sleep for months?

I swing. Log on to face book.

Post comments here and there.

Locked in notifications.

I wait for the night to be over again.

Unknown birds

Chant the day's break.

Some mysterious jogis chant

To embrace powerful moments

And inhale unpolluted air. I witness all little details.

Day long silence follows my lonely tune

That I sing at night. Stars are invited tonight.

Final Call for Education

“To start education

Make B for Babasaheb.

He was far more beautiful than Lord Ganesh.”

(from Namdeo Dhasal , “Ambedkar:1980”)

Bows, arrows and lances
All will be futile
To see a rainbow in a distant horizon.
Without education
Even bomb may blast like a cracker
In timely armed self.

Come, be ready with your gun of the day .

Gun fires no bullet
All bullets are stored in a school library.
Demands will be sharp. Resistance pointed.
Timely education
May be the rose you may pluck
In the garden of teachers.

No fight, only self development.
Education is that dress
To cover the naked bones
And a tiny lanky brownish heap of flesh
Struggling to stand straight in confidence.

The Poem Runner

Today, it is only a matter of leaving
Through time, a routine spell of saying “see you soon”,
The house God is pale. My father’s face looks grim each time I leave.

My presence among all these absences was like the night’s blind pride
Taking on a parade in blind lanes on one fine winter morning.

Daily absences

Made me sick with myself, my poems unhappy.

I vomit yet I part as the shrill cry of the train announces its arrival
From a distant zone. So many Amirs are desperate
To win a local kite fighting game.

Passengers are my family. Without names.

Life moves on all these short absences, whirlwind of half thoughts.

My kite soars higher and higher with lyrical promises of my daughter
That she will write poems for me soon.

I run with the kite in my hands.

Relationship

Someone told me
When I was born
Relationships are made in heaven. I walked
Several miles. Struggled hard to make my name.

Each relationship has energy,
Positive strength. The wheel turns.
Negative strength. You fight within.

All about power. All depends on how
You shape that power into action.

Life is a harp. We must know
Where to touch. It's a song.

My Dilemma

*The history of our race
begins with the place of stories.*
(From 'An Obscure Place' by Mamang Dai)

I'm a snail.
Romantic Bards, Alps and the Thames are on my back.
My bones are made of the Himalaya and the Ganges.
I'm born near the banks of a rivulet
Enclosed by forest.
An ancient temple is a testimony of my heritage.
Educated and moulded by the agents
Dutiful teachers and the wind. Grew up like a hybrid.
Some accepted me. Some rejected. Some threw me out of the box.
I've a shape and size. Rooted in a context.
Did you expect my face
Like faces conditioned near the banks of the Thames?
Did you expect me to take French Meals?
Instead of rice, curd and fish curry?
Did you expect me to ask about the weather first
When we meet up in the morning?
Do you want me to upset my idols:
Sah Rukh Khan and Virat Kohli?
I wash my floors when Tendulkar doesn't score a century.
I never chewed and pronounced RP
When Ian Botham had his day at the Lords.
There are threats already from my friends.
How can I be so artificial? Eduardo Galeano never
Decorated his house with plastic flowers.

Out of the pitch?
The prize slips away for my agency
My forests and goats I keep.

I wear colours of the land.
I believe, there is a populous heaven.

My muddy paths near a local village site are tears I hold.
I bottle up my poems on concrete roads
With several lanes at Kings Cross.
Am I to do business with me? My wrist watch made in China
Has an answer. Allow me to read aloud.

Old Houses Cry for Help

When we walk down Chitpur, Shobha bazaar and Central Avenue
Teeth of Kolkata opened
Lost glory want to say something-
Mitra Bari, Chawdhuri House, Saha Bari
So many to count
Teetering on the brink of
Reducing like rubble and dust of time.

Our bones laugh at us.
We had pompous days where history walked
Through a lighted corridor
With twists and turns, scintillating reels.
Names on outer gates half faded
But still hold a name
Most of these mansions are old but shining
With age and experience.
They have seen rulers come and go
Painters never bother to paint their faces
Periodic repair is a far cry.
Each pillar whispers a story of anguish and neglect.
Still roaring in pride
Between the stars, playing on a soft lap of memory.

(Scores of majestic old buildings in Kolkata are on the brink collapse due to lack of positive intent and proper funds. This poem is based on that.)

Note:

Bari: House

Letters

You needn't remind me letters are old school.
E mails are faster
Text messages are easier
But a child grows up with his parents
Know they work well.
Sometimes the best thing we can do is to use the power
Of the written word to express us.
We get a thank you card
Or a piece of stationary
And write a long letter.
It teaches us to wait
For the post man to knock at your door someday.

It can never be a lost art. So many charming samples
Still surviving
In the literary libraries.
Keats and Lawrence never bore us.
Their chambers of maiden thoughts.
Bhagat Singh clears his hear,
"Now, brother, let us be happy"
Displays the richness of spirit. To see each other.

Mysterious Mistress

Night birds flap. A priest alights
The morning bell. Winter wind kisses the tree tops.
My mistress catches a lizard out of disgust.
She moves into deep forest.
In search of mysteries of the night. A strange plumed sky
Waits for its lover to unbutton her secrets.

Gods and monsters fight for her. Rope pulling
Ends in a draw. A medieval stillness reigns.

She returns from the shadows of the birds.

Bengali Literature in English

I'm not a publisher
I can't read my readers
I have no eyes beyond the immediate
To read what is written on the walls of history.

It's a fashion
Everywhere. I must smile in English.
I must brush my teeth after every meal
Tan my skin during the weekends.
Use tissue papers.
Blush after an English breakfast.

It's the age of Indian diaspora,
Novels in English. Sunil cries
In book selves. Heavy with dust.
Joy makes no joy. Dhoti clad Bengali babu
Only appears on screen. The Tiger roars in English.

My friend predicts,
Bengali literature will be written in English.
Who will recite poems in Bangla?
May be a few students in Chicago and Prague.
'Naya Shah Rukh Khan' will arrive
Through the main gate. In a kingly dress.

We stand in front of the *Avatar*. Hands folded.

Note:

Avatar: God

My Dreams

There is a vessel far away where once
I poured my dreams. That vessel of dreams drowned
Near the port of Haifa. Ants leaked my dreams.
The skeleton was taken away by vigilant eagles in Somalia.

My dreams swam across Jordan river
Judaism and Christianity on my back.
My jaws fixed. Arms strong.
Moist with love my dreams planted
An olive in Sindh. Jojoba in Mexico.

Realisation

I know, I have a life of nameless moments
To live, to drink and to make merry. All these lived spells
Contribute to me and my name, when life is a rich mosaic.
I want my dreams to accompany me
My actions to speak laud
As I cross the doorways of my mute neighbours.

Stories by the Tea Stall

Each time I carry the bag
Each time I travel by that street
Leading to metro station
Each time I wait for my brother to return
After a long absence
Each time I cry aloud
When India loses a game
Each time I smile
When Ranchi's golden boy hits a six.
He is a savour, great warrior
Each time I eat momos
And wait for the rain
Each time I'm wet
I stop by that tea stall
For a cup of sugar free tea.
Stiff jaws are opened
Day's hard toils relieved
In a sip. Life takes a fresh guard.

Each time I stop
The stall is overcrowded.
People debating over hot themes.
Each time I stop for a cup of tea there
I watch the tea seller growing old
Minute by minute. Talking to an old pillar.

Each time I go there
I have a story to write.
Each one over there
Is a character. A protagonist, perhaps.

Draupadi

*There are some billion doctors on this earth.
Like Parashuram I shall kill them all
and wake to life in a pool of their blood.
(from ' This Hand Has Touched ' by Sunil Gangopadhyay)*

I haven't seen the face of a second sex
So confident even when patriarchy ruled lives
She took control of the Pandavas
With strength from Srikrishna
Marked timely aggression
Heart full of kindness
Nerves strong. Mind straight as an arrow.

Draupadi with five husbands
Spearhead the process
Of cultivating roses of truthfulness and harmony.
She had no weapon in her hands
She fought the battle with her strong mind
Lethal determination.

She lost all her sons
War grabbed all those innocent babies.
No one can be more criminal than Ashwathama.

A diary of pains. Eyes always wet with tears
She writes a new saga for women across cultures.

Who is My Master?

What language should I speak?

Bangla

Hindi

Sanskrit

English

Brahmin

Dalit

All possibilities are wide open

Like open market for trade.

I move between

The language of the poet

And the translator,

Reason and effect

As if one will die without the other.

Someone told me when I was a tinny boy

Forgotten her name

May be a shadow

“Language is a master.”

I didn’t understand

I was too small.

Now the sky is clear to me

I see things through its language

I read my master through his code.

A coat made on the banks of the river Thames

Is not that will be living for ever.

Small sprouts are visible on the banks of the Ganges

And near the banks of the Yellow river.

We are holding willow branches. My old master

Is to leave behind his earthly abode soon.

My Mother

Under the cool shade of the peepal tree,
Remember, we made deals of gardens with birds
Between the parallel lives. You taught me alphabets.
It became a song a few years later. Gave fruits.

After the Earthquake

The earth was moving
It was very scary.
Only bodies
No one to cry for others.
People showed up with injuries,
Mostly from falling. Police dug holes
Only to rescue bundles of flesh and bones.
Aid agencies give their best to the welfare of survivors.
Tremors travelled
Home and beyond.

All have arrows to carry
For the next morning. My pillow will patiently
Wait till I return to it. When and how?

There is someone patiently waiting
To clear the rubbish after the earthquake.

Living on the Edge

Shoreline from each side
Engulfs a doomed patch
Of land. Gobbled up by the hungry tides
Hearth closing inches to all consuming Muriganga.
Mud huts hang perilously. Water resonate only screams of loss.
The magic of the land is gone by the wind
In the fast disappearing islands in the Sunderbans.

Jawans hurt on borders. Workers return from Yemen.
Fake officers threaten suicide. Women unbuttoned.
Walls erupted with words.

Rescue planes land.
Evacuation at a faster pace
Can prevent the patients from multi organ failure
Before their bones lose hope. The speaking tree
Treks on faith. There is the last leaf hanging lose.

Notes:

Jawans: Army who fight for the country.

Muriganaga: A river. It is a tributary of the Hooghly in South 24 Parganas district in the Indian state of West Bengal.

Lakshmanrekha

Her vessel has water from native links
Red soil and dry leaves of Sal and Mahuya.
A male shadow follows her
Like a dominant caste.
There are limits around her neck
So many nails to cross
So many walls to dig holes
Before borders extended up to child caring and child rearing.

Wearing matching sari with blouse
She writes for
A sense of community autonomy,
A history, agency of the world
To gain a space in the sphere.
Love's fires are lit—
“Women can make and women can break.”

Progressive Literature

(for Sharankumar Limbale)

Who will not cry for a socialist order?
Conferences end with resolutions. All drafts are
Writ petition in favour of Dalit literature
With renewed vigour and zeal,
In the portrayal of the Dalit way of life,
Their painful lived experiences,
The denials they face every day,
The resistance they offer
In the creation of an idiom. A saga of writing back in alphabets
In sight. Holding the flag high with a stomach full
Jatin and Kalyani with wordy pool
Take the fire out, poisoned bread
From their arms. Life narrations to flash fiction
There is inside out.

Let My Children Have Enough Rice and Milk for Their Meals

Life rides on
The steep rise in the prices of almost all goods
Essential items and drugs
The *aam aadmi* survives
With nerves in their mouth.
We meet a Salman
In slums,
Remote tribal villages
Dancing naked. Trained in pick pocketing.

Pillars crumble near the temple doorway.
Salman spends time in shopping malls
Behind the walls
Where dark nights are beautiful
People hobnobbing. He registers as a trickster.

Fire burns in the belly. It burns conscience.
So many Salmans in streets watch IPL empty stomach,
Without a roof. Economists forecast
'Great Asian Century'. India can be a giant economy.

What is wrong with my land?
Each stone has a history. Each pillar whispers a story.

Let us all ask for a simple boon,
"Let my children have enough rice and milk."

Note:

Aam admi: common man

The Other Side of the Bridge

(For Harold Hart Crane)

The bridge collapsed
Overboard into the Gulf of Mexico
“Goodbye, everybody!”, shouted the man.
His body was never recovered
Still floating
Like the stars in heaven.
Remained pronounced in his letters
And his self-doubt
Wrote immortal name on the shore
Transfiguring the bridge
For logic of metaphor. Without sound of bells.

Why Is This Neglect?

Why do a poet need to write for the Government?
Why is this boundary?
Why will he be treated as mad?
Why will he be denied to read Che Guevara?
Who will ask Benjamin Zephaniah not to perform?
Why do you draw lakshmanrekha
Prohibit him going to Amlasol?
Why can't a poet get VISA for
His family reunion in
The Tiwi Islands where the Timor and Arafura Seas meet?
How can he be silent
Seeing women clutch painted poles as they grieve for the dead?
Why can't he embrace his daughter naked
From the street?
How many have the heart like Maya Angelou,
Black street car conductor in San Francisco?
A poet chants for civil rights.
He transcribes women of colour
Navigating the passages; boundaries of home and world.
There is a reason for poetry to respond.
A poet writes back on walls for a better society:
Those who are unable to speak
Will have a say.

The beggar has a definite plate
At least he can eat salt and rice
Thrown at him.

A poet only receives arrows
From philosophers and politicians. Since the days of Plato.

Captain Crew, Please Prepare the Cabin for Landing

Landing is touching, strong and hard
Kissing a new land, sweet and soft
The mind melts, carries a baggage
Full of love and rush of blood
From where I'm coming.
A fresh spirit who was away for years
Away from the family.

Sudden call from the pilot
The announcement is Aurora of Hope.
Flat things dazzle with touch of rain
Drops leaking from the mind that is wet.

A view of my city
From the glass windows—
All look smoky like future of slum boys running here and there.
They scream in joy when
Festivals involve *idol immersion* in water as the celebrations finale.

Beautifully carved and decorated *idols* drowned into water bodies.
All creations die
In mind's cabin.
We prepare our mind to land somewhere
This side or that side of the wall.

The plane lands safely.

Diabetic Bones

Ten thousand waves crush my stories
My bones bear its wounds. I carry
Life sketches of man crossing horizons.
I take the soil out of my hands, I go out
In a rush. My mother knows my story
I'm passing on my daughter
Day by day. My blood has more salt
Than sugar. Micro needles peel my skin
Each time I scream I borrow a poem
From my heart. I write with a needle fine.
I dream black and white where
Red lines are reminder. There are so many walls
To dislodge before
I prepare my bed.
Someone will write an elegy
On a diabetic man
With medical metaphors. I'll pass my prescriptions
To photo copy my illness. The wall
Will protect others. My daughter.

All pale things are not dull.
Often classroom noises make sense.
Ears hold the yard stick
Writing is not changing profile pictures.
It insures life; rib cage that protects our heart.

Night-flowering Jasmine

I was just looking at
The mystic sweet fragrance, little white
Flowers. Night descending on simple petals.
Little mystic rules night's mysteries.

A traveller to India once said,
God smiles here.

Growing up Bengali in Kolkata

Nobody asks me
How to pronounce Bangla sounds. I open my mouth full.
Nobody writes a paper. No conference held.
No tip extended.
People say, it has expressions.
My Tamil friends say,
It sounds sweet.
My chest inhales pride
As I grab a baked fish.
Separate its bones. I do it as I mastered the art.
Naturalised it as a fish eater!
I wash dishes of smelling the fish.
My daughter asks for more pieces of Hilsa
She can't have rice without fishes.
As it's a Sunday. Monsoon ushers rain.
It fills the market with Hilsa
Of several kinds. Fish market dazzles with more light.
Some are silvery, some are whitish
All leak our taste buds. All assemble at the dining table
For a proper Bengali meal. Happy smiles are infectious.

Rosogolla at the end.
My mother is happy to see others
Can't get up after meal from their chairs.
A Sunday afternoon nap
Ends with Darjeeling tea
And Rabindra sangeet together.
All expressions storm a tea cup
Nothing goes without a political discussion.

A Bengali mind
Retrieves his glorious links.
My daughter reads grandma tales. Takes notes.
She will visit a painting exhibition tomorrow.

Her friends pose romantic watching Uttamkumar
And Suchitra Sen in the evening
When people count shadows, all roads lead to Kalighat.

On Climbing a Greasy Bamboo

Just a slap on my face. No door bell to sound.
I wear a coat and pull it off
Do the same again
Three times.
Once again.

Nothing to be done!

Our economy shines
And then, collapses. It enjoys ebb and flow.

Sundays devastate an active mind
Only to send my children for prayer meets.
Nothing can save me from my wife's angry eyes
She wants to go out
For family inter caste marriage. She will recite a poem
On Sita. She knows how to pose
When people send wishes. She is happy.

I've grown old. Time is my master.
I had a dream to meet a Godot
Who forgot to arrive at a point.
I pour water in a pot. I leak it. I wait.
I drink from the hole
I make this a fashion.
I read the *Bible* from the back.
Build the poem from the last line.
I hurry back home. Will read Srijato tonight.
My mirror has agreed to listen to my thoughtful nonsense.

A pipe smoking, revolutionary Bushman
Is waiting for me. With memory. Near Cape province.

My daughter loves working sums on greasy bamboo
And a monkey. Repeating the same act
Again and again. And again.

I survive in my world. Someone sneezes.
I walk past a Namashudra household
Near the village pond. A paper seller calls out,
Taja khobor...taja khobor...taja khobor
Where the image of Plato
Doesn't haunt me. He sleeps well in peace.
Cheer girls play the flute to him.

Note:

Taja khobor: Fresh news

Another Birth

(For Ali Cobby Eckermann)

I've been playing with the same old clock
Since I exploded from a Noongar mother,
Copy edited another birth in a series of births.
I've a proper shelter this time.

I play with Possums, I pull its long thick tail.
I have my teachers singing nursery rhymes.
Attend to home works,
Make lolly pop a favourite. Build castles of sand.
Growing old with the clock. With an old stick.

I become fatter than a Sagole Baobab
Like my forefathers I use Boab as shelter, food and medicine.
Like the artists of the Kimberley I use
Boab tree nuts for carvings and paintings.
I walk past the Swine river. Count Black Swans.

Black hands control the air flow
Like the vocal folds. I inhale my substance.
Time is always an old complaining mother.
Older than the saviours of the land,
Some old habits of man. Dennis
Knows this well. Words and drums beat at Westerley.

There is a beginning, a middle and an end.

(Boab trees in Western Australia are surprisingly huge in size. My special thanks to Professor Dennis Haskell for showing me this wonder in nature).

Writing a Blurb

All about control
Control over words, market and minds.
What looks easy is sometime tricky. The Devil
Doesn't write a blurb. It demands human ink.

The author has no right.
A translator lives dangerously
Between a publisher and the author.
Always mediating,
Constructing bridges.
Sometimes with a cigar on hands
With a pale greasy face.
Over a cup of Darjeeling tea.
Camera-ready copies of lived moments
Are ready for the market. Anxious authors
Have nerves on their mouth.

A potential market writes for them.

A Rickshaw Puller

Madan paddles his fate,
Moves fast.

Disturbs the comfortable
And comforts the disturbed.
Hits back with words.

Sweet Home

Charming deep forest and undulating topography
Old temples, folk rhythm, red soil and rare beats of tribal,
Enclosed by tall sal and mahul,
With wild elephants and birds of various species.
Santals, Mundas, Shabars and Lodhas coexist in a happy note.
Roads take us to my home ground
Where shadows meet, life's clock runs
In a strange quarter of time. People dream.
Life has a different name.

Smiling village girls carry baskets of vegetables
To sell somewhere in a village fair, near the school wall.
My daughter counts days
She weeps in thunder, lightning sans light.
Her father will bring some strange fruits.

Trains whistle pass. Her grandpa reads passages from the
Mahabharata.

Mother prepares sumptuous *bhel puri*.
Poor she, keeps her alert ears every day.

She stitches fractured dreams with prying eyes.

Third Eye

Somewhere I missed my eyes
To see things as they are.
I was searching all probable corners.
My friend called me in the evening
By then I was blind. My logic stopped.
He thought I was lucky.
I could sleep well. Without worries.
No newspaper can terrorise me. No one can
Think of me as an opponent. My daughter is safe.

She whipped
I should apply for a third eye. I remain safe in my coffin
Nothing in against. Nothing in favour.
I like things in black and white.
I don't want to see myself running away
When my world is crumbling apart.

Poet Versus His Idiom

My idiom is like peacock's feathered tail
Of rhyme, rhythm and metre. Thoughts
Stream from the milk maid's can,
Grandmother's kitchen, tribal's dancing
Chhou with colourful masks.
Each small act has a total life
In the sacred place, beside a forest
Where goats, fowls and pigeons are sacrificed
For the prayers. My pen scripts
How we happily rival each other for survival. I write.

My semicolons envelope my dreams.
I drink the heat of the Sun. Never wrote a love poem.

My wife calls my poems a mere flirt. She presents me
Files of letters I received when my tree was young.

I need poetry cleaner to take guards afresh.

A Door-somewhere? (2014)

(Released in Rzeszów in south-eastern Poland)

Reviewed by

Edyta WIĘCŁAWSKA

University of Rzeszów, Poland.

The volume of poems under review is a collection of thoughts that present a new look at the aspects of life that have always been reflected upon. Although the poet puts himself in a modest position choosing for his motto the words by A.D. Hope emphasising – by analogy to the power of nature – the helplessness of a man to describe the reality, the poems prove to be a very thought-provoking and pleasant material for highly intellectual readers.

The topics touched upon are said – by the poet himself – to have been triggered by past memories and experiences. The theme of the past recurs in a number of poems. For example, in the poem *Small Things in Life* the poet uses phrases like ‘old castles live with memories’ and ‘ancient ghosts are chanting’. In the same poem we read that the past comes to us through the open door or windows. There is also a reference to ‘unlocking the past’.

The motive of a *door* seems to be recurring throughout the volume. The image of door is a way to present life as a continuum. We wait in front of the door, cross the threshold and face new challenges. The poet says ‘I do not know his tomorrow behind the door’ in *Mysteries of the Door*. In the same poem the readers get the image of the door that is open or locked. Entering new sphere of possibilities is perceived as embarking on a journey. We read about people who wait and then leave the station (*Small Things in Life*).

The reflections seem to be even more authentic for those who can trace some autobiographical elements in the poems by Jaydeep Sarangi.

‘In *My Old Chariot*’ roads [...] carry me and my daughter’. Likewise, in *Small Things in Life* the author provides us with the picture of sitting and talking with his daughter (‘I sat with my daughter who kept talking’). Finally, *A Mirror* includes the picture of his daughter tracing white lines on his head. The authenticity of the poetry is enhanced by the promise the poet makes in *Small Things in Life*: ‘Now I don’t look for a by-pass everywhere. It’s straight from my heart’.

The poems are to be appreciated for their rhetorics. The author uses a variety of linguistic devices to convey his reflections. For example, whispering time in *My Old Chariot*, the river that greets the poet in *A Door* and the day growing older in *Day Breaking* stand for cases of personifications. In general, the metaphors of the poems under review is very rich and the images sketched by the poet may be said to be triggered by a variety of conceptual links. Hence, to illustrate, the overwhelming silence is referred to as ‘blanket of silence’ in *My Old Chariot*. Notably, the rain-based metaphors is particularly favoured by the poet. Hence we have ‘rain of images’ in *A Door*, ‘rain-lashed trees’ in *A Letter to God*, ‘words don’t rain surprise’ in *A Mirror* and ‘wet trees looked at me in amazement’ in *Each Time*.

There are also instances of taste metaphor. Here belong, for instance, sweet face mentioned in *My Old Chariot*, thoughts that are swallowed, as written in *For a Postman*, hungry eyes in *Mystery of the Land* and honey dreams referred to in *Sleep*.

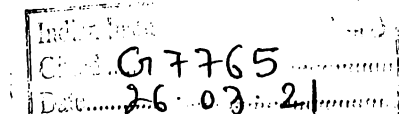
In synthesis it needs to be emphasised that the poetry by Jaydeep Sarangi has much of a clam-down effect. It puts the reader in a state of harmony, belief and trust for the good things to come. Things which are important to all of us are said to come to us in a natural way, just as the sun comes after a spell of bad weather. The message communicated in the poems is delivered with unique freshness. Reading about serious philosophical issues the reader feels relaxed and positive. This may be said to be the result of the sincerity of thought and the richness of green and rainy imagery, as delivered by the poet, which – by the way – brings to us the taste of India.

Comments on this collection:

“Jaydeep Sarangi’s new poems are rich with the physicality of life even as they explore complex tangles of identity. They ask who is the visitor, and who the landlord, who the neighbour, who the enemy? Here are poems which speak of barriers: of walls and boundaries between nations, between families, between individuals. And here, also, are exuberant and defiant connections: festivals which celebrate the “organs of the senses”, parrots that fly over borders, corridors between rooms, and kids that swim across dividing rivers. One such river is the Ichamati, which delineates the boundary between India and Bangladesh. But Ichamati, in Jaydeep Sarangi’s poem “Sailing through Ichamati” is also a corridor, and India and Bangladesh are not simply siblings, but “twins”, whose veins share “one blood”. Similarly, the rain which falls into many of these poems brings storm, but also a “monsoon of hope”, and potential for harmony: “Each small rain drop sings”. In these poems, Sarangi creates, word by singing word, a new romantic vision, one grounded in muddy village paths, rickshaw pullers, saris and Tagore, a foundation so true that from it the heart may leap “in a miraculous fabric of light”.”

—Sue Wootton, poet/editor based in *Dunedin*, NZ

“Frost had written famously, “something there is that doesn’t love a wall” and had showed his approval of those who would like to go beyond fencing of the sort that nature abhors. And here is Jaydeep Sarangi with his poems, many of which deal with walls and their limitations, and at least a few of which with the walls that divide lands that nature had built without borders and that need to be transcended. One wishes the best for Sarangi’s verses—we need poets like him with the kind of vision that will take us beyond walls and towards the embrace of the natural.” —*Fakrul Alam, Professor of English at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.*



About The Poet

Jaydeep Sarangi (b.1973) has been writing poems in English since his childhood. He has been widely anthologised, reviewed as a poet and has moderated sessions on poetry at different places. His last three poetry collections are *From Dulong to Beas*, *Silent Days*, and *A Door Somewhere?* Born at a forest enclosed town, he is now anchored in Kolkata, India. He gives fresh paint to life & manners around him & beyond the immediate. His poems are recommended to all literary enthusiasts, and lovers of poetry. Jaydeep may be reached at: jaydeepsarangi@gmail.com

About The Book

Poems in this collection are part of a long poem that has been flowing for the last two decades. They are part of a movement that breaks walls at several levels. Some poems are lyrical reflections on the immediate and the topical, events that toss in our mind. Other poems in this collection have a single speaker (not necessarily the poet himself) who expresses thought and feeling on varied subjects and moods. This poetic canvas is like a colourful sari, we can wear it in a different style on different occasions. Simple lines of these poems emit strong emotions of the poet.

What Others Think

"Jaydeep Sarangi's poems are moving testaments to parallel lives lived on either side of walls. Personal and political, they summon up the evanescent beauty of small moments with a quiet reflectiveness that speaks volumes about experiences that cross borders."-- *John Thieme, Professor of postcolonial writing at the University of East Anglia, UK.*

"A fascinating collection of interconnected poems of joy - many of which provide a subtle comment on India and beyond". -- *John Stevens, SOAS, Univ*

"Jaydeep Sarangi's poetry begins in the muffled. Only the wall knows the whole story. But his work is poetry for those who believe in a world outside of a wall, a world beyond the borders that a wall creates. This is a man who articulates peace."-- *Heather Taylor Johnson, Poet and novelist based in Adelaide, Australia.*



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