

**POEMS ON HIGHWAY, SUNIL SHARMA,
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REVIEWED BY JAYDEEP SARANGI

Sunil Sharma is certainly not the first author to use irony and humour in his writing, but for him, these became the hallmarks of his poetic style:

“ To die in a Delhi road;
Because they knew
The apathy of the public
And the police will do the rest.” (‘ Mar ja Sali’, p.63)

Many postmodern writers from different cultural positions, as a response to modernism, which frequently set its authors apart from their readers, attempt to involve the reader as much as practically possible over the course of an art form. This can take the form of asking the reader questions or allowing the reader to make comments/turns regarding the course of the narrative. Sunil Sharma achieves this participatory mode in the same vein in his poems:

“Let us all chant
With T S Eliot
Om Shanti, Om Shanti.” (‘Zen-moment’, p. 126)

In the poem, ‘You are not God but can be an Angel’(p. 88-89) he writes,

“Through those brimming
Innocent eyes;
I will
I said the sobbing child,
What else?”

Many postmodern authors embark on connections or controlling influences on the chaos(?) of society. For them the world is going to be the very frightening place to live in, and this lends a sense of paranoia to many postmodern poetry. In an interview (*Indiaree*, Oct 2015) with Saptarshi Mallick Sunil Sharma says,

“Poetry is oxygen. In smoggy cities, the value of pure air is vital to wellness of beings and much appreciated than in the open plains minus the industrial and vehicular pollution. Same way poetry acts---for the sensitive souls. Poetry is like that clean air supplied in a toxic place. For me, it is a strategy of survival in a commoditised culture that loves lucre more than the lyrics.”

He defines the modern world as ‘Prosaic times’. Poetry is a forgotten art in this materialistic world where pop books hit world hard. That is why---serious poetry---has become a minority art. Poetic talents are gasping for air in intensive care units. “The culture industry wants lyrics--- simple and dumb. There aplenty. Writing for money has its flip side. Hence, this age is not hospitable to a Plath or Wolf.” (Interview with Saptarshi Mallick, *Indiaree*, Oct 2015)

Sunil Sharma writes about all these modern day syndromes with an easy flowing cadence. He finds a ‘thatched broken home’ where life falls flat:

“Swirling devils-
Lurking
Both the

Outside,
Inside,
A dark home.”(‘Dust Devil’, p.192)

Iulia Gherghei, a Romanian poet observes, “Reading Sunil Sharma I was surprised by how much power it had over me.”(Back cover flap, *Poems on Highway*). As a close associate for more than one and half decades, I always realise this emission of power from an accomplished artist. He is out the ordinary.

An important element of postmodernism is its acknowledgment of previous literary/artistic works. Like Thomas Pynchon, one of the most important postmodern writers , uses elements from science fiction, and war fiction, songs, pop culture references, and well-known, obscure, and poetical history. While reviewing Sunil Sharma’s *Poems on Highway* I remember,

“Fragments of vessels broken at the Creation. And someday, somehow, before the end, a gathering back to home. A messenger from the Kingdom, arriving at the last moment. But I tell you there is no such message, no such home -- only the millions of last moments . . . nothing more. Our history is an aggregate of last moments.”

Sunil refers to Sylvia Plath, John Keats, P. B. Shelley, Virginia Woolf, Earnest Hemingway, and so many others. The list is endless. As a postcolonial nativist, I always make out a model on Indian Bhasha Literature. The corpus is simply amazing! This fabric of art can be extended even to humanistic/progressive literature in different languages. Sunil has a complete poem(‘A Bit of Van Gogh’) on Vincent Willem Van Gogh ,a post-Impressionist Dutch painter. Intertextuality adds value to Sunil’s word painting. Poems in this collection are strange, sensuous, and bewitching. Each poem, each artefact, is self-contained. The effect is magical!