

**RANDOM REFLECTIVE POETIC EVERYDAY!
BOOK REVIEW: *RANDOM REFLECTIONS: 340 SONNETS*
(BOOK OF POETRY)**

Poet: Bhim S. Dahiya
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The spaces in the poem are yours.
They are the place where you
Can enter as yourself alone
And think anything in.

~ W S Graham¹

In our daily struggle through the disquieting, dicey everydayness, in disillusionment, in the times of spiritual fragmentation, we gain a new meaning when we stop (or cannot even stop) by momentarily to brood or mull over a moment. But every moment, as they say, could become in William Wordsworth's words a "spot of time", if one has the eye to see within. That very moment can distend into a momentous experience, leaving behind a trail of thoughts, realizations and a creative spur to weave more words out of it. And what comes out is poetry. That is because, poetry is experience.

And when we read poetry, we too, as readers, go through not just one experience, but at least two! One, the poet's experience, through her words, and second, the reader's own attempt to connect it with her own experience, consciousness and even deeper if we may. Poetry affects. Thus, poetry becomes the space for both the poet and us, as one can "think anything in". And such a book that affects is Bhim S. Dahiya's recent collection of poetry *Random Reflections: 340 Sonnets*. At the very outset, there is something mentionable about Dahiya's book of poems. Although the poems are simplistic and enjoyable and meticulously contextual and cogent, and thus can be read, understood and identified by any serious reader, yet, it will be a treat for a niche coterie of poetry-lovers who are familiar with typically literary allusions and the current Indian context. And one cannot miss the very subtle yet powerful strand of satire that runs like an overture throughout.

This book contains 340 sonnets written by Dahiya over a quarter of a year, published by Signer and what attracts a reader first is the structuring and classification of the 340 pieces which is anything but *random*! All it articulates is a strand of poetry even in the classified chapters' titles, each of which alludes to Literature and affirms Dahiya's life-long engagement with it. To begin with, the table of contents itself; it is entitled "inside" and just that. The word is certainly not random and carefully chosen to signify literally and figuratively what awaits as one flips through the pages. As the blurb of the book reads, the poems "record responses to an important stretch of happenings and trends in our times." And rightly so, each of the 340 sonnets by Dahiya speak of his response to his own experiences, which has left deep thoughts within and the poems in their turn do continue to affect the readers. Coupled with his allusions and contexts, Dahiya

blends multiple levels of times successfully and connects sensitivity with that simplicity of literature that, which be in verse or prose, “comes out unintended”, as the poet himself perceives it in his Preface. The Preface is a defence indeed, but not of Dahiya’s own style or subjects but apart from justifying his reason to write (which is purely random and spontaneous), he also successfully achieves his self-created objective, to restore Literature’s grace of giving pure pleasure to the readers. And when it comes to that pleasure question, his poems are right up there!

The poems are written with multiple nodes of perceptions: they are random because they are ready, spontaneous response of a human being to his own experience, context, time, yet they are tailored and ‘designed’, to please! And not just to please, but to transport the desired emotion. As Douglas McGill says, in his essay “Pleasure and Poetry”,

[T]he pleasures induced by the reading or listening to a good poem, especially a poem printed on a page or displayed as unlinked text a computer screen, may be experienced as a chuckle or a laugh; or as a subtly pleasing shimmer of the spirit; or as a snap or shudder of the soul; or it may be so profound a pleasure that it feels at first like anguish; like a desperate panic; or like pain.²

Dahiya’s poems do not fail us there. Classified into seven chapters, the three hundred and forty sonnets have another unique quality. They are sonnets because they are of 14 lines each. But other than this one feature, the poems do not adhere to any other distinguishing characteristic of sonnets, structural or thematic. The poet justifies this anomaly as a dig, as an oblique blow at the disintegrating value system of present day bureaucrats, educationists, theorists. On the other hand, his allusions are critically appreciative of writers and thinkers and literary masters.

The first chapter “Who is the brute indeed” leaves us wondering who Dahiya is talking of. And as we read the 8 sonnets under this caption, we find he explores modern civilizations future in the hands of technology and does not stop short to express ruefully about his diffidence. “Gone are the days when arts guided life-” or “If one fairly watched the animal world/ One would find it superior to men’s world” can be instances of how he finds “Individuals turn into curt consumers”.

The same melody prevails somewhat in his next three chapters, “In this the worst of all crimes”, “Much marketed, much written about” and “Peasants commit suicide in distress”. They contain sonnets which continue to deride and make us think and yet feel a funny tickle, with a man called “Cringeshwar” or his poetic statistics mentioning, “There are a million maids here/ In the capital city, Delhi alone.” He continues his powerful responses even for political and social occurrences and evils. He comments through a sonnet on a man axing a woman in JNU, or the FYUP, DU’s “most innovative course” et al. He is blatantly rebellious when he says, “Spreading quite like the wild fire,/ The epidemic called gang-rape” or “NO ‘reforms’ would work in these Conditions!”

Dahiya’s emotional attachment with socialist issues are distinct in his lines, “Poverty begets poverty, misery misery,/Adding thousands of hungry mouths” or the lines “Some day the weaker ones would unite” typically smells of his Marxist ideology. The next chapter “Then quickly spread the Russian Revolution” sounds an inevitable rejoinder to the questions he has raised through his words, as he writes, “Deprivations drive them there/IN the dark of the underworld,/Living life on razor’s edge” or invokes the spirit with “Let thunder and lightning come/In all the fury at their command!”

The sixth chapter, “I would rather go with Aristotle” is more an inward journey and his tongue-in-cheek humour is unmissable, in a word, as he writes, “My heart aches, and my bones quake,/ When someone out of sheer selfishness/Gets close to me oly to procure favours,” or “See violence, Violence everywhere,/Not a straw of tolerance to hang on;/Wherever you go, whatever you do,/The sword of Damocles hangs on you.” Become specially relatable and significant in current state of affairs of our country.

The last chapter “To outlive the destructions of time” clearly refers to a typically Shakespearean confidence when he expresses his growing conviction on the crises in the human conscience, and satirizes every such intellectual process with lines like “When you have no job in hand,/ You naturally turn to thinking..” or “State what you intend to say/With a pinch of salt, as they say,” and continues to express his concern for random disturbances or “ill thoughts” that wreak the inside of the head like “bad people”. Thus Dahiya affects the readers’ heart as he rambles about his own disturbances and chaff about it in his own style and we easily stay hooked to the words till the end.

It has often been said that prose, though meant to deal with more mundane matters, affect extensively and that can last longer than what poetry does. Poetry, for that matter, is said, to have a deeper, more intense yet a briefer spell, ironically. But what it leaves back is like a “profound glimpse” to borrow from McGill again. Dahiya leaves us with something of that sort in *Random Relections* – a “profound glimpse” into an (Indian) everydayness, through a scholar-gypsy’s eyes.

References:

¹ See Moniack Mhor’s writings on Reading Poetry for Pleasure

< <https://scottishpoetrylibrary.wordpress.com/2011/04/06/reading-poetry-for-pleasure/>>

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² See Douglas McGill’s essay “Poetry and Pleasure”

< http://www.mcgillreport.org/poetry_and_pleasure.html> Dec 9 2015

³ Ibid.