

***GOLDEN CACTI* BY SUNIL SHARMA, SARANGI GNOSIS, NEW DELHI.
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Sunil Sharma , the sensitive poet from the suburb of Mumbai , produces remarkable poetry from the everyday realities experienced in an Indian megapolis in a unique way, revealing a gentle empathy and sensibility for the contradictions of urban existence in a city where---like other Asian cities---poverty and wealth stare into each other's eyes. The title itself is intriguing. "It is celebration of life and poetry in most adverse circumstances---like golden cacti that blooms in a harsh climate," says the poet in an e-mail, summing up the general mood of these poems that move fast like the city of Mumbai and its extended suburbs. It is a slice of life from lived Mumbai in all its complexities and glaring contradictions. Mumbai is powered by dreams and aspirations of its people and they find hope and dignity in most sub-human conditions, especially the poor and the slum residents, thus making the place a hive of activity and energy. Golden Cacti is a paean sung to human spirit triumphing over the odds and soaring in the blue expanse above, unhindered. His lines can be very effective; they can easily evoke the 'crisp layers of the unconscious' and surprise a reader with a rare gift of cadence and artistic elegance:

"Metro mornings, two diverse Indias collide—

The semi-clad men, women and kids

Rush with pots and buckets(.)" ('Two Indian Metros',P.34)

The poetic self of Sunil Sharma generates meaning out of dry and prosaic terrains of life's daily acts where imagination defamiliarises a familiar subject and conjures up more mysteries. Most of his poems are collage of ideas effortlessly streaming from lived moments of creative zeal. Therefore, Patricia Prime of New Zealand is right when she claims the book as "tour de force."

Sunil Sharma is a leading story teller with a rare capacity to attract his readers. There is an indomitable gusto that invites a reader or a sensitive mind to his flash fiction, short story and poetry. He is so different from the common run of writers, I'm amazed!

There is a rare sweet touch of simplicity and lucidity that mark his poetic idioms subtle where the corpus is an inviting discourse. His control over language is like a competent master and the wordsmith:

"Poetry for peace,

For harmony—

That be the agenda

For us (.)" ('Poetry Calling', p.35)

His usage of lexicon and idiom add flavor to his artistic trajectory. In a way, he is a welcome shock to a traditional reader and acts as a magician:

“You rush
For another new battle of
The hostile world.” (‘When in Love’, P.75)

His unorthodox syntax adds life and spice to his poetic articulation. He reminds me the style of great T.S.Eliot. It captures the essence of split selves of a modern man in a world of wasteland:

“And,
They
Go on
Erecting unseen
Walls
Between
You
And
Me.” (‘The Strange Walls’, p.18)

The above quoted lines are characteristic of modern syndrome of boredom and numbness where individuals are separated by human-built walls. The poet compares a modern metro man as a ‘living fossil’; devoid of sentiments and finer sensibilities. He broods over it again and again and with vivid images from different sources and creates poetic condition characterized by perception of one's environment as dull, monotonous, and lacking in proper spirit.

Sunil Sharma talks about two different but related forms of fragmentation: external fragmentation and internal fragmentation. His poetic voice is loud and it points at the morbid part of life, and society (‘ugly mass’) suffering from cancer. For a poet, there is always a *door* of hope in the midst of dark terrains of life's daily acts and Sunil Sharma predicts that with his delicate poetry. He announces, “A volcano or an iceberg, /A poet always erupts--/ In words!” (‘A Poet’, p.25)

By virtue of his urban Indian ethos, nuances and linguistic mileage that reflect various facets of life make Sunil Sharma essentially postcolonial writer. *Golden Cacti* is a significant addition to poetry in English by Indian writers and it deserves accolade worldwide.