



Through the Poetic Lens

Yogesh Patel

In the June/July issue of The London Magazine, in his essay ‘How Not to Write Poetry’, Paul Griffin criticises Poetry Society’s prescription of teaching poetry where a student makes ‘lists of words and then writes poems using these words describing objects or situations.’ The fashionable ‘spoken word’ culture also bears no compass to what real poetry recital should be. However, he misses to point out that just the traditional construction of poetry with rhymes and metres do not always make poetry if it also fails in delivering us to the challenging content. Hence, when I look at the three recent collections in terms of the points just made, I put them in this order: Patina by Kavita A. Jindal, then Tigress by Jessica Mookherjee and finally, The Waiting by Usha Akella. I rush to point out, however, that each poet’s approach is completely different in lyricism, traditional forms, and making poems transcend from ‘describing objects and situation’.

Jindal demonstrates a more balanced craft. Her observations achieve measured reflections and moods well wrapped in an endearingly lyrical manner. She has poignancy and grace laced in a are simplicity. In ‘Anything but’ simplicity speaks volume where – ‘On Not Being a Muse’ – a woman is objectified by an artist (man?) and has to deliver a portrayal, but in conclusion will not be ‘static’, call it her liberation from the expected perception.

*Behind her husbands’ back
She plans an attack.
Until it starts to get dark. Until its time
to take her pills.*

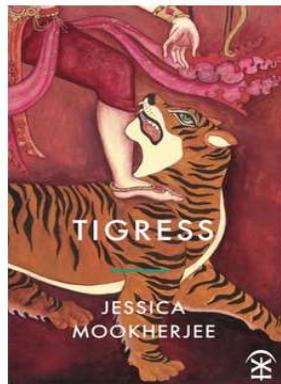
This collection is not only about immigrant’s life, or growing up, or trying to figure out parents lost in making a new home as migrants, or about struggles. It is also about woman’s wrestles with hostile realities, father’s unemployment, mother’s illnesses, poet’s negotiation with two tugging cultures, deciphering the meaning of fatherhood and motherhood, a difference between a house and a home, complexities of distances and proximities of relationships, intricacies of family, issues of depression, misplacing oneself and trying to find that self again. One minute poet clings to a fallen tree as an embodiment of mother and love, the next, she finds ‘Damp sea sat outside the pub’. These poems are ‘describing objects and situations’ as discussed earlier, but they transcend by creating impressions which lead the readers to deeper – sometimes disturbing – debates. These are the poems lived –autobiographical – pushing a reader to confront uncomfortable themes.



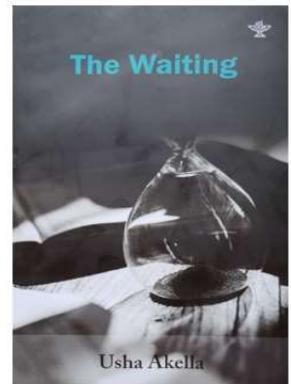
The London Magazine
www.thelondonmagazine.org/subscription/



Patina
Kavita A. Jindal
ISBN: 9780993513541
the wind in the trees



Tigress
Jessica Mookherjee
ISBN: 9781911027720
Nine Arches Press



The Waiting
Usha Akella
ISBN: 9789388468008
Sahitya Akademi India

*Gladly I will do it all
Anything but be*

*Static while you are active
Anything but be
The one from whom you source
What you make your own.*

Her poems show us that the beauty around us is not the derivative of any ostentatious aesthetics but the metaphorical patina. Patina brings time, history and value in the play. This metaphorical patina assimilates from one’s reactions to adverse encounters in life. Jindal finds these reactions in the potpourri of emotional tangles, distant observations and the measured responses drawing in a deeper meaning. Her poem ‘Piccadilly Line Salon’ brings this point home by poet putting us in the middle of women peering, pouting, slicking, and flicking doing their make-up in the morning on the tube. It contrasts with ‘Should I rustle in my satchel?/ Check in a mirror/ for bits of breakfast pear/ stuck in my teeth?’ We are left wondering about the make-up versus reality, the artificial against the natural. Jindal succeeds in her craft with lyricism and restrains as displayed in her other poems about the lack of clean water for some, Brexit, hashtag, Trump, and Boris. Here is a poet that claims ‘When slow living comes back in fashion/ I will claim as I have always done/ ...That I was here first.’

In Tigress, Jessica Mookherjee’s approach is to focus on the details of events that formulate her torturous journey in life so far. Starting from ‘me lurking inside her (mother’s) eggs, like a tiny spark’ the unborn child arrives on a plane from Bangladesh ‘from one/ part of the dying Empire, landing like an actress’ to the adolescence of ‘I open drawers, letters, cupboards, read everything/ to lie, cheat, steel my way into someone else’s life.’

The figure she cuts of her mother is of a woman struggling to define her being. The poem of the title, ‘Tigress’, captures the inner wars of this woman who would be a tigress but resigns to submission.

In The Waiting, Usha Akella once again returns to the terrain of a devotional quest. She is a master of traditional metrical forms but that is not her aim in this collection published by the prestigious Sahitya Akademi in India. Akella demonstrated her affinity to the spiritual aspects in her drama poem Ek. However, to read this collection in isolation again and make assumptions will be a mistake, as Akella’s other collections do ignore this aspect and explore various other themes of life, including her passion for travels as in her collection The Rosary of Latitudes. The philosopher Martin Heidegger has suggested that God cannot be coalesced into any known quantity, but must be sought afresh. Akella tries here to make quest fresh with a self-crucifixion

*I am nailed on the cross of my own
being
This is divine Love, I suppose.*

These are the same millennia-old poems of longing displaying an ache to resolve the *dwait* into *adwait*, a duality as a soul and God, into a singularity of God, but with a modern quest.

*Three Steps,
and I am back
a butterfly in a cocoon.*

This is not a centrifugal dispersion into a singularity, but a centripetal collapse, akin to a black hole, into the singularity, God. That is why the poet is on own cross. The poems here are not indulging in ‘describing objects and situations’. They are quite contrary to Mookherjee’s lyrical details of everyday living and experiences.

A recipient of many awards and widely published internationally, Yogesh Patel was Poet-of-Honor recently in NY. An editor of Skylark 1969-2001, he currently runs Word Masala Foundation and Skylark Publications UK to promote the diaspora poets. By profession, he is an optometrist and an accountant.