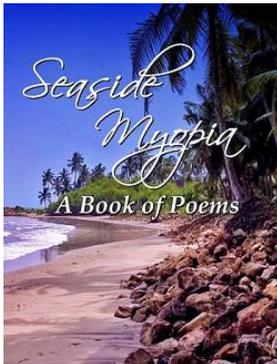


Book Review on Aneek Chatterjee's 'Seaside Myopia'

Gopal Lahiri

Poet and Critic

In our troubled times, there's something comforting about Aneek Chatterjee's meditative poems and it's a voice to be reckoned with. Here is a poet who is always a keen observer, serenely describing the quirks and foibles, residing in our mind and recording loops to evoke the rhythmic pulse of joy and sorrow. He is a political scientist by profession yet his voice is non-judgemental and lacks conflict.



Aneek Chatterjee

His debut collection of poems 'Seaside Myopia' offers a more nuanced perspective of the expanded universe where pain and pleasure mingle in ways that never cease to be surprising or poetic. Each page opens with a new wonder and each poem's arrival is armed with a new piece of thought.

Aneek mentioned that the poems included in "Seaside Myopia" have been penned during October 2017 to August 2018 and are mostly free verses with occasional rhymes and a couple of triolets.

His poems resonate with an emerging new narrative-one that is giving a platform to the freshers to find a place in the literary space and more important to connect with one another.

*When I took up the pen
seagulls were burnt in sunshine,
all paragliders swooped down
to earth. I looked at the sea, —
a big black crater laughed,
and drew me into its mind.
In agony, horror I threw
my pen in the blackhole
Quickly, it sucked my feeble weapon
and chased me, and I got a myopia ... (Seaside
Myopia)*

In fact, almost all his poems represent his engagement with language; it's one of the reasons they form such a stimulating atmosphere letting the language soar. The dialect is atypical though while the pace remains easy and hurried. His writing always feels like something new and carries its own dreams and sorrows.

In his introduction, the poet has rightly pointed out 'These poems belong to different genres and styles, from dark poems to love and sensuous; poems which emerged from daily life and societal milieu; poems crafted out of melancholy and joy.'

It's true that the book is a miscellany of different forms. It is the poet's fresh, courageous, undecieved approach that sketches the inner workings with skill and purpose. Here is the poet's haunting take on new writing landscape with interludes of lightness. There is no dullness, no whimsical fancy in the poem itself. The sheer weight and bounce of the words in each line capture the essence.

We've only the earth and the stones to interact ...

Every other moment is invisible

Every other sojourn is unliveable

from here (Come to Dry Leaves)

The view changes so often in his poetic canvas, it's hard not to feel turned around by the unpredictable strangeness. Sometimes, reassuringly, *his poems* are touching across the ground that has done the balancing act between the static and moving, that has mapped out before,

Let me measure my shadow.

Has it overgrown me?

Has it become taller, lengthier, and obese?

Every time I am pushed to the wall

I fight with my shadow.

It often doubles, beyond overgrowth;

it becomes taller than ivory towers. (The Ivory Tower)

A beautiful mix of high and low diction, more elegant, subtler, his poems at times sketch a dark world. If that sound claustrophobic, so be it. The deft rendering of the complex dynamic of life is commendable.

Sometimes I feel formless

Floating disjointed in this world

Unable to protest, unable to raise voice

I wanted to light hope

Candles of hope, but all went out

Now I carry with you lifeless white sticks! (Shadow)

Sometimes the poems are more likely to be dripped on to the canvas in the manner of an airy, swirling abstract painting. His words reminding me of Paul Klee who once described the act of drawing as "taking a line for a walk". There is something arresting here, 'Nude branches are white human bone'.

Leaves are brown

All leaves are brown here,

in summer fall or winter

human skin

Branches are white

All branches are white here

*Nude branches are white
human bone (Alien)*

The poet weaves eloquence and modesty that run through his surreal verses with ease and grace. One can feel the hidden presence of a mixture of rage, agony and vulnerability. Each word is stated with nonchalance.

*In anger, threw my pen to the floor
but heard absentee thoughts
jeering from somewhere inside
Sit in the empty room
dejected; with a
pencil in my brain (Pencil in my brain)*

Poetry is unusually comfortable sitting with its own emptiness. Here the poet uses the words to make life bearable: dissonance finds harmony and youthful spark. His poems are sometimes a signature of nature; this is perhaps the poetry of relationship where he uses language to take stance, to surprise or reinvent. Words are as if his old buddies, and see him through to the end.

*Sunflowers invited me
for a game I started, but
left very soon
The mystery of the jungle
complained, you didn't
kiss me since ages ...*

The river stopped singing (Mood)

Rhyme is surely not his strength but intertwining the fantastical and ordinary in free verses is his trademark. Engaging, dark, sensitive, the inventiveness of his verse is amazing in its prowess. His non-rhyming pieces come across most successfully because of their simplicity, their raw ingredients. There is no denying that the poet has an ability to tap directly into love, desire and darkness, something he does with courage and conviction. He brings a calm and moderate tone, and realist style to his reports on life.

*No sound, my mind
flushed out monotony
before I got back
to sound, before I was
born again, to safety., (Rebirth)*

or

*Two pairs of pigeons on the cornice
watch humans below argue
over parking space,
nylon ropes,
and
flowers stolen from*

neighbour's immortal tree. (Pigeons)

Quicksilver and self-mocking, the poet is measured in his craft as well as in rhetoric. There's rarely any thought of chasing after the exotic or mythic for its own sake. The observations drawn from his poems are like slim clouds tinged by colour of the evening sun.

I followed the black hole

into eternity

and laughed like a demon

in my orange sleep. (Orange Sleep)

A sharp-eyed observer, he's also unassumingly one of the commoners. He builds a breathless rhythm of monotony, an intimacy forged by all pervasive connectivity without losing the quietly explanatory tone and diction, the radiant clarity and intelligence and revelling in freedom all round.

I could not see. Monotony, sound

I was not really around

for syllables. Darkness in persiflage

silently began to count my age

Oh yes, I want to further traverse

Food trolley came, and free verse (Night Train)

There will be invariably some colours in his impassioned poems which resonate with voice and vision, with echoes

of longing in the surreal world. His poems reveal an unwavering belief in the power of language to redeem us from the dreary and tedious conflict, one that is infectious and might even give us all a reason for optimism.

For me twilight is splash of colors.

*Watched the sky turn red, orange, pink, crimson
one twilight after another.*

*Thousand painters were practicing their art
on a big blue canvas. (Twilight)*

There are many windows in his poems and are at times witty with a tinge of sarcasm and offer an engaging observation that absorbs and enriches, that captures reverie, that piles language with delicacy and has the perfect balance.

*A black crater extended
its arms*

One two three four ...

*All vanished into oblivion
only to resurface*

somewhere in a hapless mirror. (Reincarnation)

We are often struck by the passion of Aneek's work, the way his clipped breath at the end of each line propels us forward in anticipation at each shift in tone or meaning. The following poem evokes a kind of isolation, an escape from the humdrum life while the journey is taken through consciousness. The

essence hangs in the air and wait for the answers. Nowhere is this attentiveness to lyrical grace more apparent than this,

*Finally, when my station
was announced, I disembarked
in a hazy mist, spotted
with surreal drizzle
at midnight*

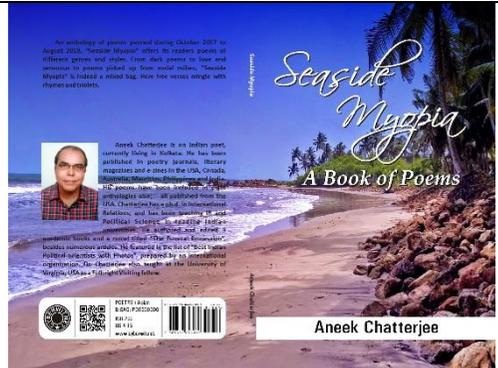
*I'm still in search of my
destination, as rain
left my station. (Destination)*

Aneek Chatterjee is one of the most promising poets in the contemporary mosaic. Some of the poems included in this collection are published in eminent journals of India and abroad and holds a fluidity of characterisation and demonstrates the poet's formal innovation.

'Seaside Myopia' is a powerful contemplation of life more personal in nature, including the scrutiny of love, affection, loneliness, grief and faith. Intimacy is its strength. This is a book where light and darkness of life unfold in every cell across the vast space of a few words while shearing conventional starts and thoughts in a seamless manner.

The cover page design is praiseworthy. And surely, the poetry lovers should grab the book at the earliest.

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Author: Aneek Chatterjee is an Indian poet, currently living in Kolkata. He has been published in poetry journals, literary magazines and e-zines in the USA, Canada, Australia, Mauritius, Philippines and India. His poems have been included in eight anthologies also; all published from the USA. Chatterjee has a Ph. D in International Relations; and has been teaching IR and Political Science in leading Indian universities. He authored and edited 9 academic books and a novel titled "The Funeral Procession", besides numerous articles. He featured in the list of "Best Indian Political Scientists with Photos", prepared by an international organization. Dr. Chatterjee also taught at the University of Virginia, USA as a Fulbright Visiting fellow.



Reviewer: Gopal Lahiri is a bilingual poet, writer, editor, critic and translator and widely published in Bengali and English language. He has had seven collections of poems in Bengali and eight collections of poems in English which includes four POD books published from Lulu Publications, USA. His poems were published in

various anthologies and journals which includes Indian Literature, CLRI, National Treasures, Home Bound etc.

He is an experienced book reviewer both in English and Bengali and his review has been published amongst others in the prestigious Desh weekly and The Telegraph Kolkata in the eighties and nineties. He is currently in the panel of reviewers of Indian Literature of Sahitya Akademi, (Print journal), Muse India and Setu online journals.

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