

**Sanjula Sharma.** *A Fistful of Sky*. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2020. 295 p. Rs. 295.

### **Poems to Meditate with a Whiff of Fresh Air**

Sanjula Sharma's *A Fistful of Sky* is an amazing collection of poems – some of them are the best in their genre that I have read in years. The book is classified into four sections – Sparing Words (A collection of Haiku and short poems); on the Wings of Poesy (Poems on myriad themes); Love Deciphered (Quatrains, sonnets and other poems on the various facets of love) and a Tangled Web (A tapestry of committed and witnessed poetry). This is Sanjula's sixth book of poetry. The collection has rhymed poetry as well as poems in free verse.

The title poem *A Fistful of Sky* is actually revelatory of what is to follow as a theme in several poems in the entire book – that in God's grand design, we are merely atomic drops in this huge universe, pre-destined to play our roles and depart. A sense of detachment pervades all her poems, she constantly reminds you of the futility of possessions and possessiveness – since in the end you have to let go of all that you might have acquired in your life's journey. Even her love poems are full of pathos and are apocalyptic sometimes in their mood and vision of love. Her love quatrains reflect the images of permanency and transience, of trust and betrayal and the fleeting passions of the human flesh, which too will pass... Her haikus are a delightful read and definitively profound. In fact all of them need to be read a second time, to absorb their true import and substance. Some of her haikus are her deepest poems – in such sparing words, she manages to convey a world of meaning. Here are some examples.

#### **Birth**

*Life nestles content  
As a new journey unfolds  
Chrysalis to dust*

#### **Peace**

*A dove sighs in joy  
Cuts across the silver sky  
Circling olive trees*



**Destiny**

*Fate will claim my hand  
For another dance in Time  
Two to tango still*

In Part II, her poems move on to her inward journey, they are intensely philosophical. We cannot fail to notice that the sky is a recurring metaphor in her book and the poet is constantly “looking above” at the sky which never fails to guide her. “Skyward” is a powerful evocative poem which illustrates this feeling of inspiration:

*Look above  
Clouds dancing in the sky  
In that wide expanse of azure blue  
Little wishes waiting to come true  
Let go of these ephemeral hues  
Life is fleeting and so are you*

Sanjula’s simple and unadorned verse conveys the clarity of her spiritual pursuit through poetry. In her second section, the poems are longer and are narratives of a seeker, for truth and a deeper meaning of life. She involves Tagore in a “Tiny Bit of Bengal.”

*In that note of grief, the fakir’s fallen tear  
Tagore’s verse of love, angst and fear  
In the philosopher’s search for eternal truth  
Here I have found  
A tiny bit of Bengal.*

“My Own Earth” is a wonderful poem where she wanders through her own earth in poetry.

*I try not to write sad poetry anymore  
For the moon beckons me  
And the strong beams of sunshine  
Spill onto my own earth  
That little space, my hearth  
The inner soil, my home  
To make it all my very own  
Till such time it becomes a legacy  
And then there is no story  
Just timeless poetry*

These lines are also soul stirring from “A Little Piece of Peace”

*This haven of heavenly slice  
That lies smiling under cloudy skies  
The self-omniscient, wondrous mystery  
This little piece of peace  
That must forever lie within me*

Part III contains Sanjula’s love poems which are a meditation on love. The first poem “Skyful of Love” contains the myriad metaphors of love.

*I look up at the sky and I ask  
Do not the seasons disturb its mask  
Of calmness unruffled and pure?*

...

*The sky cannot wrap up in a blanket  
Or carpet itself in tears  
Roll up like a matted floor  
Or hideaway its fears  
It must forever remain there  
Vast, endless and aware*

*This is the skyful of love  
That poets write about  
The rain that is the pain  
The sun that is the burn  
The moon the changing face  
The stars that remain ablaze*

The love quatrains are questioning forlorn lines, seeking the meaning of love.

*There’s a voice within me meandering on  
Virginia Woolf in conversations forlorn  
I stream conscious words, silently laid bare  
Fractured on a heart that once did care*

*Hear similar emotions in another quatrain  
What is love if not a ship of Theseus  
Emotional facets all going to pieces  
Misshapen, splintered stories put together  
Hearts in place and passions fettered.*



A Tangled Web (Part IV) is more complex in its structure and context. There are political and social narratives which are imaginative in texture and tone. There are realistic urbane poems, humane and contemporary. It is a pot pourri of the visible and invisible, seen and unseen, of promises and reality. Some sketches are given below.

***Broken Sky***

*Even as a child I believed in you  
Looked up as if you were Heaven  
And magic all rolled into one*

...

*I look above now and see  
You falling down upon me  
Bruised, broken and battered  
Like mere mortals on the ground*

...

*What is it now?  
A broken sky or a broken me?  
Maybe ... a broken you.*

The “Pilgram’s Path” about the Uttarakhand floods or the “burning” of “Kashmir”, or the helpless cries of “Nirbhaya” or “Draupadi” are well narrated in all these long poems which tell stories, each one which agitates or stirs her social conscience. In “Freedom at Daylight”, she talks of substantive democracy being the birthright of every Indian when she writes:

*Who knows that freedom is not yet gained  
For autonomy is not just democracy won  
But a piece of heaven for every Indian born*

Sanjula’s poetry has matured and mellowed over the years and this is clearly evident to those of us who have followed her journey as a poet. She is a deeply meditative poet, who is ready to probe into the deepest layers of our consciousness in order to understand the body, the mind and the human spirit. She reflects on her visible world, about Nature, her own experiences and those of others with the intense curiosity of a practising poet. She experiments with poetic forms and there is always something new she has to offer in every new book. I urge you to go back to her title poem once you finish the book to understand the essence of her poetry. The last paragraph of “A Fistful of Sky,” reads thus:

*The sky is yours to widen, to breathe in, feel  
Universal canopy with no boundary  
The sky—just a fistful of it  
Open your palm and it still fits  
Until you let it go.  
And you and the earth are no more.*

I will recommend Sanjula Sharma's latest collection of poems to everyone who would like to read a book of poems to meditate with a whiff of fresh air on a day of leisure under an azure blue sky.

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