



SHAMANIC POET

The Speaking Stone: A Review

The Speaking Stone, the seventh collection of poetry by Pravat Kumar Padhy, takes on some huge themes such as consciousness, transformation, existence, time, the Cosmos and Nature, and does so with language that takes the reader out into the infinitely large at times and, elsewhere, inwards to the infinitely small. There are forty-two poems here, all of three stanzas each, none of which have titles beyond a Roman numeral.

His poems are spiritual, whilst grounded in a scientific view of the world (or is it the other way around)? Pravat holds a Masters' of Science and Technology and a PhD from the Indian Institute of Technology (ISM) in Dhanbad; I can see why he throws spirituality, metaphysics and science in together, to encourage the reader to make connections and to reduce the false separation that exists in all spheres of human experience, as he does in IV;

*From the tiny tender ripple
To the gravitational wave,
Everything resides in the law of logic.*

I love the juxtapositions that he creates in this way, though I'm less convinced that everything resides in the law of logic – logic is a human creation, and Creation is so much bigger than that. Elsewhere there is a greater ring of truth, as here from VIII;

*In the string of evolution
We all are living particles of vibration
Musing the time to an infinite point
As time has neither a beginning nor an end.*

Another theme that exorcises Pravat is that of low-vibration discrimination as against a recognition of the Oneness, not just of the human race but of the entire Universe. "Humanism is the religion," he declares in XIV, dismissing others as divisive and somewhat toxic. Sometimes, it feels like he's despairing of the world, such as in XVI when he writes, "Is present a blind for the past / Compelling the future / To be a burdened present?"

Some of his best poetry comes from the deep reverence he clearly has for the natural world. One of my favourites is the opening stanza to XXII;

*A gift of beauty dwells:
In the humility of a tree,
Silence of the saint-like mountain,
Calmness of deer and lamb,
Splendor spread of peacock,
Gentle flight of birds
and tranquil swim of fish.*

Even the choice of the word 'splendor', where I would have expected the more standard 'splendid', adds a certain charm to an already powerful set of lines that reads like a small prayer. Sometimes, though, the poet falls into triteness, as in the last stanza of the same poem;

*Everyone is a workshop
Of eco-friendly learning.
The vast world is meant for
All to share and live.*

I'd like to have seen the power of the first stanza carried right through to the end, rather than this apparently rather rushed finish that doesn't really take the reader anywhere new.

Much as I love the language Pravat uses in much of his work here, and I applaud the underlying themes, especially the idea of a short-sighted, greedy human race blind to the wonders of Nature and the beauty of Creation, it can get a little repetitive, a sense that is sharpened by the fact that each of the forty-two poems fits onto one page and has three blank-verse stanzas. Here is XXVIII in full;

*Man spreads his kingdom
Like bewildered wildfire,
Swallows the beauty of nature
Bestowed for all.*

*There may not be a pond
For fish to rejoice
And lotus to delight.*

*The sky would be jammed
With dirt and dust
Leaving the birds to scream
Only mournful songs.*

As I say, beautiful language and sentiment but, for this reviewer at least, this collection would have benefited from some variety in poetic form, structure and length. Also, even though the poet's themes are impressively magnificent his poems, when read as a collection, sometimes come across as saying the same things over and over, especially in the middle section of the collection which, I believe, the poet has made

deliberately dark. This encourages a rather bleak mood to descend over the reader, from reading, say the first stanza of XXX;

*Truth shivers
Under the burden of icy lies.
The shadow of evil erases
The bright light within.*

The enormity of what Pravat is writing about sometimes leaves one feeling overwhelmed, lost, hopeless. As an indication of the sameness that pervades sections of this collection, here's the opening stanza to XXXI, the very next poem;

*Patience is lost
In the whirlwind of craziness.
Man collects mere dust
At the end of the vicious conflict.*

It reminds me of a comment a friend of mine years ago made about the music of Joy Division – “music to slit your wrists to.” And she was a fan!!

It's not all grim, though, by any means. Indeed, there is an arc to this collection whereby it gets very dark in the middle before lifting us all back out towards the end through uplifting and hopeful thoughts, designed to sink into our consciousness where they can simmer away and, perhaps, manifest outwards, one day soon.

In poem XXXIV which, were it mine, I would probably title 'A New Earth Rise', Pravat writes, “He wishes to kindle a new light of hope / And to script a new poetry / With the syllables of kindness.” I love the idea of scripting a new poetry – ultimately, isn't that what every poet dreams of doing?

Overall, this is a very accomplished seventh collection from a poet who has a lot of work and experience from which to draw. The gloomy mid-section is definitely rewarded by the more hopeful closing poems, though that only works if the reader manages to actually get through the gloom and out into the light; I rather fear that some readers will give up in the depths of the dark forests that Pravat creates, never to emerge. For those who persevere, the rewards are there, waiting for you.

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