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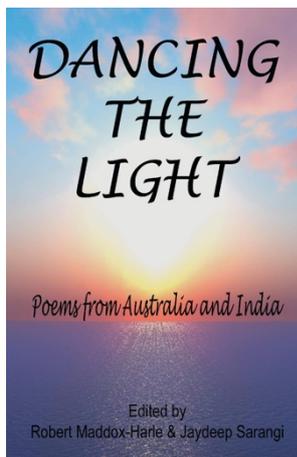
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TEXT Review

Waltz to Life

review by Sutanuka Ghosh Roy



Rob Maddox-Harle & Jaydeep Sarangi (eds)
Dancing the Light: Poems from Australia and India
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When two authors unconnected culturally, geographically, historically or socially, hailing from two poetry-rich nations come together to play with the unlimited possibilities of finding joy and mirth in life, a literary fusion is destined to happen. *Dancing the Light: Poems from Australia and India*, edited by Rob Maddox-Harle and Jaydeep Sarangi, carries in its pages the potential to discover unexpected delight. The anthology is published by Cyberwit.net, and is the seventh book in their Australian-Indian poetry series. The previous anthologies are: *Poetic Connections: Poems From Australia and India* (Lonsdale); *Building*

1

Bridges: Poems From Australia and India (Maddox-Harle); *Voices Across The Ocean: Poems From Australia and India* (Maddox-Harle & Sarangi); *Homeward Bound: Poems From Australia and India* (Sarangi & Maddox-Harle); *The Land: Poems From Australia and India* (Sarangi & Maddox-Harle); and *Searching For the Sublime* (Sarangi & Maddox-Harle).

Many of the poets have responded directly to the title of the anthology. To examine a little closer, dancing is a symbol of celebration, enjoyment, and here represents the potential to be transported out of the mundane. Light of course, is a metaphor for brightness and clarity, and the ability of the poet to experience enlightenment. Poems in this anthology are a record of deep-seated questioning; minds carrying reverberations from within. These intimate poems manifest the truth of experience through the construction of unique images taken from life. In the Introduction the editors state clearly: ‘We wanted this collection to have a positive feel and outcome, no doom and gloom poems dwelling solely on Extinction, Anthropocene Depression, Climate Change Disaster or the woes of the world’. Hence the poets – eleven Indian poets and eleven Australians – are charged with the task of exploring the positive side of life through their work.

The anthology opens with Adrian Rogers’ poem ‘Botticelli Dances with Venus’ where the poet is ‘kaleidoscopically colouring memories, / pirouetting moments’ of life’ (10). Rogers looks beyond geographical boundaries and extends his field of vision to include the ‘dying sun’ that sits ‘above the horizon’ (10). It is thrilling to witness Amelia Walker’s ‘Sky Dance’: ‘Hot night, storms brewing, / the clouds fox-trot, / slow then faster, / their arms glistening bolts of lightning, / their hearts the beating thunder’ (18). In the poem the sky comes to meet the earth and dances with the life it encounters, sprinkling it with joy. Another of Walker’s poems, ‘Lessons in Dancing’ (19) is rewarding for how it teaches through the experience of the poet being taught themselves, recalling how ‘most of us hated poetry and dancing and later, / some of us turned to jazz, to rap, / to punk, not realising / these were their own forms / of poetry / and poetry its own kind/ of dance’ (19-20).

Basudhara Roy presents her verse from an enlightened plane, reminding us to remain hopeful, ‘I do not know / if, when you leave, you think / of me. It does not matter. / All that matters is this door ajar’ (29). Furthermore, in ‘Journeys’ (31) she grapples with the potential for experience to be purposed toward a better future. Wrestling similar themes is Brian Dally, who, wary of pride and arrogance on show when humanity celebrates giant leaps in science, reminds us, ‘in the end we’re here for one brief dance, and then we’re gone, but love and life and death will carry on’ (36).

Bronwyn E Owen in ‘Healing’ pens an aesthetic experience from an enriching encounter with nature. She writes, ‘the trees said to me / I am my own guru / and / so are you I didn’t understand then / I understand now’ (40). Cameron Hindrum slips in some secrets of life to

his readers in ‘What Will Survive Us’, as he outlines, ‘The age of no turning back / – On which we have all turned our backs. / Walking leads me through this quiet / Until I can find the river again: / Which, at least, is honest’ (54). Similarly seeking honesty is Christopher (Kit) Kelen, who in the twelve-part poem ‘Hardanger Set’ sheds bits of imagery, leaving faint, teasing clues of where real life resides. His sparse phrases are best seen in the following lines: ‘Have a head of song. / Imagine yourself never touching at all. / That’s insect, bird and angel business. / The one breath. / It’s so much distance I’m thrown from. / Make the heart empty / Be whole’ (61).

In the poem ‘Impossible Words’ David Hallett explores the limits of language, presenting an intense engagement with the moment, undertaken without the pitfalls of attachment: ‘spoken in softest tones / at the break of day and the dawn of night / – impossible words: forever always and never – / to love and be loved (to love and be loved) / that is all’ (63). In his second poem featured in the anthology, ‘Bridge’, Hallett’s speaker has an epiphanic moment when they realise it is only love which bridges the gaps between people in life, stating, ‘and there is a bridge, / a bridge leaps the waters and the tower of trees, / a bridge of dreams and words, / its path is fern and flower and golden rain, / and always, always the bridge is love’ (68).

D C Chambial’s ‘Beautiful Beyond’ recalls a metaphysical devotional poem where the poet expresses his earnest desire to step backward to a place where there is a beauty beyond; a ‘Serene Satisfaction, sans deeds, Writ large on every face’ (71). Gopal Lahiri’s verses have a unique serenity which produces a calming effect on the reader. A true clairvoyant, in his poem ‘Healing Space’ he writes: ‘The invitation is always there to transcend time, / Creating the healing space in nature / In search of the truth.’ (78). ‘Armistice’ by Lahiri (81) remains an aesthetic treat for the readers and ‘Dancing Light’, much like the rest of his oeuvre, is steeped in hope. Janie Conway Herron’s poem ‘Winter Nights’ (84) is a feast for the senses. There is a neatness to her poem ‘Home’ which describes ‘That silent place / where my own words / flow’ (85). Jaydeep Sarangi’s poems ‘Truth’ and ‘A Poem Away’ have a magnetic pull because of the element of drama in them. He writes, ‘I want to be a river, someday when my prayers will be done’ (95). His soft focus is on life; all of human life with its myriad hues, and the substance of this, liquefied in dappled tones.

Laxman Singh Rathore seeks blessings from ‘The Being who possesses neither name nor form, / nor a fixed domain’ in ‘Divine Glimpses’ (102). Malaswami Jacob recreates an old Mizo folklore about the journey of the spirits of the dead to the other world in ‘Black Lake’ (111-12). Poems by Mark Cornell, ‘Our Dusk Visitor’ and ‘Mr Plover’ are buoyed with a quizzical humour. Nathalie Buckland writes about the binaries of individual identity and anonymity in the poem ‘Ordinary Miracles’ (127). The speaker of Padmaja Iyengar-Paddy’s lyrical poems strives to remain anchored against the storm and stress of lived experience. In the poem aptly titled, ‘Enlightenment’, she writes, ‘I felt a strange light pervading my whole

being Meaning of Life I finally saw without really seeing' (138). Equally, the poems of Pankajam Kottarath reintroduce us to our own experiences. There is a distinct sensation of gliding in Paramita Mukherjee Mullick's 'When I became Queen For a Day' (150). In it, the verse has the effect of feather light bristles in some places, while words are arrested in diverse splotches at other places, yet in both cases the poem favours chance over life.

Robert Maddox-Harle's deeply felt verses, 'The Return' and the eponymous 'Dancing the Light', are full of the aches of existence. No doubt a different experience for different people, Maddox-Harle demonstrates how the fissures that we create in life are filled up by poetry and its attendant virtues. He writes, 'the realisation that everything is light, photons and pixels / dancing in harmony, / a Waltz in the zero-point-field', leads him to assert that, 'if that's all there is, then let's keep dancing' (159). Saima Afreen's poems are an exploration of the complex cross-currents blowing across societies, politics, ecologies and economies. The poems 'Of Dark Suns' and 'A Couplet' are steeped in life and its memories, and the plethora of thoughts which these evoke. Her verses are engaging beyond her extraordinary technical virtuosity. Like a guitarist, Sunil Sharma's agile verses glide nimbly over the frets sans any kind of visible effort or scraping. This is evident in the lyrical phrasing of 'Light': 'eyes closed, lips muttering hymns composed thousands of years before – and still sung with gusto in the middle-class homes believing in old gods, in a commercial city' (170). This easy juxtaposition highlights the poem's stunning simplicity, making it a contender to be considered a modern classic. Fittingly, the final poem in the collection, 'Dancing Light' (175-76) embeds a subtle melody to mask the daunting technical work it undertakes, being both a transportation out of the mundane and the experience of the poet's own enlightened thought.

The editors of this anthology Rob Maddox-Harle and Jaydeep Sarangi have not been daunted by this formidable task. Their selection of poets masterfully maintains a balance between gender, age, race and ideology. Few could have done better. The diversity of personal experiences and poetic techniques collected here will surely, as has been the case with other Cyberwit anthologies, allow readers to broaden their horizons. This anthology will surely appeal to scholars, researchers and students who seek poetry that pursues a better understanding of the subtle nuances of life.

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