



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT SPECIAL ISSUES

Number 60 October 2020

ISSN: 1327-9556 | <https://www.textjournal.com.au/>

Beyond the bend

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To cite this article: Uniyal, R 2020 'Beyond the bend', in J Sarangi & A Walker (eds) *Indian-Australian exchanges through collaborative poetic inquiry*, TEXT Special Issue Number 60, *TEXT: Journal of writing and writing courses* 24, 2 (October): <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue60/Uniyal.pdf>

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Abstract:

This single-authored contribution to the special issue on ‘Indian-Australian Exchanges’ reflects the power of poetry to connect us and provide us with strength through challenging times. The article arises from a correspondence that arose then was cut short due to intervening circumstances. That correspondence occurred between myself, Ranu Uniyal, and Australian poet Quinn Eades, who was initially selected for the project but had to withdraw when conflicting responsibilities arose. There was nonetheless an initial exchange of poems between us. We read and appreciated each other’s writings, but due to upheavals including but exceeding challenges associated with the Victorian Bushfires and then the COVID-19 pandemic, our conversation was less extensive than initially planned. Nonetheless, the work presented in this article reflects how poetry can still happen when everything else fails. In times of crisis, poetry becomes an ally and a possible confidante. 2020 has been, for many people around the world, a year of excruciating pain, of loss of life and dignity. Living is uncertain and the future dark; the present has little to offer, swamped by distrust, difference and disillusionment. Humankind has been humbled by the virus. Where does poetry lead us in these moments of anxiety and fear? This article traces one pathway.

Biographical note:

Ranu Uniyal is Professor of English, University of Lucknow. She did her doctoral studies from University of Hull, UK. Her poetry has appeared in *Cha An Asian Literary Journal*, *Asia Literary Review* (HongKong), *Mascara Literary Review* (Australia), *Jaggery*, *Medulla Review*, *Sketch Book*, *Twenty 20*, *Whispers* (USA), *Littlewood Press* (UK), *Bengal Lights* (Bangla Desh), *Madras Courier*, *Muse India*, *Kavya Bharati*, *Femina*, *Manushi*, *Indian Literature*, *Spark*, *The Enchanting Verses Literary Review*, *Ethos* journal and several anthologies (such as *The Dance of the Peacock*, *Building Bridges: Poems from Australia and India*, and *Suvarnarekha: An Anthology of Indian Women Poets in English*). She has published three poetry collections: *Across the Divide* (2006), *December Poems* (2012) and *The Day We Went Strawberry Picking in Scarborough* (2018). Her English poems have been translated in Hindi, Oriya, Malayalam, Urdu and Uzbek languages. She also writes poetry in Hindi. She is a founding member of a day care centre for children with special needs in Lucknow.

Keywords:

Poetry – collaboration – crisis – hope

Introduction

This article arises from my brief exchanges with Australian poet Quinn Eades, with whom I was initially partnered to create an article for the ‘Indian-Australian Connections’ special issue. Eades and I completed the first two stages of the collaboration model as outlined to us by the project editors: we each sent the other three poems, as per stage one; then, after reading one another’s poems, we each wrote and sent three new poems responding to ones we’d received, as per stage two. We were just entering the project’s third stage – an email-based dialogue in which we began to reflect on our experiences of reading and writing in response to one another in order to elucidate what the process brought us in terms of new knowledges and ways of knowing about culture, identity, situatedness and more.

Unfortunately, challenges arose that cut our conversation short just as it was beginning to flow. These included, first, the Victorian bushfires and associated upheavals, and then, the COVID-19 pandemic. Swamped by unexpected conflicting responsibilities, Eades had to withdraw from the project having participated only minimally in the third stage (the email exchange) and not at all in the final stage – that of writing up this article to share our findings with others. I, nonetheless, decided to continue and write up some reflections on my own, for I felt that the process of reading and writing in response to Eades’s poems was a process of becoming – an ‘unstable and continuous movement: “a constant, fluid process of changes, interactions, and transformations”’ (Gannon and Gonick 2014: 5) that brought me to new understandings about the role poetry can play as a mode of connection and a source of strength through difficult times. Eades graciously gave me permission to publish his six poems, as presented within this article, and also to quote some words from the brief initial emails we did manage to exchange.

Knowledges regarding how poetry can assist us in times of struggle are of particular concern at present, given the state our world is in. Recent times have been, for many people across multiple transnational contexts, times of excruciating pain, of loss of life and dignity. Living is uncertain and the future dark; the present has little to offer, swamped by distrust, difference and disillusionment. Humankind has been humbled by the virus. Yet in the midst of this, poetry can still happen, even when everything else fails. For me, through these times of crisis, poetry has served as an ally and a possible confidante. Even though our exchange was not as extensive as initially anticipated, connecting with Eades across literal and cultural distances, even just through reading his words, has been a source of poetic inspiration and strength despite anxiety and fear. This has strengthened my belief that, as you grow older, you realize comfort lies in verse, in words that heal.

This article presents, first, the poems I initially sent Eades, followed by my artist’s statement about these poems and the ways in which merely sending them for another poet to read was for me an enriching experience of being and becoming that brought solace through difficult times. The article then presents the poems Eades sent to me, followed by my reflections on these writings. After this are the poems we wrote for one another in response to the initial poems, and then another reflection. Overall, the article works towards an illustration of how

and why I believe in the power of poetry to connect people in times of crisis, and to provide a path through times of despair.

Stage one: poems by Ranu Uniyal sent to Quinn Eades

'Jageshwar' by Ranu Uniyal

First published in Across the Divide (Uniyal 2006)

Temples burning without lamps
No shadows fall on deodars.

Hills like upright wombs
Hold on to the cackle of crows

Clouds let off wrinkled steam and the skies
See the rocks blossom naked and wild

Pilgrims swat beside the priests and pandas
And women circle them with coconut and rice.

They who could never remember their own prayers
Ready with ablutions for the sick and old.

Chants welcome *Mahamrityunjay*¹ while he sits
Amused not every disciple is a *Markandeya*².

'At the Dancing Square – Chowk' by Ranu Uniyal

First published in The Day We Went Strawberry Picking in Scarborough (Uniyal 2018)

Let me be. She licks her scream like a morsel it
hovers in the brazen sky. My sun is caught in the rain.
Staggering halfway to the square she fixes her laughter.
Somewhere far away from the sloppy moonlight
there is a hope, red and blue.

Not all men are tone deaf unable to hear the call
of hunger. Body, bosom, bare hips, needless to say
bare feet. She cannot afford the luxury of sleep.
Her hair smells of jasmine and hands glisten with
Jaipuri bangles. Kohl-rimmed eyes ready to sting.

Worn out with waiting the city lacerates one and all.
The city has spared none. The city will spare no one.
The street is her illustrious companion.
Often it rings with the flavor of *seviyan*³ and *paan*⁴
Even the *ghungroo*⁵ relishes the touch of *korma*.⁶

Tabla and sitar once had a taste of *lucknowi tehzeeb*.⁷
Tracing her steps, up and down, subversive innuendoes,
voices reeking with lust and country made liquor, gaping
indifference of the hushed minarets. Often she is baffled
by the distant call of Amma: ‘*Get up and be ready for Ajaan.*’⁸

A whiff of wisdom sits on her head. She opens her empty
fist and catches the fading star, like long lost siblings they
laugh at each other and promise to meet again. If not tonight,
she knows she will find a lover and watch him snap
her dreams with eager lips and unsteady fingers.

‘In a City of Riot’ by Ranu Uniyal

First published in The Day We Went Strawberry Picking in Scarborough (Uniyal 2018)

Will you draw for me
a neat house with as many
rooms as nights of love?

Will you gather in your arms
my dissolving flesh and
comfort me with a promise

of return even if I know
it is our last night together?
Will you bring me shards

of energy from the Main
Bazaar? Where will you go
when the shutters are down

after the weekend riots?
Will you embrace me tight
as you get a tossing glimpse

of an enemy with toxic eyes?
Will you erase my belief
that the world is seeking

not a saint, but a rebel
to set itself free from
the scab of inequality?

Will you scrub me clean
with mud from the Dead Sea
and the water from the Ganges,

perhaps in confession I will
join you and search for hands,
innocent, before the crime?

Will you defy the Scriptures
and devote a new tongue
with Om, Amen, and Allah

inscribed in it as signifiers
of one and the same light?
Will you sing of everlasting

joy, *sat chit ananda*,⁹ when
bereft of feeling, unattached
and distant, I will betray

all bones, and smash your
bristling trust with one
stroke of a staggering lie?

Reflection on the experience of sending the initial poems

Writing becomes an act of refuge. It saves you and lets you live. It shakes you from a state of anomie and brings you close to the living. Poetry helps you dust the mortal frame and lets you enter the inner core, the hidden face of your being.

The experiences of writing and sharing poems with others are for me as much processes of being as of becoming – of transforming and coming to new ways of knowing by opening myself to possibilities of connection and interaction (Gannon and Gonick 2014: 25). This, for me, is profoundly enriching. I write about India and its people. Places stir my anxiety and I am often drawn to the treasures of history. My first three poems were primarily about the lives in India. I find the rich cultural heritage of India can best be represented in poetry. My poem

‘Jageshwar’ is based on one such journey. Jageshwar is a quaint sleepy town in the lap of Himalayas. If you miss the bend you miss the town. Surrounded by the green deodar trees it houses more than a hundred temples. They form the fabric of everyday life. A rich socio-cultural tradition runs through this landscape. People live and survive amidst difficult terrain. It is their faith, their belief system that nurtures them.

The gross everyday life in the city where women are often victims of patriarchy and poverty is the recurring theme in my poetry. Women have suffered at the hands of an unjust system. They have been denied a voice and a place in society. My poem ‘At the Dancing Square’ is about one such woman who has been through the tyranny of betrayal in love and forced into prostitution. ‘In a City of Riots’ critiques the pervasive ideology of state as the most destructive of all forces. It is important to acknowledge principles of love and justice in establishing true bonds of human relationships.

Stage one: poems by Quinn Eades sent to Ranu Uniyal

‘Big Things Break’ by Quinn Eades

First published in Rallying (Eades 2017)

You are nearly five. I am on the train
to the city and there are electric guitars and rasping voices coming
through my headphones. The rain is clearing. I look up
and see the skywheel has its pods.
And I remember you.

Eight weeks old.
Black Saturday fires.
It was so hot the skywheel
cracked. Metal buckling until it could not sustain its own weight.
When we went outside I felt as if the air was going to catch,
as if we were breathing
in fire. As if it was not possible to survive.
And that was in the city. It was not Kinglake. There were no embers
in the wind. But dust. So much dust and wind and the cracking
skywheel and my breastmilk
stained singlets and you so hot you could barely
move. All you could do was drink. I had a two litre bottle
of water with me always. You were upending me. You were tipping me
sideways. You were unending in all of the ways where you got
exactly what it was you needed while I dripped and grazed
through the squalling
days.

And now you are nearly five. And the skywheel
has its pods. They sit against the blue Melbourne
sky and wait to carry thousands into the view. They are
ready to be fulfilled; to be empty, and then
full. Pinwheeled spinnakers rotating in all kinds of wind,
they are finally the vessels that will show us
buildings like gleaming spines, that will hold onto the shouts
of children and then caress them
later, in the unturning night, like newly made marbles
or things made from sapphires and gold.

When we go past the skywheel next week, on the Bolte Bridge, its pillars
holding back gulls and shipping containers and the iron red cranes
that make us think of dinosaurs you will notice and say
Look the skywheel is finished and
how much does it cost and
can we go on it and
tell me again about the fires and
why was it so extremely incredibly hot and
how can it be so hot that something that big can break?

And I will try to answer all of your questions, the way I do, and say
yes and
a lot and
probably and
you were eight weeks old and
it was so hot that the skywheel could not sustain its own weight.

Metal melts. Hard things are soft. Small things get big. Big things break.

'Lay Down, Lay Down' by Quinn Eades

First published in Rallying (Eades 2017)

The floorboards have had enough
of being walked on. They are trodden through,
they are worn. They wait impatiently for all of us
to leave so they can sigh, and rest, and feel the
weight of rugs and furniture and dust, pressing
lightly along their lengths, like love.

The beds are sick of being slept in. They are
claustrophobic. They are colonised by dust mites
and skin flakes and sweat. They dream of a night

alone, with nothing between them and the air but a sheet. The imprints of bodies remain because there's nothing they can do about the way weight changes the form of their mattresses, over time, with love.

The couch doesn't want to be sat on. It is bowed and exhausted. Its cushions are flattened and huffy. Last night one of the children spilt a whole cup of milk onto its seat. White river, there was an attempt at escape. There was an attempt at repelling, but eventually the cow juice settled into its creases, damply, with love.

The table is tired of holding things up. Food, especially, but also cutlery, and those plates with roses on them. It is fed up with being accidentally drawn on, and then the scouring that follows. It despises the way it is moved when the floor is mopped, and resents elbows and the small feet that dance on its top, with love.

The walls are sick of holding up the roof. The roof is sick of holding out the sky. The tiles are sick of stopping the birds from making their nests. The windows are fed up with keeping out the rain. The stumps are tired of lifting the house up out of the dirt. The front door has had enough of keeping strangers out. The lights are tired of being light. The taps have had enough of letting water in. The toilet is sick of taking water (and everything else) out. The bath is fed up with all the cleaning and bathing. The fucking soap that rimes its edge and slither slips along its bottom as if it belongs there, as if it is home.

The curtains are exhausted at the thought of being drawn, the chairs cannot bear to keep their legs straight, the kettle refuses to whistle, the oven will not get hot, the shower has dried up, the bathroom tiles, finally, surrender to mould and the mould grows. The mould is blue and bottle green, and a sick, bright orange that flares in the corners.

The house lays itself down. It sighs. Relief. Surrender. Dust. Mould. Scum. Mites. The busyness of ants. Lay down, lay down, lay down. Let yourself be coated.

This. This is love.

'Swim' by Quinn Eades

First published in Rallying (Eades 2017)

Water holds memory
it knows its way back.
Clouds grey white the roiling
sky a storm promising presence and absence both.

Sand here is coarse it scrubs
our feet we drop clothes
into a pile, skewer water
bottle, and walk to salt
beat the heat binders
gone breath unconstrict.

I squeal you plunge.

Melbourne boy made soft
by heated pools and the
oceanless Northern suburbs
where I find respite at the creek.
You plunge and butterfly
out ahead the brown of
your back a fleshy turtle
shell. Your arms pointing
the way to horizon, to home.

You come up grinning
you tell me to go all the
way
in.

On the next wave
I dive strive the salt
hitting eyes I come up
you are there.

We are push pulled
in the chop we are gaze.
Water swallowed
ocean cooked sky licked

we are octopus arms
slippery legs strong bellies
a flicker flash of
this.

You fit. You just fucking fit,
you say in your tear strung voice on the phone, in bed,
over water, under cover.

You're for me, I say throwing
fear, knowing rightness,
feeling sure like roots in soil: vine climbing, branch reaching, shoot seeking.

The storm does not come. It
stays half the sky. We
swim and dive, we shoulder
ride. We shoulder ride!
You go down I slip my
feet around your back
lace my hands to settle them
on the top of your head.
You push up, you brace.

I am big this is no whippet
thin circus trick this is pure
strength. Your chin just out
of water you face the waves.
We laugh like we have beaten gravity. I lose balance. We
both fall, and come up
spitting the almost storm, laughing more.

Looking up there is cloud and not,
the yellow light of rain wanting to come,
the cold whip of wind bringing wet.
We swim, drift, laugh, hold, kiss.

Lips touch lips, hands hips, toes find calves,
eyes find what comes next.
What comes next?

Reflection on the experience of reading the poems by Eades
In the brief correspondence we shared at the start of our exchange, Quinn Eades
responded to some of my queries with utmost sincerity:

I am a trans person who birthed two children prior to my transition (my kids still call me Mama but my pronouns are he/him and/or they/them). (Eades 2019)

It is interesting to see how gender sensitisation works in both of us. As a transgender person, Eades refers to emotional camaraderie and pleasure that builds up in a relationship. His poem 'Swim' captures these things with evocative imagery, for instance through the 'Clouds grey white the roiling / sky a storm promising presence and absence both', and later when 'Looking up there is cloud and not, / the yellow light of rain wanting to come, / the cold whip of wind bringing wet. / We swim, drift, laugh, hold, kiss.' He also writes candidly about bodily and emotional experiences not often brought to the page, which to me seems a form of activism, for these things need to be written about so that those of us who have or have had such experiences realise we are not alone. Poetry's capacities for sharing these things is part of how and why it connects us, even when there is no literal exchange beyond simply reading the other's words on a page or screen.

As a poet and a feminist, I am touched by Eades's words and by his continued engagement of writing as a socially transformative activity. I, too, feel a sense of social responsibility to create change where gendered injustices are concerned. I want to let the voices of those marginalised by rigid norms of gender be heard through the corridors of power. I want them to breeze in and out, to let the windows open and feel the breath of fresh air that resonates with rhythms of anguish, assertion and ardour. India has a history and Australia, too, a history of the vanquished and the nameless. Collaborating with Eades has brought me to see how women and transgender people can act as allies. Together, I believe, we must tie the alphabets of love and resilience and let words flow with abandon. Kamala Das did that when she wrote of her experiences as a woman in India. For instance, consider these lines:

I must pose
I must pretend
Must act the role
Of happy woman,
Happy wife.
I must keep the right distance
Between me and the high.
I must keep the right distance
Between me and the low.

O sea, I am fed up
I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had,
I want to be dead... (Das 1986: 25)

Das spoke with fervour about the need for love in this tuneless world. She challenged the patriarchal power structure and spoke of desire in woman as an extension of her being. However, there is an unmasking of the self when she writes with an uncanny rage in her poem 'The Stone Age': 'Ask me why life is short and love is / Shorter still, ask me what is bliss and what its price...' (Das 1986: 69).

Judith Wright carried the legacy of protest in Australia. She, too, has an incisive eye that sees and draws inspiration from women. In her poems the physical elements of nature embrace not just the indigenous face but also the nameless and the vanquished. As a poet of the people, she has worked unceasingly for those on the periphery. Love is the *terra firma* of her project on consciousness raising. See how she works through the network of emotions and builds a poem as in 'Lyrebirds': 'Some things ought to be left secret, alone; / some things – birds like walking fables – / ought to inhabit nowhere but the reverence of the / heart' (Wright 2003: 54). There is a fine intimate detail that brings heart to the core of her imagination. It creates a world of wonder and pain, is mythopoeic, but there is neither the urgency nor desire to bring it out in the open. It is a secret worth cherishing.

Poet Quinn Eades, though working from a different perspective, in a different context, is a representative of similar traditions of poetry that calls out injustice and seeks social change. Eades's first three poems came as a unique surprise to me. As I read 'Big Things Break' – a poem addressed to a child – I could sense the maternal warmth running through the poem. The city with its multiple images of survival is hard and soft, big and small. The heat and fire of the city and the unusual cracking of the 'skywheel' leave behind a trail of questions. Contraries of life come together and memories resonate with good times of sunshine. The pride and patience of a parent as they hold their child with sheer ebullience shows how similar is this experience of rearing a child across cultures.

Eades's second poem 'Lay Down, Lay Down' is one of the most interesting love poems I have read recently. The house is 'tired, sick, colonised by dust mites'. I am reminded of a woman who spends all her life looking after home and children and there is no way that she can escape the drudgery of keeping the house clean, rooms in order, food in the fridge, mopping the floor, cleaning the toilet – unending chores at home. There is a sadness attached to this bizarre business. Her heart lies elsewhere. *Ars est celare artem*, implies art lies in the concealment of art. This poem is an excellent appropriation of the house and all the objects going on strike. I am surprised that the ending is neither repressive nor repulsive. A quirky ending is an assertion of a desire to be coated with love. The poem 'Swim' is also about love where the joy of camaraderie and the intense lovemaking has deep social implications. It reads like a dream which is shaken by a sudden jolting question: 'What comes next?' Tactile imagery accentuates the uncertainty of future. The body is celebrating the call of the flesh and suddenly becomes conscious of its inadequacy.

Stage two: poems by Ranu Uniyal in response to the poems sent by Quinn Eades

'The Inanity of Conversation' by Ranu Uniyal

Responding to Quinn Eades

How often have you been through it all,
he asked me. My eyes can smell the
mint behind his ears. I pretend as if I have
not heard him. I pretend as if I love
the curve of his throat.

For him I am a blank sheet on which
he must carve his story. For him I am
just a sigh that gets diffused
while the fury of the storm is burning
the town upside down.

Nothing remains once the tree is dead.
The smoke has run its course and the
quiet has settled in the middle. Nothing
lives forever. I put my feet on the
tarnished floor and let him do all the talking.

'From One Fife to Another' by Ranu Uniyal
Responding to Quinn Eades

My arms are wide like an eagle
and I spread them out for you.
My little angel I wish I could keep
you safe from the claws of bitterness,
biting the soul of this earth.
My arms spread two inches
by six and I cling to you, hoping
to see you whole and intact.
The naked forest has walked
into my garden and all the birds
that sang for you have been scared
to death. The sky-rise apartments
are now companions of the distant
air. Sparrows and crows have been
hushed to silence. The once green
acacia shrieked as they chopped
her limbs. Thank God, the trees
do not speak, I said. And some we
do not know. But why do we need
to know them all? You ask me.

I was once a tree – all green.
Very tall, bobbing in the wind.
I had leaves, branches and occasional
flowers. I too had a name. A woman.
A mother. Once a tree. I brush
them aside, my tears, an upright
foliage lying heavy on my chest.
Pick you in my arms
wide like an eagle
step into this life.
No remnants behind.
No obituary to write.

‘Only Grief’ by Ranu Uniyal
Responding to Quinn Eades

War. We played the game.
The enemy and I so brown
and brave. Our cardboard guns
spewing anger. Winning a delight.

Jealousy and pride embraced
our hearts, sacred as a folklore.
We sang dangerously of the
failure of our prodigal ancestors

to keep us alive. So cold is
our blood and nothing is left
in us: only words quibble
on empty breasts.

I blow kisses in the air
and watch them collide
with ever vigilant grains
of ash and disappear.

Of love they have no evidence.
Of remorse I have none.

Reflection on the experience of responding to poems by Quinn Eades

will they hold a dedicated hand make me their own
carry me in their in sides make me an alter from an old bone
a feather fallen a stone scooped out a silver skull

crunching words with yellow teeth pebbled
chewing the crust of a life lived
under the mantle the horrific heat
the water never coming down

egress by Quinn Eades
Responding to Ranu Uniyal

the city gives us nothing
peels back skin
dissolves language
on every other corner
a bowed head another sign
bowl or hat at feet
some all the way down
forehead on footpath
palms pressed together

please

streets run straight here
vendors cry a grid laid down
to carry unemptied pockets
eyefulls of disdain
the water torture
of every unspoken

no

remember my own hand out
eating nothing eating air
mcdonalds for a cup of water
grease dripping from other chins
watching every fucker eat
every door a shut face
a chewing jaw open
shut open full closed

remember a lucky find

a coin in the gutter in the dry fountain bed
warm silver cracking a single blunt day
pushed into pocket
something to hold to turn
between finger and thumb

think nothing think thank you think please

homage by Quinn Eades

Responding to Ranu Uniyal

on the radio he asks about riots
about Stonewall about Mardi Gras
what were the crossings over
how did they link

always this question
who threw the first brick

our archives a caul a wet membrane
a high heel worn by the wrong foot
coming back to what's between our legs
coming home to silence
to we don't know who you are anymore
to couldn't you just

there are photos of us holding hands
holding signs holding bodies split open
outside the hammered cell block
so close to the boot kicking in

there is footage of us
backs against bluestone
torn satin fissured lips

on the radio he asks about celebration
sequins gatherings art

the National Gallery pays homage
to Haring to Basquiat
because we are easier to love when we are quiet
when we leave art behind us
when we are interred tragic and young

too many gone but when the riot runs inside a body

—31 cells break down are overrun

—27 a needle a slow poem struck down

they can pretend that every wrong turn was our own

make an art shrine a velvet cape a catalogue

send a late letter from the institution

in full colour hard bound signed *with love*,

Reflection on reading response poems sent by Quinn Eades

It is significant to note that poets connect through emotions. Words are used to express the multiplicity of those emotions. It is the lived experience that adds to our struggle. As parents, we share in common our feelings of anxiety and concern for our young children in an unpredictable world. In the poem ‘nimbus’, images of loss and suffering come alive in ‘the horrific heat’ and ‘the bush fire moon’, a loss that Australia has been through in recent times. ‘egress’ calls to mind our present situation where ‘every door a shut face’. The poem ‘homage’, too, talks of violence both in art and life. Eades’s verses convey a sense of never being whole – always ‘breaking’ – a sense of in-between – neither complete nor full, ending is more than a beginning. Unfolding and retelling, recreating and breathing – everything is done with a simultaneity, alterity is all. The rawness of emotions gets twirled in an unseemly set of correspondence that takes place between the poet and the reader, the lover and the beloved, the giver and the recipient, the worshipper and the worshipped, the body and the soul, the self and the other, the quaint and the queer, the strange and the simple.

As poets we are haunted by the inevitable truth, the end of life. Aging and emptiness constantly bring us close to death. It is impossible to evade the unending loneliness, to fill in the absences. As poets we are both worried about the world we live in. We share concerns for the environment, want our trees to remain green and healthy, our lands fertile and our minds open. It is sad to see the city smack of resentment and there is distrust in all quarters. Only children have innocence, the adults are plagued with nagging fear and incompatible desires. While Eades is adept at handling odd poetic sequences, short breaks and line division stand out with confidence; I prefer to work with full sentences, gradually moving from one thought to another. Both of us enjoy writing, find comfort in words. Both of us share an inimitable bond with *Prakriti* – nature. His nature is of fire and often tends to draw sustenance from water. Water is the strongest element in Eades’ poetry. He also loves to play with colours. Colours signify multiple shades that haunt his inner thoughts. He also writes about those on the periphery. For me all the five elements are in a vacuum unless they merge with Purusha – the Ultimate reality. And I sing with elan – *Aham brahm asmayee tat twam asee. Sat chit Ananda* – He and I are One – a song of everlasting joy.

Concluding thoughts

As you get older, you realise comfort lies in verse, in words that heal. Poetry becomes your additional nutrient. It nurtures you. If stories make you cry, poems keep you awake at night, words warm your heart and you long for a world where all can live without fear and guilt. If you have a roof over your head and food on your plate and are still complaining, think of those who long for a home and do not want to die of hunger. If you can see and feel – it means you are alive. Pick up your pen and be glad that you can still write.

Notes

1. *Mahamrityunjay*: Refers to Lord Shiva, three eyed deity who liberates mankind from bondage of death.
2. *Markandeya*: In Hindu scriptures *Markandeya* is a devotee of Lord Shiva. He fought against *Yama*, the Lord of Death and attained immortality. The temple of *Markandeya* is in Jageshwar, the hills of Kumaon, India.
3. *Seviyan* – Pudding made of sugar, semolina and nuts.
4. *Paan* – Betel leaf
5. *Ghungroo* – Ankle bells
6. *Korma* – Meat dish
7. *Lucknowi Tehzeeb* – City of Lucknow with its distinct culture and tradition.
8. *Ajaan* – Prayers
9. *sat chit ananda*: a mantra that means ‘truth, consciousness, bliss’.

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