



## ANGUISH, DEVOTION, AND FEMININITY A STUDY OF BHAGYALAKSHMI'S POETRY

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*I have woven all my dreams around you*

.... ..

*I shared with you when you were absent*

*I must have come across*

*As a dumb, meek, mild person*

*Of a few words*

*Sure I was enamoured of your presence*

*That I hardly uttered a word*

*Many things were unsaid*

*To date they remain unsaid*

*Krishna was silent*

*While Meera sang in ecstasy*

*Here this Meera was silent*

*While you manifested in myriad ways.*

-Silent Song

A highly qualified officer of the Government while in service, Dr J. Bhagyalakshmi has been a poet. Earlier she has been associated with Poetry Club of India (*Continuum*) and editor of *Communicator* and *Indian Foreign Review*. She held the post of Director (Media) in the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment. So far she has published four poetry collections: *Happiness Unbound* (1998), *A Knock at the Door* (2004), *When Fortune Smiles* (2007) and *Missing Woods* (2014).

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*Happiness Unbound* is of a special kind which displays deep femininity replete with pain and forbearance with a deep and wide understanding of the human condition, particularly of the fair sex. The title reminds the reader of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. The title refers to a condition totally different from that of the Greek legendary character. Prometheus' in the Greek closet play was in intense pain and he does not have hope of even death for

liberation. The pain and suffering of the speakers in many poems is heart-rending and there is no release from captivity which the Greek had. The speakers in the poet's mind are released from happiness itself. At first the title sounds enigmatic or paradoxical but the suffering of the poet's protagonists is excruciatingly real.



The speaker in the poem 'Two Lungfuls' remembers, after mentioning the Greek hero says this:

But look at me,  
There is air everywhere  
Below, above and all round  
Blowing over hills and dales,  
Lakes and oceans

And in open spaces –  
Yet neither could I borrow  
Nor could I steal  
Just two lungfuls  
When needed it most. (p.31)

The poet being a lover of literature even in her student days knows of Greek mythology and legends and speaks of Damocles and Phoenix too in her poems.

Literature students remember the poem Ancient Mariner and the condition of the one with the dead albatross hung around his neck and the line: Water, water every where but not a drop to drink. The descriptions of suffering in some of the poems are beyond compare and the poet really wants to convey that feeling.

Waves are a common feature in the earlier poems. The speaker in 'Waves' says:

What waves are you sending out?  
They are touching me.  
There is a catch in my throat  
And a stirring in my heart. (p.1)

The speaker in this poem is in an exuberant mood of joy. Another speaker in another poem reveals a peculiar feeling in 'Magic Tune'.

There is a magic tune  
... ..  
Sometimes it is a wave  
Coming with vehemence,  
Breaking at  
My inner being  
And leaving  
Traces pleasant and unpleasant.

In 'Ethereality' the speaker aspires to sublime happiness:

Let me be pure radiance  
Exuding waves of love. (p.4)

In 'Communion' there a new way of being poetic for sending and sharing a vibration across closed lips with a question:

If I pen my thoughts,  
The charm will go.  
If I keep them unsaid,  
You will never know.

... ..

Is there a way

.... ..

That could vibrate  
Across my lips? (p.5)

Some poems impress the reader that the thoughts communicated are celestial. 'In Silence' the speaker said:

My thoughts come up to  
Your abode  
Make a circle and retreat  
Without ever touching your door. (p.8)

In this the pronouns may refer only to the lover and the ladylove, the later being the poet-speaker.

In 'Presage' the speaker has an intense yearning with devotion for the 'you' and that may be God too. This is one of the most luscious of the poems in this collection, the last line being the best. Hence the whole poem;

I searched you out  
In that crowd  
My eyes fixed on you  
Then hustle and bustle  
The crowd surged on  
And you were near  
I could have stretched  
My hand and touched you  
But I didn't  
I was silent  
No rustle from my silk  
No jingles from my bangles  
No sounds from my anklets  
Yet you turned round  
And smiled!

Dear me!  
I forgot the jasmines in my hair. (p.10)

In 'I know not what to Say'

.... ..

You are my inner self



That goes with me  
Through thick and thin  
Yet if I have to define

And give you a name  
I know not what to say. (p.12)

'Happiness Unbound' is happiness released. It is seen even in the earlier poem also, in 'Those Eyes of Thine' which is pious and highly devotional:

.... ..  
Their baby like shine  
Purity of shrine  
Brings to my mind  
All that is kind

Could they have ever  
Contracted dear  
Thinking how  
Worthless I am? (p.14)

In 'Happiness Unbound' there is a dialogue which ends thus:

"Do we know your father?"  
They asked haltingly.  
I nodded:  
"Who is he, if we may ask?"  
I beamed with happiness  
When I uttered:  
"The Lord of the Universe." (p.15)

Devoutness with deep faith is the theme of many poems. 'Where Were You?' is about a search:

I looked for you  
Oh Dear One!  
Here, there and everywhere.

.... ..  
Ah! Gentle touch  
Why, it's you!  
And that too so nearby.(p.18)

Awareness of human failings and compassion too are in some poems like 'The Living and the Dead':

.....  
We overflow with ourselves  
Filling nooks and corners  
Leaving no room even for the living  
And as for the dead,  
May their souls rest in peace.(p.19)

In the poem 'Silent Pact' the antecedent of the pronoun is left by the poet to the imagination of the

reader. The 'you' could be the lover or even the Supreme Being.

I am because you are  
But always you are  
With or without me  
So it is my needs  
That you should heed. (p.21)

Intense devotion is the hallmark of the religious mind and here it is so

...it is my earnest wish  
And a prayer from my heart  
That you be with me  
Whether I move or not. (p.24)  
'Watch out' is about impermanence:  
I know the call will come  
Later or now  
We should part  
And go our different ways. (p.25)

'Eternal Spring' is a deep yearning. The evasive dream is the floating thought.

Let me try once again  
To catch that  
Evasive dream  
... ..  
Let me feel it  
Even if it rushes like wind  
Let me wake it up  
Even if it is in slumber  
Let me melt it  
Even if it is frozen  
Let it be an eternal spring  
In my heart for ever sprouting. (p.27)

Serious and intense cerebration is revealed in 'Siddhartha'.

At a glance –  
That Siddhartha  
Before he became the Buddha  
Comes into my thoughts  
Like a glowing question mark  
And the rest is  
Blank, bleak and dark. (p.30)

The thinking could be that of Yasodhara.

The poet's idea of moral sense is displayed in poems like 'Don't Do unto Others'

.... ..  
Forget who hurt where  
When and with what effect;



At least don't do unto others  
As they did unto you. (p.40)

'Wail not for a dream' again is moralistic:

For what use is a body.  
When there is no life?  
So it should meet its end  
And who could do that  
Better than you yourself? (p.41)

Crossing the limit is the point in 'Insurrection'. The cruel perpetrator's jaw drops when the resistance in the victim of cruelty is witnessed:

When the chains were tightened,  
Day after day.  
Making me immobile,  
I knew it was not death  
But near about death.  
Choking yet not killing,  
Stifling yet not snuffing out,  
Death like life,  
But not death itself.  
When the chain around my neck

Started tightening  
That is when I yelled  
And let out a cry  
Blood curdling and spine chilling cry,  
Which made you still  
In your tracks, dropping your jaw. (p.64)

In her very first collection, the poet Bhagyalakshmi has made her predilections and prowess evident. She expresses her feelings of devoutness to the Supreme Being and forbearance of all suffering caused by a perpetrator.

The poet's second collection *A Knock at the Door* is a more intensely scripted poetic imagination which is about the ruminations of the poet's inner self. The title poem has a strain of deep rooted moral sense. The thoughts expressed in the second volume are primarily god-oriented and the knock is at the door about the unseen though being around and ever within. Human relations, particularly conjugal relations also, come under this poet's scanner. The poems are revelations of moods, hurt and pained, very personal, and ever roaming in the higher regions of thought processes.

The basic devoutness of the poet is in the very first page in dedication to Goddess Saraswati, the embodiment of supreme knowledge and wisdom.

As the great poet Krishna Srinivas hoped and wished the poet's second collection is 'a treasury of interior excavations'. The poet herself in her preface laid bare the prolegomena of her writing:

'As a trained and practising communicator my personal preference is for the unadorned, free from obscurantism and commitment to difficulty. I don't shirk from writing in first person. It does not overwhelm me, nor does it confine to myself. For me it is all pervading "I", a mere technique, a matter of convenience and ease and just the flow.'

No avid reader of poetry mistakes the "I" in every poem as the poet. A poet diffuses his or her feelings, emotions and ideas through various persons who are transformed as speakers of the poems. The poems require careful and slow reading many a time for getting into the poet's heart-mid-intellect, call it *manas*, if you will. The title poem is an eminent case in point. The entire poem is here for the reader:

*A Knock at the Door*  
It was past midnight  
There was a knock at the door  
I sat up  
I could sense the storm outside  
And the stillness within  
Now this knock  
No, I will not open the door  
Come what may  
I have locked from within  
I know the doors are strong  
And also pushed a few more things  
To stop the entry  
Of that unknown wind  
Again, unmistakable knock  
I should do all I can  
To ward off that intruder  
May be, I am secure  
Perhaps the storm will abate  
And the stranger will walk off  
I may see the morning peace  
And the whole new world before me. (p71)

Past midnight is time for sleep – but not for the speaker at that moment. Knock is heard quickly. Storm is felt and raging is understandable. The identity of the intruder is left for the reader's guess. Is the knock expected? 'Come what may' is from a guess ominous. Determination to be safe – door



locked within. Additional precautions are taken too. Unknown wind, may be unexpected, may be unusual, and may be the routine – left to the reader's imagination. The knock unmistakable – is it known, expected? The trespasser is an intruder, not one known. Hope of the storm abating is there. The stranger's walking off is only a hope, a wish. With the dawn and morning the whole world is open before the speaker. The 'old world' – of the storm, night, intruder are agitations. Was there something that happened earlier? The more the reader thinks the more the guess work for a number of alternatives. Good poetry always lends itself to interpretations. The inquisitive/patient/diligent reader would surely be rewarded. And that is literary appreciation. A quick reading is not the right thing in trying to go to the heart of the matter. Quick reading is for crime fiction – the mind-heart races but in reading a poem the heart slows down and the mind thinks of the various possible alternatives. The poet does not expect the reader to rush; a poem is meant for slow chewing, for traversing back and forth to understand the import of imaginative writing.

Now, to some selected poems only since a review, an aperitif should not be heavy.

'In Silence' the speaker thinks of a way to understand and looks within. He thinks of entering 'your' garden. The pronoun obviously must refer to some one dear, or even the divine. The feeling of restraint is there - no 'plucking one single bud'. The speaker is considerate and pious-intentioned.

'My words frame  
The tenderest feelings  
With utmost care  
Without ever crossing  
My silent lips. (p.2)

'It is Me' is addressed either to the lover or even God Himself:

And let me know  
If I lurk anywhere  
In your thoughts  
... ..  
Or do you feel any fragrance  
Coming subtly across?  
Then I know, it is me

Lurking in your heart

And harping on your thoughts. (p.3)

'Closed Fist' is about 'you'. God's intention or it may be the cause of action or inaction - that is never revealed. The devotee is puzzled but always totally faithful:

What do you have in your fist  
Could it be as vast as the sky  
And as empty as space  
A sum total of illusion  
Creating images of hope  
Stoked by fertile imagination. (p.4)

Devotees believe that total surrender is what complete faith should lead to. Looking within the devout assesses the inner-self and finds its smallness:

Where do I stand  
In your galaxy?  
... ..  
A tiny dot  
About to shine  
But afraid to show.

(Tail-End, p.8)

'Parrot's Tale' subtly and painfully suggests the caged-woman by bringing in the fortune teller's parrot with wings clipped.

The past was when  
It was caught  
The time was when  
Its wing were clipped  
Then time for  
Rigours of training  
Now its present,  
Slavery from dawn to dusk  
As for its future,  
Drudgery and death.  
We have those parrots  
Aplenty and around  
Trapped, clipped and trained  
Never, never to take wing again. (p.9)

'Gallop Unbridled' is a piece of well-meaning advice. Pride of eminence or glory, or authority and power can be a squeak, a whisper in time just by the turn of the wheel. So the poet cautions:

Think for a while  
And think of it everyday  
So that you may be firm  
In the saddle



Through the gallop unbridled. (p.10)  
 'In the Cosmos' is an explanation of death. No one knows what happens later:

In thoughtless world  
 In wordless state  
 In the cosmos  
 Where energy radiates  
 Who can shape a formless one,  
 Who can utter a wordless thought?(p.11)

The right attitude and a sense of life and living make one express one's gratitude to the Creator:

As I sit this moment  
 Savouring your love  
 And experience unalloyed peace  
 My eyes moisten with gratitude... (p.12)

Even in the poem 'Ocean Deep' ocean is symbol suggesting God's grace. Here the poet's devotion is seen:

As I stand  
 By your sandy beach  
 I see your magnificence. (p.13)

In 'Mirror image' the principle of good nature is laid down:

Living for others does not mean  
 They live for you  
 And you make up their world;  
 It only means  
 You care, you notice  
 And give a thought  
 For those around,  
 Then you see the mirror image. (p.14)

A thoughtful woman would be assertive and justly independent. Not knowing this may lead her to helpless servility. 'Cause and Effect' is about this:

It is indeed strange  
 To mew like a kitten  
 And say, "I don't want to be independent."

.... .. ... ..

We are the cause  
 And we are the effect. (p.15)

In 'My Secret' a woman's self-deluded secrecy is the subject:

I don't want to tell anyone  
 I don't want to share this feeling  
 I won't even let the one know  
 For whom my feeling is welling

... ..

It looks as if I required a third eye  
 But I wouldn't breathe a word  
 Even to the one  
 For whom I lived and died  
 But I am... (p.17)

The reader easily knows who 'the one' is.

The state of despicable feeling in the subdued woman is the theme in 'A Minus' put in a powerful way:

Tell me what is minus?  
 A minus is a minus  
 Always a loser  
 Self-effacing, undesirable,  
 Better avoided.

.... ..

That explains it all  
 Why in some circles

Girls are rated as minus.(p.50)

There are many subtle poems on God without a direct or specific mention of Him. These show the innate god feeling and god consciousness in the speakers. A speaker says that as long as she is servile, a woman would not be able to see the sky, the stars and flowers. Having dug a tunnel with hard work she would not be able to walk back to freedom.

The poem 'Now Tell Me' concludes thus:

Now you tell me  
 What is dawn,  
 What is dusk,  
 Why nightfall  
 And the Milky Way,  
 Which I wanted to know all the while  
 But had no time when I was servile. (p.36)

Bondage makes seeing the sky impossible. Tunnelling all the time is losing freedom permanently.

In the poem 'A Lamp and Light' the speaker lights a lamp in childhood. The lamp continued to burn but suddenly it was no more.

Suddenly I discovered  
 That the lamp is no more  
 Has it died on its own?

.... ..

I turned within  
 And found some quiet radiance  
 No glitter, no glitz  
 But soft on the eye



Almost like full moonlight  
Reaching out to every nook and corner  
Brightening my whole being. (p.37)

The reader knows that the lamp is F A I T H.

'A Picture on the Wall', once again, is about God. The human being is the picture on the wall. Without the artist behind the wall there is no picture on the wall.

.....  
Indeed, I am the picture  
The visible side that is;  
You are on the other side, the invisible,  
Yet without you  
Where is the picture  
And who is the artist? (p.43)

In 'Host not Found' the computer trope impresses readers who work on personal computers day in and day out. Clutter and garbage make the system unworkable. It is impossible to have all the space one wanted. Megabytes are limited. The speaker says

First let me empty the bin  
Well, wait, can I do it in a jiffy  
By a press of a button  
Or is it a life long process?  
I think, I should e-mail  
To the make  
Hello, are you there,  
Or is it, "Host not found?" (p.44)

'Thought for Thought' is about deep thinking and looking heavenward.

But to receive you  
All my modern means fail me  
Just for once  
Lend me yours  
So that I may know  
Word for word  
And thought for thought. (p.48)

Bhagyalakshmi writes thought-provoking poetry with strong feelings of distress about the nullification of women. She is strengthened by her implicit faith in God. She has the strong tree as a trope. She knows about the elixir of life and living. She concludes the poem of that title (*Elixir*) thus:

You may sway, you may swing  
You may bloom and feel strong  
But remember, it is roots all along

Charging you with elixir of life. (p.54)

Bhagyalakshmi's third collection, *When Fortune Smiled*, displays a process of crystallization and a progress towards maturation. She looks within and around with a deep effort for understanding and self-realization as well as the ways of life and living around. She thinks of male mentality and feminine helplessness which cause anguish and distress.

The title poem which comes towards the end of the collection is very significant both as crystallization and maturation. Always looking inward and around she reconciles to things beyond her control. She arrives at a stand to accept what comes along, no matter fair or foul, encouraging or otherwise, when fortune smiles and she has a lesson to teach. Here is the mindset of the poet:

It so happened  
Once fortune smiled  
Fortune smiled at me graciously  
And brightly  
This was the moment I was waiting for

As a person the speaker tells the reader

Lo, and behold  
I cursed myself ...

This is but natural. The mental reaction caused by fortune turning her back is understood. The speaker is frank

When I opened my eyes  
I saw her walking past by me  
Now what was civil,  
What was courteous how would I know  
I was transfixed and gazed in vain  
I saw the brightness spread in the horizon  
Even today I preserve that smile. (pp. 72-73)

Experience and thoughtfulness and the equanimity that is developed silently and impressively expressed in the way the speaker ends with what is quoted in the epigraph.

The poet and literary critic J.P. Das was quoted on the blurb of this book: "... the poet's mantra is get connected'. Mixing with all, while being in the many, is wise and thoughtful. In 'Getting Connected' the speaker begins:



My mind is a wanderer  
It wanders ceaselessly

.... ..

While the universe is on the move  
I, a miniscule of universe,  
How can I hope to be still?"

This is sensible thinking. The world moves forward and so does time. The human mind too should move. Being one among the innumerable, one has to realize that the only way to stay alive is this:

One should step out of  
This self-indulging circle  
To fuse and infuse  
To get connected  
To all pervading suffering  
And ever diffusing happiness. (p.3)

The right feeling of one among many is the prime requisite for meaningful living. Social awareness makes the speaker of the poem shed copious tears. The poet is rightly concerned with insufferable lot of the fair sex even from the tender age of childhood. The speaker here goes on thus perhaps having honour killings in our country.

She will be punished  
If she goes wrong  
And she will also be punished  
If someone else does wrong  
So here she stands  
A lonely figure a mere fifteen year old  
Shedding copious tears  
And bearing the brunt of guilt  
Of the crime she never committed. (p.9)

In 'Call it if you will' the speaker feels perturbed and sad about diseases like senile dementia, Alzheimer's and the like. The condition of an earthquake, cyclone or tsunami is as disturbing.

Yet I am holding on  
To the same faith  
That left you wayside  
While the world moved ahead  
Unconcerned and unconnected (p.11)

With immense faith and forging ahead god ward, the poet recalls time and again Browning's lines/ 'God's in His Heaven/ All's right with the world!' as did in her earlier collection "A Knock at the Door". In the poem 'Leave it Alone' the poet talks about the unconscious mind, the junk room strewn and packed with all

useless and rejected stuff. Going into it is only courting pain or trouble which may push into insanity.

Crawl out of that store  
Sometimes scaring  
Sometimes alluring  
At times puzzling  
For which you have no clue  
Leave it so and be happy  
But never try to open the door  
Else, you will be opening Pandora's Box. (p.13)

The Grand Declaration in the Upanishad *Aham Brahmaasmi* is brought up in the poem 'I Am Because You Are'. The point the speaker makes is that he/she is there because of the Supreme Being. This kind of philosophizing comes from total surrender and absolute devotion. This kind of feeling is seen in many poems like 'Spring Comes Again'. Dust thou art and to dust thou return – it is said. The speaker in this poem says:

... I see a cloud traversig the sky  
I smell the rain nearby  
Perhaps there is a seed sprouting  
Sedately, cheerfully raising its head  
And looking up skyward. (p.15)

In 'We come to You' the pronoun refers to the omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. The speaker uses the all inclusive plural:

We come to you  
To sing paeans of glory  
We come to you  
To question your heartless stance  
... ..  
Our ignorance and our foolhardiness  
Our gullibility and our dependence  
We may belittle or admire you  
But we come to you again and again. (pp.45-46)

Looking up skyward is a matter of both hope and faith. 'Three Cheers of Life' is a piece of kind and well-considered advice:

Even if it is a puny flower  
Trying to spread its fragrance  
Gather them all now  
And treasure in your memory chest  
Take them out  
Whenever you can



And pass them around to spread the cheer  
Do so now,

And say three cheers to life. (p.16)

There is another such piece of wise saying that while there is abundance in want and grief and suffering too.

But if every one partakes

Share a bit here, share a bit there

Can the scales be even

Enriching that and mitigating this? (p. 17)

'Be Happy' is another offering sane advice:

Never mind and be happy

.... ..

If someone is indifferent

Presume, he is free from worldly bonds

Not to be annoyed but be happy

If someone ignores you

For, after all, ignorance is bliss

And that is where the journey ends. (p.39)

There is moralizing, philosophizing – if one looks deep into Bhagyalakshmi's poetry. Time and again there is high flown rhetoric too but that is inevitable when one gets inspired to reveal something from the inner recesses of the heart-mind.

You cannot lift your little finger

To wipe way that trickling tear

Yet a class, a mass, a universe

Are your genuine concern. (p.21)

The poem 'Our Togetherness' is about placing the last slab on the speaker. The speaker is forgiving and togetherness held in esteem and valued.

I know how many places it takes

To reach that crucial spot

Where our togetherness is buried,

But remember,

You placed that last slab. (p.23)

The 'I' may be a friend, spouse or anyone. Conjugal felicity and compatibility are not found everywhere. There is unhappiness, bickering, sorrow and even loud complaint, 'Making the Invisible Visible' is an experience of both pain and forgiveness.

I understand the undercurrent of love

I perceive the connectivity invisible

I savour the meaning of creation and rejuvenation

Be that as kit may, tell me,

How can one make (the) subtle substantial

And invisible visible?(pp.25-26)

Incompatibility and yearning to be connected is there in the poem 'So Long...'

We are divided in space

yet connected

So long

Till we meet again. (p27)

There is understanding and a suggestion too in 'Quiet Flows Life'

It matters little

How fast or hard you ravelled

Why to think of sweat and tears

And the accomplishments galore

Let there be no recapture or rewind

See, quiet flows life

Better you flow along.' (p.52)

The pronoun here is indefinite as in several other occasions. It may be the story writer if there is no subtlety seen in that:

I am no ordinary reader

Though that is what I should be

I assume too much

... ..

I know this is your story after all,

I am a mere character

Why should I jump out of the plot

To dictate terms to the writer himself! (p.29)

In 'Fantasy' the 'I' says

Let me turn back and see

Your radiant face

And your cherubic lips

Uttering my name like a sweet melody. (p31)

Of man-woman relationship, the speaker in 'The Game' (smilingly) says:

Don't you see this game

Where tails you lose,

Head he wins

And you are here to play the game. (p.42)

'Love for Love' has stinging irony where male dominance and female helplessness are brought out piquantly:

Two deprived souls

Are living together in love

One is a dog

And another is its owner

... ..

... where would he seek



Unalloyed the unconditional love  
 If not in a dog  
 Which must have got a lion's share  
 When love is first distributed. (p.43)

The tragedy of it all is that the 'dog' doesn't get it. (p.42)

In this third collection one sees a very significant progress towards fruition and crystallization in this third collection of the poet Bhagyalakshmi. Starting poetry writing three decades ago, she scaled great heights and achieved both crystallization and maturation in her 2014 collection *Missing Woods*. Dr J.P. Das paid the poet the best encomium writing "This latest connection would come as reaffirmation of the humanitarian philosophy, which has been the mainstay of her poetry over the years."

Missing the woods for the tress is an oft quoted expression for being unable to have a clear view of the whole. Seeing the wood gives an idea of life, living and existence.

Imagination and wordplay go together effectively in this poet. The epigraph from Pericles the Greek politician itself is solemn: "What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments but what is woven into the lives of others. This poet weaves profound thoughts and realizations into the lives of readers thus making their living acquire some depth and width too.

The very first poem 'Adieu' reveals the faith in God though it is bidding a goodbye..

Wherever I turned my eye  
 I could feel your watchful eyes—  
 ... ..  
 When I held you in my arms  
 I held throbbing life itself

... ..

Thank you for your brief stay

While traversing this universe (*Adieu*, p.9)

The feelings expressed are at ends of the canvas of thinking, sometimes sulking, sometimes sad and some times reflecting joie de vivre. "A Bird's Eye View' speaks of a bird – an excellent trope and no less expressive of poetic imagination:

Striking against a wall  
 Eyeing its own image  
 Before closing its weary eye. (p.10)

In many poems there is kind soul referred to 'traversing the vast universe'. In 'Agony' the speaker speaks about a child:

What kindly soul were you  
 While traversing  
 This vast Universe  
 Cared to pause a while  
 To be with me?  
 But tell me, child,  
 Is it fair to come late  
 And then early  
 Even as I await my turn? (p.11)

The poet takes a special look at nature. The globe is a spinner extraordinary. Living is on different planes – wakeful and sleeping. The experiences in the two make them doubly rich. On the mountain – the roof top there is another experience

Above, the sprawling sky  
 Below, the pulsating life  
 Around, the freezing cold  
 But here the sun shines bright  
 Very bright and very sharp. (p.13)

'Beauties and Beasts' is about the grassy field below and the racing clouds above, another experience. 'Between To Breaths' is about another duo and philosophically the speaker says:

After all, our entire lives nestle in  
 Between two breaths. (p.16)

The speaker of the poem *Biksham Dehi* is an eternal beggar. While the mendicant calls thrice only in a day, the speaker says:

I owe everything to you  
 Yet incessantly call out  
 'Biksham Dehi, Bilsham Dehi'. (p.17)

Man's life is the theme on 'Broken Bridges'. Woman is man's essential, basic love.

She was a fantasy  
 She created a myth  
 Wove a web of happiness  
 In which he felt  
 Secure, supreme and lorded over  
 But surprisingly she vanished  
 So did the world she created.

... ..



Nothing can mend those broken bridges.  
(p.18)

Women's condition, travails and horrors of ill-treatment are in the poet's mind and she makes the reader think deep. Human life would not be full with a half – with only a man or a woman alone. 'Can you recall?' is a poem in which the speaker is a woman she ask a number of questions and concludes:

However faded the picture be  
It is worth keeping,  
For what is life  
If not a series of frames  
Even if one is missed  
The gap is too obvious  
To ignore. (p.19)

Devotion is the nerve centre in this poet. In fact, in spite of all tribulations, it is devoutness that keeps life and makes life worth - living. This is the outcome of a life mixed with feelings sad, pensive and painful. Man or woman is only an actor obeying the director of the play who determines the roles and incidents. Dreams are also an active ingredient in thought processes. We are asked to dream and dream again and are told that dreams never fade.

What a pity  
That you forgot how to dream  
Bring back the *joie de vivre*  
Live life to the brim  
Come, dream again and again. (*Dream Again*,  
p.24)  
Let there be a chance meeting  
I will pour out all the dreams I lived  
Watching the benign smile  
Once again on your cherubic lips. (*Dreams  
Never Fade*,p.25)

'Encode-Decode' is science sly, secret messaging. The code is of the Almighty. Devotion is knowledge of the codes:

Sure, you send myriad messages in one million  
ways  
Woe is me, I am out f reach  
Or blissfully ignorant  
Yet incessantly waiting,  
Waiting for your call. (p.27)

Many or most of the poems are with the indefinite pronoun: it is left to the reader to piece out the

referent, or the antecedent. In 'Fantasy' the speaker says

Let me turn back and see  
Your radiant face  
And your cherubic lips  
Uttering my name like sweet melody.(p.29)

The beauty is that the 'you' could be a lover or more significantly God.

Bhagyalakshmi uses proverbs, maxims, witticisms and idioms too to put record her poetic imagination. Hobson's Choice is one signifying that there is no alternative and this wisdom

.... ...  
Whatever strengths there are in the world  
Whatever courage the man is blessed with  
Whatever fortitude the divinity has bestowed  
Gathered them all  
To hold your head high  
And face life  
Because it is Hobson's choice  
And remember  
Beggars are not choosers.

God is ever in this poet's mind. Repetition of His name, retelling the same tale again and again is no lapse, does not sully anything. Such is the poem 'Reminscence':

.... ....  
"What a story, what a story!  
You narrated Rama's story  
Oh, Sabari, Sabari, please tell it again." (p.60)  
'Riding a Tiger' is living a life as long as it is allowed.  
Any way, have a ride while it lasts  
Making it as joyful as you can  
But always remember  
You are riding a tiger. (p.63)

Devotion is extreme self-surrender, taking things as they come. This poet's speaker expresses her feelings of anguish, devotion and femininity.

In 'Volcano' several questions were raised:  
Does grief purge one's feeling?  
... ..  
Does it purge, elevate, ennoble?  
Who can answer that howl,  
That heart rending wail?  
... ..  
(It)is as painful as



Facing a bursting volcano  
No, grief does not ennoble  
Nor pain can elevate one's soul. (p 73)

Anguish is thick and pervading. In these words the speaker tells us "you can never be Right':

Always you fall short of something  
There is something lacking

... ..

Only the Almighty knows  
What is right or what is wrong  
But a girl child can never be right  
Always a little below standard  
For ever in need of reprimand

Beseeking approval here and around. (p.79)

Can there be anything more lacerating, painful? This is Bhagyalakshmi's angst. Her poetry demands sharp, acute cerebration.

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