



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

Dr V.V.B. Rama Rao

(ELT Professional, Noida, UP. 201307)



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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. (p.27)

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. (p.31)

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 'Reminiscence':

....
"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.
