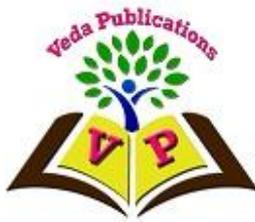




PREVIEW

LOOKING WITHIN AND BEYOND: THE POETRY OF VALUES & WISDOM

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ABSTRACT

A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds.

-P. B. Shelley, *Defence of Poetry*

Prof. V.V.B. RamaRao, a septuagenarian ELT professional, is well-versed not only in ELT and literary criticism, but also is a perceptive poet, who knows how to separate good from bad. *Looking Within and Beyond* is a thoughtful collection of poems pondering over the loss of values and tendering beautiful gems of wisdom to the younger generation of poets and readers alike. The poet has dealt with a variety of themes very skillfully to discern the truth of life in these poems.

Keywords: *Materialism, Ego, Satire, Paradox, Epicurean philosophy, Aristotelian Philosophy, Insensitivity.*

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A study of Rama Rao's thirty-seven short poems evinces his fine creativity and one is enamoured of the values, which presently seem to have been lost in the mire of materialism. The poet sings about the loss of human ethics. The very first poem, 'A Sigh and Relief', is a satire on the political power. The politicians, these days, are mad with power and seem to have lost their ability to judge gold from dross. He, very aptly, argues that "Vice has limits / Death is not the only end": human vices aren't infinite and the most frightening death is not the end of life. Those who fail to learn this truth must know that "Bangs may not sound" but "can be doused". Power and beauty are short lived. One should remember that "Waves that surge retreat too" but life goes on infinitely. "Nothing remains", in the third stanza, and "Nothing stays", in the fourth stanza, remind the reader of Shelley's words: "Nothing beside remains" about king Ozymandias, who attempted to eternalize himself by getting his 92 feet high statue placed on a platform in a temple so that those who come to the temple should bow down to him first. The poet tells that with the passage of time this statue has also fallen prey to the onslaughts of time and is in ruins. So, the contemporary rulers should remember that all power and pelf are transient; if anything remains, it is only virtue and God's will. The arrogant and insensitive politicians also become the victim of time. Past memories are sung in the poem, 'Memory'. Memory to the poet, when old, "flashes for no reason at all" like "A whiff of a thing forgotten long ago / from the distant insignificant past". Old memory sparkles suddenly to the protagonist of the poem and reminds things and persons forgotten long ago. Sometimes, these memories are senseless. In this poem, the protagonist remembers about his youth when he walked, in a fashionable T-shirt with sun-glasses on his eyes, flaunting his ego. Now, he realizes that it was all useless. Memories do stealthily stalk 'Joys of Living', which enumerates what makes old people delighted: looking at grand-children playing before them and showering their affection on them by "Offering candy and frisking [their] hair". A wife requesting her husband to take tea first gives joy to

both of them. At this spectacle, the old couple feels complete and thanks God for this bliss that results from filial company. The poet infers that "Life is for living in joy /with a satisfied feeling of well being". Joyful living with children and grand-children inflates their hearts with family pride. 'My Son My Father' is a paradoxical poem. Though the title of this poem appears illogical, yet the persona in the poem tries to justify it: when he was young and his son—an infant, he used to help him; now, when he has grown old—in his sixties or seventies—his son helps him: He bathed me, fed and helped me dress When badly needed of course. Took care of my hair, took me out for haircut sent me to sleep too, going on cautioning all day. This was a common spectacle in Indian families when children considered it their moral responsibility to look after their parents in their old age. The poem, 'Learning', tells us that learning is an endless process. It continues till one breathes one's last. He feels angry when his son "makes fun" of him, and taunts or sneers him and "mimics too". He does so to beget joy for himself, though it looks childish to the old protagonist. But, after a little while, he realizes that it is learning and "Getting this to know is joy at three score". And when the protagonist becomes conscious to this wisdom, he becomes extremely happy. Geriatric problems, in old age, are not without their humour and joy. One has to take lots of pills to live longer and keep oneself in good health, but "The gas must not give in getting exhausted / with no gas stations nearby"—farting, a perpetual problem with the elderly people brings in universal truth amalgamated with humour. However, the protagonist feels consoled finding his medicines "near the table and bedside". His family members take proper care of him and put all required things within his easy reach. 'On Sobriety and Sensibility' opens with "Sage-seer-saint Vatsayan" and his "sutras" that "were misused and abused, over practiced / Damaging and misusing the objectives of living". Vatsayana is known for his kama sutras—a discourse on techniques of sex. The objective of the great seer was to impart knowledge and not to allow people to over-indulge in the use of their passions. On the other hand, Saint Gautama, Gautama the



Buddha, who “had expectations on humans / that they can be inebriate / holding passions under control” expected people to become intoxicated in their quest for God to mitigate human suffering by keeping their passions under control. The poet has used this paradox to show that humanity, these days, has become slave to passions. There is so much degradation in the values of life that even human procreation is endangered—“come under the witches / Making the fair foul and surely the foul fair”. This allusion reminds the reader of the witches, who are busy to prepare the most poisonous concoction in their cauldron to make their “charm firm and good” (*Macbeth* 5.4) in their effort to murder Macbeth. In the cut-throat competition man is after man. Manu, the law-giver of the Hindus, was never after “fame or power” unlike the present rulers/law-makers. The objective of ancient law “was to lead humans to light and wisdom”. Vatsayana and Buddha, both wanted to make humanity wiser and not waste their energy in useless human endeavours of yielding to sensual gratification. The poet is despaired when he concludes: “Wise counsel not followed, we are doomed to fail and perish.” In the contemporary age men do not want to take good counsel as readily as the bad one which makes the protagonist despaired. And when he comments that “we are doomed to fail and perish” shows his pessimism. Despair and pessimism result from this paradoxical existence of humanity.

In ‘Quizzical Quartet’, body, mind, spirit, and soul, these four tell about themselves. Each one tells about itself in six lines that imparts equal worth to all individually, and also evinces the poet’s impartiality. Body declares that its “needs are urgent, whimsical”. It neither has patience nor tolerates any delay. Its demands must be fulfilled as soon as possible and “Without me [it] nothing gets done, enjoyed or gives peace.” When body is starved and feeble one fails to experience and imagine the things and situations; but, at the same time, it lacks confidence. It resonates between the good and the bad:

Sacred I could be or sinful
Merry or mischievous, candid or
deceitful

Helpful, guiding or misleading
Could be either nice or nasty.

So, the wavering mind cannot be relied upon.

Spirit is neither good nor bad: “Not an elf or a goblin”. Its attributes are: “Valour, vigour and vivacity”—the abstract qualities. Soul reveals that when things are done without its intent, they become uncontrollable. It harvests only the fruits of past karmas. Because “Control is beyond me – mine is only to repay” what has been sown in the past life, as karma, is to be paid in this life. So, these four vital – concrete and abstract – things of human existence exist together in a human being and cannot be severed. One has to learn to use them in right perspective to make life noble and sublime.

Selfishness becomes the core of ‘Old Age Domes’, in its concern for the aged parents vis-à-vis old people who are deserted by their well-to-do children to spend the last days of their life in old age homes. The poet wants to know whether it is a “free fall” or a “paradigm shift” in our ethics. The concept of “old age homes” is a concept derived from the west. “We”, with this idea, “grew clever very fast”—it is what apparently seems! The poet, in reality, denounces this idea. In olden days, children looked after their parents to their best with whatever they possessed and that was our culture. Now the children, living abroad are well off, talk about “Old Age Homes” for their parents and fail to provide them their meager sustenance of filial love. They begin to ask such questions: “I never asked you to bring me here!” and “Why me, the moneyed more are there!” Such things were never dreamed of in our culture. They dole out some currency for their parents to let them live alone. They do it out of compassion: “A meager dole is mercy / Can I be so heartless?” Can this behaviour of the so-called modern generation, in any way, be called kind-hearted? All bonds of filial relations seem to have fallen apart. The “Dome”, in the title, is a portmanteau word derived by joining the two words “dole” and “home”. It also implies the dominance of the occidental value system over the oriental value system. Home is changed, with mercy offering –



“dole” – in the form of a little money into “dome”, where old people wait for the catacomb, their death.

‘Of Lotus Land’, is a juxtaposition of the new and old values as well as the rich and the poor. The poet begins with the example of “Lotophagi”, which reminds the reader of Tennyson’s ‘The Lotus-Eaters’ deriving its theme from Homer’s *Odyssey*—and calls them “not sinful”—pious. The poem is also satirical in tone: “If no crumbs of bread, why not cakes?” The rich are unmindful of the poor: “The haves in indolence stain / The white radiance of the skinny millions”. He reminds the reader that those days are past when “poverty was sung as a gem of virtue”—considered good, because it taught humanity the virtues of life. While making a dig at the gluttonous habit of the rich, the poet refers to epicurean philosophy of the Athenian thinker Epicurus (341-270BC): ‘eat, drink and be merry’—the philosophy emphasizing good as pleasure and bad as pain. Notice the humour in it: “The gluttonous pot-bellied without compunction / Belch aloud and suppress farts.” It not only makes a jibe at the over-eating habit of the rich but also at their manners. The poet ends the poem by alluding to ‘Ulysses’—another poem by Tennyson—and his strict observance of duties: “Decent not to fail in offices of tenderness”. It makes the poem satirical and suggests the dereliction of responsibilities by the present politicians and bureaucrats and adopting a ‘WHY SHOULD I BOTHER’ attitude towards those who look towards them for compassion, which seems to have dried in the hearts of rulers and their machinery.

In ‘Jetlag’, the philosopher poet introduces the concept of lag—the act of slowing down or falling behind—being directly proportional to the length of flight of the airplane to indirectly hint at the contemporary polity and their insensitivity to feel. The word, “Jetlag”, seems to have been derived from the term, DRAG, in dynamics, a branch of Mechanical Physics that gives resistance to motion in a medium – e.g. air, in the case of Jet-flight. The poet uses this to suggest antipathy of the rulers and their machinery toward the common-man. He maintains that “The brain curdled refuses to feel, not to say of any thinking”: the minds of politicians have become

acerbic and lost sympathy for the destitute. Their brains are likely to “be deflated” because of their inhuman and indifferent attitude coupled with their ego. The protagonist calls such an attitude as “Blood curdling and shamelessly painful than the jetlag”. The poet very aptly compares the human indifference to the technical jetlag/drag. Both serve to retard the natural functioning of the mind, machine and society. This will lead to the collapse of human society. He pleads to stop such human impassiveness to save dissolution of social sanity: “Would anything stop a crumbling house of cards!” The poet compares the present societal set-up with house of cards which is bound to fall down with the slightest movement.

Honest living is the motive of ‘Quo Vadis – Where do you go?’. The poet lays stress on avoiding materialistic life. Love for money leads to dishonest life: “Doings go haywire”. In fact, it is written keeping in mind the present politicians who are blindly and shamelessly after accumulating wealth while in power. In such an ambience “Kingdoms crumble” as “bank notes travel in truck loads”: it suggests horse-trading in politics to topple the governments. He is very authentic when he says: “handful of silver corrupts absolutely”; so, he advises modern man to “Bury lucre to earn honest coin” and to choose “the thorny path of virtuous wages”. In other words, the poet is advocating the Aristotelian philosophy of virtue as the mean between the two extremes. From Aristotelian philosophy, the poet moves to the proliferation of temples in ‘Mystery Spots Galore’: Indian deities, gods and goddesses exist in “Every hamlet, village, town, [and] city”. Even “Ma Shakti”, “after She was disembodied” – there is reference to goddess Parvathi’s immolation by jumping into her father’s *Yajnakunda* for not being invited by her father, King Daksha. Thereafter the bereaved Lord Shiva carried her body from place to place on his shoulder. Her body organs, according to the myth, dropped one by one at several places: “Every inch of land, nook and corner of land / Even mountains, rivers and water-tables” that have now become sacrosanct and are worshipped as *Shakti-peethas*. It is the sheer hypocrisy of man that on the one hand, he shows himself as impeccable; but, at the same



time, he commits several “scams, murders, atrocities / Blood-curdling rapes”. See the irony of fate for the fair sex, and satire on the rich, inherent in the following lines: “Surely Shakti from Her numerous *peethas* / Must have been venting Her disgust, anguish and wrath / Leaving children to the mercy of glib-tongued multi-crore *patis*.” This line concatenates it with the fourth line: “Glib tongued *politicos*”, who “buy men”, in the poem, ‘Quo Vadis . . .’, thus, making his poems well-knit, coherent and cogent.

‘Coming of Age’ teaches that years do not make one wise and mature, but mind also grows “slowly” and “Acquisition of *Jnana*”, which is “the goal”, comes with constant contemplation at a stage when “mundane things fade”— man stops worrying about worldly cares and concerns. Enlightenment follows “Slowly, slowly, steadily”. Here, the poet advocates the development of a dispassionate and disinterested attitude in one’s life. The last line is worth notice that *Jnana* (knowledge) is achieved very slowly but steadily. The emphasis on words “slowly” and “steadily” reveals that the acquisition of true knowledge about life, like Buddha’s enlightenment under Bodhi Tree, is slow and continuous process. It can neither be acquired fast, nor by gaps in one’s efforts. This *Jnana* or knowledge is about the divinity, which “is all power and glory”. However, at the same time, the poet is doubtful, if it can be achieved in “this world clumsy / With things, wishes, passions around”. Though the knowledge of the Divinity is very significant, yet meretricious worldly things, human wishes and passions are the lairs in attaining such “power and glory”.

The poet grows solicitous, in ‘Thoughtful’, thinking that vices are destroying human virtues and man expresses his “Inability to restrain / The ever-changing deceitful quagmire”. It is so rampant that “The moves that can never be stopped”. It seems endless and the poet’s awareness that these have gone beyond human control. Man finds himself helpless in this mire. But a thinking mind can’t stop contemplating. The poet alludes to Lord Buddha’s discarding “His bowl” in desperation when he fails to find any remedy to the sufferings of this world. But,

“What can we throw away – even with this weak mind?” remains the rhetorical question that continuously haunts the contemplative psyche of the poet.

The poem, entitled ‘Phonic’, opens with the second half of the twentieth century, when phones were not common and messages were sent through telegraph wires and little children “used to glue ears to telephone poles / . . . listening to the buzz and hum” and felt excited. On the contrary, now phones of different shapes and sizes can be found everywhere and with all kinds of people irrespective of colour, creed, gender and financial position. Verily, they (Mobile phones) are omnipresent from aristocrats to those living in *jhuggi-jhonpadis*— thatched huts.

‘Strategic?!’ is a poem that tells about saleable things: human organs put on sale to earn easy money. When a seller is found, there are “buyers dime a dozen”. The prices vary according to the demand and urgency of the moment. The poet turns satirical: “Hearts are in great need / but not a seller yet”. Heart is an organ on which the life of a person depends and not a saleable commodity. It is its non-stop working that keeps one alive, therefore, it can’t be sold; it also suggests sensitivity of a person. However, there is also demand for this organ, but none wants to sell it. If someone decides to sell heart, “Strategies can be worked out in a jiffy”; buyers will be in scores. The poet feels pity for such a person: “God save the intending seller”. The poet’s dig at this human tendency to make money, by selling even their body organs, becomes apparent.

‘Pessimism?!’ is the sixteenth poem of the collection. It begins with the colonial ambience when common men, “suffering agony, grief and penury”, feared the rulers and felt themselves voiceless before them. With the declaration of independence, these people nourished hopes for “*roti, kapada aur makaan*”—bread, clothes and shelter—the bare minimums of human subsistence. They felt that their days of suffering were over. Something “went wrong and awry”. The new race of rulers/leaders had “ambitions of power and pelf”. They nursed their own relations, while “The hungry looked up with



anguish but are not fed". All ethical values were thrown to the winds in the leaders' love for money and chaos prevails. When faith is lost everything falls apart: "Faith lost nothing is sacrosanct any longer / Sanctums are ransacked". In the turmoil of misrule nothing, and none, is safe. "Hooligans and vandals" become omnipresent and omnipotent. To elaborate this disorder, the poet alludes to W. B. Yeats' poem, 'The Second Coming': "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (line 3) and the poet writes: "Corruption cannot be wiped out by the corrupt", because the leaders are themselves corrupt and the common man continues to think, though vainly, that they will eliminate corruption which is impossible—a utopian concept. They, no longer, believe in the age old values of avoiding wealth and sticking to "the dignity of poverty". Besides, contemporary "politician in power rues in bitter agony: 'How can I win without money?'" in conformity with the economics of winning elections in the pseudo democracies. It shows politicians' love for money and dereliction of their sacrosanct duties and responsibilities for which the poor and ignorant voters have entrusted them with unlimited powers by electing unscrupulous people to rule over them. The endemic irony of fate of the poor masses and the poet's intended satire on the polity send shivers through the reader's spine.

'God's Grandeur' is about the physical handicaps: blindness or deafness. People having these sense organs take pity on such individuals and wonder: 'It's surprising how he get(s) along!' The poet is of the view that such people do not seek compassion or sympathy but "few affectionate greetings / Even the smiles are understood". They provide enough leaven to encourage them: "They are sustenance enough!" These turn out to be "His caring action, His blessing, His glory!" If 'God's Grandeur' is about human affection, 'Success Story' is spun on the theme of diligence and honesty in life: "Fortune favors hard work". The opening two lines allude to the US President, Abraham Lincoln: "Log house to White House", and Indian Prime-minister, Narendra Modi: "Tea-vending to Prime-ministership", respectively. They reached high positions by dint of their hard work, honesty, dedication and desire to

serve people whole heartedly. They, perhaps, believed in the Hindu concept of karma: "*Kaarmanyevaadhikaaraste, maa faleshu kadachana, ...*" (The *Gita*, 2.47). The poet/protagonist is of the view that "There can be no substitute—short cut for success". It comes as reward of past karma at the appropriate time.

The protagonist, in 'Stay Put', thinks that it is almost impossible to stop thinking about one's cares and concerns of life. One cannot be in peace even in sleep: "Even in slumber a whirl gig it is / Action, musing, attempt, plan / Worry, anguish, angst" and wants to know an answer to the rhetorical question: "Can there be a stop – even for a trice?" for the common man. "Peace eludes, silence fades, worry debilitates" and in our attempt to achieve peace of mind "we are helpless". The state of "Sang-froid" needs continuous practice by any practitioner; it is easily preached by the proponents of *Dhyanamudra*, meditative contemplation, and can only be attained by "Sages and seers" who "can stay put with serenity." What is easy for the sages and seers is impractical and impossible for the common man.

The poet, in 'Abhorrence', equates hatred with fire "that blazes, leads even to conflagration". The protagonist exhorts men to stop hating one another. In the endeavour, when one thinks about the cause of hatred, mind/rationality tells that it is useless. It, whether with family members or in society, is always destructive. Therefore, one should give it up before any such commotion begins to disturb. Only peaceful mutual understanding can lead to success. The poet's prescription for it is: "Think deep without passion and cultivate understanding / Your happiness is in your hands". While hatred is vice, understanding is virtue: Men should embrace virtue and stay away from vice to be happy in life.

'Sweet Temper', for the poet, is a thing of mind, heart; and will, habitual nature, emotion, and soul. However, it is not possible to rein in all these. The protagonist advises men: "Never lose temper" and "Win praises/prize for sweet temper". While anger is destructive like fire, cool attitude begets trophies of life. Thus, one should always maintain one's cool: It is the golden rule for success.



In 'Kittening and Penning', the poet beautifully compares two activities: giving birth to kittens by cats and the art of writing. For the poet, "Fertility is a boon to pray for" whether reproduction in animals including human beings or artistic creation. The poet avers that he is not a cat lover; but, once he saw a mother-cat suckling her young ones and wondered: "Did cats ever send up prayers for fecundity?!" as do human beings. In this poem, the poet also contemplates on to the idea of writing a poem, which needs "a spark divine / An inspiration – frenzy too" to bring forth "The radiance of a rapturous thought"—to write/create a beautiful work of art. However, both these creations become identical in "Orgasmic feeling of satiety"—the satisfaction that follows creation. The poet, in 'Poetic Sensibility', says that "A good poem needs relishing – slow and steady" to enjoy it thoroughly. He also likens it to a child's "lozenge to stay long" to feel the "warmth and the fleeing feel of longevity" of the poem. Poetry is such an art that it "needs entrancing sensibility" to comprehend and relish it with patience like the one who "watchest the last oozing hours by hours" in Keats's ode 'To Autumn' (Garrod 218). It is not only writing that gives pleasure to the artist but also the poetic sensibility that tries to comprehend the work of art to enjoy it.

The poet, in 'What is New Now!', tries to find something new amidst the age old "Hunger, greed, passion and power-mongering" that abound in the contemporary world. If one comes across something strange, it is "Man can marry man – things unnatural"—a hint at court's sanction to gay marriages—and modernity is nothing but only "Common sense uncommon". Now, even "Money-spinning and megalomania" have also become old and outdated. Now, when everything is falling apart, if there is something as new, it is "ancient, saintly wisdom". Who can dispute this suggestion? Taking the same thought further, in 'Pristine Wisdom', the poet comes to the realization that "nothing old is great or good / Nothing new or modern". There is nothing debatable in it. "Ancient wisdom has sublime and unique understanding" inherent in it. He thinks that "Discerning wisdom has the capacity to delve

deep into things". For this reason, "Some tales in our scripture-like epics are guidelines for us all". Our epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are full of wisdom that one can learn to make one's life righteous. This poem also talks about the erosion of values in life. It "percolates from places high" and "degenerating moral fabric demands radical action". He is very true in his observation: erosion of values starts from persons placed at higher positions whom the common man emulates. Ideals of "peace, fraternity, equality", the tenets of French Revolution are also the need of the present times, but have become obsolete. In this poem, the poet refers to the basic question that haunts the starving masses: "People need food and work – not assurances and promises". It is the duty of our politicians to provide it to the masses. They seem to have failed; and "polities are in imminent peril", thinks the poet judiciously. In his views, it is necessary "to realize that maintenance must precede governance", but our polity turns a deaf ear to the true and desired reforms in society. So, this poem ends with a pessimistic note, because there is none to "listen and start acting with gumption".

'Summer Scourge' is about the fatal summer that has killed a large number of people around the country. The sun, in the morning itself, appears "Platinum-hued, like molten silver"—very hot. The poet is also aware of the sufferings of the people in Andhra Pradesh, as he himself belongs to that State of Indian union. There the summer is sweltering. The people "without proper roofs over their heads" face acute water shortage. They are "Parched, singed, smouldered ... in the blaze". They number "not in hundreds ... but millions": it shows the amplitude of the natural calamity. Countless people die in this burning heat. Statistics fail to give truth: "Nature's fury never comes right in statistics". The people of Andhra "cry in vain in horrid pain" about the three things: "Mother Nature's displeasure, the sun's valor, or fate". There is none to listen to their wails. In this poem, the poet reflects on the blistering heat wave of 2015 that killed thousands. The people in Andhra are the worst sufferers of this calamity.



The protagonist, in 'In High Dudgeon', sees a cat with a pigeon in its jaws—a situation of imminent death. The spectacle makes him highly philosophic: "Not able to live – it's not possible even to die". Friends no longer "continue to be friends" and he murmurs a song from a famous Hindi film, Sangam: "*Dost dost naa raha pyaar pyaar naa raha*". There is deception everywhere; even filial relations have become ungrateful. It also reminds him about daughters, who turn ingrateful like King Lear's daughters: Regan and Goneril. His mental state is very much similar to Lear's "on the heath". He finds himself incapable to "hold the reins of [his] thought process". Next, he broods over the Hindus' sacred river, the Ganges: "*Raam Teri Ganga Mailee Ho Gayee*" – the title of another Hindi film, because the govt. at centre is making great fuss about cleaning this river to preserve its sanctity, but nothing tangible seems to have been done. He relates this decadence to *maya*, a concept of illusion, and makes several mythical references to different ghats at the bank of Ganga river at Varanasi and flowing of the river down from "the crown of the Supreme Being, Parama Shiva". He is so disgusted with the present times and degeneration of values that he wonderingly questions: "Can filial devotion to motherhood again be resurrected?! / Can legislation cleanse the river to her grandeur natural?!" These seem rhetorical questions and answer to them is in the negative. When people become sacrilegious, nothing can be done to mend the situation unless the people themselves mend themselves. The situation appears to have reached such a pass that it can never be "forgiven by the omnipotent"—the situation is irredeemable and incorrigible. This poem evinces the poet's disgust, at the contemporary social setup full of besmirched human values at their worst.

The poet, in 'Fruition', wails at the infirmities of old age, when one finds it very hard to move out and welcome people. It is unavoidable and makes one helpless. At this age: "Memories throng by myriads, sweet, sour / Sad, pensive, sensitive and sentimental." Love is another human sentiment that gives bliss. But, as the old man thinks of his love of youth, who also has grown "decrepit, with eyes

sunken and hair thin / ... walking with a stick", gets solace to notice that he is not the only sufferer. He safely concludes: "Bliss is a condition of the mind", which can safely be called fruition of human life. The poem, 'For Our Children', teaches the youngsters to learn from their teachers/elders. The poem divulges that there are sixty-four wise methods of teaching and learning. And "Much depends on the learner's aptitude too." He tells the tale of a snake that bit people. It created fear in the minds of people and whenever they sighted a snake, beat it even when it had stopped biting them. It sought the advice of its teacher and explained its position. The teacher told to stop biting but not to hissing and that proved useful for the snake. The snake's hissing frightened one and all and saved it the undeserved beating. Thus, it teaches that "Learners get much by their own intelligence from their teachers!"

The title of the poem, 'Midsummer Day's Dream', seems to have been derived from Shakespeare's comedy, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*. This poem also lashes at the decadence of human values and love for wealth accumulation: "Values are vanishing foul lucre holding sway". Our honourable representatives in legislatures and Parliament have become vain-glorious; and, bureaucrats "in offices are at logger heads" and some invisible fights are going on. Leaders of political parties try hard to win elections: "Brains leading parties are flexing muscles to win". Power gives rise to treachery: political promises are soon forgotten. The voters, "Hungry men, powerless look this way and that" and find it "Difficult to breathe or wake up safe". It is their penury that makes them helpless: they have no shelter to sleep safely at night and be free from the worry of being trampled: "Hundreds of bucks we need to wake us up smiling". It suggests penury, helplessness and corruption.

The poem, 'Look Within', which imparts half the title to the book and seems to be woven on Kabir's couplet: "Bura bura sabko kahain, bura na dikhey koi; / Jo dil khojo aapna mujh sa bura naa koi" (Karki 124). Likewise the protagonist realizes that "Passions and vile abuse make me a beast many a time", but to become good is very difficult: "It



needs a thousand births to become saintly / That too only with His grace!" Instead of blaming the world, one needs introspection for one's true evaluation. And 'Looking Below', the hundredth poem in the collection, is about car washers, who come early in the morning to wash the cars of the rich Sahibs. Nobody cares for them: "I never saw any one giving the fellow a look." They work talking to each other, though quite apart. The poet writes, looking at them: "Car washers working far from one another talk jokingly" among themselves. But the philosopher, in the poet, wants to know: "When can they be equal socially?" They, the car washers in the poem and workers/labourers in general, always look for parity: "The hungry eyes wait for a glance to flash!" from their Sahibs. It is not the job that one does, but the thinking that makes one wicked and low.

The book provides a good read for those who are alarmed at the decline of human ethics and boundless craze for materialism at the cost of human lives. The poet has used his keen scalpel satirically to pierce the sensitivity of the insensitive politicians who rule and have the moral as well as constitutional responsibility to ameliorate the condition of the suffering populace in the country, in particular, and in the world, at large. It is often said that wisdom comes with age. The poems also have good pearls of wisdom for the younger generation to learn; if, and only if, they want to usher into a country "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high" (Tagore 20). Of course, these poems are the pouring of a mature mind that has learnt so many lessons from age and experience, and now wants to advise and guide the generations to follow. It has been very pertinently said: "the price of wisdom is above rubies" (*Old Testament*, Job, xxviii, 18), and "Wisdom is of the soul ... is its own proof" (Walt Whitman, *Song of the Open Road*). However the greatest question is: Is our polity ready to accept it? The book has material worth several research articles besides jolting the sensibility of our insensitive people at the helm of affairs. The book exemplifies the truth that age can cripple body, not mind.

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