

The Second Genesis

An Anthology of
Contemporary World Poetry



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Patron : Satish Verma

Editor & Compiler : Anuraag Sharma (President, ARAWLII)

Associate Editor & Project Manger : Moizur Rehman Khan (Secretary, ARAWLII)

Assistant Project Manager : Anumeha Bagri

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It is wisdom to believe the heart.

- George Santayana

Unfazed you stand in-
A drizzle, to locate the
Moon nestling in clouds.

The speed of bite was fatal
Showing the movement
Of incompleteness.

I searched the identity-
Of one anonymous, who
Had fathered an illegitimate eunuch.

I wanted to make a Confession, looking at the
Blue sky, about my waywardness.

The crazy thing of mixing
The flowers, winds, and birds
With serious chores of life.

Unmistakingly a poem.

- Satish Verma

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For
Shibu
(The fluffy black gossamer, all glossy
floating, wagging its tail in the street
how soon his race was run...)

The Second Genesis

Preface

Many years ago, I taught my little daughter one of the Chinese short stories prescribed in her school course. Unfortunately I fail to recollect the title and the author's name of that particular story. However, at the back of my memory wall, there flickers a dusty cobweb and a dim reminiscence of the story. It was something about a painter who made a landscape and made it so dexterously that before the emperor who had commissioned it, the painter himself entered in it and disappeared along with the painting itself.

Something similar happens during poetic composition. If taken metaphorically or symbolically, the commissioning self, the creator and the creation are oned in a synthetic and spiritual whole. And then and thereafter the readers are invited to follow the course and enjoy the bliss. In order to cover and hide, the poet reveals more. The painter in the Chinese story hides himself not behind the canvas but in the landscape itself and by doing so reveals and paves the way for the emperor and onlookers as well. Art is to hide art – but it is more to reveal heart as well. And the little 'more' it reveals is just like a revelation – like the one which Buddha had had under the Bodhi tree – which had come to him through evolution, plus grace. Grace is bestowed only upon the one who has lived through intense experience and gained in wisdom. And it was George Santayana who said – “It is wisdom to believe the heart.”

The heart, biologically a pumping station, has – so I've repeatedly been telling my students – basically nothing to do with what poets and creative writers from Wordsworth in the main to the recent practitioners of poetry have called – feelings. But then, any intense experience certainly does tell upon the rise and sinking of blood which ultimately affects our palpitations. Something similar happens in love and under intoxications as well. And not far from this is the Sufian experience of *Samah* which ultimately leads to some revelation/realisation of the spiritual sort.

Poetry when wedded with spirituality gains in profundity and becomes celebratory. And celebration is just a performance of the total being. It is in such performance that balance and imbalance are blurred to the extent of coming into one harmony; all paradoxes are oned, all juxtapositions co-exist, all existences are non-existent, all non-existences collectively inhale and exhale unanimously.

The Second Genesis is a collective voice of celebration of creativity and poetry performed in every nook and corner of the world. It is the playing of an orchestra which has innumerable instruments and sounds as different from one another as a murmuring musical silver disc's is from its original shadow in the dark sky. And yet they are all performances – performances of beings enthralled and drowsed at the same time by the fumes of creativity. Most of the poems collected and selected in the present anthology exemplify this celebratory mode. Moods – which is what poems differently are in Yeatsian terminology – differ however. But the mode remains the same.

A few years ago, I wrote a foreword to the *Songs of Debauchery* by Satish Verma – wherein I referred to the *Mahabharata* – having the Song Celestial in the midst of the Great War. And just as the Song Celestial is so aptly a part of the violent combat between the *Kauravas* and the *Pandvas*, in the same way the songs during the debacle of the present civilization are justified.

Similarly *The Second Genesis* too, has its justifications – what though, during the process of inviting contributions from the poets from all over the world I did receive a few responses in a way objecting to the very title of the proposed anthology. I tried to satisfy their queries but in one instance I failed totally. One such writer – Hadasaah Haskale – wrote to me: “Thank you for your invitation to submit poems to the Second Genesis. A puzzling title. I know about Yeats's poem ‘The Second Coming’ but genesis and creation being what they are, original and forever present, always happening unsecondable (as I see it) -- what can the title signify?” To which I had to explain that: “Yes, the title sounds puzzling. But then...it entirely depends on where you begin and where you end. And a beginning is that which has nothing before it. But is there anything which has a beginning and nothing before it-- perhaps *neti...neti...neti* -- a NOT is placenta-*ed* to a mothering YES, each nothing is sac-*ed* in thingness and each never is 80% evered. The Buddhistic Interdependence exists even for a ‘yes’ and ‘no’. A NO presupposes a Yes and a Yes is an appendix to a No. It is Second Genesis, therefore...”

But Hadasaah Haskale remained dissatisfied and disappointed till the end – and I in all admittance and despite my best intent could not succeed in having her poems for the volume. Her objection to the empirical fact – that a genesis after all is a genesis and cannot therefore be either a first or second – or the tenth or the hundredth for that matter – seems to have its own logic. But then, poetry, too, has its own logic and follows its own logistics unconcerned and beyond the tangible, so-called intelligible matter-of-fact reality. Art is like reality and yet unlike it – and the very unlikeliness tends to lift it to the level of truth where it seems to join sublimity and spirituality. Not the one of the kind Moses had had or Prophet Mohammad had had – but the one Rabia or Lal Deh or Kabir had experienced. Such a spirituality is just a rung down the one where religious prophets had reached and therefore it is closer to man as man with limits of imagination and bounds of intelligence. It is here – at this juncture that it becomes celebratory for celebration occurs not when one has reached the pinnacle but when one is just about to reach the summit – *Yeh Khalish kahan se hoti jo jigar ke paar hota....*¹

Here I recall my reading of John Drinkwater's introduction to Tagore's translations of Kabir's poems wherein Drinkwater succinctly explains the mystic experiences of the glorious moment of the union (or communion) of the human soul with the universal being. He points out that the human soul is keen to have the communion with the universal soul but does not intend to lose itself and experience a total loss of its identity. Could that be possible – to be oned with and yet be one in oneself? Either you have the cake or you eat it!

1. What sweet stinging be there if the arrow had past rent the heart!

But such rhetorics exist only for those inhaling the air of *Eehloka*. Just beyond and a little above falls the border land of poetry and creativity where all improbabilities are possible and all possibilities sound improbable! I once wrote:

Nazar Chilman, Tassawwur Perahan, Jaama Daanai
*Haqeeqat hai haqeeqat se pare – kab iski tai paai*²

Yes, the Truth *Ultima* recedes farther and farther, the more we near it. The truth itself is a mirage and seems to play hide and seek with the human soul. We walk, we move, we go up and reach nowhere.

Truth lies in that nowhere sphere. To quote K. D. Khan:

Teri chaah me itne hum door nikle
*Ke peeche kayi kos Mansoor nikle*³

And only a poet is consciously or unconsciously aware of and awake to such limitations and only-to-this-extent attainments. When he is consciously aware of it, his poetry tends to dwell in and become a craft and when unconscious awareness befalls him – it becomes celebratory. He becomes a *Deewana* – and sings:

*Ya to deewana hanse ya wo jise tu taufeeq de*⁴

But *taufeeq* (Grace) is bestowed only upon the one who truly deserves it and the one who is the *bona fide* recipient of this grace is the one who has apparently passed through the ordeals of gradual loss of the self and yet has not totally lost it. Passing through is as important as going across. The front foot is fallen into the beyond-land and the rear one has just been lifted from the *Eehloka* and still carries the dust thereof under its sole.

It was in one of my articles written during the late Nineties of the last Century on Brecht that I termed the then times as the Hamlet century of the Christian Era: “To be or not to be – that is the question...” and the *fin de siècle* of the last Century seemed to breathe this sort of the questioning air. The century paused on the crossroads of this or that, between an either and an or, between an ‘is’ and ‘a would-be’ and silently slipped (amidst the din of cheers welcoming the new Century though!) into 2001. A noisy night awoke into a calm dawn... and the serpent of time began to move on its scales. The Hamlet century soon gave way to the Lear-era – we all are in. Like *Lear*, it is an epical era and like *Lear*, again (so said Lamb, perhaps) cannot be staged or staged properly. Not a violent world, but a volatile one, it seems to have its own predictable catastrophes and breathes the silence – one before the storm when Lear under the force of love and truth would be out of wits, go mad and cry.... *Oh, never, never, never, never, never...* The realization is maddening and the revelation seems to culminate in a Learean *neti, neti, neti...*

2. Sight – a veil, imagination – a garb and just a drapery – intelligence all
Truth lies beyond and beyond still, past all gauge and scales all.

3. I've come this far, Thee to find

That Mansoor is left miles and miles behind.

4. Either laugheth the one lost in love or he who hath Thy grace...

It is a world wherein violence plays counterfeit, culture is dubious, nature all fishy. There is agony all around and no hope of its transcendence.... The man at Martin Place, in Murray's 'An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow', weeps, weeps and weeps. His weeping is not only ignored – for that was what used to be there in the last Century – but taken for granted and accepted as a run-of-the-mill sort with no potential to go beyond itself. This is Lear Century. Lear is mad. Dead is Cordelia. And the Fool nowhere to be found. The globe is flattened to the Heath and the winds howl but are heard like a whimper "... this is the way the world ends... this is the way..." the literary Tiresias of the gone-by century had foreseen it. In 'Nineteen Hundred Nineteen', Yeats, too, had his premonitions when he added just one more symptom – the birth of a destructive beauty – to the three more – fanaticism, violence and destruction of traditional art and culture, so well pre-postulated by Aurobindo in 1905, as indicating the collapse of a civilization. We seem to have reached the verge of a zero culture where the cyphering of values and time-tested and time-sustained traditions is being taken for granted and being accepted as a natural course of the completion of a cycle or a circle. But a circle ends where it begins. The show must go on and on it goes. Beyond the Lear Century, across the 21st Century lies the island of Prospero and Ariel and Miranda and Ferdinand – the region of faith, hope and innocence, the land of virtue, and all forgiveness sans grievances, sans regrets, sans curses. The doleful shades lead to the pastures new....

The Second Genesis is at hand – what though this at-hand-distance looks too wide and too far-off. The poet's ken can foresee it and therefore Wole Soyinka writes:

There is a breathless moment when the world
Lies deep in sleep, when nothing stirs,
When the great waves are still, the Trade Winds
Drop, a pause, where all is silent, even
As in earth's pre-natal dawn...

The anthology may have its archetype in Noah's Arc – a mythical blueprint for another genesis or not to go that far, it may resemble Murray's *Common Dish* which is all containing and none-excluding. I personally wish it grows like a literary *Kalpa Vriksha* fulfilling the dreams and expectations of one and all. Like the *Akshayapatra*, ever-lending and never ending, of Panchali in the *Mahabharata*, the Anthology, hopefully, will cater to the tastes and demands of the readers in every clime and of any culture.

The poets included herein do come from lands as different from one another in cultural ethos as Japan and China on the one hand and Turkey and Bulgaria on the other. Despite our best intent and best efforts to cover almost each and every country, giving enough space to the poets from all over the world, we could receive contributions only from creative writers from nearly sixty countries or so. The fact, that some of the important countries are still left out, along with the already warm responses of those who could so kindly join us in our ambitious venture – does give us strength and impetus enough to consider bringing out a sequel to the present volume in the near future and/or to make *The Second Genesis* a regular feature of the ARAWLII, if possible.

II

Anthologies are usually brought out with a purpose to canonise literature in the main. They may also aim at giving a common platform to poets and creative writers to share their creativity and experiences with the community of readers. Still some of them may focus on some particular theme and may accordingly contain poems addressing it.

The *Second Genesis* is different and unique – so the compilers hopefully feel – in the sense that it does not either claim to have achieved or consciously attempted at realizing, any of the above ideals, in fact. Here I recall a few of my exchanges of letters with Anatoly whose poems are included in the present volume. When asked about the specific theme the selectors/editors wished the poems to address, I had to reply:

Dear Anatoly,

Many thanks for your kind and prompt response.... As the title suggests the anthology intends to focus on creativity at its best in the form of poetry. The thematic concern may vary as per the choice and the mood of the poet. This said, however, I personally feel that any written canonical document must be as graceful as grace itself....

In a sense, if taken at its face-value on the basis of the above lines, I may easily be blamed of making a naïve and novice endeavour to think of bringing out the present volume without any specific aim or objective in mind. Yes, I do confess in all humility and yet obstinate shamelessness that at this juncture I, in fact, have not had anything particular in mind. But then, to have nothing in particular does not mean to have nothing at all.

A birth is, in fact, most usually accidental. If it is planned, it is more of a cloning in. And so has been the idea of and the circumstances in which the present anthology was proposed. And then –

*Main akela hi chala tha janib-e-manzil magar
Log sath aate gaye aur caravan banta gaya....⁵*

And *The Second Genesis* is just a *caravan* of literary creativity itself being performed in every nook and corner of the world. During the course of receiving contributions for the proposed volume I have had moments which were overwhelming, enthralling and in a few instances depressing also. Some of the poems did tingle my nerves, went straight into my being and for hours and days I played the *raas* with the poetic words and lines e-mailed to me. If I am asked a common question as to why I selected some particular poem, leaving out some others, well my common answer may perhaps be that I selected the one because I had rejected the other one. As said already, as a reader and student of poetry and also as an editor of the present volume I should not have any clear cut, well-written objective in my mind to look out for any specific theme in a piece of poetry. Pre-concerns, be they what they are, do mar the impending 'surprise' – the glorious moment one waits and waits forever. And a tickling

5. Alone did I set out for the destination far off
Others came along and joined in to form a caravan thereof.

poem is one that comes as a surprise and pierces within. A surprise and a never ending wait for it have been, in all idiotic humbleness may I say, the only *sine qua non* behind the selection and compilation of the present anthology. It is just like the innocent waiting of a poor child who craves for a candy and waits for a festival to be held in his slum-dwellings, for months and months and suddenly the appointed day comes and there comes also an e-mail containing some poetic candy for the poor boy. The compiler, perhaps.

At the outset of the present century, when the world is torn between a fast dying 'was' and a mewing 'is', and man is being shorn of 'manness', when what once used to be considered evil ways, are accepted as signs of greatness, when we fight not like weasels in a hole, but like curs on streets for a loaf of some rotten leftover, when insensitivity is the order of the day and sort of Yugadharma, and merit is butchered at the altar of jealousy and cut-throat competition, when we are the Beckettian 'lost ones' moving up and down a glass cylinder – when – *yada ,yada hi dharmasaya galanir bhavti bhartah...* then the ray of hope in the corpuscles of *The Second Genesis* remains an anchoring force and soul-sustaining and sole saving device. Was it not Matthew Arnold who ever wished poetry to replace religion? And the time is more conducive and befitting to have his wish come true than ever before. The growth of science and technology at the cost of humanities – or literature in general and poetry in particular – has been responsible for the corrupt society we have come to belong to. The world indeed is too much with us, vitiating the soul and spirit of man – reducing man to a biological unit and the whole generation a herd of off-springs, one living more by instincts and less by inner impulse. In the midst of this agony and angst, it needs a poet not only to feel but to voice the pain and the pangs thereof. He alone can bring us the holy giddings and point to the rising star and set out on a journey of the Magi.
And *The Second Genesis*, therefore.

Ajmer
Holi, 2014

(Anuraag)

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A.R.A.W.LII. – A Vision

A.R.A.W.LII. (Academy of 'raitə(s) And World Literati) has long been working to promote literature and creative writing and to strengthen cultural ties between India and other countries. Our Advisory and Editorial Boards have eminent poets and writers from all over the world.

We have been regularly and religiously publishing our biannual journal *Prosopisia* - the first ever journal from this part of the globe, devoted to poetry and creative writing. Since its inception, every issue of *Prosopisia* has been a fascinating confluence of *littérateurs* from all over the world, including major voices and budding poets as well. Through this journal, we have been rigorously working to realize our aim of interpretation, publication and propagation of creational literature being written in the various parts of the globe and to help maintain the acceptable standards of creative writing as prevalent among the contemporary writers of the world.

Apart from this, A.R.A.W.LII. has to its credit a number of volumes of poetry, plays, journals, newsletters, critical studies, edited volume of critical essays and monographs. We have also been consistently organizing Literary Conferences, Book Launch Events and Poetry readings.

The present volume is a modest attempt at bringing together, on a single platform, creative writers of around sixty countries. A.R.A.W.LII. proposes to make this grand celebration of poetry and creativity a regular biennial feature. This beside, in near future the Academy intends to introduce writer-in-residence fellowships for creative writers and poets of other countries.

The Academy also proposes to hold ALF (Ajmer Literary Festival), which will provide a common platform for a literary get together of poets and writers. It is no coincidence that the name 'ALF' echoes the sounds of Arabic '*Alif*', Hebrew '*Aleph*' and Greek '*Alpha*', all three in turn being derived from the Phoenician 'aleph and all of these roughly meaning 'to begin' or 'to be acquainted with'. In the Hebrew *Sēpher Yəšîrāh* ("Book of Formation" or "Book of Creation") the letter 'aleph' is said to be the king over breath, to have formed air in the universe, temperate in the year, and the chest in the soul. Aleph also begins the three words that make up God's mystical name in Exodus, I Am who I Am (*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*, אהיה אשר אהיה). In Jewish mysticism it represents the oneness of God. And in Jorge Luis Borges' short story, 'the Aleph' is a point in space that contains all other points. Anyone who gazes into it can see everything in the universe from every angle simultaneously, without distortion, overlapping or confusion.

In a world where social networking has become almost a religion, the Academy's intent to bring together innumerable diverse voices and colours of different cultures and *mushk-e-ghubaar* of different lands on a single literary forum is almost a sectarian zeal with which the sky of the contemporary literarydom is to be scaled and the seas of common suffering of mankind to be fathomed.

(Moizur Rehman Khan)

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