

BOOK REVIEW

Multiple Levels of Living: Sanjula Sharma's *A Fistful of Sky*

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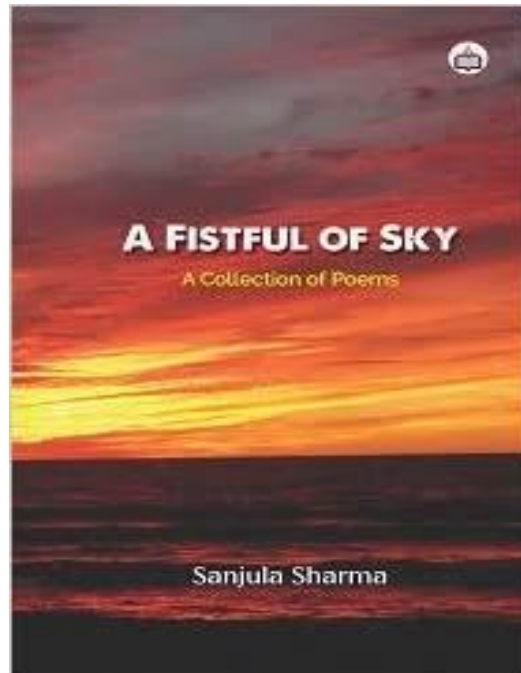
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***A Fistful of Sky: A Collection of Poems.* Sanjula Sharma. New Delhi: Author's Press. 2020. Pp. 112. Rs. 295. ISBN 978-93-89110-78-4**

A Fistful of Sky: A Collection of Poems by Sanjula Sharma consists mostly of poems that are philosophical in nature and deal with abstractions. The poems deal with both the mundane and the profound, the ephemeral and the timeless, crafted in various molds or genres. The title refers to the fact that we can only hold a part of the universal consciousness, and finally that too merges back into the beyond. The vivid but minimalistic cover image with its myriad of sunset/sunrise shades, but absence of concrete shapes/structures aptly captures the spirit of this multi-genre collection, viz. haiku, sonnets, quatrains, free verse and rhyme. The poems of Sanjula Sharma, a distinguished poet, writer and journalist based in Delhi, hold a unique, natural attraction for audiences, old and new. While her formative years spent in Darjeeling, for both her schooling and graduation, gently seep into her writing, the cityscape which became her *karmabhoomi* also finds a presence in her poetic oeuvre. Armed with a Master's degree in English Literature from Jadavpur University, Sanjula has been associated with several newspapers, and her 'Happy Minds' creative writing workshop for children caters to her innate poetic spirit. This is her sixth collection of poems.

In her poem 'This Moment too will Pass', Sanjula talks about the ephemeral nature of life, and how it is necessary to recognize it as such, without unduly fretting over things:

'It is only transient
This fleeting minute
Just one little stroke
In life's vast canvas
Then why fret so?'

In a similar themed quatrain titled "Seize the Hour" Sanjula highlights the death of yesterday, and the mysterious nature of tomorrow, while reiterating that "...Boundless joy is never here to stay." The simplicity of language is effortlessly married to the form and emotion, striking an instant chord with the reader.

In another well-crafted poem titled "My Own Earth", Sanjula speaks to herself, in a self-reflexive tone, ruminating on the path from humble beginnings at home leading eventually to a legacy.

'I try not to write sad poetry anymore.
For the moon beckons me
And the strong beams of sunshine
Spill onto my own earth
That little space, my hearth
The inner soil, my home
To make it all my very own
Till such time it becomes a legacy.
And then there is no story
Just timeless poetry.'

Images cluster thick and fast as she talks in 'A Tiny Bit of Bengal' about paddy fields, banyan trees and wooden boats on the Hooghly. She talks about Tangail silks and Baluchari weaves on Chowringhee streets too, a clear indication of Sanjula's vibrant power of representation, and acute sense of observation as well as association, an unmistakable hallmark of a sensitive poet.

The poem 'Nirbhaya' is a powerful evocation of the death of a brave heart. She says:

'A fire has been lit
And slowly the flames of rebellion
Ignite the mindset of a woman wronged.'

There are several love poems in the book too. Sanjula writes,

'Come, sit by me
Pass me that Vikram Seth and my coffee.
Don't go. Savour the evening light
Reach out to a dying fire...'

The economy of words, the directness of the demands/ requests, an overarching sense of *carpe diem*, and a lingering poignancy add to the beauty of the poem. Sanjula's sincerity and depth of emotion touch the heart. On the other hand, a poem like "Beloved" meanders through the terrain of love, through its ups and downs. The narrator travels through different love locations as it were, from "It's easy to walk away/ Now that I know/ You are truly mine...", to "...Come back, beloved!/ You cry... and I must comply..."

The poems in the volume have been classified into four sections viz. 'Sparing Words' (containing Haiku and short poems), 'On the Wings of Poesy', 'Love Deciphered' (containing (Quatrains, sonnets etc.) and 'A Tangled Web'. The poems are rich with metaphors and connotations and allusions. The diction is modern and the setting in time and place varies. The poems of this volume truly represent multiple levels of living, inhabiting spaces of multiple meanings and experiences. Her carefully and tastefully curated poetry page on photo sharing social media site Instagram, with the handle @lostinverse is also a treasure-trove of images, both visual, and in verse. The volume deserves a read for its sheer variety and sincerity of thought, with poems encompassing a sky-like wide canvas, and its appeal to connoisseurs of poetry across age groups.

BIO- NOTE

Rachna Joshi has an M.A. in Creative Writing from Syracuse University in New York. She has worked for the Dandelion Magazine Society in Calgary, Canada, and has taught English through the Calgary Catholic School Board. She has published four books of poetry: *Configurations* (Rupa & Co., 1993); *Crossing the Vaitarani* (Writer's Workshop, 2008); *Travel Tapestry* (Yatra Books, 2013), and *Monsoon and Other Poems* (Tethys, 2020). She has been working as Senior Assistant Editor at the India International Centre for the past two decades.

Kalyanee Rajan teaches English Literature and Language at Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi, India. She is a bilingual poet and a women's writing researcher.