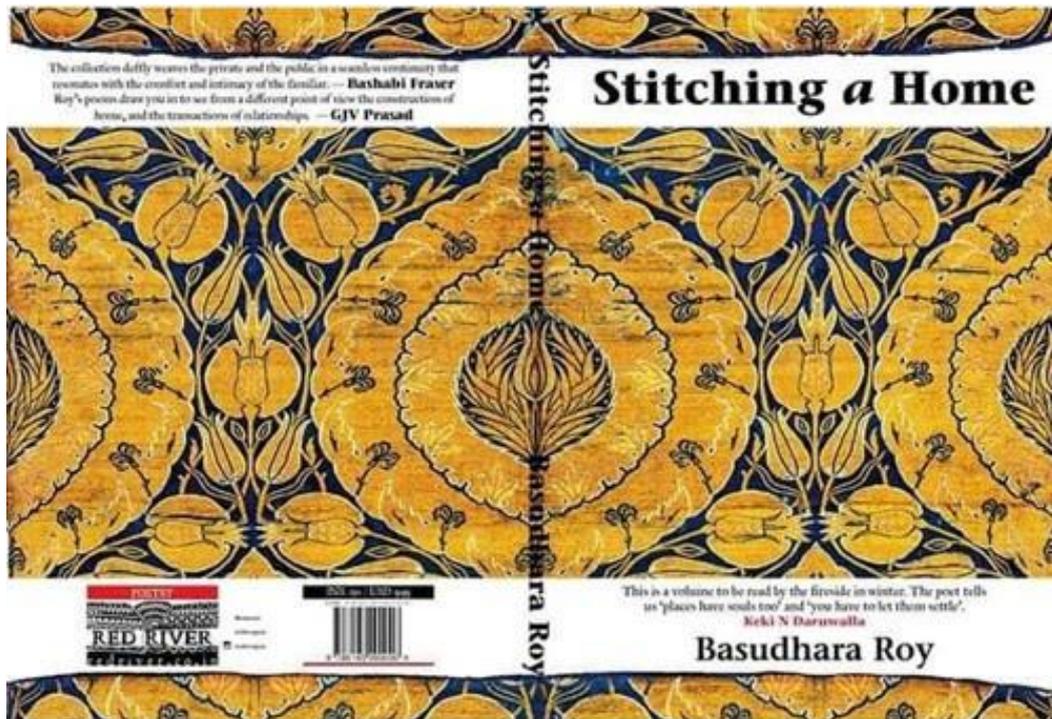


BOOK REVIEW

“...Home is not arrival”: Basudhara Roy’s *Stitching a Home*

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Stitching a Home

Basudhara Roy

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Stitching a Home is a noteworthy second collection of 53 poems by Basudhara Roy. In this slim but cogent volume, poems pulsate with aching nostalgia of places with “souls” and reflect upon a wistful rendezvous with relationships, in flux, follies, and wisdom.

The mustard yellow floral motifs (embedded in the dark blue base) on the cover not only render the book a pleasurable body to hold in hand but also offer a suggestive preview to the intensity of the verses tucked inside.

Organized in three sections as “I Sift the city”, “I ‘d Still Keep It” and “It Takes Time”, the collection begins with “odes to past” with infectious reminiscences of “...a heart once younger...” (“Banaras I’ *Stitching a Home* 15) Past places enliven memories of “encounters forgotten”, “love unconfessed”, “loss unaccounted.” The poem ‘Topophilia’ outlines how places grow root, and roost, in self:

...

A surface, crack, bolt, switch
can be stubborn, hostile till you summon
empathy to touch, and their frayed longings,

...

braille-like on fingertips.... (19)

There is an inflowing interaction and negotiation between memories and places in the lingo of lodging and habitation. Such exchanges continue in the second section of the book while poems such as ‘Hunting for my Poem’ and ‘Uncritiqued’ gauge the poetic process. An additional streak of feisty reproval of patriarchy can be observed in ‘The Right Kind of Woman’ and ‘Comings’. ‘Off / Duty’ and ‘Un/Dolling Your House’, in the third section, too, serve as reflectors to the hideousness of patriarchy:

When you want me, call and I will
appear, expressions tidied, smile
well-placed, voice washed clean

of reproach. You will, mollified,
find in me all you have ever desired—

contentment, gaiety, sacrifice,

love without hope of receipt, (*‘Un/Dolling Your House’* 67)

The poem calls out the patricentric insolence to womenfolk with a murmur of irony in the manner of Kamala Das’s *‘The Looking Glass’*. Several poems seem to be powerful declarations to “break free of tradition” be “unwalled by home” and “step out” in a way that “no conches can ever call us back.” (*‘Off /Duty’* 64)

Roy’s imagery portraying female desire reminds one of Kamala Das too. Consider; “...perpetual dampness that sweats / between its roots like musk, like the clandestine love-rush in dreams.” (*‘Secrets’* 22) “love-parched skin (*‘Keeping Faith’* 56).

Nonetheless, Basudhara Roy’s “own” capital of metaphors organically germinate round her distinct voice. Be it a moment of personal association, retribution, waiting, renunciation, or healing, Roy paints it vividly with the metaphors gleaned from the recesses of “home”— her muse, and her “two inches of ivory” that carries imprints of all human clusters and connections.

In the poem *‘Home Truths’* the titular metaphor “home” is defined with a scintillating array of epigrams. Home is both freedom and bondage, residing as much in the memory of an “old city” as in the movement on the *‘City Street in Rain’*(23) or in the vastness of “continents”:

Across continents, we hand our days
and nights to each other.

Your coverlet of night becomes mine

....

My sun, meanwhile, / makes steady way / to your day... (*‘For a Friend in a Distant Land’* 28)

Home is a touchstone to a self that “was broken” and is “still not whole”:

...I have learned to keep
my pieces to myself and routinely
shuffle this makeshift frame
of life as I go about making

sense of the world... ('Meeting by Chance' 30)

Home becomes a vantage point to understand and express the self and the world through the "braille" ("Topophilia' 19) of nostalgia, memory, and relationships, so much so that one wonders if the collection could also be called "stitching a self."

Basudhara Roy's meditative, and piercing imagination thrives on sensory metaphors that traverse the "...grooved / meanings" (38) and "dig into inferences". A city street washed in rain appears as "a contented snake / in the rain's embrace", a "Bejewelled mistress", "newly blossomed into womanhood". Likewise, the condition of "Gestational Diabetes Mellitus" is personified as craving in the lines:

...sweets like sin,
this mate of a tongue, like a pious widow
burning, craving orgasm. (41)

Or

...these chores
stand tall like lighthouses ('Chores' 61)

Many poems in the collection seem to celebrate love and hope in a solid, positive, but a non-preachy way. Consider the verse below where the persona insists on siding with "love":

Love is no place one arrives at.
Only a light one can be part of, (37)

And;

 ...You must
be grateful if corridors usher you along,
if windows freely give way to light and air,
if shadows protect you from the excesses of truth, ('Topophilia' 19)

Roy’s style is lyrical, conversational, straightforward and yet, strangely restrained. It is ironic, but mildly so. “Sentimentality” and “romantic claptrap” are not wiped clean off her verses, rather, buttressed with impersonalized reflective depth and stylistic subtlety. The power of her verses come from an honesty that is clear, but not loud. Her diction and idiom bear marks of individual perception of a woman straddling multiple personal and professional roles, and accomplishments of associations, simple expressions, personification, and elucidation:

We grow up taking
too many things for granted—
hems, shores, rivers, knots
words, locks, walls. (‘Granted’ 69)

Some among many of my favorite poems in *Stitching a Home* are:

...I want
to darn, weave, knit, embroider

into you all my waiting. But you
have long given up adornments
to become a saint. (‘Renunciation’ 51)

...I won’t
hang upon you

stockings of self like
some belated Christmas tree.
I will merely speak
of the weather... (‘Meeting by Chance’ 30)

Lastly, Roy’s poems are rich in “poetic value.” Though the collective anguish of womenfolk against male centered social norms could be termed as an “ulterior value” of her poems – they are essentially personal and passionate. The verses in the volume capture tender and earnest journeys into the interior of a woman’s self; as a person, professional, lover, mother, wife and a

denizen of the world. They quietly call for your attention and leave you with an unabashed reckoning of your heart full of thoughts and impulses. They make you feel wealthier.

...I tessellate thoughts
into neat stanzas, hang them
like chimes on windows you come to greet.
Your world swings
(‘For a Friend in a Distant Land’ 28)

BIO- NOTE

Dr. Jindagi Kumari is Assistant Professor at Maharaja Surajmal Institute of Technology, New Delhi (affiliated to Guru Govind Singh Indraprastha University) where she has been teaching English Language and Communication Skills for the last 6 years. She also taught, temporarily, at National Institute of Technology, Jamshedpur, and Sri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi University. She completed her PhD on Indian English Poetry from ISM-IIT Dhanbad. The areas of her research interest are Indian English Literature, Post-colonial Studies, and English Language Teaching, among others. She has published short stories and poems in Journals such as *Muse India*, *Setu* and *Kitaab*, *The Bombay Review*, and *Teesta Review*.