

# IMPRESSION ON SARIKA MUKESH ‘S ‘SHABDON KE PUL’

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The longest distance can be bridged by the shortest words. Sarika Mukesh’s publication *Shabdon ke Pul* (‘Bridges of Words’) 2014 did just this. Although I have not had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Sarika Mukesh personally, her books, sent so thoughtfully to me dissolve the distance of the thousands of miles that separate Vellore in Tamil Nadu from Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, and bring me almost face to face with her. This is what all good literature must do-narrow the distance between the creator and the reader, especially when the collection is titled *Shabdon ke Pul*.

I was charmed by the title and began to turn the pages musing one after the other on the more than eighty ‘moment’s monuments’ that it consisted of. It is with joy that I read of the healing power of poetry in the appended prefatory note wherein the author narrates the healing impact of her verse on an ailing near one. Let us hope that despite the cacophonous materialistic noises all around, poetry like all aesthetic pursuits shall continue to provide embalming music to weary souls. On this one hope the charm of good poetry can sustain itself despite assaults from so many directions.

In this brief write up I would like to randomly sum up my reflections on some selected poems from the volume:

- The collection opens with a poem on Shri Krishna with a sequel following it on the Radha Krishna myth. Following this there are short pieces to charm a Krishna devotee including one wherein the poet narrates an imaginary conversation with the mythical flute player raising rhetorical questions that delight.
- There are captivating images of dawn and dusk presented before the mind’s eye in delightful shades with the poem on dawn ending with a Shellyian optimism spilling over also in the next poem ‘Asha-Pratyasha’. What a solace it is to read that the whole sky lies in our palm’s reach. An image of the sun mirroring the day deserves mention as does the striking nature image of moon and stars hanging on a rope in the sky.
- ‘Sandhya Ke Waqt’ and ‘Haseen Shaam’ in a sequence are two beautiful illustrations of sunset and the human activities that accompany and follow it. With deft strokes the hungers of love are only hinted at with a great deal more left to the imagination.
- In ‘Tumhari Yaad’ memory is concretised through images of lotus, pearls and sandal. As in most Haiku poetry, the images stem out of directly observed occurrences, events and things and are therefore very easy to empathize with.

- Kaleidoscopic pictures of memories confront us yet again towards the end of the collection in ‘Shesh Hai Yaad’- Memory personified as knocking at the mind – as hanging frames on walls bringing tears as they flash upon the inward eye.
- These series of poems particularly made me recall Yeats often quoted lines “Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry”.
- The titles are arresting and invite an immediate response from the poetry lover. They carry us directly to the core concern of the verse and leave us wonder-struck and reflecting for long after the haiku reading is over. Short words, short stanzas, shorter lines carrying deep meanings and eternal truths clothed in sweeping generalisations – ‘Sorrows will divide on sharing, joys will multiply (translated) – make a deep impact on the psyche. The pangs of a lover’s separation are seldom so simply stated as in ‘Vidaa’ (Separation) where the title itself inducts us into the core concern of the poem.
- Some grim issues and the need to direct the thinking of the readers in the direction of some corrective measures are highlighted in poems on practical issues related to everyday living like ‘Dudh Andolan’, “Kaise Kaise Sach’ ‘Pahunch Gaye Kahan hum” (on Rising Sensex and Falling Sexual Morals), Parivartan (Change is the Eternal Truth), ‘Sansad Maun’ (Satire on Contemporary Political Scenario). The beauty of a poem lies in knowing exactly what is to be left unsaid- saying less and suggesting more. This is evident in poems of this collection like ‘Panchhi’, ‘Achha Vyaktitva’ and ‘Aakanksha’ to name a few. These poems illustrate Frost’s words that poetry is saying one thing meaning another. For instance the bitter truths of a fast paced mechanical life are hinted in ‘Jeevan ki Ramayan’. The spark is kindled to be turned ablaze in the readers’ minds.
- “No poet can know what his poem is going to be like until he has written it”, opines W.H. Auden, “The Poem”, ‘Manovigyan’ is a penetrating picture of the human mind’s inexplicable workings. It raises pertinent questions related to everyday occurrences-why trains attract every age, why beauty seduces, why ripe fruits and beautiful flowers are the first to be plucked. ‘Umra and Hum’ is a new way of looking at birthdays as taking us a year closer to our end and hence a time to reflect on the shortness of life.
- All human relationships are built or broken because of words, words both said or unsaid are indeed bridges that span the distance between two hearts and forge a connect/bond of a lifetime. Hence the title of the collection invites an immediate response as does the title poem ‘Shabdo ke Pul’- it carries a very delicately balanced image of broken relationships carried on fragile bridges of words–relationships break, bridges of words crumble in a moment (translation of second stanza). All bridges built by words lack a concrete foundation and can be devastated by storms of misunderstanding. The poem ends again with a rhetorical question on the transition of all relationships, leaving us thinking for long. Perhaps relationships fail because instead of building bridges we build walls of separation!
- The poet’s succinct comment on the new culture so predominant everywhere expressed in a satiric view in the aptly titled ‘Nayi Sanskrati’, rings a bell in every reader’s mind. We have all come across over ambitious aspiring youths who wish to rise tall even if it means by beheading peers
 

Barhte raho  
Chahe katna pare  
Kisi ka gala

- The joyful pains of life expressed through concrete image of pearls is impressive in ‘Aansu’ as it brings to the mind the woes of a lover so hard to conceal even harder to reveal, similarly voiced again in ‘Na Chala Pata’ as pain is described to be melting away like wax once blessed with the ecstasies of love. There is a chain of poems on the myth of Draupadi’s public disrobing and her consequent plight as depicted in ‘The Mahabharata’. These clearly indicate the author’s feminist stance. Meaning words so aptly and directly used leave the reader pondering on the horrific disgrace of the mythical heroine and also all women thereafter. The poetic technique employed has a mantric quality:

Aaj .na kal  
Abla ho sabal  
Ichchha prabal

- Indeed, “True ease in writing comes with practice not chance, as those move easiest that have learnt to dance.”(Pope) ‘Naari: Ek Chitran’ has an image which makes a mark on the mind for being refreshingly innovative: the image of tongue and cheek to describe the state of women in a society burdened by lustful male gazes from all directions.
- This unforgettable collection ends befittingly on a devotional note begging for forgiveness ending in all humility which is always the crowning glory of any artist. It instantly reminds one of Tagore’s muse in *Geetanjali* and the need to surrender ego at divine feet to accomplish bigger ideals.
- The conventional three worded verse of haiku makes an immediate impact upon the audience’s mind we grasp the essence and retain it comes with a brief moment’s pause. This results in better empathy with the poet and the poem- there is deeper involvement. We respond better to poems that trigger in us similar memories of our own past and since this collection has such a rich medley of themes from different experiences of life, there is something to hold the interest of every section of reader. Also it most certainly leaves us in contemplation and virtually prepares us in remote ways to confront life’s ups and downs with more fortitude and maturity. This is the ultimate test that any work of art can be put to. I wish Sarikaji’s ‘God’s Plenty’ in all her forthcoming endeavors and am tempted to end with the words of T.S. Eliot, “Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go.”

## REFERENCES

*Sarika Mukesh. Shabdon ke Pul: Jahanvi Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013.*