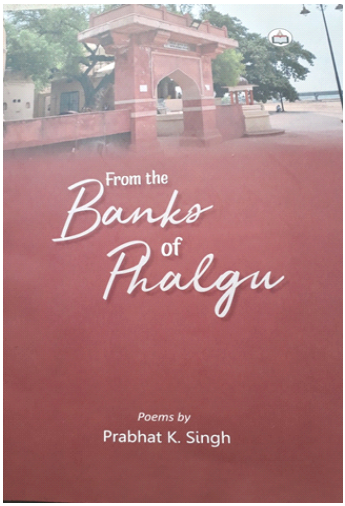
Prabhat K. Singh. *From the Banks of Phalgu.* New Delhi: Authors Press, 2022. pp. 80, PB, Price: ₹ 295 / US$ 25. ISBN: 978-93-5529-446-3.

Reviewed by
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Prabhat K. Singh (b. 1952) is a notable poet with considerable contribution to Indian English Writing from Bihar/Jharkhand. A distinguished professor of English literature, now retired, he has authored seven books of literary criticism, six books of poetry, including one in Hindi, and three books of translation into Hindi. *From the Banks of Phalgu*, his fifth book of poems in English, is a striking collection of 46 poems, offering a luminous in-look on nature, life, aspirations, culture, and community with a spiritual and philosophical viewpoint. As the opening poem "You and I" reminds the readers *á la* Indian scriptures:

> You and I,
> the part and the whole, manifestations
> of the same Being complementing life.
> …
> struggling to be at home
> with the changing tunes.
> ("You and I", lines 1-10)

He boldly asserts: "Isn't life an opportunity / to realize limitlessness / within our limited consciousness?" ("You and I", 22-24).

Professor Singh seeks "to harmonize reason with impulse" ("To My Constant", 13) in his lofty quest to unite (the *Upanisadic* and the Biblical) "earth with heaven," negotiating conflicting legacies of the past and the contemporary. Like every poet he is aware of the troubled time we live in just as he notices various changes in the contemporary socio-psychological mind and expresses his concern about the widespread degeneration:

Egotism, affectations, and callousness
are natural shadows of the green-eyed
monsters,…
God bless the edgy minds, the threats
to neutrality, though kept close.
…
There are fires
that last until the pyre. (“Goodbye” 13-32)

Yet, he is not negative nor does he try to give up; he is rational and believes in continuing to move ahead:

I pause, think, make myself at home,
and join the forward march of Time
under the fresh morning dome. (“Once Again Smiles the Moon”, 23-25)

and

Weathering uncertainties, how long
can I wait to grind the sky?
The present hard, the future terrifying,
mind is enveloped in a rage, I feel
the snort of anger on my nose.
…
Against all oppressive weight
rise like air
mixing enthusiasm with fury. (“Paths Are Not All Blocked”, 29-42)

One smells romantic sentimentalism when he tries to placate his emotional outburst and says:

But be calm, brave heart, and cry not out,
just attend to your grief patiently.
You will not fall like autumn leaves
withered from your sorrow,

howsoever brutality inflicted. ("Will They Ever Find Your Like?", 18-22)

Prabhat appears upset over the "weird pattern of the ordinary" that celebrates instability, rejoices villainy, glamorizes adultery, promotes messy relationships, and seeks to survive on sheer consumerism that constructs a panorama of anarchy with "dissonant realities in fragmented utterances" ("Postmodern", 30-31).

Obviously the poet is alive and trying to touch everything, even that which is sickening and worrying everyone, but not digging deep to make a difference. He raises several meaningful questions, and tries to answer them too, but the universe is too complex to yield to a poet's brief journey within and without: "I find it easier to say when you hear / without listening," ("Will They Ever Find Your Like?" 1-2), he declares.

The formal echoes of T. S. Eliot, Wordsworth and others notwithstanding, the poet from the bank of the river Phalgu in Gaya (Bihar) offers a personal, critical, at times satirical, and realistic overview of what he has experienced or observed closely and passionately. The poems in the latest collection of Prabhat K. Singh are essentially humane, empathetic, and friendly. These are highly readable, enjoyable, and worth sharing with poets and researchers interested in recent Indian poetry in English.

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