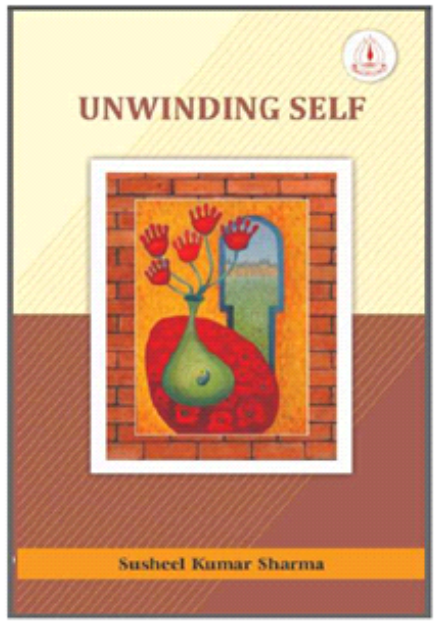
Susheel Kumar Sharma. *Unwinding Self*: *A Collection of Poems*. Cuttack: Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute, 2020, PB, pp.152. Price: ₹250, $ 15. ISBN: 978-81-943450-3-9.

Reviewed by
Pradeep Kumar*



Poetry is something that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm. It promotes literacy, builds community, and fosters emotional resilience. It can cross boundaries that little else can, and that is why we read and enjoy William Wordsworth, John Keats, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, etc. whose poetry reached all over the world. Susheel Kumar Sharma's *Unwinding Self* also has all the characteristics that make him a global poet. This collection has forty four poems and most of them are short in terms of their length but filled with deep thoughts. By reading these poems anyone can feel the vast experiences of so many fields of life of the poet that he has gone through in his life. These poems range from the social problems of the society to the problems that the poet faces in his life.

Beginning from the poem "Snapshots", the poet concludes the collection with 'Stories from the Mahabharata'. This is how his journey of poetry begins with trivial issues and ends in an epic. The collection explores the wide range of his thoughts and the world which he experiences in the course of time. The book opens like this:

> My voice
> Empty noise.
> Your babble
> Enchanting music.
> We are God's creation. ("Snapshots", 1-5)

This shows poet's dissatisfaction with the world where people are interested in trivial things and they are living their life aimlessly. In this poem, the poet describes the Nature in which all the living and non-living components are busy in doing their work. He expresses his concern for those who are careless towards their duties.

Some poems of this collection have autobiographical note where the reader is introduced to a number of incidents of Sharma's life. These poems use first person pronoun 'I' which may mean that the poet is talking about his own life. "The End of the Road", "Durga Puja in 2013", "Kabir's Chadar", "The Soul with a New Hat", and "Crowded Locals"' are such autobiographical poems in which Sharma shares his own experiences. In "The End of the Road" Sharma shares his experience of how his eye-sight became poor and a doctor advised him to use a new spectacle. Here the reader infers that the poet has firm belief in his God and the doctor he talks about resembles the God, and the spectacle is the blessing of the God that makes his perception clear. There are other religious poems like "Durga Puja in 2013", "Chasing a Dream on the Ganges", "Akshya Tritya", "Ram Setu", and "Stories from the Mahabharata" in which references from Hindu mythology have been used. Through all these poems Sharma shows his faith in Hindu religion and its mythology. The beginning of "Chasing a Dream on the Ganges" reminds of William Wordsworth's poem "Ode to Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood". Like Wordsworth Susheel Kumar Sharma has infinite love for the natural world and is thrilled at the sight of the rivers he visits.

While reading the poem "On Reading Langston Hughes' 'Theme for English B"' the reader comes to know about a teacher who expresses the emotions of a student who travels 20 kilometres on foot to reach his university and become an educated person. The poems "Destitute", "The Black Experience", "Me, A Black Doxy" and "Lost Childhood" are gloomy in nature as they represent unhappy situations of their characters. The poem "The Destitute" runs like:

> The air seems to choke
>
> Me to death.
>
> I have to kill myself for regeneration. (22-24)

In this poem the narrator has settled in a foreign country for a job and he is not happy there due to home-sickness apart from his poor economic condition.

"Thus Spake a Woman", "Babli Poems", and "Wearing the Scarlet Letter 'A"' are fully devoted to the women who are suffering for various reasons. The poem

"Thus Spake a Woman" is divided into four parts: *A* Dreamer, *Fracas, The Cracked World*, and *A Lament*. These four parts describe the four stages of a woman's life; her dream of having a lover, the turmoil she faces, her inter-caste marriage, and her life as a mother. This reminds the reader of Kamala Das' poem "An Introduction" in which she was in front of a mirror and was looking at her physical beauty; so does the woman in this poem of Sharma. "Babli Poems" is the longest poem of the collection with 415 lines in 11 parts. This is like a biography of a modern young girl in which the reader witnesses many incidents of her life from school going child to a mature woman who is seeking for emancipation. In her school days she behaves carelessly:

> Bubli is bubbling;
> She does not know with what;
> She goes to the college to attend a class.
> She does not know her classroom
> And enters a different one. (14-18)

And this is when she gets maturity after getting hurt for several times:

> Bubli is sitting before her master
> Cross-legged like Apala must have
> To ask questions, to seek knowledge
> And to defeat the sage to prove her
> Wit, logic, strength and worthiness. (77-81)

Some poems like "The New Year Dawn", "The New Age", "The World in Words in 2015", and "A Family by the Road" are satirical as they are full of contradictory statements. They criticise the way people have chosen to live their lives foolishly. They have started following the Western culture blindly without knowing its real agenda. *Unwinding Self* consists of some poems which deal with the issues of prostitution, slavery, etc. In "Me, A Black Doxy" Sharma depicts a prostitute who considers herself a social creature like other human beings and demands for her social rights.

Sharma seems to look contemplative and suggestive while composing "Strutting Around", "The Soul with a New Hat", "Endless Wait", "Bye Books, Not Diamonds", and "Coffee". In 'Coffee' he says:

> I am stirring my memories
> In the cup of coffee

Clockwise and anti-clockwise
Sometimes slowly,
Sometime passionately,
Sometimes briskly. (1-6)

It seems that this collection *Unwinding Self* has emerged from that very cup of coffee in which he used to stir his memories. He is contemplative when he stirs his memories slowly; he is suggestive when he is passionate, and satirical when he is quick.

The poem "The Kerala Flood 2018" shows that Sharma is much disturbed with the flood situation in Kerala and he is moved by the suffering of the people who are stuck there. Poems like "The Fountain Square", "Ram Setu", and "Connaught Place" seem to look like travelling memoir. The minute observation with which Sharma describes each and every item present at those places is praiseworthy. It shows his aptness in judging the environment in which he gets a chance to reside. In the last poem of this collection "Stories from the Mahabharata" Sharma recites 25 stories from the epic and all of them consist just 3 lines each. The reader can see the ability of the poet who is able to put a story in just three lines. It is like putting a river in a *kamandala* (water pitcher).

The language of this collection is very simple but the readers need to know the context of the poems if they want to enjoy them. It is also true that the original meaning lies within the poet but one will not feel this kind of situation with this collection because the readers will correlate themselves with most of the contexts of the poems.

Unwinding Self is a marvellous collection of poems having a variety of subjects and united by the knowledge and experience of Professor Susheel Kumar Sharma who is energetic, pathetic, and sarcastic throughout the collection. These poems keep the reader busy for all the time and they are put in such a way that it looks like they are interrelated. I wish this collection will get the worldwide readership and the readers would be able to grasp the message that Professor Sharma wants to convey to them.

*****Assistant Professor of English, Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh – 211002, India. Email: drpk.eng@allduniv.ac.in

© 2023 The Author. Published by Paragon International Publishers. Open Access Under CC BY 4.0 licence.