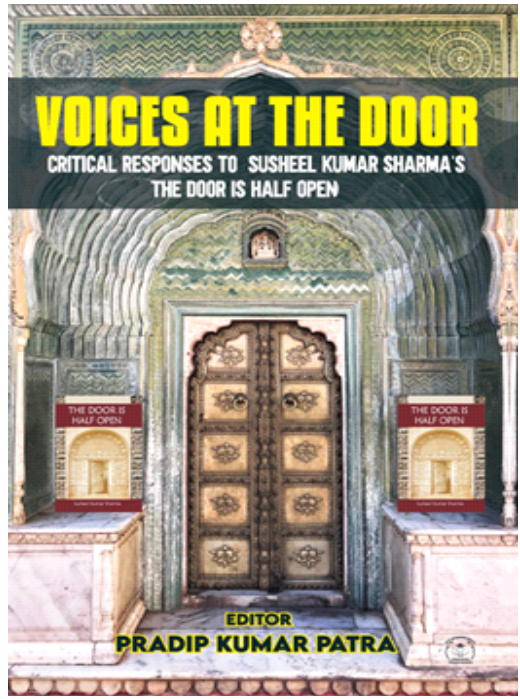
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Pradip Kumar Patra, editor. *Voices at the Door: Critical Responses to Susheel Kumar Sharma's The Door is Half Open*. Upanayan Publications, 2023, pp. xxv + 270, PB, Price: ₹ 599, $ 25, € 25, ISBN: 978-93-91467-00-5.

Reviewed by
Nidhi Verma*



Pradip Kumar Patra's *Voices at the Door: Critical Responses to Susheel Kumar Sharma's The Door is Half Open* is a comprehensive collection of critical essays that explore the complex topics and literary nuances of Sharma's collection of poems, *The Door is Half Open*. The attractive cover has an old-world charm that entices the reader to reach out for the book, as it depicts the kind of door that is reminiscent of olden *havelis* and *kothis*. Not only does the image conjure up a sense of nostalgia, but it also serves as an extension of the cover of *The Door is Half Open*. Patra's editorial skill is evident in this critical compilation of 57 reviews which brings together a range of academic voices to examine and assess Sharma's complex poetry. These reviews are sandwiched between the editor's succinct introduction and the editor's interview with the poet himself. The introduction and interview themselves reveal the deep sense

of respect that Patra holds for the poet whose work he is reviewing and editing. Patra's description of Sharma's *oeuvre* shows his familiarity and fondness for the poet's style.

Patra has skilfully curated a diverse range of critical essays and reviews, which provide a unique perspective on Sharma's body of poetry. Sharma's poetry is rich in its grasp of socio-political and cultural references, and the reviews included in this collection cover the different aspects of Sharma's poetry with dexterity, from textual analysis and thematic investigation to more extensive discussions on the cultural and sociopolitical foundations of Sharma's writing. Because of its diversity, the anthology is guaranteed to be both a useful academic tool and an appealing read for any reader with an interest in contemporary Indian poetry.

The strong appeal of this collection lies in its thematic depth. From spirituality, existentialism, and identity, to familial relations and love, the reviewers traverse a broad range of subjects explored in the socio-cultural context of Sharma's poetry. *The Door is Half Open*'s multiple levels of meaning are made easier for readers to understand by the variety of essays compiled in this collection. The essays also accentuate Sharma's adept use of words and his ability to arouse strong feelings in readers with seemingly straightforward verses.

Reputed academics from several fields have contributed to this anthology, each lending their specialised knowledge and critical perspective. These include K. Balachandran, T. S. Chandra Mouli, Stuti Khare, Ashok Kumar Sinha, and Jai Shankar Jha. Their insights are perceptive and thought-provoking, often revealing subtle nuances that the average reader might miss, such as when Syed Ahmad Raza Abidi speaks of how Sharma's personal sense of nostalgia for childhood and a past rich in moral values is discernible in his writing. In Patra's own interview with Sharma, the conversation about Sharma's investigation of the human condition is especially insightful, as it highlights the existential questions that are present in his poetry. The collection has many foreign contributors too. For instance, Barbara Wühr, a German author, highlights aspects of Sharma's poetry that attract her as a non-native reader. She lauds the wide range of themes he is able to include in his poems.

Patra makes sure that the critical articles he has included in this collection contextualise the book within a larger cultural and historical framework, rather than simply analysing the text in isolation. This method expands the reader's comprehension of Sharma's writing by illuminating the significance of his poetry in the modern world. The chosen articles are interesting to read because they frequently make

links between Sharma's individual experiences and the more significant social issues of the day. A common and welcome trait across all the critical pieces is the choice of language, which avoids jargon and excessive theoretical posing. This allows the collection to remain accessible to the lay reader while being scholarly in its approach.

Voices at the Door: Critical Responses to Susheel Kumar Sharma's The Door is Half Open is a valuable addition to the literary criticism of poetry, as there is a dearth of good critical analysis on poetry in India. It is an exemplary work of editorial acumen, which, while aiding and enhancing the reader's appreciation of Susheel Kumar Sharma's *The Door is Half Open*, also opens the floor to broader conversations on contemporary Indian poetry. Anyone wishing to learn more about Susheel Kumar Sharma's poetic world should read this anthology because of the meticulous assessments of the contributors that are brought to light by Patra's editorial vision.

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