

**Poet who Unifies Sensibility: A Rendezvous with
Basanta Kumar Kar
by
Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal**

Author of three collections of poems--*The Naïve Bird*, *The Silent Monsoon* and *The Unfold Pinnacle (unpublished)* -- Basanta kumar Kar, who holds a senior position in an international development organization, writes his poetry from the core within. *The Naïve Bird* is a collection of poems that exudes the aroma of love intrinsically blended with nuggets of nature, expressing the inner space spontaneously. Indira Goswami has admired the collection in an adorable manner: "I am extremely impressed by this anthology of Basanta kumar kar's poems. I am sure these poems will make us conscious how much we need to comprehend the uniqueness of nature to bring about true peace and joy in today's troubled world." *The Silent Monsoon* is an inspiring skyline of free verse on the themes of love, soft emotion and painful agony. His third collection of poem, *The Unfold Pinnacle*, is written on completely marginalized Indian women. This collection is a progeny of a sensitive mind. Nicole Dastur of *Times of India* comments, "... his poems evoke a string of emotions in you. His lines make you think". Michael Northen, the editor of *Wordgathering* (US) was impressed to bring a pre-published book review of *The Unfold Pinnacle* due to its "unusual nature". Michael comments, "*The Unfold Pinnacle* is a genuine attempt at poetry in the service of the greater good." Keshav Malik, former Editor of *Indian Literature* comments thus about Kar's poetry:" Of course, there awaits much applause for his act of imagination which is bound to touch some hearts." This poet, who hails from Kendrapara (Orissa, India) discusses with Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal several aspects of his poetic creation in a detailed and pedantic interview.

NKA: What is poetry for you? Is it a medium to reform the society? Or, is it a thing of beauty, giving eternal aesthetic pleasure? Or, are the aforesaid two functions of poetry juxtaposed for you?

BKK: Poetry is the outpouring of the heart and the head: the alphabets and the words are offshoots. It is an expression of truth with unification of sensibilities. As it has to combine both thought and emotion the portrayal of beauty and soft emotions are part of it. Yes, it is both a medium to reform the society, about bringing to fore the silver lining of hope among the clouds of deep despair, the love for life and the zest to live but more significantly, it is the eternal aesthetic happiness that such writing provides.

NKA: Where do you get the input for your poetic output? I mean to say—what are the sources of poetic inspirational pools in you?

BKK: I get inspired by the beauty that beholds me. As a poet one has to re-discover the beauty in each element and at each inch of life. The manifestations can be through individuals, nature, divinity, grief and sorrow. In most of the cases they are alive and living individuals. I get inspired by their perspectives of life and survival, their struggles and the moments of pleasure that they steal from their otherwise troubled/mundane lives to encourage themselves to pull on. I relish this inner strength.

You sketch
Indigo, blue, white
green, red, yellow and violet
adding truth to canvas
present, future and past.

(Truth –The Naïve Bird)

NKA: How has your association with social development organizations assisted you in your poetic endeavors?

BKK: I am in the social development sector for the last twenty five years and carry the experience of working in India and other countries. I have witnessed poverty, vulnerability and multiple deprivations of rights from close quarters and the disastrous effect that these conditions have on individuals, especially women and children.

At times we only observe and scribble on manifestations and symptoms. There are underlying and structural causes. My association with social development organizations help me to empathise.

Contrary to brick and mortar, sand and clay, I always tend to argue on the need for providing emotional support and love by recognizing that the most marginalized are after all humane. I strongly feel that there is a need to work with people to help them cope up with emotions, absence of appropriate mental health, lack of love, human dignity, loneliness, solitude etc, that are given birth by poverty and deprivation. It requires a paradigm shift by empathizing with these people who carry a volcano of suppressed emotions in their bosoms which is slowly and steadily eating into them. It needs an outlet, a helping hand, a heart sensitive enough to understand the pain and one who can help in pulling up the strings and motivate to carry on with the life. Each writer, author and development activist has a role to play in this regard.

NKA: What are the major literary influences on you?

BKK: My Village and My Life.

Each flower speaks
speaks your language
truth meets the tongue
brokered through finger prints
following you around.

(‘Author’ , *The Silent Monsoon*)

NKA: You talked about poetic fiction in your book *The Naïve Bird*. Could you elaborate on this?

BKK: Yes, I shared that the collection of poems is a semblance of fiction in poetry, each poem spilling onto another naturally. All the poems from the beginning to the end are part of a tale, a story that comes to an end with the last poem.

NKA: In your collection, *The Unfold Pinnacle*, you seem to have created an inner contact with the seething anguish of your characters. What is the origin of this affinity with the characters? Is it some personal despair, which has helped you in feeling the pain and anxiety of the women? It is said that a poet universalizes his personal emotions. Are you some inner grief of your heart through these women? Is there any personal factor responsible for this sympathetic approach towards the leaden-eyed despair of these women?

BKK: It is difficult to insulate your own experience in a literary pursuit. The characters in each poem of *The Unfold Pinnacle* are based on real life stories on women. I sit with them for hours and hours and scribble their unheard agonies and voices. It is a story of the inner space of those people not of mine. I have tried to do justice to the poems by penning down just the fact, nothing more or less because I feel that I owe those to the women whose lives and reality I have sketched on paper. I have honored the inner strength of my female protagonists to survive against all odds, for having maintained an otherwise strong exterior on the face of extreme despair and deprivation.

NKA: If these character-portraits had been by the pen of a woman writer, would there have been some alteration in the poems? After all, a man's delineation of the female suffering will always be marked by outsider's syndrome? What do you say?

BKK: I do not think so. The underlying and structural causes are common everywhere. The pain is dark and real. The style, tone and technique of communication may change depending upon the writer's own perceptions and experience but the inherent emotion will remain the same.

The Unfold Pinnacle is a bouquet of feelings that has the power to touch and change hearts. This is a progeny of a sensitive mind and heart which has resulted from the marriage of a creative and humane initiative with the foresight of providing a new dimension to the development paradigm by way of a different communication medium.

NKA: Why did you choose English as the medium of your poetic expression? Any special reasons for this choice?

BKK: I am a student of English literature apart from having degrees in Law and Management from a premier rural management institute. Hence writing in English comes easily to me. It is an international language and has large diverse readership. Moreover the overwhelming response from these diverse readers have reinforced and encouraged me to write in this language.

NKA: Have you also written something in your native language? Which mode of poetic expression do you prefer—native or alien? Please make an argument.

BKK: I have published poems in English language. Yes, I have plans to write in my mother tongue, Oriya. I am of the view that both the modes of poetic expression are important and that each one has its own uniqueness.

NKA : What about your future writing plans?

BKK: A beginning has been made. I have found tremendous response from the readers across the globe. Editors are frequently requesting me to send them my poems. I have also received the request for using the poems for digital story telling and for developing documentaries on the stories that they hold.

The poems from *The Unfold Pinnacle* are now used for teaching-learning purpose too. I intend to carry on such writing.

I believe poetry has the power to transform and bring happiness in an extraordinary, wonderful way.

NKA: Will you mention some individuals and organizations, who have helped you in your writing career?

BKK: I inherited this from my childhood when as a child I observed my grand-father writing. This was a great inspiration. My family and friends have been the greatest supporters and the first critics of my work .Of course, I owe my writing to all my heroes and heroines- animate and inanimate who have helped me by opening up their lives to me to see, understand and make a copy with words in print.

NKA: Were there some obstacles too in your career as a creative poet? What, in your view, hinders the progress of poesis in a poet's heart?

BKK: You know poetry today is influenced by market and market forces. The economics of business influences. But thanks to the technology (websites, blogs, online publishing) which helps you to reach out to diverse readers. Most of the development journals are taking unusual interest in bringing out the poems that I write through a debut special column. This is a an encouraging move.

A poet needs to take risk and be courageous to bring out the words, feelings and comments that involuntarily mumble incoherently in the heart. I would like to share a few lines from one my poems that perhaps can provide you the answer:

Silence needs words
words need courage
courage needs conviction
you possess everything
better break silence
in words unspoken
with conviction and courage.
(‘Silence’, *The Naïve Bird*).

Dr.Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal is Senior Lecturer in English at Feroze Gandhi College, Rae Bareilly, (U.P.), India. He has his doctorate on T.S. Eliot from Allahabad University.

Dr. Agarwal is interested mostly in Indian Aesthetics, Diaspora and Contemporary Critical Theory. His interviews with a number of contemporary literary figures, as well as his research papers, book reviews, articles and poems have appeared in publications, including *The Vedic Path*, *Quest*, *The Confluence*, *Kafla Intercontinental*, *Pegasus*, *IJOWLAC*, *The Journal*, *Promise*, *The Raven Chronicles*, *Yellow Bat Review*, *Poetcrit*, *Carved in Sand*, *Turning the Tide*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Bridge-in-Making*, *Katha kshetre*, *Hyphen* and *South Asian Review*. Several anthologies have selected his poems and articles. His poem "To Lord Krishna" is in the celebrated anthology, *The Pagan's Muse*, Citadel Press. Several of his literary pieces have been included in *The People's Poet: Summer Community Magazine* of 2004 and are posted on websites. He has also edited a critical book on Stephen Gill. He successfully participated in International Literary Festival, 2008, held at Calicut.