Jaydeep Sarangi. *The Wall and Other Poems*. Allahabad: Cyberwit.net., 2015. PB. Price Rs. 200. ISBN: 978-81-8253-5638.

Reviewed by
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For an English reader, *The Wall and other Poems*, by Jaydeep Sarangi, raises the issue of how to read much Indian poetry. Sarangi's poems have an ease of access and are fresh but consist largely of philosophical anecdotes. The problem for the English reader is the question: What is poetic about it? Yet one can still distinguish that Sarangi is one of the better Indian poets.

The poems offer a first-person account of the poet's general spirituality. For example, the first poem in the collection, "Friendship beyond Borders", says:

> Walls stand up and shake hands,
> Crossing borders of the mind
> And then, two hands extending a friendship.
> Dawn seeds from the meetings
> and round tables Resolutions pile up.
> Frescoes on the walls.
> Prosaic congress to decide on its fate.

Which adds a richness of dimension to all those walls which we build, not only around ourselves, but to protect our countries from invaders. Often, the reader is taken into the experience of the poet with immediacy, as in "Sailing through Ichamati":

> We are a very old wall,
> Useless at times. Sometimes forgotten.
> People don't want us anymore
> In need of no repair, we struggle.
>
> History books record tears on our bricks
> Long languishing hours, deep sighs Smoked
> around us.
> Policies and principles ruled our lives When the
> countrywas young.
> We, only we, have forgotten the language of surprise!

Sometimes, rapture is based in the world of nature he is experiencing, as at the conclusion of "Aphrodite Near the Banks of Dulung":

> Oja-Pali rests solely on its myth.
> Her beauty never misleads men to many roads and lanes
> Every household on the banks of small rivers and
> Water bodies see her in a sari. Talking to local tribes.

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She is never jealous of Aphrodite Her
skin is not white like her.
She has no muse in English Only a few
know her. Talk about her.
Offer puja to her on auspicious days.

She visits simple huts near the forest
On the banks of Dulung
When frogs are out in the rain. The place is muddy.
Snakes rule a slippery world.
(Note: Oja-Pali is a musical folk theatre)

When he recalls an earthquake or tsunami in "Bio Data of a Poet," it is immediate and vital, bringing to mind the devastation in Nepal and elsewhere: yet the poet can still find something in the midst of terror and hopelessness to write about:

An earthquake or Tsunami,
A poet is always at the desk.
Words and music flood the world, Walks through the mud.
He holds the world in one hand.
Shakes it
Rubs it
Crushes it He takes the skin out with
both hands.

It is of the nature of such Indian poetry that it works first as narrative, devoid of metaphor that lifts the poem above mere anecdote. Consider one of the most linguistically striking poems, "Insomniac," for example:

Did you borrow my sleep for months?
My lonely nights
Walk between the stars
I listen to light footsteps, thin drizzle. I read *The*
Labyrinth of Solitude
My mind walks through a lonely
road.
Nights grow deep.
Did you borrow my sleep for months?

I swing. Log on to face book.
Post comments here and there.
Locked in notifications.
I wait for the night to be over again.
Unknown birds
Chant the day's break.
Some mysterious jogis chant
To embrace powerful moments
And inhale unpolluted air. I witness all little details

The voice of the speaker, here and throughout these poems, declares itself confidently and meaningfully. The reader is left to sift through the music and imagery. There is the implied suggestion that he has come through to something more grounded yet spiritual than a flight of fancy.

Sarangi presents himself as easy-going, yet given to reflection. His manner is free-flow verse that follows the current of the intelligent, educated, experiencing mind. Typically, poems are called "Sailing through Ichamati," "A Doorway near Vistula," "Green Garden", "Insomniac" or My Dilemma", poems about a place, an activity, a scene or an idea. The title is frequently a clue, sometimes a crucial one to experience the poem coherently. And even poems without one of those words in the title are reflective – "Green Garden," for example, sounds as if it would be by an English poet, but the poem is not like an English poem:

> This green garden of colours and sounds, has been
> Our teacher and the head of the family of
> Shadows and sicknesses. River Vistula gently murmurs nearby.
>
> Long cherished hopes, heavy hearts Wet in rain.
> Some castles for knightly banquets Kiss our senses.
> Blood run wild. It has some native plants, taste buds leak Reminded of
> honey bees have their days with Herbs and
> flowers.

For here, we have "the head of the family of / Shadows and sicknesses" – "the river Vistula" and the native plants. We are inveighed into a day-dream.

Passages of enchanting language tumble through the poems, as in "Lakshmanrekha":

> Her vessel has water from native links
> Red soil and dry leaves of Sal and Mahuya.
> A male shadow follows her Like a dominant caste.
> There are limits around her neck
> So many nails to cross
> So many walls to dig holes
> Before borders extended up to child caring and child rearing.
>
> Wearing matching sari with blouse
> She writes for
> A sense of community autonomy,
> A history, agency of the world To gain a
> spacein the sphere.
> Love's fires are lit—
> "Women can make and women can break."

Indeed, there is no resolve, until we reach the final line, "Women can make and women can break." We are then reminded of the title and the fragmentary nature of the poem.

One of the most reflective poems is "Growing up Bengali in Kolkata," which begins:

> Nobody asks me
> How to pronounce Bangla sounds. I open my mouth full.

Nobody writes a paper. No conference held.
No tip extended.
People say, it has expressions. My
Tamil friends say, It sounds sweet.
My chest inhales pride As I grab a
baked fish.
Separate its bones. I do it as I mastered the art.
Naturalised it as a fish eater!
I wash dishes of smelling the fish. My daughter
asks for more pieces of Hilsa She can't have rice
without fishes.

The resulting poetic is its unique artefact. Another poem, "Poet Versus his Idiom" begins with the lovely line: "My idiom is like a peacock's feathered tail" and ends with the poet's observations that he "needs poetry cleaner to take guards afresh."

My idiom is like peacock's feathered tail
Of rhyme, rhythm and metre. Thoughts
Stream from the milk maid's can, Grandmother's
kitchen, tribal's dancing Chhou with colourful
masks. Each small act has a total life
In the sacred place, beside a forest
Where goats, fowls and pigeons are sacrificed
For the prayers. My pen scripts
How we happily rival each other for survival. I write.

My semicolons envelope my dreams.
I drink the heat of the Sun. Never wrote a love poem.
My wife calls my poems a mere flirt. She presents me Files of letters I
received when my tree was young.

I need poetry cleaner to take guards afresh.

Here the poem begins by observing the beauty of a poem, its rhymes and rhythms, and compares it to the grandmother's dancing and the joy of the simple life. It then continues to the poet's wife, who calls his poems 'a mere flirt'. But Sarangi is in full possession of his voice and he has a command of an elegant and passionate style. Many of the poems are laid out on the page to create a montage of the way in which a poet's thoughts arise and how he melds them, with rhyme, metre and assonance to create his poems.

Each poem, each artefact, is self-contained, and the book does not attempt to provide a progressive arc. They are strange, sensuous, and bewitching. Throughout Sarangi brings a raconteur's impulse, with wide-ranging humanistic voracity, tempered by careful reflections by line and details. And here is the strength of this book, that what is unique to the poet can also stand for a wider poetic experience. Look, we're all different, the poet seems to say; and, look: we're holding hands.

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