Aju Mukhopadhyay. *Manhood, Grasshood and Birdhood.* Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2014. pp. 88. Price: ₹ 180.00. ISBN: 978-81-7977-521-9.

Reviewed by
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Manhood, Grasshood and Birdhood is the eighth collection of poems by Aju Mukhopadhyay. Besides writing poetry in English and Bangla, he has produced a number of books on biography, philosophy and environment. Though, he is best known for his books on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The present book has been divided into two sections 'Manhood and Grasshood' and 'Birdhood.' The first section covers more than half of the book. It mainly deals with the poet's experiences of glee and gloom with 'Men and Countries'. Hedescribes the golden time of ancient India that allured the 'Foreign merchants and missionaries' 'carrying Christ's message' but the ill wills of the invaders disappoint him because they 'ravished her' a number of times. In the course of time there have been drastic changes in the terms of social, economic and political. The poet believes that being a huge nation sometimes the unimaginable happenings distress India's soul. Still it is a progressive, sovereign and democratic country where people of allcultures and creeds live together. So we should not forget the love and fraternity. He suggests that:

> Instead of pride domination or diplomacy
> let us embrace all with pure love
> for that is the only sovereign entity.
> ('United in Camp-fire' 28-30)

New themes of his experiences with men and naturemake him an experimental poet. His acute love for the flora and fauna gives an ecological order to his poetry which is praiseworthy in themodern age of hankering after the lavish city life. The poet writes:

> How have we progressed in time
> when we are still not in rhyme
> with the primitive and the ancient,
> with Nature, our everlasting friend?
> ('United in Camp-fire' 1-4)

He also gives an example of ceasing tribal life and suggests that tribal people face difficulties in leading their life as per their wish. Their habitat is brought to an end for 'self-interest or self-assertion'.

Social and political disorder has given rise to corruption throughout the world. It draws poet's attention. He does not like such evil prevailed in society. His love for the mother land is well expressed in the poem 'Yearned Gloom'. When people celebrate the arrival of New Year, the poet sees the "humiliated face of our Mother land/bent

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with the burden of corruption… /tears rolling down her cheeks for her children vile."('Yearned Gloom' 1-6)

In 'Politicians of the World Unite' the poet writes that 'political activists' are 'Diehard' who 'have spread their wings far and wide/cutting up didoes, corrupting/ the country's social fabrics'.

> they touch the pithy heart of truth
> with hard core supercilious falsehood;
> this is a class irrespective of parties
> who loot the country's wealth
> shedding all dignities;
> there are exceptions as in every other field
> but in the long run most entrants join their guild.
> ('Politicians of the World Unite'11-17)

The poet sees it a 'dangerous signal in all countries' (26). Though he is pessimistic and his hope is still alive in him.

> Hope and trust surge in us that God may indeed
> burn all garbage, evil doers and deeds
> and sow in us the fresh-life seeds.
> ('Yearned Gloom' 40-42)

In the poem 'What a Great Republican Shore are We Basking in!' the poet presents the real picture of India which is known as a country of agriculture but the use of 'foreign seed' and 'entirely unsuitable foreign expertise' is considered a pride. The system of farming has so worsened that it leads the farmers to commit suicide. It is very difficult to understand that 'everything including petty vegetables/will come to their hands well packed, marked/by multinationals.' 'Muddy hands and legs, poor farmers or tilled land and bullocks/nothing will remain except foreign bred profit and stocks.'The changing scenario disturbs the poet. For him it is ridiculous so he is unable to believe that 'we have taken the development road'. ('What a Great Republican Shore are We Basking in!')

Crime, terrorism and misguided religious belief (causing jihad) taking numerous lives also draw attention of the poet. But here also he does not lose his hope. He wishes that one day 'the sane voices' ('The Victims of the Evil Forces') will rise to cease these heinous crimes and peace will prevail with equal right and dignity.

'Krodh' is an important poem of the book. Here the poet goes in the past and highlights the brutality of the Sultan and zamindar. They could torture their servants and bound-labourers and took their lives. In Mughal Empire the king did the same as zamindars. The poet reminds us those black days and convinces us to have control over our anger which is the worst enemy proved by histories.

To grow long hair and long beard in order to show off himself a religious or spiritual person has become a trend in India. It has been found that a person without long hair and long beard has more religious knowledge than them. In recent years a number of anti-social activities have been exposed which had been committed by

them. In the view of the poet there are various so called saints smocking afeem and ganja. Which kind of saints they are? What lessons do they teach? The poet sees themas culprits and escapists only. ('Either a Saint or a Ganja Khor')

In 'Invisible yet Perceptible' the poet discusses the philosophy of life and death. He reminds the eternal truth of life that one who takes birth, he has to die. So it is better to believe in eternal soul than the perishable body. We find another poem ('Pray that You Play Your Part Best') of the same vein in which the poet mentions that death is inevitable. It is an equalizer that maintains balance in the universe. If one does not believe in God, he believes in death. So we should not waste our time in vain. We should use our time in some good work and play our role best till we are alive. Thus we can escape from repentance.

The poet also maintains a balance as Nature and soon he brings us in another world. He brings forth the scenery of happiness in 'Spring of Life'. As spring is the best season, it gives us relief from the 'thrilling chill' and scorching heat of the summer. Here he reminds us the ending lines of PB Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind': 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind?' He also says that spring is a 'great/creative daughter/ of Nature' which gives birth to many things on the earth. The beautiful colours of flowers rejuvenate us and their smells intoxicate us. Lovers also wait for this season for their long cherished enjoyment.

'Arribada' is another poem through which the poet reveals the law of Nature. He presents beautiful pictures of fish, turtles and some other creatures but at the same time he says that their beauty is short lived. We enjoy their beauty but forget their fate. The truth is that what comes is bound to depart unlike Keats's Nightingale's songs.

The section 'Birdhood' has several poems on birds that draw our attention. They present the beauty and lifestyle of birds.

Thus *Manhood, Grasshood and Birdhood* contains the poems that fully justify the title of the book. Though while reading some of the poems of the collection the readers need to understand their background. However, the language used thoroughly is so simple, and style is so lucid that readers of all groups can relish them fully.

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