

Mapping English Poetry from Bihar: A Snapshot of Twenty-Two Swans in the Lake of Life

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Abstract

This paper maps English poetry from Bihar highlighting twenty-two poets who have made Bihar speak its rich tradition of quest and cultural ethos. Though this poetry has its roots in local soil, it transcends the local boundaries and becomes universal by virtue of its fusion of cultural rootedness, philosophical questionings and modern poetic expressions. Thematically and technically, this poetry is rich enough to quench the thirst of readers across the globe by its universal concerns of life, death, love, society and spirituality. Babu Avadh Biahri Lall, R. K. Singh, Prabhat Kumar Singh, Pashupati Jha, Punita Jha, C. L. Khatri, Kalpna Singh-Chitnis, Binod Mishra, Tabish Khair, Sumirasko, Bhaskarananda Jha and Abhay Kumar are some of the significant English poets who have touched almost every aspect of life—be it social, political or religious or cultural.

Keywords: Soil, traditions, cultural ethos, philosophical reflections, spirituality

Buddha, Mahavira, Chanakya, Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Aryabhata etc., are such names as remain flashing on the mind's screen as fresh as ever. Bihar is credited to be the birthplace of all these unforgettable legendary figures. Bihar, though sometimes tagged in unfavourable terms, is the most pious and fruitful land from which springs great personalities not merely of India, but of the world. Bihar always remains engaged in its quest—whether it is literary quest or political quest or religious quest or any meaningful quest that contributes in making life meaningful.

Ram Bhagwan Singh has done a remarkable work by editing an anthology, titled, *Bihar's Literary Quest: English Poetry from Bihar*, which includes 22 poetic voices that have made Bihar speak its own rich tradition of quest. Though poetry may have its roots in “the local habitation and colour”, it “transcends all physical barriers and censors” (Forward vii). None can deny that “Indian English poetry, by and large, remains conformist as it sings of God, spirituality and ethics” (Foreword vii). Bihari poetry in English also follows the same tradition. Ram Bhagwan Singh generalizes English poetry from Bihar stating that “Bihar poetry germinates in the local soil and breathes in free air and rings in platonic love” (Foreword vii). To prove his point of view, he has selected 22 poetic swans (poets) from Bihar who have given voices to Bihar in revealing almost every domain of life—be it social, political or religious or cultural.

As Bihari poetry springs from the Bihari soil, it gives the fragrance of Bihar that makes one feel the very socio-cultural ethos of the land on the micro level and of India on the macro level. It does not talk of Bihari or Indian only, but of every human being who has a heart to feel and head to think. Ram Bhagwan Singh is quite clear in acknowledging Bihari English poetry not as different but “a part of Indian English poetry in its nature and character” and

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so he declares with his firm conviction that Bihari English poetry “shares the same national characteristics, the same pre-independence traits and after” (Forword vi). This observation serves as a humble yet significant attempt to establish Bihar’s English poetry as a valuable contribution to world literature.

Ram Bhagwan Singh’s *Bihar’s Literary Quest: English Poetry from Bihar* features representative poems of 22 poets who seem to resonate with the symbolism of the cover image of the book—a serene view of Ghora Katora, a picturesque lake with a statue of the Buddha amidst the hills of Rajgir. *Bihar’s Literary Quest* is not just a literary journey, it is a spiritual quest for meaning, anchored in nature, peace and perseverance. The twenty-two poets are the swans swimming gracefully in the lake of life confronting its predicaments and composing songs of existence.

Bihar’s Literary Quest: English Poetry from Bihar offers the poetic journey of seven departed poets: Babu Avadh Bihari Lall, Gurudas Mukherjee, Umeshwar Prasad, Ravi Nandan Sinha, Pashupati Jha, C. L. Khatri and Sumirasko who have gone to the other world after completing their life’s pilgrimage. It also celebrates 15 living poets: Amarendra Kumar, R. K. Singh, Prabhat Kumar Singh, Kumar Vinod Choudhary, Anil Kumar Prasad, Punita Jha, Vijoy Mishra, Samar Pratap Singh, Kalpna Singh-Chitnis, Binod Mishra, Tabish Khair, Bhaskaranand Jha, Abhay K., Surabhi Sonam and Agranee Shree who continue to contribute to English poetry with their rich and diverse voices. Most of the poets are professor-poets though some of them belong to administrative, medical and science areas. The editor does not claim this anthology as “a compendium of Bihar poetry in English” as there may remain some poets who are still in the dark. It is his firm conviction that this anthology of poets from Bihar will be a “valuable contribution to world poetry today” (vii).

Here is a brief snapshot of all these 22 swans who are swimming in the lake of life.

Babu Avadh Bihari Lall (1866-1921)

The tradition of Bihari poetry begins with Babu Avadh Bihari Lall who hails from Baksanda village of Nawada district of Bihar. He is the first poet who wrote in English in Bihar. Ram Bhagwan Singh wonders why Avadh Bihari Lall was not acknowledged by K.R.S. Iyengar and M. K. Naik. While he was featured in *Mapping the Nation: An Anthology of Indian Poetry in English 1870-1920* by Sheshalatha Reddy who writes: “His poetry, most of it political in nature, evinces a complicated admixture of both loyalty towards and eviscerating critique of the British government” (19). He loves Bihar and, in his poem “Bihar”, calls her “a charming place and goldy to the sight” (6). He talks about “the songs of birds, the scent of flow’rs, the sight / of nature” (7), the sight of which thrills his soul with delight so deeply that he feels himself transported to “the enchanted ground” where he finds Paradise. He responded to Rudyard Kipling’s poem “White Man’s Burden” by writing “The White Man’s True Burden” that revealed the message that it was not a burden to the white man, but to an Indian who was being cheated in the name of white man’s burden.

Gurudas Mukherjee (1928-1988)

Gurudas Mukherjee, who writes in Bengali and English, hails from Patna. He registered his presence as a poet with *Spider’s Consciousness* (1963). He is indebted to Hardy, Thomas and Frost for inspiration, but what he writes is truly Indian. As a poet, he is an empiricist who talks of knowledge which is based on experiences and sings from senses. In his poem, “The

Weaver”, he declares: “After a lot of choosing / I weave experiences / With eyes and hands / And give finishing touches” (14-15). Like a true religious Indian, he knows that excess of everything is bad and so in “Blood is Cheaper than Water”, he asks the people to “Beware of power’s intoxication / That misleads man to their own destruction” (11).

Umeshwar Prasad (1933-1998)

Umeshwar Prasad, who hails from Khagaria, Begusarai, is a teacher-poet and journalist. “I want to rape the conscience of humanity” (19). This very statement reveals the very nature of his poetry. Even the titles of his poetry collections like *Confrontation and Other Poems* and *A Nailed Dream* reveal the truth of this statement. Through his poems, he wishes to awaken the sleeping conscience of the people. In the poem “Unveined Cells”, the poet has written the new script of the meaning of love. For him: “Love’s not a word, dear, / it is a sightless Nun / groping to the cross, dear (26). True love lies in complete surrender to the Cross, the Jesus, the God.

Ravi Nandan Sinha (1952-2021)

Ravi Nandan Sinha, who hails from Hazaribagh is a bilingual scholar writing in English and Hindi. His journal *The Quest* has been a very popular journal of Indian literature in English. He defends poetry in his poem “Your Poets” against the idea that the poetry is a “cardboard kaleidoscope” (57) and a mere plaything for children. He declares that poetry is a moral battlefield where crazy men, i.e. poets fight the battles from which others remain indifferent to face. Poetry is not an escape but it is an act of courage, resistance and truth telling. “Stand aside, my friend, and watch / Some crazy men fight your battles for you; / They are your poets” (57). His poem “Fifty Years of Freedom” offers a post-Independence critique and juxtaposes the sacrifices of the past with the corruption and selfishness of the present. No doubt, it deals with materialism and decay but it also presents a hopeful vision of regeneration where values like sunflower will bloom in the sunlight of truth. “It is time to come out / Of our private winters.../ Let the sunflower / Converse with the confident sun, / Once again” (64).

Pashupati Jha (1955-2023)

Pashupati Jha, who hails from Benipatti, Bihar, is a significant poet with his five poetry collections: *Cross and Creation* (2003), *Mother and Other Poems* (2005), *All in One* (2011), *Awaiting Eden Again* (2015) and *Taking on Tough Times* (2016). Praising his poetry, Ram Bhagwan Singh writes: “Jha’s poetry is pithy, poignant and at times direct yet profound...His language is soaked in simplicity yet its effect is stunning” (65). He writes on love, death, hunger, relations and contemporary scenario in simple, yet forceful language. His poem “Mother” reveals personal grief, reverence and philosophical reflections. Lines like “Mother, you were / Therefore, we are, / and would continue to be / till eternity (67) demonstrate that the mother becomes a timeless force of continuity. The poet transforms personal feelings into a universal vision connecting mother to the Divine Feminine symbolizing compassion, strength, wealth and nurturing energy. His poem “Obituary” is a reflection on the universal human condition of aging and mortality. It offers a critique of the mechanical prolonging of life without vitality, affirms the resilience of the spirit and finally makes the poet accept death as a natural closure. His poem “Many Unresolved Questions” embodies deep existential, social and spiritual concerns while offering a critique of modern society. He has many questions but

does not find their answers. He feels himself like “a lost sailor / on the waves of the unending sea / looking desperately for an island for refuge” (70). He will die but questions will always remain within and after death, he will “wait eternally / for the day of judgement / for the day of resurrection” (70).

C. L. Khatri (1965-2022)

Chhote Lal Khatri, who hails from Lakhawar, a remote village in Jahanabad district is a meaningful poet with his poetry collections: *Kargil* (2000), *Ripples in the Lake* (2006), *Two Minutes Silence* (2016) and *For You to Decide* (2016). His poetry, which is replete with petrichor of Bihar, possesses the innate quality of simplicity and originality coupled with irony and fusion of idea with feeling. Through his poems, the poet creates ripples of love and harmony in the hearts of the people. His poems like “Homage to Maa”, “Holi” and “Jogi ji wah Jogi ji” evoke regional culture for creating harmonious relationship, based on love, feelings and mutual understanding. The poem “Two-Minute Silence” is a criticism against the materialistic attitude of the people who have become bankrupt as they have lost their spiritual values. Khatri’s “Professor Saheb” seems to shake hands with Nissim Ezekiel’s “The Professor.” What makes his poetry striking is that he fuses regional poetry with the poetry in general and, thus, preserves Indian cultural ethos.

Sumirasko (1973-1995)

Sumirasko (Sumit Prasad), the most prolific poet who wrote more than 3000 poems, short stories and essays is from Sindri, Dhanbad. Ram Bhagwan Singh, in a review of Sumirasko’s *Messiah*, writes: “Sumirasko from Bihar is a wonder poet of all times. The literary world knows little about his poetry written during his short but amazingly creative life of just 22 years. His poetry is mainly mystic and esoteric. His parents fail to explain how Sumirasko wrote thousands of poems disproportionate to his age and length of life. They just called him ‘Buddha.’ Had he lived longer, he would have become one in his poetic outpourings” (121). Sumirasko’s poetry is full of philosophy, spirituality and religion. He reveals his feelings about the life of poet in his poem “In Distress” revealing the fact that a poet is often misunderstood and rejected in the society. In “Messiah”, he experiences the presence of God and devil within him and he has to suffer as a result of their fighting. “The two fight beyond good and evil / I just stand and feel the pain of dual” (158).

Amarendra Kumar (b. 1937)

Amarendra Kumar, who hails from Hajipur, is a bilingual poet writing in Hindi and English. Some of his poetry collections are *The Real Episode* (1980), *Sound and Shell* (1986), *Stage Dilemma* (1988), *Song / Anti-Song* (1996), *Passionate Pilgrim* (2006) and *Happenspace Poems* (2016). The poet in Amarendra Kumar offers life as a complex challenge and seems to echo what Eliot says in the line “It is impossible to say just what I mean” (8). He reflects over existence, meaninglessness and the human condition. In “Myth”, he believes that heaven does not exist; it is a myth while hell is simply emptiness or hollowness of meaninglessness of life. “heaven a myth / hell the hollow core / timeless time a teller / in the hole / filling it dig by dig” (34). Silence, in “Meaning”, becomes meaningful and effective form of communication. He states: “Silence on meaning / long, almost endless, / a surer way to convey” (29).

R. K. Singh (b. 1950)

Bihar for R.K. Singh is his karmakshetra, not birthplace. His poetic creation came to flower in I.S.M. Dhanbad which is now in Jharkhand. Some of his popular poetry collections include *My Silence*, *Memories Unremembered*, *Music Must Sound*, *Above the Green Earth*, *The River Returns*, and *I am no Jesus*. He is a well-known name for his haikus and tankas which, as Ram Bhagwan Singh writes, “are fine capsules of witty and pinching realities by turn” (35). His words that are covered with the layers of meanings and senses speak more of what they mean on surface. In “Self-Neglect”, he shows that it is an irony of life that human beings live not by their own standards but according to others’ standard. He states: “love or hate / what others dictate / we get duped / our time lost, without / inner wholeness” (36). For Singh, flesh and spirit, though they seem to be two different opposing identities are one in reality. In “God, Sex and the World”, he mixes sacred with profane while talking of life force creation which can be experienced through physical intimacy. For him: “It’s a part of prayer / to have the lingam kissed / or kiss it to feel / the creator’s pulse” (39).

Prabhat Kumar Singh (b. 1952)

Prabhat Kumar Singh, who hails from Gaya, is a genuine signature of poetry with his poetry collections like *So Many Crosses*, *The Vermillion Moon*, *In the Olive Green*, *Incredible Impressions*, *From the Banks of Phalgu* and *Wandering Words*. He is a poet, critic and translator. Writing about his poetry, the editor writes: “His articulation of the conflicts of love, lust and loyalty issues from the heart and has the watermark of authenticity and genuineness” (46). He is a genuine poet who writes with authenticity and does not hesitate to present the reality of the contemporary scenario. In “Night Safari”, he sees the wolves in the young boys who are “jean clad wolves, hideous hyenas / howl in the streets” (49). He asks with affirmation: “Is there an animal / That isn’t found in humans” (49). Corruption is everywhere. Fire—fire of lust, fire of money, fire of selfishness is burning. Oil-fields, crematorium and even shrines are not untouched from this fire. He reveals his anxiety and worries about future and so his advice, in the poem “Save Yourself, If You Can” is: “There is fire everywhere / Save yourself, if you can” (51). But he is quite optimistic about poetry in his poem “Never a Bad Time for Poetry” where he writes: “There is never a bad time for poetry. / it sprouts stronger in storm” (54).

Kumar Vinod Choudhary (b. 1956)

Kumar Vinod Choudhary (b.1956), who registered his presence as a poet with *Marigold in Rainbow* (2011), is from Muzaffarpur in Bihar. Ram Bhagwan Singh writes: “To him poetry is the ultimate of human knowledge in the same way as music is the ultimate of human feelings” (74). His medical knowledge is reflected in his poems. He believes that poetry is crafted and measured art. It flows with meanings and becomes an inspired revelation. In “Write Poems” he writes: “Write poems—/ measured limbs / Staccato mesmerisms” (75). His poem “Je Connais” reveals the biological truth that the heart is simply “a knot of muscle” (75), but at the same time he also knows that the same knot regales his heart. The poet, though MBBS, is quite conscious of the modern people who are detached from nature because of their obsession with technological progress. He believes that the technological progress has resulted in the loss of ecological and cultural values. He describes such scenario in his poem “From Point to Point” thus: “As civilizations grow / Distance from two points / Recedes” (79).

Anil Kumar Prasad (b. 1958)

Anil K Prasad, who hails from Gopalganj, is a trilingual poet writing in English, Bhojpuri and Hindi. He calls poetry immortal and ponders over the fact that makes it immortal. In his poem “Poetry”, he traces its immortality in universal emotions that continue to live in every age. “The emotional universals stay alive / In every chime, in any clime” (86). The poet in “Remembering a Day” presents the picture of the people of the contemporary society. He feels sad and anxious over the carelessness of the people towards their responsibilities to society. In “Remembering a Day”, he asks the question and responds to it himself stating: “Where are the people who took / Interest in the public good? / Personal progress in life / Is the supreme goal” (86). His poem “Progression” presents life as a journey through a desert concluding that true progression lies in ignoring distractions and moving with inner calm, focus and resilience. “Distracting mirages / ignoring them / I move on” (91). This poem reminds one Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.”

Punita Jha

Punita Jha, who hails from Jamshedpur, registered her presence as a professor poet with the publication of *Rainbow of Love*. She writes on life, women empowerment, dreams, individuality and identity. She uses plain images to make mortality human as well as acceptable. She uses journey as a metaphor in her poem “What If I Die Tomorrow” and creates a concrete image of the abstract idea of death which for her is just the beginning of a long journey. “We live and enjoy a good life. / Be ready to accept / A happy, good second innings. / We all have to die” (93). Her poem “Empowered Women” demonstrates a transformation of a woman from oppression to self-realization. She believes that it is education that frees her from helplessness, abuses and exploitation. She declares: “I can fight my way through, / I’m neither a commodity nor a social discard, / But a priceless gift and guide for one and all” (97).

Vijoy Mishra (b. 1959)

Vijoy Mishra, a poet from Durbangha, is known for his poetry collection *Malaise* and short stories collection *A Slice of Life*. The poet in Vijoy Mishra, sometimes becomes Keats in romanticism, sometimes Ezekiel in expression and sometimes Kamala Das in breaking male chauvinism. Lines from “A Ruse”: “Was she flesh and blood / or Some spirit divine?” (100) and “If it is me or SHE in ME” (101) remind the reader Keats. His poem “Politicisation of Women’s Cause” is rooted in Indian socio-political context as it talks of dowry deaths, reservation and protest. It also addresses some universal issues of gender inequality and exploitation of women’s causes. Mishra writes: “Change, if at all required / Is to break male chauvinism, / His ego and impulse, / The carnal desire / of the brute in him” (105).

Samar Pratap Singh (b. 1965)

Samar Pratap Singh, who registered his presence in the domain of poetry with his poetry collections: *Roses of Rapture* and *Relation Undefined*, is a poet from Madhubani, Darbangha. He started limping limericks that came to him as naturally as leaves to a tree. For him, muse is the elixir. Ram Bhagwan Singh writes: “As a worshipper of nature, he feels mortified to see the ecological degradation threatening mankind. (116). His poem “Mirage” echoes age-old philosophical and spiritual traditions which see life as impermanent and fleeting. Ambitions, achievements and illusion dissolve with the passage of time. Only awareness to life’s mirage

can offer clarity and humility. “Everything looks a mirage / The virtual becomes reality / And the man gets trapped within” and “The life is itself a mirage” (119).

Kalpna Singh-Chitnis (b. 1966)

Kalpna Singh-Chitnis, who hails from Gaya, is an Indian-American poet. *Trespassing My Ancestral Lands*, *Love Letters to Ukraine* and *Bare Soul* are some of her popular collections of poetry. She is a diasporic poet who, in the words of Ram Bhagwan Singh, employs “simple, homely metaphors as true markers of her originality and down to earth connectiveness” (124). She is so rooted to the land of her birth that in her poem “The Land of My Birth”, she utters: “I carry my city in the marrow of my bones” (126). She recalls in her memory her city and the reminiscences which she keeps safe in her heart like receipts. In her poem, “Trespassing My Ancestral Land”, she, in her dreams, searches for “the Buddha in a forest, Muhammad in a cave, and Jesus in Galilee” and looks for “Krishna on a battlefield” (126).

Binod Mishra (b. 1966)

Binod Mishra, a professor poet with his two poetry collections, namely: *Silent Steps and Other Poems* (2011) and *Multiple Waves* (2017) hails from Jaideopatty, Darbhanga. His poems, as Ram Bhagwan Singh writes, “are soaked in contemporary reality where he bleeds for the marginalized” (135). He is sensitive enough to see the oppressions and exploitation prevalent in all the strata of the society. His muse voices not only pain but it also talks of hope. He believes that poetry should come out of silence and comfort zone to face and react against sorrow, injustice and history. His poem “Cry of a Poem” is a meta poem as it talks about poetry and reflects over the responsibilities of poetry. It should narrate the sufferings, struggles and aspirations of the people. “A poem cries / to disenchant itself / from the crowd / to narrate the pangs / of the crowd” (136). The beauty of Binod Mishra’s poetry is that it brings the marginalized to the centre turning them into the symbols of inspiration. Such beauty can be seen in his poem “The Postman” in which he turns the postman into a symbol of resilience, service and cultural transformation. The postman is not just a postman but becomes a carrier of history, ideology and poetic imagination. He is “both colonizer and the colonized” (140). When the postman presents himself before the poet thus: “I am both colonizer and the colonized”, he becomes a larger – than – life voice. His bag is not simply a bag but it becomes a metaphor for history of mankind.

Tabish Khair (b. 1966)

Tabish Khair who hails from Gaya in Bihar is a famous poet settled in Aarhus in Denmark. *My World* and *Where Parallel Lines Meet* are his significant poetry collections. In his poem “The Streets of Memory”, he sees “hope in the twist of the knife” and thinks that sometimes “to tell of death is to remember life” (149). He is a diasporic poet who is well-acquainted with the pain, memories and displacement experienced when one settles in another country. In his poems, this diasporic feeling is reflected, be it “Immigrant” or “Homily.” He uses metaphor and allegories in his poems which reflect the very essence of the fairy tales that he uses for his poems. His poems “Immigrant” and “Homily” are based on H. C. Andersen’s ‘The Little Mermaid’ and ‘By the Almshouse Window’ respectively. His use of fairytales shows his deftness in revealing theme and gist of his thoughts and intentions.

Bhaskaranand Jha (b. 1975)

Bhaskaranand Jha Bhaskar, who hails from a small village of Kharka Basant under Jalley Block of Darbhanga district of Bihar is a trilingual poet writing in Maithili, Hindi and English. *Soothing Serenades: Straight from the Heart* (2018), *Two Indias and Other Poems* (2019), and *Thoughts in Solitude* (2020) are his poetry collections in English. As he is revolutionary in spirit, he writes the poems of protest. The poem “Ire and Fire” is a social and political critique revealing the destructive forces of corruption, anarchy and moral decline in society. In his poem “Sweats and Blood”, he believes that “war for survival has been there since eternity” (160) and all are in war for the sake their own identity. The poet reveals the determined spirit of the weak and the poor who will never bow down their heads before the oppressors. “Let the blood hands behead as many as they can / But the poor’s head will never bow down” (160). The poet talks of the system and the poor people on one side, on the other he attempts his pen to write about love resulting in spiritual love in his poem “Darling of Heart.” Love which begins in the presence of body ends in spiritualism where the lover feels the presence of “Sat, Chit and Ananda / Existence, Consciousness and Bliss” (162).

Abhay K. (b. 1980)

Known for *The Book of Bihari Literature*, Abhay Kumar is a diplomat-poet from Chhabilapur near Rajgir in the Nalanda district of Bihar. He writes about nature, philosophical musings and Bihar’s cultural ethos and heritage. In his poem “Nalanda”, he mentions the library Dharmagunj which was burnt by Bakhtiyar Khilji’s army and which continued to burn for months resulting in the destruction of the sacred manuscripts and treasures of knowledge. The poet comes to the present time and feels that “the light of the world is fading today / to face ravages of time” (170). He connects himself again to the past and feels that he has risen today “like phoenix” from “the ashes” of burnt books. His poem “Diplomacy” seems to echo the form and rhythm of T.S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Man.” The poet borrows Eliot’s pattern, rhythm and tone to express a different idea, i.e. diplomacy. He defines diplomacy thus: “Between the doves / and the hawks / Between annihilation / And co-existence / Revolves diplomacy” (174). In his poem “Earth Anthem” he finds earth as “the most beautiful planet in the universe” (176). The poet, while pondering over the earth, begins to talk of life and death. Death, for him, is an ocean and life a river. This is life, i.e. river which finally flows into the ocean, i.e. death. “The river cannot flow back / to the plains and the mountains / It must flow into the ocean, / and become one with it” (176-177). His poem “Come” reveals cosmic modern vision while merging nature, mythology and astrophysics in this poem. The poem “Come” reminds the reader Tagore’s song “When the heart is hard and parched up.”

Surabhi Sonam (b. 1987)

Surabhi Sonam, who belongs to Jahanabad, is a poet from Mithila region. Though she began to write at the age of 12, she registered her presence in the domain of poetry with her first poetry collection *Mirage* (2020). She is a young poetic voice whose simple poems have layers of meaning and literary significance. The poem “The Goddess”, though seems to be simple on surface reading, possesses deeper meaning as it offers a critique of patriarchy, myth-making and the objectification of women in the guise of respect. The poet assembles the pieces of blocks and gives her a look that she wishes to see. To be tagged in the image of a goddess is the only thing which the poet wants her to be. “Like pieces of blocks / I assembled her together / Gave her the looks / I wanted to see” (180).

Agranee Shree (b. 2004)

Agranee Shree, who started composing poems at the age of eight, hails from Patna. She registered her presence with *The Merry Spring* which contains 20 poems with her own paintings and drawings. She writes poems on nature, love, friendship, silence, pain, suffering and God. Shaileshwar Sati Prasad calls her “a sensitive poet in English with rare insight into diction and rhythm which crystallizes her abstract ideas and spiritual craving” (185). Her poem “Visitor from Heaven” is full of message that God is within and He never takes rest. The poem “Mom, I Love You” reveals the poet’s love for her mother and this love is even greater than the love that the mother has for her. She loves her mother like the clouds that love the sky, the rivers that love their flow and the sunflowers that love the sun. The poet offers a philosophical depth along with existential reflection in “Time Eternal.” While reflecting over time, she utters: “Time is a flowing river, / It will keep on its flow, / it will never pause, / No matter what you do” (188).

A snapshot of these twenty-two swans (poets) demonstrates that English poetry from Bihar is rich in both theme and techniques. The poets give expressions to personal memory, culture rituals and social realities but they have the techniques to transform them into universal reflections. This transforming art succeeds in making them globally acceptable, thus saving them from the regional tag. Their poetry is the fusion of cultural rootedness, philosophical questionings and modern poetic expressions. This fusion becomes rich thematically and technically when these poets employ striking imagery, sharp diction and stylistic innovation in giving expressions to their ideas. Universal concerns of life, death, love, society and spirituality enter the river of Bihar’s poetry quenching the poetic thirst of readers across the globe.

Here are some techniques employed by these poets from Bihar for making their poetry appealing and striking. For instance, the poem “Progression” by Anil K. Prasad is brief but rich in thoughts, images, figures and expressions.

Sand,
Date-palms
And
In my palm
Quietness and calm
Distracting mirages;
Ignoring them
I move on- (91)

The poet has beautifully created here a scene before the reader who himself feels and imagines like the poet. To create such scene before the reader is an art. The reader imagines ‘sand’ before him and, thus, finds himself in the desert. On the one side he sees ‘sand’ and ‘date-palms’ which remind him of dryness, boredom, heat of struggles and difficulties while the very word ‘date-palm’ makes him look towards his own body part ‘palm’ where he feels ‘quietness and calm’ quite contrary to the outward scene. The poet feels quietness and calm within and this makes him stable from within. As he is stable and calm, he compares inner and outer scenes. As the desert is before him, his eyes make him see mirages which distract him. Presence of mirages befools him. These mirages simply distract him, but the quietness and stability within makes him ignore them. The poet moves ahead remembering his goal of progress in life without being distracted by the attractions which simply are distractions for

keeping him away from his destination. This is poetry from Bihar which possesses such artistic qualities as can attract any reader across the globe.

Poets from Bihar are expert in employing figures to make their expressions appealing and thought-provoking. They get rhythm, lyrical and emotive effect by using alliteration in their lines. Here are the instances of alliteration from Bihar poetry in English:

“Sleeveless surroundings” (Umeshwar Prasad 22)

...

“The sand shuffles syllables” (Ravi Nandan Sinha 57)

...

“Screeches rend the slept sky / Sirens and screams, disarray, holocaust” (Samar P. Singh 117)

They use the figure ‘Simile’ for giving a visual mental image to their thoughts in order to make the reader understand their perspectives. Mark the lines for the use of Simile:

Memories still linger

Like half remembered fairy tales. (Ravi Nandan Sinha 64)

...

I am like a lost sailor

on the waves of the unending sea (Pashupati Jha70)

...

She was standing like Mother Mary

Feeding me her breast

Alas! I could not be her Christ (C.L. Khatri108)

Sample the lines for the use of ‘Metaphor’ for creating vivid imagery and conveying emotions and abstract ideas.

Love’s not a word, dear,

it is a sightless Nun (Umeshwar Prasad 26)

...

When jean clad wolves, hideous hyenas

Howl in the streets? (Prabhat K. Singh 49)

...

smile is a weathered wreath

for I live alone, alone (Sumirasko 52)

...

My love is a rising sun

Which makes the whole world bright. (Agranee Shree 186)

The poets from Bihar knows well how to give human qualities to non-human subjects and create vivid imagery in order to deepen emotional connection. This they do with the help of the figure ‘Personification.’ Here are some samples for the use of the figure ‘Personification.’

Let the sunflower

Converse with the confident sun, (Ravi Nandan Sinha 64)

...

The Brahmaputra meanders

Her muddy water

Cast spells (Kumar Vinod Chaudhary 82)

...

The Earth is shorn of its green hair (Samar Pratap Singh 118)

...

The heart of a river
Does not discriminate. (Kalpna Singh-Chitnis 131)
...
Even a flower is more intelligent
protects the sap is forever vigilant (Sumirasko 151)
...
Amidst the salutes of the trees
The earth silently mourns the brave death. (Bhaskaranand Jha Bhaskar 166)

Sample the lines for the fusion of figures like ‘Simile’, ‘Metaphor’ and ‘Alliteration’:

trapped in tunnel, draped in dark, yet firm
Slithering silently like reptiles (Binod Mishra 142)

Sample the lines for the fusion of figures like ‘Alliteration’ and ‘Personification’:

Time timely cures
The Time-borne wound; (Vijoy Mishra 103)

Here is an excerpt which is fusion of the figures like ‘Metaphor’ and ‘Personification’ along with repetition and rhythm.

Time is,
Time was,
Time will be,
It will never wait for you or me.
Time is a flowing river, (Agranee Shree 188)

Here is an instance of ‘Paradox’ and ‘Metonymy’:

I flew on the wings of aluminum and steel
that would finally take me home, away from my home. (Kalpna Singh-Chitnis 127)

The first ‘Home’ suggest a return to a place of final destination, i.e. America where she is now living and the second ‘Home’ signifies leaving behind the place of origin resulting in the journey of separation from the native place or the place of her birth. Phrase like ‘Wings of aluminum and steel’ refers to an airplane.

Poets from Bihar are skillful in using a well-chosen phraseology like “the mist of ignorance” (Babu Avadh Bihar Lall 2), “blind alley of eternity” (Amarendra Kumar 33) and “lines of anxiety on the farmer’s face” (Binod Mishra 135). Kalpna Singh-Chitnis in her poem “Invocation” awakens Mother Goddess by addressing her by her nine names: Shailputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghante, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Katyayani, Kalratri, Mahagauri, Siddhidatri” (128). Here are the two excerpts that reveal Bihar poets’ knack in employing allusions like Adam, Eve, Santiago etc. in order to make their poetry globally acceptable and accessible.

So that the fruit of knowledge
May help Adam and Eve
Until kingdom come. (Vijoy Mishra 106)
...
It’s truth and you go like Santiago
To uphold what none could hold

And a victory within the defeat (Samar Pratap Singh 119)

Asking question is an art. Questioning itself becomes an answer of responding. Kalpna Singh-Chitnis asks series of questions and responds in them.

Who am I?...
Am I fire or wind?
Am I clouds or rain?
Am I a star or space?
Or a bare soul without face? (132)

Here are two more instances: one from Gurudas Mukherjee's "The Cicatrice" and the other from Prabhat K. Singh's "Night Safari" that prove the art of asking questions and equally art of responding them again in questions:

Does the spirit retain no trace
Of its quest, its breathless race,
Its struggles, doubts and hours of gloom...? (17)
...
Is there an animal
That isn't found in humans? (49)

As Bihar is the land of great saints and philosophers, it is natural that poetry will also be philosophical, meditative and reflective. For Gurudas Mukherjee, "The meaning of life is the quest / The end of life alone brings rest" (17). Tabish Khair wanders in the streets of memory and concludes philosophically: "To tell of death is to remember life" (149). Bhaskaranand Jha Bhaskar becomes so skeptic that he raises a question on the mysterious existence of God: "If God exists / Why does He remain silent" (163)? Whether there is God or not, a man has to live his life and find out meaning in the meaningless world. "But man has to live his life, come what may" (166). Abhay Kumar talks of man who attempts to win the world but fails to win himself. "You conquered all / but yourself" (175). R. K. Singh fuses God, sex and the world into one in order to be enlightened. "meeting and departing / learning and unlearning / each moment synthesizing / god, sex and the world" (40). Life for Abhay K. is "a river" which falls into the ocean, i.e. death. "Death is an ocean, life is a river / The river flows into the ocean" (176).

Poets are like water that takes shapes in the vessel in which it is poured. The poets from Bihar, when the situation demands, becomes revolutionary in spirit. Too much suffering results in anger. The weak reveal their anger and protest even the strong. "When suffering exceeds the limit / Even weak ire sets the strong on fire" (Bhaskaranand Jha 165). Punita Jha is against all kinds of exploitation. She recommends education which will make an end of all kinds of women oppression. She makes her persona strong enough to fight and make her way. She is not a commodity to be sold; she is a guide for all. Mark the lines for the strong determination of the poetic persona who becomes mentally prepared to fight any fight.

I can fight my way through,
I'm neither a commodity nor a social discard,
But a priceless gift and guide for one and all. (Punita Jha 97)

This is not merely a woman poet like Punita Jha but even a male poet like Vijoy Mishra raises questions related to politicisation of women's cause. Everyone seems to be baking "the bread of personal share" in the name of politics for women's cause. He offers a solution of the problem related to the politics in the name of women's cause thus:

Change, if at all required,
Is to break male chauvinism, (Vijoy Mishra 105)

Most of the poets are professor poets who always take an advantage of their teaching profession. A teacher is the best moralizer. Bihar's English poetry is replete with this moral element. Even those who are not teachers also reveal their moralistic tone wherever they have moral to offer. Babu Avadh Bihari Lall does not hesitate to respond to exploitation of the Indian in "The White Man's True burden." He asks the white men in a moralistic tone to improve their actions: "Heed how thy God of justice / Will thy actions see" (9). Gurudas Mukherjee warns about the danger of power that takes man to the path of destruction. "Beware of power's intoxication / That misleads man to their own destruction" (11). Prabhat K. Singh asks the people to save themselves from fire—fire of lust and fire of corruption. "There is fire everywhere / Save yourself, if you can" (51). Kalpna Singh-Chitnis is aware of the relativity of truth and so advises the reader saying: "Truth is not always what is said / Truth is not always what is heard, / Sometimes, the truth exists somewhere in the middle" (132). Ravi Nandan Sinha does not hesitate to bring out the problem related to environmental pollution. "An entire nation marching into the future / With the handkerchief to its nose" (63). Anil K. Prasad puts a satire on politics by bringing out the fault of the democratic system. Democracy is a mockery of government in the name of people. "it seems by seeing the mockery / of a democracy by the people, of the people / But not for the people" (87).

"Let all words be brief" (146). This is what Tabish Khair writes. Saying truth in a few words is an art. This is the art which is embraced by the poets from Bihar writing in English. Here are some excerpts which are aphoristic in nature revealing truth and experiences of life:

once, after all, has to be a realist someday (Pashupati Jha 72)
...
We all have to die. (Punita Jha 93)
...
Oh yes, life is colorful in spite all its trivialities. (Punita Jha 94)
...
Absence shows one's real worth. (C. L. Khatri 109)
...
The life is itself a mirage (Samar Pratap Singh 119)
...
Discover happiness everywhere (Agranee Shree 189)
...
Thank God for everything (Agranee Shree 190)

Poetry from Bihar is deep rooted in relations, Indian ethos and traditions. Poets honour their cultural values. They wish to maintain their goodness in order to save relations in spite of the fact that they know they are being befooled but never reveal so in order to save relations. Vijoy Mishra knows the value of maintaining relationship with family and so declares in his poem "I'm Too Good":

If goodness is foolishness
I'm ready to be
Double a fool
to be
Befooled by my own (102)

Bihar is known for Chhath puja. C. L. Khatri reveals the significance of this puja while recalling his mother. "And the rising sun of Chhath / Giving us thekua, kasaar and fruits in prasad / Guerdon of three days observance" (Khatri 109). Bihar is the place where "much water has flown under the sand of the Falgu, the Niranjana" (Chitnis 127). This is the place where festival like Holi is celebrated with love and enthusiasm. "Holi hai bhai Holi hai! / Don't take it amiss; it's Holi!" (Khatri 112). Songs of Bihar's folklore "Dance Jogi ji dance, / Holi ka hai trance.2 / Jogi ra sa ra ra ra.....2 / Jogi ji wah jogi ji" (Khatri 113) are sung with love. Bihar's festivals, rivers and folklore are in English poetry from Bihar. By writing in English in local idioms and rituals, the poets in Bihar assert a Bihari identity across the globe. What Sumirasko writes: "so crucial an art it is / the word, the music, the pattern / it can lift the genuine reader" (154) is quite applicable to Bihar's poetry in English. Word, music and pattern are the three ingredients which are significant in making English poetry from Bihar great and meaningful and its main purpose is not simply to move the reader but to make "the realization of spirit" (155). English poetry from Bihar is the mirror of life and its experiences. Sumirasko, in his poem "The Criterion", writes that the poetic pen from which "ink that flows, is life's stream" (156). In "River of Songs", while Kalpna Singh-Chitnis explores her own poetic journey, she appears to channel the voice of Bihar when she utters thus:

I opened my eyes
And found poetry before me.
I turned my back on it
To face reality,
Even since I'm transformed into
A river of songs. (131)

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