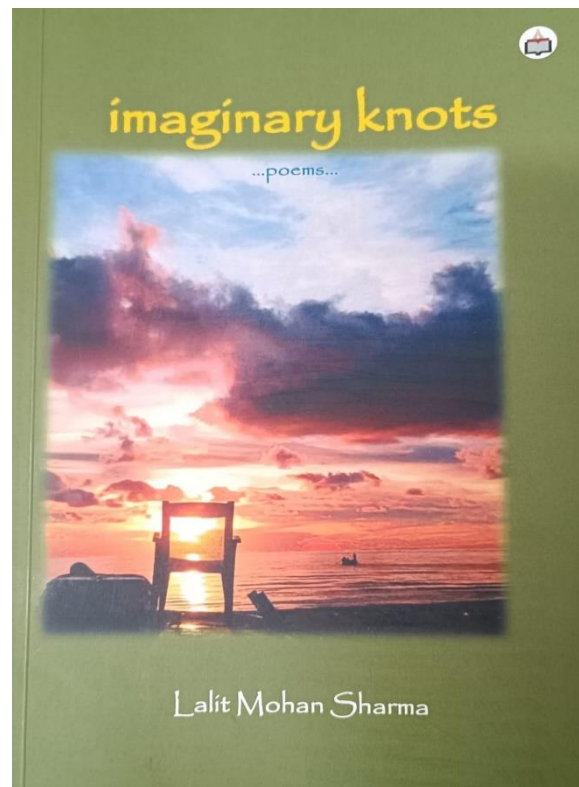


***Imaginary Knots* by Lalit Mohan Sharma, New Delhi: Authorspress, 2024.
ISBN: 9789355299086, Pages:117.**

Reviewed by Tamali Neogi
Assistant Professor of English
Gushkara College
(Affiliated to the University of Burdwan)
West Bengal, India.
Email: Tamalineogi13@gmail.com

Imaginary Knots, the ninth collection of English poems by the celebrated poet Lalit Mohan Sharma, invites the readers to tie/untie the imaginary knots with the poet's fanciful thoughts, introspection as well as reflection on contemporary socio-political realities, the key aspect of Sharma's anthologies. In contemporary times when most of the sensitive minds are traumatized by the reverberations of suppressed voices of dissent rising in the neglected, war-torn corners of our globe, the poet naturally begins with a poem like "Insufferable" that deals with war and human suffering. "For whom do we mourn" too echoes the plaintive notes of war. Disturbed times,



hypocrisy of political leaders, religious intolerance are recorded in poem after poems – "Space Shrinks," "Amphitheatre," "Summer of 2023," "India @ Seventy 6." "Two Thousand Twenty Four," "Dialogues," "Listen or Not to Listen," "Why Must You?" "A Continental Chief," "Harassing the Heritage," "Space for Sedition" and "Imaginary Knots." When ". . . disorder is the order of the day" (34), it is very natural that rights are denied "Within Amphitheatre of Democracy" (42). The "poet's powerful protest is registered in words: "Always the casualty is mankind" (48). His love and empathy for the common citizens in contrast to "those in power" (50) is evident in the following lines(in "India @ Seventy 6")

"Common people are not ignorant, stupid;
They are honest, gullible and credulous.

Sweating in earning to feed their lives,
They breathe words of holy scriptures;
No time for them to become shrewd or
Proclaim to be better than neighbours.
That game belongs to those in power,
Who claim to be custodians of history.
They tell you what to eat or must avoid,
Who the ancestors, whom to worship,
Who enslaved you so many years ago,
And who awakened you to freedom.” (50-51)

Sharma’s description of the commoners reminds one of Hardy’s portrayal of the simpleminded rustics in his novels. At times though the tone is one of mockery, yet the poet retains his faith in humanity and we hear: “Conflicts unforeseen seem to conflate/Contemporary times,/That’s just temporary,/A phase of transition” (50). In unforgettable lines the poet describes past heroes in contrast to the mimic men of our times: “If men were like a menu at a restaurant,/You will select a few and neglect the rest./But great men are like metaphors,/You don’t approach them literally./They offer traits to portray in life” (51). His poetry represents the shabby realities, atemporal, universal.

There is death on streets, collision of vehicles, or
of vested interests wrought with conflict claims (59)

Against harsh reality, the poet's imaginary vision calls for a temporary sojourn into the world of hope. He sees:

The ancient arrives
Posthaste to enshrine
On the celebrities tongue-tied
Stand to abide by ordinances
Before being turned into laws
In the new House of Commons (55).

“Listen or Not to Listen” and “Continental Chief” are fine parodies of contemporary political leader/s, posing an image larger than life: “He looms large, his shadow/ Hovers over us like a

shade” (67). Or one may quote “His quiver of a mind has more arrows/ Than warrior heroes of Epic battles” (93).

The poet sees through the false “patriotic fervor” (108) and is not a spineless native as not to protest against the diplomatic act of “wrapping past in false narratives” (111). “Unhealed Wounds” (68) leads the poet to find solace in love and beauty as if he is summoned to a world of delicate feelings that nourish his poetic sensibility; the poet enters the cocoon of these loveliest feelings either to visit a world of “forgotten fantasy” (23), simply to wear the “necklace of joy” (29) or to come out more energetic to face the “rubble and debris” (15) of his times. The anthology contains a good number of love poems where the personal, romantic and finer aspects of life are celebrated in verse through the festival of images. His need to communicate and failure of conversation are expressed marvellously through this image:

words as pebbles sink
Trapped by floating leaves
Submerged in past reservoir (70).

In “Why Must You” against religious intolerance and politics of religion he creates a striking image:

why must you install yourself like a shrine
At the Centre of a temple of intolerance? (81)

A lover's mind is “Busy with flights of butterfly” (83). In a yet different poem he sees humanity as “sowing sapling;” “we plant ourselves;/ Men and before them their fathers/ Sourced the ignition that did launch/ The unveiling of memory’s beginning”(90). In a world of virtual friendliness the poet's urges “Assume Bonsai shapes on the Internet” (26); his desires “In a thousand forms...Assumed shapes like clouds” (32). At times purposefully his mind “hides itself to seek again/ The elusive edge of fulfilled dreams” (45). In “A Face Perfect” he celebrates a rhythm of phonetics in human form (57). Lalit Mohan Sharma's love poetry must be read in the light of the lines quoted from Nietzsche: “...we have/ Art so that we shall not die of reality” (58).

Imaginary Knots contains a few occasional poems as well like “Shy Gardener,” “Baaji,” “Father and Son” etc. which reveal his inclination “To exclaim joy in surprise and embrace/ The world frolic around in playful fun” (64). “My Readings,” “Initiation on,” “On Reading Again” are such poems as offer a valued glimpse to the poet's private existence. The poet's

capacity to go beyond the immediate, delving deep into broader realities of life, is expressed wonderfully in this poem titled “Beginning of Memory.” The melancholic tone of “Before I check out” contrasts against the poet's insistence to be permanently in the state of adolescence, marked by “ceaseless” “human quest for ripeness in life” (79). In the final analysis it can be said that though in a number of poems some structural flaws are evident (either internal logic of the poem is not properly built or the poet at times seems to get lost in reflection, forgetting the point of view with which he begins), *Imaginary Knots* is a must read for readers whose “young passion” and “adult emotion” (75) need an anchorage to get subsistence; readers either learn to philosophize or learn the arts of living.