

Book Review on Dr Savita B Singh's *The Road and The Lamp*

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Poet and Critic

'The Road and The Lamp'. the debut novel by Dr Savita B. Singh, explores the love's splendours and the wisdom of living that slowly burns in the easefully flowing narrative. It's the plot of the past history and the inherent bonding in the novel that advances seamlessly through the lovers in her nimble and insightful prose. The author pours her heart into this life-affirming story that celebrates the joy and friendship, love and light.

The tone of this beautiful, unforced novel is quiet and nuanced yet the author's gentle gaze never fails to notice the real life. Neither the unnecessary degradations, nor the verbosity can dampen in lighting up the pages of this book. Sympathy, sharp and acute as a projectile, is one of Savita's most powerful and beautiful weapons. She understands the space between people, how we long to move through it, how we fill up our empty moments. Her writing is consistently fresh and engaging.

'The Road and The Lamp' is a lovely exploration of longing and vulnerability, a reminder of the bondage and the true humanity. It's an accomplishment, even more startling because it feels effortless. The simple structure of the novel and the lyrical prose convey the dynamic expression of the author's radiant curiosity. The writing is actually an elegant choreography, as easy to read as gliding across floorboards.

They were crossing through a rocky countryside, intersected by numerous rivers and rivulets. When a full moon sailed out, from behind the tattered clouds, there rained down an ethereal splendour, creating a mystical play of silver and shadows. Rishi Sarkar stood still, as he absorbed the remote beauty of this lonely planet. The elixir bathed and cleansed his mind. There emanated from this singular beauty, of the silent wilderness sweeping past, a tranquillity which aroused within him a belief...the Almighty became a tangible presence.'

The energy and excitement of the fiction, come from the two prime characters Dr Rishi Sarkar, a wealthy and composed man and the unadorned, young, orphan woman Chitra who is haunted by past terrors. They meet accidentally while travelling on a train and Dr Sarkar finds in Chitra, the soul of the beautiful woman in the painting of a French artist. Kanchan, the wife of Dr Sarkar's colleague, Vasant, has bought this painting of a young western woman. Incidentally, Dr Sarkar likes the painting so much that Kanchan gifts it to him.

'He turned and found himself looking at a young woman. Her wet hair, and dripping sari, clung to her piteously shivering body. Her eyes were large and frightened, and her lips trembled as if a tempest was due from within.'

'Dada,' he whispered, 'the painting that Kanchan didi gave to you...she's a replica!' Dr Sarkar nodded. 'There is an uncanny resemblance,' he agreed softly. 'Stay relaxed, Arun. She's very frightened and upset. First I want to get her changed into something dry and warm.'

Dr Sarkar has felt during the course of his life that a part of Chitra is always be with him and the two are actually the heart of the book. She redeems him and is redeemed by him. Here Dr Sarkar and Chitra don't reside a world- they are perhaps the world.

*'Momentarily she lifted those stirringly beautiful eyes, misted with a deep emotion. Her lips began to tremble, and tear drops rolled down, onto the gifts that she still held in her hands. Suddenly she put the gifts on the bed, and got down from the bed. Bending down, she touched his feet with both her hands. Any rebuke died on his lips when he saw, as she *The Road* and the straightened up, a child-like happiness sparkling through the veil of tears.'*

Finally, Dr Sarkar and Chitra come together as if good karmas are imminent while the other happy couple Kanchan and Vasant unfortunately face a miserable end as Kanchan has met with an untimely death and Vasant after a prolonged struggle with life finds solace in spiritual

awareness in God's home. The novel unspools in a rational and realistic world in which all is not as it seems.

'Amidst the suffering, misery, despair, courage and hope, he saw people moving around, carrying the light of kindness and compassion. His soul had become ceaselessly aware of God, and the awareness cradled his traumatized soul.'

Savita is a physician by profession, which equips her in digging deep inside the inner life and she is no stranger to emotional close work as well. She writes about the gratitude, the time it takes to "know" someone unreal, the stirring of what one recalls recording as musing in a painter's thought. She shows in love bond how we respond to the smallest signals – perhaps a look, a gesture, a word. It is love between Dr Rishi Sarkar and Chitra she describes.

She is also particularly good at describing restlessness and there is a pleasing note about the prose's swiftness which is as rolling-field expansive as her empathy and its structure is organised to ease the progress of the love affair. Her narrative flows seamlessly from past to present, folding time into pleats and illuminating the fibres of love and affection.

'Chitra listened to the steady rhythm of his heartbeats. Now and then, she tilted up her face, and let her eyes wander over his face. Once, unable to restrain herself, she reached out, and very lightly touched his face. He grunted, half opened his eyes, and dropped a kiss on the top of her head.'

But each character has its singularity, vulnerability and history. Be it Hemant babu, Sitara, Arun, and these are key parts in the growth of the events, not contrived, add-on ornaments – the objects are counterbalances to the narrative, intriguing parallels. All, in their way, are precious but it's a reality that appears to be drawing closer.

'Whenever we can, let us pour oil into those lamps, which will help to chase away the darkness, now here, now there, continued Hemant babu. Let us keep alight, the torches of all those before us, who dared to care. Peer into the disheartening darkness, and you will come across a lamp burning steadfastly. Then you will spot another, and another. That one over there, was lit a century ago.'

On the whole, the characters observe one another and reveal themselves. There is no tedium, no laziness in the superiority of love and its follies, it generates only the positive vibes and sheer energy. The set pieces in the novel have both affectionate homage and unrivalled irony and the author skillfully manages the social relations and the inner lives.

'Images of Kanchan and Vasant, began to merge with excerpts, from the writings of Hemant babu: a precious emotional bond does not get cleaved by Death. Love is an emotion that remains enshrined, within the bosom of the truly grieving soul, inaccessible to Death and Time.'

One of the strengths of Savita as a writer is that she doesn't fill in just for the sake of it. What strikes me most

in her write, is the stimulus and the unconditional flow in reshaping love in our life. Her novel's enchanting search of humanity and philosophy, of how humans connect with their environment and community is treasured and it also rings true.

There is a belief that we build ourselves on soul searching and so a path grows. The novel resembles this path. She reminds us of the randomness of first encounters, the precariousness of what follows, the insecurity of being alive. She writes about the untarnished "best" self, encountered at the beginning of a romance.

There was not another soul on the road, nor a human habitation, where she could have run for protection, against the animals that lurk in such an evil darkness. Waves of giddiness and nausea engulfed Chitra, and she began to retch violently. When Dr Sarkar tried to support her, her blind eyes knew not who had touched her. Chitra's piteous, terrified cries filled the corridor.

'Chitra, Chitra.' she heard Dr Sarkar's voice calling her insistently. She turned her perspiring face, and congested eyes to him. The next moment she was in his arms, clinging to him like a frightened child, and sobbing violently.'

The author is speaking more subtly to a readership on the shades of the good Karma in fashioning our destiny, and entitling us to Divine help and intervention, in our times of trouble. Her deft rendering and intimate observation of the complex dynamics of life is beautifully enumerated.

It is a book that fascinates, that gives a new approach about love and human nature and seeks where the goodness of the society comes from. In fact, it is the frankness of the book that makes it such a great attempt to explore this wonderful theme.

The cover page design is striking. It is that all-consuming passion and love that resonates and gives this book its value. The book is a must for every bookshelf.

Title: *The Road and The Lamp - The Sparkle of the Travelling Soul*

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About the Author

Dr Savita B Singh was born in Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh and spent her childhood in various cities including Pune, Pachmari and Calcutta. She finished her schooling from St Mary's School, Pune. Further, she did her MBBS and MD (General Medicine) from BJ Medical College, Pune. She served as a physician in several hospitals in Pune.

About the Reviewer

Gopal Lahiri was born and grew up in Kolkata. He currently lives in Kolkata, India. He is a bilingual poet, writer, editor, critic and translator and widely published in Bengali and English language. He has had seven collections of poems in Bengali and eight collections of poems in English which includes four POD books published from Lulu Publications, USA. His poems were published in various anthologies and journals which includes Indian Literature, CLRI, National Treasures, Home Bound etc.

He is an experienced book reviewer both in English and Bengali and his review has been published amongst others in the prestigious Desh weekly and The Telegraph Kolkata in the eighties and nineties.

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