

Rajkamal Shiromani: *You And My Haiku*, ICLLC Publications, Patna & Wisconsin, 2010. Book Review: Sunil Sharma

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The paradoxes are obviously many: Rajkamal Shiromani, as a well-known teacher of linguistics loves to teach pure English sounds to the bewildered non-native speakers of this language of the erstwhile Raj in an English-obsessed, free country, still stuck in the old mindset of the ruled; but, as a prominent poet, prefers to compose his feelings in a 300-year-old Japanese verse form, in English! The hybridity of form and content---sourced from multiple sources in India, West and East--- can be very amazing for those living in a flat world. In fact, in a post-modern world, boundaries matter not. As global consumers of cultural artifacts and traditions, we inhabit many worlds simultaneously, sans being affected by any at a deeper level or changed by them in any profound way. With due apology to the cerebral Lyotard, an Indian may eat pizza in the early morning or a cheese-burger in the rushed evening or the spicy veg- Chinese noodles in the late night, while watching Sean Connery on HBO in his 10X10 living room on a hot humid October Mumbai in 2010, he/she may still remain a conservative Indian by heart. Haiku once belonged to imperialist Japan; but so did the "civilizing" Arnoldian English belonged to the British Empire, out to conquer territories geographical and mental. Now both Haiku and English have been appropriated, mastered and mobilized by the great Caliban and his grand- children of the post-colonial nations with great élan and for different goals. The original Haiku is non-rhymed poetic form of 5-7-5 sound units in Japanese with a kigo and a Kireji and written vertically. There is juxtaposition of two ideas in this challenging sensory art-form, demanding a reference to a season and a switch to another idea midway---all within 17-sound units that many West-led artists might find restricted and limited. The English Haikus are written in three lines, horizontally and in syllabic form. But, as it happens in the field of art everywhere, the new voices liberalize the form. Picasso did it with Monet and African art. Joyce did it with the Victorian novel-writing. Eliot was also a rebel, dismantling old traditions fast. Before them, the Bard changed many of the dramatic rules of the venerable Greeks and the eclecticism gained by him accidentally or by design or both proved to be electrical! Basho would definitely approve of the Haikus written by the polyglot and ELT-specialist Rajkamal who is writing for a mass-audience raised on differing cultural reference-points that keep on changing in a highly transient world where nothing lasts beyond a minute. His Haikus are like the minimalist stage for a bare Beckett play or a rich miniature Mughal painting packed with subtle details. These Haikus are the bare words charged with energy and pregnant with profound meanings. It is like going out of a grayish-dark, choked-up metro to the open and green meadow on a clear wintry day, and re-discovering a deep-azure sky after a long time of polluted living; and, then getting dazzled by the purity of contrasting colours, and, starkness and simplicity of the natural, almost