

Poetry of K. V. Dominic: A Critique

- T. V. Reddy

Abstract: *Winged Reason* composed by K. V. Dominic is his first collection of thirty-nine poems covering a wide range of subjects from childhood to old age, from pleasures and pains to cats, birds and animals, from feasts to singers, from politics to economics. Unquestionably this book is a social document presenting his social concerns in lyrical lines and reflecting his active participation in the fabric of social life at large. His poetry is an expression of his sympathy for the suffering sections of our society, for the poor and the down-trodden, for the helpless women and the aged. In clear terms he attacks corrupt politicians and government officials and the callous apathy of the government to the poorer sections.

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As the book opens, the first poem itself, 'In Memoriam: George Joson', an elegy written on his colleague who died in a car accident, speaks eloquently of the writer's spirit of intense humanism. While he feels haunted by his absence, he reconciles himself with the inevitable and ends with the lines: The best is to resign | to what He ordains | in time and out of time. (WR, p. 18) In quite contrast with the opening poem, the next poem 'Long Live E. K. Nayanar' is politically inspired. Like most of the Keralites Dominic too comes under the influence of the Communist ideology and he is very much moved by the death of E. K. Nayanar, the thrice Chief Minister of Kerala who is still remembered as the man of the masses. The writer bids 'Lal Salaam' to the leader, a true Communist and patriot and an 'epitome of Socialism', who championed the cause of the denied and the deprived and the downtrodden: You are our polestar | who saves us from Darkness. (WR, p.20) The next piece 'A Nightmare' is a vivid picture of the present social situation which is indeed a nightmare to any observer with a feeling heart. It is a picture of terrible contrasts and anomalies and horrible gaps that refuse to be bridged so easily – an overfed boy whose mother beats him to eat more and a bony child crying for a crumb, a lavish wedding feast in the town hall on one side and on the other side two starving girls in rags struggling with the dogs at the garbage bin, two long queues – one at the liquor shop where beggars too compete and the other at the ration shop, two-storeyed edifices with luxury rooms and swimming pools on one side and on the other slums and huts. 'A Sheep's Wail' is an interesting piece running into a dozen three-lined units giving an autobiographical picture of a typical sheep whose piercing cry is in the nature of a plea and a complaint:

Man, you are the cruelest, | you are the most ungrateful | of all God's creatures. |... | If a heaven is there | we will reach there first | and pray to God to shut you out. (WR, p. 25)

While the piece 'Anand's Lot' is a sympathetic narration of the heart-piercing cries and sufferings of the kidnaped child Anand, a school-going boy, who was beaten and forced to beg and give the collected earnings,

the poem 'Gayatri's Solitude' is a moving description of the eighty-two year old widowed mother Gayatri who is fated to live a lonely life in an old age home, though well-furnished, in India although she is a mother of three sons and two daughters as all of them live in the US: The depth of maternal love, | and the pangs of separation | no child can gauge. (WR, p.32) In 'Tsunami Camps' he narrates the untold miseries of the victims of the natural disaster who 'lost their dear ones / and fight against destiny.' Though the Government gave kits and boxes, they did not contain essential things and their plea for boats and fishing nets and their unending wails became a futile cry in wilderness; their piercing cry – 'It's better to kill us than torture like this' (p.33) – failed to reach the deaf ears of the government. Now the poet tries to harp on his favourite subject of widening difference between haves and have-nots in the verse piece of the same title 'Haves and Have-nots'. This is a world where capitalism rules and communism fails and the pity is even the so-called champions of socialism and communism do not put their principles in practice. As such the writer says: But power corrupted; | leaders turned tyrants; | philosophy failed. (WR, p.37) In the poem 'I am Just a Mango Tree' the writer succeeds in painting the man in true colours and even the tree complains to God regarding the inhuman nature and unlimited greed of man: God, why is your man so selfish and cruel? | Did you create him | to disturb this earth's balance? The God sincerely regrets his thoughtless action of creating this cruel man and expresses his bitter feelings with pain and remorse:

My child, I created him | in My own image | but he's gone
astray; | My agony is endless. | That's the fate of the Father
everywhere. | I shouldn't have created this human species; | But how
can a father kill his sons? (WR, p. 41)

'Indian Democracy' is a stark presentation of the sordid reality of the existing state of our democracy. Though ours is the largest democracy, 'regionalism and parochialism devour nationalism and patriotism'; election campaigns overflow with 'fireworks of lies and abuses'; holding of Parliament elections is 'a several billion business'; 'Criminal M.Ps are brought from jails to prove majority on floor.' The result is we have 'Corrupt Governments / draining the blood of people' (p.60-61). 'In the Name of God' is an interesting piece presenting the bitter truth of all anti-social activities committed in the name of God; the name of God is unnecessarily dragged into all unethical acts. Criminal actions are done in the name of God and history is a witness to the killing of millions in crusades in the name of God. Now democracy gets diluted in the name of God. In the name of God superstition survives, poison of communalism spreads, terrorists butcher innocent people, teens are transformed into terrorists, higher castes indulge in exploitation, secularism is destroyed and corruption gets promoted: God is dethroned | in the name of God. | And human gods are crowned | in the name of God. (WR, p. 70) The poet pays high tribute to the woman teacher Kaumudi who is now no more and who is a role model and a guiding spirit for all other women with her glowing spirit of patriotism, revealed in her early age of sixteen when she donated all her golden ornaments to Gandhi for the freedom struggle when he addressed a meeting at Vadakara in Malabar. She was so

deeply influenced by Gandhi's message that she pledged to wear no ornaments, followed his footsteps, taught Hindi in Malabar schools and led a simple life till her death at ninety-two: Kaumudi's dazzle dimmed | the dazzle of all other women in jewels and ornaments. | Let's bow our head to this rarest gem. (WR, p. 75)

His second collection *Write Son, Write*, published a year later in 2011, has thirty-one poems with a Preface and a Foreword by the contemporary poet P. C. K. Prem. In this second volume the writer seems to continue his favourite theme of social reform and justice aiming the shaft of his satire on corruption which has grown to monstrous size. Finding fault with all-embracing materialism his sensitive heart grieves at the loss of moral values in all the walks of social life. The first poem which happens to be the title poem 'Write my Son, Write' is a lengthy verse divided into twenty-one parts that run to seventeen pages with pictorial presentation. Dominic declares in his Preface that "The opening poem Write, My Son, Write' is indeed the manifesto of my views and philosophy. Divided into twenty-one parts, it declares my views on God, Man and Nature." God created man with a purpose and a mission and not for fun to fill the vacuum. As such this poem starts on a solemn note with God's words: My son, | I have a mission | in your creation, God spoke | to my ears. (WSW, p.21) God asks his son to look at the tip of his pen and tells him that he is the ball of his pen, the ink that flows on the paper and asks him 'Write till / I say stop'. He asks him to feel the symphony of the universe and it grieves Him to see that his species seldom feel His rhythm and they have become insensitive and in this respect plants and animals are better than human beings. Part three elaborates the rhythm and harmony, present in every molecule and in every atom. It is present in the majestic tramp of elephant, in the dart of deer, trot of tiger, race of rabbit, lope of leopard, swoop of swine, scud of squirrel, canter of kangaroo, tear of bear, gallop of horse, bound of bull, dash of dog, dart of cormorant, plunge of kingfisher, flit of swift, swoop of kite, plummet of eagle, buzz of bee wing of mynah, drone of mosquito, motion of snake, march of centipede and millipede and movement of worms and insects. He says: 'Rhythm is there / everywhere / and creates / the perpetual / harmony' (p. 23). Part Six speaks of the importance of co-existence and cooperation and states the core of the message: Your existence | depends on others; | all my creations, | useful and beautiful. (p.25) Part Ten finds fault with the cruel and violent nature of man: 'Who gave you right / to kill my creation?' (p.29). The writer is against the killing of animals, fowl and fish for their taste and food, for their sport and fun. Part Fourteen deals with the limitations of man; what we hear, see and know is very little: 'What you hear / is little; / much more lies / beyond your ears.' (p.32). While Part 16 gives a brief sketch of different types of mafia, religious, political and intellectual, Parts 17&18 deal with religious mafia, Part 19 with political mafia and Part 20 with intellectual mafia. The last part 21 is more or less a summation of the lengthy verse reiterating the message that human beings can survive in this world only when they allow other creatures, plants and animals to live in harmony:

If they heed | they will be saved; | other beings | will be saved; |
plants will be saved | and the universe | as such will be saved. (p.37)

The lines of the next poem 'An Elegy on my Ma' are written in memory of his mother who passed away on 14th October 2010 and in this context it is good to remember that this book is dedicated to his beloved mother. His mother was a symbol of the purest love, selfless service and sacrifice and a source of inspiration and the poem has an appropriate ending: Ma, we will go ahead | boosted by your divine words. (WSW, p.41) After a poem it is followed by another piece 'Massacre of Cats' which is a sad reference to the poisoning of his four favourite cats by his neighbour, a man of high rank in the society, and in the poet's words this death of his cats was as shocking to him as his mother's death. His materialist neighbours go to church every day, read the Bible every day, but they have not learnt 'to love other beings as fellow beings. 'The next poem 'Aung San Suu Kyi – Asia's Lady Mandela' pays a glowing tribute to the patriotic leader and champion of democratic rights in Burma whose name bears the title of the poem:

Suu Kyi, the epitome of valour, | showed her people through her
life | liberty is born from the ashes of fear. | Her twenty years of
political life, | more than fourteen in solitary cells. (WSW, p.53)

Now Dominic the poet is enchanted by the captivating sight of coconut trees which are seen in abundance in Kerala, and in fact Kerala and coconut trees go together; the result is the short piece 'Coconut Palm': A marvel to all architects. | No human hand can build | such a parallel pillar. | Kudos to the Architect of architects. (WSW, p.56) It is followed by an interesting poem 'Crow, the Black Beauty' and the writer wonders why the black crow is neglected even by poets while the white dove is extolled by all. The writer's sympathetic heart does not approve of this colour discrimination: When will the Black and the White | dwell in the same house | and dine from the same plate? (WSW, p.57-58) The verse piece 'For the Glory of God' narrates an incident reported in a local newspaper *The Malayala Manorama* Sunday Supplement on 25th July 2010 which is an instance of communal harmony of Hindu and Muslim women in the midst of communal rancour, clashes and killings. Chellamma, a seventy-five year old helpless Kerala Brahmin woman receives help and shelter from a Muslim lady Resiya Beevi at a time when religious extremists hacked off a Professor's right palm with the intention of killing him in that region. The verse "Hunger's call" is more communistic in tone and tenour and it is a plea to support the sinking life with soup and fight poverty the logical result of 'hyperinflation and economic mismanagement' the result of 'the impact of globalization, / liberalization and privatization' (p.66). 'Rocketing Growth of India' is a strong satire at our Government and at our so-called much boasted progress which in reality is an eyewash. Of course the rich are growing richer and poverty is growing and the gap between the rich and the poor is enormously growing. The lines of the poem 'To My Colleague' are really heart-rending as the piece refers to a shameful incident of religious fanaticism when the right palm of a Professor of Newman College at Thodupuzha, a colleague of the writer, was hacked off while he was returning home after Sunday Mass on 4th July 2010: India, my motherland. | Land of corruption, terrorism | and religious fundamentalism. (WSW, p.84) The poem 'Train Blast' is a description of the

poignant train blast, a heinous act of the Maoists, causing the tragic death of a hundred and fifty innocent people. They think that - End justifies the means; | Utopian ends, Diabolic means. (WSW, p.85) Now the poet asks Lord Krishna why He is so indifferent and questions: Can't you punish | these terrorists | as you punished | Asuras? (WSW, p.86). 'Work is Worship' is the last but one in this volume and the writer rightly states the good old saying and reiterates it by strengthening the message with good instances. God is with the person who works and does his duty without wasting his time and idling. He says God whispers in his ears: 'My dear son, live in Karma, | love all creations, | for I am in everything'. (WSW, p.96) The book closes with the piece 'Lines Composed from Thodupuzha River's Bridge' which is a picturesque description of the river with the bridge across it that merges at last into the sea and the lines reveal the influence of Wordsworth the famous Romantic poet of Nature since his description of nature grows imperceptibly into philosophical reflections:

Invigorating cool water gushing through your vein | overflows my
mind with eternal realities. | Every second passed in our lives | is
irredeemably lost for ever. | Invisible Time flashes in meteoric speed;
(WSW, p.99)

In his third collection *Multicultural Symphony* Dominic deals with a wide range of topics embracing multiculturalism, global warming, environmental problems, and other social problems such as poverty and unemployment, child labour and dignity of labour, the deep-rooted system of caste which is the root-cause of all the social problems and superstitions like blind belief in horoscope etc. Thus Dr. Dominic is a poet with social awareness which fills almost all the lines of his poems and it is no exaggeration to say that his profound concern for the marginalized sections of the society forms the life force and breath of his poetry. He tries to dissect corruption at all levels, political or religious, social or academic and presents it in its true colours with all the ugliness and monstrous greed. He says in his Preface; 'Corruption has become the hallmark of these leaders, and influenced by them the masses also deviate from the right track to the evil track. And who will save this society? My answer is: writers, particularly poets who are like prophets.' Thus it is quite clear that Dominic is a poet of the suffering masses and oppressed sections of the society; moreover his poems are a strong testimony to his socialistic ideas, to his leanings towards communistic ideology and to his earnest zeal as a social reformer. His poems in general are more descriptive and narrative than suggestive; though he does not make use of imagery, he is richly imaginative.

References :

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