

**Review of Shweta Mishra's *The Most Orange* by Dr. Sapna Dogra**

Author : Shweta Mishra 'shawryaa'  
Title : The Most Orange  
Genre : Poetry  
Year of  
Publication : 2018  
Pages : 117  
Publisher : Authorspress, Delhi  
Price : 295 Rupees  
ISBN : 978-93-87651-18-0

Shweta Mishra's *The Most Orange* is an endearingly frank anthology of poems full of heart and resolve. It is an offering of 43 poems that are wry, whimsical and moving. A sense of no submission to any external power prevails in most of her poems. She unmasks the smouldering voices of the society rattling behind her as she refuses to reconcile herself to the false consolation provided to her by the world.

In a lyrical and beautifully written poetic Preface, Shweta touches upon the "unattended musings" that has the power to turn lifeless objects into art. She equates the challenging art of poetry writing to digging in the ravines of the mind. The preface is no less than a poem in prose. Shweta says, "Whatsoever lies in the ravines of the mind does not stop. Its restless movements and sudden knocking keep me engaged 24/7 though I may or may not be conscious of them. Work or no work, there's something left unattended. This unattended musing has a special drive that has the power to move a lifeless object, to run the immovable motor, and to turn art to natural spring.

Each poem is accompanied by a sketch made by Shweta herself. The book is an incredible amalgamation of the verbal and the visual images. She says, "So I picked up my pen to write; there was a feeling that I have to address these thoughts. I wrote that which painted in my eyes, and drew pictures as well. Drawing was like recreating that which was said. It was the same expression, the same feel, but in a different form. I realized that writing is giving words to a thought and drawing is putting a mirror before the thoughts". The sketches are simple yet striking. The sketches complement the poems and the fact that the sketches also come from Shweta's own pen is yet another strong point of this book.

The book opens on an assertive note with the poem 'I Define My Orbit':

I define my orbit  
And would not allow  
Anybody to do that

The poem is addressed to the social and cultural forces that smother a woman's movement, creative and otherwise. She feels that somehow women themselves are complicit with society in their self-imprisonment:

We allocate the task to others  
Irresolute of ourselves  
And give massive powers to them  
Who then make or unmake our destinies

But once she defines her orbit she dares the world:

Look at this  
This is MY orbit  
...  
Don't you dare  
To mishandle it  
It's mine

She would stifle any movement that attacks her orbit. A sense of sadness, rebellion and resolve sets the tone for the poems to come. A will to live and assert runs throughout her poems. The poems are never depressing even when the subject and voice of some distresses to the extreme.

Even though most poems are about the travails of the modern women, we find poems on nature, general moral decay, ethical sterility, politics of renaming roads, cities, places; poverty, class differences, etc. Her "strong winds of thoughts" encapsulate, the "gumtiwoman", a "garbage lifter", "fake religiosity" and "dead dogmas", to name a few.

The poem 'A Shameless Girl' is a sarcastic take on the Indian society's faith in pandits for marriage and rampant victim blaming:

But he brushed his hands against my nipples  
Accident, you silly baby  
If he poked his thumb. . .

And outstretched his palm to range your  
Belly bottom  
He was in the route of performing  
Holy chants  
...  
It's evil to voice 'bout your curves  
It's evil to ill understand the sacred ways.

In 'Hands and Behind' Indian society's faith in pundits, *kundalis* and palmistry are again mocked. But as we can infer from the poem, palmistry navigates the course of the body and not the soul.

My destiny works for me  
When I break from the net  
...  
I discover that I am the creator  
I am the builder  
That I can change the course  
Of rivers and events  
...  
My body has to follow rules  
...  
But my soul is as free  
As all that is beyond

There are many gems in *The Most Orange* that everyone must read. 'Let It Be Your Dance' is an ode to introspection, self-appreciation and liberty; 'Silenced Words' conjures a picture of silenced dreams that has the ability to capture the imagination of the readers to an outstanding degree; 'Throw Away this World' provides a witty and human voice, which is insistent and opinionated at the same time and begs to be heard.

Loss of identity is another major theme of this book. Identity is forever eluding. The "sugary webs" of shackles of societal forces "Gag me for breath" she says in 'I reduce you to Naught, I Flourish'. In 'Disappearing Words' there's a desire to search, assert and reinforce one's identity. Similarly, the poem 'Breath' is about living a secondary life.

I enjoy breathing  
I want to breathe  
...  
I do breathe sometimes  
Secretly  
In closed rooms  
...  
When nobody's around.

In the poem, 'I Do It I Know Not Why' the monotony of daily domestic chores and the absurdity of conformity weighs upon the speaker.

I do it  
Because everyone does it  
I know not why  
I don't question  
...  
I wash bathrooms  
I clean floors  
Day after day  
I know not why

The imagery of cracks, fissures, crevices, breaking, strangulation and oppression runs throughout. In 'I Was Meager' she says:

They owned and possessed and exercised  
I just owed, buckled and took refuge under

Similarly, in 'Stay Away' she says:

My wounds are mine  
And so are the cracks

I personally liked 'I Dare Not Pick My Pen' where travails of every educated Indian daughter-in-law is highlighted:

I dare not pick my pen  
A dragon sits there  
It looks straight into my eyes  
MOM AND DAD CALL ME

...  
MY HUSBAND CALLS ME

...  
But the dragon has not yet left

My pen  
It's lying there  
Possessed.

I was moved by the poems that dealt with introspection like 'Let It Be Your Dance':

And dance to yourself  
To your tune  
That you own  
That belongs to you

Imagery of hiding and rebellion is also conspicuous in some of the poems. In 'Silenced Words' she says:

Young and pregnant with dreams  
I sang poems on paper  
Words wrapped and folded  
Hidden from the eyes  
...  
My dreams in me  
My words everywhere  
Unheard

She acknowledges and reasserts the self with all its imperfections with a furious zest. In 'Stay Away' she asserts:

My words are mine  
And so are the cracks and crevices  
These patches on my skin

Her poetic voice in the end appears starker and vicious. Some of the final poems in the collection like, 'There is No Limit to Our Rising', 'Think Big' and "'The' Institution" plays upon the dual idea of shackles that binds an individual in order to smother his or her movement on the one hand and a will to be free of all that forces one down on the other.

One of the best poems in the collection is 'The Most Orange':

It never fails  
Those who dare to look beyond. . .  
The easy stratosphere  
Is traversed by all  
But the most purple. . .  
The most orange. . .  
Would always be missed by. . .  
Easy eyes

The 'most orange' is visible to only those who 'think big'. The path to self-recognition cannot be traversed by all. But the most orange can only be caught by those who dare to surmount the mountains within and without.

I admired everything about this book: its cover, title and artistic unity. The book is well brought out with hardly any typographical errors. The collection is praiseworthy for its furious zest and rebellious tone. Shweta Mishra's inventive collection is accessible and intelligent.

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#### **\*\*\*\*About Reviewer**

Dr. Sapna Dogra completed her B.A and M.A. in English Literature from University of Delhi. She holds a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University. She is presently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English in the Government College Baroh, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. Her research interests include Folklore Studies, Translation Studies, Indian English Writing, Hindi Literature and Popular Literature. She can be reached at [sapnadm@gmail.com](mailto:sapnadm@gmail.com).