

Usha's Questions:

1. Dipak, let us begin with the mundane and with ease- a glimpse into your childhood focusing on place and its bearing on your later work.

I passed 6/7 years in East Bengal, now Bangladesh. My dad had a job which made him constantly travel from place to place, I loved travelling with him leaving my mother in Chittagong. I enjoyed constant displacement, enchanted by the places like Cox's Bazaar, Rangamati on the hills where Chakmas lived. They were Buddhist and had a king with whom I shook hands. Years in Bangladesh were very free and happy until we were forced to leave Chittagong because of Japanese bombings. I enjoyed this continuous coming and going, meeting different classes of people, as my dad had a simple and a natural way of accepting others, I think he passed this quality to me. I seldom had difficulties in making friends and acquaintances. In fact my friends have helped me publishing my work.

2. Trace your geographic transitions on the globe.

I will trace my life without giving any details of my private life.

Chittagong to Kolkata. Kolkata was a Pandora's box, Quit India movement, famine in 1943, daily mass movements and confrontations with the Police and the Military, riots in 46, etc. It was a stark contrast to the life in Chittagong, Mymensingh or Chandpur.

In 1956 took the boat from Colombo to Marseille. Then one grey rainy day arrived in England. Experienced a death rattling storm in the Arabian Sea. Cantos 6 and 11 may give a glimpse of this terrifying voyage, of course, when the storm subsided the sea became charming almost like a Persian carpet.

I settled in London, finding a job was pretty easy those days. Made plenty of trips to France, long and short. Literature, music and painting inspired me. Studied French language and literature a year at the University of Montpellier. My stays in France were free and footloose. Montpellier was teeming with African, North African, Greek etc students. Paris was full of people from other continents. France was not affluent, it was a few years after the war, still struggling to keep its Empire, but living in France was a river of feast, metaphorically, although I was poor.

Lived in London with my previous wife for 5 years, as she was Swedish we decided to leave for Stockholm in 1968.

3. How long have you lived in Sweden? I am sure our readers would be curious about that aspect of your life. As it is inevitable presence in your poetry. Curious about the collision between a Bengali sensibility and Swedish way of life.

From 1968, and after a few years at the University, I worked as a teacher, teaching English, French and later Spanish. Whenever an immigrant leaves home and enters a new country, he has to reinvent himself. Time and Space, things surrounding you reshape your life, sometimes consciously, at times unconsciously. You may react against it but in the long run your mind behaves differently, and when you take a flight to revisit your home, people think you are a stranger. It happens to everyone, and there is nothing to be ashamed about.

"Tempora mutantur, nos et mutantur in illis." Time change, and we change with them. Only donkeys don't change.

What knocked me down were isolation and Nordic gloom. It is best to read my Stockholm poems in "I have peeled this orange before". These poems were highly appreciated in Sweden, although they were pretty harsh. Some Swedish readers have tolerance and patience.

4. Places seem to displace each other with fluidity in your work. Comment?

An old Buddhist school, I think it's Yogacara school, used to say Mind is the storehouse of consciousness, and all displacements happen in the Mind. In the dreamworld the world is topsy-turvy, objects change places, you have no control over your thoughts. I remember Yama in the shape of heron asked Yudhisthira a question "What is the swiftest thing in this world?" He answered, "Mind". In a flash you are in the North Pole.

5. Fluid Twilight begins with three citations: Shlovsky, Brian Massumi and Magritte. Basically asking the reader to replace meaning with a perception of the sensory world. To suppress the urge to make meaning! How are we to disarm into a poetry that makes a high demand as this.

I'm not demanding anything. Readers and critics should decide for themselves. Meanings are not absolute, they are indeterminants. Poems are explained so many different ways. Looking for meanings, beauty and utility are age old ideas. Life is experiential, I ask my readers to experience my poems which are vortices of hallucination. It took me 12 years to write Fluid Twilight, I ask my readers to approach them with patience and unbiased mind, then experiences will follow.

6. Where do you see yourself in the "Indian Canon" and in the "European canon."

I don't know. It's readers job to put me into a pigeon hole.

7. What is it like to be a poet of Indian origin in Sweden? Are you accepted as a "Swedish" poet? How do you relate to India now?

I am accepted as a strange poet. If you read the review of "Göteborgs Posten" you will get a glimpse of what Swedish readers think of me. I think I am accepted as a poet, not as a Swedish poet, just as a poet. I don't write in Swedish. India seems far away and misty to me. I keep in touch with India through Indian newspapers in the internet.

8. A glimpse into the Literary world in Sweden would be interesting. For example, what are publishing avenues for poets? Opportunities? Creative writing classes or degrees? Reading circuits? Journals? Contests?

If you are writing in Swedish there are possibilities in publishing in journals and through publishing houses. Remember poetry is less and less read. Publishing poems are very tough. If you sell 60 or 70 books it is considered OK. Publishers publish poetry books at a loss, but the Swedish Art Council may buy books for all the libraries in Sweden which will be sufficient enough to meet the cost of publishing the book. There is no guarantee and it depends on what do they think of your work. Fluid Twilight was accepted by the Art Council of Sweden and my publisher was pretty satisfied. If you are writing in a foreign language, chances of publishing is almost zero, you need a sponsor and you have to pay for the translation. If you publish only in a foreign language, no

newspapers or journals will review your book.. There is only one prize for writers' writing in a foreign language which is called Klas de Vylde's prize for the Immigrant Writers', and awarded every second year. Luckily I was awarded this prize in 2008. There are private Creative writing classes and reading circuits for Swedish authors. There are several prizes for them too. Sweden is for Swedish authors and for authors who are supported by their countries.

9. Influences? Early heroes?

There are so many influences it is useless to count. Influences leave their marks through books, meeting unknown people in various places, conversations with friends and so on. I don't understand what do you mean by heroes, but I can say three authors left deep impression on me when I started writing at the age of 18, Pound, Joyce and Rimbaud. My first poems were published in 1956 in a Delhi Journal, called "Thought". Prof. P. Lal thought they reminded him of Pound. Among Bengali poets I enjoyed reading a 19th century poet Michael Madhusudan Datta and later Jibanananda Das who was ignored by Bengali literary circle during his life time and hardly published anything.

10. Rooted in India, mythology is inescapable and your poems abound with Greek and Indian myths. Tell us how you see mythology working in your poetry and why you choose to fall back on it.

The word "myth" in ancient Greek means story, there is no other fantastic or supernatural connotation behind it, just story. The art of storytelling and reciting in India and in Greece created an aura around these stories. I met one of those reciters in my mother. She was a wonderful reader of Mahabharata and Ramayana. She could modulate her voice so well it would touch you very deeply. Our neighbours used to come and listen to her. All my knowledge of Indian mythology I gathered only by listening to her. Myths are very vibrant in my heart.

Myths are the deep structure of the human psyche. It resurfaces again and again in different shapes and forms but the message is the same. Take for example the wanderings of Odysseus or in Mahabharata Yudhishthira's exile for 12 years. This happens to day, and the hero accumulates wisdom and knowledge through his wanderings. Or, Yudhishthira's visit to Hell resembles Aeneas visiting Hades to meet his father. Oedipus myth, the triangular conflict between father, mother and son which happens every day.

I think retelling myths gave depth to my work.

11. Would it be right to say the frequent use of mythology happens independent of a spirituality, for you, which is indivisible in the Indian Psyche?

Sorry to say I don't know what "spirituality" means. In India during my youthful days people were very aware of stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. In folk theatre (yatra) the audience knew the stories pretty well.

12. Would it be possible to share insights into your creative process? Your poetry is such a torrent of specificities...how do you harness that plethora?

I start with a project or an idea in my mind and slowly soldier along. There will be several drafts, lot of reading and constant corrections, sometimes rewriting the poems again or reworking on the old ones. For example my Paris poems were written long time ago, but I

had to go back and rework on them. Poems unfold my first encounter with Paris, Paris in late fifties. I saw Tristan Tzara playing the chess. Sartre holding his court. Edith Piaf crying her heart out on the microphone, etc. It was a memorable experience. Besides there was joie de vivre (joy of life) which was completely missing in London. A moving carnival. The same could be said about my Andalucian poem and Venice poems, I studied Flamenco, played it, practised with dancers not as a professional, read Lorca and history of Spain, travelled extensively etc. And my coming book of verse "Dogwalks", will be concentrated on my observations on city lives. Intuition and free associations are my tools, where places meet and shake hands and images create an illusion of hallucinatory world.

13. Are you a disciplined writer?

I think so. Of course, there are always breaks because of family duties, at times waiting for the new project.

14. Image! Image! Image! Seems to be your credo. How and why has this happened?

Take a walk through an Indian street, what do you meet, colour, forms, noise from people and objects around you. They either attract you or repulse you. They are alive, and there are moments of my life I experienced all objects around me were shining jewels. I was absorbed by them. I remember reading Rimbaud's "Illuminations". All images in these prose poems are disorderly ragbag, but everyone of them shining. If you want to glean meanings, you will be lost and also your experience will be almost non-existent.

Objects around ask you to participate in them, you turn these objects into poetic images, montage or metaphors. If you want to express a particular feeling you need images to carry your feeling otherwise it will be weightless. I think Eliot wrote an interesting essay on this and he used a phrase "objective correlatives". I can't remember the name of the essay.

15. Let's chat about the Cantos. Tell us about organization of the 14 cantos. I notice a profusion in the form and content in the first canto and a sparseness almost of exhaustion in the 14th canto.

All 14 cantos are different. One thing is common they are narratives.

Canto 1 begins with my childhood, then ends with a beautiful story from Mahabharata.

Canto 2 Tries to say about the mood of Paris in late fifties. Poem 3 in this Canto is an homage to Tristan Tzara.

Canto 3. I have tried to blend the snowstorm and the death of a hooligan who was hopelessly in love. I read about him in a daily.

Canto 4. I wanted to write about a trip, .

Canto 5. is a circular Canto. I begin in a village Rosättra, north of Stockholm, Darjeeling and Kolkata in forties, back to Rosättra.

Canto 6(mirror of waves") and and Canto 11(Night flows into Ocean) are based on my personal experience. There are certain similarities of course, the central theme is the sea voyage and the storm. As I believe in "living Hell" and experience it and also I have great predilection for classical poets like Vergil and Vyasa who help me to explore and portray death pangs as in Canto11. You can imagine what Yudhisthira has gone through after the great war and his visit to Naraka. But Canto11 doesn't stop there, later parts are magical journeys through the Mediterranean Sea. The last part is all about Sindabad the Sailor, in a mocking way.

Cantos 7 and 8 (Athens and Lesvos)

Canto 9 is all about Sappho, her relationship with her father, which is my construction. As far the story goes she was very fond of her dad who died in a war.

Canto 10. I used subway as Hell, where Orpheus encounters The Black Eros or the Black Venus. You can see the likeness between the Indian and Greek words: Yama and Kama, Eros and Thanatos.

Canto 12 I was terrified by pollution in Beijing. The poem is my reaction.

Canto 13, At Dionysos, is a restaurant where I meet my friends every Thursday. The poem is the culmination of our discussions.

Canto 14. poems on Crete.

!6. Are there any Indian poets you admire?

Sorry to say I didn't have chance to read Indian poets writing in English except your book of verse. I enjoyed very much reading your devotional poems.

17. The profane is divine for you. Or is divinity a superfluous term? Comment?

We are treading on a dangerous ground. These are the terms for mystics to answer. I'm no mystic. They say there is no difference between Nirvana and Samsara. Our social and cultural codes determine our views of the world. I'm an iconoclast, love breaking rules.

18. Is it possible to trace the unfoldment of your work. Constants?

"I have peeled this orange before" and "The smell was a dark waterfall"

!9. Why Poetry? Do you write in other Prose genres?

Poetry comes easily to me. Bad or Good. I've tried writing prose, but it becomes poetry. Who knows I may be able to find a style in the near future.

20. Have you quenched your Literary standards? In other words, are satisfied with your output?

I hope not. Hope to write more and publish in the future.

21. Where is your Poetry heading?

I am going to publish a new book of verse, "Dogwalks", which I think is different from my previous works. You will be able to tell and comment if you read them.

22. What does Globalization mean to you specifically and for Poetry?

I call it "gobbolization", big fish swallows small fish. May be we'll get closer to each other. More compassionate! I don't know. I don't think we will write better Poetry.

