

**UNWINDING THE SEMIOTICS
IN SUSHEEL KUMAR SHARMA'S "UNWINDING SELF"**

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Abstract

If direct observation can result in a literary genre of poetic art, analysis of selected poems in "Unwinding Self" becomes inevitable for the evaluation of diverse levels of poetic style, such as Japanese three-line haiku in mini-cantos of the *Mahabharta*, suggestive iconic-flashes on variable images and events in "Snapshots", gender performativity in "Bubli Poems" to gratify femininity with undertones of irony and many more which the poet experiments to prove his poetic mettle. The study attempts to find a formidable ground into the latencies of 'empirical imagery', which refer to the poet's empirical mind that pervades into more than one iconic imagery or event at a time. The Poet's multiple reflections which remain explicit or manifest in a chain of life-like sequences of variable structures with variable styles are concatenated dexterously in such a way that each poem invites the readers to dive into the poet's wordplay, drawn on religions, contemporary events, relationships and allusions which the traditions tell in words and numbers. One becomes fanciful to decode the suggestive significance of "The New Year Dawn" with the appearance of 'three stars' representing "Orion's Belt" for the new hunter in the imagery of Magi. The poet's suggestive line – "Five times a day, my father's/ Hands go up in the sky" - makes him agnostic and empirical about his Muslim father's hands that can create colourful designs and build houses instead of knowing the unknowable Supreme. His poems can be approached with the term 'suggestive objective correlative' as the poet's self-soul manifests in different identities, and each poem moves around the central metaphor, which sometimes becomes subtle due to the latent association with the places of visits, dates and years of events and the wordplay in numbers drawn from myths and legends, news, including literature; even the glossary in the collection sheds light on suggestive latencies.

Key Words: Cultural-identity, Dharma, Gender-issues, Historicity, Neo-genres, New-age, Viable-self.

Introduction

“Unwinding Self” is a successful collection of poetry if one goes by the sheer number of reviews published in several reputed Indian academic journals during the hard times of COVID-19 when several journals were either delayed or were not published. In their limited spaces, the reviewers have not done justice to the poetic art of Susheel, as will be evident from the following brief review of the literature. Asun López-Varela, for example, opines that “Unwinding Self” is “an extraordinary and successful attempt to unwind the ambiguous, complex and colourful nature of all human selves”. Asun maintains that: “With the hand of a painter, Dr Sharma can capture a kaleidoscopic scenario made up of micro concrete moments of conflicting life events, turning them into a macro-cosmic experience, a larger perspective that encompasses the harmonic sublime” (Sharma, 2020: 407). Ashok Mohanty does not go beyond making some stray remarks here are there: “The well-chosen structure words and images make a great contribution to the overall meaning. The context and the underlying conflict mark a poetic genius. The day-to-day problems with humour and irony elevate us” (Mohanty, 2021: 445–447). Awadhesh Sinha praises “wide-ranging themes, dexterity and skill and his use of satire” in Susheel’s poems: “Wide-ranging themes have been suitably treated with great dexterity and skill. Above all, the originality of expression and thematic treatment is beyond comparison. His brilliant use of satire in some poems leaves the reader spellbound” (Sinha, 2020: 371). Dhurjjati Sarma holds that “brevity and suggestiveness can be considered as defining features of [Susheel’s poetry].” (the thumbprint mag) In his Afterword Donovan Robert holds that questions pop up abundantly in the collection because Susheel is trying to find answers with a precursory insight to raise consciousness at the individual, the social, the psychological and the philosophic levels (Robert, 2020: 123–124). He finds disillusionment and anger controlled and coloured with humour and whim in the poems and considers the book “a celebration of paradox” (Robert, 2020: 125). Without any elaboration, H. C. Gupta states, “the collection presents the muse clad in gaudy costumes, glittering diamonds” (Gupta, 2021: 159). Jenó Kidasi, in his “Afterword”, makes a very detailed thematic analysis of Susheel’s poems and asserts that “several poems in this book raise questions to evoke critical thinking and force the reader to the explore different notions to research on some philosophies, practices and social programming that otherwise remain marginalised and underrated” (Kidasi, 2020: 137). However, he does not refer to his art at all. Judy Andrews in her long review has pointed out: “The versification is syllabic, tonic and sometimes a synthesis of the two... . Most of his poems are Free verses which is a popular kind of modern poetry” (Andrews, 2021: 47). K. Kamala in her “Droplets of Wisdom” states: “... [Susheel’s poems] defy all kinds of classification. At the same time, they are Indian in background, universal in appeal, cosmic in theme, metaphysical in perspective and romantic in style” (Kamala, 2021: 138). She moves on to examine the “poems foregrounding the subject matter in them” (Kamala, 2021: 139). K. Kamala holds, “Sharma’s poems are a beautiful combination of his profound reading, minute observation, poetic sensibility and serene mind. Sharma’s concern for humanity, love of Indian culture and its values, the everyday sights and the people around him, witty remarks and subtle references, interesting observations and the like constitute the essence of this wonderful work” (Kamala, 2021: 138–141). Nataša Miladinović writes: “... the world we meet bursts into images, one dissipating into another each time we blink, overwhelming us and thus foreshadowing what is to come should we let ourselves be

pulled in and immersed further in the course of the reading to come, posing a challenge to know and embrace the Self and its Shadows in as many parts it wills to reveal itself to us. ... [Susheel] plays with words creating a mosaic of sounds, images and thoughts by which he learns who he is and who those around him are, both personally and globally. The imagery pulsates with life and thought” (Miladinović, 2020: 124–125). P. V. Laxmiprasad writes, “[Susheel] exhibits consummate skill as a poet and his perception of the present world and its glaring realities is evident of his artistic skill. ... If nature’s wondrous objects dominate this collection, it is equally Sharma’s adroit skill in beautifying them with a life force. Nature, a realistic world, philosophy, a spiritual saga of life and images occupy the collection (Laxmiprasad, 2020: 161). Parneeta Jaggi mentions allusions to history, myths and literary texts, symbols and the “images culled from multiple sources defying specific cultures or demographics” (Jaggi, 2021: 366). She also notes the use of the marks of “interrogation interspersed throughout poetry ... [which imply] an insatiable thirst towards perfection and self-realisation through art” (Jaggi, 2021: 366). In her “Afterword” Patricia Prime hints as to how the collection shows that “what is edgy, authentic and provocative can also awaken the spirit and make its reader quick with consciousness” (Prime, 2020: 139), and in her review, Patricia hints that, “The more personal poems are well-crafted; ... the structures simple but musical.” (muse India) Patrycja Austin says, “Unwinding Self” [is] a constellation of forms and ideas. The collection is the strongest when it plays with associations, converses with other poets or makes allusions to real-life events. It carries the reader across places and ideas. It heightens one’s sensorial response to the surrounding reality. It allows us to understand better the way it is changing” (Austin, 2020: 139–141). Pradip Kumar Patra maintains that in “Unwinding Self” ... imagination draws inspiration from reality. His poems are just like morning tea. With each and every sip one refreshes, one feels the world unfolds before him, with no malice towards anybody one comes to know both positive and negative aspects of human doing and one has the opportunity to reminisce the past which has vanished or lying wounded” (Patra, 2020: 142–150). Rabindra Verma has identified some “natural, comic, tragic, childhood, horticultural [images that retain] the attention of readers” (Verma, 2020: 205); he also mentions that “the abundant evidences of anaphora reflect redundancy and affect the readers’ concentration and diminishes [the readers’] mental perception” (Verma, 2020: 205). He also uses expressions like “mini-micro-poems”, “Micro-poetry” and “Found Poetry” to describe the opening poem, “Snapshots”, and the last poem, “Stories from the Mahabharata”, which are “remarkable for [their] brevity, dexterity and intensity.” He has referred to symbols, cinematic technique and poetic irony in Susheel’s poetry in passing. Rama Rao Vadapalli V. B. hints at “a lot of imaginative combustion” in Susheel’s poetry. Shubha Dwivedi considers [“Unwinding Self” to be] a distillation of the aesthetic, moral and theological choices [the poet] made at pivotal points in his life (Rama Rao: 29). Siddhartha Sharma writes: “[Susheel’s] use of meaningful mythological and literary symbols creates images reverberating right kind of feelings in the hearts of the readers. His poems are fundamentally reflective of the perpetual existential condition of the beleaguered contemporary man, which he has depicted with astounding artistic finesse” (Sharma, 2021: 265). Suresh Dubey opines, “The conscious art learnt by Sharma from the Russian artists makes literariness more important to him than the dictatorship of the proletariat. ... Susheel’s poetry is difficult to understand in the first go. One must work hard to discover the music of ideas, unities and disunities and experience different shifts and gaps. Sharma breaks the idiom of everyday language in this book and turns commonplace and ordinary experiences into special ones. He is an Eliotic poet to a certain extent

employing wit and irony to break the language and old poetic styles and practices” (Dubey, 2020: 196–202). Svitlana Buchatska holds, “[Susheel] reveals all his beliefs, attitudes, myths and allusion which are the patterns used by the Indian poets. [He] is a great master, a poet and a litterateur whose beautiful, not always simple language combined with wit and power of observation allows him to portray Indian reality in particular details. Using various literary elements and poetic devices, the rich world of characters ensures Susheel Kumar Sharma a prominent place in world literature” (Buchatska, 2020: 150–152).

Discussion

Suppose Shakespeare writes that there is a history in every man’s life. In that case, Susheel Sharma, who chose to be “a poet and teacher” (Sharma, 2020: 52), says winding and unwinding are two esoteric processes of revelling the endless hours, days, weeks, months, years and ages of each human self in every Age/ Yuga. His voice in “Unwinding Self” becomes explicit in a given time and place situation. However, at the same time, the said voice desires to remain manifest or latent in words which are mysterious voices of the self which traditions have produced. Some of these voices, being flashes of the fine intellect of his teaching profession, are chosen, recorded and produced with the passages of clock time while others remain suggestive, drawn on natural phenomena. On reading the collection of forty-two poems in “Unwinding Self”, one may find the heard voices of the unwinding self of the past in the 21st century. He tends to be a neo-occultist of mixed creed and genres in which his talent glitters on tangible seasons of salvation without death. This collection of 42 poems of diverse lyrics and narrative forms begins with the flashes of “Snapshots”, a poem in 15 miniatures of $5/4/5=14$ lines and then $4/4/4/5=17$ lines, and the rest with regular 4-line unrhymed eight stanzas. This poem may be considered a prologue to the 40 poems. It comprises the poet’s kinetic-snap words cum run on regular and irregular lines of 15 ideas, episodes or flashes of successive scenes or events recorded after the imagist tradition of the 20th century. The “Snapshots” is then followed by 40 poems of mid-course narratives and lyrics on different subjects, themes, events and layers of the unwinding self. The said collection ends with “Stories from the *Mahabhart*” as an epilogue. This epilogue on mini *Mahabhart* runs in XYZ format of Japanese haiku sequences of 25 mini-cantos or miniatures.

The cover design carries Launa Stebule’s “Sweeney Erect” artwork, perfectly matching the poet’s art with the 25 mini-cantos of “Stories from the *Mahabhart*”. The artwork exacts 25 fingers of five arms of five Pandavas who fought the great battle of the *Mahabhart* against their brothers called Kauravas. The five hands of the art design are represented as five branches matched with one celestial stem of a celestial tree of symbolic Yang-force entangled with the Yin force below as twin seeds of the Tree to represent the unwinding self of man and woman. Suppose the Kauravas and Pandavas are said to be the grand-sons of Vyas by *Niyoga* rite with the widows of deceased king Vichitravirya. In that case, Vyasa is said to be the son of Parasara, who fornicated with the Virgin-Satyawati and later got married to legendary King Shantanu, the biological father of Ganga-Putra Bhishm who pledged to remain the caretaker of Kauravas and Pandavas. Genealogical details apart, it is Vaysa who composed the grand theme of the epic the *Mahabhart*, which represents the period of transition from *Dwaper Yuga* to *Kali Yuga* on an esoteric dawn called “Akshya Titya” in the month called *Vaishakh* which is typically superimposed over the solar months of The Hindu New Year from 13-14 April with the variable Akshya

Triya. To avoid the complex issues of the myths, names and terminology used in 42 poems, the poet has appended a “Glossary” to help the foreign readers (pp. 88–116). The collection also includes “Afterwords” by seven scholars of foreign and Indian origin (pp. 117–152).

Several essential aspects of the collection are not only emblematic but also esoteric. The first poem, “Snapshots”, of the collection (as stated above) may be considered as a prologue to 40 poems, while the last – “Stories from the *Mahabharata*” – is the epilogue. The prologue, as well as the epilogue, happens to be two esoteric shadows of the poet’s “Unwinding Self” which push their ends forward and backwards to be contrasted and juxtaposed with the mystic agents of the mighty creeds of the unbeliever who says, “I am Uma./I am Vishnu./I am Varanasi.” (3), and the believer who says, “We are God’s creation.” Like the opening words of the Gospel of John 1:1 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” – the poet has his bubbles of words which he wraps up as ‘voice’, and puts them to contrast: “Your babble/Enchanting music./My voice [words] /Empty noise.” (1) One of his empty voices is deeply latent in the identity of a heathen God of gods who is missing in the esoteric mystery of procreative creation. His identity becomes explicit in the end lines of the poem “A Family by the Road” – “I am Shiva,/Shivoham.” One can reach His existence in the winding self of the primal man of the west and the east and the search for the lost family by the roads which remain manifest in the objects of natural phenomena. When the poet writes – “It does not matter/ If the snow in the Himalayas melts... I remain unstruck by the sun-stroke/Nor my wife get loose-motion/By eating with my bull./My son too/Sleeps peacefully on the pavement” (73) – it conveys the poet’s winding desire to be merged in One Word – Shivoham – which not only denotes “I am Shiva” but also “Om” to connote: “I am eternal, I am pure. I am intelligent. I am free, I am unbound consciousness” (114).

The rest of the 13 miniatures of “Snapshots” from II to XIV are the flashes in words, which run into 50 lines. These lines represent vivid images of the struggle for existence amid disasters, flashes of romance with natural phenomena or the existence of the self amid man-made circumstances, places, rituals and objects, which traditions tell in words. For instance, if “The duck catches a fish”, it is in winter, the author sees the beauty of the grove and says, “Only the red berries/Do not make/The earth enchanting.” He then loves to gaze into the sea for hours and hours without getting bored. Finally, on seeing- “A bird [that] flew/Into the sky/Bidding [him] goodbye/On the temple ramp”, – he becomes religious and philosophical. Which of the ancient or modern temples, churches, mosques or synagogues he visits is unknown. However, he inevitably becomes spiritual at the flight of the unknown bird, which bade him goodbye. Suddenly, he flashes upon Blue Bird Airways flying from Emirates to Heathrow airport or London, where “India take on England at Lords.” His poetic imagery of kinetic nature – “Tsunami hits Japan./God is resting in Heaven” – represents the human self struggling for a second life on the earth but with a difference which Lord God brought as Flood for forty days after the first act of creation. The unwinding self of the poet finds people and creatures doing unusual things not only on computers but also in an urban location from “Rising sun” to its setting amid “Weathered livelihood”, but the “Civilisation marches ahead” unconcernedly for the Second Flood of Lord God. The poet invites association with such latencies and reconstruction with appropriate suggestions.

Despite being auto-biographical, some of his 40 poems invite appropriate dissociation and reconstruction with the appropriate association. For instance, “The End of the Road” commemorates his youth when he did not need second sight but plain glasses to

save his eyes from moths or insects during a derive from meeting his wife. As it was a wedding gift from his mother-in-law, he did not use it to look romantic. It is late; his wife replaced it with a new one having “photo-chromatic lenses” to protect the eyes from the sun and look romantic. On becoming foresighted with growing age, he fails to recognise a close friend Mr Das who gifted him a pair of glasses. A sudden transition came with particular glossing stuff when he gained farsightedness before his grandson. The latter notices his grandfather’s failure to recognise the words in general and the vowels ‘e’ of the pen and ‘a’ of the pan. However, the grandchild being moneyless and young enough, failed to gift him a pair of spectacles. As there was no one to gift at the growing stage, he feared “On his Blindness” or “Milton’s way by reading” may be due to multiple reasons. The cause may be debated, but he indeed began dictating like Milton, but the impaired sight was changed or gifted with three new pairs of spectacles. The dominant motive lies in receiving spectacles as gifts, dictating like Milton or using four out of six spectacles to suit the occasion and accept the reality of the gradual loss of the fore and far sights. The loss makes the puritan priest realise the ‘gifts’ as “another man’s burden” when one loses the precious gift of God to experience the loss of Paradise with flying colours. The man of the eastern and western intellect cannot revisit Paradise safely as the eyeballs behind the sixth pair of his spectacles roll in vain to regain Paradise or go against the follies of the world which Samson, the perfecting hero, performed/ indulged. The required reconstruction is deeply latent in “Milton’s way”, upon which scrolls the objectivity of the poet’s unwinding self.

Such latencies upon which objectivity gyres may be drawn on the clues range from place names, mythological characters, a legendary person, a work of art, or a period, to an emblematic object that traditions tell in numbers and words. For instance, the theme-based 5-day account of “Durga Puja in 2013” is followed by a latent invocation to the virgin goddess Durga early morning on variable *Shasthi*, as it falls on a bright lunar fortnight of *Aswin* month, which coincides on the Gregorian October 10, 2013. Though it is a 5-day festival, the persona visits the ‘monumental pandal’ on October 11 (Saptami: 7th day of the waxing moon), October 12 (Maha-Ashtami: the 8th day), October 13 (Maha-Navami: the 9th day) and October 14 (Vijya Dashami: 10th day). The deity’s house is the autumnal house, where she remains for five days. The miniature II of the poem confirms the poet’s visit to ‘Saptami’, representing the seventh day of the waxing moon. There he witnesses the suggestive darkness that drops again amid “thunder, wind, and water.” The Maha-Ashtami of the season kept the poet awakened in the III miniature. He was keen to watch the symbolic or ritual bloodshed of the demon *Mahishasura* amid ‘*dhoono*’ representing mist or smoke inside the *pandal*. Since it was a liturgical drama, there were no sacrifices but tempestuous, stormy rain that started outside. The Maha-Navami in the IV miniature coincides with the human effort of rescuing the lives of “ninety lakh” people of the coastal region of Orissa. The Gregorian date on Vijya Dashmi on October 14 is of great importance as it both coincided with the liturgical events of the sending of the deity amid ‘*sindoor khela*’ amid a rain-drenched *pandal*. The tempestuous storm, which the poet refers to as “Phailan”, that hit the coastal region of Gopalpur in Odissa on Ashtami, October 12 2013, and got weakened on Vijaya Dashmi, October 14 2013, requires reconstruction, as the poet expresses his devotion to mother goddess in seven mini-cantos or miniatures. The first miniature of four lines reads – “My soul longs/To be with my mother/Who is yet to decide her place/Where to locate her?” (5) – and remarks, “I can walk barefoot...Phailan is a spent force./Gopalpur summons again.” The latencies surround the words *Mahishasura* and *Phailan*, which the poet uses as an epithet for a

tempestuous storm that hits the coastal region and becomes “a spent force.” The mystic line – “It is time for Ma to return home” (6) – as well as the questions – “Can’t she return to her Lord next year?...Where was impurity?” (6) – need suggestive reconstruction as she usually remains seated on a lion and her two sons Ganesha and Kartikeya are placed on her right and left-hand sides respectively with Maha Gauri and Saraswati. However, her ‘Lord’ identity, which remains manifest in the anthropomorphic imagery of “crap hair”, remains missing. The very choice of the word “crap hair” is highly suggestive of “mighty Rudra, the God, with braided hair” (*Rig Veda* 1.114) representing Lord Siva’s head-formed interlacing network of a braided river. It is He who is believed to be the Goddess’s consort.

For the next, I would like to jump to four scattered poems, namely “The soul with a New Hat”, “The New Year Dawn”, “New Age”, and “The World in Words in 2015”, and club them to be read as cluster-poems as these represent a latent vision of transition from Autumn to winter, then to Gregorian New Year, and then mixed up an era of the New Age of the space technology. In “The Soul with a new Hat”, the poet celebrates Christmas, which usually falls on Gregorian December 25 every year. The Christians treat the idolatrous return of “Durga Ma’s bindi” (6) in Autumn contemptuously. On the contrary, they wait for the return of the virgin “Mother’s Night” every year on Christmas but with a different narrative on Virgin Mary’s annunciation on Gregorian March 25 and the miraculous birth of the Lord on Gregorian December 25. This time the poet commemorates his going to a well-built cathedral dedicated to Lord Jesus. It may be due to some fear of the Lord’s judgment on his Second Coming, faith or devotion as he confesses in the concluding lines: “My next life will be decided/By my *Karma* or/By my devotion to/The cathedral.” (62) Here the word ‘*Karma*’ happens to be the keyword for the new ‘Hat’ of the soul which the poet dissociates from pagan philosophy of judgment to associate it with righteous ways of life with celebrations of Christmas week. Here he talks in terms of the number and survival of his wax-like body and the emblematic light of the candle on Christmas: “My father gifted me/A packet of candles/On Christmas last./It had *thirty* candles;/I needed sixty more to/Light my house...one by one.” (61) When some of the candles were blown out, the poet recollects the act of rekindling the blown out candles: “*Three years* ago/It was my sister/Helping me survive.” (61) On his visit at Jerusalem in winter (John 10:22) if Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world*” (John 9:5), and preached – “Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you” (John 12:35) – the poet remembered his walk in the light during Christmas: “*Three years* ago/It was my sister/Helping me survive.” (61) Some two years back it was his younger brother “who was helping [his] effort/To shine against odds.” (61) This year his wedded wife and his son who helped him rekindle some of the blown out candles. Altogether, “ninety candles” were lit in his mind. The poet then becomes highly mystic: “Facing all sorts of blows;/Spreading light was drear/Than shedding molten wax.” (61) As the Christmas night comes to its end on a Gregorian December 26, the poet concludes: “The heavenly light is spent/Fog is enveloping me/ S-l-o-w-l-y.” (62) The poet then dissociates a period of six days which may be counted in six letters of the term “S-l-o-w-l-y”, which may be computed in terms of number from December 26 to December 31. It is challenging to understand the latent message that remains manifest in the six letters regarding the number game on or after Christmas. Since it is expressed concerning the mystic ‘fog’ which envelops the poet’s mind on the final ‘y’ representing the 90th candle, I wish to juxtapose the candle-light with the “heavenly light” of the nativity star, which was ‘consumed’ as well as ‘spent’ with Janus like the face of the pagan God on December 31.

The following poem in the selected cluster marks the beginning of “The New Year dawn” to “take on life and also death/With equal strides.” This poem identifies the poet’s unwinding self in the spirit of the heathen deity Janus at mid-night: “I had been gazing with my throat/Sour mouth and bruised shoulders/In piercing cold of December/At the sky waiting for the new sun/To bring me a new lease of life/Over the garden, over the fields/Over my loan and broken vehicle.” (27) The term ‘broken vehicle’ is the key word to denote his broken car as well as connote the vehicle of Time which is now “out of joint.” It may be due to the succeeding lines – “I followed the three stars/ Hoping to take me to a place/ Where I meet the three magi/ Who are to guide me to the shelter of my saviour...Near the hearth where I do not/ Sacrifice a dove to keep me warm/ Where I do not have to/ Say, thou art mine.” (27) Most of us know that there was only one Star which the Magi followed to witness the nativity at Bethlehem. But the referential “three stars” (27) which the poet follows to meet “three magi” (27) to guide him since Epiphany, January 6 or variable Easter marks the beginning of a dated or undated new journey to the “shelter of the saviour.” (27) The poet’s mystic journey is wrapped up in emblematic “nakedness” of whole humankind which the saviour has to bear “with equanimity.” (27)

The third poem in the proposed cluster of poems has its background. This demonetisation was announced by the Indian government on November 8 2016, to usher in “The New Age” of space technology, which brought to colourful world currency whether “Blue and pink papers.” The poet becomes ironic “Now I do not have to/ Stand in a queue to encash a cheque” (28) as transactions are now done after space-based technology for everything. However, the racial attitude of the white boy remains unchanged against the black: “Why do you/Ask me to come to the class?/To be in the company/Of black boys/Who smell foul” (28) or the girl is compelled to come to “that classroom/Which has not been cleaned/Nor even swept/For ages.” (28) The blue and pink colours of the New Age, in particular, require to be juxtaposed with the colour symbols of “The World in Words in 2015”: “The layered worlds have four colours./Bright radiates like God,/Dark absorbs like evil/Brown resembles devil/Yellow is Mammon./Everybody lives fine/The world is progressing,/It is moving on with a steady pace.” (29) The leftover colour is red, which symbolises the colour of the blood in the New Age, but the poet’s unwinding self touches it differently in eight miniatures.

All men become members of one standard order of colourful Space-Technology. The colours of “New Age” when clubbed with the colours of “The World in Words in 2015” and the unwinding self of the poet with eight unending short sections, they make nine sections of different categories of lyrics to be concluded with the 17 lines of “Renewed Hope”. The end lines of the poem “New Age” – “... the piercing nails/ In the [wooden] benches there/ Tear my saree,/ It no more can be darned/ Spotlessly” (28) – may be considered the first short section on inexpressibly horrible blood symbolism in the new age where lady’s ‘saree’ represents the emblematic flesh and blood which once torn apart cannot be stitched spotlessly. It is plausible to bring the lines – “God has given you intelligence/ Enough I suppose” (29) – and then read the import of the irony in the rest of the quoted lines: “Haven’t you been accredited with seven stars?/ Do the stars matter?/ The magi were guided by/ The Star to the messiah.” (29) If the west imitated the narrated versions of the three magi in reckoning the flesh, blood and water, the poet develops a parallel situation but with a difference: “‘The Plough’ has been christened the *sapt rishis*./The fault lies in us, not the stars./ Constellation matters, and so do the stars./We name the stars,/We assign them places./We give them values./We value gold. Gulf oil/Not the stars/We are the masters/Of our fate and yours.” (30) He then concludes the *modus*

operandi of the fine intellect of the east and the west, north and south: “The galaxy belongs to us/ We do not allow/ Anyone to touch the moon.” (30) In his “A voice”, the poet raises a question – “Where are the seven/ Horses that drive the cart?” (21) – to mean the seven mythological Horses which drive the sun’s chariot but by glossing the 28 legs of the 7 Horses (7x4=28), which the Hindu astrologers have merged into 28 *Nakshatras* including ‘*Abhijit Muharta*’ of 12 signs of Vedic astrology through which the sun passes to denote ruler-ship of the planets and its impact in religion, mythology, cosmology and calendrical holy days such as *Akshya Tritya*.

The poet pretends to become a prophet or a Rishi to speak differently about life and the landscape of different cultures. By selecting the opening lines of the rest of the mini sections of “The World in Words in 2015”, I would like to introduce the import of different activities in different landscapes of the west, east and middle east. I want to quote without reviewing the import of waste-lander’s unwinding self: “To taste/ the best wines/ You are to land here./ Don’t you know our history?” (30) – “Listen, O hungry and thirsty ones?/ Blessed are those that/ Live hungry for they will inherit/ The Kingdom of God at an early date” (31) – “Margie has been wandering/ Speaking Russian, Italian and English. . .John has been wandering /Speaking Spanish, French and Portuguese/ From Goa to Sao Polo/From Tokyo to Quebec from Moscow./ He mumbles, ‘I am all alone in this world.’ ” (32) – “What are you doing: raids,/ No fear of media?/ I control them./ Human rights?/ I create them.” (32) – “It is time to rejoice/ The profit of the company/ Has grown twenty times in five years.” (33) – “Dreams had been created/ When I did not know/ Dreams can be had only by a sleeping person.” (34) – “Democracy has come/Let us celebrate and dance/Equality has come let us sing and dance/We are free now let us rejoice, and dance/I love my freedom, let me leap into the sky.” (35) Finally, the poet invites us to rejoice with an assurance: “No one will wear golden clothes now/ No one will sleep in the palace now/ Equality has to rule / Democracy has come.” (35)

A feminist’s quest in a democracy of the new age has a mystic history of her own in 413 lines of “Bubli Poems”, arranged in eleven mini-cantos. In section I, the poet introduces Bubli as a psalm singer of a village temple who knows not “What she is bubbling with/ Yet the village lad knows” (37) how to approach her. On growing young, Bubli joins a college where two to three young lads lead her and then two lads fight for love like gangsters: “Hurled bombs and pistol shots./ Bubli continues to bubble;/ She knows not why;” (38) but the lads are looked for to be booked behind bars. Bubli cannot change her desire to become a feminist turned politician in the city of refuge. She not only bubbles with joy but loves to raise lots of questions to seek knowledge, and her master despite raising apocryphal questions – “Does water flow to the hills?/ Do the fish fly like birds/ Do the birds swim like a fish? Has a tiger turned vegetarian/ Does a stag kill a lion? . . . gazes into thin air” (39–40). Bubli, despite being bubbled with puzzles, becomes a “leader/What though if a cheerleader. . . /She is bubbling with shouts for applause.” (40) The first section comprising four mini sections of XI-Bubli poems, forms a narrative account about Bubli’s feminist identity with the poet’s latent sinister-irony which remains manifest that Bubli desired to deviate from being a village-psalm singer to a cheerleader. The second phase of Bubli’ feminist quest has its beginning in the New Yuga of space which made her watch the TV and imitate the dress code of lads amid protest – “The woman shall not wear that/ Which pertaineth unto man. . . “(Deuteronomy 22:5) – but continues to follow up the teachings of her female teachers against all odds. From V to VIII sections, she tends to become Katrina or Madhuri Dixit of Bollywood, Martina, Steffi Graf or Serena in tennis courts and Trupti Desai, who remained at the forefront of

Sabrimala temple and the Haji Ali Dargah where she fought for gender equality. She was ultimately lodged in the psychiatric hospital attended by a psychiatrist to cure her of a severe mental disorder. There she not only protests – “I am OK, but you are not OK, doctor/ I feel the pain, but you do not, doctor...Who can sleep when there is so much Disorder, so much malice/So much bitterness./ So much victimisation./ So much acrimony around?” (46) – but also asserts: “I do not see any light in sight to dispel/ So much of darkness.” (46) Bubli demands light instead of medicine, but the doctor “gave her an injection/ To give her rest, some peace, some solace.” (46) The third and the final phase of her unwinding self is summed up in three segments from IX to XI about her quest for spirituality: “Bubli is waiting for the revelation...” – but “Bubli is not able to decide;/How can she?/She is not yet ready for salvation.” (49) Bubli’s intellectual incapacity and inherent demonstrativeness, the feminist woman cannot be trusted to make the right choices of salvation and, therefore, must be supervised by their male counterparts or gender as a mother. Such narrative poems, along with lyrics, abound with multiple themes of diverse nature and systems of male and female subjects who love to live with different creeds, colours and classes or different shades of their sexes in the poet's esoteric *Neo-Kali Yuga of Space*.

In his “Unwinding Self”, the poet never deviates from the filial ties of human institutions, which give importance to binary relations such as men-women, boy-girl, son-father, daughter-mother, brother-sister, his-father, her father, and his interaction at multiple places ranging from home to airport and from airports to the overseas landscapes which he has visited. Even in his short poems, he becomes subtle and ironical. For instance, in “Hands”, the poet begins “Five times a day my father's/ Hands go up in the sky in gratitude/ To the One who had sent him here.” (70) Here, he invites his readers to consider the First Sura called “Al-Fatia”, the first seven verses in Quran when it was handed over to Muhammad or “la-ilaha-illallah-muhammadur-rasulullah” which Muslims recite five times to mean “There is no god but One Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” The father’s hands look beautiful when he weaves designs on sarees with colour and contours “to weave his dreams come alive.” (70). The poet suddenly becomes philosophical – “His God is formless” – and raises a controversial question: “Whose picture does he see/ When he stretches his palm/ Each day? ...His hunger is not/Entangled in the cobwebs/ Ours is.” (70) If Almighty Allah uses a parable “the weakest of homes is the home of the Spider” (Q 29:41), we ought to reconsider the concluding lines: “His hands are beautiful/ I need to take more care of him/ I need to read the [6] lines of his [jointed] palms.” (70) The 8-legged spider is capable of moving in all the eight directions including up and down to build their weakest home in mid-air by producing silk of various types, but the six lines of human hands build substantial houses for their sons when the “Mom” is away.

Sharma’s poem “Thus Spake a Woman” has distinctly been composed in imitation of Eliot’s book “Four Quartets” but with four different interlinked titles: i. “A Dreamer”, ii. “Frances” iii. “The Cracked World” and iv. “A Lament”. The context of all four, despite being obscure, moves around the theme of John Keats’ poem “I Had a Dove and the Sweet Dove Died”: “... Its feet were tied/ With a silken thread of my own hand’s weaving:/ Sweet little red feet! Why would you die?/ Why would you leave me, sweet bird, why?...” but with a difference. The key words of the poem may be summed up as follows: “deep red roses devoid of any thorns...to the yellowish moon” (16), “offer of jasmines, roses, *belpatra*” (17), “no sycamores” (17), “an outcaste in the cellular jail” (17) who sang “soothing songs for my baby ... [of] ... a different God” (18) and “I recollect

how painful it was even to conceive you” (18) as a female child and “It was not so easy to give you birth, O child!” (18) It is in “A Lament” the mystic term “winding” (19) takes place in connection with stairs that “had been blocked/ At the fourth floor.” (19) On his visit to the *Ganges in December* for a holy dip or thoughts of committing suicide, the persona cum poet noticed that his sinister and fair hands were caught by two mystic women, and he was unable to think beyond but baptism “with water.” And the third woman who was deeply seated in his psyche said: “Life is precious...Life was precious for me/You were precious for me, O child.” (“Thus Spake a Woman”, 19) It seems the persona was saved by the biological mother to sing the songs of salvation. The poem also invokes “Old and Young Women” in Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. (<http://4umi.com/nietzsche/zarathustra/18>)

Real salvation happens to be the key word upon which the poet invites us to read the concluding lines of “Renewed Hopes”: "In search of salvation/ For generations she sent him away/ Her son had left home/ To be educated in a big university/ To enable him to get a job/ That will bring him peace and prosperity.” (63) Since it is writ in the mother’s fate of her son’s survival: “She could pass days and nights/ Praying for him/ With empty stomach/ Invocation brings results quickly.” (63) The poet does not conclude that mystic notion of salvation in death but survival to save her son who must survive in others’ hands to sing the songs of “New Age” of space technology but without deviating from the cultural heritages of the lost antiquities.

The ultimate vision of such achievable salvation rests on one’s Karma and its proliferations which the unwinding self quests since time immemorial till date in the New Age with endless wait and renewed hope how to seek betterments in life without any effort to prove “God wrong” but by trying to “awaken the [primal] snake /Sleeping so silently for ages.” The reflective mystery of the self becomes explicit in the opening lines of the poem “Rechristening the City”, which need not be Allahabad but every city of refuge that speaks to the self: “I shall keep on you on your toes/ You may call me by whatever name/ You wish to. I am consciousness/ I am the reality, I am the water/ I am the land/ Where are the boundaries?” (72) Contextually, the poet invokes every human self to “Stand up like the *Akshya Vat*/ Against all poison” (72) and struggle for a new definition of the term 'salvation'. What interests me is the poet's reference to the imagery of the Tree and all poison which speaks about superimposed mythological stories in the Glossary (89), which the poet has appended. The mystic Tree had its existence not only in the flashes of the same flood story of Lord God Vishnu but also in the esoteric lines of the 42nd poem *Stories from the Mahabhart*a where emblematic “Dharma and Moksha hang on a tree./ Seers watch avariciously.” (84) *Sharma*’s vague reference to the *Akshya Vat* or the ‘Tree’ where Dharma and Moksha hang reminds me of Norse God Odin in the lines from *Havamal*: “I know that I hung on a windy tree nine long nights, wounded with a spear” (Stanza 138). Does Odin/Dharma hang on the Tree waiting for Moksha cum salvation? The *Akshya Vat* is the reduplication of the Tree of life located in Lord God’s Eden Garden in Paradise or the holy city of refuge now called Prayagraj.

Like Christians, the Vikings and the Hindu occultists believed that the world as we know it would end one day. If the occultists of Norse myths juxtapose the end of the world with the battle of Ragnarok, the Hindus associate Ragnarok with the great battle called Mahabharta, and the Christians with the forthcoming battle of Armageddon. When the battle of Ragnarok is over, the Vikings believe that *Lif* and *Lifst*ar will come out from *Yggdrasil* and repopulate the earth again. The notion of Dharma may thus also be associated with the day of judgment, which coincides with the notions of *Akshya Vat* and

Akshya Tritya of lunar and solar dates of the Hindu month *Vaisakha* (April) which marks the beginning of the new solar year on April 14 in Punjab, Assam, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh and others. Though the poet prefers the lunar calendar but leaves the option open, and becomes bold enough to identify the day with Jesus' bride as professed in Revelation with a difference: "Me ain't contaminated./ Me ain't a sinner./ Me is the Lord's faithful bride/ And thou art the man." ("*Me, A Black Doxy*" 15) The echoes of the day may be read in the book of Revelation: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and wife hath made herself ready." (Revelation 19:7). The winding horizons which remain latent in allusions of *Akshya Vat* and *Akshya Tritya* become unwinding but with multiple implications if we consider *Vaisakha* as the New year of the pagan Hindus.

The city of refuse continues to be the Sangam city of three sacred rivers with a tree called *Akshya Vat*. It was initially located in the centre of the royal garden of the fort. Myths apart, the poet sees the personified righteous man Dharma and the righteous woman Moksha who liberates men from the cycle of birth and death, hang on this *Akshya Vat*. The poet's reflections on *Akshya Vat* remind me of a gigantic mystical tree in Norse myth known as *Ask-Yggdrasil*, which binds the realm of death by the roots, the earth by the stem and heaven by its overshadowing leaves together. Every day the trio of Norns of Norse mythology named *Urdor*, *Verdandi* and *Skuld* poured water from the nearby destiny well onto the Tree so that the Tree should not wither. An attempt to juxtapose the identity of *Akshya Vat* with *Ask-Yggdrasil* as the Tree of life would bring about the existence of two people called *Lifthrasir*, "a man" and *Lif*, "a woman" in Norse mythology. Analogically, the couple in the Norse myth may be represented with *Yaksha/Dharma* (male) and *Yakshi/Moksha* (female) as individuals whose multiple shades of Karma in populating the earth remain a mystery. The couple will find shelter not only in the sacred Tree of the Vikings called *Ask-Yggdrasil* but also in its parallel called *Akshya Vat*, representing the Tree of life which Lord God had planted in His Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8). *Dharma-Karma-Moksha* of man and woman are the three sequential principles which seem to have their beginning in *Akshya Vat*, the symbolic Tree of life which the gardener God but prohibited *Lifthrasir* and *Lif/Adam* and *Eve/Dharma* and *Moksha* from tasting the fruits of *Karma* about procreation in heaven. If the pronunciation cum transliteration of the "Xy" letters of the Latin alphabet in English or 'X' as "X-AP" sounds like *Akshya*, I wish its mystic unwinding extend not only up to XY chromosomes of women and men but also to their esoteric existence in *Yggdrasil/Akshya Vat/Tree of Life* in Western and non-western occultism where "There is no DNA test/To judge their paternity." (31) The sermons are full of enchanting music but the poet feels that we are creations of man and woman of the *Akshya Vat*, but he knows that his voice would remain empty noise.

Conclusions

It all depends on how the poet understands the term 'salvation' and how he expresses it in his poems published periodically for seven years from 2012 to 2017, including "The Kerala Flood 2018" or more till its publication in 2020. As some other poems imply, the collection presents a multiplicity of modes which have explicitly been accommodated with religious structures. However, the term "In search of salvation" continues to be a central metaphor that remains manifest, glossed over or latent in the poet's ghostly vision around which desires and Karmas of the male subjects and female

subjects, including his family are constructed and maintained as flashes to capture the images, and proliferated in “New Age” of the space technology. Woven into the convincing central metaphor, there are numerous local illuminations which are historically sensitive as well as complicated. However, the poet’s Glossary proves the allusions to be his way of engaging style.

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