

*Sorrows of Bengal

MSPVT

Sushil Panja frequents gatherings of poets and intellectuals almost daily at College Street Coffee House, Kolkata, in the evening, writes poems in Bengali, and silently passes on the piece of paper on which the poem is written to a friend in the gathering for perusal, waits and then takes back the paper. The paper is not always tidy but the poem certainly is. In most cases his poems are live depictions of the sufferings of the poor and downtrodden. The poet's mind wades through the man made flood of 1978 autumn destroying standing crops in the fields as well as thatched mud huts of poor peasants of south Bengal. "The fancy tin-trunk of mother seems to be still under the collapsed wall...yards of the village homes, the paddy fields are under a vast sheet of water like the sea...And there prevails the sepulchral silence all around".

The dark, black brutish days inside the notorious Presidency Jail in the early 1970s come alive with the story of Anirban who was a scholar, a good debater and a revolutionary who was killed in cold blood, his bullet-riddled body was lying there visible to the insiders yet the police report said he died of 'serious gastro-enteritis'. "We thundered in unison-Anirban, we swear, we will try our utmost to finish your unfinished mission!" Here the poet seems to remind those who are carrying on their shoulder the red flag of fire and brimstone in forests and hills for ever to carry on the fight till victory is achieved, because they must know that they are on a mission.

The sunshine of mid-day and the moonshine of dawn are soaked in the sobs of the boy who does not know what happiness is, because he is at a loss as to what to do at the demise of his father who lost his land and his ill sister wrapped in quilt is lying on clay floor for years. Alas, there is no social security! Stark penury and deathly gloom reigns everywhere before the boy.

In this way the poet weaves past sufferings and sorrows of the poor as well as of those who are either leading or are sympathetic to revolutionary struggles to end exploitation and tyranny. In this small book under review, the poet has self-introduced himself, wherein one will find his first hand, experience of human sufferings due to brutality of rulers and their henchmen. The poems were originally written in Bengali. In this edition English translations by his friend Kausik Roy of 41 poems only find place. The poems were composed between 1970 and 2008 on contemporary theme. The poems are short and thought-provoking. □□□

*SORROWS OF BENGAL, A Collection of Bengali Poems

By Sushil Panja, translated into English by Kausik Roy, Published from Afif Fuad, Dibratrir Kavya, 29/3, Sri Gopal Mallik Lane, Kolkata 700012. Pages 48; Price Rs 75.00, US\$ 7, UK£ 5.