

Review of Annapurna Sharma's *When Jaya met Jaggu and Other Stories*

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When Jaya met Jaggu and Other Stories

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“Tradition never claims lives. It merely holds all being in a close circle, not the vicious web of a spider, but the gossamer of love. (Under the Tamarind Tree 162) Annapurna Sharma's short fiction is a healing touch in the tortured world of today. And Puchki, the great granddaughter, the narrator who is mix of Indo-German-Italian is a beacon of hope for countless generations who belong to this world of mixed cultures. What binds all in the collection is love, that gossamer of love that she speaks about throughout the book in its varied hues.

When Jaya met Jaggu and other stories published by Hawakkal is a collection of 9 stories dealing with the complexities of love and the myriad forms and turns it takes. It is a delightful work, written with an eye for detail. Urban, rural, diaspora, the very local are all flavours permeating through this volume. And each story binds the characters with that one emotion which is a connecting thread to every value and tradition in its own way. Perhaps that is what makes this volume so very Indian. It travels through our minds connecting experiences, hopes and dreams.

Whether it is *The Lame Mango* which troubles us with the intense obsessive connect that blossom in Ajay for a mango tree or the *Jasmine Maid* which opens up the familiar world of class exploitation, the vicious circle of poverty and sexual exploitation and awakening or even the very unexpected closing of *Coffee pleasure* touching upon a topic which is still heard in whispers, Annapurna never ceases to amaze. Just when one settles down to the mundane and the explicable, she jolts us to an unsettled feeling which is what happens in *Coffee Pleasure and Jasmine Maid*. Her subtle forays into the human psyche, its intense pressures and pleasures give the readers a sense of a sensitive mind at work. Hers is an eye which discerns and an ear which hears even the smallest sigh and cry.

Coffee Pleasure tugs at the heart strings. Initially taking the readers along a familiar path about unfulfilled dreams, Annapurna later overturns the oft held patriarchal/ Freudian notion of a troubled mother-daughter relationship to a quiet sublimation of a mother's awareness and acceptance of her daughter's desire, choices, aspiration and ambitions. It is that one line in the letter of the mother that raises eyebrows, "We have one thing in common" (54)

The collection has an interesting mixture of stories on relationships between humans, between humans and Gods and between humans and the world outside. Inanimate world would be an inappropriate term because what Annapurna does is not just look at the inanimate as lifeless but as possessing a distinctive meaning in connection with the living world. The last three stories in the collection, *Gods without Inquest*, *Temple under the Tamarind Tree* and *the Lone Jungle Crow* opens up a world where humans, gods and beliefs are entwined. It is a curious feeling of being in a familiar world, wanting to do away with certain hard held traditions, but caught in the web of tradition, modernity and a quiet strength.

The writer experiments with forms, the epistolary and the confessional in *Coffee Pleasure* and anthropomorphism in *Lunchtime* throwing the readers into a frenzy of grasping at the threads of narration, trying to make sense of the stories. I remember turning the pages back forth making sure that I have not made a mistake! Annapurna toys with our minds and that is what makes her tick after we set the book aside. To use cliché, the icing on the cake is of course *When Jaya met Jaggu*. It is a tale which tugs at your heart, a tale which subverts the intensity of relationships and a tale which makes you question the roles we play and whether there is anything permanent and logical about it. It is a bold one and an endearing one, a story which shakes our foundation of family and love and memory.

Annapurna Sharma's prose is simple yet so powerful. She has a way with words, transporting us into a world of enchanted imagination. Listen to this "I smelt the rawness in the air, the untamed, virulent fragrance of skin, supposed to give goosebumps to anyone". (Coffee Pleasure 35) One can literally feel and smell it. I would call it an immensely readable book.