About the Book

Prakriti and Purusha are two permanent entities - one completes itself in consonance with the other. Women, the representative of Prakriti have been in crisis for a long time, not only in undeveloped but also in developing countries. The crisis owes its origin to a break from tradition, multiculturalism, high hopes, and aspirations. For centuries, these acts of cruelty have vehemently denied Women the right to exist. But this marginalized section of the society is not devoid of an ancestral legacy of protestors. Women, and their supporters, have repeatedly endeavoured to address this question through numberless volumes. But the strangling of these voices interrogating the manipulative system, which has time and again, sought to redact the painful and complex reality, cannot always be ignored.

The anthology entitled *Cuckoo in Crisis* comprises poems of 25 women poets spread out in different corners of India and abroad. It contains poems of various moods and manners perceptively questioning a woman's ongoing crisis and their timeless sins. It helps unleash the putrefied consciousness initiating a metamorphosis of change. The omnibus collection not only reminds us of the traumas of violence committed against women but also offers us the joy of freedom reclaimed by Women.

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Cuckoo in Crisis

An Anthology of Poems

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Cuckoo in Crisis

An Anthology of Poems

POEMS BY 25 WOMEN POETS

Editors
CHARU SHEEL SINGH: BINOD MISHRA

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An Anthology of Poems

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Cuckoo in Crisis

An Anthology of Poems

Dedicated to all Women Poets



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Foreword

Cuckoo in Crisis: An Anthology of Poems

Women have been writing poetry in India in different languages for centuries. This fact, however, has gone unnoticed. Susie Tharu and K Lalitha edited a volume on Indian Women's writing published by Oxford University Press. But this volume begins a bit late. It is remarkable that India has women thinkers during the *Upanishadic* period and there are a number of women in the *Smiriti* Literature. The *Vedas* are our primary texts and commentaries upon them constitute a counterpart to that tradition. The *Vedas* are males while commentaries are females. When a primary textual tradition of a particular country evolves itself into shape and dignity, it magnifies itself into textuality. In the *Bhagwad Geeta*, Krishna says that Nature is womb to me. Krishna plants seed and this world comes into existence.

Prakriti and Purusha are two permanent entities- one completes itself in consonance with the other. It is important to say so because the recent women's writing tradition in India links itself with the Eurocentric models originating from France, Europe, England and America. The anthology is entitled *Cuckoo in Crisis* because Indian women writers are still searching for their identity. Kamala Das created a kind of (low mimetic) Renaissance in women's poetry. It should, however, be recorded that it is not easy to become a Sati Savitri nor a Gayatri. Vedic female textuality begins with Gayatri and Aurobindo's *Savitri* is an example of what female textuality would be like. Indian women have women's power and it is they who had inaugurated the foundational Script. They are the Adi-Shakti- Nav Durgas and *Ten Mahavidya*s. When Shiva prohibits Parvati from going to the Yagna being performed by her father Daksha, Parvati does not agree with the suggestion. When

Shiva insists that Parvati should not go, Parvati magnifies herself and multiplies into ten different forms. Shiva runs here and there for safety and security.

When Parvati questions her father why did he not call Shiva, Daksha called Shiva as uncultured, uncouth and even barbaric. Parvati could not tolerate this insult to her husband and she burnt herself dead in the oblationary fire. It should be perceived here that Parvati as a woman disagrees with her husband and disagrees with her father. She is searching for her own identity. But this quest makes her born again to become the daughter of Menka and Himalaya to be reunited with Shiva. It is clear from this story that we need not borrow Eurocentric models because the West can give us only the models of rebellion. Parvati gives us a model of rebellion and conjunction both. She brings the best out of Shiva who performs the *tandav* dance and this leads to the birth of performing arts. The small hand drum in Shiva's hand produces mantric syllables that constitute the sacred body of Indian textuality.

Indian scriptures are full of the examples of large-heartedness of women. In an episode from *the Mahabharata*, after the war is over, Krishna begs permission to leave but asks Kunti to demand anything that she wanted. Kunti replies that she wants endless sorrows because in sorrows only Krishna is remembered very often. The second example is of Draupadi who loses all her five sons, whose heads were cut off by Ashwatthama, the son of Pandavas' guru, Dronacharya. Arjuna wants to kill Ashwatthama, but Draupadi dissuades him from doing so. She rather says that Ashwatthama should not be killed because he is the only son of Dronacharya, the guru. This kind of female idealism and sacrifice can only be found in Indian Women's textuality. This is rarely to be found in any other literature of the world.

Indian English women writing need to keep this in mind that they might be writing in English but the tradition that they inherit goes back to thousands of years. Fictional narratives are frequent these days because human beings are interested in reading their

own stories. The truth is that the narrative itself is a woman and this woman has forgotten how to die and come back to life again. They also need to perform Satyavan and Savitri's exercise out of themselves. Indian English women poetry is a personal utterance in the lyric form and there are hardly any objective frameworks. India has been evolving over the ages and women should not only look backwards. They also need to look at future and create poetry that is foregrounded. One could recall the poems of Meera and her immense creativity which produced Krishna everywhere. There have been women social reformers - Savitribai Phule, Rani Laxmibai etc. There have been women in politics also like Kamala Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj and tradition continues. Women are now flying fighting aircrafts; they are administrative officers and CEOs of many big companies. India is looking forward to Indian women poets for creating a new India. Women must transcend the immediacy of experience and find bigger frameworks- historical, mythical, religious and others.

The difference between fictional narrative and fictional poetry is that in the former one can continue to live in the time while in the latter one must effect psychological death and get born again. Poetry is all excavation, discovery of the *bindu* and creation of a particular body, mind, *mandala* (circle). One must transcend the coitional body *(sambhog kaya)* and enter into a body of reformation *(nirvana kaya)*.

The next stage comes to establish a body of religion *(dharma kaya)*- righteousness ennobles and sublimates as opposed to the one, that depresses and de-generates. After the Indian English women poetry has passed through these stages, it will acquire the status of the diamond body *(vajra kaya)* where all forms of contraries merge into the synchrony of aesthetic imagination. That is the high-water mark where the Indian poetry must land itself.

My colleague and friend, Prof. Binod Mishra, has done yeoman service by editing some key volumes on various aspects of the study of literature. However, they have not received the attention that they

truly deserved. I thank Binod Mishra for making *Cuckoo in Crisis* a reality. I sincerely hope that Indian English women poets will feel encouraged and inspired by reading what is available here.

Spring, 2021. -Prof. Charu Sheel Singh

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We wish to express our sincere thanks to all the publishers who have earlier published some of the poems included in this anthology.

Acknowledgements are also due to Ms. Meenakshi Verma, whose indispensable efforts right from reading the manuscript to organising and giving it a proper shape, have transformed our dream into reality. This anthology would not have been an accomplishment without the constant encouragements of all the friends, relatives, and family members, right from its inception to its publication. And finally, we acknowledge the profound love of all poetry lovers, who always steal time from their busy schedule to read, to appreciate and to lend meaning to the muses in an age of reasoning.

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Introduction

Poetry has, in all times, been a subtle medium to conceal and reveal emotions and feelings felt yet left ignored because of the humans' helplessness resulting out of social bindings, pressures, obligations, and limitations. These emotions and feelings seem not to die but to simmer inside, waiting for an opportune hour to flow. We all are mere bundles of energies, smithereens like, broken from that ultimate source. And yet, an ethereal difference potent enough separates us, creating enemies in each other, filled with hate and curses. Why should one be declared worthy enough to receive all the forgiveness and the other cursed with pain, torture, and all the blames? Needless to mention, both men and women being God's creations, the needs, urges, actions, and reactions of the two are different. In traditional set-ups, their roles and responsibilities being defined, one gets an edge over others, which causes confusion, conflicts, and chaos. In this regard, women most often get victimized because of the constructed ideologies, which result in physiological and emotional make-ups that force them to render, to tender and to surrender before their male counterparts. While their metabolism prepares them to absorb, accommodate and affect, they cannot be deprived of their equal right to live, to love, and to lead.

History is witness to the fact that marginalization of women has been a long cry. Women have been in crisis for a long time, not only in undeveloped and developing countries; their position is no different in developed countries as well. The crisis owes its origin to a break from tradition, multiculturalism, high hopes, and aspirations. In India, there have been women of high intellectual calibre during the Upanishadic period. They also occupied a place of prominence in Smriti literature. However, their deterioration ran parallel to their development in the successive stages of Indian history. The magnitude of the crisis increased manifold after the decolonization of India from the Muslim and the British rule.

Women, and their supporters, have repeatedly endeavoured to address this question through numberless volumes. But the strangling of these voices interrogating the manipulative system, which has time and again sought to redact the painful and complex reality, cannot always be ignored. The civilized world lent an open ear to these screams, accept the varied reasons responsible for them, break the facade of how culturally utopic our society is, and reconstruct it following a deconstruction.

Poems reflecting this change in sensibility, tenor, tone and idiom were invited by the editors with the aim of fulfilling this gap of representation in anthologies published on women's poetry so far. Poems translated from the regional languages into English were also welcome. It is also important in this connection to address the Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsee women who must make it a point to make the anthology a success. Indian Diaspora living anywhere in the world was also invited to participate in this venture. This omnibus collection triggers our passive conscience, forcing us to be sceptical of the biased system, which seeks to destroy Women's being. It contains poems of various moods and manners perceptively questioning a woman's ongoing crisis and their timeless sins. The poems of this collection amply record the traumatic reality that Women as a community and even individually, endure and evolve to survive the wounds ensuing from heinous crimes like rape, violence, and disrespect etc. The melodious voice of the cuckoo which has been stifled since time immemorial needs to be heard and understood empathically to herald a new world full of harmony and happiness.

Since this anthology is a poetic accumulation of published and unpublished poems, the copyright remains with the poets. It includes the poems of twenty-five poets spread out in different corners of India and abroad. It opens with the poems of **Usha Akella** invoking the divine to lend voice and strength to God's supreme creation being sandwiched between prescriptions and proscriptions. Through numerous poems, the poet advocates women's desire for freedom in choices for love and awakens them to come out of the liminal space. With the help of their indomitable determination

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