

**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF A.R.A.W.L.II PUBLICATIONS, AJMER, INDIA –
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with A.R.A.W.L.II
(Speech read out in absentia)*

It is my pleasure to be part of the launch of **A.R.A.W.L.II PUBLICATIONS**, which is certainly a major event on the Indian literary scene. Although I am unable to be present in person, please be assured that spiritually I am with you at this moment and that I am happy to have this my speech read out by an esteemed colleague.

Poetry is a genre that features high on the literary agenda of **A.R.A.W.L.II**, and it is on that aspect that I shall concentrate in these brief words. Indeed, my own contribution to the enterprise has been in that field, with the afterword I have written to the selected poems of Satish Verma and my translations for *PROSOPISIA: An International Journal of Poetry & Creative Writing* of poems by Carla Vanessa Gonzáles, of Peru. I believe that **A.R.A.W.L.II** is developing a distinctive vision of poetry, apt for the age of globalisation, that focuses above all on its intercultural role, its potential as a vehicle of **dialogue between cultures**.

The selected poems of Satish Verma, published by **A.R.A.W.L.II** under the title of **BEYONDS & BETWEON**, are already an impressive product of intercultural dialogue. Satish Verma, an Indian poet and Hindi native speaker here writing in English, traces a dark journey through a landscape not of this world - a burnt, stunted, desiccated inner landscape that in many ways recalls T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* – and yet at the end, in a movement reminiscent of the Tagore of *Gitanjali*, welcomes the arrival of a transformative Guest, in an eminently Indian fashion.

Fittingly, the **A.R.A.W.L.II** edition of these poems brings them firmly into the arena of cultural dialogue by integrating poetry and criticism in a highly original fashion and by marshalling Verma's fellow poets as critics. The book not only frames the poems, in the conventional way, within a Foreword (by poet and critic Anuraag Sharma) and an Afterword (by myself): it also intersperses, with the body of the text, no less than three 'Midwords', of whose authors, one hails from India, Sheela Upadhyay, and two from elsewhere – E.E. Sule from Nigeria and John Kinsella from Australia, the latter two both reputed poets. Both stress the universality of Verma's writing: for Sule, 'the poetry has the verve to inject new spirit into the thinking mind'; for Kinsella, 'the poems become a will in themselves – a will to live in the best way, the spiritual way'. For both these poet-critics from the outside, poetry in the hands of a master like Satish Verma is the bearer less of historical and cultural specificities than of a shared humanity which yearns to communicate across barriers.

That spirit of transcultural striving is also to the fore in the second **A.R.A.W.L.II** publication I would like to comment on, Anuraag Sharma's translations into Hindi of 'Four Canberra poets' published under the title **MEHRAAB**, an word of Arabic origin glossed in the title as **THE ARCH**. An arch is a space through which one passes from one location or state to another, and thus stands as a suitable metaphor for that activity of passage which is translation. Anuraag Sharma has selected poems by four living poets associated with Australia and its capital: three Australians proper, Alan Gould, Geoff Page and Mark O'Connor, and the Fijian of Indian origin, Satendra Nandan. The poems of the last-named are already the product

of a cultural hybridation, as when, in English, he invokes himself reading ‘Vyas’s Mahabhartta, Valmiki’s Ramayana’ while his daughter Kavita ‘runs out into the aangan’ to collect ‘fallen, bright yellow mango leaves’.

This volume takes the form of a parallel text, with the English-language originals fronting Sharma’s Hindi translations. It is thus part of a project aimed at making work in English accessible to Hindi speakers in India who lack the necessary of the source, or would simply prefer to read anglophone writers transposed into the resonances of India’s other co-official language. Here, then, it is not just poetry but translation too, that creates archways linking cultures. On this point, Anuraag Sharma has supplied a stimulating Preface in which he reflects on the transformative role of translation, suggesting eloquently that ‘translation is an arch – a covenant like a rainbow between the original and the nearly original’, or, indeed, that ‘the art of translation is a ... yogic “kriya” which involves the transmigration of one’s soul into the body of the original poet / author’. The yogic imagery here suggests an Indianisation of the foreign text, which yet somehow retains its own feeling and vibration in the process of alchemical transformation.

Poets comment poets; poets translate poets. The active and dynamic word flies free above the boundary walls of nation and culture. The literary and poetic venture embodied in **A.R.A.W.L.II** is exciting indeed, and I am more than pleased to be enabled to play my part in this unfolding adventure in language.