

Book Review

RATNA RAMAN

An embellished, crafted book

My generation was lost. Cities too. And nations.

But all of this a little later.

Meanwhile in the window, a swallow.

-- Czeslaw Milosz (last page of the book)

To devote a life to the writing of poetry, one needs both privilege and leisure and while the former seems to be abundantly available in Covid-time, leisure seems pretty much unavailable in the face of hurtling through innumerable miniscule daily chores and chasing imaginary, imagined and real schedules. Poetry provides pleasure and can bewitch with its meanings; A lot of poetry is afloat in the world and poets continue to add more, while teachers engage generations of students of varying ages, with all manner of verses, rhymed and free. Yet the serious readers of poetry continue to drop in number. Perhaps the music in the world is being slowly stifled, perhaps the music within all of us has slowed down, and in times of pandemic lockdown, it is possible to opine so, as a reviewer/critic, possessed of the specialized training to conduct autopsies on the bodies of poetry and fiction and its important component, language. Sudeep Sen's curating of words such as *Fractals*, 'Kintsugi' (the Japanese art of mixing gold dust in clay, used to fix broken ceramic, in order to give it a new texture and life) and now the polysyllabic *Anthropocene* highlights his quest for meaning and its prolonged exploration in different contexts.

Sudeep Sen's *Anthropocene* is an impassioned and beautiful response to the extraordinary planetary crisis of our time. It is full of the richest insights that have risen from the global South here witness to the multiple catastrophes that are now unfolding around us. -- ANITA CHAND

Sudeep Sen is a shining star in India's poetic firmament. -- WILLIAM DALRYMPLE



ANTHROPOCENE
climate change, contagion, consolation

SUDEEP SEN

FOREWORD BY CAROLYN FORSHEE

Sen takes trouble over the composing and arranging of the collection of verse in layered and varied ways. The poems are evocative, the words trace his journey through different time periods and ensure that the lay



Sudeep Sen

reader will reach out for that most useful of tomes, the dictionary to clarify or refresh his/her understanding of the meaning of the word. Armed subsequently with the meaning of the word to center his/her journey through the body of the book, the reader is in for a pleasant surprise. Once the threshold of the title is crossed, the reader is in mixed company. Familiar and unfamiliar poets rubbed shoulders (in *Fractals*); famous and familiar ancient and modern writers through the pages of Sudeep Sen's current production. Suddenly, Sen is no longer merely the anguished poet speaking of his grief, or the philosophic man of letters on the verge of pushing us into a discovery, or making one himself. With excerpts from a galaxy of writers, Sudeep Sen sets up a parlor for poetry and we are invited into this carefully arranged, consciously crafted space, in which innumerable older writers are prominent artefacts or the window dressing, leading us into Sen's book lined study cum boudoir beyond whose windows lies the serendipitous green.

Anthropocene serves as both noun and adjective and refers to the current geological age, one in which human intervention has impacted the environment and climate. The book is divided into nine sections, namely, the Prologue, Anthropocene, Pandemic, Contagious, Atmosphere, Holocene Consolation, Lockdown and Epilogue.

The Prologue, draws attention to the gaudy world that Calvino opines, imprisons us, and is framed by writings from Frida Kahlo, Amitav Ghosh, Roland Barthes, Salman Rushdie and John Muir. Declaring in Akira Kurosawa's words that an artist cannot look away, the first section provides a meditation on contemporary affairs. Sen chronicles his experiences in Bangladesh and New Delhi, documents his life as a poet over three decades of voluntary social isolation and the success of his timely poem 'Love in the Time of Corona' while reiterating his anxiety about the global destruction of the environment by rich nations and the disastrous climate change and the pandemic. Speaking intermittently in his own voice, Sen enlists the need for positivity and hope, and the need to slow down, consume less and love selflessly and expansively. Section Two draws attention to climate change, global warming, pollution and asphyxia generated by human apathy.

The pattern of installation writing is modified in Section Three. Sen introduces black and white photographs of the grim pandemic: the blacked-out page of *The New York Times* as well as its obituary page, along side various metrical patterns and prose that document the spread of the pandemic, and portrays the new topography and vocabulary of the lockdown, making us recall each grim day of virus, hunger and hapless migrants. Sen writes vignettes in prose, attempting to make sense of the period of quarantine.

The last few sections of the book allow the reader to view black and white photos that set up paper trails of contours and lines and trace patterns and alignments into books, backs of hairs, juxtaposed with coloured shots of the skies and a cutting board with chopped vegetables speaking of a dish in process in the kitchen. When Sen is not setting up his poems in conversation with other writing, he assembles and collates well-thoughtout photographs of the world outside and around him interspersing it with well-framed lines. Sen alternates between smooth prose and fluid poetry and the nine sections of the book work like small skits that add up to the continued theatre that is staged in this collection of thoughts, phrases and haikus. Within the pages of the book, people continue to come and go. The book concludes prayerfully, invoking the Buddhist Chant of the *om mani padme hum*.

Sudeep Sen's latest book concludes with hope and prayer offering insight and analysis of our times. *Anthropocene* is an embellished and crafted book of assorted ideas, allowing the zeitgeist of our times into the recesses of individual minds. Perhaps this is the resting place that Sen envisages for the small private voice of the twenty-first century poet.

Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation

by Sudeep Sen,

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