

Editorial Note

The year 2012 was born with forebodings. Now that it's nearly passed, a sense of relief, even a vibe of new-found joy has come over us. It's so with us every time a season slips through without leaving its trail. Our notion of happiness has reduced to become just the passing of time with least possible disturbance or change. But change is what we must learn to wear and live for and through.

The Fall is on again. Nature is, again, a spectrum of colors. A symphony of colors and freshly cool breezes. Of copper leaves blowing in the wind. Artist Prem Singh has captured some moments of such colored passion of Canadian Fall in his new paintings two of which have graced the front and back covers of this number.

Shrinking of readership of literary fiction and nonfiction and of proliferation of pop fiction readership has become the current topic of the media. It might be so, but literary works can never lose their base, an inborn hunger and quest for variety of human experience and for creative use of language. A habit, not merely a fashion. Imaginative literary works can never leave the book shelves in the home, the shop and the public place because of our lives being grounded in language. Poetry may have suffered on grounds of readership but it has always withstood its ground. It still enjoys craving of many lonely hearts or lonely moments of most not so lonely.

After two double issues, we are temporarily back to quarterly mode. Double or single, both modes were equally welcomed by our readers and well-wishers. At times, constraints of time and delayed submissions bind us.

To keep balance, we bring you a fresh mixed bag of articles, book reviews, literary conversations, enough poetry and a good dose of literary fiction and a solitary article on cinema.

Som P. Ranchan, Shauna Singh Baldwin and John Brandi are among the attractions this time.

Gurdev Chauhan

Buddha

Three Cantos

By Som P. Ranchan

Canto 1

Mahaparinibbana

Light shone on his wife and child
The taper flared for a moment
And then was still

But he knew that in its seeming stillness
Mind is swept off by storms
That the slightest movement of sound, smell
taste, and touch
Triggers the lust of the will
Towards possession

Now or never
He thought

Eddies swirled within his consciousness

Out in the courtyard
Odorous with roses
After the day's work and the day's play
The dancing beauties slept
Their tresses harboring Pluto's darkness
Bosoms sensuous
Drinking the moonlight

But oblivious of alien shadows
Now or Never
He thought
Eerie voices whizzed past him
Disembodied footsteps fell

On the roof of his will
And down the corridors of his mind
Glided a throng of phantoms
Holding his consciousness as a leashed animal
Now or never
Thinking with violence
In surge surpassing
He tore himself from habitual grooves
Man's love in search of greater love
In search of perilous becoming
In search of the nothing of compassion
In search of destiny

Embarking on a voyage un-returning
To find an answer
To inanities of existence
Manifold illusions

To find an answer
To the collapse at the street's end
Of a shriveled old man
To the grisly phantom stalking through all lands
Pouncing on bird beast animal man

Brahma Vishnu Siva
Were dumb
Asleep for eons
Indifferent to cycles of manifestation
Bache hum mortify the flesh
So his soul could float in the soundless ether
Without the crag of the body

Explained suffering away
As symmetric illusion
In a deified pattern
Explained away
Leprosies
Plagues
And malarial memories

They indulged in astral flights
And fierce feasts of levitation

But as he was returning homeward-bound
Flinging distances in the flight of guilt
He met a girl
Beautiful beyond words
Her color with the lemon of foam
Flecked with the lemon of the evening Sun
Golden her aura

She asked him no fool questions
There was no hassle with words
They looked and lay down

In the tall rushes prolific
On the banks of the lost Saraswati
And she gave him
The naked fakir from the forest
Her neck
So transparent
That he could see saliva scoot up and down as
quicksilver
Her breasts swinging above him as jars of honey
and soma drink
Her hips hot and heaving as burning deserts
Her thighs strong as columns
Held him in a vice

And she gave him
Her lotus
Cool as sherbet
And he knew the why and the wherefore

*

For days on end though he went about haunted
Meditating on her hair
Where the light of the moon dwelled and
The brilliance of fire
On her eyes the unfathomed wells of sparkling green nectar
On her lips teasing as the Himalayan snowline
On her breasts sharp conical
As the tapering vertical walls of Mt. Kailash
Which pierced his ribcage on that first fatal embrace
Fracturing his heart into splintered fragments

And he had cried
But no sound had come

He meditated meditated
On her hips
On each pubic hair
Meditated meditated
Till she took him to the jungles of passion
Where everything, twigs leaves bark trunk and root
Senses feelings ego consciousness
and the nameless Brahma was burnt

His passion quenched
He became that stream
Flowing through all lands

Elephants came to drink its swelling currents
And filling their trunks
Spouted it against blue heaven
Maidens came to wash their burgeoning arses
Holding the waters in the shy cups of their right hands
Washed and washed
And went into reveries
Their arses had never sipped such waters
Holy men came and sat on its banks
To meditate on the sound of water
Till they wee filled with it

Water in their eyes
Water in their nostrils
Water in their ears

Their bodies enveloped in water
The whole world bathed in water

Their meditation complete
The waters returned to the stream
With the bilge of their egos dissolved
And they left happy
Carrying the carcass of their empty hides
Light as breezes
Swaying as hollow reeds

An endless thronging pilgrimage came of men women
And children
To the banks of this stream
Hath yogis came and stood as strokes on one leg
And crumbled gazing into its depths
And the river flowed carrying their skeletons to the invisible sea

But none knew that he water
Flowed from the breasts of this girl
It flowed from the churning of the ponds of lotus

And from the primal waters had sprung
In the dim dawn of creation
The seed of the world
From the drip drip of Siva's semen metals marbles
And precious stones
And from the shedding of her public hair
Himalayan deodars and Redwood forests
And later when he came to himself

And went forth
Seducing somnolent villages Phambian Wisconsin Mitra New
York California
Squandering himself in a prodigal mood

Kissing their eyes with the lemon of Nirvana
They did not know that he was really giving
This girl

To some he gave her eyes
And they began to perceive
Becoming wrapped in knowledge
to some he gave her lips
and they chanted in ecstatic devotion
And to others he gave her breasts
And they went wild

And died into themselves

But the lotus he kept to himself
For that was his secret his strength
The measure of his attachment
His motive for implication in existence

Then when the girl died years afterwards
While he was far away visiting his love monasteries
That had sprung up in every village in every city
In courtyards and household corners
In the wake of his wanderings
He let it all
And hurried back
And carrying her derelict body
To the cremation ground
Warping the corpse in sheets upon sheets of spring colors
Sprinkling on it saffron of his blood and his tears that had flowed
for a long time
Piling upon it flower leaf and wood
And as he gave the torch to the pyre
And as the fire shot forth
He climbed onto it
With the fresh live fat
The flames leapt into a bonfire

And he became the ultimate ashes
Of the dread Mahaparinibbana

Canto 2

Amrapalli

Once upon a time the life that I am now
Was born as Amrapalli
Who reigned supreme in the beautiful Vaishalli

I loved song and dance
And whispering nights
The litanies of youth
The votive plaques and the glittering tears
My gardens were odorous with champak and roses
And many me rose from the lotus ponds
On the wings of the murmurous bees
Caressing their mistress
Mornings, evenings, and afternoons

I loved my breasts
The bitter crypts of tenderness
The murdered swans shone in my neck
My body a burning pyre of slow suicide
And my chambers of opal and porphyry
Sealed me from heat and cold and strife

Ay, the very gods came to me in disguise
To drink cool draughts from my fragrant breath
And embayed in marmoreal arms
Like children slept
Like children wept

Everybody thought he had a part of me,
all of my names,