

Distillations from the Unknown: A Review of Tamali Neogi's *Ripples in Silence*

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In *Awakened Cosmos: The Mind of Classical Chinese Poetry*, Chinese literary scholar David Hinton highlights how ancient Chinese poets explored language as a relationship with the cosmos, "[...] poetry pares language down to a bare minimum, thereby opening it to silence. And it is there in the margins of silence that poetry finds its deepest possibilities — for there it can render dimensions of consciousness that are much more expansive than that identity-center, primal dimensions of consciousness as the Cosmos awakened to itself." Hinton's view is derived from his studies of classical Chinese poets such as Tu Fu who lived in an era of nihilistic violence yet maintained balance through contemplation and spiritual seeking. Poetry in today's literary landscape maintains this rigor of silence and path of language as openness to the cosmos. It may seem odd that language should be taken as a medium of silence or that poetry emerges from the languishing depths of poverty. The poet is the rare class of seer, and the nature of the vision depends on the faculty of imagination. In his *A Defense of Poetry*, Percy Shelley defines the imaginative capacity in contrast to reason as "[...] mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity." While our modern ambitions are unseated in restlessness and cultural history takes a back seat for pursuits aimed at industrial betterment, the quality of poetry and the humanities diminishes like a fog over the mind.

Contemporary problems reach critical mass and poetry responds to the deficit of humane understanding. Our sense of awakening may feel futilely intertwined with the deep sorrow of modern life. However, during the devastating world wars era of T. S. Eliot, he voiced the fragmentation and emptiness from his own perilous sense of doom in great modernist works such as "The Wasteland". The literary readership is declining yet a sense of restlessness and resentment breeds on this fallow ground. Poets must become artful healers, not just panderers to solipsistic emotions. Medical doctor and poet Rafael Campo discusses submissions he receives as editor of *JAMA's* Poetry and Medicine section, "I'm seeing and reading poems about empathy, about cultural difference, about end of life, about, really, the nature of human suffering." Does contemporary poetry reflect an urgency or hopelessness, or are there poets offering transcendence and a deeper look at human interconnectedness?

A poetry collection like *Ripples in Silence* by Tamali Neogi published by my own Transcendent Zero Press this year opens the reader to a cosmopolitan reach that borrows from metaphysical knowledge across the ages. Neogi's depth of perception faces struggle and misery in human life by embracing paradox and ambiguity. Her courageous stance recognizes the messiness of sorrow and the absence of pure understanding within the physical world.

Her poetry is rich in contemplative spirit and empathy. Her conciliatory spirit is divulged in “Flowers of Parijat Tree” among other poems:

*“Poet Angel, let my poetry be like you,
Soft, new light after rain,
Neither heat nor hatred,
Only surrender makes rainbow possible.”*

In the same poem, she uses Greek mythology to highlight paradox within language, “Words are moving ceaselessly, / Heracles’ task to join the opposites, / the dimensions of truth, / being shaped into an invisible garland, decked with jewel-like stars.” These lines portray truth as dimensional, indicating it has foundations in spacetime. Truth is given a multifaceted reality that exceeds human perception, “shaped into an invisible garland.” This line addresses language as silence of signs, something to be shaped through binaries. The poet is like the mythical Heracles, evoking strength and burden in the act of creation.

Truth is the sustenance of the poet. Neogi’s poetics frequently highlight the need for truth. For instance, she writes in “You Came to Me”:

*“Uncanny silence pervades,
I question, is it a dream of a world
where a star is burnt by its own fire,
like truth lost in the search?”*

These lines situate nicely into Hinton’s comments on ancient Chinese verse. The “You” is truth itself, the dispeller of lies and illusions. Neogi writes further describing her relationship to truth, “[...] rather a beggar in a lonely lane,/ wondering at your commitment.” Here, language embraces revelation from the silence during the poet’s struggle with the cosmos. The poet recognizes herself as the “beggar” against cosmic grandeur’s making and re-making of existence. This reflection resembles *samsara* in Buddhist texts. *Ripples in Silence* often invokes such vulnerability and social marginalization to describe the human condition. By intimately intoning human frailty before divine love, Neogi intimates a God whose subtle strength is paradoxical yet compassionate. In “Monsoon Love” this devotional sense is revealed:

*“As the divine droplets pour from the sky
on the ardent lovers and vulnerable minds,
wash away the ugly sensations
from the smitten hearts,
to pave the way and convey
Monsoon love is for all!”*

God is not simply an overarching legislator who punishes and rewards, but a being of truth existing in relation to human instinct. The longest poem in the volume is “Karna and Arjuna: A Dialogue”. This poem uses dialogue between Karna and Arjuna to unveil the paradox of holiness. By developing an analogy through conversation, Neogi constructs an imaginary world where humanity is not aimlessly in search of companionship as truth is hidden from view. This dialogue occurs after the brothers’ deaths in which Arjuna urges Karna to forget the rivalry of their earthly existence. Neogi writes in Karna’s voice:

*“In boundless yearning, man embodies the divine,
trees bear fruit,
buds bloom into lotuses with thousand petals.”*

This reflection follows from Arjuna’s humble admission of shortcoming as he reveals how Fate favored him:

*“Frustration, though boundless, doesn’t eliminate desires,
rather it feeds the passionate hearts more,
as, never ending Sulphur and hell fire.
Rejection of Draupadi has certainly hurt your pride,
her grand presence among all, my expectations.”*

The dialogue between Karna and Arjuna not only explores struggles within the human psyche, but it suggests reconciliation is possible. The sullen events experienced between the two brothers condition their sensibilities toward one another, yet reflect the need for harmony even as Fate designs the winners and losers. Karna suggests reconciliation amongst life’s embittered flux:

*“But, brother,
what I now think is
after a certain time
this realization,
like dew drop in heat
will definitely evaporate
and dream children,
playing on the shore of the ocean of melancholy,
again we are to start from zero.”*

Neogi’s poetics render this dialogue as a struggle between two reconciling rivals in death after the yearning of their lives has passed. Karna and Arjuna, after drinking of Lethe, meet dialogically and use their experiences to embrace harmonious understanding about life. Both offer insights and share mutuality. Arjuna responds after noting how opinions differ:

*“Consciousness like ball may go on rolling,
carrying realizations of our previous lives
to our next births.
But to me,
starting from nothingness,
in each birth,
it is a fresh attempt to reach infinity,
this is what means it to be human,
till Mahakaal releases us
from the cycle of birth and rebirth.”*

The brothers reach an affirmation that divine nature is not easily understood or defined, reflecting an existential liberty shared by humanity.

The question of Fate appears in “It Is Fate” through a dialogue between Mother Earth and the Father. After Mother Earth questions, “Father, why have you put / all the irreconcilable strains worldwide, / in one gargantuan geometrical frame” the Father responds:

*“[...] the children are sent to play a game of balance,
where the balancing mechanism is inactive by default,
And it is Fate, nothing else.”*

The conclusions reflect a cosmopolitan humanity where supposed “winners and losers” share the field which bears no judgement. This equality suspends privilege and recognizes the humanity spanning the globe.

Ripples in Silence is not mere abstraction or philosophical reflection. The work embraces emotion as a form of reason. In “Much to Say...” Neogi prioritizes emotional navigation of life:

*“So much to say
yet very little can be uttered.
Remember you, mother,
in thirst one digs a hole on earth,
a deep hole perhaps,
for water level has gone downwards,
like our raw emotions
when alien growth
overshadows blood kinship.”*

“Much to Say...” portrays a daughter’s relationship with her mother in the voice of the daughter. She reflects that children are ungrateful and indifferent, taking for granted what the mother does to offer caregiving. The daughter’s voice also shines a light on God’s benevolence in revelation, “Time unfolds different truths for all.” By describing truth as “unfolding” in the daughter’s life, Neogi shares that truth is a process of maturity, and a singular truth in the human imagination is unlikely.

Ripples in Silence balances language within cosmological silence, reflecting the imagination’s bare relation to harmony and synthesis. Language initiates revelation and sparks the vision from darkness. In “Don’t Mind if I Say” the female voice discusses how body and mind are intertwined in passionate emotion. The male gaze upon female beauty is a rite into harmony:

*“To fulfil my dream of freedom for all,
you, like a mad horse of rebellion,
run across asumadrahimachal.
I come out, standing on the threshold,
when your triumph is transfixed in my bindi
I give my all – affection and warmth.”*

The woman, speaking in her own voice, explores her sympathy for human suffering and binds it to her own fate. Her “dream of freedom for all” is a deeply emotional experience rather than a political ambition. Neogi delineates the space between human passion and ambitions of the greedy: “It’s our brown world where springs have gone dry, / Ha! The corporate greed of Leviathan!” The poem presents a woman’s view of oppression’s octopus tentacles stretching across human imagination.

Neogi’s craft is original yet balances global religious symbolism with compassion inspired by modern fragmentation. The age which birthed religion thousands of years ago bears resemblance to the current era. Cultures are in closer contact, fragmentation of order is uprooting traditions, strife is emerging from desperate inequality, and rapid progress and growth is creating paradoxical new understandings of our humanity. During the Axial Age as today’s dominant faiths were developed and codified, their creators borrowed and expanded on prior traditions. Sacred writings reflect shared humanity and unveil the human imagination in relation to the vast cosmic intelligence that resonates within it. Literature is distillation from a vast unknown language that is metaphorically called “silence.” Tamali Neogi’s *Ripples in Silence* offers contemporary literary culture a voice for its grief. Neogi’s fresh perspective emerges in a period when AI begins to replace human literary creativity, universities focus on social activist paradigms, and technology subverts spiritual impulses. Human solitude declines into loneliness and our global condition is rife with declarations of new emergencies. While poetry cannot offer solutions, it can expose our frailty and draw commonality amongst discord. An age of polarization, reframed injustices and rapid social shifts offers an opportunity to envision an expansive imagination resonating through the

cosmic order. As the conflicted period of Tu Fu beautified his poetics, so does this age offer us the poems of Tamali Neogi.

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