

Book Reviews

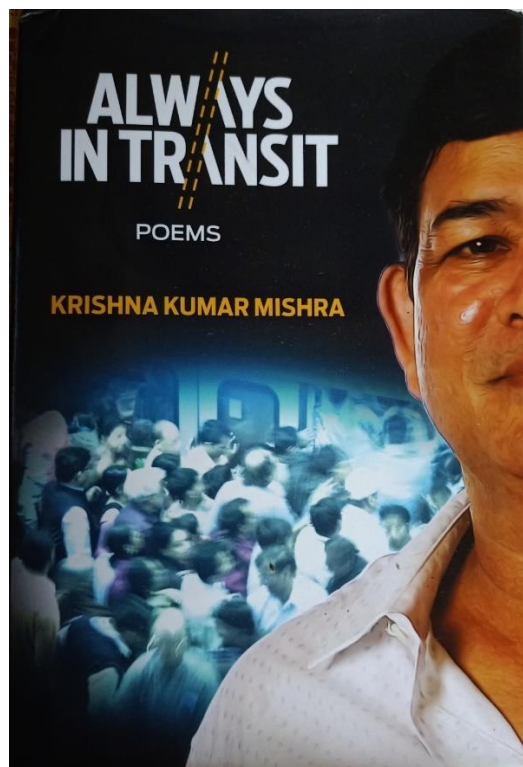


CAESURAE: POETICS OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

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Always in Transit: Poems by Krishna Kumar Mishra. Scintilla Books, Mumbai. 1994/2023. Rs. 200/- Reviewed by K.V. Raghupathi.

The book that is being reviewed is a compilation of poems written by Krishna Kumar Mishra. It was initially released in 1994 and reissued in 2023. According to the information on the book's back cover flap, Krishna Kumar is a bilingual poet, writer, editor, scriptwriter, painter, and columnist. He is an aviation engineer by training but works as a journalist. He is the editor of *Indian Economy & Market* at the moment.

Poets are divided into two categories: those who teach in colleges and universities, and those who do not. Poetry writing, or writing in general, is not someone's exclusive domain. Anyone can be creative, and it can happen anywhere. Krishna Kumar falls into the latter group since he is a journalist by profession. The poet has organized the collection's forty-eight poems into three sections. Every poem addresses a minor issue that holds great significance for the poet. Hence, they are reflections on a small scale. There are thirty poems in the section titled, "Certainly Not an Unexamined Life," which explore themes of relationships, life, love, and death. The idea of dying in the room is explored in the poem "Stranger in the Room." Although the poet feels that "some experiences eat too deeply" (13), he does not feel fearful of death or life in general.

The poet devolves into philosophy in "On a Birthday," contemplating the meaninglessness of existence. Birthdays are a pleasant occasion to celebrate, but the poet also notes that they are a "wind of emptiness" (14). Memories are like "long shadows" that are difficult to erase, and this is the theme of "Once Again." There are some that hurt and some that are enjoyable. The poet, behind these recollections, sees life's "extraordinariness" and "its astonishing possibilities," delivering a hopeful message to the youth who waste their energy in hopelessness.

In "Friends," pals come and depart from each other's lives. Nobody remains the same. "Everyone leaves everyone else alone" (18). Having trustworthy and decent friends in one's life is hard. Everybody dreams of "small / And big mountains around," but reality is full of pitfalls and drops. "A Quiet Winter Day" (20–21) states, "Reality is anything but perfect and / Life is certainly not about being perfect / But being imperfect/To be quirky." Everything is found at home: warmth, love, tranquility, and contentment. Eventually, after working around for years, a person must return to his/her permanent residence. In the beautiful poem, "Not Having a Home," the poet promotes this idea. He reminds us that ever since leaving his

"parental home," where he discovered "Enormous warmth and fragrance of love" (23), he has never had a permanent residence. It made him "feel virtuous and brainy" (23). He spent a lot of time feeling "shut tight" (23) in leased houses. The poet acknowledges that a rented house always "disturbs the equilibrium" (22). In the final lines of the poem, the poet makes a striking distinction between a home and a house: "A home is where you live / Built with ruffled beds / Uncontrollable laughter / The arms of your loved ones.," but a house is "where you stay" (24).

The poem, "You Never Know," explores the fleeting nature of happiness. In difficult times, we believe that "the end is near" and that "moments of happiness, and laughter / And those good old days will never be back." When it is said that "Time is a cruel creature" (25), we must learn to live with this harsh prank. The beauty of silence is captured in the poem "Woods in a Dark Night." "A silence wraps me" (26), the poet says each time he traverses the forest. In "night and all nights," he discovers "a dazed human expression / Slipping all over the darkness" (27). In "Silent Space," the poet expresses a great desire for silence to break free and feel its pull, yet he also bemoans the thoughts that are "floating around" (30) in his head. Later on, he acknowledges that "silence is all pervasive" (31) and that "the stillness could be oppressive," but that "my still presence I feel is more beautiful / Than beautiful of the morning though / The stillness could be oppressive" (31).

"Always in Transit" is a narrative poem; it occupies the center stage of this section, which presents a contrast between the lives of "those days" and "these days." Each day was marked by an "incident" and each day was an "accident" (39). The poet becomes nostalgic and begins every stanza in the first four sections with "Those days," recollecting his youthful days, which seem to be filled "with tremendous emotional intensity," "magical vibrations" (35) and "brimming with happiness" (37). It was always a life "about / Hopes and dreams", "mercurial in moods", but also "blind bitter days of pain" (36) for the poet. The poet is enthusiastic about the past, reflecting, "Past is always memorable / Silky and smooth" ("Flashback" 42). "Those

days” were happy days not only for the poet but also for every human. “How can we forget the taste of that freedom?,” the poet reflects. In the next three contrasting sections (V, VI, & VII), the poet becomes critical of the life patterns of “Now these days” wherein human relations are never constant but “Crossing the waves of pandemonium / With an inner emptiness” (37). The poet describes, “It’s like a coffin we are forced to fit into / Coffins that make us run on / Unfamiliar, unknown, rugged land.” (37-8). He adopts philosophical tone, summing up life as “short, that the future is irrelevant / Nothing ever turns out the way we plan it” (38).

“Death Has No Dominion” is yet another delightful poem that reflects on death. Despite its uncertainties, the poet genuinely feels that “death has no dominion” and he has not resigned himself to that “what is to be / Is to be or our epitaphs are written / Long before we die” (41). Growing cynical, he says, “Maybe true yet bullshit” (41). In “Reading a Book,” he makes a distinction between two kinds of reading books: reading books that happen for passing examinations wherein he unequivocally states there is no “enjoyment” (63). On the other hand, reading books of wild interest, the poet claims, will make one “smarter”, “accomplished”, and it allows one to make contact “with reality / With someone else’s imagination” (63). It is true indeed.

The poet's voice is simple, sincere, and natural. The poems are devoid of rich imagery and verbosity, which is not a flaw and they follow a structured format. They make it easier for readers of many backgrounds to comprehend the straightforward feelings. All the poems depict a different happening. Writing about one's experiences is fascinating since it is distinctive and potent. The poet has exactly followed this dictum that “emotions speak just one language and that is understood by all” (from the blurb). Every syllable in every poem is clearly illustrated. With these straightforward poems written at various moments in time, Krishna Kumar is assured of a bright future as a poet. He ought to write more in the future and we may anticipate more excellent poetry from his pen.

***About the Reviewer**

A former academic, poet, novelist, short story writer, book reviewer, and critic, **K.V. Raghupathi**, widely published and anthologized, has thirteen poetry collections, two short story collections, two novels, eight critical works, and over forty book reviews. Recipient of several national awards for his creativity, he lives in Tirupati and can be reached at drkvraghupathi9@gmail.com.

