

Book Review

## **A Euphoric Medley of Love, Passion and Mysticism: A Review of *Bare Soul***

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<b>Title of the Book:</b>	<i>Bare Soul</i>
<b>Author:</b>	Kalpna Singh Chitnis
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Genre:</b>	Poetry
<b>Publisher:</b>	Partridge, New Delhi
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The poetic exuberance of Kalpna Singh Chitnis is eloquently expressed in *Bare Soul* weaved as a medley of love, passion, romance, separation and mysticism. One marvels at the creative imagination and the ease with which the poetess bares her soul. The poetry of Kalpna Singh Chitnis reminds us of Rumi's conception of pure love, which is eternal, celestial and transcends the physical form, time and space. The perpetual feeling of love is heightened to the core with the juxtaposition of breathtaking love and poignant sadness. Her nostalgic deliverance of powerful emotions in 'Bare Soul' has a mesmerizing appeal transcending time and space. Like a free bird, love that is spiritual and divine, soars high in the realms of skies and is limitless and set free without any bonds of fear or guilt. Love has the capacity to revive, regenerate and resurrect. In case of failure too, it is the love which emerges victorious. Like a phoenix, it has the capacity to recreate and re-emerge even if it is reduced to rubble. The interplay of strings of powerful feelings associated with unfathomable love in

its purest form in the silhouette of the beautiful verse of 'Bare Soul' is amazing.

It is totally an ecstatic experience to go through *Bare Soul*- the masterpiece poetry of Kalpna Singh Chitnis. This is a fantasia par excellence of love, passion, romance, separation and mysticism, employing the names of poems repeatedly. Each poem stands out as a complete work of art and is stunningly breathtaking but also together creates a series of stories. One finds oneself in a trance while going through this wonderful creation transcending time and space.

One wonders and is completely awestruck at the creative imagination and the ease with which the poetess bares her soul. The interplay of strings of emotions associated with unfathomable love in its purest form in the silhouette of beautiful verse raises goosebumps. So appealing is her imagery that one gets completely immersed in the beauty of its verse and feels the same pricks and pangs of pain and pleasure, a lover undergoes in the quest for love. The way she opens her soul and lets others enter into her spirits, thoughts,

fears, future, aspirations and dreams, is mind-blowing. She totally hypnotizes, captivates and captures the heart, mind, body and soul and the mood of the reader that one just can't escape but to dance to the tunes of her powerful emotions.

According to Partridge in *World Literature Today*, "Covering the contradictory pain and immensity of love, the temptation and torture of sin, and the turmoil of the creative process, the poet searches for self-realization in baring her soul in poems of rich imagery and metaphor connecting her to nature and the whole world". In this deeply personal book of poetry, the poetess weaves a complete web of conflicting emotions through a series of poems, unfolding layer by layer the intensity of love entangled with the pain of separation and finally reconciliation.

The first few poems set the tone of her poetry. Life has been metaphorically imagined as jungle, which has caves, but no cages and has a freedom unchained. She imagines the life devoid of any artificiality. She craves as to how beautiful this world would be if we shun the outward cover-up and hypocrisy...

In the jungle, there is no need to  
pretend

let's just be, whoever we are.

let's be lions, eagles, wolves, hyenas,  
deer, doves, deities or serpents; if that's  
what we are...

Let's bare our souls,  
and keep the sacredness of the jungle

There is a smooth flow of love in the river of her songs. The river of love takes in everything good or bad and everything becomes pure as the river flows. Pure love is unbiased and sans prejudice. The water of love is as cool and refreshing as that of the waterfall.

Good, Or Bad,  
I can't discriminate!  
Right or Wrong,  
I'm not aware of it!

Seeing you before my eyes,  
I turn into a waterfall,  
You are my ancient thirst!  
Seeing you no more,  
I leap into the darkness for light,  
You are my ancient quest!

Love in its pure form is ubiquitous without any bias or prejudice as mentioned in one of the remarkable quotes by Rumi, "The real challenge is to love the good and the bad together, not because you need to take the rough with the smooth but because you need to go beyond such descriptions and accept love in its entirety" (*The Forty Rules of Love* p.153). Unmindful of the fact that pure love is vivacious, omnipresent, all-pervading, dwells within one's heart and soul, the poetess' ancient quest for love is beautifully depicted through the hallucinating imagery of Mirage when she says:

When I try to reach you,  
you step back;  
when I try to let go.  
You follow me everywhere...  
I don't know,  
Whether you are my obsession,  
Or I'm yours?

The poetry of Kalpna Singh Chitnis reminds us of Rumi's conception of love. Pure love is limitless having no boundaries. It is eternal, celestial and transcends the physical form, time and space. The complex and abstract nature of love has always fascinated the writers since ages. Paulo Coelho says in *The Zahir: A Novel of Obsession*, "Love is an untamed force. When we try to control it, it destroys us. When we try to imprison it, it enslaves us. When we try to understand it, it leaves us feeling lost and confused". E. M. Forster in *A Room with a View* says, "You can transmute love, ignore it, muddle it, but you can never pull it out of you. I know from experience that the poets are right: love is eternal". The feeling of this irresistible

overpowering nature of ancient love is so well described when Kalpana says:

When I try to close my doors at you  
I break into a million pieces.

When I try not to hear my voice  
You become louder than a thousand  
prayers.

When I try to lose your sight  
I drown in a hundred rivers.

Kalpna Singh Chitnis pours her heart and spirit out in her poetry. Her verse is undoubtedly the language of the soul. The imagery of beautification of the physical form of the soul all drenched in this serene divine love holds the reader in awe when the poetess says:

Paint me gold like the sunshine;  
colour my eyes river-green;  
colour my tresses with the colour  
sapphire;  
colour vermilion my lips;  
paint the moon as a dot on my  
forehead;  
and eyelids sparkle with stars;  
paint me, O Painter! As the world  
awaits,  
for the finest creation of yours!

Eternal love passes through all tests of time. The perpetual feeling of love is heightened to the core with the juxtaposition of breathtaking love and poignant sadness. As rightly said, "Where there is love, there is bound to be heartache". Disturbing images such as those of whispering of serpents in silence, crawling of scorpions inside the human heart are the premonitions of the impending feeling of rejection and remorse associated with love. Perhaps the poetess is well aware of the looming sorrow and is all set to brave all the storms when she says in *Ancient Remorse*:

neither do I resist my tears  
as you unveil,  
you have given me the glory of tasting  
the sweetest venom of life

that I accept,  
challenging me every impending death,  
promising a new life every time  
with my last breath.

With childlike simplicity, Kalpna Singh Chitnis describes the intensity of passion through the fear of losing her love:

Let it go,  
let it go...  
I say it again,  
and let your hand go  
from the grip of my hand...

You float away from me,  
disappearing in the womb of the ocean,  
right before my eyes,  
and I cry letting you go  
like losing a child...

Love is perpetual, everlasting and enduring. It never loses its sheen and withstands all the ordeals and tests of time. "Just as clay needs to go through intense heat to become strong, love can only be perfected in pain" (*The Forty Rules of Love* p. 86). The state of love, which is true and pure, doesn't come easy. True love seeks complete submission of one's ego and self-worth. The complete surrender of one's sense of self and subsuming oneself at the altar of love is beautifully articulated:

Down under the moon,  
I embrace the earth,  
On a cold winter night,  
My heart must feel the frost,  
and my lips must burn,  
as I swallow the venom  
to make my love immortal.  
The moon is no longer the same,  
as it was gifted to me by you,  
and I wonder,  
how to fathom the depth of your skies,  
where I lost my precious stars?

Love is sublime and divine when one's love transcends the individual boundaries and takes into its fold the entire cosmos. Kalpana's

love poetry exudes mysticism to the core. This mystic sense of oneness with the universe and going beyond the extremes of knowing and not knowing; happening and not happening; being and not being and everything in nothing, is expressed so beautifully when she says:

You gave me nothing;  
I had nothing to take care of,  
Nothing to worry about;  
You set me free of everything.  
You took everything away from me,  
and became my prisoner for the  
lifetime.

Love that is spiritual and divine is limitless and is set free without any bonds of fear or guilt. Like a free bird, it soars high in the realms of skies. It does not require any explanation:

You want me to free you from guilt.  
But I'm neither the lock, nor the key;  
Both are in your hands, my friend,  
Set yourself free!

Love has the capacity to revive, regenerate and resurrect. In case of failure too, it is the love which emerges victorious. Like a phoenix, it has the capacity to recreate and re-emerge even if it is reduced to rubble:

Break me down,  
Bring me earthquakes,  
Reduce me to dust,  
I shall recreate myself

So profound is her philosophy of love and salvation, it is impossible to fathom the depths of her emotions. In her poem "Conversations with a Friend", the intensity of

her thoughts through her simple verse is so appealing when she says:

I'm a silence after your celebrations,  
a melody in the air without  
expectations;  
a missing face in your happy crowd,  
a wish that you can't say out loud;

a spot still tender in your heart,  
like a meaning hidden in an abstract  
art;

I'm a humble grip on your restless  
mind,

the day when choices aren't kind;

I'm a rebel soul in your utmost  
captivation,

a calm amidst all your tribulations;  
a question among all your answers,  
and an answer among all your  
questions;

Ingrid Henzler (German Author and Poet) rightly says, "Kalpna, you are an ocean I can never touch the bottom, taste the fullness of your water, endless is your variety, in expression, in the paradox which can be understood only with the soul." The childlike honesty, simplicity and integrity of Kalpana's verse lend *Bare Soul* a special charm which the reader finds difficult to resist. This euphoric medley of love, passion and mysticism has a mesmerizing appeal transcending time and space. It leaves us all wonderstruck at the finesse and the ease with which the maverick poetess weaves her thoughts and emotions in such a superb piece of art.

## WORKS CITED

Chitnis, Kalpana Singh. *Bare Soul*. New Delhi: Partridge, 2015.

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