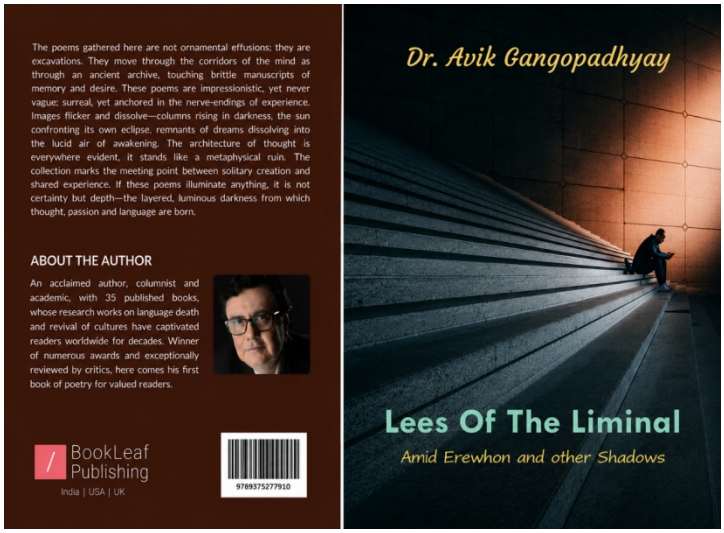
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Shadow and Meaning: A Review of Dr Avik Gangopadhyay's *Lees of the Liminal*

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In some poetry collections, the 'ornamentation of the word' aims to impress; in others, the reader is asked to enter a hard world, into what is difficult to find, and stay there for some time. Dr Avik Gangopadhyay's first book of poems, *Lees of the Liminal: Amid Erehwon and Other Shadows*, is the latter. Less an assertion of poetic certainty than a book of uncertain margins: a threshold between memories and forgetfulness, identities and anonymities, imagination and reality, and life and death. The space in between—"the liminal" and the subtitle, where meanings are always created, changed, and re-created, is its realm of poesis.

It also marks the first time that the author freely released a vein of poetry which has stayed with him for more than 40 years, as asserted in his Preface. These poems have inhabited his "quiet chambers" in his inner life, written between scholarship and solitude, and now come out on the public horizon, Gangopadhyay writes. He presents their published work not as an act of exhibition, but as an act of trust: faithful to the reader as much as to the poet. This feeling of emergence – that the poems are not so much freshly minted works of art as the surging up from deposits of thought, memory, and experiences – is significant to their understanding: that is, this is significant to the understanding of the collection.

The title itself constitutes the book's imaginative space. The prefix "Lees" guides us to "what is left behind" when something has been "poured out"—the residue, sediment, or remainders of an experience, while also suggesting "the liminal" and thresholds, and what happens in the in-betweenness of things. In the subtitle, *Amid Erewhon and Other Shadows*, it extends that geography into the unreal, the imagined, and the psychologically abstruse. The result is a poetry of "leftovers" and "transitions": the residue of experience and what is made apparent at the margin of the known and the unknowable, in the mind's rapt openness.

Gangopadhyay's impetus can be felt in his poems; his thoughts are clearly reflected in them. According to his preface, his long time with the many languages and cultural practitioners of the past has shaped his poetic sensibility, meaning that words "have sediment" and metaphors have ancestry. As a result, the group is not just scholarly; it's intellectual. It expresses its philosophical currents in the image, the voice, the dialogue, and the characters that play out.

"This World," the first of the three poems in the book, serves as an appropriate introduction to the study. The study isn't just a space; it's an inner chamber where language becomes hard to come by. The poet looks for words: images "on the verge of being strangled" by "vapours of silence"; and memory is achieved through a peculiar melding of colours, sounds, objects, and half-spoken texts. The poem outlines another central paradox of the collection: poetry springs from the very place where language falls wanting.

Throughout the volume, this silence-speech contrast recurs across the chapters. The theme of blood memory, inheritance, and the endurance of experience is explored in “Issue of Blood”. While blood is linked to remembered forgetting, intergenerational survival, and gladiatorial conflicts between self-speech and expression, the details are sparse. Associations are scanty: blood is linked with forgetting, remembered forgetting, generational continuity, and struggles between inner speech and expression. In ‘Unknown Identity,’ the issue becomes existential. The speaker continually looks for the self but never finds it anywhere, all the while remaining in a familiar place. It is not possible to see into the known world but to see one’s own “unknown identity”, and the poet comes to the unsettling knowledge that he is devoured by his “dissolved self”.

Hence, tricky restabilization of identity in this collection is never possible. The self is not something owned; rather, it is a process. In poetry, this phenomenon is particularly extreme in reading or writing that reflects shifting desires, dreams, wishes, changing relationships, change over time, even a false idea of oneself. This is forcefully revealed in “The Mirror Edits”, as the poet discovers that desire, dreams, hopes, relationships, and even the illusion of himself are all evolving; instead of merely reflecting identity, this mirror “edits” it. The poem provides one of the simplest and clearest statements in the series, emphasising the fleeting nature of this life, as with each return there comes a time of another kind too: for each return, there is a departure; for each departure, there is a return.

Unstable identity implies an unreliable memory. Through a fragmented, dream-like sequence of birth, desire, creation, place, and memory, “Remnants of a Dream” unfolds. They came back again and again—‘When were you born?’ ‘Where were you born?’ ‘Why were you born?’ – and thereby began to turn autobiography into metaphysics. Later in the poem, a reflection on nature, instinct, free will, love, and duty comes to the fore, suggesting that existence itself might be a series of forces over which consciousness has limited control. So the dream is not a half-out-of-the-way escape from reality, but a way to inquire into, explore, and pursue reality.

Repetition is the most evident place in the collection where philosophy is at its core; the opposite of death is reiterated, rising to the fore, exposing the philosophical problem and tension underlying the whole collection. The six titles: “Shadows”, “Delicate Immortality”, “The Sun and the Dark”, “Me and You”, “The Unclosing Parenthesis”, and “Waiting Room for Meaning” are all different takes on mortality. But the poems aren’t opposed by a simple life-death dichotomy. On the contrary, they mutually interpret each other again and again in a circular fashion.

In this regard, “Me and You”, which is built around a dialogue with Life and Death, is particularly effective. Life is “beginning”, hunger “ambition”, becoming “life”, and Death is “stillness”, surrender, and what makes the human story “Death”. The interchanging of dialogue overpowers the death trope as the enemy, as the idea is approximated and simplistic. Rising, Striving, Creating becomes meaningful when Death becomes the horizon of Life, the boundary between life and death.

"The Unclosing Parenthesis" further elaborates the same paradox, but from a different angle—the one of immortality. The poem doesn't assume endless life is an obvious utopia, but suggests that urgency, surprise, and perhaps desire will wobble a few times before finally abating. Endings give experience form, which makes them a target of envy for immortality. The collection's best philosophical lesson is this: Death isn't a lack of meaning; it can be a lack of meaning-making.

Some outstanding aspects of the collection include dramatic conversations and personification. The questioning of 'L'imagination' and 'Réalité' is contradictory. Imagination attacks reality by setting bounds on it, while at the same time vouchsafing evidence for it and eliminating mystery. Reality never backs down and charges the imagination with the sin of fusing dream and desire with achievement and reality. The poems are structured symmetrically and oppositely, and neither could be enough on its own. Without imagination, reality is sterile, and without reality, imagination can be delusional.

In "Que la terre, le ciel et l'eau parlent," too, a dramatic technique is employed, in which Earth, Sky, and Water, in a cosmic dialogue, speak with one another. Their voices challenge and question who and where they came from, where they are now, the nature of love, emptiness, and maybe the potential for survival after death. Gangopadhyay takes the questioning of the psychological self to a whole new level here, and ventures into the realm of nature. Although the scale of the poem is quite large, it is intentionally small in its centre—a seeking for continuity in an oblivious universe.

However, the book is most contemporary as it focuses on emotions under the heading "Lasst die Niederlage, die Depression und die Frustration sprechen". Failure, comparison, and failure to feel happy—all breed defeat; a dulled ability to perceive and emotional isolation lead to depression; restlessness and thwarted ambition to vexation. The personifications frame psychological experiences that don't exist in actual reality in images recognisable today: the failed screen, the unsuccessful e-mail, the loading circle, the traffic lights, and the unsent message. The poem therefore brings the collection's metaphysical themes into today's life.

The book must never become a bleak, dull existence. Lasst die Hoffnung, die Fantasie und die Tagträume sprechen" (Let hope, fantasy, and daydream be counter-voices) begins with "Hope, Fantasy, and Daydream. Hope brings possibilities and a sense of not knowing; imaginative courage comes from fantasy, and a fleeting strength comes from daydreaming, allowing the mind to meander beyond mere bounds. This is no trifling movement. The collection does not really amount to an extended meditation on the negative, but rather a dialogue with darkness and possibility.

The poem "The Theorem that Silences Wonder" also serves as a counterpoint. Life is presented as unalterable and definite; it is personified, leaving no room for chance or opportunity. The poem begins with questions about music, prayer and hope when everything has been as if it were all this, etc.? The poet's sympathies are

clear: mystery, uncertainty, and unfinishedness are needed for human imagination. A universe that is totally determined by rational rules is reasonable, but unpoetic.

Another theme in this collection is intertextuality. Echoes of poetry, drama, and art in “First Voice,” “Second Voice,” “Third Voice,” and “Fourth Voice” create a literary world familiar to the reader. This throwaway reference to a past or inherited literary tradition, represented by the characters Fra Pandolf, Porphyria, Andrea, and Prufrock, puts the speaker in dialogue with it. Gangopadhyay doesn’t just copy his predecessors; he uses their experiences as material and a starting point to investigate memory, guilt, desire, death, and artistic consciousness.

However, at times, the ideas in the work overshadow the emotions. Gangopadhyay often breaks from conventional narrative flow in favour of abstract themes, paradoxes, and even bizarre images. Some poems require re-reading because they lack a single obvious meaning and instead offer multiple meanings and images. It is difficult, and it’s good. Some parts of the book might challenge readers who want a more direct lyrical expression, while others may prefer to dwell in the ambiguity and find a more fertile opportunity to discover the book. The poem can be read this way, and the poet anticipates it when he tells the reader not just to observe the poems, but to “inhabit” them.

“Syllables in Silence” is the final poem of the collection that evolves the present. Here, the existence of poetry does the work itself. The artist confronts the enigmatic self, tries to articulate chaos, and refuses to be indifferent to the meaning of the universe. So, the whole of the movement is not one of “finding certainty,” but proceeds towards “creating certainty”. When there is no final answer available in life, the creation of art is a way to make “life present.”

Here, *Lees of the Liminal* proves itself as interesting and serious contemporary Indian-English poetry. It is a series of boundaries that are crossed from life to death, memory to forgetting, reality to imagination, scholarship to poetry, voicelessness to speech, despair to hope. It aims toward a philosophy, executing its steps in poetry. The shadows that follow it are not only signs of darkness but also spaces where other meanings are revealed.

To approach the book, one should use Gangopadhyay’s description of it as an act of offering “resonance,” not “revelation,” as the most apt. Some of these poems are not definitive or complete, don’t necessarily provide solutions to the questions they pose, and don’t exhaust life's contradictions. Instead, they hold onto these oppositions and let them reverberate. So I think watching *Lees of the Liminal* shows that the book is less about getting there than about waiting for meaning to come to one, even though it’s called *Lees of the Liminal*.

Its main achievement is in this. The poems acknowledge that human consciousness is the residue of memories, desires, wounds, literary echoes, unfulfilled potential, and unanswered questions. But the poet keeps making his language of these fragments. Wisely, the book ends with the poet’s “ordering syllables in the face of the abyss,” an act of affirmation.

Lees of the Liminal will, however, do more than ensure an easy and immediate poetic reading for every reader. This requires patience, thought, and an "undeveloped" state. But this requirement is an asset. Gangopadhyay's poetry proposes the worthiness of the pending. In a time that tends toward immediate resolutions, the poet asserts his ongoing devotion to the unsolved. Its shadows aren't meant to obscure meaning but enhance it. Not like a plunge into indecision, but a space of possibility is what its liminality is. The "lees" of his experience - its residue after experiencing—are transformed in the poet's hands into raw materials of art.

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