Kesar Lall’s poems are as fresh as he is unpretentious

Ageless wonder

Kesar Lall has spent most of his writing life documenting the lives of others and collecting their folk tales. Many of his admirers have hoped for some time that he would turn inward, and address his own background and experiences. These poetic Reflections, released by the prolific Vajra Publications, are a partial window into his thoughts. And what modest and honest thoughts they are. This collection of 127 of Lall’s poems, with an appealing introduction by Don Messerschmidt and a candid cover photo by Kumar Ale, is as much a pleasure to read as it appears to have been a pleasure for Kesar Lall to write.

At 81, Lall appears more unstoppable than ever. At a recent meeting, he showed me collections of folders with drafts of his ongoing projects: prose, poetry, translations, and more. What’s more, he writes for himself, for his own happiness, not to please others.

The simple profundity of Lall’s words and his unpretentious sentiments are inspiring, and serve as a reminder that not all good writers have to be tortured or miserable. “An open mind without pride and prejudice is a blessing,” Kesar Lall writes. 

The trick is to first turn the shoulders to 90 degrees. And as you finish the movement, don’t drop the right shoulder as they downswing, or rotate their hips through the shot. The aim is to get a nice arc to the shot, no matter what the length is. This is called the hip turn, and it is the key to getting your golf swing right.

To draw a picture of my life.
If one has the skill
To compare myself with
To him who dares to dream...

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To walk across the street.
Now he has paid me back.
He gave me his hand
To go from room to room.

The contemplation of life and of women are recurring themes, sometimes overlapping, as in:

One night, through a half open window,
I caught the moon
Shamelessly looking
At women on her bed, dreaming.

Although ostensibly apolitical, some of Lall’s poems exhibit shrivelfulness about the temporal nature of power:

A man who longs to be remembered
Long after his death
Is oft forgotten before he is gone.

But enough abstraction and analysis, let his poems speak for themselves. Two of my particular favourites are:

Precious little moments
Give a garden of memories to wear
To him who dares to dream.

And

A piece of charcoal
Is all I can think of
To compare myself with
At this late hour.
Yet it might still be used
If one has the skill.

To draw a picture of my life.

Mark Turin, PhD, is a linguistic anthropologist and director of the Digital Himalaya Project (www.digitalhimalaya.com).

Nareesh Newar

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