

## **Book Review of *Panorama: A Collection of Short Stories* by Shilpi Chaklanobis**

Title: *Panorama: A Collection of Short Stories*  
Genre: Short Stories  
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*Panorama* is an enthralling collection of short stories that primarily revolves around relationships in a modern-day metropolis. In fifteen stories Shilpi displays plethora of familiar urban character: domestic help, college professor, working mother, passengers travelling in a train, to name a few, and situates them in interesting positions that involves dilemmas, loss, regret, repentance, acceptance and grief. This is Shilpi's maiden venture into creative writing.

According to Edgar Allan Poe, one of the Hallmarks of a good story is its coherence to hold the readers interest from beginning to end. This is applicable to the present book as well. There was not a moment of tediousness and each narrative unravelled with a grace and interest. Shilpi's efforts to breathe life into her characters are indeed commendable. All her stories are closely related to life and human experience.

The book opens with a story "Wok" that will immediately remind the readers of Premchand's story "Idgah" where the four-year-old orphan named Hamid gifts tongs to his grandmother because she burnt her fingers daily while cooking. The parallels between the story are hard to miss: the absent father, the child full of hope and aspiration, impoverished life, resistance to temptation and filial gratitude. But Shilpi's story has a much poignant and tragic ending as the readers discovers the "wok" gifted to the mother by her daughter was not the cause of the mother's inability to provide her with wholesome meals each day. The curse of poverty breaks a mother's heart, "When Rani fell asleep, Vimla, with a heavy heart, took the wok and locked it in the almirah where another wok was lying quietly. She looked at the twin woks mocking her, with a stream of tears flowing down her cheeks. Now she would have to invent another valid excuse for Rani to explain why she couldn't prepare potato curry for her." It's a terrific ending.

Not all stories follow a strict narrative pattern. Shipli experiments with form and content as well. In "Mirage" she deploys the tool of dairy writing to unravel the inner workings of the protagonist's mind. The story "Peanut" is unique in the sense that it appears to be a page out of an autobiography. With less

plot and lots of narration it's a moving account of a loss of a pet dog and memories of the past. The readers also find themselves confronted with a beautiful Bangla song whose translation is readily provided for those not familiar with the language. The readers will eagerly agree with the author as she says,

But everything in life comes with a price tag. The cut-throat competition to reach the top and ever-increasing work pressure to meet the tight deadlines can sometimes drain you. . .When you are constantly surrounded by a million people, screaming, shouting, wanting to be heard, the need for a loving caring companion is felt the most.

The autobiographical element can't be missed in the story "The Untimely Death". The story is set in Kanpur and the protagonist is Shipli. The blurb of the book tells us that Shilpi "hails from the beautiful city of Kanpur and has spent the majority of her adult life in Delhi. . . She aims to translate her experiences and understanding of human relationships into stories that not only move people but also resonate with them." The writer expresses disgust with respect to the unfortunate saga of communal riots of 1984 and blood-curdling memory of the assassination of the then prime minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi.

The story "Second Tsunami" shows a disturbed atmosphere of a calamity and how it can have an indelible effect on the psyche of an individual. Joseph Conrad said, "No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze." Shipli wants to drive home the point that in the face of hunger, there are no morals, principles, rights and wrongs. It is a very moving and a tragic account of siblings under the ravishes of hunger that forces a sister to become an equal competitor for food and survival with her brother with whom she always had a motherly affection.

The title of the book is apt to the content of the book. Since they are narratives inspired by lives of people around us it is a panoramic view of human emotions and feelings at large. All her stories are really worth its salt. Her skill in writing short stories is indisputable, all the stories eventually will prove itself to be a great asset to a sensitive reader who wishes to unravel the mystery of human existence.

*Dr. Sapna Dogra completed her B.A and M.A. in English Literature from University of Delhi. She holds a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her research interests include Folklore Studies, Translation Studies, Indian English Writing, Hindi Literature and Popular Literature. She can be reached at [sapnadm@gmail.com](mailto:sapnadm@gmail.com).*