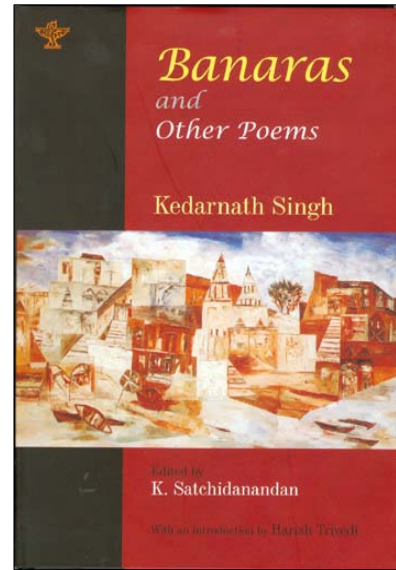


Hindi Poetry in Translationby **Ria Roy Choudhury**¹***Banaras and Other Poems:******Anthology of selected poems of
eminent Hindi poet Kedarnath Singh,***Ed. **K. Satchidanandan.**

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The book is a valuable addition to the existing translations of Kedarnath Singh's poetry. It covers a wide range of his poems from 'Hastakshar kar deta hun' and 'San 1947 ko yaad karte huye' to 'Kaali mitti', 'Maajhi ka pul' and 'Kavitaa'. The introduction by Harish Trivedi provides an insight into Singh's rustic origins. The Ganga, which flows three kilometres to the south of his village, appears in many of his poems in both its familiar and unfamiliar aspects. Trivedi holds a mirror to his childhood and elucidates how his poetic afflatus was influenced by "the songs in praise of Mother Ganga which the village women sang". The first string of his life was attached to Banaras when he went there for senior school and like William Wordsworth, Singh keeps 'recollecting' it in 'tranquillity'. Kedarnath Singh, even at the peak of his career, always remains attached to his roots. Trivedi explains how the poet's excursions to New York, Trinidad, Berlin and Paris, whose reflections are evident in his poetry, "do not fill emptiness but serve rather to deepen it."

In the book *Banaras and Other Poems*, contributions have been made by Vinay Dharwadker, Anamika, Christi Merrill, E.V. Ramakrishnan, K. Satchidanandan and Harish Trivedi. Vinay Dharwadker's translations of Kedarnath Singh's poems have been a brilliant attempt of what may be called (in the words of Dryden) 'paraphrasing' of the source

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language text. That is to say that Dharwadker has taken the liberty of altering the sequence of words and lines and often as a consequence, the total number of lines exceeds the actual number of the Hindi poems. However, he has not altered the meaning of the original poems and has placed special attention in keeping intact Singh's unique style of punctuating, that is to say that the lines have all been kept unpunctuated. This has been a concern not only for Dharwadker but also for all the translators who have contributed in the book of poetry.

The translations concretize Kedarnath Singh's attempt to amalgamate motifs that are not generally compatible with each other. For instance, 'love poem' and 'ducks' in '*On Reading a Love Poem*', 'mother' 'squeezed between needle and thread' in '*Between Needle and Thread*', 'nests' and the 'Taj Mahal' in '*The History of Nests*', 'word' and 'snake' in '*Words Don't Die of Cold*' and so on. Such confluence of themes that are poles apart, often reminds of the syllogism of Metaphysical poetry. Time and again through his poetry, Singh has returned back to his village, to Banaras, to Delhi and J.N.U. He returns to his 'mother-tongue', to his 'home and country' and personifies water in several of his poems. On pages xxv and xxvi, Harish Trivedi talks about the humans who have existed in Kedarnath Singh's poems including Buddha, who had once walked the same grounds of Uttar Pradesh as Singh himself, an old Buddhist monk whom he knew, some of the Muslim residents of his village like Ibrahim Miyaan and so on.

Images form a crucial part of the poems and they keep shifting from the romantic to the post-modern, from the surreal to the trivialities of existence. One such instance is found in the poem 'Law and Custom' as follows-

"The moon borrows from the sun
Oceans borrow from rivers
India borrows from the World Bank"

In 'Broken Down Truck', the poet moves from a subjective to a universal realm as he goes on to explain how the broken-down truck was actually a representation of his city without which, it would have been difficult for the city to be recognised. According to Singh, the ploughing of a tractor is a melody to the ears of oxen, as found in 'The Oxen's Love of Music'. Thus, that which is generally considered to be a cacophony by humans is a symphony for oxen. In 'Home and Country', the poet considers Hindi to be his 'country' and

Bhojpuri to be his 'home'. In Appendix-I, K. Satchidanandan discusses the continuous interplay of the rural and the urban in Kedarnath Singh's poetry. While the country represents innocence and tranquillity, the city is an emblem of ambition, din and bustle and materialism. The ox in '*Zameen Pak Rahi Hain*' is a symbol of the cruelty undergone in a rural milieu along with its engrossing and meditative aspect. Buddha reminds him of over-utilization of water on earth while in '*The Carpenter and the Bird*', the brutal strokes of the axe not only uproots a tree but also snatches away a home from a bird and perhaps even its life.

Taking Singh's original poems into consideration, no rhyme scheme or metre in particular, has been followed in the translations which are wrought with enjambments. Metaphors and occasional use of alliterations are common. Overall, the book is a valuable contribution in the arena of Indian Literature in Translation and provides valuable insight into the world of ennui and decadence, the city of myth, religion and history and the picture of the world around us, which Kedarnath Singh has painted with his own perspective.