

beyond the horizon beyond: haiku & haibun by Kala Ramesh (2017, Vishwakarma Publications, Pune, India). 178 pages, 5 ½ x 8", perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-86455-01-7. \$11 plus postage from <https://goo.gl/eejbHE>

Reviewed by Scott Mason

Kala Ramesh is a passionate proponent of haiku on the Indian subcontinent with many outreach initiatives to her credit. The title of her latest collection of haiku and haibun—properly rendered on three lines as *beyond / the horizon / beyond*—could not help but remind me of the immortal *beyond / stars beyond / star* by another haiku trailblazer, the late American poet L.A. (Agnes) Davidson. Before reaching the Contents page I discovered that this title is sourced from one of the author's tanka (the only one in this volume): *beyond / the horizon / beyond... / waves of unknown oceans / inside this conch shell*

We've thus been properly served notice that these are poems of both the physical (and highly sensory) and the metaphysical. Ramesh buttresses her *bona fides* in the latter category with epigraphs by such notables as Kahlil Gibran, Lao Tzu and Omar Khayyam; and her introduction offers interesting perspectives on the physical elements and our individual senses from India's own wisdom traditions.

Understandably, then, the scope of Ramesh's work is both broad...

swollen buds
the fragrance becoming
a child's breath

burning ghat...
from the depths of grief
my friend's off-key tune

and deep...

bronze temple bell
the mingling undertones
of myriad thoughts

dense fog...
I dream walk
my sense of I

Often her poems feel distinctly (and distinctively) mystical, happily at play on the unified field of all phenomena.

leafless tree
the sun rises
with a walking stick

bulbul
the wind
owns the song

Song is a recurring motif that wafts throughout this collection. This doubtless reflects the poet's own training in the instrumental and vocal traditions of classical Indian music. But it also helps us appreciate and experience firsthand the uniquely Indian sense of life as performance. The sound references and qualities that enliven these haiku connect them both to the particular (Indian culture) and the universal.

The forty-one haibun comprising the second major section of Ramesh's book read like personal and engaging journal entries, featuring not just family members but also a cast of soothsayers, flute players, an Urdu-quoting poet and other colorful characters. These are sketches to savor.

In a collection of nearly 300 haiku it may not surprise that not every single one rang my own temple bell. That said, there are many more than enough poems here to resonate, and Ramesh's very best haiku offer us a medley of sensory delights of unsurpassed delicacy.

taking flight—
a butterfly flicks off
its shadow

soap bubbles
how softly mother
bursts into laughter

liquid twilight
the tilt of a water pot
on her hip

summer moon
a wave's white foam
glazes the rock

sleepless...
a swaying web catches
and loses the light

receding wave...
crab holes breathe
the milky way

I am pleased to accompany Kala Ramesh (and commend to you)
beyond the horizon beyond.