



# The Myriad Hues of Ranjana Sharan's Poetry

*Edited by*

**Dr. Farzana Ali**

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**AUTHORS P R E S S**

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## Contents

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<i>Foreword</i>	5
<hr/> <b>RESEARCH PAPERS/ ARTICLES</b> <hr/>	
1. Nostalgic Aromas in the Poems of Ranjana Sharan <b>Dr. Chetna Pathak</b>	15
2. Exploitation and Resurrection in the Female-centric Poems of Ranjana Sharan <b>Dr. Pranjali Wazalwar Kane</b>	22
3. Contemporary Anxieties Challenge Intellectual Power but Motivate: A Brief Critique on <i>Scents and Shadows</i> <b>PCK Prem</b>	30
4. Creative Voice: <i>Scents and Shadows</i> <b>Dr. Usha Sakure</b>	35
5. <i>Scents and Shadows: A Sumptuous Feast</i> <b>Cijo Joseph Chennelil</b>	39
6. Depiction of Suffering: Feminist Viewpoint in the Poems of Dr. Ranjana Sharan <b>Dr. Chetna Pathak</b>	43
7. Burning Feet on Hot Pavement: Portrayal of the Poor and Downtrodden in the Poetry of Ranjana Sharan <b>Dr. Nayana Barde-Patil</b>	51
8. A Discernable Creative Venture of Blissful Cadences <b>Cijo Joseph Chennelil</b>	58
9. A Critical Analysis of <i>The Purple Jacaranda and Other Poems</i> <b>Dr. Vijay Kumar Roy</b>	65
✓ 10. The Theme of Growing Old in the Selected Poems of Ranjana Sharan <b>Dr. Pranjali Wazalwar Kane</b>	74
11. A Ringside Ovation: Four Poems of Ranjana Sharan <b>Vishwas Vaidya</b>	84



12. A Nature Lover's Paradise: <i>The Purple Jacaranda</i> Dr. Tahera Mannan	91
13. Five Poems of Ranjana Sharan Vijay K. Mishra	99
14. Ranjana Sharan's Poetry: Nature and Ecology Dr. Arvind Ladole and Dr. Rupali Bhave Wasule	114
15. The Existential Aesthetic Reality in the Poetry of Ranjana Sharan Himanshu Jena	122
16. Nature Consciousness in the Past and the Present Dr. Chetna Pathak	126
17. The Ghazals of Ranjana Sharan: An Overview Tanzeela Khanam	132

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**INTERVIEWS**

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1. Academics and Poetic Creation: A Dialogue with Dr. Jernail Singh Anand	145
2. For Poetry the Sky is the Limit: An Interview with Ranjana Sharan Sinha by Dr. Chetna Pathak	150
3. An Interview with Ranjana Sharan Sinha by Critic Space Journal	155
4. Teaching is more than an Occupation and a Task: An Interview with Ranjana Sharan by Adetee Sokhee	160

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**BOOK REVIEWS**

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1. A Review of <i>Scents and Shadows</i> Critic Space Journal	165
2. <i>Scents and Shadows</i> : A Review The Literature Today	168
3. <i>Scents and Shadows</i> : Book Review Kevein Books and Reviews	171
4. A Review of <i>The Purple Jacaranda and Other Poems</i> Kevein Books and Reviews	174
<i>Select Critical Opinions on Ranjana Sharan Sinha's Poems</i>	176
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	180
<i>Index</i>	183

## The Theme of Growing Old in the Selected Poems of Ranjana Sharan

Pranjali Wazalwar Kane

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### Abstract

The most natural process of life perhaps is aging. An organic being is bound to mature and decay with time. Nothing and nobody can change this. And yet all of us feel the pangs of loss of youth and the fear of the approaching end. We are never actually prepared for the most natural thing. We are not prepared to accept the reversal of roles that the young would take care of us, that we would depend upon the others. Rather we endeavour to do everything to fool others by concealing our true age. Metaphorically, death is akin to the death of art. The fear of the artistic ability drying up is also there. This struggle of accepting old age or finding compensation in other meaningful things, is keenly felt and expressed by poets like Ranjana Sharan Sinha in her writings. This article is a humble attempt to study the selected poems of the poet from this perspective and to bring forth her anguish as a poet.

### Introduction

Out of all the churnings of the heart and the mind, man has perennially faced the fear of death. Death has been viewed as the culmination of Old Age. And old age has been considered as the loss of youth. In his prime, man seldom comes to the threshold of annihilation. Even the remote possibility under normal circumstances seems irrelevant. It is only with the advent of autumn that man starts realising the never-returning possibility of the ideal life; about the mysteries of the end. So the reference to Autumn



convey so much. Sensitive souls like the poets have often been drawn to the topic of growing old and approaching one's winter years. Old age is often synonymous to lack of physical and mental activity, hopelessness and the waning of the desired urges. It is also akin to losing one's abilities and inspirations. There are many things related to the creativity of artists. Simply the ill will of some people can also affect the ephemeral art. This feeling does not affect artists when they are in their prime. But as age advances and the experiences of life become more pronounced, these self-doubts start cropping up.

Be it the famous sonneteer William Shakespeare or poets like Elizabeth Bishop, every sensitive creator has expressed his or her anguish over the decay of the human mind and body. In sonnet 73 'That time of year thou mayst in me behold', Shakespeare writes about the twilight of life with yellow leaves, coldness, bare ruined choirs of birds, calling old age death's second self. The Romantic poet S.T. Coleridge in 'Youth and Age', expresses the change that has taken place between the 'now and then': old age has taken away the charm of youth. And if we can but remain young in mind, everything is saved! In the later age, the Victorian icon, Alfred Lord Tennyson laments the wastage of Man's glory in 'Tithonus' with his eternal old age contrasted painfully with the eternal renewal of life of Aurora. Matthew Arnold's 'Growing Old' and W.B. Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium' resonate with the idea of loss of glory and beauty. Yeats perhaps goes further and writes about the forward journey of man to attain something higher than the physical or the sensual even in face of old age.

If we go further down the line, the 20<sup>th</sup> century brings to us writers like Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979), an American poet and short story writer. She won the Putlizer Prize for Poetry in 1956. Her work 'Crusoe in England' is a poem of 183 lines based upon the life of Robinson Crusoe. Basically it sums up the difficulties Bishop faced in her creative journey as a poet. For her, old age is synonymous with loss of creative abilities. The metaphorical meaning is exposed through her use of images and symbols. According to her, the process of poetic creation can be as lonely as



the exile of Robinson Crusoe. The poem is about self-pity and high responsibility of a creator.

### About the Author

Dr. Ranjana Sharan Sinha, a former teacher by profession and a poet by passion, has received accolade for her poem 'Mother Nature' from none other than the Ex. President of India, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. She has written poems on Nature, about the plight of Indian women, and has also sensitively portrayed the inner angst of human beings in general. Her poems from her anthologies 'Spring Zone', *Scents and Shadows* and '*The Purple Jacaranda and Other Poems*' depict her sensitivity and love of nature.

Ranjana Sharan writes, "Poetry is the most beautiful form of written expression that exists, or will ever exist. Through poetry, poets express their innermost feelings, desires, fears and aspirations." She has also to her credit a book of short stories 'Midnight Sun' and some other critical books like 'Feminism: Times and Tides', 'Different Dimensions' and 'Nature in the Poetry of Wordsworth and Pant'. But it is through her poems that words come to her like 'whispers from unknown regions', and sometimes she analyses a dream that becomes poetry! She savours the moment when inspiration descends. It is both a joy and pain for the poet when she is finally able to give verbal form to the ectoplasmic dreams she envisions.

### Selected Poems

A few of Ranjana Sharan's poems deal with old age and the sense of loss of youth and vitality that majority of us face in life. One can recount poems like 'Autumn Leaves' and 'Fossilized words' from her anthology '*The Purple Jacaranda and Other Poems*', and 'Once Again', 'White Fog', 'Valentine's Day at Sixty', and 'She's Gone forever' from the anthology *Scents and Shadows* here. Let us analyse these poems and try to understand the mind of the poet.



*Autumn Leaves*

Metaphorically, the Autumn season has always been considered to be an age of maturity and experience. The old order changes, yielding place to new! It is the period of age which has positive as well as negative connotations: the prominent being the loss of youth!! People of all ages have always looked at old age with a certain amount of uncertainty, with death lurking at every corner. But poets like Ranjana Sharan look upon old age not as an end of life, but as the loss of youth and vitality. No more shall the leaves retain their green vibrant colour. The sadness percolates through every object of nature:

Rusted, brown, yellow, tan –  
Sad, silent autumn leaves!

It is sadness because of the death which can pounce upon the victim anytime? It is because the poet is afraid to go into the eternal darkness? The poet is sad for the silent leaves because they have lost something that they initially had; once they waltzed with the wind, but now they lie on the ground. Perhaps had there been no celebration of life in spring time by the green leaves, the poet would have felt less sadness while looking at the decayed life. The beauty a heroine nurtures throughout her youth, leaves her lonelier once it fades. The companionship of words that a writer feels, is suddenly broken one day when those same words defy him or her. The confidence and vitality that a sportsperson experiences early in his life, is many a times lost once when he grows. He is no longer the same person. It is this loss, this betrayal that increases the woe. We mortals too, ail and die. This adds pathos to the poet's mind. Sometimes death comes to take us slowly through the labyrinths of time, elongating the moment of misery into a long drawl. And sometimes, the whole game finishes with one last breath. With every creation the artist feels the same. Maybe this is my swan song. Maybe the fountain of talent would dry up after this.

There is no escapist tendency in Sharan's work, though! She faces life with all its imperfections, expresses grief, undergoes the pain and yet stands still to let the music of life end. There is a



certain restlessness in her with the approaching end. Yet unlike the Romantics, she lives in the present recollecting the past glory. There is acceptance of the inevitable future. And like the Romantics, she weaves a beautiful yet lonely picture of nature with its flora and fauna. A unique quality of her poems is the use of nature imagery with a lot of colours and the use of transferred epithets wherein nature and the poet become one. This unity of the internal self with the external nature is the jewel of her writing. In this respect we may compare her with Shelley and Keats. She writes:

A slip into sepia, grey horizons,  
No cerulean skies at eventide –  
The fading fires of sunset vault:  
Restless, dying autumn leaves!

#### *Fossilized Words*

The poem 'Fossilized Words' is another picture of desolation and sadness. The poet is completely at loss to accept the inevitable. The 'dull evening', the setting 'sun' and the 'sad song of the stars' pushes the poet into further anguish. There is a meek attempt at waking up, but the efforts do not bear any fruit. The reference here is to the advancing age. The dullness, the ache, the sadness is more because of the loss of youth than the approaching end. Death will put a final full stop to the ramblings of the mind. But before the actual death, there is always a period of desperation.

Metaphorically, this depicts the journey of the poet. The creative stalk is fast depleting, the brooks are drying up and the poet is feeling a loss so deep that it creates a sense of utter hopelessness:

Words freeze into silence  
To get fossilized forever  
In the closed chambers  
Of the anguished heart!

The existence of the silenced words in the close recesses of the poet's heart. It is no longer shared with anyone. Can 'fossils' be considered alive? Even though the fountains of creation have dried up, all is not dead. The preserved remains of the ideas of the poet

silhouette the corpse of creativity. The poet feels the immense loss. And the sad part is that there is room for only one person in the creative domain. The poet cannot share the anguish with her fellow – travellers.

### *Once Again*

The poem 'Once Again' canvasses the 'lost self', 'the disconnectedness' the poet feels. She agonises over the withered trees with black snake-like branches outside her window. Time's winged chariot fast approaches and takes us away. The poet experiences fear and helplessness over the 'futile and erosive years' which belong to this unproductive stage. It is a compulsive thing; this writing business. One has to crystallise the thoughts and put them into words. Ranjana Sharan reminisces the glory of past:

The full moon of yesteryear  
With its soft shimmering glow  
Limps along the memory lane.

Just to remember those times is also an ache for the poet. It reminds her of the resplendent past glowing with the promise of future. She asks, "who can escape the natural process of aging"? And we all know the answer.

The unique characteristic of the poem is the compensation the poet seeks in her soulmate, one who loves the sorrows of her changing face. His reassurances drive away her anxieties and reaffirm her faith in herself. This culmination of being into another is not found in other poems of Ranjana Sharan. It is as if she has found her anchor at last. Love does not change with the changing times. The power of creativity can ebb and flow, but goes on forever. It is the beacon light in the midst of the whirlwind of old age. Love juxtaposed with growth feels quite reassuring.

### *Valentine's Day at Sixty*

The title of the poem 'Valentine's Day at Sixty' is self-explanatory. There is love in the air on Valentine's Day. The vigour-charged air revitalises the young and the old alike. But the poet



laments the loss of passion on Valentine's Day which is supposed to ignite passion in men and women. All around the roses bloom filling the air with their sweetness, but the poet states that spring no longer fascinates her. She admits that nothing stirs within her bosom. There is fear again at the mere thought. The advancing years have robbed her of the precious emotion of love. Never again perhaps would she experience it. She uses the word 'sad', 'unhappy', 'gloom', 'beauty fades and flies', 'fleeting charm' with such sensitivity that the readers start sympathising with her.

The second part of the poem changes the mood. The poet is comforted. The whole pathos in the first part of the poem changes when all of a sudden she looks in the star-like eyes of her better half. She gets a pleasant surprise. She is still loved and revered by him. His support and unconditional acceptance changes the mood of the poem. There is still hope!

Beauty is deeper than the skin  
Love means staying together  
through thick and thin;

The poet concludes on the ever optimistic lines of the Victorian poet, Robert Browning:

Grow old along with me!  
The best is yet to be...

Slowly the colours of sadness get replaced by the rainbow. Old age no longer frightens her. She can accept it and live it fully with her life partner by her side. She gets infused with energy.

### *She's Gone Forever!*

Perhaps this poem 'She's Gone Forever' is the jewel in the crown of Ranjana Sharan's array of poems. It truly and completely exhibits the trauma and the insecurities of a person and a poet also. The poet has reached a stage in life which is alien and strange. She is unable to understand its significance and necessity. In such a condition, even the exuberance of nature is not able to comfort her anymore. She writes:

The scarlet gulmohar  
with their flamboyant flames  
fall on the ground:  
A sense of fall silently comes!

The images of nature, the smells and colours of the leaves and flowers and other natural objects have always fascinated the artists. But now these same images no longer comfort the anguished heart. There are sudden panic and confusion, there are inner rumblings and a futile search.

The poet senses the end of her earthly existence from deep within where the tender and nostalgic feelings reside. She writes:

A boundless ocean forced along  
by the winds of halcyon days,  
surges up within me  
provoking nostalgia!

The poet is saddened by the remembrance of the past glory juxtaposed by the present condition of uncertainty. Now life is full of 'to and fro' of emotions from the past to the present. The poet tries to remember herself: her lost self. She sees a woman without lines or signs of aging, vibrant and agile. The poet tries to hold her, possess her, but feels the vain attempt more hurtful. She concludes:

My bygone days like  
pale effervescent champagne,  
hiss in the flute of  
my advancing years,  
whispering with the mesmerising bubbles!

Oh, how beautifully has this been expressed! Is it not felt by all the mortals at one point or the other? The sensitivity and transparency of the poet's soul is evident in these lines. Man wants to embrace perfection and immortality. What remains unfortunately remains is the crude reality of Time. It defeats the mighty as well as the meek.

The beauty of this poem lies in its varied interpretations. It is the expression of a person's bewilderment and anguish over getting



old. It is also the regret of an artist whose youthful, vibrant self is gone forever! Perhaps it will never come back to her. Even if it makes an occasional comeback, would it be of the same magnitude as her earlier self? The self-image of the poet has suffered a blow. There is perhaps no reconciliation or solace. These emotions remind us of the earlier discussed poems. We can safely say that this forms the base of her writings.

### Comments

In the poem 'The True Meaning of Life' by Pat Fleming, a contemporary American poet, the poet accepts the limitations of old age and states:

But how much I reach out,  
To others when needed,  
Would be the true measure,  
Of how I succeeded.

It reverberates the wise adage that what you are is God's gift to you and what you become is your gift to God. Every human being can find the true meaning of life in helping others in time of need. It is not what material progress that we have achieved but the place that we have created in other's hearts. Success can be measured thus. We reach out to others, we create an indelible bond.

By being a sensitive and mature human being, Ranjana Sharan has given so much to mankind. Her expressions record the common everyday emotions of a multitude of human beings. And at the same time, they are a record of personal anguish and condition of a mature poet. By reading these rumblings of her mind, people would find solace in them. They would feel that there is someone who has understood their plight; someone who has shown the path of seeking compensation in other humanbeing. Her use of imagery and choice of setting convey that the world of nature is not different from the man-made world. God has plans for all the living things and Nature is a compensation forever. In her poems, Nature has assumed a character of its own. The seasons mentioned are like human beings with their set characteristics and emotions. The

Yellow Autumn with its woeful stillness reminds one of the helplessness of man in front of Time. We have to go away as our time ends here. No amount of coaxing nor any accomplishments can prolong our stay here. Similarly, the art of any and every artist also has a life span. Art comes unannounced into the life of the artist, and departs on the wings of fancy suddenly one day, leaving the artist bereft and clueless. The fear of this condition plagues their heart constantly. It is a living death for the artist. And Ranjana Sharan has beautifully captured their fear in her poems.

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