

神を拝し愁眉をひらく花明かり  
*kami wo haishi / shūbi wo hiraku / hana akari*

praying to the god —  
 the shadow fades in my mind,  
 the glow of flowers

The note by the editor and translator is illuminating here, when it explains the significance of a late visit by the poet to the Izumo Shrine. A note by the artist says that his illustration of a “wind-bell with a clear sound that fades in the air” is meant to capture the essence of the prayerful moment, though a wind-bell more obviously evokes the summer heat. There is much to ponder in this volume, which is replete with notes and explanations, presented in both English and Japanese throughout. It is possible to discern the poet’s intentions, and the richness of his work, if somewhat obscurely, filtered as it is through the Japanese scholar’s quaint old-fashioned English (“nigh” and “nay”). That both he and the artist are sincere in their admiration for the poet, and in their response to his haiku, is not to be doubted, and there are interesting touches to the illustrations, such as the specially designed seals inked in red onto each of the haiga, that create an original impression. So there is much to enjoy at different levels, though the haiku have been conveyed, as it were, through a glass darkly.

*An Inch of Sky: Haiku & Haibun*, by Paresh Tiwari (No place [India]: 20 Notebooks Press, 2014). 118 pages; 20.5cm; 5" x 8". Semigloss black and blue card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-5196-392-9. Price: Rs. 300 from online booksellers

*Dandelion Seeds: Haiku, Senryu & Tanka*, by Arvinder Kaur (Ludhiana, India: Aesthetic Publications, 2015). 129 pages; 17.5 cm; 4¾" x 6¾". Semigloss four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-83092-42-0. Price: Rs. 275 from online booksellers

*Reviewed by Charles Trumbull*

If anyone needs proof of the maturity of Indian haiku, these two books—the first full-length *haikai* collections in English by both poets—will surely provide it. Paresh Tiwari grew up in the northern Indian city of Lucknow and now works as an electrical engineer in Hyderabad. Arvinder Kaur is a professor of English at the Post Graduate Government College for Girls in Chandigarh. Both are protégés of Angelee Deodhar, the doyenne of Indian haiku, who wrote prefaces for the two books; both write in Punjabi and English (Kaur’s book is in both languages); both began publishing their work in English a scant three years ago; both earned their spurs online, and both have been contributors to the bilingual English-Punjabi journal *Wah* since its inception in 2014. And both books are remarkable.

As its subtitle suggests, Tiwari’s book is about evenly divided between haiku and haibun. He displays an excellent command of English and all its nuances and writes fluently. A relative newcomer to haiku, Tiwari impresses by the quick mastery of the genre and the volume of his output in haiku and haibun.

Both collections contain haiku that are so classical in concept that they have a familiar ring. In his haibun “Barbed Wires,” for example, Tiwari echoes—one suspects deliberately—Bashō’s haiku *Summer grasses, / all that remains / of soldiers’ dreams* (trans. Stryk):

3-rifle volley  
all that remains of  
his promises

Kaur, too, includes a haiku that alludes to Bashō’s *How piteous! / Beneath the helmet / Chirps a cricket* (trans. Blyth):

battlefield —  
a helmet slowly fills  
with snowflakes

Perhaps each beginning haiku poet should be allowed one haiku on every overworked theme, such as an animal drinking from its reflection or a dead bird's wing flapping in the wind. A rule like this would provide shelter for haiku such as these, by Kaur and Tiwari, respectively, that join scores of previous haiku about moon images in puddles, pots, and pans:

last night's dishes — a piece of the day moon in a bucket	puddled road ... the street kid splashes each full moon
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Tiwari is particularly strong in his love-tinged haiku, such as these:

night chill — she steps in wearing moonbeams	longest night ... the taste of sea breeze and her absence
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Kaur's forte is haiku about relationships and family:

stars adrift ... the loved ones who left one by one	farewell — the stare of the doll she left behind
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Both poets can be seduced by the beauty of poetic effects, especially non-Japanese tropes, to a degree that we in the West are not really accustomed to. One reader may find this desirable in a haiku, another disqualifying. For example, these two of Kaur's use, respectively, a conceit and synesthesia:

silent night — a thornbird's heart empties of song	spring blossoms ... all the colours of her laughter
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The first of these of Tiwari's relies on personification and a conceit, the second on zeugma:

moondrops ...  
 a nightjar knitting  
 symphonies

a year on —  
 mothballing memories  
 with her coat

I am also of two minds about the desirability of using words in languages other than English or unusual locutions and localisms in English-language haiku. On the one hand, such expressions add color and specificity to the poem; on the other, they undermine the universality of a haiku's impact. Kaur uses a lot of them, and I find it annoying to stumble repeatedly over names of articles of women's clothing such as *pallu*, *phulkari*, *dupatta*, and *pashmina* or food items such as *dal makhania*, *kofta curry*, and *idli*. I'm grateful there is a glossary, though many unfamiliar words are not included, for example, *bindi* (red dot on the forehead of a Hindu woman), "koel" (a kind of cuckoo), "langur" (a kind of monkey), "orange hour" (I cannot find any definition for this term, and Kaur uses it twice), "pillion" (British English for a passenger seat on a motorcycle), and "quisqualis" (an herbal medication). On the topic of word choice I would point out that three of Kaur's haiku begin with the word "homecoming," she uses the word "dollop" in three haiku, and refers to the Rakshbandhan (Hindu festival of fraternal love) in two others.

When Kaur holds the allusions and poetry in check—which is most of the time—she achieves moments of poignancy and transcendent beauty. Haiku such as these are most typical of what you'll find to treasure in her fine collection:

memorial mass —  
 moth wings tap  
 against the window

dandelion seeds ...  
 the way you came in my life  
 and left

Likewise, I'll long remember images such as these by Tiwari, both from haibun:

autumn dusk  
 hanging by the door  
 her faded coat

you decide  
 to walk away instead ...  
 moonless sky

While there is much to treasure in both books, I find myself thinking that it might have been better for both poets to have started with slimmer collections. Tiwari's 138 haiku (including those in the 25 haibun) and Kaur's 167 haiku may be more than should be offered on a first outing. More rigorous selection might have helped reduce the number of familiar sounding and repetitious verses and concentrated readers' attention on the luster of the remaining haiku.

## BRIEFLY NOTED

*Nest Feathers*, edited by *The Heron's Nest* editorial staff (No place: 2015). 174 pages; 6¼" x 9½". Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-4951-6794-2. Price: \$23.00 from [www.theheronsnest.com](http://www.theheronsnest.com)

Haiku usually focus on the now-moment, so often the history of any single poem, journal, or organization—covering a longer timeframe and more complex or nuanced—is usually neglected. So we are delighted to see anthologies such as *Nest Feathers*, which tells the story of *The Heron's Nest*, a longtime cherished journal. The volume includes the journal's origin story by original editor Christopher Herold with 248 haiku from the first fifteen years of its run (1999 – 2013). The haiku are the best, as selected by the editors, of the more than eight thousand haiku published by the journal. *The Heron's Nest* is a strong journal, and one we send beginning poets to to learn more about haiku, so the haiku are memorable. Recommended.