

A THOUGHT NEVER DIES

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Javed Amir, a talented old Ravian and a former member of the Pakistani diplomatic corps, is settled in Washington DC (US) since 1978. He writes fiction and essays and has a recognizable journalistic background also. As a multilingual writer (English, French and Spanish), he is known to the intellectual circles on five continents (which encompass literally the whole world) by virtue of his articles, essays and reviews.

Thought Never Dies, his magnum opus, falls in the line of his earlier three publications viz., *The Mask* (short stories and poems), *Writing Across Boundaries* (essays), and *Modern Soap* (novel). It is a compendium of 'art and thought', reflecting the longitudinal expanse of his mental sallies and ramblings as a perceptive literary artist. It is a thoughtfully conceived publication which the author has dedicated to his spouse Clemencia quoting a moving stanza from Dylan Thomas's poem *In my Craft or Sullen Art* (I write ... Not for the towering dead. But for the lovers, their arms/Round the griefs of the ages). The three sections of the book comprise Essays, Articles and Book Reviews which are purported to be 'a foray into the works of some of Amir's favorite writers, artists, painters, philosophers, scholars of mythology and religions, and pantheists' --- virtually forming 'the *raison d'être*' of its title.

There are as many as fifteen essays in the opening section of the book. Style is the man. Amir writes in a stylish vein; his sentences are architecturally structured, with a figurative relish transcending the clichéd syntax characteristic of the writings of this sort. As a literary artist he feigns no delusion about scholasticism; there is a marked perspicacity in his diction which embraces a variety of topics ranging from the palpable aura of the material world to the impalpable mystique of a philosophical world of ideas, abstractions and apperceptions. As a glob-trotter too, he seems to have assimilated a wide variety of knowledge and experience which imperceptibly creeps into the

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kaleidoscopic panorama of his writings and lends them inter alia, a new dimension and direction.

And lo and behold, in the *Directionless Lines*, poet Ejaz Rahim bemoans: In a loveless season/People abandon homes Exile is not the name/Of a place/But an enclave in the mind. Javed Amir might not literally belong to this 'flock', but his anthropomorphic feelings, as the former chants, do tend to form 'little pens of meaning/With wooden padlocks/To collect one's flock of thoughts/And give a semblance of order/To diasporic leanings'. On a closer reading, the latter's essays would seem to 'balance a life devoted to the wisdom of thought with the wisdom of the senses' as Lucretius (Roman poet: c. 99-55 BC) thought about Epicurus (Greek philosopher: 341-270 BC). Khaled Ahmad's foreword to the book is an exercise in fluidity of phrases wrapped in deep critical insight and catholicity of judgement. In his 'Introduction', the author divulges the thematic undertones of his composition in an aura of nostalgia swinging him to the meandering Ravi of his youth from the glides of the Potomac of the approaching sunset of his eventful life.

The essays map his spiritual journey; the articles serve to portray the cultural and literary events in the (Washington) DC area; and the book reviews (published in the daily Dawn, Karachi in 2002-10) highlight the domestic and global developments in the first decade of this century. His growing consciousness of age is however, counterbalanced by what the poet said, *Ripeness is All* --- epitomizing his adventures into the realm of letters, of art and thought, and of flesh and blood which (to recall Ghalab) is 'but a loop in the web of thought'.

Garcia Marquez (1927-2014), reputed Colombian novelist and journalist, Marcel Proust (1871-1922), celebrated French fiction writer and essayist, Gore Vidal (1925-2012), noted American novelist, essayist, and playwright, Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), famous French post-impressionist painter, and Carlos Fuentes (1928-2012), well known Mexican humanist, novelist and essayist, and also a diplomat, have been projected in this section with reference to their person and art. Other topics discussed here are an apprehension of 'the sacred', mythology, language, belief, love, art, sex, the Xanadu of a Toledo, and the deuce of materialism. The essay on Art and the Erotic Imagination is the pick of this section as it seeks to probe into some of the popular fallacies about

the meaning and function of art vis-à-vis eroticism, pornography and abject vulgarity. To him the experience of the erotic in art is 'an attempt to integrate body and soul into a whole' (Cf. James Joyce (1882-1941) and D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) in English, and Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-55) and Ismat Chughtai (1915-91) in Urdu.

The next section comprises Javed Amir's articles on persons, events, and recaps. Mohsin Hamid and Tariq Ali are separately profiled with reference to their books titled *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Bush in Babylon: The Recolonization of Iraq*, respectively. The themes of both these works have been subjected to a concave-convex mirroring so as to enable the reader to measure their relativistic immediacy and urgency in relation to the ground realities of the day. 'Can Lahore's Ravi ever flow into Washington's Potomac?' and 'It is a disaster because you are there.' The two quasi-asides would seem to sum up the paradigmatic collocations built up in the respective critiques of the expat fiction writers.

The division of book related to Javed Amir's erudite but analytical reviews of *Scheherazade Goes West* (Fatema Mernissi of Morocco), *American Chica: Two Worlds, One Childhood* (Marie Arana of The Washington Post), *The Bubble of American Spremacry: Correcting the Misuse of Power* (George Soros), *Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich* (Kevin Phillips), *Globalization and its Discontents* (Joseph Stiglitz), *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Chalmers Johnson), *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East* (David Hirst), *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (Robert Kagan), *The Age of Terror: America and the World after September 11* (Editors: Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda), *Rumsfeld: A Personal Portrait* (Midge Decter), *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership demands a Pagan Ethos* (Robert Kalpan), and *The Death of the West: How dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions imperil our Country and Civilization* (Patrick J. Buchanan), brings into focus some contemporary publications with controversial authorial stances on issues like westernization of the Orient, plutocracy, globalization, western purblindness, Continental drift, terrorism, war, and the new world order etc.

The writer's approach in analyzing these issues is purely objective and hence unbiased: consistent with a 'need to articulate his transition from the East to the West'. He views the whole murky scenario from a positivistic angle, spasmodically enlightening the reader on the intricacies of what may be termed as the uni-polar syndrome of global politics accruing from the rather unceremonious 'melting' of the Iron Curtain, hung on the so-called Soviet Block in the not very distant Cold War era, in the wake of glasnost and perestroika of Mijail Gorbachov (b.1931) fame.

At the end, Javed Amir has added a few reviews of his book *Writing Across Boundaries* by Professor Gilani Kamran (distinguished Pakistani writer, poet, critic, and educationist: 1926-2003), Karl Hille, and David Preston besides reviews of his novel *Modern Soap* by Muneeza Shamsie, and his former colleagues and compatriots Riaz Muhammad Khan, Ejaz Rahim and late Abdul Basit Haqqani. All of them have delved deep into the merits of the two publications, highlighting their salient features by blending 'the mythic and the mundane', in their fecund critical estimation.

The last pages of the book resound with nostalgia of the days when the author studied at the Government College (Lahore), followed by his induction into the coveted echelons of the foreign service of Pakistan, launched *The Mask*, and also composed *The Addict*, a short story for *The Pakistan Review*, and a couple of poems for *The Ravi* and *The Pakistan Times*.

The flap of the book carries laudatory comments from multi-ethno-cultural luminaries like Khaled Ahmad, Riaz Muhammad Khan, Ejaz Rahim, Marie Arana, David Cohen, Gloria Silvestre Khokhar, and Carole Sargent, on his 'ease of expression, the fusion of wit and learning and (his) ability to present the great themes of art and literature' besides 'an amazing command over cross-cultural works'. So like Dylan Thomas, he has successfully ventured to weave the fine fabric of his undying thought 'round the griefs of the ages', nay to be more specific, round the grief of the age.