

Gulzar's new anthology of poems steeped in nostalgia

'Pancham, you remember those monsoon days, when in the valley below the mountains, rail tracks made their way emerging out of the mist..' Poet, lyricist and filmmaker Gulzar's ode to musician R.D. Burman, popularly called Pancham, in his new collection of poems whips up myriad emotions with its vivid imagery and simple word play.

Gulzar's latest offering 'Selected Poems', translated into English by Pavan K. Varma, is tinged with nostalgia, grief, loneliness and longing for the years gone by.

The book was released by Penguin-Viking in [New Delhi](#) Tuesday at a function graced by the poet and the translator. The poems selected and translated by Varma touch upon a gamut of 'little everyday things and small moments in life' that, according to Gulzar, make for the most powerful of verses.

'My inspiration is a Spanish poet of Romanian origin Marin Sorescu,' Gulzar told IANS. 'Read his poetry to know him,' he laughed, when asked what Sorescu's poetry was all about.

Sorescu, a playwright, poet and novelist, was born in Romania and wrote in Spanish during the sixties, seventies and eighties. He was deeply influenced by the natural rhythm of life and human emotions.

'Selected Poems' has 44 Urdu poems, mostly sonnets, along with their English translations. The poems are a reflection of the author's life, offering snapshots of his journey as a progressive writer since the fifties.

The themes are diverse - taking off from the rural fields of Punjab, where Gulzar was born, to the din and the underbelly of his adopted home, Mumbai, ennui of big city life and his ties with nature, mankind and god.

Bollywood creeps in unbidden in poems like 'For Naseeruddin Shah' and 'For Pancham'.

'I spent so many years with Pancham, so many days when we would drum our fingers on the walls, on the dashboards of our cars and on the balustrades on the terrace to get the rhythm and the score for my lyrics right. They were mostly outside the music studio. He was such a restless soul. I miss him,' Gulzar says.

His voice breaks as he recites the last few lines from his ode to the master composer: '..The train arrived but it was not yet time for it to leave. But you simply walked a few steps, into the mist, and melted away. I remain here alone in that mist, Pancham.'

'My lyrics are influenced by my verses,' says the lyricist-poet, who prefers free-flowing verses to meter and rhyme. 'I don't think I can define my themes. But all my poems are about life and the way it affects and appeals to me,' Gulzar said.

He, however, refused to talk about films. 'Let us just talk about the book,' he insisted.

A poet first and a filmmaker later, Gulzar vows that he will continue to write poetry as long as he

lives. 'But it all depends how long I live,' he laughed. Poetry, feels the film-maker, will continue to exist as long as life exists in this world. 'It is an expression of life. I am happy that Penguin has taken up my work.'

Gulzar credits the translator with the choice of poems. 'One day, he told me that he wanted to translate my poems. I said, go ahead. Read them. After reading my verses, Pavan was confused and wanted to know the ones which he could translate. I told him, do 'inky, pinky, ponky' and pick out the verses at random,' the poet recalled amid laughter.

Varma, who recited a duet of six poems with Gulzar (the poet recited in Urdu while Varma read out their English translations), feels that the rich imagery and the literary dexterity set Gulzar apart from his peers.

'The range of his works and theme is huge and yet so simple,' said the translator, who has recently transcribed a volume of Kaifi Azmi's poetry in English for Penguin.

'Translation is an important medium of literature in India because that is the only way vernacular writings can be taken to the masses. But we are still so inadequate,' Varma told IANS.

Born Sampooran Singh Kalra in Jhelum district, now in Pakistan, in 1934, Gulzar worked as a 'mechanic' before joining the film industry in Bollywood with which he has been associated for nearly five decades.

He was known for collaborations with music maestros like R.D. Burman, father Sachin Dev Burman, Salil Chowdhury and Madan Mohan. Known for his Left leanings, his movies 'Aandhi', 'Angoor' and 'Mausam' were a rage in the Seventies. Gulzar was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2004.

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