

# **Saga of a Crumpled Piece of Paper**

by

Vivek Sharma

Writer's Workshop, Kolkata India (2009)

(63 original poems in English)

(with an introduction by Thomas Lux)

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## INTRODUCTION

About three years ago a young man named Vivek Sharma showed up at my office at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) where I teach and direct a program (classes, community outreach, a reading series) called Poetry at Tech. Vivek was a PhD student in polymers. I've always liked that word—polymers—but didn't know, until Vivek told me, what it meant: plastics. He's now doing post doc work at MIT, one of the young stars in the polymer world.

The day, aforementioned, when Vivek stood in my office doorway, he was smiling, shyly, and his eyes were burning—with poetry. Almost immediately he began showing me poems, many of them ghazals, many narrative poems about village life in India, and on many other subjects as well. He came to all the readings, began hanging around with the poetry crowd (which he had to hide a bit from his PhD advisor), and the poems continued to pour forth. We went through, carefully, dozens of them (he later told me it was 75) and he kept getting better and better, his eyes burned more and more with what the Russians call Nightingale Fever: a passion for, and the inability to stop, writing and reading poetry. Because he was a doctoral student, he never was my “official” student but I'd guess, in over 35 years teaching poetry writing and reading, I never worked more with any other individual.

We became friends. He came to the Sarah Lawrence College Summer seminar for Writers and worked with such poets as Stephen Dobyns and Stuart Dischell. He hammered his raw but considerable talent with revision after revision, he learned his craft, he wrote and wrote and read and read. And have I mentioned that he wrote these poems in English? He grew up more or less bi-lingual but his mother tongue is Hindi. (If I lived in France for 40 years I wouldn't be able to write an intelligible haiku!) He had so many questions! And he was also a good teacher: I learned a great deal about Indian culture, its rich literature, and art, from him. He is one of the finest young men I have ever known and I, and the rest of his friends here in Atlanta, miss him.

About his poetry, specifically, I'm going to be short but incisive: he is a gifted young poet with a rare sense for the texture of language, he knows how to use language in such a way that it helps the reader explain him/herself to him/herself. His poems provide for me “a momentary stay

against confusion” as Mr. Frost defined poetry. He’s a lyric poet with a narrative streak and he writes exceptionally good love poems: “She moves me like a pencil/sketching memories with each swipe of her hand.” Is the opening of one such poem to his beloved. His poems are alive with color. Some of the first poems he showed me were on the different colors, and their significance, of the sari, which he also taught me to pronounce properly: accent on second syllable, not on the first, where most American would accent it. His poems, particularly his village poems, are filled with people, with characters. In seeing the dignity as well as the foibles of one culture it reminds us of our own dignity and foibles. It’s a very big village he writes about and his poems are bridges across a wide ocean. He is a member of the tribe, albeit scattered all over the planet, of poets. He is, and will be, one of the voices the future of poetry needs to hear.

--Thomas Lux  
Bourne Professor of Poetry  
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