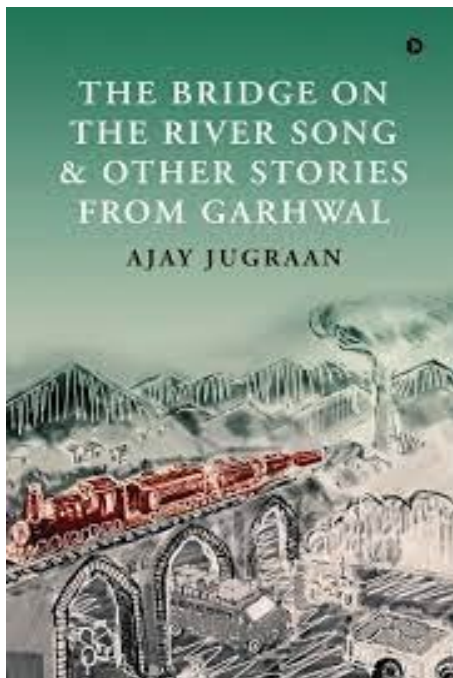


Book Review: The Bridge on the River Song & Other Stories from Garhwal by Ajay Jugraan

Srirang K Jha*

ABSTRACT

This article reviews a collection of stories titled ‘The Bridge on the River Song & Other Stories



from Garhwal’ by Ajay Jugraan, a cross-border investment, business and arbitration lawyer based in Delhi, India. He is a master storyteller who keeps the readers engaged with his unique ability to create an intense narrative with characters and plots one can easily relate to. In the anthology under review, there are 23 absorbing short stories set in culturally rich Garhwal region of India. The anthology comprises author’s original stories in English, a few of his stories translated from Hindi and a few others taken from folk traditions with fresh rendition. All the stories have one thing in common –the nuances of the distinctive socio-cultural milieu of Garhwal

and Kumaon region. The stories in the anthology are imbued with varied themes ranging from romance to bravery, suspense, history, and mystery. Also, the stories trigger emotions like love, compassion, empathy, gratitude, joy, hope, pride, awe, and peace. The stories in the

*Associate Professor & Head, General Management & International Business Area, Apeejay School of Management, New Delhi, India E-mail: srirang.jha@learn.apeejay.edu

anthology capture all shades of life both in rural and urban settings. The reviewer has a vivid reminiscence of having crossed the bridge on the river Song during a recent road trip to Dehradun. The book truly captures the magic of the bridge over river Song as well as the rich traditions of Garhwal region for the readers.

Keywords: Anthology, Nature, Family, Life, Garhwal, India

The Bridge on River Song & Other Stories from Garhwal Published by Notion Press, 2023; Pages: 219; Price: INR 300
--

The Bridge on River Song & Other Stories from Garhwal by Ajay Jugran is a noteworthy omnibus of 23 fascinating short stories set in culturally rich Garhwal region of India. The anthology comprises author's original stories in English, a few of his stories translated from Hindi and a few others taken from folk traditions with fresh rendition. All the stories have one thing in common –the nuances of the distinctive socio-cultural milieu of Garhwal and Kumaon region. The stories in the anthology are imbued with varied themes ranging from romance to bravery, suspense, history, and mystery. Also, the stories trigger emotions like love, compassion, empathy, gratitude, joy, hope, pride, awe, and peace. The stories in the anthology capture all shades of life both in rural and urban settings.

The first story of the collection, 'The Small Radio' is an adorable narration of love and separation, attachment and detachment, and primacy of the call of duty, even if the job of the soldier does not bring any accolades for the protagonist. The story captures the nuances of the soldier's life during World War II, when Indian soldiers were drafted to fight under the British Raj in any part of the world, far away from their sweet homes and loving families. Typical of a soldier's life, the story ends with his departure in response to the call of duty, leaving behind his beautiful wife with a small radio as memento. Both have no idea when they would reunite.

Second story titled 'Be as Resilient as a Cockroach' is equally captivating. It revolves around candid conversations among five friends who have accomplished professional success but

failed to experience happiness in their lives. All the friends have some health issues which often come with privilege and prosperity. However, taking cue from another interwoven narrative from battlefield in the story, they learn the finest lesson in their life –one can be as resilient as a cockroach and that giving up in any circumstance was not an option. The third story, 'A Small Price to Pay' is about a captivating narrative of a rescue operation in which the protagonist –a senior army officer, hurt his back badly and lost three of his toes in the right and two in the left. Yet, he was not too keen to accept the accolades as he had just paid the small price for saving his boys.

The fourth story titled 'Fearless Mahipal' is about a soldier who is fearless at the battlefield but scared of cats in the backyard of his home. The fifth story, 'Paradise Calls', is about a failed suicide attempt and how the protagonist surprises the narrator by being sighted as a volunteer art teacher in a rehabilitation centre whom the latter had taken for dead. The sixth story, 'A Bouquet for the Florist', is equally intriguing. It is about an unrequited love which lasted a lifetime and the protagonist ended up dedicating an anthology of poetry written over past 30 years to his beloved, not knowing whether she would ever be privy to his emotions. The next story, 'The Choice of Love' is a cute narrative of how the protagonist finally finds his lost love.

The story titled 'Point Sudha Ju' has captured an interesting quest to delve into the excellent family tradition of cartography which is cut short by the protagonist's own intrinsic interest in creative writing instead of drawing maps of the hilly terrains. Likewise, stories titled 'Apolo Princess', 'Just Three Bad Habits', 'Tapka Mangoes', 'The Musical Hillock', 'Miss Beautiful Thorn', 'Badrinath Beckons', and 'Just One Game of Chess' are also imbued with ruminations from familial bonding. 'Karnavati: The Queen of Garhwal Who Cut Mughal Noses' is a fascinating rendition of a folktale from the region. 'The Bridge on the River Song' is yet another emotional narrative about how people in Garhwal region relate to the rivers in their daily lives how desperately they desire to save them. Title of the anthology also comes from this story.

'The First Car Uphill' is an interesting tale drawn from local tradition. The story narrates how the Pahadi King Bolendu's Rolls Royce reached his palace at the hilltop about a hundred years ago when the roads in the mountainous terrains were not at all developed. 'Missing the Essence' is satire on how the politicians befool their followers. 'Chhamna Devi' is a captivating

story about rise and fall of a self-made God-woman. 'The Benefit of the Doubt' has captured improbity of a judge of a district court in an interesting manner. 'The Scrap dealer of Dalanwala' is a noteworthy story about a visually challenged micro entrepreneur who was extremely adept in his work. 'Don's Big House' is a story about malicious person who destroys all the family ties due to his greed with a predictable end.

Quality of all the stories in the anthology is splendid in terms of plot, characters, and narration. Characters in most of the stories may resonate with the readers. Illustrations by Dr Sunil Parulkar, Rachna Sharma Joshi, Deepak Kotnala, Twisha Singh, Shobha Uniyal, Manish Kala, Meena Kothari, Mishika Kala, Aayushi Thandassery, Nyla Khera, and Ambar Agnihotri have added great value to the anthology. Cover Art designed by Ambar Agnihotri is quite appealing. A few photographs by Sanjay Nainwal have been used in the anthology. Mallika Ramachandran has edited the anthology efficiently.

Luminaries like Lt Gen (Retired) Syed Ata Hasnain (Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir); Ambassador Bhaswati Mukherjee (an expert in international affairs); Tarun Khiwal (noted visual artist); R. N. Bhaskar (Consulting Editor, Free Press Journal); Dr Varada Nikalje (Professor, NCERT); and Akshat Ghildial (award-winning author of 'Badhai Ho', 'Badhai Do' and other Bollywood films) have appreciated the book profusely. Likewise, some of the readers namely Anil Bhatt, Rachna Joshi, Archana Nautiyal, Sona Kukreti, Moushami Ghosh, Akshaya Dhaundiyal, Rakesh Jaldy, Sumit Dutta, Megha, Arjumand Fatma, Neera Ramachandran and Dr Alok Saklani among others have also commended the book in their micro reviews on the Literary Potpourri.

Some of the stories of Ajay Jugraan are also available in audio format on StoryJam and other podcast/youtube channels. He has also published a collection of poems in Hindi titled 'Atrang Satrang'.

REFERENCES

- Jugraan, A. (2023). *The bridge on the river song and other stories*. Notion Press.
- Ramachandran, M. (2023). *Book review: The bridge on the river song and other stories*. <https://potpourri2015.wordpress.com/2023/11/03/book-review-the-bridge-on-the-river-song-and-other-stories-2023-by-ajay-jugraan/>