

Book Review

**Still Pond of Silence: Metaphor, Myth, and Resilience
in Tamali Neogi's *Ripples in Silence***

Transcendent Zero Press, Houston, 2026,
Pages: 132, (PB). ISBN: 978-1-9460460-6.

Prof. Pradeep Trikha

Visiting Professor, Dept. of British Studies,
University of Munster, Germany. pradeeptrikha@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59136/lv.2026.27.1.50>



In a contemporary poetic landscape often cluttered by performative fragmentation and hollow confessionalism, Tamali Neogi's *Ripples in Silence* arrives with the sharp, cold clarity of a winter morning. This third major collection from Neogi—an Associate Professor at Gushkara College and a scholar of V.S. Naipaul—further solidifies her reputation as a formidable voice in Indian Anglophone poetry. While her previous award-winning works, *Winged Monologues* and *Winged Dialogues*, explored the soaring architecture of voice, *Ripples in Silence* descends into the profound weight of the unspoken. Neogi's scholarship does not stifle her lyricism; it

anchors it. The collection is a sustained meditation on the human condition, expertly weaving the intimate domesticity of the Bengali household with a sweeping societal critique. Her verses are rooted in a rich alluvial soil composed of Bengali Cultural Nuance: The scent of *mogra* and the rustle of saris. Philosophical Intertextuality: Deep engagements with Tagorean humanism, Buddhist thought, and Hindu mythology. Classical Allusions: Subtle nods to Western biblical and classical traditions that lend the work a universal resonance.

The title *Ripples in Silence* is no casual metaphor. Silence, in Neogi's universe, is not absence but the precondition of resonance. It is the vast, indifferent backdrop of corporate greed, historical trauma, and existential void against which the smallest gesture—a mother's tear, a child's unanswered question, the wilting of an expectation—creates concentric waves of meaning. Like the “ripples in water” that appear in her earlier poem “Joystick” (published in *Teesta Review*, 2024), these ripples disturb without shattering the surface. They propagate through the reader's consciousness long after the page is turned. The collection's 132 pages thus become a still pond into which Neogi drops pebbles of perception. The silence is never empty; it is gravid, pregnant with the unsaid, the intergenerational, the mythic. To read the book is to feel those ripples lapping at the edges of one's own quietude. The title, therefore, is not descriptive but performative: it enacts the very aesthetic it names. Neogi does not shout; she disturbs. And in that disturbance lies the collection's quiet power.

Consider, first, the opening movements of expectation and intimacy. In “Bouquet of Expectations,” Neogi constructs a floral metaphor that is at once tender and merciless. The bouquet is not a romantic cliché but a fragile architecture of hope—petals arranged by hands that know they will eventually drop. The poem unfolds in a domestic interior redolent of Bengali households: the scent of *mogra*, the faint rustle of a sari, the weight of unspoken marital or maternal duty. Yet Neogi refuses sentimentality. The flowers “lean toward light they cannot keep,” their stems “bent by the gravity of promises unkept.” Here, the metaphor does double work: it evokes the personal—perhaps a woman's deferred dreams in a patriarchal frame—but also the universal. Expectations, like cut flowers, are severed from their roots the moment they are offered. The poem's philosophical depth emerges through a subtle intertextual nod to Tagore's *Gitanjali*, where the divine is often figured as a gardener who prunes as much as he nurtures. Neogi secularises and domesticates this image: the gardener is now the self, pruning its own illusions. The effect is quietly devastating. One feels the exquisite agony the blurb promises—the resilience of the human spirit tested against its own hopeful fragility.

Equally luminous is “As Soul to Heart,” a poem that reads like a private epistle between two chambers of the same being. The soul addresses the heart not as superior but as a coequal sufferer. “You beat, I wander,” the soul confesses; “you bruise, I remember.” The language is raw yet refined, oscillating between physiological precision (“the ventricle's stubborn contract”) and metaphysical flight. Neogi draws on Buddhist notions of *anatta* (no-self) while simultaneously invoking the Upanishadic dialogue between Atman and the embodied self. The result is a philosophical hybridity that feels organic rather than contrived. The poem refuses the easy mysticism of much spiritual verse; instead, it insists on the embodied cost of consciousness. The heart's “wet labour” is never romanticised; it is the site of both love and exhaustion. In an age of performative wellness, Neogi's insistence that soul and heart must negotiate their mutual wounding feels bracingly honest. The poem's closing image—a single drop of blood “rippling outward in the silence of arteries”—returns us to the collection's governing metaphor, suggesting that even internal life produces ripples that disturb the body's quiet.

“Light and Shadow,” previously published in *Teesta Review* (Vol. 7.2, 2024), stands as one of the collection's emotional and formal peaks. The poem opens with visceral trauma:

When darkness works on me

*Like poison in entrails,
Stabbed spine, broken bones,
raped genital left to perish,
I, in half dead's agony,
open my bruised eyes... (p.77)*

The imagery is unflinching, almost clinical, yet never exploitative. Neogi refuses voyeurism; the violence is rendered through the survivor's fractured perception. The "serpentine cloud" that breathes, the "storm of dust" that erases desert mountains but spares "the laboratories of lies"—these are not decorative but philosophically charged. Light and shadow here are not Manichean opposites but dialectical partners "working in tandem, blood and tears." The maternal cry—"come back, come back"—introduces an intergenerational thread that will be deepened elsewhere. The baby sun, lowering its head and receiving the speaker's "colour", suggests a transfer of vitality across generations, a quiet defiance of oblivion. The poem ends with the imperative "Mom, rise up," collapsing personal resurrection into mythic renewal. One hears echoes of Tagore's "Where the mind is without fear" in the refusal to let dusk descend permanently, yet the poet's voice is distinctly contemporary—marked by the gendered violence that shadows Indian public discourse. The poem's power lies in its refusal to resolve: light does not triumph; it negotiates with shadow. That negotiation is the poem's ethical core.

"Disease of Unhappy Times" shifts register from the personal to the socio-political, yet never abandons metaphorical precision. The "disease" is not a metaphorical illness but the contagion of collective discontent—corporate indifference, environmental degradation, the hollowing out of empathy. Neogi diagnoses the age with the cool eye of a clinician who has read both the *Mahabharata's* epic hunger and modern neoliberalism's quiet cruelties. Street children appear as "insects caught in a spider's web," their "epic hunger" more powerful than Kaurava conspiracies. The poem's intertextuality is deft: Hindu mythology provides the scale, Buddhist compassion the moral lens, and Tagorean humanism the quiet rage against mechanised indifference. The closing stanzas move from diagnosis to quiet indictment: "We end where we start from. Complaints meaningless. / He offers, He withdraws." The divine itself is implicated in the silence that permits unhappiness. Yet Neogi's critique is never shrill; it ripples outward, forcing the reader to confront their own complicity in the "laboratories of lies" that sustain the status quo.

The query rightly highlights "Charade" and "Much to Say" as sites of literary intertextuality. In "Charade," Neogi stages life itself as a masked performance. Detachment is not Buddhist renunciation but a survival strategy in a world of performative identities. The speaker watches herself "playing the part assigned by mirrors," yet the mask slips just enough to reveal the "exquisite agony of existence." Allusions to Greek tragedy (the charade as cathartic illusion) mingle with Bengali folk theatre and the biblical "vanity of vanities." The poem's philosophical depth resides in its refusal to choose between engagement and withdrawal; instead, it holds both in tension. The final lines—where the mask is laid aside only in the silence of the grave—return us to the title's governing metaphor: the charade creates ripples that outlast the performance.

"Much to Say," by contrast, is a poem of intergenerational communion. Here, the domestic scene—perhaps a grandmother's wrinkled hands, a child's unfiltered questions—expands into a meditation on legacy. The title's ellipsis is deliberate: much is said, yet more remains unsaid. Neogi draws on Tagore's *The Post Office* and the Upanishadic guru-shishya tradition while grounding the exchange in the specificities of Bengali middle-class life: the smell of mustard oil, the weight of inherited silences, the quiet transmission of resilience. The poem refuses nostalgia; the intergenerational bond is shown as both gift and burden. The elder's wisdom is

“a bouquet of expectations” passed to younger hands that may not want the flowers. Thus, the collection’s poems converse with each other, creating internal ripples.

Throughout *Ripples in Silence*, Neogi’s language remains “both raw and refined,” as Don Winter notes in his endorsement. She avoids the ornamental excess sometimes found in Indian English poetry, favouring instead a muscular sparseness that lets imagery do the philosophical labour. Metaphors are never merely decorative; they are epistemological tools. A bouquet becomes an ontology of hope; light and shadow, a dialectic of survival; disease, a cultural pathogen. The intertextuality never feels pedantic. References to Tagore, the *Mahabharata*, Greek myth, and the Bible emerge organically from the lived texture of a Bengali intellectual’s consciousness. This is not cultural tourism but cultural synthesis—the natural inheritance of a scholar-poet who moves fluently between classrooms and inner chambers of the heart.

Critically, one might ask whether the collection’s philosophical density occasionally risks abstraction. In a few quieter lyrics, the ripples threaten to flatten into mere meditation. Yet even these moments serve the larger architecture: they create the silence against which louder ripples gain force. Neogi’s strength lies in her refusal of easy epiphany. The human spirit’s resilience is never triumphalist; it is earned through “blood and tears,” through the labour of continuing when the laboratories of lies remain intact. In this sense, *Ripples in Silence* aligns itself with the ethical poetry Neogi herself has edited—verse that does not merely console but interrogates. The physical object itself—its stark cover, modest dimensions—mirrors the aesthetic. There is no clamour for attention; the book trusts its reader to listen. In a publishing landscape increasingly dominated by algorithmic visibility, Neogi’s commitment to quiet resonance feels almost radical. *Ripples in Silence* does not shout its relevance; it earns it, poem by poem, ripple by ripple. Tamali Neogi has produced a collection that honours the best traditions of Indian English poetry while forging something distinctly her own. She has taken the silence that surrounds us—personal, cultural, existential—and shown us the ripples we ourselves create within it. Through metaphorical imagery that never sacrifices precision for prettiness, through philosophical depth that never sacrifices feeling for abstraction, and through literary intertextuality that enriches rather than burdens, Neogi reminds us that poetry’s truest power may lie not in volume but in vibration. *Ripples in Silence* is not merely a book to be read; it is a disturbance to be felt. In the quiet hours after closing its pages, one still senses the concentric circles widening—proof that the title was never ornamental. It was prophetic. *Ripples in Silence* is a work of rare philosophical density and metaphorical precision. It is a disciplined, unflinching look at the “unsaid” that governs our lives. Neogi has crafted a collection that proves silence is never empty—it is merely waiting for the right voice to wake it up.