



Home - Jan 1, 2007

Cover Story

Gallery

Art News

Spring Board

Close Up

Photo Features

Interview

Essays

Features

Reviews

Book Reviews

Immersion and
Emergence: Ravi
Agarwal

Version True

Readers' Page

Archives Home

BOOK REVIEW



Title: **Immersion, Emergence**
Author: Ravi Agarwal
Publisher: Author
Year: 2006
Price: Rs.300/- (India), US\$ 25
Reviewed by **JohnnyML**

Requiem for Yamuna

*"Oh Earth, the one yet to be dead
May your soul rest in peace
In the impending death
This is a requiem written in my heart today
For mine and your funeral rites"*

- An Elegy for Earth by ONV Kurup

(An unskillful translation from Malayalam by the reviewer)

This book titled '**Immersion, Emergence**' brings nothing but these lines to my mind. A beautiful and moving elegy in prose written with a lot of feel and love for the dying river Yamuna comes as an accompanying catalogue of Ravi Agarwal's photographs taken in and around Yamuna. This catalogue stands on its feet as an independent work of literature supplemented with adequate visuals.

Ravi Agarwal, an environmental activist, leader of the NGO Toxics Link and an independent artist who uses photography as a medium, became a familiar name in the art world when he represented India the 11th Documenta, Kassel, Germany in 2002. He started wielding camera at the age of 13 and since then it has been a faithful companion to him. His engagement with the movements against ecological and environmental depletion added a new dimension to his photographs. Photography, which has always been a sustaining and meaningful activity for him (like the diary writings) became a medium in itself to further his activism.

NGO activism in India generally lacks aesthetic fineness. Rough clothes and disheveled looks, gloomy faces and street players' fatigue mark them out even in the mass movements. However, Ravi Agarwal's activism has an aesthetic panache. Besides his activities as a social worker, he captures the visuals from the areas that he passes through. They become aesthetic tools to convey his activist ideas to a different mass. His works, perhaps not seen (perhaps would never see) by the subjects (of these photographs) engage an aloof mass (of aestheticians and the middle class) with the issues depicted in them. From within the gallery walls, these photographs could move towards newer directions and find comrades in arms elsewhere in the world.

'Immersion and Emergence' not only gives us visuals of a vandalized Yamuna, the artery of Delhi. It gives the author's first person engagement with the river. Ravi Agarwal seems to be a lover in distress. He is suffocated and pained by the condition of his love, Yamuna, the river. However, he looks at the people who are evicted from its banks in the name of urban development with a positive energy. He is enamored by their instinct to survive, their hope in hopelessness, their ability to demand dignity. Ravi Agarwal puts all these in words, with the verve of a poet.

What interests a reader like me is the poetry of its prose; the urgency and the collapsing of words. Like the bulldozers razing the structures down to

planes, constructed words break and splatter around for the birth of a 'terrible beauty' (a terrible beauty is born-W.B.Yates). What interests me further is the author's ability to connect the eviction and uprooting of the natural/migrant people from the riverbeds with the play of power structures that internationally dispossess the common people. Ravi's book is a requiem for a dying river and for those people who are uprooted.

OPEN EYED DREAMS

Presents



7-16
March '07

Travancore
art gallery
New Delhi

Curated by
Johnny ML

[visit website >](#)

**Art
Galleries**



© 2006, artconcerns.com

JohnyML + Dilip Narayanan initiative