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Rupa Rao's *A Poetic Odyssey: Life and Legacy of Dr. Jernail S. Anand*
A Review

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In the constellation of books Rupa Rao's *A Poetic Odyssey: A Biography of Dr J S Anand* illumines the readers with a documentary-like clarity as she sets off on the voyage of a little boy born in a small village of Alamgir in Ludhiana who registered his presence on the world literary scene and was conferred with prestigious awards as Charter of Morava, Seneca Award, Franz Kafka Award, Maxim Gorky Award and the nomination for the prestigious Nobel prize for Literature. Though published in December 2025, the timeline of the *Poetic Odyssey* begins from 19 January 1956 when a little boy was named *Jernail (The General)* by his maternal grandfather. At an impressionable age, the boy witnessed the rigours of pecuniar hardship, humiliation, and nurtured a keen longing to escape to regions of fancy when the family business collapsed and the poverty invaded their home. Finally, when the boy was eleven, the family moved to nearby Ludhiana city, a vast sprawling metro dotted with industrial units of multiple hues. The book captures the true emotional essence as the boy experienced jealousy, insecurity and a shift in the focus of care and attention for the first time when his little sister arrived, how he felt as he held her for the first time in his arms, and as time passed, the little sister followed him all around calling "Binu, Binu" all the time.

Anand's childhood was characterized by the fears and phobias as attend the life of a growing child, with active dread of Mathematics and the terror of being targeted and beaten by the teachers.

However, the family moored in strong conscientious, moral grounding throughout life, imbued Anand's life with vitality. *The Poetic Odyssey* captures the pristine innocence of a young budding Anand at the age of 12 when he confuses Compartment in an examination as a reward, and is greatly disturbed when some of his classmates get it while he seems to be dispossessed!

This book chronicles the inner, unconscious memories of kindness, empathy and generosity; in the context of his 9th class teacher S. Kulbir Singh and the sobering influence of Principal N.S.Tasneem, recipient of Sahitya Akademy Award. This book is not about Anand's eminent glories, his accomplishments and the number of attainments in life, rather it serves a different purpose of telling the readers how a person's efforts, parental and family priorities can whirl the string of fate and destiny. It underlines how the undying resilience in a super ordinary boy from a humble background, carves out a niche for him in the world of academia and creativity, thereby conveying to the readers that setbacks, conflicts, inner struggles, emotional turmoils, cold sneers from the hierarchal social order, are the battles which human beings must endure and subdue in order to stand on their own in the end.

Rupa Rao, the biographer, articulates the subtle thoughts and emotions of her subject in a language that epitomizes the complexities of Anand's life by keeping the unwavering focus on various nuances of his poetic odyssey. The impress of objectivity in portraying the emotional and traumatizing preludes to the terrors and tremors in Anand's life, adds to the charms of the write up as one experiences Yeatsian and Eliotian strains in Anand's oeuvre. The universal concerns that are at the centre of Anand's creative universe, lend to the *Poetic Odyssey* an aura of immediacy in the context of extenuating contemporary times. Dr. Jernail Singh Anand's 18 epics and burgeoning creative endeavors have elicited critical appreciation from the contemporary poets and critics as Dr Maja Herman Sekulic, Dr Basudeb Chakraborti and Dr. Lalit Mohan Sharma for Anand's transcendental and mature vision of life. For a biographer the task of pronouncing a final word on Anand's Poetic Odyssey is hazardous as his oeuvre is evolving and may merit revisioning!