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Tirtha Prasad mukhopadhyay

Editor

Tarun Tapas Mukherjee

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Five Poems by K. Satchidanandan

Translated from Malayalam by the poet

Galilee

His house was in a valley
teeming with violets.
Clouds blushed at the sound of his neck-bells.

He grew tall fast in the rain's lullaby
like some of those wild trees.
Even before the smell of
mother's milk had left him,
he found before him
a rope, a knife, a hook.
The mouth was stuffed, like on the gallows:
his weeping should not disturb God.

I could not stand the blue sky in his eyes,
and the dance that lay choked on his hooves.

When they pulled the rope,
he heard a flute.
He stretched his neck as if to his mother's udders.
They laid it on the clod stone.
We closed our eyes.
Heaven's blindness enveloped us.

I saw within his bleeding head:
A sunlit green turf, on it
a herd of white sheep like a cluster of stars,
a lean half-naked youth in long hairs
in the middle of the herd.

Five wounds,
on his body.

(2004)

Misplaced Objects

In a flash I recall all the
misplaced objects of my life:
the ten lambent marbles
forgotten under the dry leaves
beneath the mango tree,
the umbrella left behind in Apu's saloon
the day rain failed to turn up,
the pen that dived from the pocket
while climbing the cashewnut tree
on the way back from the village school,
the sky-blue shirt remaining
in a hotel wardrobe in Riga,
the long list of books lent, never returned,
some unredeemed debts, a few unrequited loves.

Forgetfulness alone never forgot me.
As I fell in love I began misplacing my heart,
metaphors as I began to scribble poetry.

Later, looking at the hills, I began to feel
the sky had misplaced them and
the clouds had misplaced the rainbow.

I have recently begun to suspect
this very earth with us on it
has been misplaced by God.
In the order He recalls, He claims back:
woods, rivers, us.

(2006)

On the Way to Shillong

On the way to Shillong
on the sepia banks of lake Umran
under a jacaranda tree in bloom
I saw her: Banalata Sen.*

Today after a decade
I again pass by the lake.
She is still there:
A jacaranda tree in full bloom
under a violet cloud
scurrying along the sky.

(2003)

* the protagonist of Jibanananda Das's Bengali poem, Banalata Sen

Rain, You

Was it rain
or you?

There were scents:
intense ones,
of the rain-washed earth, of tobacco,
of the acrid sap of the mango-stalk,
of oleander flowers,
of woman's inner lips.

There were colours,
flying ones,
of the mynah, of the pink balsam,
of collyrium, of wild fire,
of wet yam leaves, of red wine,
of fresh paddy.

There were memories,
unendurable ones,
of the index finger, wet lips,
aroused nipples,
wounds, bells,
irreplaceable hearts.

How many names how many selves
How many places how many births
How many rivers from touches

The mad ecstasy of dreaming of your return
when I lose you
The wild shock of the fear of losing you
when you return.

I have never seen a rain so blue
an embrace so liquid, a dance so irrepressible,
a monsoon kiss that rains so incessantly
like flowers from a *gulmohar* tree.

(2005)

Repetitions

We make love on the beach
and re-enact the ritual
in signs scrawled on the sand:
'We made love here'.

The wind, waves and indifferent feet
conspire in envy to tear that
festival banner apart.

Love's evanescence
deposits salt in the follicles of
our hair, all on end.

Tomorrow another pair
will land up here: man
and woman; may be man
and man, or woman
and woman : they too
will scrawl that line
on the shifting sand;
the same salt-breeze
will sing for them a lullaby.

Love is not eternal;
it just ceaselessly repeats itself ,
saltily, like the sea.

K.Satchidanandan is a poet of national and international repute writing in Malayalam. He has a doctorate in post-Structuralist poetics and was Professor of English at Christ College, University of Calicut, Kerala, editor of Indian Literature, the journal of the Sahitya Akademi (The National Academy of Letters) and later the Chief Executive of the Akademi. He edits the SAARC journal Beyond Borders in English, the poetry quarterly Kerala Kavita in Malayalam and the South Asian Library of Literature. He has 21 collections of poetry in Malayalam besides 16 collections of world poetry in translation and 23 collections of critical essays and interviews besides four collections of essays in English. He has 27 collections of his poems in translation in 17 languages, including five collections in English, six in Hindi and one each in Arabic, German, French and Italian besides all the major Indian languages. He has won 21 awards for his literary contribution besides Senior Fellowship from the Department of Culture, Government of India, Sreekant Verma Fellowship from the Government of Madhya Pradesh and the K.K. Birla Fellowship for Comparative Literature. Many of his books of poetry and criticism have been textbooks in Universities. He won the Sahitya Akademi award in 2012. A film on him, Summer Rain was released in 2007. Satchidanandan has represented India in several international literary events like the international literary festivals in Sarajevo, Berlin, Montreal, Beijing, Moscow, Ivry-sur Seine, Jaipur, Delhi, Montreal, Hay Festival-Trivandrum and Kovalam and book fairs at Delhi, Lahore, Kolkata, Abu Dhabi, Frankfurt, Leipzig, London, Paris and Moscow besides having readings and talks at Bonn, Rome, Verona, Ravenna, Leiden, NewYork, St. Petersburg, Damascus, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Oman, Sharjah, Singapore etc. besides most of the cities in India. Satchidanandan has been honoured with Knighthood of the Order of Merit by the Government of Italy, with the Dante Medal by the Dante Institute, Ravenna and the India-Poland Friendship Medal by the Government of Poland. He has also been an activist for secularism, environment and human rights. For more please visit <http://satchidanandan.com>.

From Book IV of *The Parliament of Poets: An Epic Poem* by Frederick Glaysher

We soon were over a plain, a wide field,
where two vast armies were ranked to battle,
legions on either side for war, the carnage
about to begin, so it seemed. Into this,
Tagore led me. Panic surged within me,
as I looked at him, and he peacefully
looked back. Ksatriyas, warriors and princes,
on either hand, girded for the worst,
stood ready to commence. And then I realized
this was the war of the Bharatas,
Kurus seeking to destroy Pandavas
and Arjuna, the rightful heirs of the
kingdom. Not being of the warrior class,
I confess, I felt very out of place,
as we landed on a small hill behind
a red oleander overlooking the site
of the battlefield. Not far away,
I noticed a chariot, alone, between
the armies, Hanuman's flag flying on it,
two figures standing nearby, engaged in talk,
not battle, though some struggle waged in the soul
of one, Arjuna, his charioteer, Krishna,
attired in his glory, indescribable.
Darshan not through a statue but the living god.
Out of sight, or so I hoped, we watched,
strained to listen, the conversation going
back and forth, while I recalled their great words,
treasured deep within my heart, the call to
sacrifice and duty, the warrior's art,
test supreme of every soul, the mettle.
Arjuna put down his bow and arrows,
and I became aware that we were not
alone behind that bush, but now, at my
elbow, to my surprise, I recognized
a most incongruous figure, a prim
New England man, Ralph Waldo Emerson,
dressed in his dark suit, collar and cravat,
smiling serenely upon the scene.
And I recalled and mulled over his lines,
"If the red slayer thinks he slays,
or if the slain think he is slain,
they know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

I am the doubter and the doubt.
 And I the hymn the Brahmin sings,"
 while nearby Krishna intoned them as well.
 "Master," I said, "you were my first teacher,
 guide. You opened the way for all of us,
 walking away from the cowled churchman.
 The time has turned away from the Over-Soul.
 Tell me how to go on from here, how to raise
 a universal song for all mankind,
 as universal as the morning wind."
 Smiling sweetly, gentle tolerance and
 forbearance, love and compassion, he said,
 "What's a moment of confusion in the face
 of eternity? Shrug it off. The Eternal One
 is within every man and woman.
 You already know better than I that
 you must find your own way. Self reliance.
 Now watch and listen," turning to the battle.
 Resolve strengthened in my startled heart, the call
 of duty, as Krishna called to Arjuna,
 "Remain poised in the tranquility of Atman,"
 and other snatches we were blessed to hear.
 Krishna's back now toward us, Arjuna
 bowed before him, clasping his hands, seemed
 transported to a higher realm, while we
 remained below, standing on our feet of clay.
 Arjuna bowed down a second time to
 Govinda, Lord Krishna, a deep shudder
 of emotion ran through my body and soul,
 like nothing I had ever felt before,
 not physical, spiritual, the only word
 that can convey some vague inkling of what
 I felt, like wave on wave of surging water,
 on a beach, braking over the shore, my soul,
 spreading out, much absorbed into the sand,
 while most was drawn back into the sea.

[88 lines]

Frederick Glaysher's epic poem, The Parliament of Poets, was published in late 2012 (ISBN: 9780982677889; eBook, eISBN: 9780982677865. Earthrise Press, 2012) He is the author of several books of poetry and prose. He has been a Fulbright-Hays scholar to China and a National Endowment for the Humanities scholar on India. He has been an outspoken advocate of the United Nations and an accredited participant at the UN Millennium Forum (2000), and attended the UNA Members Day 2012 on the Millennium Development Goals, held in the General Assembly Hall. He lives in Rochester, Michigan USA. <http://fglaysher.com>.
