

EROZIO

GATHERED GRACE
(An Anthology of Indian Verse in English)

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Edited with Notes and Commentary

by

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PREFACE

In recent times most of the universities in India have introduced Indo-Anglian literature as one of the papers at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels in their English literature programmes. However, there are very few student editions of anthologies that cover the whole range of Indo-Anglian poetry. Some of the good anthologies available now are only meant for elite reading as they do not provide any notes or commentary.

This anthology is an attempt to present a representative selection of Indo-Anglian verse along with notes and commentary to enable the student and the lay reader to have a proper understanding of each poem. The notes are prepared to assist the student to absorb the spirit of each poem and the commentary on each poet gives adequate details about his/her life and work. All selection is perception and this is a range rather than a total picture that I have tried to reflect in choosing the poets and poems.

One of the problems I encountered while compiling the anthology is the scarcity of reference material, especially on contemporary Indo-Anglian poems. There are no full-length studies on most of the contemporary poems included in this anthology. The interpretations of such poems are purely subjective. In the matter of punctuation, I have adopted the system followed in earlier standard publications of the poems.

Several people have helped me with suggestions in the compilation of this anthology. Foremost among them is my friend and colleague, Mr. P. Raja, a poet in his own right who has given me several useful hints about interpretations of some of the poems. I am thankful to him. I gratefully acknowledge the help rendered by my wife, Seetha, in preparing and typing the manuscript.

K.R. Ramachandran Nair

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HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZIO (1809-1831)

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born on 18th April 1809 in Calcutta, died on 26th December 1831 and was buried in the Park Street cemetery. His father was Portuguese and mother English. Thus he had no Indian blood in him. But he was born and brought up in India, he taught Indian students in an Indian college and the themes and sentiments in his poetry were purely Indian. Above all, he loved India and was sad about her condition. So Derozio is, undoubtedly, an Indo-Anglian poet. During his exciting life of twenty-three years he was clerk, teacher, poet, journalist, free thinker and social reformer. In 1828 he became an Assistant Master in Hindu College, Calcutta. However, in 1831 he had to resign the job following accusations by the management that his teaching and influence had corrupted young minds and that he was a rebel and an atheist. Eight months later he died.

Derozio wrote lyrics, narrative poems, sonnets and ballads. *The Fakeer of Jungheera* is his most successful effort as a narrative poet. His poems reveal a talent which would have blossomed further had he lived longer. Two important themes in his poetry are love and death. Besides the poems included in this anthology, some of his other well-known poems are *The Bridal*, *The Golden Vase*, *Song of the Hindustanee Minstrel*, *Night*, *The Tomb*, *The Poet's Habitation* and *Poetic Haunts*.

I**The Harp of India**

Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
 Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain;
 Thy music once was sweet — who hears it now?
 Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
 Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain; 5
 Neglected, mute and desolate art thou,
 Like ruined monument on desert plain:
 O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
 Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,
 And many a wreath for them did Fame entwine 10
 Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave:
 Those hands are cold — but if thy notes divine
 May be by mortal wakened once again,
 Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

II**To the Pupils of the Hindu College**

Expanding like the petals of young flowers
 I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
 And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
 Your intellectual energies and powers,
 That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours) 5
 Their wings, to try their strength. O, how the winds
 Of circumstances, and freshening April showers
 Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds
 Of new perceptions shed their influence;
 And how you worship truth's omnipotence. 10
 What joyance rains upon me, when I see
 Fame in the mirror of futurity,
 Weaving the chaplets you have yet to gain,
 Ah, then I feel I have not lived in vain.

III**Chorus of Brahmins**

Scatter, scatter flowerets round,
 Let the tinkling cymbal sound;

Strew the scented orient spice,
Prelude to the sacrifice;
Bring the balm, and bring the myrrh, 5
Sweet as is the breath of her
Who upon the funeral pyre
Shall, ere Surya sets, expire.
Let pure incense to the skies
Like the heart's warm wishes rise, 10
Till, unto the lotus throne
Of the great Eternal One
High ascending, it may please
Him who guides our destinies.
Bring the pearl of purest white, 15
Bring the diamond flashing light;
Bring your gifts of choicest things,
Fans of peacocks' starry wings,
Gold refined, and ivory,
Branches of the sandal tree, 20
Which their fragrance still impart
Like the good man's injured heart,
This its triumph, this its boast,
Sweetest 'tis when wounded most!
Ere he sets, the golden sun 25
Must with richest gifts be won
Ere his glorious brow he lave
In yon sacred yellow wave,
Rising through the realms of air
He must hear the widow's prayer.— 30
Haste ye, haste, the day declines
Onward, onward while he shines,
Let us press, and all shall see
Glory of our Deity.

IV

A Walk by Moonlight

Last night — it was a lovely night,
And I was very blest—
Shall it not be for Memory
A happy spot to rest?

- Yes; there are in the backward past
 Soft hours to which we turn—
 Hours which, at distance, mildly shine,
 Shine on, but never burn. 8
- And some of these but yesternight
 Across my path were thrown,
 Which made my heart so very light,
 I think it could have flown. 12
- I had been out to see a friend
 With whom I others saw:
 Like minds to like minds ever tend—
 An universal law. 16
- And when we were returning home,
 “Come who will walk with me,
 A little way”, I said, and lo!
 I straight was joined by three: 20
- Three whom I loved — two had high thoughts
 And were, in age, my peers;
 And one was young, but oh! endeared
 As much as youth endears. 24
- The moon stood silent in the sky,
 And looked upon our earth:
 The clouds divided, passing by,
 In homage to her worth. 28
- There was a dance among the leaves
 Rejoicing at her power,
 Who robes for them of silver weaves
 Within one mystic hour. 32
- There was a song among the winds,
 Hymning her influence—
 That low-breathed minstrelsy which binds
 The soul to thought intense. 36
- And there was something in the night
 That with its magic wound us;
 For we — oh! we not only saw,
 But felt the moonlight around us. 40

- How vague are all the mysteries
Which bind us to our earth;
How far they send into the heart
Their tones of holy mirth; 44
- How lovely are the phantoms dim
Which bless that better sight,
That man enjoys when proud he stands
In his own spirit's light; 48
- When, like a thing that is not ours.
This earthliness goes by,
And we behold the spiritualness
Of all that cannot die. 52
- 'Tis then we understand the voice
Which in the night-wind sings,
And feel the mystic melody
Played on the forest's strings. 56
- The silken language of the stars
Becomes the tongue we speak,
And then we read the sympathy
That pales the young moon's cheek. 60
- The inward eye is open then
To glories, which in dreams
Visit the sleeper's couch, in robes
Woven of the rainbow's beams. 64
- I bless my nature that I am
Allied to all the bliss,
Which other worlds we're told afford,
But which I find in this. 68
- My heart is bettered when I feel
That even this human heart
To all around is gently bound,
And forms of all a part; 72
- That, cold and lifeless as they seem,
The flowers, the stars, the sky
Have more than common minds may deem
To stir our sympathy. 76
- Oh! in such moments can I crush
The grass beneath my feet?
Ah no; the grass has then a voice,
Its heart - I hear it beat. 80

V

Morning After a Storm

1

The elements were all at peace, when I
 Wandered abroad at morning's earliest hour,
 Not to inhale the fragrance of a flower,
 Or gaze upon a sun-illumined sky:
 To mark the havoc that the storm had made 5
 I wandered forth, and saw great Nature's power.
 The hamlet was in desolation laid
 By the strong spirits of the storm; there lay
 Around me many a branch of giant trees,
 Scattered as leaves are by the southern breeze 10
 Upon a brook, on an autumnal day;
 Cloud piled on cloud was there, and they did seem
 Like the fantastic figures of a dream,
 Till morning brighter grew, and then they rolled away.

2

Oh! Nature, how I love thy face! and now
 That there was freshness on thy placid brow,
 While I looked on thee with extreme delight,
 How leapt my young heart at the lovely sight!
 Heaven breathed upon me sweetly, and its breath 5
 Was like the fragrance of a rosy wreath.
 The river was wreck-strewn; its gentle breast
 Was like the heart of innocence, at rest;
 I stood upon its grass-grown bank, and smiled,
 Cleaving the wave with pebbles like a child, 10
 And marking, as they rose those circles fair
 Which grew, and grew, then vanished:—but oh! there
 I learned a moral lesson, which I'll store
 Within my bosom's deepest, inmost core!

KASIPRASAD GHOSE (1809-1873)

Kasiprasad Ghose was born in 1809 and was educated at Hindu College, Calcutta. After leaving the college, he edited an English weekly, *The Hindu Intelligence*. It was the publication of *The Shair and Other Poems* (1830) that brought him recognition as a poet. He was one of the earliest Indians to publish a regular volume of English verse and in his own day some of his poems were included in *The Bengal Annual*, an anthology brought out by Capt. D.L. Richardson.

In spite of occasional bright flashes, Kasiprasad Ghose's poetry is generally imitative and full of conventional descriptions and moralisings. He had a predilection for unhappy and unfortunate themes. He was one of the pioneers of Indo-Anglian poetry.

I**The Farewell Song**

Farewell my lovely native land!
 Where roses bloom in many a vale;
 Where green-clad hills majestic stand,
 Where flowerets woo the scented gale;
 Where Surya from his throne above 5
 With brightest colours paints the day;
 Where ripples rise to clasp their love,
 Th' eluding beams that o'er them play;
 Where when the queen of silent night
 Graces the star illumined hall, 10
 How on the heart her dewy light
 In streams o'erpowering still doth fall;
 Where mighty Ganga's billows flow
 And wander many a country by;
 Where ocean smiles serene below, 15
 Beneath thy blue and sunny sky.
 Where many sacred rivers lave
 Full many a wood or mountain green,
 Where pines and citrons towering wave
 In rural grandeur — stately scene! 20
 Land of the Gods and lofty name;
 Land of the fair and beauty's spell;
 Land of the bards of mighty fame;
 My native land! fore'er farewell!

II**The Moon in September**

How like the breath of love the rustling breeze
 Is breathing through the fragrant sandal trees!
 How sad but sweet the Bulbul sings above —
 The rose plucked off its stalk — his withering love!
 Like liquid silver yon soft-gliding stream 5
 Wanders and glistens in the lunar beam,
 Which like a modest maid, in love and fear
 Shrinks, half reluctant, from the clasp so dear

Of frequent heaving waves. But see! a cloud
Hath wrapt the Moon like Beauty in a shroud. 10
But now, she issuing shines with brightest sheen,
And tips with silver all the woodlands green.
Region of bliss! Irradiate gem of night!
Soother of sorrows! Orb of gentle light!
Full right the bards of ancient days suppose 15
Thou wert the region where the deities chose
To hide their nectar from the demons fell,
Destroyed or headlong hurled to deepest hell.
For still, resplendent Moon! whene'er we see
Thy placid face, and fondly gaze on thee, 20
Its gentleness upon the wounded soul
Exerts a healing power and calm control.

III

To a Dead Crow

Gay minstrel of the Indian clime!
How oft at morning's rosy prime
When thou didst sing in caw, caw numbers,
Vexed I've awoke from my sweet slumbers,
And to avoid that hateful sound,
That plagues a head howe'er profound,
Have walked out in my garden, where
Beside the tank, in many a square,
Sweet lilies, jasmines, roses bloom, 10
Far from those trees within whose gloom
Of foliage thick, thou hadst thy nest
From daily toil at night to rest.

Now lifeless on the earth, cold, bare,
Devoid alike of joy and care,
The offals of my meal no more 15
Attract thee as they did before
There's rubbish scattered round thee, but
Thy heart is still, thine eyes are shut.
No more that blunt yet useful beak
From carcasses thy food can seek, 20

Or catch the young unheeding mouse,
 Which from the flooring of my house
 Urged by its helpless luck, would stray
 And bask beneath the solar ray.

Gay minstrel! ne'er had Death before 25
 Its dart destructive, sharpened more
 To pierce a gayer, mortal heart
 Than thine, which ah! hath felt the smart!
 Though life no more is warm in thee,
 Yet thou dost look as though 't may be 30
 That life in thee is full and warm;
 Not cruel death could mar thy form:
 Thy features, one and all, possess
 Still, still, their former ugliness
 They are in truth the very same 35
 The Indian crow hath, known to fame.

Oh! may when death hath closed these eyes,
 And freed from earthly bondage, flies
 The spirit of eternity,
 Stretched at full length I lie like thee, 40
 On mother earth's cold lap so ne'er
 To spin such verses out I'll dare,
 And please the public ear again
 With such discordant, silly strain,
 As though didst once delight to pour 45
 At morn or noon, or evening hour.
 In sooth I promise this shall be
 My last line in addressing thee.

MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DUTT (1827-1873)

Michael Madhusudan Dutt was a Bengali by birth. In 1843 he converted to Christianity. He married a European and went to England where he qualified for the bar. After his return to India he moved to Madras where he edited an English newspaper. His most well-known work is *The Captive Ladie* (1849), a metrical romance centred round the legends about the Rajput king Prithviraj Chauhan and his captive princess Sanyogita. Another blank verse work is *Visions of the Past*. His Bengali epic *Meghnad-Badha* narrating the adventures of Indrajit, son of Ravana, secured him an immortal place among Bengali poets.

Madhusudan Dutt's English poems show the influence of the English romantics, especially that of Byron. Most of his poems deal with episodes and incidents from Indian history and legends.

I**My Thoughts, My Dreams****i**

My thoughts, my dreams, are all of thee,
 Though absent still thou seemest near;
 Thine image everywhere I see—
 Thy voice in every gale I hear. 4

ii

When softly o'er the evening sky,
 The stars seem twinkling one by one,
 The star of eve arrests my eye,
 As if it hit the sky alone— 8

iii

So like its tranquil lustre seems
 The light of that soft eye of thine—
 The star of hope, whose cheering beams
 Upon my heart so sweetly shine. 12

iv

The lake, whose placid waters lie
 Calm and unruffled by the wind
 Gives a fair image to mine eye
 Of thy serenely pensive mind. 16

v

The streams, that wander glad and free
 And make sweet music as they flow
 Remind me of thine hours of glee —
 Thy playful arts to banish woe. 20

vi

Thy soul is imaged by the hills
 That unshaken by the blast:
 And hence the hope my bosom fills,
 Thou wilt be constant to the last. 24

vii

Whate'er in this fair earth I see
'Mong Nature's form that's pure and bright
Reminds me ever, love, of thee
And brings thine image to my sight. 28

II

Oft Like a Sad Imprisoned Bird

Oft like a sad imprisoned bird I sigh
To leave this land, though mine own land it be;
Its green robed meads,— gay flowers and cloudless sky
Though passing fair, have but few charms for me. 5
For I have dreamed of climes more bright and free
Where virtue dwells and heaven-born liberty
Makes even the lowest happy; — where the eye
Doth sicken not to see man bend the knee
To sordid interest: — climes where science thrives.
And genius doth receive her guerdon meet; 10
Where man in all his truest glory lives,
And nature's face is exquisitely sweet:
For those fair climes I heave the impatient sigh,
There let me live and there let me die.

TORU DUTT (1856-1877)

Toru Dutt, one of the earliest of Indo-Anglian poets, led a life of tragedy and beauty. She died young leaving behind a modest corpus of poetry of which the poems included in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) are the most enduring. The *Ancient Ballads* consists of nine legends, most of them chosen from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Vishnu Purana*. They are Savitri, Lakshman, Jogadhya Uma, The Royal Ascetic and the Hind, Dhruva, Buttoo, Sindhu, Prahlad and Sita.

Toru Dutt's fame rests mainly on these ballads and a few other poems of which *Our Casuarina Tree* is the most well known. Most of her poems are narrative and her poetry as a whole exhibits a sophisticated poetic mind saturated with Hindu ethos and tempered by European cultural influences.

Toru was the first Indo-Anglian poet to interpret the spirit of India to the West. She was the first woman writer in Indo-Anglian literature. She left behind such a glory and legacy that even today we think of her as the marvellous young girl who died before her prime after blazing an immortal trail in Indo-Anglian poetry.

I

Lakshman

“Hark! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!

It is, — it is my husband’s voice!

Oh hasten, to his succour fly,

No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice.

He calls on thee, perhaps his foes

Environ him on all sides round,

That wail, — it means death’s final throes!

Why standest thou, as magic-bound?

8

“Is this a time for thought, — oh gird

Thy bright sword on, and take thy bow!

He heeds not, hears not any word,

Evil hangs over us, I know!

Swift in decision, prompt in deed,

Brave unto rashness, can this be,

The man to whom all looked at need?

Is it my brother that I see!

16

“Oh no, and I must run alone,

For further here I cannot stay;

Art thou transformed to blind dumb stone!

Wherefore this impious, strange delay!

That cry, — that cry, — it seems to ring

Still in my ears, — I cannot bear

Suspense; if help we fail to bring

His death at least we both can share”

24

“Oh calm thyself, Videhan Queen,

No cause is there for any fear,

Hast thou his prowess never seen?

Wipe off for shame that dastard tear!

What being of demonian birth

Could ever brave his mighty arm?

Is there a creature on earth

That dares to work our hero harm?

32

“The lion and the grisly bear

Cower when they see his royal look,

Sun-staring eagles of the air
 His glance of anger cannot brook,
 Pythons and cobras at his tread
 To their most secret coverts glide,
 Bowed to the dust each serpent head
 Erect before in hooded pride. 40

“Rakshasas, Danavs, demons, ghosts,
 Acknowledge in their hearts his might,
 And slink to their remotest coasts,
 In terror at his very sight.
 Evil to him! Oh fear it not,
 Whatever foes against him rise!
 Banish for aye the foolish thought,
 And be thyself, — bold, great, and wise. 48

“He call for help! Canst thou believe
 He like a child would shriek for aid
 Or pray for respite or reprieve —
 Not of such metal is he made!
 Delusive was that piercing cry, —
 Some trick of magic by the foe;
 He has a work, — he cannot die,
 Beseech me not from hence to go. 56

For here beside thee, as a guard
 ’Twas he commanded me to stay,
 And dangers with my life to ward
 If they should come across thy way.
 Send me not hence, for in this wood
 Bands scattered of the giants lurk,
 Who on their wrongs and vengeance brood,
 And wait the hour their will to work”. 64

“Oh shame! and canst thou make my weal
 A plea for lingering! Now I know
 What thou art, Lakshman! And I feel
 Far better were an open foe.
 Art thou a coward? I have seen
 Thy bearing in the battle-fray
 Where flew the death-fraught arrows keen,
 Else had I judged thee so today. 72

“But then thy leader stood beside!
Dazzles the cloud when shines the sun,
Reft of his radiance, see it glide
A shapeless mass of vapours dun;
So of thy courage, — or if not,
The matter is far darker dyed,
What makes thee loth to leave this spot?
Is there a motive thou wouldst hide?

80

“He perishes — well, let him die!
His wife henceforth shall be mine own!
Can that thought deep imbedded lie
Within thy heart’s most secret zone!
Search well and see! one brother takes
His kingdom, — one would take his wife!
A fair partition! — But it makes
Me shudder, and abhor my life.

88

“Art thou in secret league with those
Who from his hope the kingdom rent?
A spy from his ignoble foes
To track him in his banishment?
And wouldst thou at his death rejoice?
I know thou wouldst, or sure ere now
When first thou heardst that well known voice
Thou shouldst have run to aid, I trow.

96

“Learn this, — whatever comes may come,
But I shall not survive my Love, —
Of all my thoughts here is the sum!
Witness it gods in heaven above.
If fire can burn, or water drown,
I follow him: — choose what thou wilt,
Truth with its everlasting crown,
Or falsehood, treachery, and guilt.

104

“Remain here with a vain pretence
Of shielding me from wrong and shame,
Or go and die in his defence
And leave behind a noble name.
Choose what thou wilt, — I urge no more,
My pathway lies before me clear,

- I did not know thy mind before,
 I know thee now, — and have no fear.” 112
- She said and proudly from him turned, —
 Was this the gentle Sita? No.
 Flames from her eyes shot forth and burned,
 The tears therein had ceased to flow.
 “Hear me, O Queen, ere I depart,
 No longer can I bear thy words,
 They lacerate my inmost heart
 And torture me, like poisoned swords. 120
- “Have I deserved this at thine hand?
 Of lifelong loyalty and truth
 Is this the meed? I understand
 Thy feelings, Sita, and in sooth
 I blame thee not, — but thou mightst be
 Less rash in judgement, Look! I go,
 Little I care what comes to me
 Wert thou but safe, — God keep thee so! 128
- “In going hence I disregard
 The plainest orders of my chief,
 A deed for me, — a soldier, — hard
 And deeply painful, but thy grief
 And language, wild and wrong, allow
 No other course. Mine be the crime,
 And mine alone. — but oh, do thou
 Think better of me from this time. 136
- “Here with an arrow, lo, I trace
 A magic circle ere I leave,
 No evil thing within this space
 May come to harm thee or to grieve.
 Step not, for aught, across the line,
 Whatever thou mayst see or hear,
 So shalt thou balk the bad design
 Of every enemy I fear. 144
- “And now farewell! What thou hast said,
 Though it has broken quite my heart,

So that I wish I were dead —

I would before, O Queen, we part,
 Freely forgive, for well I know
 That grief and fear have made thee wild,
 We part as friends, — is it not so?”
 And speaking thus he sadly smiled.

152

“And oh ye sylvan gods that dwell
 Among these dim and sombre shades,
 Whose voices in the breezes swell
 And blend with noises of cascades,
 Watch over Sita, whom alone
 I leave, and keep her safe from harm,
 Till we return unto our own,
 I and my brother, arm in arm.

160

“For though ill omens round us rise
 And frighten her dear heart, I feel
 That he is safe. Beneath the skies
 His equal is not, — and his heel
 Shall tread all adversaries down,
 Whoever they may chance to be. —
 Farewell, O Sita! Blessings crown
 And peace for ever rest with thee!”

168

He said, and straight his weapons took
 His bow and arrows pointed keen,
 Kind, — nay, indulgent, — was his look,
 No trace of anger there was seen,
 Only a sorrow dark, that seemed
 To deepen his resolve to dare
 All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed,
 As out he strode with dauntless air.

176

II

Sita

Three happy children in a darkened room!
 What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?
 A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,
 And in its centre a cleared spot. — There bloom

Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace 5
 Tall trees; there in a quiet lucid lake
 The white swans glide; there, "whirring from the brake,"
 The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;
 There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;
 There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light, 10
 There dwells in peace the poet anchorite.
 But who is this fair lady? Not in vain
 She weeps, — for lo! at every tear she sheds
 Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
 And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads. 15
 It is an old, old story, and the lay
 Which has evoked sad Sita from the past
 Is by a mother sung 'Tis hushed at last
 And melts the picture from their sight away,
 Yet shall they dream of it until the day! 20
 When shall those children by their mother's side
 Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

III

Our Casuarina Tree

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
 The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
 Up to its very summit near the stars,
 A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound 5
 No other tree could live. But gallantly
 The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
 In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
 Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
 And oft at nights the garden overflows
 With one sweet song that seems to have no close, 10
 Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown
 At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
 Sometimes, and most in winter, — on its crest
 A gray baboon sits statue-like alone 15
 Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
 His puny offspring leap about and play;
 And far and near kokilas hail the day;

And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast, 20
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll, 25
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear 30
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away 35
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon: 40
And every time the music rose, — before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay 45
Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,
Dearer than life to me, alas! were they!
Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees — like those in Borrowdale, 50
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
“Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow”, and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse. 55

IV

Sonnet: The Lotus

Love came to Flora asking for a flower
 That would of flowers be undisputed queen,
 The lily and the rose, long, long had been
 Rivals for that high honour. Bards of power
 Had sung their claims. "The rose can never tower 5
 Like the pale lily with her Juno mien" —
 "But is the lily lovelier?" Thus between
 Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.
 "Give me a flower delicious as the rose
 And stately as the lily in her pride" 10 —
 "But of what colour?" — "Rose-red", "Love first chose,
 Then prayed, — "No, lily-white — or, both provide,"
 And Flora gave the lotus, "rose-red" dyed,
 And "lily-white", queenliest flower that blows.

V

The Tree of Life

Broad daylight, with a sense of weariness!
 Mine eyes were closed, but I was not asleep,
 My hand was in my father's, and I felt
 His presence near me. Thus we often past 5
 In silence, hour by hour. What was the need
 Of interchanging words when every thought
 That in our hearts arose, was known to each,
 And every pulse kept time? Suddenly there shone
 A strange light, and the scene as sudden changed.
 I was awake: — It was an open plain 10
 Illimitable, — stretching, stretching — oh, so far!
 And o'er it that strange light, — a glorious light
 Like that the stars shed over fields of snow
 In a clear, cloudless, frosty winter night,
 Only intenser in its brilliance calm 15
 And in the midst of that vast plain, I saw,
 For I was wide awake, — it was no dream,
 A tree with spreading branches and with leaves
 Of diverse kinds, — dead silver and live gold,
 Shimmering in radiance that no words may tell! 20

Beside the tree an angel stood; he plucked
A few small sprays, and bound them round my head.
Oh, the delicious touch of those strange leaves!
No longer throbb'd my brows, no more I felt
The fever in my limbs — “And oh” I cried, 25
“Bind too my father’s forehead with these leaves”.
One leaf the angel took and therewith touched
His forehead, and then gently whispered “Nay”
Never, oh never had I seen a face
More beautiful than that Angel’s, or more full 30
Of holy pity and of love divine.
Wondering I looked awhile, — then, all at once
Opened my tear-dimmed eyes — When lo! the light
Was gone — the light as of the stars when snow
Lies deep upon the ground. No more, no more, 35
Was seen the Angel’s face. I only found
My father watching patient by my bed,
And holding in his own, close-press’d, my hand.

MANMOHAN GHOSE

(1869-1924)

Manmohan Ghose, the elder brother of Sri Aurobindo, was born in 1869. Educated at Manchester, London, and Oxford he stayed for eighteen years in England before returning to India in 1898 to become a Professor of English in the Presidency College, Calcutta.

Manmohan's first known verse were those included in *Primavera*, a volume of poems published in England in 1890. His other publications are *Love Songs and Elegies* (1898) and *Songs of Love and Death* (1926) besides a poetic play *Nallo and Damayanti*, a lyrical epic *Adam Alarmed in Paradise* and two poetic sequences entitled *Immortal Eve* and *Orphic Mysteries*.

Manmohan Ghose was a quiet man and a disciplined poet. Though his life was darkened by the prolonged illness of his wife, Manmohan did not neglect either his duties as a teacher or his commitment to poetry. His wife died in 1918. In 1921 he underwent an unsuccessful operation for cataract in the eyes which left him almost completely blind for the rest of his life.

Manmohan's poems deal with love, nature, fate and man's destiny in the ever-changing universe. Throughout his life Manmohan suffered from an unmitigated hankering for England. In fact, one of the ruling passions in his life and poetry is the conflict between a nostalgic longing for England and the compulsions of staying in India.

Cloaked from the weather.
 How could your dear foot drag?
 Or did my courage sag?
 Heavy our way did lag, 10
 Pacing together.

I looked in your eyes afraid,
 Pale, pale, my dear!
 The stones hurt you, I said,
 To hide my fear. 15
 You smiled up in my face,
 You smothered every trace
 Of pain and langour.

Fondly my hand you took,
 But all your frail form shook; 20
 And the wild storm it struck
 At us in anger.

The wild beast woke anew;
 Closely you clung to me.
 Whiter and whiter grew 25
 Your cheek and hung to me.

Drooping and faint you laid
 Upon my breast your head, —
 Footsore and laggard.
 Look up, dear love, I cried: 30
 But my heart almost died,
 As you looked up and sighed, —
 Dead-weary, staggered.

There came a rider by;
 Gentle his look. 35
 I shuddered, for his eye
 I could not brook.

Muffled and cloaked he rode,
 And a white horse bestrode
 With noiseless gallop. 40
 His hat was mystery,
 His cloak was history;
 Pluto's consistory
 Or Charon's shallop.

One heart brimful of love for me, her love that encasketed all.
 Dear, like a trembling drop of dew I held thee in my hand;
 How of a sudden could I so spill as to lose it in infinite sand,
 Fresh on the rose-petal of life, with its fragrance through and
 through 15

Drenching my heart? I held thee long, thou trembling drop of dew.
 As I stood sadly secure of thee, as happy I looked my fill,
 Thou from that rose petal didst glide and vanish in salt sea rill.
 Now by the infinite shore I roam, the bliss that all things laves;
 Down-bent, weeping, I seek for thee by a mournful music of
 waves, 20

Deaf to the grandeur and the roar that hath washed thee away from me;
 In the streaming sands and my own salt tears I wildly look to thee.
 Thou with the freshness and the foam art glorying borne away;
 I mid wreck and driftwood grope and daily with all dismay.
 "Come back, tremulous heart," I sob, "heart's bliss, come back",
 I cry. 25

Only the solemn ecstasy of waters makes reply.

SRI AUROBINDO (1872-1950)

Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose) was born in 1872 in Calcutta. He was educated in England along with his poet brother Manmohan Ghose. He mastered English and the classical languages and began writing poetry very early. On his return from England in 1893, he was appointed in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda. In 1906 Bipin Chandra Pal invited him to become the editor of *Bande Mataram*, a journal devoted to the cause of India's freedom. Thus was Sri Aurobindo involved in India's struggle for freedom and was branded as a terrorist by the British. In 1910 Sri Aurobindo left for Pondicherry where he founded his now world famous ashram. He passed the rest of his life in Pondicherry and achieved fame not only as a poet but also as a philosopher who attracted disciples and admirers from all parts of the world.

Sri Aurobindo was a voracious reader and prolific writer. He wrote poems, plays, criticism and philosophical essays. *The Life Divine* is his most philosophical work in prose. His poetry is, by and large, spiritual, mystic, symbolic and philosophical. Sri Aurobindo's other important works are *Savitri*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *The Future Poetry*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and *The Human Cycle*. In addition, he made several translations from Bengali and Sanskrit classics into English. Sri Aurobindo shows great metrical skill and thematic diversity in his poetry.

Professor K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar considers him as 'the one uncontestedly outstanding figure in Indo-Anglian literature', a writer who 'was not merely a writer who happened to write in English but really an English writer'.

I**The Tiger and the Deer**

Brilliant, crouching, slouching, what crept through the green heart of
the forest,
Gleaming eyes and mighty chest and soft soundless paws of grandeur
and murder?
The wind slipped through the leaves as if afraid lest its voice and the
noise of its steps perturb the pitiless Splendour,
Hardly daring to breathe. But the great beast crouched and crept, and
crept and crouched a last time, noiseless, fatal,
Till suddenly death leaped on the beautiful wild deer as it drank 5
Unsuspecting from the great pool in the forest's coolness and shadow,
And it fell and, torn, died remembering its mate left sole in the deep
woodland, -
Destroyed, the mild harmless beauty by the strong cruel beauty in
Nature.
But a day may yet come when the tiger crouches and leaps no more in
the dangerous heart of the forest,
As the mammoth shakes no more the plains of Asia; 10
Still then shall the beautiful wild deer drink from the coolness of great
pools in the leaves' shadow.
The mighty perish in their might;
The slain survive the slayer.

II**The Blue Bird**

I am the bird of God in His blue;
Divinely high and clear
I sing the notes of the sweet and the true
For the god's and the seraph's ear. 4
I rise like a fire from the mortal's earth
Into a griefless sky
And drop in the suffering soil of his birth
Fire-seeds of ecstasy. 8
My pinions soar beyond Time and Space
Into unfading Light;

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>	31
I bring the bliss of the Eternal's face And the boon of the Spirit's sight.	12
I measure the worlds with my ruby eyes; I have perched on Wisdom's tree Thronged with the blossoms of Paradise By the streams of Eternity.	16
Nothing is hid from my burning heart; My mind is shoreless and still; My song is rapture's mystic art, My flight immortal will.	20
III	
A Dream of Surreal Science	
One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink At the Mermaid, capture immortality; A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.	4
A thyroid, meditating almost nude Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light And, rising from its might solitude, Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.	8
A brain by a disordered stomach driven Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell, From St Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven. Thus wagged on the surreal world, until	12
A scientist played with atoms and blew out The universe before God had time to shout.	14

SAROJINI NAIDU (1879-1949)

Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, was born in 1879 in a middle class Bengali family settled in Hyderabad. At the age of twelve, she stood first among the candidates who appeared at the Matriculation Examination from the erstwhile Madras Presidency. She went to England and studied in London and Cambridge. She began writing poetry while she was in England. The exotic lyric quality of her early poems attracted the attention of two English critics, Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons. They encouraged the young girl to write more but advised her to confine herself to Indian themes instead of trying to be 'falsely English'.

After her return to India, Sarojini plunged herself into poetic activity and the next twenty years of her life saw publication of three volumes of poetry, *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). Another volume entitled *The Feather of Dawn* was posthumously published in 1961.

Sarojini was not only a poet but also a fiery patriot who took an active part in the country's struggle for freedom. She did not write any substantial poetry during the last 32 years of her life; the poet in her gave place to the patriot. Sarojini entered the vortex of the freedom struggle along with Gandhiji and Nehru and rose to become the President of the Indian National Congress in 1925. After Independence she became the Governor of Uttar Pradesh.

Sarojini's poetry presents a kaleidoscope of Indian scenes, sights, sounds and experiences transmuted into a fantastic and sensitive vision of colour and rhythm. She is a poet of volatile imagination and lyrical tenderness endowed with an enormous sensitivity to sound, colour, rhythm and rhyme. A few of her poems border on the mysterious.

I

Palanquin-bearers

Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along,
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.
Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
We bear her along like a pearl on a string. 6

Softly, O softly we bear her along,
She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;
She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide,
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.
Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,
We bear her along like a pearl on a string. 12

II

Indian Dancers

Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what passionate bosoms
aflaming with fire
Drink deep of the hush of the hyacinth heavens that glimmer around
them in fountains of light;
O wild and entrancing the strain of keen music that cleaveth the stars
like a wail of desire,
And beautiful dancers with houri-like faces bewitch the 4
voluptuous watches of night.

The scents of red roses and sandalwood flutter and die in the maze of
their gem-tangled hair,
And smiles are entwining like magical serpents the poppies of lips that
are opiate-sweet;
Their glittering garments of purple are burning like tremulous dawns in
the quivering air,
And exquisite, subtle and slow are the tinkle and tread of 8
their rhythmical, slumber-soft feet.

Now silent, now singing and swaying and swinging like blossoms that
bend to the breezes or showers,

Now wantonly winding, they flash, now they falter, and, lingering,
 languish in radiant choir
 Their jewel-girt arms and warm, wavering lily-long fingers enchant
 through melodious hours,
 Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what passionate bosoms
 aflaming with fire! 12

III

To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus

Lord Buddha, on thy Lotus-throne,
 With praying eyes and hands elate,
 What mystic rapture dost thou own,
 Immutable and ultimate?
 What peace, unravished of our ken,
 Annihilate from the world of men? 6

The wind of change for ever blows
 Across the tumult of our way,
 Tomorrow's unborn griefs depose
 The sorrows of our yesterday.
 Dream yields to dream, strife follows strife,
 And Death unweaves the webs of Life. 12

For us the travail and the heat,
 The broken secrets of our pride,
 The strenuous lessons of defeat,
 The flower deferred, the fruit denied;
 But not the peace, supremely won,
 Lord Buddha, of thy Lotus-throne, 18

With futile hands we seek to gain
 Our inaccessible desire,
 Diviner summits to attain,
 With faith that sinks and feet that tire;
 But nought shall conquer or control
 The heavenward hunger of our soul. 24

The end, elusive and afar,
 Still lures us with its beckoning flight,
 And all our mortal moments are

A session of the Infinite.
How shall we reach the great, unknown
Nirvana of thy Lotus-throne?

IV

June Sunset

Here shall my heart find its haven of calm,
By rush-fringed rivers and rain-fed streams
That glimmer thro' meadows of lily and palm.
Here shall my soul find its true repose
Under a sunset sky of dreams 5
Diaphanous, amber and rose.
The air is aglow with the glint and whirl
Of swift wild wings in their homeward flight,
Sapphire, emerald, topaz, and pearl,
Afloat in the evening light. 10

A brown quail cries from the tamarisk bushes,
A bulbul calls from the cassia-plume,
And thro' the wet earth the gentian pushes
Her spikes of silvery bloom.
Where'er the foot of the bright shower passes 15
Fragrant and fresh delights unfold;
The wild fawns feed on the scented grasses,
Wild bees on the cactus-gold.

An ox-cart stumbles upon the rocks,
And a wistful music pursues the breeze 20
From a shepherd's pipe as he gathers his flocks
Under the *pipal*-trees.
And a young *Banjara* driving her cattle
Lifts up her voice as she glitters by
In an ancient ballad of love and battle 25
Set to the beat of a mystic tune,
And the faint stars gleam in the eastern sky
To herald a rising moon.

V**The Lotus
(To M.K. Gandhi)**

O mystic lotus, sacred and sublime,
 In myriad-petalled grace inviolate,
 Supreme o'er transient storms of tragic Fate,
 Deep-rooted in the waters of all Time,
 What legions loosed from many a far-off clime 5
 Of wild-bee hordes with lips insatiate,
 And hungry winds with wings of hope or hate,
 Have thronged and pressed round thy miraculous prime
 To devastate thy loveliness, to drain
 The midmost rapture of thy glorious heart... 10
 But who could win thy secret, who attain
 Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma's breath,
 Or pluck thine immortality, who art
 Coeval with the Lords of Life and Death.

SHIV K. KUMAR

(b. 1921)

Shiv K. Kumar was born in Lahore in 1921 and was educated at the local Foreman Christian College and later at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, from where he received his doctorate. He has travelled extensively and was a British Council Visitor at Cambridge (1961), a Research Fellow at Yale (1962), Visiting Professor at Marshall (1968) and Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Northern Iowa (1969). For a few years he was Professor and Chairman of the Department of English at the University of Hyderabad. Kumar's poems have appeared in several Indian and foreign journals like *Quest*, *Ariel* (Leeds) and *Meanjin Quarterly* (Melbourne). His first collection of poems *Articulate Silences* was published in 1970. Since then he has published several volumes of poetry such as *Cobwebs in the Sun* (1974), *Subterfuges* (1975), *Woodpeckers* (1979), *Broken Columns* (1984) and *Trapfalls in the Sky* (1987). He was awarded the Central Sahitya Academy Prize for the best writing in English in 1987. His critical writings include *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel*, *British Romantic Poets: Recent Revaluations* and *British Victorian Literature: Recent Revaluations*.

The major themes in Kumar's poetry are love, sex and companionship, birth and death and the sense of boredom and horror arising out of the anguish of urban life experiences. He adopts the ironic mode of a confessional poet especially in poems in which he explores the self through interaction with others. Like Robert Frost, he often selects a simple and unpretentious fact or incident and develops it into a meditative experience. *Indian Women*, *A Mango Vendor* and *Rickshaw-Wallah* illustrate this aspect of Kumar's poetry. Yet another trait in his poetry is the harmonious mingling of wit, humour and irony. With a rare insight into the ridiculous aspect of a situation, experience or fact. Kumar digs at follies and pretensions as seen in poems like *Poet Laureate* and *Epitaph on an Indian Politician*.

Kumar is a scholarly poet with the entire range of English literature at his command. The dichotomy between the East and the West is another major theme in his poetry. Autobiographical elements overflow in poems such as *Broken Columns*. Kumar writes, "In view of my extensive travelling in the West, I seem to be constantly returning to the theme of cultural interaction. I feel, unconsciously, I guess, that with me contrast is almost a mode of perception. It is this awareness that compels me to recapture my days in New York as a kind of life-in-death."

I

Indian Women

In this triple-baked continent
women don't etch angry eyebrows
on mud walls.

 Patiently they sit
 like empty pitchers

5

 on the mouth of the village well
pleating hope in each braid
of their mississippi-long hair
looking deep into the water's mirror
for the moisture in their eyes.

10

 With zodiac doodlings on the sands
 they guard their tattooed thighs

waiting for their men's return
till even the shadows
roll up their contours

15

 and are gone
 beyond the hills.

II

An Encounter with Death

The blue-bells clanged like
muffled cymbals, beating
the retreat in a weird, funeral sound.
Zeus, my white Alsatian, resting
on his massive haunches, suddenly
struck up a plaintive whine.

5

But that gusty afternoon
I sensed not these forebodings,
still joking with my mother who reclined
against the Mugal pillows on the divan,
like an empress, four score and three.

10

She laughed boisterously at something I said
or unsaid. And then a pause, and then as though
the door-handle shook, but it was her throat

caught in the noose of convulsive gasps, rattling
like tiny pebbles in an earthen pitcher 15

The dog's whine broke into three yelps—
my mother's hand was on her heart.

I was undone.

In my flush I heard the snapping of some
mysterious bonds. 20

For thirteen days, say the Hindus, the departed
soul hovers round its earthly habitat,
and so for thirteen days I have communed with the spirit

Whenever a door rattles, a nipping
wind howls, a dog whines or
blue-bells clang, I feel her
presence within me. 25

III

Epitaph on an Indian Politician

Vasectomised of all genital urges
for love and beauty,
he often crossed floors
as his wife leaped across beds.

In his kitchen garden he grew
only tongues and lungs
to blow into fragile mikes
powerful harangues 5

half conceived in haste.

All his life he shambled around
in homespun yarn,
socialising his soul, 10

while his sons flourished
in the private sectors of big business.

Here he lies, silenced by tongue
cancer, during the stormy budget session, 15

in the Lord's year of grace 1969 —
My his soul rest in peace!

NISSIM EZEKIEL

(b. 1924)

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the leading Indo-Anglian poets today. He was born in Bombay of Bene-Israel parents. He took his Master's degree in English literature in 1947, went to England in 1948 and studied philosophy at Birbeck College under C.E.M. Joad.

Ezekiel had been a professor of English in one of the Bombay colleges. Later he lectured on American literature at the University of Bombay. He retired from his position as Reader in English in 1985 and now lives at his family home 'The Retreat' in Bombay. He was a Visiting Professor at the University of Leeds in 1964. He recited his poems in a number of American colleges during a tour in 1967. Besides teaching and writing, Ezekiel has tried his hand at various occupations. He started as a copywriter in a Bombay agency of which he became the manager later. He also worked as a manager of 'Chemould', a frame manufacturing company, where he wrote poetry during his spare time. For some time during the sixties he edited the elite journal *Quest*. He was the poetry editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and the editor of *Imprint*. Besides contributing to several periodicals both at home and abroad, Ezekiel has authored seven volumes of poetry since 1952. In 1983 he was selected for the Central Sahitya Akademi Award for the best writing in English.

Ezekiel's important works are *A Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) and *Latter Day Psalms* (1982). In addition to these he has published *Three Plays* (1970) and edited a few books including *An Emerson Reader* (1965).

Ezekiel is a poet of sophisticated manner and tone. His best poems show an introspective and meditative finesse. His conversational style and unpretentious mode reveal a highly disciplined craftsman who has perfect control over his medium. He is essentially an urban poet and

there are several excellent poems on the city of Bombay revealing the poet's insight into the life of that 'barbarous city'.

Broadly speaking, there are three main themes in Ezekiel's poetry—the sensation of oppression in a crowded civilization represented by his native city, Bombay; the sensual woman we often encounter lingering on the borders of our respectable society, and the moral self of the poet expressed through his devastating irony.

I

Background Casually

1

A poet-rascal-clown was born,
The frightened child who would not eat
Or sleep, a boy of meagre bone.
He never learnt to fly a kite,
His borrowed top refused to spin. 5

I went to Roman Catholic school,
A mugging jew among the wolves.
They told me I had killed the Christ,
That year I won the scripture prize.
A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears. 10

I grew in terror of the strong
But undernourished Hindu lads,
Their prepositions always wrong,
Repelled me by passivity.
One noisy day I used a knife. 15

At home on Friday nights the prayers
Were said. My morals had declined.
I heard of Yoga and of Zen.
Could I, perhaps, be rabbi-saint?
The more I searched, the less I found 20

Twenty-two: time to go abroad.
First, the decision, then a friend
To pay the fare. Philosophy,
Poverty and Poetry, three
Companions shared my basement room. 25

2

The London seasons passed me by.
I lay in bed two years alone,
And then a Woman came to tell
My willing ears I was the Son
Of Man. I knew that I had failed 30

- In everything, a bitter thought.
 So, in an English cargo-ship
 Taking French guns and mortar shells
 To Indo-China, scrubbed the decks,
 And learned to laugh again at home. 35
- How to feel it home, was the point.
 Some reading had been done, but what
 Had I observed, except my own
 Exasperation? All Hindus are
 Like that, my father used to say, 40
- When someone talked too loudly, or
 Knocked at the door like the Devil.
 They hawked and spat. They sprawled around.
 I prepared for the worst. Married,
 Changed jobs, and saw myself a fool. 45
- The song of my experience sung,
 I knew that all was yet to sing.
 My ancestors, among the castes,
 Were aliens crushing seed for bread
 (The hooded bullock made his rounds) 50
- 3
- One among them fought and taught,
 A Major bearing British arms.
 He told my father sad stories
 Of the Boer War. I dreamed that
 Fierce men had bound my feet and hands. 55
- The later dreams were all of words.
 I did not know that words betray
 But let the poems come, and lost
 That grip on things the worldly prize.
 I would not suffer that again. 60
- I look about me now, and try
 To formulate a plainer view:
 The wise survive and serve — to play
 The fool, to cash in on
 The inner and the outer storms. 65

The Indian landscape sears my eyes.
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners.
They say that I am singular,
Their letters overstate the case.

70

I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am.

75

II

A Morning Walk

Driven from his bed by troubled sleep
In which he dreamt of being lost
Upon a hill too high for him
(A modest hill whose sides grew steep),
He stood where several highways crossed
And saw the city, cold and dim,
Where only human hands sell cheap.

5

It was an old, recurring dream,
That made him pause upon a height.
Alone, he waited for the sun,
And felt his blood a sluggish stream.
Why had it given him no light,
His native place he could not shun,
The marsh where things are what they seem?

10

Barbaric city sick with slums
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many-tongued,

15

20

Whose wages are in words and crumbs.
He turned away. The morning breeze
Released no secrets to his ears.

The more he stared the less he saw
 Among the individual trees. 25
 The middle of his journey nears.
 Is he among the men of straw
 Who think they go which way they please?

Returning to his dream, he knew
 That everything would be the same. 30
 Constricting as his formal dress,
 The pain of his fragmented view
 Too late and small his insights came,
 And now his memories oppress,
 His will is like the morning dew. 35

The garden on the hill is cool,
 Its hedges cut to look like birds
 Or mythic beasts are still asleep.
 His past is like a muddy pool
 From which he cannot hope for words. 40
 The city wakes, where fame is cheap,
 And he belongs, an active fool.

III

Enterprise

It started as a pilgrimage,
 Exalting minds and making all
 The burdens light. The second stage
 Explored but did not test the call.
 The sun beat down to match our rage. 5

We stood it very well, I thought,
 Observed and put down copious notes
 On things the peasants sold and bought.
 The way of serpents and of goats.
 Three cities where a sage had taught. 10

But when the differences arose
 On how to cross a desert patch,
 We lost a friend whose stylish prose
 Was quite the best of all our batch.
 A shadow falls on us — and grows. 15

Another phase was reached when we
Were twice attacked, and lost our way.
A section claimed its liberty
To leave the group. I tried to pray.
Our leader said he smelt the sea

20

We noticed nothing as we went,
A straggling crowd of little hope,
Ignoring what the thunder meant,
Deprived of common needs like soap.
Some were broken, some merely bent.

25

When, finally, we reached the place,
We hardly knew why we were there.
The trip had darkened every face,
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
Home is where we have to gather grace.

30

IV

Marriage

Lovers, when they marry, face
Eternity with touching grace.
Complacent at being fated
Never to be separated.

4

The bride is always pretty, the groom
A lucky man. The darkened room
Roars out the joy of flesh and blood.
The use of nakedness is good.

8

I went through this, believing all,
Our love denied the Primal Fall.
Wordless, we walked among the trees,
And felt immortal as the breeze.

12

However many times we came
Apart, we came together. The same
Thing over and over again.
Then suddenly the mark of Cain

16

Began to show on her and me.
Why should I ruin the mystery
By harping on the suffering rest,
Myself a frequent wedding guest?

20

V

The Railway Clerk

It isn't my fault.
 I do what I'm told
 but still I am blamed.
 This year, my leave application
 was twice refused. 5
 Every day there is so much work
 and I don't get overtime.
 My wife is always asking for more money.
 Money, money, where to get money?
 My job is such, no one is giving bribe, 10
 While other clerks are in fortunate position,
 and no promotion even because I am not graduate.
 I wish I was bird.
 I am never neglecting my responsibility,
 I am discharging it properly, 15
 I am doing my duty,
 but who is appreciating?
 Nobody, I am telling you.
 My desk is too small,
 the fan is not repaired for two months, 20
 three months
 I am living far off in Borivli
 my children are neglecting studies,
 how long this can go on?
 Once a week, I see a film 25
 and then I am happy, but not otherwise.
 Also, I have good friends,
 that is only consolation.
 Sometimes we are meeting here or there
 and having long chat. 30
 We are discussing country's problems.
 Some are thinking of foreign
 but due to circumstances, I cannot think.
 My wife's mother is confined to bed
 and I am only support. 35

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

(b. 1928)

Jayanta Mahapatra was born in 1928 in Cuttack. He teaches Physics at Ravenshaw College. His poems have appeared in several Indian and foreign journals. *Svayamvara and Other Poems* appeared in 1971. His other earlier publications were *Close the Sky* (1971) and *Countermeasures* (1973). In 1975 Mahapatra was awarded the Jacob Glatstein Memorial Prize instituted by the Modern Poetry Association, Chicago. In 1976 he toured the USA as a visiting writer. Since 1976 Mahapatra has brought out five collections of poems — *A Rain of Nights* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* (1980), *Relationship* (1980) and *Life Signs* (1983). He won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981.

Mahapatra is deeply steeped in Indian tradition. He is a poet with great fidelity to his native environment and region. His poems reveal a mythic consciousness of the Orissa landscape and the ancient culture of that region combined with a deeply reflective vision of life. There is an abundance of local details in his poetry. He is a significant 'private lyric voice' meditating over the way of life and experiences of a region, yet reflecting the ramifications of the national culture. Mahapatra's sensibility seeks out images from the world of decay and pain and subtle ironies impart a certain permanence to his vision. His experiments in Indian English poetry have helped evolve a language eminently evocative and truly adapted to the Indian ethos.

Mahapatra says that his attempt has been to 'return to my roots so that they reveal who I am'.

I**Thoughts of the Future**

Cross-legged, sunk in a rope-cot throughout the day,
 he pores devoutly over papers, across wriggly letters
 that wear the fates of planets, stars. Nothing
 profanes him. Faith eases the run of his household history:
 the cool beliefs of sandalwood's salve on his brow, 5
 a sacred thread the colour of his hidden bone,
 the tangle of hard births in the unshaven lock
 of holy hair behind the head.
 Fair, haughty Jagannath Mishra,
 his loose belly-flesh quivers as he voices a question: 10
 an illness in my past somewhere?
 My father's answer ends up my thirteen years.
 The man looks like a monsoon-month toad.
 His cold Hindu eye will not discard anything.
 Mute, I fidget seated on a low stool beside his bed. 15
 Father glances sharply at me: perhaps the fee
 he has to pay burns the skin along his spine.
 The world's the same.
 It's the future's face he would not offend.
 A woman of the house peeks through 20
 the discoloured curtain in the door. Her pumpkin-face
 wearily backs in again, past the gaze of stone.
 The pundit leans forward to us,
 his eye conspiratorial, every act a ritual.
 Their meanings prostrate on the green field of time. 25
 The fragments he makes of time freeze my father;
 between the right moments and the inauspicious
 my thirteenth year stands as a dead wall.
 May be funeral pyres shine through Father's eyes.
 On my future the pundit nods. The world changes. 30
 Eyes of an alien British school teacher
 decorate my brick wall like festive wick-lamps in the dark.
 I escape the winds of other sons blowing down the veins.
 (I studied in the Stewart European, with the ecclesiastics.)
 At last the session over, the fee is paid. 35

We tiptoe back slowly into the street,
the future of my body dividing us, across the present.
The walk of wooden clogs creeps through our fears.
I look up at a father's face: its simple sky
twisting with the stain of inheritance,
the dilemma of worlds peddled between those two,
making real the circle which *karma* leaves behind
like a halo left behind by the rain —
his eyes dry and stiffened as the toes of a toad.

40

II

The Bride

She who fought her fevered farewell all night
and cried child's tears upon the rock-faced
silence of a father's days, awaits the summit
of her hopes that revolved
around many a virgin night,
a midnight vigil fashioned for her
to carve an artificial dell of joy
from a stranger's anonymous care.

5

Where the starlight at the window stares
at the perfumed innocence of her painted hands
and spills the lyric hush of love in the air,
she remembers the taste-of-sin smiles
on her sisters' faces to feel the secret flutter
of exiled body, the pressure of sunripe breast;
yet shall this end

15

in the fabled pride of a dying sunset?
And, she herself, so mad and drunk
of her lone vigil, is tuned to the stealthy
opening of the door, a mammoth's footfalls
upon the floor that envelop her bones
in a common harlot's fare,
for this moment when the bedecked bride,
as stone at touch and belled,

20

dreads the thunder and lets
the fierce lightning race
wave after wave through her
sun-inflamed flesh.

25

III**The Mountain**

Shackled to the earth it stands, all its dead weight.
 In the darkness of evening
 silence and pressure only,
 multiplying, adding, subtracting,
 In the abyssal heart. 5

Each day,
 falling to pieces under the straddling sunlight,
 it gives clear proof that one
 might still reconstruct one's life. Rigid,
 yet strangely impotent, 10
 perhaps it eagerly waits for the world to speak,
 for the mute clock to strike again,
 for a new kind of society to form from the ruins of hate.

And all day
 we climb those slopes which do not ease at all, 15
 where unfinished time blots out the differences
 among us, as it sets itself irremediably on the peak.

Late in the evening of life
 an embarrassment prevents the world from speaking.
 Can the wide valley here down below 20
 lessen the mountain's weight? Here,
 where we are afraid within ourselves,
 and the earth is thin and sad with insufficiency;
 the wind razes the fields of our rights
 and the great bulk of conscience stirs, 25
 moving in its process of exorcism.

A.K. RAMANUJAN (b. 1929)

A.K. Ramanujan was born in Mysore and educated at the local Maharaja's College. He began his career as a lecturer in English in Quilon and later worked in Belgaum and Baroda before migrating to Chicago in 1962. He was a Fulbright scholar at Indiana University and later moved on to Chicago University where he is now Professor of Dravidian Studies in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations.

Ramanujan's first collection of poems *The Striders* appeared in 1966. In 1969 he won the gold medal of the Tamil Writers' Association for his translation of the classical Tamil anthology *Kurunthohai* into English under the title *The Interior Landscape. Relations* appeared in 1971. His next book, *Speaking of Siva*, translations from medieval Kannada literature, was given the National Book Award in 1974. Ramanujan's other important publications are *The Literature of India: An Introduction* (1975) and *Selected Poems* (1976).

Ramanujan's poetry is an amalgam of Indian and American experiences. Its origin is 'recollected personal emotion'. He draws upon our cultural traditions and the ethos of the orthodox Hindu family life. The major theme in his poetry is a pensive obsession with the familial and racial reminiscences. Even ordinary incidents and experiences seem to provide him with new insights enabling his memory to travel back nostalgically into the happenings of two or three generations.

His favourite disciplines — linguistics and anthropology — gave him the 'outer forms — linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience'. Ramanujan has drawn effectively on the folklore tradition and each poem presents a kaleidoscopic view of the colour patterns of existence. Passion and reason characterise his poetry suggesting a desperate need for evolving an integrated personality in a chaotic world of several alienations.

Ramanujan is an exile reluctant to sever his links with the springs of his cultural traditions. The problems of life and poetry are basically the same for him. His chief concern has been to reconcile the recollected emotions with the vulnerability of the present and the future. "It is not an emotion recollected in tranquillity but recollection emotionalised in tranquil moments that appears to be the driving force behind much of Ramanujan's poetry."

I

The Striders

And search
for certain thin-
stemmed, bubble-eyed water bugs.
See them perch
on dry capillary legs 5
weightless
on the ripple skin
of a stream.

No, not only prophets
walk on water. This bug sits 10
on a landslide of lights
and drowns eye-
deep
into its tiny strip
of sky. 15

II

Of Mothers, among Other Things

I smell upon this twisted
blackbone tree the silk and white
petal of my mothers youth.
From her ear-rings three diamonds
splash a handful of needles, 5
and I see my mother run back
from rain to the crying cradles.
The rains tack and sew
with broken thread the rags
of the tree-tasselled light. 10
But her hands are a wet eagle's
two black pink-crinkled feet,
one talon crippled in a garden-
trap set for a mouse. Her sarees
do not cling: they hang, loose 15
feather of a onetime wing.

My cold parchment tongue licks bark
 in the mouth when I see her four
 still sensible fingers slowly flex
 to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor. 20

III

Still Another for Mother

And that woman
 beside the wreckage van
 on Hyde Park street: she will not let me rest
 as I slowly cease to be the town's brown stranger and guest.

She had thick glasses on. Was large, buxom, 5
 like some friend's mother. Wearing chintz
 like all of them who live there, eating mints
 on the day's verandahs.

And the handsome 10
 short-limbed man with a five-finger patch of gray
 laid on his widows' peak, turned and left her
 as I walked at them out of the after-
 glow of a whisky sour. She stood there
 as if nothing had happened yet (perhaps nothing did)
 flickered at by the neons on the door, 15
 the edges of her dress a fuzz, lit red.
 Fumbled at keys, wishbone shadows on the catwalk,
 as though they were not keys, but words after talk,
 or even beads.

He walked straight on, towards me,
 beyond me, didn't stop at the clicks of red 20
 on the signals.

And she just stood
 there, looking at his walking on, me
 looking at her looking on. She wanted then
 not to be absent perhaps on the scene 25
 if he once so much as even thought
 of looking back.

Perhaps they had fought.
 Worse still, perhaps they had not fought.

A.K. Ramanujan 57

I discovered that mere walking was polite 30
and walked on, as if nothing had happened
to her, or to me:

 something opened
in the past and I heard something shut
in the future, quietly, 35

 like the heavy door
of my mother's black-pillared, nineteenth-century
silent house, given on her marriage day
to my father, for a dowry.

IV

Snakes

No, it does not happen
when I walk through the woods.
But, walking in museums of quartz
or the aisles of bookstacks,
looking at their geometry
without curves
and the layers of transparency
that make them opaque,
dwelling on the yellower vein
in the yellow amber 10
or touching a book that has gold
on its spine,

 I think of snakes.

The twirls of their hisses
rise like the tiny dust-cones on slow-noon roads 15
winding through the farmers' feet.
Black lorgnettes are etched on their hoods,
ridiculous, alien, like some terrible aunt,
a crest among tiles and scales
that moult with the darkening half 20
of every moon.

A basketful of ritual cobras
comes into the tame little house,
their brown-wheat glisten ringed with ripples

- They lick the room with their bodies, curves 25
 uncurling, writing a sibilant alphabet of panic
 on my floor. Mother gives them milk
 in saucers. She watches them suck
 and bare the black-line design
 etched on the brass of the saucer. 30
 The snakeman wreathes their writhing
 round his neck
 for father's smiling
 money. But I scream.
- Sister ties her braids 35
 with a knot of tassel.
 But the weave of her knee-long braid has scales,
 their gleaming held by a score of clean new pins.
 I look till I see her hair again.
- My night full of ghosts from a sadness 40
 in a play, my left foot listens to my right footfall,
 a clockwork clicking in the silence
 within my walking.
- The clickshod heel suddenly strikes
 and slushes on a snake: I see him turn, 45
 the green white of his belly
 measured by bluish nodes, a water-bleached lotus stalk
 plucked by a landsman hand. Yet panic rushes
 my body to my feet, my spasms wring
 and drain his fear and mine. I leave him sealed, 50
 a flat-head whiteness on a stain.
- Now
- frogs can hop upon this sausage rope,
 flies in the sun will mob the look in his eyes,
 and I can walk through the woods. 55

ARUN KOLATKAR**(b. 1932)**

Arun Kolatkar was born in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, in 1932 and lives in Bombay where he is employed as a graphic artist in an advertising agency. He is a bilingual poet writing in both English and Marathi. His first book of poems *Jejuri* appeared in 1976 and was awarded the Commonwealth poetry prize for the best first book of poetry in English. *Jejuri* is a long poem in thirty-one sections concerned with a visit to Jejuri, a place in western Maharashtra sanctified by the Khandoba temple. The poem combines the irreverent urbanite attitude of the pilgrim Manohar with a colloquial speech rhythm and irony to produce an impact of beauty and power.

Kolatkar's long poem *The Boatripe* is a series of surreal perceptions characterised by contemplativeness. His poetry has an incantatory quality which must be the result of his familiarity with classical Indian narrative verse. A peculiar kind of stillness haunts *The Boatripe* which has borrowed its rhythm from the surge of the sea.

Kolatkar's poems are marked by his inquisitive eye for detail. Some of his shorter poems are attempts to establish correspondence with reality through the employment of humour and irony. Poems like *Yeshwant Rao* and *The Station Master* come under this category.

From Jejuri**I****The Bus**

The tarpaulin flaps are buttoned down on the windows of the state transport bus all the way up to Jejuri	3
A cold wind keeps whipping and slapping a corner of the tarpaulin at your elbow.	6
You look down the roaring road. You search for signs of daybreak in what little light spills out of the bus	9
Your own divided face in a pair of glasses on an old man's nose is all the countryside you get to see.	12
You seem to move continually forward towards a destination just beyond the caste-mark between his eyebrows.	15
Outside, the sun has risen quietly. It aims through an eyelet in the tarpaulin and shoots at the old man's glasses.	18
A sawed-off sunbeam comes to a rest gently against the driver's right temple. The bus seems to change direction.	21
At the end of the bumpy ride with your own face on either side when you get off the bus	24
you don't step inside the old man's head.	

II

Irani Restaurant Bombay

the cockeyed shah of iran watches the cake
decompose carefully in the cracked showcase;
distracted only by a fly on the make
as it finds in a loafer's wrist an operational base. 4

dogmatically green and elaborate trees defeat
breeze. the crooked swan begs pardon
if it disturb the pond; the road neat
as a needle points at a lovely cottage with a garden. 8

the thirsty loafer sees the stylised perfection
of such a landscape in a glass of water wobble
a sticky tea print for his scholarly attention
singles out a verse from the blank testament of the table 12

an instant of mirrors turns the tables on space.
while promoting darkness under the chair, the cat
in its two timing sleep dreams evenly and knows
dreaming as an administrative problem. his cigarette 16

lit, the loafer, affecting the exactitude of a pedagogue
places the match in the tea circle and sees it rise:
as when to identify a corpse one visits a morgue
and politely the corpse rises from a block of ice 20

the burnt match with the tea circle makes a rude
compass, the heretic needle jabs a black star.
tables, chairs, mirrors are night that needs to be sewed
and cashier is where at seams it comes apart. 24

KAMALA DAS

(b. 1934)

Kamala Das was born in 1934 at Punnayurkulam in Kerala. She belongs to a family of poets and writers, her mother Balamoni Amma herself being a renowned Malayalam poet. Kamala Das had very little formal education. At the age of fifteen she was married and she spent most of her life in Calcutta. Now she lives in Trivandrum.

Kamala Das's first book of poems *Summer in Calcutta* was published in 1965. Her other important verse collections are *The Descendants* (1968) and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1971). She published her *Collected Poems* in 1984 and for this she was awarded the Central Sahitya Akademi Prize in 1985. Her explosive autobiography *My Story* was translated into fourteen languages. Besides these, she has published a novel *Alphabet of Lust* and a number of stories for children.

Kamala Das is a bilingual writer. She writes short stories in Malayalam under the pseudonym Madhavikutty. She was given the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969 for *Thanuppu* (Cold), a collection of short stories in Malayalam. Earlier in 1963 she had been given the Asian Poetry Award sponsored by the Manila Centre of the PEN. For some time she was the poetry editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and of *Youth Times*, Delhi.

Kamala Das is predominantly a poet of love and pain. She hardly ventures outside her personal world and there is a remarkably felt confessional strain in her poetry. Her main themes are love, sexuality, sickness, mortality, loneliness and despair. She expresses her need for love and affection with a sense of urgency. In some of her poems there is a touch of pathos born of nostalgia for home and childhood.

Kamala Das's poems reveal her sensitivity as a woman who seems to struggle for a few moments of happiness and tranquillity in a world of despair and sterility. She is often compared with Sylvia Plath in her quest for identity through self-revelation.

I

A Hot Noon in Malabar

This is a noon for beggars with whining
 Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
 With parrots in a cage and fortune cards
 All stained with time, for brown *kurava* girls
 With old eyes, who read palms in light singsong 5
 Voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
 On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
 Bangles, all covered with the dust of roads,
 For all of them, whose feet, devouring rough
 Miles, grow cracks on the heels, so that when they 10
 Clambered up our porch, the noise was grating,
 Strange This is a noon for strangers who part
 The window-drapes and peer in, their hot eyes
 Brimming with the sun, not seeing a thing in
 Shadowy rooms and turn away and look 15
 So yearningly at the brick-ledged well. This
 Is a noon for strangers with mistrust in
 Their eyes, dark, silent ones who rarely speak
 At all, so that when they speak, their voices
 Run wild, like jungle-voices. Yes, this is 20
 A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love. To
 Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet
 Stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my
 Home in Malabar, and I so far away

II

The Dance of the Eunuchs

It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came
 To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals
 Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling,
 Jingling. Beneath the fiery gulmohur, with
 Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing they danced and 5
 They danced, oh, they danced till they bled ... There
 were green

Tattoos on their cheeks, jasmines in their hair, some
 Were dark, and some were almost fair. Their voices
 Were harsh, their songs melancholy; they sang of
 Lovers dying and of children left unborn 10
 Some beat their drums; others beat their sorry breasts
 And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy. They
 Were thin in limbs and dry; like half-burnt logs from
 Funeral pyres, a drought and a rottenness
 Were in each of them. Even the crows were so 15
 Silent on trees, and the children, wide-eyed, still;
 All were watching these poor creatures' convulsions
 The sky crackled then, thunder came, and lightning
 And rain, a meagre rain that smelt of dust in
 Attics and the urine of lizards and mice.... 20

III

The Old Playhouse

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
 In the long summer of your love so that she would forget
 Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but
 Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
 Pathways of the sky. It was not to gather knowledge 5
 Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn
 What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every
 Lesson you gave was about yourself. You were pleased
 With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow
 Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured 10
 Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed
 My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices. You called me wife,
 I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
 To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
 Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and 15
 Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
 Questions I mumbled incoherent replies. The summer
 Begins to pall. I remember the ruder breezes
 Of the fall and the smoke from burning leaves. Your room is
 Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always 20
 Shut. Even the air-conditioner helps so little,

All pervasive is the male scent of your breath. The cut flowers
In the vases have begun to smell of human sweat. There is
No more singing, no more dance, my mind is an old
Playhouse with all its lights put out. The strong man's

technique is

25

Always the same, he serves his love in lethal doses,
For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted
By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last
An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors
To shatter and the kind night to erase the water.

30

IV

Death is so Mediocre

Life has lost its clear outlines. Or else, I may
Have gone half blind, its ritzy splendours stealing
The light from my eye. The night, forever
A garbage collector, tearing grubbily
The wrappers off many a guilt remains
A dubious ally. All the rest are lying morgued
With that hazy past. And, yet invitations
Come from strangers who proudly string me between
Starved serviette blooms at their tables. And, after
The drinks are drunk and the food eaten, when asked
To speak I find my poor mouth turn into an
Open cavern, ransacked bare, by burglars
Of thoughts and suddenly wealth and lust seem like
Languages once learnt but now forgotten. Death is
So mediocre, any fool can achieve
It effortlessly. For those such as me the awful
Vulgaries of the final rites are not
Quite right, the slow unwrapping of the carcass,
The many paltry, human details that must disgust
The esthete, the flabby thigh, the breasts that sag,
The surgery scar, yes, it would indeed be
Of no bloody use believing in my soul's
Poise when the paid marauders strip me of that
Last unbleached shroud and ready me for the fire.
Like an elephant not bidding goodbye while

5

10

15

20

25

Taking off for that secret edge of forests
Where they slope into a sure but invisible
Sea, I shall go too in silence leaving not
Even a finger print on this crowded earth,
Carrying away my bird-in-flight voice and
The hundred misunderstandings that destroyed
My alliances with you and you and you

30

R. PARTHASARATHY

(b. 1934)

R. Parthasarathy was born at Tirupparaiturai near Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu in 1934. He had his university education in Bombay and spent a year (1963-64) as a British Council scholar at the University of Leeds. He began his career as a lecturer in English in Bombay. In 1971 he joined the Oxford University Press as an editor.

Parthasarathy's poems have appeared in several Indian and foreign journals and anthologies. In 1966 he was awarded the Ulka Poetry Prize instituted by Poetry India. In 1968, along with J.J. Healy, he edited *Poetry from Leeds*.

Parthasarathy's only collection of poems *Rough Passage* was published in 1976. Though it consists of several poems written through a period of twenty years, *Rough Passage* is treated as a single poem. "It should be considered and read as one poem. In it twenty years' writing has finally settled," says Parthasarathy. The three sections in *Rough Passage* are 'Exile', 'Trial' and 'Homecoming'. This framework has helped the poet to express the three stages of his intellectual and emotional development. 'Exile' places the culture of Europe against that of India and points to the poet's loss of identity with his own culture. It begins with a search for roots. 'Trial' celebrates love that passes through turmoils but nevertheless gives the poet a sense of belonging. The third part 'Homecoming' is an attempt to reconcile his urban self with his Tamil roots.

Parthasarathy began with an infatuation for English and England. However, after his visit to England he was disenchanted. The essential tension in his poetry lies in the dilemma caused by this disenchantment and his late awareness of a loss of identity with his own culture. His most striking poem *Under Another Sky* explores the problem of whether one becomes an exile in one's own country by speaking and writing an alien language.

Parthasarathy's poetry exhibits a sense of nostalgia; his comments on his country are half-ironic and often he indulges in self-satire. There is a sadness combined with contemplativeness visible in most of his poems. Parthasarathy is a consummate craftsman who possesses a highly sensitive and competent sense of language. He introduces surprising images and metaphors and his imagination endows them with symbolic and universal significance.

The poems included in this anthology represent the three parts in *Rough Passage*.

I

Exile

As a man approaches thirty he may take stock of himself. Not that anything important happens.	3
At thirty the mud will have settled: you see yourself in a mirror. Perhaps, refuse the image as yours.	6
Makes no difference, unless You overtake yourself. Pause for breath. Time gave you distance: you see little else.	9
You stir, and the mirror dissolves. Experience doesn't always make for knowledge: you make the same mistakes.	12
Do the same things over again. The woman you may have loved you never married. These many years	15
you warmed yourself at her hands. The luminous pebbles of her body stayed your feet, else you had overflowed	18
the banks, never reached shore. The sides of the river swell with the least pressure of her toes.	21
All night your hand has rested on her left breast. In the morning when she is gone	24
you will be alone like the stone benches in the park, and would have forgotten her whispers in the noises of the city.	27

II**Trial**

(i)

Mortal as I am, I face the end
with unspeakable relief,
knowing how I should feel 3

if I were stopped and cut off.
Were I to clutch at the air,
straw in my extremity, 6

how should I not scream,
'I haven't finished?
Yet that too would pass unheeded. 9

Love, I haven't the key
to unlock His gates.
Night curves. 12

I grasp your hand
in a rainbow of touch. Of the dead
I speak nothing but good. 15

(ii)

Over the family album, the other night,
I shared your childhood:
the unruly hair silenced by bobpins 3

and ribbons, eyes half-shut
before the fierce glass,
a ripple of arms round Suneeti's neck, 6

and in the distance, squatting
on fabulous haunches,
of all things, the Taj. 9

School was a pretty kettle of fish:
the spoonfuls of English
brew never quite slaked your thirst. 12

Hand on chin, you grew up,
all agog, on the cook's succulent
folklore. You rolled yourself 15

R. Parthasarathy 71

into a ball the afternoon Father died,
till time unfurled you
like a peal of bells. How your face 18
bronzed, as flesh and bone struck
a touchwood day. Purged,
you turned the corner in a child's steps. 21

III

Homecoming

This afternoon I dusted my table.
Arranged everything in order
in a desperate attempt to get hold of myself 3

Later, I watched my forty years
swim effortlessly ashore in a glass of beer.
However, there is no end 6

to the deceptions I practise on myself:
I have, for instance, lived off friends.
Told the usual lies 9

and not batted an eyelid.
I have burned my files for fear
they'd close in on me. 12

I have even kept letters unopened for days.
I don't have to complete anything.
Now I spend most of the day 15

plucking grey hair from my forehead.
Once in a way I light a cigarette. Follow
the smoke as though it were a private tour. 18

K.D. KATRAK
(b. 1936)

Kersy D. Katrak was born in 1936 and now lives in Bombay. He is the Managing Director of an advertising agency. He has contributed poems to several journals like *Quest* and *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. His poems have also appeared in several anthologies of Indo-Anglian poetry. His two collections of verses, *A Journal of the Way* and *Diversions by the Wayside*, came out in 1969.

Katrak's poetry is characterised by a reflective strain born of personal experience. He moulds his poems through several minor details to reach a sudden focus of revelation, exaltation or terror. Katrak exhibits a vein of the occult in some of his poems. One of his recurring major themes is man's struggle through a hostile and magical world. However, Katrak recoils from the unpalatable encounters with this outer world and tries to take refuge in domestic love and the comforts of a home.

Katrak's terse lines are marked by a colloquial vigour and his images and metaphors sharply outline the sentiments expressed.

I

Woman on the Beach

Coming around the bend we felt the head
Of subtly turning air, the changing sound
Of larger tides beating against the land.
Living beside the sea we sense them first:
The first small signs of cold that apprehend 5
Our short and sudden winter. As we came round
The last flat bend, my wife smiled gently. Brandy, I said:
Courvoiseur Brandy. Winter became a thirst;
A singing in the ears, the senses sharp and free.
I whistled and changed gears as we went forth 10
To take the last steep drop that meets the sea:
Turning towards the house I felt the wind
Pointing its finger North.

Details sometimes intrude upon our lives and point
Towards the centre. This woman was a detail 15
I saw her first
From out the corner of my eye
Behind the car, I braked and swerved
My wife clucking annoyance, and parked elsewhere.
There she lay 20
Flat on her back, her elbows propped her up:
Dressed shabbily but not a beggar.
From time to time she moved and scraped
A little backwards: dressed shabbily
But not a beggar... 25
Three hours later between the trifle
And brandy, I found the hard
Centre of my vague unease.
I had seen such movements before
In puppies whipped to death, in mangled cats, 30
Men hit by trucks and crawling blind
Across the road to some imagined shelter:
I had seen those slow
Witless movements before: her back was broken.
I ran; 35

Obeying as we always do
 Some law of more than necessary love
 Always too late.

When I reached the front gate she was gone.
 Taken away, I thought, strangers have helped 40
 She could not have moved far unhelped...

Facing the winter stars
 Suddenly bright,
 Suddenly apprehensive for my wife alone
 And sleeping, I turned upstairs and ran. 45
 Counted my possessions and was relieved
 To find them there. Counted my life
 And found it limited but good.

Turning the sheets I slipped beside my wife,
 Half asleep she understood 50
 My need for reassurance and comforted my pride.
 Before I slept I said a prayer for my wife
 Having accounted all, but not accounted God
 Who pauses to disrupt
 With something much like love, the smallest life. 55

Next morning was the first cold day with hot
 Winter breakfast on the plate.
 I wore my three-piece suit, we talked and ate
 Relieved at having found the usual things to say.
 Turning towards the car I saw the crowd 60
 Two hundred yards behind and walked that way
 Knowing what I would find.

She lay there as I looked and mind
 Outstripped its midweek calm:
 This was Thursday. And that red horror there, 65
 The back indeed was broken but there was more:
 The flesh had torn, smashed, pulped, retreated, to expose
 The hidden and interior bone.
 That calm unnerving whiteness was untouched whilst in the red
 Flies moved in swarms. 70

What madman
 Demon husband, raging lover, or what claws

K.D. Katrak 75
Of hell or powers of love had done this;
From what great heights dropped her
And left her at my doorstep to be found 75
By me, neglected, and from there to crawl
Blindly towards the mothering sea before she died:
I would not know.

But my reflex was instant:
Doors shut in my mind. 80
Wipe the mouth, adjust the tie:
Call the police I said
Fighting panic at my own
Disproportionate sense of loss:
Fighting to keep together 85
All that I knew: the house, the small
Patrimony of land, the lawn where winter flowers had grown.
But knew this once for all: the only flesh
With which one may identify 90
Death, is one's own

II

Colaba Causeway

Here at the Southern limit of the city,
The poor, the beaten and the meek:
Involuntary images of pity:
Fill my eyes and will not let me weep
Beggar and peddler, and old jew, 5
Turn the heart to whining again:
Encountered in the familiar view.
But I have grown remote from pain
Walking the street with casual eyes,
And I have grown remote from love; 10
White skirted girls bring no surprise,
Walking this street, I only move
Till from across the road a running urchin
Shouting and full with his nine years age
Skittles a stone that strikes me on the shin 15
And all my poise 'behnchod' dissolves in rage.

KEKI N. DARUWALLA

(b. 1937)

Keki N. Daruwalla was born in Lahore in 1937. He had his early education in Ludhiana. Later he took a post-graduate degree in English literature from the Panjab University. He joined the Indian Police Service in 1958 and now lives in Delhi. His first collection of poems *Under Orion* appeared in 1970. *Apparitions in April* published in 1971 received the Uttar Pradesh State Award. *Crossing of Rivers* appeared in 1976. The latest collection of his poems is *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982). Daruwalla was selected for the Central Sahitya Akademi Award for the best writing in English in 1984.

Daruwalla has been a regular contributor to several journals, both Indian and foreign. His poems have appeared in *Antioch Review* (Ohio), *Trace* (California), *Poet Lore* (Boston), *Trans-Atlantic Review* (London) and *Opinion* (Bombay). His poems have also appeared in several anthologies of Indo-Anglian poetry and are always favourably received.

In addition to poems, Daruwalla has also published a collection of short stories entitled *Sword and Abyss* (1979).

Daruwalla claims that his poetry is rooted in the rural landscape of India. In spite of its bitter satiric tone, Daruwalla's poetry evokes a sympathetic response in the Indian reader because of its intensely Indian quality. It is in the background of this all-inclusive Indian ethos that Daruwalla delineates the agonised psyche of the Indian intellectual. The tension in Daruwalla's poetry arises from its measured progress from earthy sentiments to sophisticated urban expression. He believes that content is more important in poetry than form, that poetry is exploratory and an 'aid to come to terms with one's own interior world'. Daruwalla says, "Writing a poem is like a clot going out of the blood." In short, according to him, poetry is 'therapeutic'

Though man's existential pain is the major theme in most of his poems, Daruwalla is capable of both pathos and stern humour as seen in *Apothecary* and *On the Contrariness of Dreams*.

I

Hawk

1

I saw the wild hawk-king this morning
riding an ascending wind
as he drilled sky.

The land beneath him was filmed with salt:
grass-seed, insect, bird —

5

nothing could thrive here. But he was lost
in the momentum of his own gyre,
a frustrated parricide on the kill.

The fuse of his hate was burning still.

But in the evening he hovered above
the groves, a speck of barbed passion.

10

Crow, mynah and pigeon roosted here
while parakeets flew raucously by.

And then he ran amuck,
a rapist in the harem of the sky.

15

As he went up with a pigeon
skewered to his heel-talon
he scanned the other birds, marking out their fate,
the ones he would scoop up next,
those black dregs in the cup of his hate!

20

2

The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man.

When snared in the woods
his eyelids are sewn with silk
as he is broken to the hood.

He is momentarily blinded, starved.

25

Then the scar over his vision is perforated.

Morsels of vision are fed to his eyes
as he is unblinded stitch by relenting stitch.

Slowly the world re-forms:

mud walls, trees burgeon.

30

His eye travels like the eye of the storm.

Discovering his eye
and the earth and sky
with it, he leaps from earth to ether. 35
Now the sky is his eyrie.

He ferocious floats on splayed wings;
then plummets like a flare,
smoking, and a gust of feathers
proclaims that he has struck.

The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man 40
Hawking is turned to a ritual, the predator's
passion honed to an art;
as they feed the hawk by carving the breast
Of the quarry bird and gouging out his heart.

3

They have flushed him out of the tall grasses, 45
the hare, hunted now
in pairs by mother hawk and son.
They can't kill him in one fell swoop.

But each time the talons cart away
a patch of ripped fur. 50

He diminishes, one talon-morsel at a time.
He is stunned by the squall of wings above.
His heart is a burning stable
packed with whinnying horses.

His blood writes stories on the scuffed grass! 55
His movements are a scribble on the page of death.

4

I wouldn't know when I was stolen from the eyrie
I can't remember when I was ensnared.
I only know the leather disc
which blots out the world 60
and the eyelids which burn with thwarted vision

Then the perforations, and yet
the blue iris of heaven does not come through.
I can think of a patch of blue sky
when shown a blue slide. 65
But I am learning how to spot the ones

crying for the right to dream, the right to flesh,
the right to sleep with their own wives —
I have placed them. I am sniffing
the air currents, deciding when to pounce.

70

I will hover like a black prophesy
weaving its moth-soft cocoon of death.
I shall drive down
with the compulsive thrust of gravity,
trained for havoc,
my eyes focused on them
like the sights of a gun.

75

During the big drought which is surely going to come
the doves will look up for clouds, and it will rain hawks.

II

Easy and Difficult Animals

You have no problems such as mine
you do not cower
from your own thoughts

 it doesn't frighten you
the iron edge awaking from its rust
the crawl of oxidised dreams
 in lonely hours.

5

Where do you get your insights from
and your simple words?
teaching our daughter that day you said
 some dreams are animals
 some dreams are birds

The moonface was either
 turned towards light
 or away from it

dark fruit/incandescent fruit
Your distinctions were a knife
that went cutting to the root
You divided in two

10

this animal delirium that we call 'life'
into 'easy animals'/'difficult animals'

15

All that moved on legs
 flew on wings
 crawled on the belly
 inhaled through fins
 hedgehog and weasel and polecat
 all that went to the taxidermist
 gizzard and buzzard and bat
 you lumped together as 'easy animals' 20
 and pitched against this menagerie
 one solitary cry
 that one 'difficult animal'
 that was I

III

Apothecary

A solemn mask on a liquored-up face
 looks incongruous. Why not rip it off?
 That's better! Sit down, man! Smile once again!
 You don't have to stand there
 and cough discreetly and shuffle about. 5
 You haven't come here to condole! All is well
 in my house — thank Allah for it who keeps
 the obituary-scribe from the door.
 Yes, yes, I understand, the death of a patient
 is also a death in our family 10
 a part of me dies with him.
 But this boy from Sarai Khwaja complained
 of an ear-ache. I'd not seen him before.
 Some ear-drops I gave him and forgot about it
 till that ekka stood at my door in the evening. 15
 'He's thrashing around like fish ... a stomache-ache..
 he just can't hear it...'
 'An intestinal knot may be,' I said, and when
 I reached the village he was already dead,
 his mother looking at me as if I had knifed him.
 For this week past I face an empty room, swatting flies. 20
 All my patients come from Sarai Khwaja,

Sarai Mir, Allhadadpur, Kusum Khore.
Five miles on ox-cart and mule-back they came
but now they shun me as if instead
of powders I dole out cholera and pox!

25

If a man comes to his lawyer for advice
and is murdered on his way back
will his clients abandon him? Never!
But a Hakim turns leper! They won't even read
the *fatiha* on my grave!
There is no logic to it, it's just there.
As there is no logic to a child
with an ear-ache in the morning
dying by evening of a stomach ailment.

30

Faith is all very fine. It is one thing to say, 'All this
is the acquiescence of clay to the will of the Lord',
and drain your philosophy with a nightcap,
and quite another to face a hangover and
an empty clinic in the morning.

My uncle is paralysed — Allah is merciful
or what would he have said to this —
my only patient in fifteen days dead!
What does the pedestrian think of it,

40

Hakim Rizwan-ul-Haq
son of Irfan-ul-Haq

45

Hakim-ul-Mulk, Physician Royal to the
Nizam of Hyderabad reduced to this?

I know what you are thinking of:
the cars lined on the kerb outside
patients spilling out into the streets
from that homeo clinic across.

50

He is a widower and keeps
two good-looking compounders.
He tackles a serious case by ramming home
penicillin in the thigh

55

and a suppository in the rear.
Homeo clinic you call it!
You said something, did you,

- Brother-healer did you say? Hippocrates?
 A homeopath keeps two handsome adolescents as his compounders. 60
 Now where does Hippocrates get into the act?
 He promises his clientele prophylactic doses
 against typhus, measles, chicken pox, flu.
 There isn't a plague in the slimy bogs of hell 65
 which Doctor Chandiram, gold-medallist, can't stave off
 with one of those powders of his!
 Pardon me, for I got carried away.
 We all pad the hook with the bait, Allah downwards.
 What is paradise, but a promissory note 70
 found in the holy book itself? And if you probe
 under the skin what does it promise us
 for being humble and truthful, and turning
 towards Kaaba five times a day,
 weeping in Moharram and fasting in Ramadan? 75
 What does it promise us except
 that flea-ridden bags that we are
 we will end up as splendid corpses?

DOM MORAES

(b. 1938)

Dom Moraes was born in 1938 in Bombay. He belonged to a Roman Catholic family which came from Goa. His father was the famous journalist and author Frank Moraes. Dom stayed in India till he was sixteen and then went to Oxford (1955). Before he left for England he had inspiring contacts with several Indian writers and artists like Nissim Ezekiel and Mulk Raj Anand. In England he met Stephen Spender, Auden and E.M. Forster. Moraes's genius as a poet developed under such influences.

Dom Moraes's first book of poems *A Beginning* was published in England in 1957. The book drew significant praise from English critics and Moraes was awarded the Hawthornden Prize at the age of eighteen. His second book of verse *Poems* came out in 1960. Another collection of poems *John Nobody* was published in 1965. During the period from 1959 to 1965 he apparently suffered a decline in poetic power and so, on the advice of Auden, engaged himself in translation work and produced *The Brass Serpent*, a translation of the Hebrew poet T. Carmi. Moraes's collected poems under the title *Poems 1955-1965* was published in America in 1966.

Dom Moraes has also written several prose works like *From East to West* (1971), *A Matter of People* (1974), *Voices for Life* (1975), *The Open Eyes* (1976) and *Mrs. Gandhi* (1980). In 1960 he published a travel book *Gone Away* and in 1968 his autobiography *My Son's Father* was published.

Though Moraes was born a Roman Catholic, very early in life he turned away from religion. Like other Indo-Anglian poets, he went through the emotional strain of being caught between his Indian birth and an intellectual sympathy with English language and culture. He draws on his Indian and English experiences and his mind seems to be haunted by contrasting visions of love and death, religion and violence,

life and destruction. Apart from his poetic technique and verbal skill, his poetry is characterised mainly by two elements — dream and reality—and often his poetry is stained by a note of despair and pessimism.

Moraes draws upon local legends and myths and employs macabre symbols and metaphors. He was struck by the contrast between disorder and chaos in human existence and the order and interdependence in the non-human world. His poetry expresses this acutely agonised sense of contrast through its ordered pattern of symbols and metaphors. The sophisticated awareness that makes Moraes say ‘We suffer and are not made beautiful’ is the source of his poetry.

I

Sailing to England

Fallen into a dream, I could not rise.
I am in love, and long to be unhappy.
Something within me raised her from the sea:
A delicate sad face, and stones for eyes. 4

Something within me mumbles words and grieves
For three swept out, while inland watchers groaned,
Humped, elbows jerking in a skein of waves
Like giant women knitting. One was drowned. 8

He could not swim and so he had to sink
And only floated after having died,
Clutching some weeds, and tolerant of the tide:
A happy traveller on a sea of ink. 12

I blot his eyes: waves rustle in the breeze.
Perhaps he's thinking. The moon will rise in blood
Trawling her whisper across the sprawling seas
To rouse him, if he thinks. But if he's dead? 16

He must forget his death, I'll tell him so:
'It's nearly time for lunch', I'll tell him, 'change:
'Be careful: grin a bit: avoid her eyes:
'Later go settle in the upstairs lounge 20

'And laugh as if you ground stones in your teeth,
'Watching the sea: or simply sit alone:
'Or choose the wise alternative to death:
'A nap to while away the afternoon'. 24

II

At Seven O'Clock

The masseur from Ceylon, whose balding head
Gives him a curious look of tenderness,
Uncurls his long crushed hands above my bed
As though he were about to preach or bless. 4

- His poulturer's fingers pluck my queasy skin,
Shuffle along my side, and reach the thigh.
I note however that he keeps his thin
Fastidious nostrils safely turned away. 8
- But sometimes the antarctic eyes glance down,
And the lids drop to hood a scornful flash:
A deep ironic knowledge of the thin
Or gross (but always ugly) human flesh. 12
- Hernia, goitre and the flowering boil
Lie bare beneath his hands, for ever bare.
His fingers touch the skin: they reach the soul.
I know him in the morning for a seer. 16
- Within my mind he is reborn as Christ:
For each blind dawn he kneads my prostrate thighs,
Thumps on my buttocks with his fist
And breathes, Arise. 20

GIEVE PATEL

(b. 1940)

Gieve Patel was born in Bombay in 1940. A medical practitioner by profession he is also a poet and painter. He was educated at St. Xavier's school and Grant Medical College. He is a frequent contributor to journals like *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. His poems have been included in *New Poetry in India* (1974) and *Young Commonwealth Poets '65*. His first collection of poems was published in 1966 under the title *Poems*. In 1977 he published a second volume of poems, *Do You Withstand, Body*.

Patel's output as a poet is very small, but his voice is original and compelling. The themes in his poetry are mainly related to the agonising experience of becoming and being a man in a distracted society. Thus his poems are meditative comments on the Indian scene and experiences. Several of his poems are angry reactions to human neglect and suffering he encounters in his immediate environment. He analyses every phenomenon with clinical fastidiousness and aloofness, with a touch of irony. This is seen in *Post-Mortem*, a poem that sums up with rare sensitivity the whole process of post-mortem ironically leaving out the cause of death alone. Thus every probe he makes clarifies the mystery of our existence.

Patel believes that a clear, logical and true poem changes something including the poet himself. The justification for a poem is the change that it brings about in the reader as well as in the poet. In his mature poetry Patel is concerned with the human situation of violence and suffering. His sympathies are with the oppressed, with anyone who is denied the right to live. The repressed wrath against the human condition finds an outlet in his poetry in the form of indulgence in images of violence against the human body. Poems like *Post-Mortem*, *How do you Withstand, Body* and *O, My very Own Cadaver* are examples of this preoccupation with the trails of violence. Patel reacts

cautiously to the Hindu ethos that surrounds him as in *Naryal Purnima*. A note of irony and understatement pervades this poem and the cultural inanity of the Hindu households is brought out through a searching probe into human attitudes that control their rituals.

Patel's poems are couched in matter-of-fact language and he avoids complicated imagery and symbols.

I

On Killing a Tree

It takes much time to kill a tree,
Not a simple jab of the knife
Will do it. It has grown
Slowly consuming the earth,
Rising out of it, feeding 5
Upon its crust, absorbing
Years of sunlight, air, water,
And out of its leprous hide
Sprouting leaves.

So hack and chop 10
But this alone won't do it.
Not so much pain will do it.
The bleeding bark will heal
And from close to the ground
Will rise curled green twigs, 15
Miniature boughs
Which if unchecked will expand again
To former size

No, 20
The root is to be pulled out —
Out of the anchoring earth;
It is to be roped, tied,
And pulled out — snapped out
Or pulled out entirely,
Out from the earth-cave, 25
And the strength of the tree exposed,
The source, white and wet,
The most sensitive, hidden
For years inside the earth.

Then the matter 30
Of scorching and choking
In sun and air,
Browning, hardening,
Twisting, withering,
And then it is done 35

II

Commerce

I force initially simplicity of commerce,
 A rupee note changes hands.
 His tongue is loosened, and squatting by me,
 Straightening the groundspread, his
 Offered hospitality, he talks. 5

I anticipate defeat, feel cheated from the start.
 These, as usual, will be external gestures.
 As always, what is unexpressed will roll
 Darkly behind his eyes and click shut.
 Yet I listen again. 10

Unmistakable the difference.
 It is he searching me out.
 Enquiries after my job or family
 Not a screen this time for the quietly guarded.
 I would seek to escape the challenge he poses. 15

Simple enough his look. Wife and child
 At the rear of the hut penetrate
 The darkness cocoon, endorse
 The man's enquiries. This
 May well happen again, I tell myself. 20

Permitting my mouth I might spark into speech.
 What then, Sir Poet, of political choices?

ADIL JUSSAWALLA

(b. 1940)

Adil Jussawalla was born in 1940. He was educated at Oxford. Between 1965 and 1970 he taught at a language school in London. He has travelled widely in England and other European countries and published poems both in India and abroad. His first collection of poems, *Land's End* was published in 1962 and the second collection *Missing Person* in 1975. He edited an anthology *New Writing in India* in the Penguin series in 1974. Now he lives in India.

Like Nissim Ezekiel, Jussawalla claims that he began writing in English because he did not have mastery in any other language. He belongs to the Parsi community (a 'refugee community' as he calls it) which had given up Persian without adopting another language as its own. So as a Parsi, Jussawalla had to use a language that is not his own. Justifying the use of English Jussawalla writes, "A poet must know what he's about and what his medium's about. If he knows these two things well enough he can do what he likes with language — even turn it right round and stand it on its head — and get away with it."

Though Jussawalla has no sentimental concern for things Indian, his poetry exhibits a definite Indian awareness. He uses powerful imagery to evoke a mood or emotion. His poems, generally, have a taut structure of word and association and he exhibits a disciplined fastidiousness in balancing images and experiences. His poems in *Land's End* cover a large area of experiences like nature, time, man-woman relationship and the poet's social concerns. Jussawalla is particularly good in his short lyrics. In *Missing Person* the predominant theme is that of alienation. Through the central metaphor of the missing person, Jussawalla explores self and society.

In *New Writing in India* Jussawalla characterised Indian writing as a reflection of the inability of the Indian bourgeoisie to find a dynamic role for itself in a changing society. Jussawalla himself represents this

predicament as pointed out by a critic — “Jussalwalla is one of the few Indian writers in English who have sought to give full expression to the predicament and failure of the middle class intellectual who is aware of the burden of the past but wants to play some role in changing the course of history in his own immediate political and social context. His poetry is inevitably the poetry of alienation.”

I

The Waiters

Blacker than wine from the loaded grapes of France,
Blacker than mud their Tamil minds recall,
Dark skins serving dishes to the sallow
Sweat more night than grapesblood has; all
The long summers that abjured, for chance 5
Of better prospects, change, a sun of contrast,
Stick in a language their clients won't allow.
Must button up their manners with the past.

Grow expert on the epicure's stuffed heart;
Polite of speech, punctilious, guarded, kind. 10
As guardians of good taste, the waiters know
The soiled and cluttered kitchens of the mind;
The rancid oils where sweeter dishes start,
Cooked, like a pick-up's words, the soot-black roof
Behind our pasted smiles; their darkness grew 15
To insight in their day; they stand aloof.

But slacken in their service after eleven.
Guarding the days unending appetites,
Grow shifty-eyed, avoid our munching faces; 20
The spit and polish of our eating rites.
Then closing time; they dream of a foodless heaven,
Shrug off their coats like priestly cloaks of pity,
Day's ministry complete; slip to their sleeping places
In the throat of the feasted, pink-faced city.

II

Approaching Santa Cruz

Loud benedictions of the silver popes,
A cross to themselves, above
A union of homes as live as a disease.
Still, though the earth be stunk and populous,
We're told it's not: our Papa's put his nose 5
Down on cleaner ground. Soon to receive
Its due, the circling heart, encircled, sees

- The various ways of dying that are home.
 'Dying is all the country's living for',
 A doctor says. 'We've lost all hope, all pride'. 10
 I peer below. The poor, invisible,
 Show me my place; that, in the air,
 With the scavenger birds, I ride.
- Economists enclosed in History's
 Chinese boxes, citing Chairman Mao, 15
 Know how a people nourished on decay
 Disintegrate or crash in civil war.
 Contrarily, the Indian diplomat,
 Flying with me, is confident the poor
 Will stay just as they are. 20
- Birth
 Pyramids the future with more birth.
 Our only desert, space; to leave the green
 Burgeoning to black, the human pall,
 The free 25
 Couples in their chains around the earth.
- I take a second look. We turn,
 Grazing the hills and catch a glimpse of sea.
 We are now approaching Santa Cruz: all
 Arguments are endless now and I 30
 Feel the guts tighten and all my senses shake.
 The heart, stirring to trouble in its clenched
 Claw, shrivelled inside the casing of a cage
 Forever steel and foreign, swoops to take
 Freedom for what it is. The slums sweep 35
 Up to our wheels and wings and nothing's free
 But singing while the benedictions pour
 Out of a closing sky. And this is home,
 Watched by a boy as still as a shut door,
 Holding a mass of breadcrumbs like a stone. 40

GAURI DESHPANDE

(b. 1942)

Gauri Deshpande was born in 1942 and was educated in Pune. After obtaining her Ph.D. in English, she taught for some time in Fergusson College and in the University of Pune. Now she lives in Bombay. She writes novels and short stories in Marathi and poetry in English. She worked for some time as a sub-editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and later as an assistant to the editor of *Opinion*. Apart from publishing three collections of poems, she has written a political biography of Gokhale. Her poetry collections are *Between Births* (1968), *Lost Love* (1970) and *Beyond the Slaughterhouse* (1972). She has also edited *An Anthology of Indo-English Poetry*.

The two important themes in Gauri Deshpande's poetry are love and death. Her expression is simple and direct and she avoids complicated imagery. She does not make use of myths and traditional symbols as several other Indo-Anglian poets do and never sticks to the traditional stanza pattern or rhyme scheme. Her positive strength as a poet is her powerful emotion and sincerity of expression. Even simple daily occurrences and experiences evoke highly emotional responses in her and her poems are personalised expressions of these simple and powerful emotions. The simplicity and limited range of her themes, the directness of expression and the sense of humanity and sympathy that pervades her outlook enable the reader to experience a rapport with her.

I**A Lunch on the Train**

Since I cannot bring myself to hand over
 All that money for a first-class fare
 Must resign myself to bear
 Witness to my fellow-travellers' 5
 Strange habits.
 Next to me a group of three
 Whose intricate relations to each other
 I puzzle over, deciding finally upon
 The strange solution of a husband
 And two wives. 10
 The woman in front of me, a mere girl,
 Too young to have been a mother of three
 Is struggling vainly to feed one, control
 The other, and the third is abandoned
 From the weary care. 15
 Near the window, a seat I covet,
 A man long of nose and abstracted gaze
 A tiered tiffin-box on his knee
 Is waiting with patience, apparently
 Just for lunch. 20
 Catty-corner from him a youth
 Trying disdainfully to read a book
 And protect his carefully shined boots
 From the various expectorations
 Of his small neighbours. 25
 Half way through the journey it's lunch time.
 On cue the tiffin on the right is opened
 And eaten, shielded fastidiously from
 Hungry eyes in the front; in no time
 Re-closed, in repose. 30
 The two wives then opening many boxes
 Bring out feasts of sweets and fruits:
 It's a long process feeding his large appetite
 And their own tiny birdlike.
 They accomplish it, self-congratulate 35
 When from one a paan is accepted

From the other a clove; then they watch
Him lean back and sleep.

The hungry mouths have watched him too,
Whose mother had not enough thought
Or money, to provide their lunch on the train.
The youth is on a diet of mere knowledge
And it's my turn

40

The sandwiches wax-papered in my bag
Throb and grow enormous like a crime,
Finally desperate, I compromise,
Buy bananas in a bunch,
And distributing them to the foodless four
Force myself to eat the remaining one;
It shouldn't look too like charity,
Salve conscience, if not hunger.

45

50

II

Migraine

At first you say, if I lie here, eyes
closed, not moving at all,
it will go away. Surely I can beat it.
It's only a twinge headache.

It laughs. Showing just a tawny tail
the beast awaits, making you think, hopeful,
of aspros, codeins and cool drinks.

5

Then smiling slowly it shows itself.
Placing its paws carefully about your temple,
begins to press. You rage and pretend you're dead.

10

But it's clever, goes on — until, tears streaming
from pain-destroyed face, mouthing
long, inarticulate screams your body
heaves up its very guts and you lie
reduced to a sweat-drenched, shivering,
whimpering lump of agony, smelling of sickness
and vomit, humiliation.

15

Dizzily dragging yourself on pulpy haunches
you collapse on the white tiles below
the basin, half-blind with pain — it is the only

20

reality. What help now? Not love,
not medicine, not gods and ancestors. None.
Only your total humility and surrender
to this fact of pain.

It will retreat in the night for a month or two.
You can resume human disguise till its next advent
and masquerade as a person, sane, intelligent,
loved and desirable.
Till the next time then.

25

PRITISH NANDY

(b. 1948)

Born in 1948, Pritish Nandy is today one of the youngest and most prolific Indian poets writing in English. He is a precocious poet and has received several awards including the Padma Shri. He had lived in Calcutta for many years working in an advertising firm until he moved to Bombay a few years ago as the editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*.

Nandy has nine books of translations to his credit. He has also edited several anthologies. Among his original works the most important ones are *Of Gods and Olives* (1967), *On Either Side of Arrogance* (1968), *Masks to be Interpreted in terms of Messages* (1970), *Madness is the Second Stroke* (1971), *Riding the Midnight River* (1975), *A Stranger Called I* (1976), *The Nowhere Man* (1977) and *Pritish Nandy, 30* (1978). His *Collected Poems* was published in 1973.

Nandy is a controversial poet both in the choice of themes and in their treatment. He is a daring and ambitious experimenter who exercises disconcerting images and intriguing metaphors. That is why Mulk Raj Anand calls him 'the harbinger of the new Indian consciousness in his honesty of expression and compelling originality of language'. He handles the English language with great sensitivity and naturalness. Nandy is a poet of love and contemporary social ethos. He believes that, in spite of using English as the medium, Indo-Anglian poets should seek their roots in Indian culture and tradition.

Nandy's love poetry encompasses past, present and future and has a sense of urgency and infinite passion. Like Whitman, the poet extols the soul as well as the body. Nandy has assimilated the rich tradition of love poetry from Jayadeva to Tagore and is influenced by the songs of Mirabai which he has translated.

The other major theme in Nandy's poetry is his experience of

anguish and loneliness in the context of modern living. The political turmoil, violence, deprivation and social unrest find utterance in his poetry through powerful images and metaphors. To him politics is an integral part of human existence and is inextricably wedded to personal aspirations of love, liberty and peace. So in his political poems like those on Calcutta, there is violent tension due to the juxtaposition of terror, cruelty and death on the one hand and the urge to counter these negatives through the exploration of love on the other.

Though Nandy writes in free verse, most of his love poems are prose-poems. His language and vocabulary have attained an exotic grandeur that expresses the tensions and anxieties we live with today. Nandy has achieved in his poetry a 'breakthrough of the new consciousness'.

I

Calcutta If You Must Exile Me

Calcutta if you must exile me wound my lips before I go

only words remain and the gentle touch of your finger on my
lips Calcutta burn my eyes before I go into the night

the headless corpse in a Dhakuria bylane the battered youth his brains

blown out and the silent vigil that takes you to Pataldanga Lane
where they will gun you down without vengeance or hate

Calcutta if you must exile me burn my eyes before I go

they will pull you down from the Ochterlony Monument and torture
each

broken rib beneath your upthrust breasts they will tear the anguish
from your sullen eyes and thrust the bayonet between your thighs

Calcutta they will tear you apart Jarasandha-like

they will tie your hands on either side and hang you from a worldless
cross and when your silence protests they will execute all the words
that you met and synchronised Calcutta they will burn you at the stake

Calcutta flex the vengeance in your thighs and burn silently in the
despair of flesh

if you feel like suicide take a rickshaw to Sonagachhi and share the
sullen pride in the eyes of women who have wilfully died

wait for me outside the Ujjala theatre and I will bring you the blood
of that armless leper who went mad before hunger and death met in
his wounds

I will show you the fatigue of that woman who died near Chitpur out
of sheer boredom and the cages of Burrabazar where passion hides
in the wrinkles of virgins who have aged waiting for a sexless
war that never came

only obscene lust remains in their eyes after time has wintered
their exacting thighs

and I will show you the hawker who died with Calcutta in his eyes

Calcutta if you must exile me destroy my sanity before I go

II**Love**

The third time is always the most difficult. Or so I have been told.

The first time you do not know. Your innocence is your strength. The second time you are hurt and thus prepared. But the third time, my friend, is when you are quite totally unaware. And, therefore, so completely vulnerable.

And it was on the third time that she entered my poetry.

But words cannot live your life for you. A fact we all come to realise, sooner or later. But because I am a poet it took me a little longer to come to terms with this truth.

So, when life took over, one dusklit autumn night, I caught her by her hair and dragged her to the edge of the forest, where I left her to the mercy of the rain, the silence and endless memories.

For it was friday, when words catch up with their masters.

NOTES

1

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio

I

The Harp of India

This is a patriotic sonnet. The poet bemoans the fall of India from the high pedestal of fame and glory to her present condition of shame and servitude.

The metaphor of the harp is maintained effectively throughout the poem.

Harp is a musical instrument having several strings of graded length to be played by plucking on them.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|---------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | withered bough | : | symbolically suggests the bough of history |
| 3. | Thy music once was sweet: | | You had a glorious history or civilisation |
| 6-7. | Neglected... desert plain | : | The lines suggest the desolate condition of India deprived of her past glory and greatness. The 7th line echoes Shelley's <i>Ozymandias</i> . |
| 8. | many... mine | : | The several poets and artists of ancient India |
| 12-14. | but if... strain | | the poet's readiness to sing in praise of India or to serve her cause is revealed here. |

II

To the Pupils of the Hindu College

Derozio worked as an Assistant Master in Hindu College, Calcutta, from 1828 to 1831. He was a most popular teacher loved and respected by his students. In turn he also had great affection and love for them.

Outside the college, several students attended his Academic Association and were impressed by the young master's scholarship and progressive views. The sonnet is a tribute to his students and reveals Derozio's deep concern for their welfare. Incidentally, it is also a confession of what Derozio thought as the duty of a teacher.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Expanding... flowers | : | The imagery of the blossoming flowers suggests the expansion of the pupils' minds under the impact of learning. |
| 5. | like the... hours | : | The development of the young minds is compared to the flexing of the wings by the birds in summer mornings |
| 9. | new perceptions | : | The new learning and the new outlook the pupils received |
| 13. | chaplets | : | wreaths |

III

Chorus of Brahmins

Chorus of Brahmins forms the 8th section of the first Canto of *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, the longest narrative poem of Derozio. The poem describes the strange vicissitudes in the life of an unlucky brahmin widow, Nuleeni. She is about to commit suttee on the funeral pyre of her husband. At that moment, her former Muslim lover and at present the leader of a gang of outlaws, appears on the scene, rescues her and takes her away to the rock of Jungheera in the river. In the ensuing battle the Fakeer is killed. Nuleeni rushes to the battlefield on the river bank and clasping the body of the dead lover, dies.

Chorus of Brahmins describes the bustling activity just before the suttee. The religious rituals preceding suttee are mentioned. The chorus assumes the form of a hymn with its musical tone, flowery and colourful imagery and psychotic flashes.

Line

- | | | | |
|----|-----------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. | flowerets | : | small flowers or petals |
| 2. | cymbal | : | a hollow plate-like musical |

- instrument of brass, beaten together in pairs. Often used in Hindu religious rituals.
5. balm, myrrh : perfumes
 27. lave : bathe, wash

IV

A Walk by Moonlight

The poem was written a year before Derozio's death. It shows a greater maturity of thought and sensitivity to Nature's mysteries. It expresses an overwhelming spiritual experience the poet had once while walking in a moonlit night. A mysterious sense palpable only to the inner self disturbs the poet and he suddenly realises the mystic unity that exists in the diversity of the universe. Like Wordsworth, he feels a sense of kinship with other creatures of nature.

Line

15. tend : attract
 22. peers : equals
 31. Who robes for them of silver weaves : Who (the moon) weaves for them robes of silver
 34. hymning : singing in praise
 35. minstrelsy : art of a minstrel, i.e., music or singing.

V

Morning After a Storm

The poem consists of two sonnets describing the placid beauty of Nature after the ravages of a storm in the night. The sonnets present a contrast between the stormy night and the calm morning. There is an awareness on the part of the poet of the twin aspects of Nature—her all-consuming power of destruction and her sustaining power of beauty. The travails of the human spirit in a world of sin and suffering until it achieves eternal peace in the sunlight of God's grace is the hidden theme of the poem.

Line

1. elements : forces of nature
 7. hamlet : village

- 12-13. Cloud... dream : These lines impart a sinister meaning to the havoc caused by the storm
13. the fantastic figures : the frightening shapes clouds assume during a violent storm are referred to as fantastic ghostly figures let loose by the power of Nature
- II
4. How leapt... sight : The line echoes Wordsworth's famous lines, 'My heart leaps up, when I behold A rainbow in the sky'.
6. rosy wreath : wreath made of roses
7. wreck-strewn : strewn with the wreck of last night's storm.

2

Kasiprasad Ghose

I

The Farewell Song

The poem is a rich tribute to the motherland, India. The beauty and sublimity of India is eulogised. The majestic scenic beauty of the land is described in romantic terms; religious and mythical associations are invoked and a general sense of admiration for the motherland is revealed. The poem was written probably on the eve of the poet's departure for England.

Line

2. vale : valley
4. flowerets : small flowers
7. ripples : small ripples
9. the queen of silent night : the moon
17. lave : bathe, wash
23. bards of mighty fame : famous poets of ancient India.

II

The Moon in September

The poet is enthralled by the moonlit splendour of a September night. The enchantment created by the lunar beams is described in sensuous terms. Romantic and mythical associations are infused into the description so as to give a pleasingly weird impression of the magical night.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | rustling breeze | : | breeze that passes through the trees making a rustling noise |
| 4. | The rose... its stalk | : | symbolises withering love |
| 10. | shroud | : | veil |
| 11. | sheen | : | light |
| 15-17. | Full right... demons fell | : | The poet alludes to the Hindu myth which says that the <i>devas</i> (gods), after obtaining the pot of nectar by stirring the ocean of milk, hid it on the moon fearing that the <i>asuras</i> (demons) might, otherwise, steal it. |
| 21-22. | Its gentleness... calm control | : | The impact of the moon's beauty on the human soul is purifying. Of Wordsworth's faith in the healing power of Nature. |

III

To a Dead Crow

The poem is apparently a lament over the death of a crow. However, it has a more profound theme — death. Musing over the death of the crow, the poet gradually passes on to a consciousness of his own death. The crow which disturbs our sweet slumber in early mornings with its discordant notes is often considered a nuisance. However, here it is presented with the halo of sympathy and beauty.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------|---|---|
| 1. | minstrel | : | singer |
| 10. | gloom | : | darkness |
| 15. | offals of my meal | : | the leftover of my meal |
| 26. | dart | : | arrow |
| 38. | earthly bondage | : | earthly life which is considered a bondage. |

3

Michael Madhusudan Dutt

I

My Thoughts, My Dreams

This is an excellent love lyric. Every aspect of Nature's beauty reminds the poet of his beloved who is now separated from him. A tone of pensiveness permeates the poem. However, the constancy of love is reiterated through several images and concepts.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|---|---|
| 2. | Though absent... near | : | suggests that the poet is now separated from his beloved. |
| 7. | The star of eve | : | The evening star, Venus |
| 13. | placid | : | still, calm |
| 19. | hours of glee | : | hours of joy |
| 21. | Thy soul... hills | : | constancy of love is suggested. |

II

Oft Like a Sad Imprisoned Bird

The sonnet expresses the poet's intense fascination for the West. India, in spite of her natural charms and dear associations, does not give him satisfaction. He feels like a sad imprisoned bird and longs for liberty. Western civilization with its love of liberty, love of virtue and passion for science fascinates the poet. He seems to be aware of the humiliating condition of his own country under foreign rule.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 3. | green robed meads | : | meadows of green colour |
| 4. | climes | : | climates, refers to other lands |
| 10. | guerdon meet | : | suitable reward. |

4

Toru Dutt

I

Lakshman

This is one of the poems from *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. It is not properly a ballad but a dramatic dialogue or colloquy. The theme is derived from the *Ramayana*. Sita, deeply moved by the beauty of a golden deer roaming about the hermitage, pleads with her husband to get it for her. Rama goes in pursuit of the deer in spite of the forebodings expressed by Lakshman who guesses that the golden deer is Maricha in disguise sent by Ravana. After a long pursuit of the deer Rama sends an arrow which fells Maricha. While dying he cries out in Rama's voice for help. Hearing the agonised cry, Sita mistakes it for Rama's voice. Toru Dutt's poem begins at this point. Sita urges Lakshman to rush to help Rama. However, Lakshman is unmoved as he has been instructed by Rama not to leave the hermitage and to give protection to Sita. Moreover, Lakshman knows that Rama is fortified against death and is invincible.

Toru Dutt has chosen a critical moment from the Ramayana story and then developed it into a poetic dialogue between Sita and Lakshman revealing the complex character of Sita and the steadfastness of Lakshman. Toru shows great psychological insight, imagination and restraint in narrating the incident.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|--------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Hark | : | listen |
| 3. | succour | : | help |
| 6. | Environ him | : | surround him |
| 8. | magic bound | : | as if under the influence of some magic or spell |
| 12. | Evil hangs over us | : | An ironic statement. Sita seems to have some forebodings about the events to come. |
| 25. | Videhan Queen | : | Sita, daughter of the king of Videha |
| 28. | dastard tear | : | tear caused by base fear |

29. demonian birth : being born as a demon or *rakshasa*
35. Sun-staring eagles : eagles that fly so high that they appear to be looking at the sun from close quarters.
40. in hooded pride : showing the outspread hood in pride.
52. Not of such metal is he made! : Lakshman suggests the divine origin of Rama and assures Sita that there is nothing to fear.
55. He has a work, — he cannot die : Lakshman hints at the divine purpose of Rama's birth — the destruction of Ravana and other *rakshasas*.
74. Dazzles... the sun : Sita sarcastically suggests that Lakshman has only reflected glory and greatness of Rama.
75. Reft : bereft, without
76. dun : dull, grey-brown colour
80. Is there... hide? : Sita attributes evil motive to Lakshman.
87. A fair partition! : A fair division! A sarcastic and ironic remark.
96. trow : trust, believe
119. lacerate : cause pain and sorrow
123. meed : reward
143. balk : thwart, defeat
153. sylvan gods : gods of the forest
175. Hoarsè the vulture screamed : The vulture cries out loudly when Lakshman departs for the woods in search of Rama. The vulture's cry is an ill omen.

II

Sita

Sita is the shortest ballad written by Toru Dutt. It presents Sita in the hermitage of Valmiki after she was rejected by Rama. Toru recollects

the scene of Sita's life of suffering from her memories of the stories told by her mother. Thus there is a delicate autobiographical strain in the poem which makes it very personal and enhances the ingrained pathos of the scene described.

Line

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|--|
| 3. pries | : | enters |
| 11. the poet-anchorite | : | the poet saint Valmiki who composed the <i>Ramayana</i> . Sita lived with her children in Valmiki's hermitage. |
| 14. amain | : | with full speed |
| 15. lay | : | song |
| 22. erst | : | erstwhile |

III

Our Casuarina Tree

Our Casuarina Tree is described as 'the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner' (E.J. Thompson).

The poem may be seen as a poetic invocation of a casuarina tree in the garden of the poet. The tree is described in detail and it soon develops into a beautiful symbol linking the poet's pensive youth and joyous childhood. Toru invests the tree with symbolic and weird qualities. It is a vision encompassing the poet's past and present and even reminding her of her motherland whenever she is in foreign countries.

"The first stanza is an objective description of the tree; the second relates the tree to Toru's own impressions of it at different times; the third links up the tree with Toru's memories of her lost brother and sister; the fourth humanises the tree, for its lament is a human recordation of pain and regret; and the last stanza wills as it were the immortality of the tree" (K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar).

Our Casuarina Tree has a few similarities with Wordsworth's poem *Yew Trees*. It might be that Wordsworth's poem had an impact on Toru's mind and was fresh in her memory when she composed *Our Casuarina Tree*.

The poem is written in eleven-line stanzas with the rhyme scheme

abba, cddc, eee, probably an adaptation of the ten-line stanzas of Keats's odes.

Line

- 1-2. Like a huge python... : The imagery is probably
 ...the rugged trunk : suggested by Wordsworth's
 lines in *Yew Trees*,
 "Huge trunks! and each
 particular trunk a growth
 Of intertwined fibres
 serpentine
 Up-coiling, and inveterately
 convolved"
 (*Yew Trees* - 11.16-18)
2. The rugged trunk : The rough main stem of the
 tree.
 indented : marked
6. The giant wears the scarf : The giant tree wears the
 creeper like a scarf around it
11. darkling : in the dark
12. casement : window
19. wend : go
21. hoar tree : ancient tree
30. dirge-like murmur : a murmur that resembles a
 mourning song
31. shingle beach : beach covered with pebbles
32. eerie : strange
37. water-wraith : the spectre of the sea
- 45-46. Therefore... unto thy : Therefore, I would gladly
 honour : dedicate a song in your honour.
- 46-47. beloved... repose : the reference is to the poet's
 sister Aru and brother Abju
50. like those in Borrowdale : The reference is to the trees in
 Borrowdale about which
 Wordsworth speaks in his
 poem *Yew Trees*. Borrowdale
 is a beautiful valley in the Lake
 District where Wordsworth
 saw four trees of 'huge trunks'.

- “...those fraternal four of Borrowdale,
 Joined in one solemn and capacious grove;
 Huge Trunks!...”
 (*Yew Trees* - 11.14-16)
- 52-53. Fear, Trembling Hope... : This is a partial quotation from
 ...Time, the Shadow; : Wordsworth’s *Yew Trees*.
 Wordsworth wrote:
 “...Fear and trembling Hope,
 Silence and Foresight; Death
 the Skeleton
 And Time the Shadow;...”
 (*Yew Trees* - 11.26-28)
55. May Love... Oblivion’s : It is the hope of the poet that
 curse : love would make the tree
 immortal and save it from the
 curse of oblivion.

IV

Sonnet: The Lotus

The sonnet is a lyric version of a legend about the birth of lotus. The legend says that Flora, the goddess of flowers and plants, created the lotus combining the beauty of the rose and the lily in order to end the dispute between them for supremacy.

Line

1. Flora : goddess of flowers and plants
 4. Bards of power : famous poets
 6. her Juno mien : Juno was the wife of Jupiter,
 the supreme god. Lily flower
 and the beautiful appearance of
 Juno.
 8. Psyche : the soul
 13. dyed : coloured

V

The Tree of Life

This is believed to be the last poem of Toru Dutt written probably from her death-bed. The poem records a rare mystic experience she had while she lay attended by her father. The vision of the tree of life with silver and golden leaves beside which there stood an angel is effectively presented.

The poem suggests Toru's forebodings about her death and yearning for immortality.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|---|---|
| 8. | And every pulse
kept time? | : | every pulse was rhythmical in
tune with the passing of time. |
| 11. | Illimitable | : | boundless and infinite |
| 20. | Shimmering in radiance | : | shining in all brilliance |
| 22. | sprays | : | twigs |
| 37. | watching patient | : | watching patiently |
| 38. | close-prest | : | pressed closely |

5

Manmohan Ghose

I

London

The poem expresses a passion for London where the poet spent a few years of his life. It is a rarefied emotional reaction to the charms of the great city rather than a description of its tumultuous life. *London* is a good example of the poet's ability to emotionalise concrete experiences.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | sweetest country | : | England |
| 4. | espouses | : | presents |
| 5-6. | Oh, the rush... London | : | The poet's intense involvement
in London life is suggested |
| 8. | entranced | : | as if under some spell |
| 9. | sated | : | satiated, fully satisfied |
| 13-14. | And a sense...
with mine | : | a sense of mystic relationship
with humanity is suggested |

- 20-21. How sweet... : humility and self-effacement
forest of life! of the poet are expressed here.
23. Beautiful boughs : beautiful branches; however,
here it means beautiful trees.

II

The Rider on the White Horse

It is a poem of love and death and the central strain is an awareness of anguish. It was written after the untimely death of the poet's wife. The poet visualises the arrival of Death, the rider on the white horse, along the path of his life's journey to take her away from him. The first three stanzas are an extremely delicate and touching expression of the poet's love and solicitude for his wife and the last four bring out the anguish caused by her death. The crisp, irregular lines indicate the gnawing anguish of the poet.

Line

3. Roughly the storm : the storm of life is suggested
7. cloaked : protected
10. Heavy our way did lag : we lagged behind
17. smothered : suppressed
29. laggard : lagging (adj.)
39. a white horse bestrode : sat riding on a white horse
43. Pluto's consistory : Pluto is the god of the
underworld. Consistory is a
place of assembly. The line
suggests the underworld
dominated by the powers of
Death
44. Charon's shallop : the boat of Charon
Charon is the boatman who
takes the souls across the river
styx to the underworld.
51. Give me to weather : Give me so that I may protect
her, give shelter to her.
52. corse : corpse

III

The Dewdrop

This is one of the poems written in commemoration of the poet's wife. Her untimely death in 1918 left the poet thoroughly shattered and he never recovered from the wound and emptiness caused by this tragedy. *The Dewdrop* was written about a fortnight after this tragedy. The poet's daughter Lotika Ghose recollects the circumstances: "For about a fortnight he remained stunned and apathetic to all that happened around him. Then one evening as his daughters were sitting disconsolate and silent on the steps of the house and twilight deepened around them, their father came out and joined them. The apathy was broken and his voice sounded happy as he told them he had written a poem on their mother. Eagerly they turned to him, for they knew that in the wrecked state of his health two slender threads had bound their father to life, their mother and the need to care for her and his poetry. One had been snapped and if the other weakened what hope was there? Soon they heard their father's melodious voice reciting the lines of the now well known poem, *The Dewdrop*."

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | laves | : | bathes, washes |
| 6. | souls of dreams
unflowered | : | unfulfilled dreams |
| 12. | her love that encasketed
all | : | her love that contained all as a
casket holds precious jewellery
or pearls |
| 18. | rill | : | a small brook. |

6

Sri Aurobindo

I

The Tiger and the Deer

This is a metaphysical lyric in which the reader may discover more than one level of meaning. Written in free quantitative verse, the poem is suffused with philosophical and symbolic undertones. It presents in strikingly realistic terms the tiger, the burning terror of the forest. It tells us how an unsuspecting deer is suddenly mauled to death by the tiger,

'the pitiless splendour' of the forest. The contrast is between the 'mild harmless beauty' (the deer) and the 'strong cruel beauty' (the tiger). However, the contrast also brings to light the possibility of the extinction of the tiger and the survival of the deer in a future age. The tiger symbolises Death or Destruction whereas the deer symbolises the Principle of Life and Beauty. The poet hints at the possibility of Peace and Harmony surviving Terror and Death.

Sri Aurobindo seems to suggest that might is self-destructive and the 'slain survives the slayer'. He upholds the principle that even the mightiest force on earth cannot annihilate the good and the noble and the beautiful for ever. Here lies another symbolic extension of the meaning of the poem giving it a patriotic and nationalistic colour. The tiger might as well symbolise the British with all their weapons of oppression and the deer might symbolise India with her heritage of culture and human values.

Line

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Brilliant | : | The tiger is brilliant because of its striped colours |
| | crouching | : | lying close to the ground ready to jump on the prey |
| | slouching | : | drooping or bending very low |
| 1-2. | Brilliant... murder | : | The lines give a realistic and terrible picture of the tiger which combines beauty and death in it. |
| 3. | pitiless splendour | : | the tiger |
| 4. | But the great... crouched | : | The repetition of the words suggests the cautious but cruel manner the tiger waits for its prey |
| 5. | death leaped | : | death in the form of the tiger |
| 7. | And it fell... woodland | : | A sentimental note is introduced by referring to the mate of the deer |
| 8. | the mild harmless beauty | : | the deer |
| | the strong cruel beauty | : | the tiger |
| 10. | the mammoth | : | a species of elephant now extinct, believed to have existed in the central Asian |

- 12-13. The mighty... slayer : plains millions of years ago. A symbol of strength and terror. These clinching lines express the poet's faith in the resurgence of Peace and Harmony in spite of the presence of Terror and Death in the world. Misdirected Might is self-destructive. The killed survive the killer. The poet suggests the capacity of the Spirit; evil destroys itself and the good triumphs.

II

The Blue Bird

'I' in the poem is identified as Soul which is a part of the Divine. Blue is the colour associated with the Divine. The poet conceives the soul as a blue bird. The poem tries to summarise the celestial attributes of the Soul, its divine splendour and glory. The poem is an attempt to express the intangible splendour of the Soul in terms of the tangible sense of words.

Line

- | | | | |
|------|-----------------------|---|---|
| 1. | in his blue | : | in His (God's) celestial abode, Heaven which is supposed to be blue |
| 4. | seraph | : | angel |
| 5-8. | I rise... ecstasy | : | The soul's divine role as a link between heaven and earth is suggested. Even the possibility of rebirth of the soul is implied. |
| 6. | griefless sky | : | heaven |
| 8. | Fire-seeds of ecstasy | : | Soul is the source of all human joy |
| 9. | pinions | : | wings |
| 13. | ruby eyes | : | ruby-like eyes or red eyes |
| 14. | perched | : | sat |
| 18. | My mind... still | : | Suggests the immensity of the |

Soul, its perfection and tranquillity

19. My song... art

My song is the artistic expression of the mystic joy.

III

A Dream of Surreal Science

The poem is an intelligent satire on the claim of modern science that it can explain everything, even the mystery of genius. The poet suggests that any attempt to explain genius in biological terms (glands, hormones, thyroid) is stupid. Genius stands beyond logical explanations and one has to resist the temptation to resort to intellectual and scientific analysis. The poet seems to say that genius is the manifestation of the Divine. Science with its limited insight would one day lead the world to total destruction.

The poem was written in 1939, six years before an atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Since 1945 the world has been in the shadow of a nuclear war and today there is a great awareness about the danger of total destruction lurking behind nuclear preparations by world powers. But Sri Aurobindo foresaw this danger even before the first atomic holocaust and expressed his anxiety in a telling manner in the last two lines of the poem.

The poet visualises a kind of 'surreal dream' in which several unusual scenes appear. The sting of the satire is in the assumption that genius is merely a manipulation of the biological traits in man.

Line

- | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 1-2. | One dreamed...
immortality | : | The first dream is that of a gland writing Shakespeare's Hamlet and achieving immortality. |
| 2. | Mermaid | : | Mermaid tavern frequented by Shakespeare where he used to meet and argue with contemporary writers |
| 3-4. | A committee... Odyssey | : | The second dream is that of 'hormones' composing Homer's <i>Iliad</i> and <i>Odyssey</i> |

3. A committee of hormones : note the bitter sarcasm. Hormones are an internal secretion in the body
- Agean : Agean sea
- 5-8. A thyroid... right : The third dream is that of the Buddha meditating under the Bo-tree and later enlightening the world with his teaching of the Eightfold Path
5. thyroid : a ductless gland in the neck
 meditating almost nude : a satiric reference to the habit of so-called yogis
6. Bo-tree : Bodhi tree, the tree under which the Buddha meditated and gained Enlightenment
8. the Wheel : the symbol of the Buddhist Order
 eightfold path : The eight teachings of the Buddha directed towards the annihilation of 'Desire' leading to Nirvana
- 9-12. A brain... until : The fourth dream is about Napoleon who ravaged Europe causing untold misery
9. by a disordered stomach driven : the pathological condition of the dictator is referred to
11. St. Helena : The island where Napoleon was imprisoned by the British and where he died
12. wagged on : moved on
- 13-14. A scientist... shout : This is a futuristic dream or vision in which the scientist plays with atoms and destroys the whole world. The all-powerful scientist would one day destroy the world even before God gets time to halt the

process of destruction. The poem ends with the nightmarish vision of the world being destroyed by an accidental nuclear explosion.

7

Sarojini Naidu

I

Palanquin-bearers

In the 19th century and even during the early part of the 20th century it was common for noble ladies to travel in palanquins. Two or four men would carry the veiled palanquin. In Sarojini Naidu's poem a noble lady, probably newly wed, is being borne to her husband's house in a palanquin. The song sung by the palanquin-bearers is not about them but is a delicate paeon to the beauty of the bride.

This is one of the most musical and charming lyrics of Sarojini Naidu. In this poem of twelve lines seven similes are used to suggest the beauty of the bride. The palanquin-bearers carry the bride like a pearl on a string. The bride is filled with the hope of happiness and the palanquin-bearers themselves are affected by the sweetness of that hope. The poem is a spontaneous expression of emotion mingled with music, sound and colour. A proper reading of the poem reveals its delicacy.

The seven similes are found in lines 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10.

Line

- | | | | |
|----|--|-------------|--|
| 2. | sways | : | the rise and fall of the movement of the palanquin-bearers is suggested. |
| 3. | skims | : | floats silently |
| 5. | gaily | : | both the bride and the palanquin-bearers are richly attired. |
| 9. | springs
a beam on the brow of
the tide | :
:
: | shines
the crest of a wave that reflects
the sunlight. |

II

Indian Dancers

The poem is a musical rendering of the supreme joy of a dance experience. The rapture and voluptuousness of the beautiful dancers are suggested through the slow-moving rhythm of the lines. Their scent, smile, the rhythmical tread of their feet, their 'singing and swaying and swinging' to the tune of keen music are brought to life through the slowly-winding movement of the verse. Note how the carefully chosen words recapture the liveliness, ecstasy and image of the dance-rhythm just as a sculptor would do it in stone.

Each line contains eight feet and each foot is an anapaest. Each quatrain has alternate rhyme.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|---|--|
| 1. | ravished | : | filled with delight |
| | rapture | : | extreme joy |
| | celestially | : | in a divine manner |
| 2. | hyacinth heavens | : | blue or purple coloured sky |
| 3. | strain | : | tune |
| 4. | cleaveth | : | cleaves, pierces |
| 4. | houri-like | : | like a houri. Houri is a nymph
of the Mohamedan paradise. |
| | watches of night | : | stars |
| 5. | maze | : | a network |
| 6. | poppies of lips | : | lips red like poppies |
| 7. | tremulous | : | trembling |
| 10. | languish | : | longing for love and sympathy |
| | radiant choir | : | group of dancers wearing
bright dress |
| 11. | jewel-girt arms | : | arms with bands decorated
with jewels. |

III

To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus

The mystic face of the Buddha with its divine quiet and rapture has always been an elusive experience for poets and artists. Sarojini's poem is an attempt to realise the divine beauty of the Master seated on a lotus.

The Buddha seated on the 'lotus throne' radiating that mystic rapture around is the ultimate symbol of spiritual perfection and joy in a troubled world. While we are destined to go through 'the travail and the heat' of unfulfilled desires, the supreme peace on the face of the Buddha remains a mystery to us. It eludes our understanding though captivates our attention. We are left with the burden of the mystery that inspires a 'heavenward hunger' in our soul.

The first stanza of the poem describes the Buddha in meditation, seated on his lotus throne. The second stanza presents a contrast between the noisy, unquiet and transitory human life subjected to Death and suffering and the peace and serenity of the Buddha. The third stanza describes the struggle and toil of man while the Buddha enjoys perfect peace and serenity. The fourth stanza says about man's perennial search for spiritual realisation which is never fully achieved, though the divine spirit is never crushed. The fifth stanza says how the soul of man is lured by the divine mystery, the far-off vision which beckons the soul of man.

Line

1.	Lotus-throne	:	The meditating Buddha is always seated on a lotus.
2.	elate	:	raised
3.	mystic rapture	:	divine joy and quiet on the face of the Buddha.
5.	What peace... ken	:	peace which cannot be comprehended by man, which is beyond his ken (sight)
8.	the tumult of our way	:	our troubled life
12.	Death... Life	:	Death-Life paradox is suggested. The fabric of Life is continuously being unwoven by the invisible hands of Death.
20.	inaccessible desire	:	unfulfilled desires that cause suffering. The Buddha taught that the prime cause of suffering and sorrow is desire
24.	heavenward hunger	:	the longing of the soul to merge with the Divine.
27.	mortal moments	:	moments of life on earth

28. Infinite : Eternity
 30. Nirvana : The ultimate stage of spiritual bliss where man is totally free from all desires, often wrongly equated with the Hindu concept of 'moksha' or salvation.

IV

June Sunset

This is one of Sarojini's finest nature lyrics. Though primarily a poet of the outward beauty of nature, Sarojini sometimes retires into the quietness and solace of nature. When she is weighed down with worldly care or emotional stress, she takes refuge in nature. In *June Sunset* the poet makes an attempt to discover 'true repose' and tranquillity under the charm of a sunset sky.

The three stanzas of the poem reveal the three succeeding stages in the emotional response of the poet to the unfolding delights of a June sunset. The poet derives great consolation from the mystic charm of the sunset. In the first stanza there is a desire for repose under the sunset sky, in the second there is an awareness of the resurgence of life around and in the third there is a nostalgic flashback into the bygone days of love.

A sentiment of spiritual joy runs through the poem. There is a feast of rich colours and the spring is described with all its sensuousness reminding us of Keats and Tennyson.

Line

1. haven : shelter
 2. rush-fringed : bordered with rushes or reeds
 4. true repose : true peace of mind and joy
 6. Diaphanous : transparent
 amber : yellow
 7. glint and whirl : faint light that appears in a circling movement
 11. quail : a small bird. Its cry is clear like a whistle
 tamarisk : a kind of shrub (not tamarind)

13. gentian : a plant of the genus *Gentiana*
 18. cactus-gold : cactus flowers of golden colour
 23. Banjara : a girl belonging to the Banjara (wanzari) tribe.
 25. an ancient battle of love and battle : The Banjara girl sings a song the theme of which is some ancient battle or love affair. cf Wordsworth's solitary reaper singing about 'old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago'.

V

The Lotus

(To M.K. Gandhi)

The sonnet is addressed to M.K. Gandhi who was the poet's political mentor. The essential inspiration of the poem is patriotism because the subject of the poem, Gandhiji, was slowly emerging as a symbol of Indian patriotism at that time. The poet has achieved a symbolic identification of Gandhiji with the lotus, the flower that represents India's spirit of sanctity and nobility. The lotus is believed to have a divine origin. Gandhiji also represented the divine ethos of the nation. The poem invokes the ageless beauty of the lotus. The celestial attributes of the flower are transferred imaginatively into the spiritual personality of Gandhiji to make him a 'mystic lotus'.

Line

1. Mystic Lotus : The lotus flower is believed to have a divine origin and mystic powers. Gandhiji is addressed as a mystic lotus.
 2. myriad-petalled : With several petals suggesting Gandhiji's several spiritual attributes
 3. transient : weak and short-lived
 5-9. What legions... : These lines suggest the evil forces of the world that try to destroy the divine loveliness of
 ...loveliness

- the flower. The 'wild-bee hordes with lips insatiate' may symbolically suggest the British against whom Gandhiji started a non-violent struggle.
5. far-off clime : Britain
10. midmost rapture : deep joy as when one is in a midstream where the waters are deep.
12. Brahma's breath : The lotus is Brahma's seat and so is divine. It is Brahma's flower.
14. Coeval... Death : Brahma is one of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Vishnu and Siva representing Life and Death. Brahma represents Creation. The equality Brahma enjoys with the other two is shared by the lotus because it is the seat of the Brahma. Thus the lotus is coeval with the Lords of Life and Death. Symbolically, Gandhiji is presented as the divine Creator of a new world.

8

Shiv K. Kumar

I

Indian Women

A familiar Indian scene is evoked in the poem. Women waiting with empty pitchers at the village well is a common sight in India. This familiar situation is turned into an occasion to suggest the spiritual impoverishment of the women. The barrenness of the triple-baked continent, the hollowness of the pitchers and the strangeness of the zodiac doodlings on the sands are suggestive of the spiritual impoverishment, anxiety and hopelessness of the women. They wait for

the return of their men as they wait for the filling up of their pitchers. The women's sexual longings and disillusionment are also suggested in the concluding lines.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | triple-baked continent | : | the dryness and barrenness of the Indian landscape are suggested. |
| 5. | empty pitchers | : | symbolic of the emptiness of the women's lives |
| 7. | pleating hope in each braid | : | pleating the hair is a diversion for the women. |
| 8. | mississippi-long hair [^] | : | hair long and winding like the river Mississippi |
| 9. | looking deep into the water's mirror | : | water level in the well seems to be low. |
| 11. | zodiac doodlings on the sands | : | doodlings or scribblings on the sands as if drawing a zodiac sign. |
| 14-17. | even the shadows...
the hills | : | There is no indication when the men would return. There is a note of despair and pain in the closing lines. |

II

An Encounter with Death

The theme of the poem is the poet's experience of the death of his mother, an old lady of eighty-three. She dies of a heart failure even as she is joking with him reclining against the Mughal pillows of the divan. Death comes so suddenly and unexpectedly that the poet feels he is undone. Death snaps the mysterious bonds that have existed between the son and the mother.

The poet creates a weird atmosphere by referring to the several mysterious forebodings before and after the death. The myth about the departed soul hovering round its earthly habitat for a few days more after its departure from the body is explored. Several weird sounds are mentioned imparting a sense of other-worldliness to the atmosphere. The poet has relied on the reader's mythical consciousness and human

sympathies to make the encounter with death an experience that surprises and subdues him.

There are five short sections in the poem. The first section refers to the mysterious sounds indicating the presence of death — the clang of bluebells and the plaintive whine of the Alsatian. The second section shows the Mother reclining against the Mughal pillows on the divan like an empress. The third section presents the laughing Mother suddenly caught in the noose of convulsive gasps. The fourth mentions her death preceded by three violent yelpings of the dog. The last section is an attempt to feel the presence of the Mother's soul even after death. The weirdness of this attempt is suggested by referring to the rattling of the door, howling of the wind, whine of the dog and clang of the bluebells.

The poem is an excellent exposition of the impact of a mother's death on the consciousness of a sensitive son whose responses are conditioned by age-old traditions and myths about death.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1-6. | The blue-bells... plaintive whine | : | The mysterious sounds suggest the presence of death. It is a popular belief that dogs moan just before a death in the family. |
| 9-11. | my mother... an empress | : | The mother is a most dignified old lady, almost like an empress.
: Even she is not spared by death. |
| 15-16. | rattling like... pitcher | : | a picturesque description of the weird noises produced by the mother in the grip of sudden convulsions. |
| 19. | I was undone | : | An effective and dramatic way of mentioning the death of the mother. |
| 22-23. | For thirteen days... habitat | : | The Hindus believe that the soul of the departed person hovers round its earthly abode for a few days more enabling |

the living to communicate with it. The several rituals following death attain significance because of this belief. However, there is no unanimity about the number of days the soul is supposed to be around—it may range between 9 and 16 though here it is mentioned as 13.

III

Epitaph on an Indian Politician

The poem is a daring portrayal of the Indian politician of today. With mordant humour and biting irony the poet presents the Indian politician as an opportunist in action and a hypocrite in ideas. He makes wasteful public speeches, wears khadar, talks socialism while encouraging his sons to make money in big business. The man who has been using his lungs and tongue for powerful harangues, ironically, dies of tongue cancer, that too, during the budget season when he would have had several opportunities to use his tongue.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1-2. | Vasectomised...
beauty | : | Incapable of any fine emotions. The Indian politician has become insensitive to human values. |
| 3. | crossed floors | : | changed party loyalty or even group loyalty within a party |
| 8-9. | powerful harangues...
in haste | : | suggests the sterility of all political speeches |
| 11. | homespun yarn | : | khadar |
| 12. | socialising his soul | : | note the bitter irony |
| 13-14. | while his sons... big
business | : | The hypocrisy of the Indian politician is clearly brought out. |
| 15-16. | silenced by tongue cancer : | | died of cancer of the tongue. The politician contracts tongue cancer, probably, by the overuse or misuse of his tongue. |

17. in the Lord's year of grace: An ironic reference to the year
1969 1969 when the Indian National
Congress split.

9

Nissim Ezekiel

I

Background, Casually

The poem is autobiographical. It gives casually the background of the poet who was born and brought up in Bombay. The poem expresses the travails of an intelligent Jew boy of 'meagre bone' living and growing up in a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual urban society. It gives several details of the poet's school life; the sense of alienation he developed; his departure for England; return to his native city; marriage; jobs and the utter disgust he has developed for his own environment. However, the poet has no intention to quit the city or to run away from its challenges. In fact, he had made a commitment long ago to stay where he is. Irony and alienation combine to produce an inerascable impact on the reader's mind.

Line

- | | | | |
|------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | A poet-rascal-clown | : | The poet makes an ironic and condemnatory reference to himself |
| 3. | a boy of meagre bone | : | suggests the delicate health of the boy |
| 4-5. | He never... spin | : | The sense of alienation begins so early. He is not a part of the mainstream of social life around him. |
| 7. | A mugging Jew among the wolves | : | Refers to the poet's racial origin; he is a Bene-Israel Jew. A 'mug' means a simpleton. It also means a 'sheep'. The second meaning is more appropriate here because of the subsequent reference to 'the wolves'. |

- 8-9. They told... prize : Note the irony
13. Their prepositions : knowledge of English
- 16-17. At home... declined : Note the irony
25. basement room : a dingy room at the basement of a building
- 28-30. And then... had failed : These lines refer to the poet's first sex experience.
34. scrubbed the decks : he engaged himself on a ship as a menial servant to pay for the passage
36. How to feel it home, was the point : The sense of alienation has already become strong
44. I prepared for the worst. Married, : Note the irony
- 48-50. My ancestors... his rounds : These lines refer to the poet's Jewish ancestry which is one of the causes of the sense of alienation. Bene-Israel settlers took to oil pressing soon after their arrival in India.
56. The later dreams were all of words : The urge to write poetry began
66. The Indian landscape sears my eyes : The sense of alienation and disgust is complete
67. I have become a part of it. : However, the poet is aware that he has no escape because he is a part of the environment he abhors
71. commitments : choices
- 71.75. I have... I am. : This is the final choice of the poet to stay where he is. This is a sort of intellectual preparedness to accept the reality without surrendering to it. He continues to condemn the ethos of the bitter native city of his, but continues to live there as a part of it.

II

A Morning Walk

The poem is about the city, Bombay. It expresses the disgust and revulsion of the poet at the inhuman ways of the city where even a pleasant morning walk is impossible. The crisscrossing highways, the slums, the hurrying crowds, the rain, the stink and the inhumanity of the city compel him to look for an alternative, at least temporary, on the distant hill garden. The poem translates the bustle of the barbaric city into a gnawing pain that oppresses the poet's memory. The paralysis of the will and the finer emotions the Bombay man suffers from is succinctly suggested by a chain of metaphors. The cold and dim city is his purgatory. The morning walk is a walk intended to be out of the city's fatal grip but it ends up once again as a walk towards the city's festering fascinations.

The poem is reminiscent of certain passages in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. (See the protagonist's journey to the Chapel Perilous in section V of *The Waste Land*.)

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|---|---|--|
| 3. | Hill too high for him | : | the hill looms large as a symbol of disenchantment with the city life. |
| 6. | cold and dim | : | coldness and dimness suggest the inhuman characteristics of the city. |
| 7. | Where only human hands
sell cheap | : | The emphasis is on 'only'. The inhumanity that grips the city is suggested. |
| 10. | Alone, he waited for the
sun, | : | probably because the skyscrapers of the city block the rays of the rising sun. |
| 14. | The marsh where things
are what they seem? | : | The decay and degeneration of life in the city is suggested by the word 'marsh'. |
| 15-21. | Barbaric city... crumbs | : | A very suggestive description of the crowded city. |
| 19. | purgatorial lanes | : | lanes that are teeming with suffering lives. According to |

- Roman Catholic belief purgatory is a place in which souls are purified of sins through suffering.
27. men of straw : men who have lost all human values and feelings. cf. T.S. Eliot's *The Hollowmen*
30. That everything would be the same : The utter monotony and routineness of city life is suggested
36. The garden on the hill is cool : The garden is the symbol of hope but still unrealised
42. And he belongs : He belongs to the city. So he cannot escape from its grip. The poet's love-hate relationship with the city is suggested.

III

Enterprise

Enterprise is moulded out of the frustrations in a barbaric city. It is an allegory of the pilgrimage theme with the suggestion of futility. The poem speaks about a journey from the city to the hinterland by a group of 'exalting minds'. The journey is undertaken with the purpose of escaping from the monotony of the inhuman city and to gather experience of grace and innocence from the traditionally quiet and pure rural environment. The group encounters several impediments on the way. Its initial enthusiasm soon vanishes. At the end of the journey there is complete disillusionment. The final line 'Home is where we have to gather grace' stands out as the homiletic conclusion of a misdirected enterprise.

There are six stanzas each of five lines with alternate rhyme scheme. The thematic progress in the stanzas corresponds to the progress of the pilgrimage from morning to evening. The first suggestion of serious discord comes exactly at the middle of the poem, the 15th line — 'A shadow falls on us — and grows'.

Journey or pilgrimage is a metaphor for life throughout the poem.

Line

2. exalting minds : noble and cultured minds. The group consists of city intellectuals
5. The sun beat down to match our rage : The heat matched the enthusiasm of the group
rage : enthusiasm
7. copious notes : plenty of notes. Obviously the pilgrims maintain a diary as is the fashion with intellectuals.
9. The way of serpents and of goats : An ironic reference to the city-dwellers' notion that the villages are full of serpents and goats.
10. Three cities where a sage had taught : A reference to the village 'godman' who claims that he has taught in several cities before he took up abode in the village for the spiritual benefit of the rural poor!
12. desert patch : It is the 'area of special difficulties' symbolic of the first occasion when a difference of opinion arises among the pilgrims.
13. we lost a friend : "He may have died in the ordeal of crossing the desert patch; or he may have deserted the group, abandoned the enterprise" (Nissim Ezekiel)
15. A shadow falls : It is the shadow of defeat. This is the beginning of several obstacles the group has to encounter on the way.
19. I tried to pray : As one of the participants, the poet, at this stage, becomes totally disillusioned. So he tries to pray.

22. A straggling crowd of little hope : The group is already demoralised by the experiences it has undergone
23. the thunder : It is the voice of illumination that should have guided the group in its arduous journey. Ignoring it has led the group to troubles. The thunder suggests "that which is momentous, spiritually important in comparison to the daily trivia of living".
cf T.S. Eliot's use of 'thunder' in *The Waste Land* — V. Ezekiel uses it in its first meaning — Da, Damyata which means 'subdue yourself'. It is the failure on the part of the group to understand the message of the 'thunder' that finally leads to disillusionment.
24. Deprived of common needs like soap : The group is deprived of even essential material comforts.
28. The trip had darkened every face : The trip had caused only despair in every participant. A sense of futility comes to the group.
30. Home is where we have to gather grace. : This is the clinching line that sums up the futility of the whole enterprise. The ultimate irony lies in the knowledge that home is the place of affection and love. The pilgrims had not explored 'home' for their emotional needs. Instead, they set out in search of 'grace' elsewhere. Hence the disillusionment.

IV

Marriage

The theme of the poem develops through six stages — love, marriage, joys of married life, strains in marital relationship, antagonism and separation and the refusal of the poet to dwell upon the topic further. It is one of the ironies of life that marriage which unites the lovers ultimately leads to their separation. The bliss that begins with a touching grace of eternity gradually disappears; strains develop and many a time the lovers settle down to a nagging existence. The unresolved marital strains not only destroy the dream but also result in the disintegration of emotions and intellect. Through an effectively contrasting concept the poet suggests that the whole process which begins with the denial of sin (innocence) ends in the thought of murder (sin). However, the mystery of marriage continues to haunt and the poet himself is a frequent wedding guest silently and sadly witnessing marriages which are destined to disintegrate in due course. The enchantment makes victims of us all.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|----------------------------------|---|---|
| 2. | Eternity with touching
grace | : | The blissful experience of getting married. 'Grace' suggests the spiritual significance of marriage |
| 4-5. | The bride... lucky man | : | A mildly ironic statement |
| 10. | Primal Fall | : | The original sin and fall of man. The sin committed by Adam and Eve led to their fall from grace. The original sin is the cause of man's sorrows. |
| 16. | the mark of Cain | : | thought of murder. Cain was the first murderer. Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, murdered his brother Abel out of jealousy. (ref. Genesis, Chapter IV-xv) |
| 18-20. | Why should I...
wedding guest | : | The poem ends in irony |
| 20. | wedding guest | : | ref. Coleridge's (<i>Rime of the</i> |

Ancient Mariner, Part I, Stanza
iv)

V

The Railway Clerk

This is one of the poems written in Indian English. Ezekiel has satirised the Indian way of speaking English in a series of poems entitled *Very Indian Poems in Indian English*. *The Railway Clerk* imitates the English speech style of an average Indian clerk, semi-educated and perpetually harassed. The poem is a funny but pathetic soliloquy of a miserable Indian railway clerk, probably working in one of those crowded offices in Bombay's Victoria Terminus. He is a miserable man not because he speaks his own brand of English but because he is weighed down with worries of all sorts. He is constantly pestered by his wife for more money; his boss harasses him by refusing leave; he does not get either overtime or bribe and worse still, he has to support his mother-in-law.

In 35 lines Ezekiel has drawn the pathetic picture of a Bombay railway clerk in pure Indian English. The derisive laughter provoked by the clerk's Indian English soon subsides when we become aware of his sad plight.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|--|---|---|
| 4-5. | This year... twice
refused | : | suggests the harassment caused
by the boss |
| 7. | overtime | : | payment for overtime work |
| 8. | My wife is always asking
for more money | : | Typical Indian English usage |
| 14-18. | I am never... telling you | : | Each line contains an Indian
English usage — use of present
continuous for simple present,
very common with Indian
speakers of English. |
| 22. | Borivli | : | a suburb of Bombay |
| 30. | chat | : | conversation |
| 32. | thinking of foreign | : | thinking of going to foreign
countries |

10

Jayanta Mahapatra

I

Thought of the Future

The poem narrates a boyhood experience of the poet. When he was thirteen years old, his father took him to a pundit (astrologer) to know about his future. The pundit is an inseparable part of the Indian way of life. Jagannath Mishra, the pundit in this poem, is a typical representative of the greedy, uncouth, tradition-bound, cunning pundit race of India. The father, who seems to have implicit faith in the pundit, represents the native Hindu innocence. The boy, who is destined to learn under a British school teacher, is caught between these two conflicting ethos. His thirteen years make a dividing line between past and future, between the murky past dominated by the pundit and the festive future dominated by the British school teacher.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 2. | wiggly letters | : | twisted letters — refers to the writing in the astrological texts. |
| 5. | sandalwood's salve | : | sandalwood paste or ointment |
| 14. | monsoon-month toad | : | the toad imagery underlines the character of the pundit |
| 30. | The world changes | : | cf. 1.18 For the pundit the world does not change; everything is set down in his astrology. But for the boy it does change. |
| 34. | Stewart European with the ecclesiastics | : | The school where the boy learns under European masters |
| 38. | wooden clogs | - | shoes with wooden soles |
| 41. | peddled | - | sold |

II

The Bride

The poem expresses the emotional convulsions of a bride just after her marriage, waiting anxiously in the bridal chamber for the arrival of the

bridegroom. Tonight is the summit of her hopes, yet a gnawing anxiety corrodes her expectations. She maintains the lone vigil, attentive to the footfalls at the door. She is full of forebodings about the new role she has to play as a 'bedecked bride'. She is like a stone at touch, belled and is sensitive even to the feeblest of apprehensions.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|---|---|---|
| 1. | fevered farewell | : | emotional leave-taking |
| 2. | rock-faced | : | grave and unemotional |
| 8. | a stranger's anonymous care | : | The care provided by an unknown person. This refers to the bridegroom who is a total stranger to the bride till the time of marriage. |
| 12-13. | the taste-of-sin smiles on her sisters' faces | : | The smile on the faces of the sisters who are, probably, already married. They seem to say 'we have tasted it all'. |
| 16. | the fabled pride of a dying sunset | : | Some unknown fear begins to gnaw her mind. 'Dying sunset' is a metaphor for unfulfilled hopes |
| 19. | a mammoth's footfalls | : | the sound of footfalls that appear like those of a mammoth, a prehistoric animal known for its huge size and wild nature. 'Mammoth' signifies the shape of wild apprehensions and anxiety of the bride. |
| 21. | common harlot's fare | : | Lack of delicacy on the part of the bridegroom is suggested |
| 22. | bedecked bride | : | bride in her ceremonial dress. |

III

The Mountain

The mountain stands firmly fixed to the earth. The ever-present process of growth and decay does not affect it. It is a symbol of eternity. Its message is that life can be still reconstructed and a new society created

out of the ruins of the old. There is disillusionment in us. But the conscience of mankind has begun stirring and the evils of the world would be exorcised. The poem is a pointer to human failure and an exhortation for change.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 3. | silence and pressure | : | two balancing powers that work on the mountain |
| 4. | multiplying, adding, subtracting | : | the process of growth and decay. |
| 5. | abyssal | : | very deep |
| 7. | straddling sunlight | : | sunlight that spreads across the earth |
| 12. | mute clock | : | Time |
| 15. | slopes which do not ease at all | : | slopes which are difficult to climb |
| 16-17. | where unfinished... on the peak | : | Though Time destroys all differences among us, it occupies a place (peak) above us |
| 21-22. | Here,... ourselves | : | indication of disillusionment |
| 25. | bulk of conscience | : | an example of transference. The bulk of the mountain is transferred to 'conscience'. |
| 26. | exorcism | : | the ritual of expelling evil spirits — here, reformation of society. |

11

A.K. Ramanujan

I

The Striders

'Strider' is the New England name for a water insect.

The main structural element in the poem is the poet's memory going back into his cultural moorings in India, the land of the yogis. The central metaphor, the strider, stands for the yogi who bears several unexpected similarities with the insect. Ramanujan's symbolic

exploration into these similarities opens up new insights in the reader and he is persuaded to accept the ingenious identification of the two apparently dissimilar concepts.

There is close resemblance between the strider and the yogi in several respects. Like the yogi, the strider also walks on water. Both have bright eyes. The yogi pays no attention to food and comfort and so his legs are thin; the strider also has 'capillary legs'. Both the yogi and the strider levitate and meditate. The yogi attains the light of spiritual perfection and the strider sits on a 'landslide of lights'.

The strider is presented as a mystic symbol for the yogi who has attained detachment from this world and is on his way along the illumined path (tiny strip of sky) leading to the Supreme.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 3. | bubble-eyed | : | with eyes like bubbles; bright, shining eyes |
| 5. | capillary legs | : | very thin long legs which look like capillary tubes |
| 6. | weightless | : | In the case of the yogi it amounts to levitation, the art of floating in the air with the help of spiritual powers. |
| 7. | ripple skin | : | surface of the stream having ripples |
| 9-10. | not only prophets walk on water | : | walking on water is supposed to be one of the mystical powers of a yogi. Striders also do it |
| 12-15. | drowns eye-deep... of sky | : | suggests the meditative mood. The strider sits concentrating on the 'tiny strip of sky'. In the case of the yogi, the 'tiny strip of sky' is the spiritual path of detachment leading to Enlightenment. |

II

Of Mothers, among Other Things

The source of the poem is familial memory, memory about the mother. The imagery in the first two lines suggests the futility of the poetic language in expressing the bitter memory. The poet nostalgically recalls through several tough and rough images the loving care of a mother. The mother's figure emerges mingled with the pathos of the poet's childhood, memory serving as a catalyst. Consciousness goes back to resurrect a memory symbol. It is the Mother in white silk wearing diamond earrings, thin in appearance and with a crippled palm. The imagery in the last two lines serves as an objective correlative and makes others almost ineffective.

The figure of the mother flexing her fingers to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor is one of the most touching homely imageries in all Ramanujan's poetry.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------|---|---|
| 1-3. | I smell... youth | : | The blackbone tree reminds the poet of his young mother wearing a white silk saree. The saree is wound on her giving a 'twisted' appearance especially because she is thin. |
| 5. | a handful of needless | : | piercing rays of reflected light that appears like needles |
| 8. | tack and sew | : | fasten and stitch |
| 10. | tree-tasselled light | : | light that passes through the tree-leaves and branches giving them an appearance of a cluster of shining tassels. |
| 12. | pink-crinkled feet | : | pink coloured, cramp and wrinkled feet. Exposure to rain made the feet so. |
| 13-14. | one talon... mouse | : | The crippled palm of the mother. The palm was crippled in a minor accident with a mousetrap. |

- 14-16. Her sarees... one time wing : the looseness of the sarees suggests the thin, emaciated figure of the mother
- 18-20. When I see... kitchen floor : A touching picture of the mother trying to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor, probably a crumb left behind by the son after his rice-meal.

III

Still Another for Mother

The poem is based on an incident involving a woman and her husband on Hyde Park Street. This chance experience releases a flood of memory. The woman and her husband appear to have been there only to separate. The woman is large and buxom, the man is handsome and short-limbed. He left her at the doorsteps fumbling for the keys and walked on straight nonchalantly. The woman looks on at her husband's walking and the poet looks at her looking on.

However, this experience disturbs the poet's rest. 'Something opened in the past' with repercussions on the future. Essentially, the poem is an attempt to retreat into the past to discover a sense of well-being in the image of the mother. The woman on Hyde Park Street opens the door of the poet's consciousness to reveal his mother's nineteenth century house given to his father as dowry. The house sanctified the marriage and later the very birth of the poet.

Line

3. Hyde Park Street : a street in London
 she will not let me rest : The woman has kindled the poet's familial memories and caused disturbance in his mind.
6. chintz : printed cotton
7. eating mints : eating chopped spearmint mixed with sugar or vinegar.
 : 'mint' is a plant the leaves of which are used for eating
11. widows' peak : the point of hair over the forehead

13. whisky sour : hangover of a whisky session
 16. fuzz : fine fibres
 17. wishbone shadows on the : several merry shadows reflected on the narrow footway
 catwalk
 33-34. Something opened in the : Nostalgic memory about the
 past : mother. The present experience of watching the woman links the poet with his past, childhood and mother.
 37-38. nineteenth century silent : the memory about the mother
 house : is inseparable from that of the house. The house as dowry was one of the stabilising links between mother and father.

IV

Snakes

Snakes are held in awe and reverence by religious-minded Hindus. Hindu scriptures are replete with stories of snakes which could claim equality with man and gods. The snake is very much present in the religious consciousness of the Hindus. Ramanujan exploits this ethos in *Snakes*. The poem originates in the poet's 'hooded memory' of the snakes and meanders through experiences concerning snakes and snakesmen. The sudden dawning of memory about snakes which overtakes the poet in an unexpected places leads him to the recollection of 'ritual cobras' in his ancestral home and the weird snakesman with cobras wound round his neck. *Snakes* concludes with the recapitulation of a night when the poet accidentally trampled on a snake with his 'clickshod heel' and left it like a sausage rope dead in the woods. Now the woods are safe for the poet! But are they safe for the snake?

Line

- 5-6. looking at... curves : looking at the way the books are arranged in rows in bookstacks
 14-16. The twists... farmers' : This sensitive image gives a
 feet : concrete shape to the snake's hisses. They twirl like the dust

- cones that wind through the feet of farmers who walk on dusty village roads
17. lorgnettes (pron: lorn-yat') : eye-glasses with a handle
- 19-21. scales that moult... moon : the reference is to the moulting of snakes. 'Moulting' is the process by which snakes cast off their scales
22. ritual cobras : cobras are considered to be auspicious. Devout Hindus feed them with milk as the poet's mother does (1.27)
26. writing a sibilant alphabet of panic : the cobras uncurl and writhe as if writing a language of terror. 'Sibilant' means hissing sounds like those of alphabets 's' and 'z'.
- 35-39. Sister ties... hair again : Sister's braided knee-long hair evokes snake-memories in the poet.
41. my left foot... footfall : utter silence of the night is suggested
44. clickshod heel : shoe-heel fitted with a small piece of iron underneath
45. slushes : tramples into the mud
47. nodes : lines
53. sausage rope : now the crushed snake is like a sausage rope or sausage tube
- 53-54. frogs can hop... eyes : The lines suggest a sad contrast. The snake which has sent tremors through man is now being preyed upon by frogs and flies.
55. and I can... woods : Now the woods are safe for the poet. Probably an ironic statement.

12

Arun Kolatkar

(from *Jejuri*)

I

The Bus

This is one of the thirty-one sections from *Jejuri*. The theme of the poem is an irreverent pilgrimage to Jejuri, a place in western Maharashtra sanctified by the temple of Khandoba.

The Bus expresses the sensation of the journey by a state transport bus to the temple town. It was a cold morning and the journey through the countryside becomes a sensation rather than an experience. The poet, with his genius for details, notes several minor fragments of experiences during the journey. The central image is that of movement, movement from darkness to light, from ignorance to awareness. The wind that keeps on whipping the tarpaulin, the sun that shoots at the old man's glasses and the bumpy ride that divides the image of your own face provide a strange significance to the early morning bus ride.

Lane

- | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------|---|---|
| 1-2. | The tarpaulin... bus | : | This is because of the severe cold wind of the early morning |
| 7. | roaring road | : | road along which the bus runs roaring |
| 11. | an old man's nose | : | the old man is probably sitting opposite to you. In his pair of glasses the image of your face is reflected in two. |
| 17. | eyelet | : | a small hole |
| 19-20. | A sawed off... temple | : | Note the poet's power of minute observation. |

II

Irani Restaurant Bombay

The poem attempts an ironic presentation of an Irani restaurant scene in Bombay. The squint-eyed Irani, the decomposing cake in the showcase, the inevitable fly, the loafer at the table, the sticky tea print on it, the cat

under the chair, the corpse-like burnt matchstick are the components of a restaurant atmosphere that causes revulsion. However, there is a meaningful thematic progress from the decomposing cake in the showcase to the almost decomposed human body in the morgue through a series of images of beauty and ugliness, light and darkness.

cf. Ezekiel's *Irani Restaurant Instructions*.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | cockeyed
Shah of Iran | : | squint-eyed
: a sarcastic reference to the Irani, the owner of the restaurant. |
| 2. | decompose | : | the cake decomposing is an act parallel to the reality of the squint-eyed Irani. |
| 10. | landscape in a glass of water wobble | : | the reflection of the landscape wobbling in the water in the glass whenever the table or the glass is jerked. |
| 11. | scholarly attention | : | note the irony |
| 12. | blank testament of the table | : | stray writings on the tea table |
| 13. | an instant of mirrors | : | the reflection from a group of mirrors |
| 15. | two timing sleep | : | sleep divided into two halves |
| 19. | morgue | : | a place where dead bodies are kept for identification |
| 20. | politely the corpse rises | : | The upturned movement of the ends of a burnt matchstick when placed on a table is compared to the rising of a corpse from a block of ice in the morgue. The imagery is morbid. |

13

Kamāla Das

I

A Hot Noon in Malabar

One of the central themes in Kamala Das's poetry is her nostalgic memory of the family house in Malabar and the childhood experiences centred round it. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* evokes the typical experience of a hot summer afternoon in her home. The prosperous ancestral house attracted several strangers every afternoon — beggars, *kurava* girls, bangle-sellers. All these strangers were attracted, probably, by the munificence of the generous grandmother of the poet. Kamala Das has celebrated her ancestral home in poems like *My Grandmother's House*, *Blood* and *Evening at the Old Nalapat House*. Familial memory has a curative effect on the troubled mind of the poet. It restores her. A.K. Ramanujan is another poet who exploits this theme successfully.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|----------------------------|---|--|
| 3. | fortune-cards | : | the fortune-tellers keep a pack of cards on which predictions are written. |
| 4. | All stained with time | : | discoloured due to constant use through a long period of time |
| | <i>kurava</i> girls | : | girls belonging to <i>kurava</i> tribe. <i>Kuravas</i> form a caste of 'fowlers, basket-makers and fortune-tellers'. |
| 9-10. | devouring rough miles | : | travelling long distances |
| 13. | window-drapes | : | window curtains |
| 17-20. | strangers... jungle voices | : | These lines suggest the mysterious strangeness associated with the visitors. Their passion, wildness and mistrust are suggested. |
| 22-24. | Wild feet... far away | : | Nostalgia becomes a gnawing pain and torture for the poet who is far away from home. |

II

The Dance of the Eunuchs

The poem was written in the summer of 1963. The poet had an encounter with a group of eunuchs who insisted on dancing to celebrate the birth of a baby in the house of a friend of the poet's mother. The master of the house refused permission. So the eunuchs cursed the baby in anger and moved on to another house and began dancing there. The poet was fascinated by the dance of the eunuchs because 'they seemed so perverse, so unwholesome and sinister'.

Kamala Das confesses that the poem has echoes of sympathy for the eunuchs who are denied the experience of love-making. She herself was pursuing an ill-fated love affair at that time and probably the passion and pain of this experience also have gone into the making of this poem.

It is argued that Kamala Das has mistaken hermaphrodites for eunuchs. Eunuchs are castrated males. The poet appears to be aware of the partial womanhood of the dancers though they lack generative powers. This, obviously, means that the dancers are hermaphrodites. However, the poet prefers to call them eunuchs.

Line

- | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | It was hot, so hot | : | It was summer |
| 4-8. | Beneath the fiery...
almost fair | : | The poet attempts an imagi-
native transformation of the
sexless eunuchs into passionate
women. |
| 4. | fiery gulmohur | : | gulmohur tree with red
flowers. 'Fiery' also
emphasises the heat and
passion of the dancers. |
| 5. | Long braids flying | : | the entwined knots of hair
flying in the wind caused by
the movement of the dancers. |
| | dark eyes | : | a hint at the secrecy of sex |
| 6. | They danced... they
bled | : | The poet imposes on the
eunuch womanly qualities. By
vigorous dancing they are |

- capable of menstrual flow. They bleed. They are on the way to becoming women with an intensity of passion.
- 9-10. green
they sang... unborn : symbol of fertility.
the sterility of the eunuchs' life is indicated
11. sorry breasts : Note the irony. They are 'sorry breasts' because they do not flow with milk; they are not attractive.
12. vacant ecstasy : pretended ecstasy. The eunuchs are incapable of genuine ecstasy.
- 13-14. like half-burnt logs from funeral pyres : symbolic of the decadence of life. The image evokes the fire of death and the destruction of life.
- 15-16. Even the crows... trees : Crows are vile creatures. Even they are surprised, probably, because they have not seen such a scene as the dance of the eunuchs before.
16. the children, wide-eyed still : children are an antithesis to eunuchs
- 18-20. The sky... mice : Nature is presented in a perverted form as a parallel to the abnormality of the dancing eunuchs. As a contrast to the 'heat' at the beginning of the poem, now there is 'rain', but 'meagre rain' mingling with the smell of dust and the urine of lizards and mice. Thus a bleak picture is presented suggesting the perpetual barrenness and infertility of the eunuchs' life.

III

The Old Playhouse

The theme of the poem is the precariousness and incompleteness in man-woman relationship. This is one of the recurring themes in Kamala Das's poetry. Woman needs love desperately but the search ends in the discovery of man's monstrous ego. She has to protect her vital self from the threat of man's egoistic solicitude. She has to be resilient in the face of man's enormous self-centredness and lust. Man is surrounded by artificiality and narrowness and he serves love only in small lethal doses. The woman is deprived of her joy and fulfilment. In the grip of such a relationship, there is no mirth or happiness in her life. Her mind becomes an old playhouse where no lights shine, no music plays and no dance is done.

Woman's search for identity through conjugal love, man's lustful response to woman's quest and the devastation of the feminine self caused by such a relationship are suggested. The symbol of 'the old playhouse' points to the pathos inseparable from woman's search for a satisfactory relationship with man.

There are autobiographical elements in the poem. The poet, presumably, addresses her husband. She protests against the constraints put on her life. She resents the artificial comforts afforded to her; she is revolted by the routine of lust into which her husband has converted their relationship. She is dwarfed by the abominable egoism of the man and her life is deprived of all mirth and activity. It is simply an 'old playhouse' now.

Line

- | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|
| 1. | tame a swallow | : | The metaphor suggests the husband's efforts to dominate the wife. It also suggests the theme of the poem. |
| 4-5. | the urge to fly... of the sky | : | The woman's desire to have a free relationship with man without being dominated by him |
| 7-8. | but every... yourself | : | egoism of man |
| 8-12. | You were pleased... bitter-sweet juices | : | woman's desire for love is converted by man into lust |

- 12-14. You called me wife,... vitamins : Man's unromantic concept about wifely duties.
16. Became a dwarf : Woman's identity is lost in the grip of man's egoism
- 19-21. Your room... shut : The oppressive unnaturalness of the home-atmosphere is suggested
- 22-23. The cut flowers... sweat : Degeneration of natural impulses into repulsive routine is suggested. Flowers smelling of human sweat is a metaphor for the distortion of the instinct for beauty and delicacy.
- 24-25. my mind... put out : The 'old playhouse' is the central metaphor of the poem. It suggests a mind which was once mirthful but now barren and pensive.
27. Narcissus at the water's edge : In Greek mythology, Narcissus, a beautiful youth, was enamoured of his own face reflected in a fountain. He died of despair and his name was given to a flower. Thus Narcissus is a symbol for egoistic self-love leading to self-destruction.

IV

Death is so Mediocre

The poem is a meditation on life and death. At the confluence of life and death the past experiences appear hazy with dim outlines. Yet participation in life becomes an inescapable duty. Our response to life's demands becomes ineffective and poor as death slowly moves in. Even our adherence to wealth and lust, the two ruling passions in most people's lives, becomes a faint memory. The final rites associated with death and cremation appear to be vulgar. The last journey into the 'sure but invisible sea' is performed in silence and not even a fingerprint is

left behind for others to identify us. The crowded earth does not suffer any loss by our disappearance and the several misunderstandings we had with society vanish along with us. The poet seems to think of death as a consummation of life, a slow transformation into another stage.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1-3. | Life has... my eye | : | the first three lines express disillusionment with life |
| 2. | ritzy splendours | : | showy splendours |
| 4. | A garbage collector | : | One who collects garbage and other worthless matter. The metaphor indicates the presence of guilt. |
| 6. | morgued | : | placed as if in a morgue, a place where dead bodies are laid out for identification. The death-theme is suggested. |
| 9. | serviette blooms | : | table napkins arranged like flowers. |
| 9-13. | And, after... burglars of thoughts | : | The lines suggest an inability to express thoughts. The ability to respond to social demands is gone. |
| 13. | wealth and lust | : | For most people wealth and lust are the two important concerns in life. |
| 14-15. | Death is so mediocre | : | The poet plays down the popular notion that Death is all powerful. |
| 23. | paid marauders | : | a satiric reference to the people employed to wash the dead body and do other rites connected with cremation. |
| 24. | unbleached shroud | : | It is a custom to cover the dead body with unbleached cloth before it is taken for cremation |
| 26-28. | that secret edge... invisible sea | : | the slow transition from life to death is implied. |
| 29. | fingerprint | : | Fingerprint is used to identify |

criminals. The poet is not going to leave behind even a fingerprint! Note the irony.

32. My alliances... you : My social relationship with others.

14

R. Parthasarathy

I

Exile

(i)

This is the first poem in *Under Another Sky* included in *Rough Passage* as the first poem in the section 'Exile'. The poem is centred round the theme of growing up through experience and the desirability of man taking stock of himself when he approaches the age of thirty. It may be argued that thirty is too early an age to take stock of one's life. However, the poet believes that at thirty man reaches an age when he cannot trust his own image in the mirror. More experience does not necessarily mean more knowledge and thirty is as good as any other age because 'the mind will have settled' by that time and you can see yourself from a distance. The poem indicates a contemplative mood combined with a deep sense of wistfulness.

Line

4. At thirty the mud will have settled : At thirty a sort of calm must have entered man's life. He must have become mature and his experiences must have settled like mud particles at the bottom of a vessel containing muddy water.
6. refuse the image : do not accept the image
11. Experience doesn't always make for knowledge : Identification of experience with knowledge is wrong because experience itself may be a series of mistakes.

13. Do the same things over again : Man does not learn from experience but simply repeats the mistakes he has done earlier.
- 17-19. The luminous... reached shore : The metaphor is that of a river overflowing its banks but never reaching the shore because the flow is stopped by the pebbles on the shore. Excessive infatuation for woman retards the expansion of man's faculties. There is a suggestion of the poet's early infatuation with English and the later disillusionment — 'whoring after English gods'.
- 25-26. you will be alone like the stone benches in the park : The utter disillusionment after experience is suggested. The imagery of the 'stone benches' is striking. A sense of loneliness is suggested.

II

Trial

(i)

Death and Love are juxtaposed in this poem. The poet faces Death with relief because it is inevitable. Man's readiness to die or otherwise has no relevance to the inexorable law of death. The severity of death is softened by the experience of love, by its 'rainbow touch'.

Line

4. if I were stopped and cut off : If death comes suddenly
8. 'I haven't finished' : protesting that I have not finished living — Reluctance to die.
12. Night curves : Slow approach of death is symbolically suggested
- 13-14. I grasp your hand in a rainbow of touch : Love comes as a relief on the point of death.

(ii)

The central theme of the poem is nostalgia over childhood memories. The family album releases a chain of intimate memories centred round the child. The photo of the girl with her arms round the neck of her mother against the background of the Taj Mahal takes the poet back along the memory path to the childhood of the girl. The poem is remarkable for its delicacy of sentiment and picturesqueness. A note of sentimentality is introduced by the reference to the death of the 'Father'.

Line

- | | | | |
|------|--|---|--|
| 2. | I shared your childhood | : | I went back to your childhood through the memory path. |
| 3-4. | the unruly... Taj | : | A striking description of the photo of the girl against the background of Taj Mahal. |
| 7-8. | squatting on fabulous haunches | : | refers to the Taj which appears to squat like a woman on her huge hips |
| 11. | the spoonfuls of English | : | the smattering of English learnt in the school. |
| 14. | succulent folklore | : | interesting folklore |
| 19. | bronzed | : | hardened; acquired grown-up features. |
| 21. | you turned the corner in a child's steps | : | suggests the transformation of the child into a young girl |

III

Homecoming

(xiii)

The poem is a meditation on life. It begins with an attempt to bring back order into a disorderly life. The poet has spent forty years in disorder, deception, anxiety and now he spends most of the time brooding over the onslaught of old age. Occasionally he takes flight into the realm of fancy to escape from the tedium of introspection.

Line

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1-2. | This afternoon... everything in order | : | An attempt to bring back order into life. |
|------|---------------------------------------|---|---|

- 6-14. there is no end... : A meditation on the deceptions
complete anything indulged in by the poet in his
lifetime. He has spent forty
years of deception and
disorder.
8. live off friends : live by cheating friends or at
the expense of friends
10. not batted on eyelid : never felt any prick of
conscience
13. I have even kept letters : I have kept my letters
unopened for days unopened due to anxiety about
what bad news the letters might
contain
16. plucking grey hair from : suggests the coming of old age
my forehead and how it worries the poet.
- 17-18. Follow the smoke as it : An occasional flight into the
were a private tour. realm of fancy.

15

K.D. Katrak

I

Woman on the Beach

Katrak's talent to work up to a focus of excitement and terror through several stages of a theme is seen in *Woman on the Beach*. The central theme of the poem is an encounter with a dying woman on the beach who slowly crawls towards the sea before she dies. It was an early winter night. The poet saw the woman first behind the car, flat on her broken back. Next morning he saw her dead, a red horror over which flies moved in swarms. After an instant meditation over the possible cause of her tragic death, the poet succumbed to a reflex of fighting the sense of terror within evoked by the gory sight. A death-awareness shaped through experience, shock and meditation overwhelmed the poet.

Line

- 5-6. The first... sudden winter : indicates early winter. There is
also a remote suggestion of
death

15. This woman was a detail : This woman came to my view in all vividness and clarity
19. clucking annoyance : annoyance expressed with a clucking sound like that of a hen
20. There she lay : Note the abrupt and straightforward manner the poet introduces the woman.
- 30-32. In puppies... imagined shelter : A gory picture of accidental deaths in which bodies get mangled and mutilated
37. some law : law of compassion found hidden in every human being
47. counted my life : an introspection
64. outstripped : lost
- 67-70. The flesh had... in swarms : A gory picture of the mutilated corpse
79. reflex : reaction. A sudden reaction comes after the meditation over the cause of death.
- 88-90. the only flesh... one's own : Only in a subjective and self-centred manner man can look at death

II

Colaba Causeway

The poem expresses the insensitivity that has gone into the soul of the Bombay man. Nothing stirs him. Neither the images of suffering nor the images of love had any effect on the Bombay man's conditioned consciousness. Even walking the street is a routine activity. The only experience that can arouse him from his poise is that of physical pain.

The poem is in the vein of Nissim Ezekiel's Bombay poems. A *causeway* is a raised path, usually paved with stone, through a marsh or water.

Line

- 1-7. Here... familiar view : The lines present the images of pity and suffering

8. But I have grown remote : I have become insensitive to
from pain others' pain
12. Walking this street, I only : Even walking the street is an
move involuntary and routine
activity
15. skittles a stone : throws a stone like a missile.
16. 'behnochod' : an abusive word in Hindustani

16

Keki N. Daruwalla

I

Hawk

Hawk is a merciless meditation on the predatory nature of man. The ferocious bird of prey, the hawk, is presented as a forbidding symbol of modern man. He hovers over the world like a black prophesy weaving a cocoon of death. The tone is frighteningly accurate and bitter, the images are scribbled with the colour of death and torture, pain and despair.

The poem is divided into four sections. Section I presents the hawk-king on the kill. The poet has observed him both in the morning and in the evening. He runs amuck among the other birds which are less aggressive and therefore more vulnerable.

Section II is about the trained hawk, tamed by man for the purpose of game. In fact, the trained hawk is worse, probably because he is trained and tamed by man. The only difference is that the predator's passion is skilfully moulded into an art.

Section III depicts the scene of a hare-hunt by a 'mother hawk and son'. The hare is flushed out of the grass hideout and is killed through protracted torture, not in 'one fell swoop'.

Section IV is an imaginative identification of the poet with the hawk-king. The only experience he recollects is the period of taming which has hardened him against all humanity. Now he has identified his future victims and is ready to pounce. The poem ends on a note of despair in the juxtaposition of 'doves' and 'hawks' in the last line.

Hawk is any bird of the falcon family, not an eagle. It is a predatory bird. It flies very high and its eyesight is very keen.

Line

1. hawk-king : king of hawks. There is an ironic attribution of kingly qualities to the hawk. Bird-man identification is also implied.
3. drilled : pierced, went up
6. nothing could thrive here : suggests the barrenness of the land
7. gyre : whirling motion
the bird soars up with a whirling motion
8. parricide : murder of anyone dear.
13. parakeets : parrots
raucously : hoarsely, roughly
17. skewered : transfixed, fastened
talon : claw
20. the cup of his hate : the bird becomes a symbol of hate. cf. 1.9
24. hood : a covering for the hawk's head
26. perforated : having several small holes
31. His eye... the storm : the sinister power of penetrating vision is suggested
32. Discovering his eye : Awareness of his potentiality for hate
35. eyrie : nest
36. splayed wings : wings that are spread out
37. flare : flame
38. a gust of feathers : feathers in a sudden blast of wind
- 41-44. Hawking... his heart : Hawking is imagined to be a horrible ritual in which a quarry bird is sacrificed. The myth of primitive religious practices is hinted at to impart a weirdness and inevitability to the hawk
48. in one fell swoop - in one single wicked swoop over the hare. It is suggested

- that the killing of the hare is done by intermittent attack on it, not at once
51. one talon-morsel : a morsel of flesh hooked to the talon of the hawk
- 53-54. His heart... horses : This beautifully striking image suggests the immense torture the hare undergoes
58. ensnared : trapped
59. leather disc : the piece of leather that covers the eyes of a game-hunting hawk
- 66-68. But I am... wives. : Hardening of the mind against humanity. Slow process by which hate grows to engulf humanity in its cruel hold.
- 71-77. I will hover... gun. : The imagery in these lines is suggestive of death and destruction — cocoon of death, havoc, gun.
72. cocoon of death : sheath of death. It suggests a breeding ground for death
- 78-79. During the big drought... and it will rain hawks : The poet anticipates a barrenness in the life of humanity, 'big drought' and predicts despairingly that the forces of peace and love will be subjugated by those of death. (doves and hawks)

II

Easy and Difficult Animals

The poem is an imaginary monologue addressed to the poet's wife. She is a woman of clear distinctions. She is not weighed down by any confusing problems because she sees things and categorises them into two unmistakable groups. Her thoughts do not frighten her because she has already arranged them in two neat compartments. Dreams are either animals or birds; the moon is either dark or bright. Even the delirium

called life is divided into two neat divisions — easy animals and difficult animals. Among easy animals she has included all animals, birds, fishes and reptiles. Against this crowded menagerie of easy animals there is only one difficult animal, man.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| 2. | cower | : | shrink in fear |
| 10. | dark fruit/incandescent
fruit | : | dark side of the moon and the
bright side of the moon. The
moon looks like a fruit |
| 11. | Your distinctions were a
knife | : | Your distinctions were sharp,
decisive |
| 18. | taxidermist | : | one who is engaged in
preparing, stuffing and
mounting skins |
| 19. | gizzard and buzzard and
bat | : | kinds of birds |
| 21. | menagerie | : | a place for keeping wild
animals. Here it refers to the
collection of animals and birds
mentioned in the earlier lines. |

III

Apothecary

Apothecary is a dramatic monologue in the manner of Robert Browning's. The speaker is Rizwan-ul-Huq, a Hakim of Hyderabad and the Physician Royal to the Nizam. A boy from Sarai Khwaja who receives treatment for an earache in the morning dies of a stomach-ache in the evening. This made the apothecary suspect in the eyes of the public. He is denounced as a fraud and a killer. While the homeo doctor across the road who practises allopathic remedies on the sly, attracts a crowd of patients, Rizwan-ul-Huq slowly withers away in his profession. This is in spite of his ardent faith in Allah!

The monologue is confessional and the conflict arises out of the tension between the Hakim's sincerity in the profession and the reward society pays to him. There is a note of pathos throughout. The progress of the monologue is from confessional pathos through sarcasm to cynicism. In the oppressive and fake world of unexpected and irrational

happenings, to be humble, truthful and faithful is of no avail. We simply end up as splendid corpses. There is effective counterpoising of disparate sentiments and visions like success and failure, reputation and drudgery, truthfulness and fraudulence, faith and scepticism converging towards a climactic realisation of the futility of all and the inevitability of death.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|----------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | liquored-up face | : | face that exhibits signs of excessive drinking |
| 8. | obituary-scribe | : | person who writes obituaries |
| 15. | ekka | : | a small one-horse carriage |
| 2-. | For this week... flies | : | Now patients do not come to him.
He spends his time simply 'swatting flies'. |
| 29. | Hakim | : | Physician who practises Indian medicine |
| 30. | fatiha | : | funeral prayer |
| 32-34. | As there... ailment | : | The utter irrationality of the world is mockingly suggested |
| 37. | nightcap | : | alcoholic drink taken at bedtime |
| 56. | suppository | : | a medicated plug used to administer medicine through the rectum |
| 59. | Hippocrates | : | Greek physician who lived in the 4th or 5th century BC. Earliest among ancient physicians |
| 69. | pad the hook with the bait | : | to make the bait look attractive—attempt to cheat |
| 74. | Kaaba | : | The Holy building in Mecca |
| 75. | Moharam | : | First month of the Muslim calendar |
| | Ramadan | : | Ramzan, the month in which Muslims fast |

17

Dom Moraes

I

Sailing to England

Sailing to England is a vision of love and death. The voyage invokes the poet's memory about his beloved and her delicate sad face rises before him from the sea. The episode where three people were swept out into the sea is referred to in a picturesque description of how they struggled for life in the rolling waters until one of them was drowned. The man who could not swim had to sink. There is a suggestion of resurrection from death to life in the closing stanzas. Death is conceived light-heartedly as if it is inconsequential like a nap in the afternoon.

Line

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 2. | I am in love, and long to
be unhappy | : | a paradox is suggested—'love'
and 'unhappy' |
| 4. | stones for eyes | : | A common metaphor in
Moraes's poetry. In 'Song'
dancers have 'stones for eyes';
in 'Bells for William
Wordsworth' there is the line
'His flesh had gone back into
soil and his eyes into stones'.
The metaphor suggests
permanence and wholeness. It
may have also an implication
of magical or mysterious
powers. |
| 6. | inland watchers groaned | : | those who stood ashore and
watched the incident groaned. |
| 7. | elbows jerking in a skein
of waves | : | elbows coming up and going
down while struggling for life
in a mass of waves. |
| 8. | Like giant women knitting: | | a bizarre metaphor suggesting
the figure of death. |
| 15. | Trawling her whisper
across the sprawling seas | : | The imagery is that of whisper
spreading across the vast |

expanse of the sea like a trawl,
net that is moved across the sea
to catch fish

- 23-24. Or choose... afternoon : A nap in the afternoon is mentioned as a wise alternative to death. This brings the traditionally invincible death within the volition of human beings. The strangeness and obscurity of death-experience is softened for us.

II

At Seven O' clock

The poem speaks of an early morning experience of being massaged by a masseur. However, the merely physical experience of the 'human flesh' assumes a spiritual tone when the poet recognises the reborn Christ in the masseur. Now his fingers touch not only the poet's skin but also his soul. Towards the end of the poem the masseur from Ceylon becomes a religious symbol.

Two creative movements are taking place in the poem. One is the evolution of the ordinary masseur into a Christ-figure by an act of imagination of the poet and the other is the physical resurrection of the poet by an act of touch by the masseur. Through this interacting process of imagination and reality, the poet acquires some of the aspects of the Christ-like figure of the masseur.

Line

- | | | | |
|------|-------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | masseur | : | massagist, one who massages |
| | balding head | : | indicates that the masseur is elderly |
| 4. | As though he were about | : | religious significance is |
| | to preach or bless | | attributed to the masseur. |
| 5. | poulterer's fingers | : | fingers like those of a poulterer, one who deals in dead fowls |
| | queasy | : | unsettled, loose |
| 7-8. | he keeps his thin... | : | probably to avoid the smell of the human flesh |
| | turned away | | |

9. antarctic eyes : very cold eyes
 15. His fingers touch the skin: they reach the soul : The knowledge of the soul through the body is suggested
 17-20. Within my mind... Arise : Masseur becomes a symbol of the reborn Christ
 20. breathes : conveys the idea of a new birth
 Arise : conveys the idea of blessedness or invocation into life.

18

Gieve Patel

I

On Killing a Tree

The poem is a light meditation on the process of pulling out a tree, root, trunk, boughs and all, from the inside of the earth and transforming it into brown hard wood. The tree is anchored in earth; any amount of hacking and chopping would not kill it totally because it has a bewildering way of healing the wounds on its bark and sprouting green twigs and leaves. It has to be pulled out entirely from the entrails of the earth to kill it. The sun and air would transform it into lifeless wood. Total severance from the earth kills the tree totally. The poem seems to suggest through the tree metaphor that life, pulled out of its immediate earthly environment, withers; it is difficult to kill deep-rooted life-truths and there is a self-sustaining principle underlying all living organisms.

Line

2. simple jab of the knife : simple thrust with the knife causing a cut or wound.
 3-7. It has grown... water : The principle of life that sustains the tree as an offshoot from the earth is suggested.
 8. leprous hide : rough and scaly bark of the tree
 13-18. The bleeding... former size : In spite of the attempt to destroy it, the tree survives. The self-sustaining principle of life is suggested.
 21. anchoring earth : the earth in which the tree is anchored or firmly rooted.

23. snapped out : dragged out
29. For years inside the earth : earth is the source of life for the tree. The age-old relationship between the tree and the earth is also suggested.
- 30-34. Then the matter... withering, : The effect of the sun and air on the fallen tree is that its trunk gradually hardens and withers.
31. choking : compression of the tree trunk due to the scorching heat of the sun.

II

Commerce

The poet's encounter with the man begins with the matter-of-factness of a commercial transaction. The man's interest is aroused only when a rupee note is given to him. He offers hospitality on the corner of the cloth spread on the ground and he is now ready to talk. The second stage is the man's attempt to search into the affairs of the poet through questions about his family and job. A sort of personal equation is soon established between the two in spite of their attempt to hide from each other.

The theme of the poem is the prosaic nature of human relationship in the constricted environment of modern urban life where everything is reduced to neat commercial propositions.

Line

1. simplicity of commerce : a simple commercial transaction, i.e., giving a rupee note to the man
4. groundspread : the cloth spread on the ground
7. external gestures : perhaps it is only a show of hospitality.
- 8-9. As always.... click shut : There is an element of cunningness in the relationship between the two men.
- 13-15. Enquiries after... he poses : The several enquiries the man makes and the attempt of the

- poet to evade them appear like commercial bargaining.
18. The darkness cocoon : the darkness that envelops like a protective covering
22. What then, Sir Poet, of political choices : note the irony.

19

Adil Jussawalla

I

The Waiters

The poem is a sympathetic response to the plight of waiters of Tamil origin in Bombay's hotels and restaurants. These waiters, noted for their darkness, have come to the city for better prospects and change. They stand aloof from the phoney sophistication of the city, their buttoned up manners presenting a striking contrast to the 'soiled and cluttered' culture of the city.

The Waiters has three parts. The first part introduces the dark-skinned waiters who have left behind them a miserable past. The second part presents them as 'guardians of good taste, an inevitable part of the city's sophistication,' 'polite of speech, punctilious, guarded, kind'. The third part suggests the sudden transformation of the waiters when the day's ministry is completed.

The poem is full of similes and adjectives. The poet achieves a dramatic effect by balancing and contrasting images. The descriptive observations in the poem support a continuous change of the image of the waiters from dark-skinned drudges to refined and polite servers and back to a race of tired workmen stripped to their essentials and being swallowed by the ever-feasted city.

Line

- 1-2. Blacker than... recall : The Tamil waiters are noted for their dark appearance. Darkness is an image indicating the poverty and drudgery of their life.

arguments are useless; the exile's senses shake, guts tighten and his heart is gripped in the clenched claws of disillusionment. Approaching Santa Cruz is symbolic of the approach to the home country, diseased, populous, with its slums, poverty and decay and encircled heat. The immobile boy holding a mass of breadcrumbs whom the exile encounters on landing is symbolic of the home to which he returns reluctantly.

The poem is an attempt to explore the aching inner landscape of the sensitive exile against the background of the visible outer landscape of the home country represented by the precincts of an airport.

Line

- | | | | |
|--------|---|---|--|
| 3. | A union of homes | : | a conglomeration of houses suggesting the crowd and congestion in the city |
| 4. | stunk and populous | : | It is the exile's notion about his home country |
| 8. | The various ways of dying that are home | : | an ironic statement about the living conditions in the home country. |
| 9. | 'Dying is all the country's living for' | : | note the paradox |
| 12. | show me my place | : | sense of alienation |
| 30-31. | Arguments are endless... senses shake | : | An instinctive response on realising that the time has come to land. |
| 32-35. | The heart... what it is | : | Through several images the poet brings out the sense of revulsion and fear caused by the compulsion to land. Note the use of the words - 'clenched claw', 'shrivelled', 'cage', 'steel', 'swoops', - all presenting rough and hard images. |
| 38-40. | And this is home... like a stone | : | The boy symbolises the immobile, poverty-stricken ethos of India from which the poet stands alienated. |

20

Gauri Deshpande

I

A Lunch on the Train

The poem is based on an experience of travelling in a second class railway compartment. The exorbitant fare prevents the poet from travelling first class and she is thus thrown into the company of second class fellow-travellers. She watches their strange habits. With great forbearance and sympathy she narrates the lunch-time scene in the compartment. The strange assortment of passengers consists of a husband and two wives, a young mother and her three children, a long-nosed man with a tiffin-box on his knee, a youth in the corner trying to read a book and the poet herself. The lunch-time presents a contrasting picture. The young mother and her three children have no lunch. They are the foodless four. The long-nosed man eats from his tiffin-box; the two wives feed the 'large appetite' of the husband with sweets and fruits from many boxes. This scene fills the poet with a sense of guilt and her own sandwich packet now appears like an enormous crime. So in an expression of charity and humanity she buys a bunch of bananas and distributes them to the foodless four, at least to salve her conscience.

Line

- | | | | |
|-------|--|---|--|
| 6-10. | Next to me... two wives | : | This group consisting of a man and two women presents some difficulty for the poet as she could not easily make out their relationship. So she concludes that it must be a strange case of one man having two wives. |
| 12. | Too young to have been a mother of three | : | The second group of four persons also presents a strange spectacle as the mother appears to be too young to have three children. |
| 22. | Trying disdainfully to read a book | : | The 'disdain' is perhaps due to his sense of superiority to the others in the compartment. |

24. expectorations : Refers to the children spitting here and there in the compartment as the mother does not exercise any control over them.
42. The youth is on a diet : a half-ironic remark about the of mere knowledge youth who prefers reading to lunch.
51. salve conscience : clear up conscience.

II

Migraine

The theme of *Migraine* is the inexorable reality of pain and the disintegration of personality under its impact. Migraine begins in timid doses but enlarges upon human consciousness in spite of attempts to stall its sting. The incipient beginning, the slow but determined growth and the final triumph of migraine over the body and the mind are suggested in the poem. 'Surrender to the fact of pain' leads to destruction of identity and disintegration of personality. One can resume one's identity only during the brief non-migraine spells. In due course, life of pain becomes an accepted reality and the spells of relief appear like briefly worn disguise or mask.

Line

- 5-6. ...showing just a tawny : Migraine is compared to a tail the beast awaits yellow-tailed beast which shows only its tiny tail first.
7. aspros, codeins and cool : These are supposed to contain drinks the migraine
9. placing its paws : the animal imagery continues
- 11-21. But it's clever... reality : The slow but determined manner migraine overpowers the victim and destroys a person's identity is suggested. It is like a beast felling its prey through a slow process of torture.
22. not medicine, not gods : Nothing can stall the pain and ancestors caused by migraine. Science,

- religion and tradition fail before pain
- 23-24. Only your... fact of pain : There is no choice but to surrender to the fact of pain in all humility.
26. You can resume human disguise : The normal human condition looks like a disguise because most of the time pain holds sway.

21

British Nandy

I

Calcutta If You Must Exile Me

The poem is an agonised response to the violence and cruelty that has ruled the city of Calcutta at the time of writing. The poet whose life is inextricably involved with the ethos of the great city emotionally identifies himself with it and articulates its agony in powerful tones. He does not want to leave the city in spite of the perils involved in living there as long as his senses and reason are intact. He does not want to narrate the sorrow and despair of the city to others.

The poem suggests the vital core of Calcutta's social, economic and political life. The several allusions to the topography of the city impart a sense of realism to the theme. The Jarasandha myth invests the theme with a sense of universalness. The sense of indignation and despair is made poignant with the introduction of a nostalgic strain.

It is a political poem that deals with elemental sentiments deeper and more significant than those associated with politics. There is a wide range of passions touched upon by the poet — death and despair, violence and cruelty, torture and deprivation, vengeance and hate, pity and anxiety.

Line

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | wound my lips | : | make me unable to talk |
| 2. | burn my eyes | : | make me unable to see |
| 3. | the headless corpse...
hate | : | several macabre scenes are mentioned. There are also topographic allusions. |

4. They will... your thighs : several instances of torture and cruelty are highlighted. They were daily occurrences in the city.
5. Jarasandha-like : The myth of Jarasandha is invoked. According to a Mahabharata legend Jarasandha was killed by Bhima after a prolonged duel. Bhima tore him into two halves lengthwise on the suggestion of Lord Krishna.
6. they will tie... at the stake : Two ancient forms of torture—crucifixion and burning at the stake—, are mentioned. History repeats its methods of torture in spite of the passing of time.
7. hang you from a wordless cross : ‘wordless’ qualifies ‘you’
8. armless leper : symbolic of the sickness and mutilation of the city.
9. I will show... never came : The reference is to the prostitutes of Burrabazar—another symptom of the city’s sickness
10. the hawker who died with Calcutta in his eyes : The hawker represents every man who dies in the street. The ‘hawker’ may also suggest the preying bird ‘hawk’ surveying the whole city like a curse hovering over it.

II

Love

The theme of this prose-lyric has three aspects — love, union and separation. The slow process by which love grows and encompasses the very existence of the lover to become a part of his consciousness and action is suggested. But soon the love that finds expression through

weighted words alone leads to disillusionment. The realities of life take over and the dream of love is relegated. So separation comes leaving behind only silence and memories.

When words catch up with their speakers, illusion crumbles and the bitter taste of reality strikes one silent and leaves one with endless memories to live on.

Line

- | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|
| 1. | The first time...
vulnerable | : | The three stages of surrender to the lover are mentioned—innocence, readiness and vulnerability |
| 2. | But words cannot live
your life for you | : | Realisation about the hollowness of love expressed through fine words |
| 3. | ...where I left her to the
mercy of the rain | : | ‘rain’ suggests separation |
| 4. | ...it was friday... | : | a day of sacrifice |

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