

January 2020

Guftugu



c u l t u r e m a t t e r s

SK Sahajahan, 'Happens All in Circular Motion', Enamel painting, 12 x 12 inches, 2018

About Us

Culture matters. And it *has* to matter in India, with its diverse languages, dialects, regions and communities; its rich range of voices from the mainstream and the peripheries.

This was the starting point for *Guftugu* (www.guftugu.in), a quarterly e-journal of poetry, prose, conversations, images and videos which the Indian Writers' Forum runs as one of its programmes. The aim of the journal is to publish, with universal access online, the best works by Indian cultural practitioners in a place where they need not fear intimidation or irrational censorship, or be excluded by the profit demands of the marketplace. Such an inclusive platform sparks lively dialogue on literary and artistic issues that demand discussion and debate.

The guiding spirit of the journal is that culture must have many narratives from many different voices – from the established to the marginal, from the conventional to the deeply experimental.

To sum up our vision:

Whatever our language, genre or medium, we will freely use our imagination to produce what we see as meaningful for our times. We insist on our freedom to speak and debate without hindrance, both to each other and to our readers and audience. Together, but in different voices, we will interpret and reinterpret the past, our common legacy of contesting narratives; and debate on the present through our creative work.

Past issues of *Guftugu* can be downloaded as PDFs. Downloads of issues are for private reading only.

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Contents

From the Editors

Words of Resistance

1

हरे सांप: दो कविताएं

हीरालाल राजस्थानी

5

This is How You Cook Beef

Anand Haridas

8

सपनां

प्रतिष्ठा पंड्या

13

Two Poems by Najwan Darwish

Translated into Hindi by Suman Keshari

Translated into English by Kareem James Abu-Zeid

16

Evening Walk

Salim Yusufji

20

Just Another Judgment Day

Two poems by Asmaa Azaizeh

Translated into English by Yasmine Seale

22

Love's Ways and other poems

Deepa Onkar

31

At night

A Poem by Poile Sengupta

33

Alone

Two poems by MP Pratheesh

Translated into English by K Satchidanandan

35

The Bridge of Migration: Three Poems

Yogesh Maitreya

38

Contributors

41

Terms and Conditions, Privacy Policy and Copyright

44

From the Editors

Words of Resistance



S. Vijayaraghavan, 'Collective Waves', archival pigment on paper, 2013

Poetry speaks a language unique to an individual yet aflame with a universal soul.

From Songs of Kabir

धीरें धीरें खाइबौ अनत न जाइबौ ।

रांम रांम रांम रमि रहिबौ ।।टेक।।

पहली खाई आई माई । पीछै खै (खाई?) हूं सगौ जंवाई ।

खाया देवर खाया जेठ । सब खाया सुसार का पेट ।।

खाया सब पटण का लोग । कहै कबीर तब पाया जोग ।

god my darling

do me a favour and kill my mother-in-law

— Janabai (13th century)

— trans. Arun Kolatkar

Chewing slowly,

Only after I'd eaten

My grandmother,

Mother,

Son-in-law,

Two brothers-in-law

And father-in-law

(His big family included)

In that order,
And had for dessert
The town's inhabitants,

Did I find, says Kabir,
The beloved that I've become
One with.

Translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

Poetry speaks in many tongues. And we are rich – in India – with our diverse languages of poetry.

કાપલી

કાપલીથી ક્યાં કશું
બાંધી શકાય કે સાંધી?
આ તો વળગણ છે એને
પુરાણી હવેલીનું
તે લકીરો ઉકેલતી બેઠી છે
પાયાની વાત કહેતાં કહેતાં, કોઈએ તો
ફાટવું રહ્યું

- ઉદયન ઠક્કર

महाभारत के बाद

महाभारत के खत्म होने के बाद कालचक्र कहता है कि
सिर्फ हार्न बजते हैं
और खोजने पर भी इंद्रप्रस्थ में कहीं कोई धोबी नहीं मिलता।

महाभारत के बाद
हर किसी के कपड़ों पर दिखाई देते हैं खून के दाग।

-उदय प्रकाश

لو تعرف

الحياة قالت لي:
لا تشتتر شيئاً من الموت
الموت لا يبيع إلا موتاً
هُم لك إلى الأبد
هُم معك إلى الأبد
أصحابك لو تعرف- هُم الحياة

- نجوان درويش

Poetry has always moved people to action. Whether it sings of pain and suffering, or calls for solidarity, or incites brave resistance, poetry is committed to change. Poetry is political.

This is why Guftugu ends 2019 with a special issue of poetry.



Merlin Moli, 'Walking Dead in Dark Times'

Firing at the Heart of Truth

-Huchangj Prasad

You cowards —
firing at us who wield pens.
You murderers —
celebrating the cold-hearted killing of innocents.

Let the sparrows
build nests
at your gunpoints.

Your guns may have wounded us.
But we are not just bodies,
Mute bodies.

We are children of the earth,
our mother gives us life with every letter,
strength with every word.

Look, this is not blood we shed
but ink, fresh and indelible,
writing the history of truth.

Every drop of blood now reborn
into a thousand truths.

Listen — I know, you Great Devotees!
I know the sword that chopped Shambuka's head.
I know who demanded Eklavya's thumb.
I know the truth: I know that sword.
I know you who became a gun
to kill me.

Listen — lies are not termites
eating away at truth.
Guns cannot destroy it either.
But these pens, these countless pens,
How they grow, tall, strong,
like a gigantic tree of many truths.

Translated by Ali Ahsan and Aniruddha Nagaraj

Githa Hariharan

K. Satchidanandan

December 2019

हरे सांप: दो कविताएं

हीरालाल राजस्थानी



Shoili Kanungo, 'Leaf', Ink and watercolor on paper, 2013

मिर्चें

मिर्चें झाड़ से गुच्छे में
फूट पड़ती हैं आड़ी टेड़ी
कैसी भी हरी झक
लेकिन जब ये सूख जाती हैं
बिन खाद पानी और हवा के
तब ये अकड़ पड़ती है
लाल होकर
अपने तेवर के साथ
एक एक बीज
आग उगलने लगता है जिब्हा पर
और धधक पड़ता है
शरीर की रग रग में
इंकलाब बनकर।।

हरे सांप

हरे सांप, काले सांपों की तरह
गुलामी के पिटारे में नहीं फसते
और न ही छुपने के लिए तलाशते हैं
चूहों के बिल
वे संगठित होकर
फुंकारते हैं दूर से ही अपने दुश्मन को
जो लालच का दूध दिखाकर पुचकारते हैं
वे नकार देते हैं झट से
उन तक पहुंचने वाली कटोरियों को

उन्हें मालूम है
दूध उनके जोश को
होश को
हकों और उसूलों को दरकिनार कर
छीन लेगा उनका हौंसला
और जकड़ लेगा अपनी गिरफ्त में
वे बीन की धुन से भी आकर्षित नहीं होते
वे भांप लेते हैं दूर से ही सपेरों की चालसाजी को
और हरी घांस की रहनुमाई में
बुनते हैं अपने वजूद की लड़ाई
वे बिलों में नहीं ठहरते
उनके वास
दरख्तों की टहनियां और हरे पत्तों की छाँव में मिलते हैं
इसलिए वे दूर रहते हैं सपेरों की पकड़ से
वे लड़ते हैं मरते दम तक
अपने हकों हुकूक और आज़ादी के लिए
और बचा लेते हैं
अपने अस्तित्व को शातिर सपेरों से
जो काले सांपों को तमाशा बनाकर
उन्हें रगड़ते आये हैं सदियों से
गुलामों की तरह बड़ी आसानी से।।

This is How You Cook Beef

Anand Haridas



Kedar Namdas, 'Reclining Reality', etching on paper, 8 x 10 inches

Five whistles. Six, at the most.
One more whistle,
And it will lose consistency.

You stand there, by the stove.
Waiting for the first whistle.
Wondering what could be
Happening inside the pressure cooker.

To start with,
You need to be sure that
The meat is cut from the softest region.
Rub salt to the cut pieces.

Nothing cleanses like pain.

Spices are added with precision.
There seems to be some unwritten measure
For every scoop added.
Chopped onion. Sautéed to the right shade of brown.
A slice of green chilli. Crushed ginger.
Unwritten rules of taste.

It takes a long, very long time for the first whistle.
One has to wait patiently.
Once the first whistle happens, rest follows.
But the wait for the first one is long,
And special too.

That's when you get a whiff of things to come.

First Whistle

A train of thoughts
Filled with dead bodies,
Some cut, some charred,
Always precedes the first whistle.
There is an unsettling silence before that.
In that silence, you try to forget
The fact that the train exists.
But it invariably comes.
From a long dark past
Stretching endlessly behind you,
It will come anyway.
Like that proverbial light in the tunnel
The whistle announces the train.
It comes from across the border of logic.
Driven by the desire for good taste.
Then, it starts.

Second Whistle

Once you have crossed the border
With the first whistle,
The distance to the second whistle is short.
You can measure it, brick by brick,
Spoon by spoon.
The dish is still half-cooked, yet
The smell is so tempting.

It will drive you up domes of fantasy
And put your flags up there.
You start getting visuals, smell and
Feel the touch of soft, cooked meat.
You refer back to cookbooks at this point.
Just to make sure, spices were added
In right measures.
From those pages, letters come out in hordes,
Marching along with chants,
With malice and hatred,
Determined to cook the raw cuts.
That's when you realise
That the secret of a good recipe
Is in the unwritten measures of ingredients.

Third Whistle

There will be a reluctance in letting go
The third whistle.
A slight hesitance.
As if giving a second thought on
Whether you really wanted to cook this meat.
Is this the dish that you look forward to?
You cannot take it out now,
You cannot have it as it is now.
You are neither there, nor anywhere.
The third whistle will then sound like
'Where were you, when the first one went off?'
'What did you do when the second whistle was on?'
'Why are you now thinking about this?'
'Who are you?'
The third whistle is when the meat
Starts to get the heat.
From all sides.

Fourth Whistle

By now, the aroma of the meat
Is swirling around you.
You are drooling.
You lie to yourself
That this meal is good for you.
You list out the good qualities
Of this freshly cut meat
Cooked in the perfect manner.

You keep repeating the same lies
Again, and again.
You are desperate to taste it now.
You recall all the best moments
You have had before this.
And assure yourself that
This one is going to be special.
Better than anything that happened
Till now.
The pressure of repeated lies adds that
Extra flavour to the meat being cooked.

Fifth Whistle

You close your eyes.
You have almost lost count.
All you see now is the meat
Well-settled to its edible best
Bubbling within the cooker.
You can see those brown bulbs
Popping up on the top of gravy,
Almost musically,
And then vanishing.
The symphony of a spicy meal.

Half A Whistle More

Just when you are about to
Turn the stove off,
You hear half a whistle.
You stop.
It is not the sixth one.
Neither is it the fifth.
Something happened after that.
Or was it before that?
You wonder, did you really hear it?

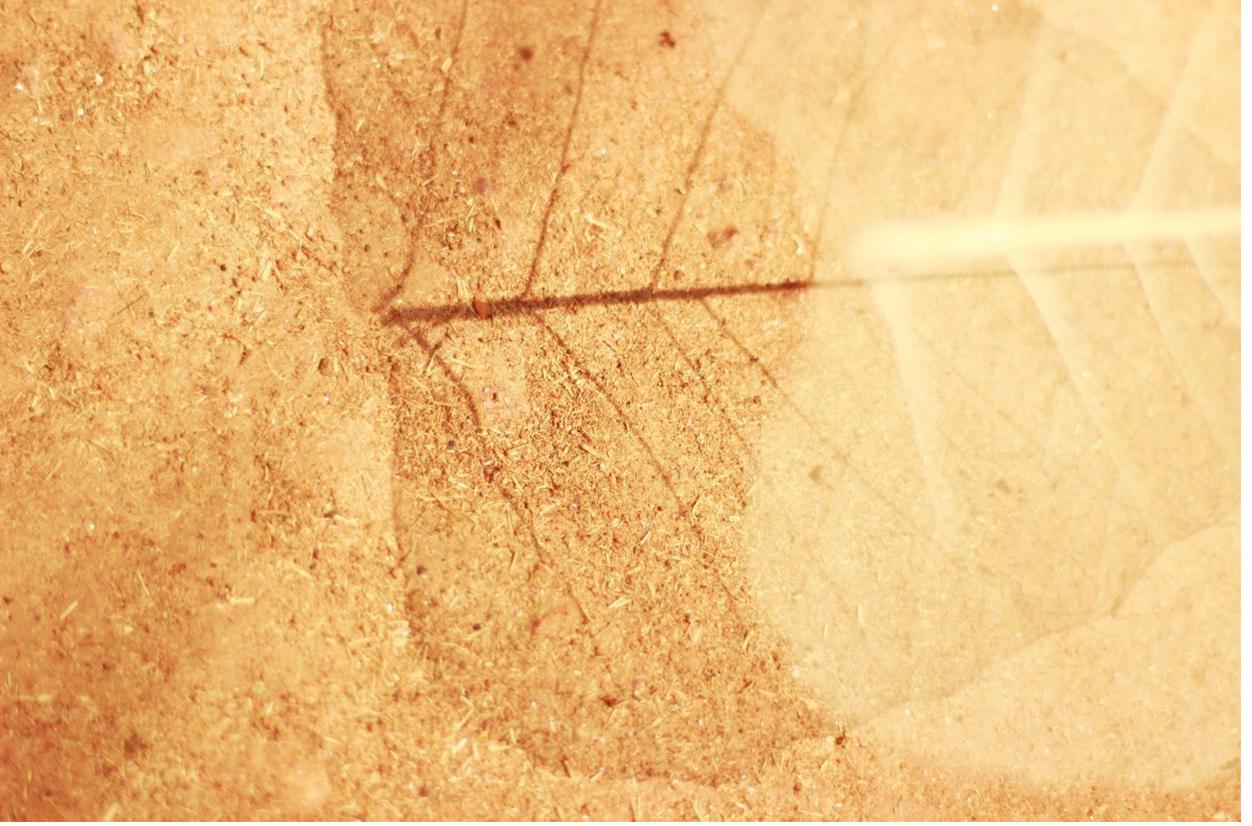
But then,
It does not matter now.

The cut pieces have been cooked.
To the best of culinary standards.
They are no longer wounds that bled once.
Spices added in specific measures
Have done their magic.

Those pieces are meant to be eaten.
They await garnishing now.

You switch off the stove.

સપનાં
પ્રતિષ્ઠા પંડ્યા



MP Pratheesh, 'Let me come to your wounds'

હું હજી આંખ ખોલતી નથી
એક સપનું ચાલ્યા કરે છે મનમાં
આંખના કમાડ પર હલ્લો બોલતી
કાળી ડીબાંગ રાતને સાવ અવગણીને
એ ભરે રાખે છે
ઝીણી ચળકતી ટીલડીઓ
ફાટેલાં ભૂરાં આકાશમાં

રાતને અંદર ધસી આવતી રોકવા
ઘણઘણતા કમાડ પર પીઠ ટેકવીને ઊભી છું
ઊંડા શ્વાસ ભરતી રાહ જોઉં છું
પણ રાત મૂકતી નથી કેડો
ચાંપે છે અંધરાભરી મશાલ
મારા ઘરનાં છાપરાં પર
એની કાળી જ્વાલાઓની લપેટમાં
ઈચ્છે છે મને ભસ્મ કરવા
નરસિંહના* હાથની જેમ બળું છું
આખેઆખી મશાલભેગી
ને તો ય જોયે રાખું છું સપનાં
કોઈ ઝાંખા અજવાળાંના
જેમાં જોવા મારે પરવાળા
ખીલંતા મારાં બાળની આંખોમાં

* નરસિંહ મહેતા એ ગુજરાતી ભક્ત કવિ હતા અને એક કથા પ્રમાણે એકવાર કૃષ્ણની રાસલીલા જોવામાં કવિ એવા તો તલ્લીન હતા કે તેમના હાથમાં પકડેલી મશાલે તેમનો હાથ સળગાવી દીધો તેનું ભાન કે દર્દ એમને નહોતું.

Dreams

I refuse to open my eyes
a dream runs inside
ignoring
a dark night
banging on the doors
outside
it stitches
tiny, glittering sequin
on the torn blue sky
I stand
with my back
against the thundering doors
I try to stop the dark night
from barging in

a deep breath
the agony of a long wait
the night refuses to let go
darkness torches my roof
wants to turn me to ashes
engulfed in dark flames
I burn
like Narsinh's* hand
I burn in the dark flames
and yet I dream
of some faint light
wherein I can see
the corals growing
in the eyes
of my little ones.

** Narsinh Mehta was a Gujarati Bhakti Poet. Legend has it that the poet, transfixed by the spectacle of Krishna dancing with the gopis, burnt his hand with the torch he was holding, but was so engrossed in the ecstatic vision that he was oblivious to the pain.*

Two Poems by Najwan Darwish

Translated into Hindi by Suman Keshari
Translated into English by Kareem James Abu-Zeid



John Singer Sargent, 'From Jerusalem', watercolor, gouache, and graphite on off-white wove paper, 30.5 x 45.4 cm, 1905-6 | Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

जेरुसलम (I)

तुम्हारे लिए बलि चढ़ाने को
हम चोटी पर खड़े थे
और जब हमने अपने उठे हुए हाथ खाली देखे
तो समझ गए
कि हम ही बलि-पशु हैं

मृत्यों को खुद अपनों के ही हाथों मरने दो
केवल तुम ही बचे रहोगे अकेले
वे जो मरने को अभिशप्त हैं
उनकी भ्रमों से भरी इस तीर्थ-यात्रा से
तुम्हें क्या लेना-देना?

खाली हाथ उठाए
हम ही बलि-पशु हैं

Jerusalem (I)

We stood on the Mount
to raise a sacrifice for you
and when we saw our hands rise empty
we knew
that we are your sacrifice

Let the mortals fall
in the hands of their fellow mortals
You alone always remain
This confused pilgrimage
of those who are impermanent-
what concern is it of yours?

Our hands rise, empty
We are your sacrifice

जेरुसलम (II)

जब मैं तुमसे जुदा होता हूँ
पत्थर हो जाता हूँ
जब वापस लौटता हूँ
पत्थर हो जाता हूँ

मैं तुम्हें मेडुसा नाम देता हूँ
मैं तुम्हें सोडोम और गोमोरा की बड़ी बहन कहता हूँ
तुम बप्तिस्मा का वह जल हो जिसने रोम को जला कर राख कर दिया

पहाड़ों पर मकतूल गीत गुनगुना रहे हैं
और विद्रोही अपनी कहानी सुनाने वाले किस्सागोओं को उलाहने दे रहे हैं
जबकि मैं समुद्र को पीछे छोड़ता तुम्हारे पास लौटा हूँ, लौट आओ
उस पतली धार के पास जो अब कतई नाउम्मीद हो चुकी है

मैं कुरान पढ़ने वालों को सुनता हूँ और लाशों के कफनों को भी
मैं मातम मनाने वालों के पैरों की धूल को सुनता हूँ
मैं तीस का भी नहीं हुआ और तुमने मुझे कितनी ही बार दफना दिया
और हर बार, तुम्हारी ही खातिर मैं जमीन से निकल आया
भाड़ में जाँ
वे जो तुम्हारी शान में कसीदे काढ़ते हैं
जो तुम्हारी तकलीफों को स्मृति चिन्ह की तरह बेचा करते हैं
वे सब जो अब चित्र में मेरे साथ खड़े हैं

मैं तुम्हें मेडुसा नाम देता हूँ
मैं तुम्हें सोडोम और गोमोरा की बड़ी बहन कहता हूँ
तुम बप्तिस्मा का वह जल हो जो अब भी जल रहा है

जब मैं तुमसे जुदा होता हूँ
पत्थर हो जाता हूँ
जब वापस लौटता हूँ
पत्थर हो जाता हूँ

Jerusalem (II)

When I leave you I turn to stone
an when I come back I turn to stone

I name you Medusa
I name you the older sister of Sodom and Gomorrah
you the baptismal basin that burned Rome

The murdered hum their poems on the hills
and the rebels reproach the tellers of their stories
while I leave the sea behind and come back
to you, come back
by this small river that flows in your despair

I hear the reciters of the Quran and the shrouders of corpses
I hear the dust of the condolers
I am not yet thirty, but you buried me, time and again
and each time for your sake
I emerge from the earth
So let those who sing your praises go to hell
those who sell souvenirs of your pain
all those who are standing with me, now, in the picture

I name you Medusa
I name you the older sister of Sodom and Gomorrah
you the baptismal basin that still burns

When I leave you I turn to stone
When I come back I turn to stone

Evening Walk

Salim Yusufji



Vasudha Thozhur, 'Travelogue – The Aesthetics of Tragedy II'

The town absorbed in pooling dusk
is poplar masts, all willow-tossed,
and lost beneath the valley's toil
of darkening green. Like a sea
in oils — and just as still — that's seen

to lap-unwrap some jutting coast,
this mass has set in a boil against
its sheer surrounds of sand-dry earth.

They flooded an ocean long ago:
this furred and whorled and welling dark
in arabesques unfurled below,
the jagged surge, its patient shore.
While Buddhists say that when the Phags-
Pa Dhitika was here he drove
a lake away, and that's when Leh
emerged as land. The story stays.

As Buddhist lore assumes the town
submerged in its evening lake,
we stand uphill, my dogs and I,
a motley, straggling band of four —
one dogs my heel, two others stray
to scent and mark the Tethyan shore;
and all intent, each one alone,
we slowly turn towards our home.

Just Another Judgment Day

Two poems by Asmaa Azaizeh
Translated into English by Yasmine Seale



Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons

يوم من أيام القيامة

كنت أجلس في المرحاض حين نُفخ في البوق

لم أخرج مع الخارجين، ولم أفرع مثلهم

هل ناداني إله أو عامل صيانةٍ كي أعترف بالخراف السمينه التي سرقتها من حقول الأمل؟

سأعترف دون أن تضعوني في القفص الكبير الذي تسمّونه نهاية العالم

دون أن أمشي فوق ضميري الرفيع بين جهنّم والجنّة

فجهنّم أمّي البيولوجيّة

ورثت عنها أوداجي المشتعلة

وحقدي على الأخيار الذين يتزوّجون العدالة كأنّها ابنة عمّهم

أعترف بأنّي أنا من أغرقتُ رأس العدالة في حوض المياه، فكان قتلاً رحيماً

أنا من سرقت مفاتيح أبواب طموحاتكم

فلو فتحتموها للفحتكم الخيبة بكفّها الغليظ

أعترف بأنّي أحببت أمّي وأبي لكن تمنّيت موتهم

وأنتي كرهت أطفالتي قبل أن يولدوا

بأنّي لا أكرهت بمن سيحكم هذي الأرض

ما دامت الفراشات لا تكترث

ولا بمن ماتوا من أجلها ما دُمت سأموت أنا أيضاً

أعترف بأنّي أشفق على الشمس الغاربة أكثر من الأطفال الذين يشحذون على الإشارات
وعلى طبلّة أذني عند سماع شعار: نموت وتحيا فلسطين
فأنا أريد أن أحيا ولو في مرحاض

أعترف بأنّي سرقت الخراف في ليلةٍ ليس فيها قمر
وبأنّي خبّأت القمر في الثلاجة كي لا يكتب عنه الشعراء
فصار الأمل صحراء قاحلة
وظنّ الملائكة أنّها النهاية
ونفخوا في البوق

النشاز يدلّف من الشّبّاك
وأنا لن أخرج من هنا قبل أن أكتب عن القمر المجمّد
والدجاج المجمّد
والقلوب المجمّدة

أنا والقمر والدجاج والقلوب من فصيلةٍ واحدة
تلك التي لن يحاسبها أحد

Just Another Judgment Day

the blast found me
in the toilet
I did not follow
the others out
took no part
in their panic

was a god calling
was it maintenance trying
to make me confess to stealing
fat sheep from the fields of hope

I will confess
no need to put me in the great cage
you call the end of the world no need
to hoist myself above my conscience raised
between heaven and hell hell you see
is my birth mother

I owe her
my temper my horror
of good intentions promised
to justice like first cousins

I confess
I held the head of justice
under the water it was a mercy
killing

I stole the keys
to the doors of everything
you hoped for to keep you from the sting
had you thrown them
wide of defeat

I confess I have loved
my mother and father
and wished for their deaths and hated my children
before they were born

I confess who ends up ruling
this land is no concern
of mine if it's all the same

to butterflies nor who died for it
if it's all the same death

I confess
I have more pity for the setting sun
than for the children begging at crossroads
more pity for my eardrum
when the slogan bellows
we die Palestine survives
you see I want to live
even in the toilet

I confess
I stole the sheep one moonless night
I hid the moon in the fridge to keep
the poets from writing about it
and hope dried to a desert
the angels thinking the end was nigh
blew the trumpet and the window
let the blast in and I
will not leave before writing down
the frozen moon
the frozen chicks
the frozen hearts

I moon chicks hearts
are all of the same stuff
answering to none

قصيدة مذبوحة

أنا معجبةٌ جداً بسير الأنبياء

قراءتها تشبه شراء ورقة يانصيب

ثمّت فانتازيا طويلة عن حياة هائلة

فارغة حتى الكمال. متأملة لدرجة أنك قد تسمع الله بأذنك. وقد تلقن كلاماً ولا في خيال إنسيّ

وقد ترى ألواناً فوق بنفسجيةً وتحت حمراء. وقد تكلم ضفدعاً. وقد تزيح عن قلبك ألم جيلٍ بأكمله. وقد تخلّص العالم من عادته في أكل برازه

هذه ليست لعبة يا محترمين

ليست نزهةً لكتابة قصيدةٍ تافهة

ليست همياناً يومٍ في وادٍ عابر

تأمل الأنبياء كثيراً حتى صاروا كذلك. تبصروا وجفّت حدقاتهم ضفاف بعضها حتى قالوا لنا

ما ظللنا نردده آلاف السنين

أنا أيضاً أريد أن أقول كلاماً كهذا

فخيالي بحجم جحر فأرٍ. فنرانه اللماحة المتذاكية وُجدت مذبوحةً على بابهِ

أريد أن أقول كلاماً عن الذبح

عن الخيام التي ذُبحت في بلادٍ مذبوحة. عن أصحابها الذين سقطوا من فروج أمهاتهم مذبوحين أصلاً

عن أمهات يُذبحن في المخازن والآبار كالدجاج بسكاكين أو لادهم

هذه ليست لعبة يا محترمين

هذه ألوانٌ فوق بنفسجيةً وتحت حمراء. حتى الـ acid لا يستطيع إليها. وعلينا أن نكون أنبياء أو

أريد أن أقول كلاماً عن بلادتي تجاه الوطن

وعن سوداويتي التي لا تتوافق مع عمري الربيعي الذي يصنع الأمل

لست صانعةً أملٍ ولا ما يحزنون

أغسل أدمغةً أصدقائي وأقول لهم إنّ هذا الوطن بحجم جحر فأرٍ وأجرهم إلى أبواب الطائرات

أريد أن أقول كلامًا عن هؤلاء الذين ليس لديهم طائرات ليجرّوا إلى أبوابها. ولمّا خرجوا ليطلبوا بطائرة،
ذبحوا ورجعوا في ثلاثٍ مثل صناديق الخضار

لكّني لن أقول

فعنقي قصير ولست أرى قيعان الآبار

حياتي مجرد خطّ متكرّر من البيت إلى العمل ومن العمل إلى البيت

في الطريق أرى فتياتٍ يصعدن الحافلات بخفّة الدجاج

وأوراق يانصيب تتعف سماء المدينة

وأنبياء مذبحون

ينهشهم الذباب

Sacrificial poem

I am a great admirer of the lives of prophets.
Reading them is like buying a lottery ticket:
the long fantasy they contain of a peaceful life,
perfectly empty.
So lost in thought you can hear God
whisper in your inner ear,
and you in turn mutter words unknown
to human invention.
You can see ultraviolet and infrared.
You speak the language of frogs.
You chase from your heart
all the anguish of mountains.
You rid the world of its habit
of eating its own waste.

Gentlemen, this is not a game,
not some trick to write a trifling poem,
not some ramble in a passing valley.

The prophets worked hard at it.
They saw so clearly their eyes dried up,
and they spoke the words that have not left our lips
for thousands of years.

I want to speak like them
but my imagination is the size of a mouse hole
and all its bright, quick mice
were found slaughtered at its door.
I want to say a word about slaughter,
about the slaughtered tents
in slaughtered lands.
About their residents,
who fell from their mothers
already slaughtered.
About the mothers, slaughtered
in warehouses and wells
like hens
with the knives of their children.
Gentlemen, this is not a game.
This is infrared and ultraviolet.
Even acid cannot touch it.
We must be prophets
and madmen to see it.
I want to say a word about my indifference
to the nation,
about my sadness and the way
it clashes with this age of springs
fabricating hope.
I do not fabricate hope.
I wash the brains of my friends
and I tell them this nation is the size of a mouse hole
and I drag them to the plane door.
I want to say a word about those who have no planes,
to whose doors they cannot be dragged,
and when they go out in search of one,
are slaughtered and return
on ice, like vegetables.

But I will say nothing
for my neck is short and I cannot see
the bottom of the well.
My life is nothing
but a looping line
between home and work

and back.

On my way I see girls
hopping onto buses
with the lightness of hens,
and lottery tickets darkening
the city skies,
and slaughtered prophets
pecked by flies.

Love's Ways and other poems

Deepa Onkar



Sayed Haider Raza, 'Forêt noir [Black forest]', oil on canvas, 30 x 60 cm, 1961

What I saw

At dusk, the flower women are a diptych:
tree-framed, skin aglow in the flame of an oil-
lamp. They sit apart from the rushing city;
fingers deft, over a thread,
weaving a cosmos of their own: pale orange
roses, each a risen moon, scatterings of jasmine stars.
I try to read the look in the dark
limpid eyes, that meet mine for an instant –
Is there joy, or pain, or weariness
from all the toil? The light dims:
eyelids drop quickly, long-lashed

Love's ways

Mostly, the memory of that journey is in fragments

bits of roads, rivers, blank skies

There was also desire, a capillary tide below skin,
inexorable: carrying us deeper and deeper through
dappled paths, tangled with history. Often we lost
our way, but were monuments enough, for the other

And it ceased to matter where it all began:
I am back to your fingers flaming
against my cheek the image of your eyes, closed,
flickers into a dark street thick with smells

Another longing floats in:
if only you'd stopped with me
at corners with sudden jasmine bowers
and men lolled with their motorbikes
under trees, the hyacinth bloomed in the quiet sun

At the beach

The crowd, half-hidden in the mist
is a continent unto itself. My feet
on the wet edge of the shore, still:
things the fine net of crows
feet fished out along with a million
foot-prints, bits of broken shells

The sea's voice, a roar, a ghost
the mind's membranes soak up.
Engrossed in cell phones, a couple
takes selfies, a woman roasts corn,
someone yells. Such happy insouciance:
all against the backdrop of blue gaping
nothingness that suggests anything
could happen

The froth pounding, pounding, ineffectual, for millennia
the city lights have inched closer every year.
Unnoticed, I pick my paths
afraid for the earth dipping
on its axis, into darkness, afraid for the sea

At night

A Poem by Poile Sengupta



Kanchan Chander, 'Running Figure', Stainless steel, 3.3 x 5.9 inches each, 2008

Last night I heard them as usual
hundreds of people on the rooftop
walking barefoot.

The first time I heard them, I woke him up,
he went out but saw nothing.
The next night he heard them too
thousands of people on the rooftop
barefoot, walking. Then the children heard them
hundreds and thousands of bare feet
on the rooftop, walking.

Then neighbours and friends heard them
on their rooftops;
now the whole town

hears them, thousands and thousands on rooftops
walking, barefoot.

Alone

Two poems by MP Pratheesh
Translated into English by K Satchidanandan



MP Pratheesh, 'Let me come to your wounds'

നടുവെല്ലൂ

ആ നാടിനും

ഈനാടിനും

ഇടയിലെത്തോട്ടുവെള്ളം

മീതേമുറിച്ചിട്ടു പന

ഒരു കുറ്റിച്ചുട്ട്

ഒരു വളർത്തുന്നായ

പടിഞ്ഞാട്ടുപായുന്ന

ഇരുളിൽ വെള്ളം

പേരുചൊല്ലിവിളിച്ചു

രാവിലെ

രണ്ടുകരകൾക്കുമിടയിൽ

തൂക്കിയിട്ടു അയാളുടെ നടുവെല്ലു്

Backbone

The stream between
That bank and this bank
A palm tree felled to link them
A flambeau of coconut leaves,
A pet dog.
In the darkness flowing westwards
Water called it by name
In the morning
Between the two banks
Was hung his backbone.

ഒറ്റയ്ക്ക്

ചാരിയിട്ടേയുള്ളൂ, ഈ വാതിൽ

ജനലടയുന്ന കാറ്റുണ്ട്

ഉണങ്ങാത്ത നെല്ലിന്റെ ഒച്ച,

മണങ്ങൾ

ഒരു വെറും ശീല ചുറ്റിക്കിടക്കുന്നത്

ആരുടെ മരിച്ചുകഴിഞ്ഞ ഉടലായിരിക്കും?

ഒരു മൃഗത്തിന്റെ നിഴൽ

മുറിയിലുണ്ടെന്നു തോന്നി

അതുമനടക്കുന്നതിന്റെ

കിതപ്പാറ്റുന്നതിന്റെ

ഈ മുറിക്കുള്ളിൽ ആരാണു ഒറ്റയ്ക്കു പാർക്കുന്നത് ?

Alone

This door is ajar
There is a wind
strong enough to close the window
The sound the green paddy
Makes, odours
Whose dead body it is
That lies wrapped in just a piece of cloth
Felt there was the shade
Of a beast in the room
Its walking, its panting
Slowly coming down
Who is it that stays in this room, alone?

These are poems from MP Pratheesh's collection of poems titled *Earth, Water (മണ്ണും വെള്ളവും)*.

Poems and image © MP Pratheesh; translations © K. Satchidanandan.

The Bridge of Migration: Three Poems

Yogesh Maitreya



Image courtesy Padmashree, Sudharak Olwe

Pochiram Kamble: The Sage of Jai Bhim

Once upon a time when Marathwada was burning...

'Pochya,' asked the Upper Caste goons, 'Will you say Jai Bhim?'

Pochiram said, 'Yes I will. Jai Bhim.'

Pochiram's hands were chopped off.

'Pochya,' asked the Upper Caste goons, 'Will you say Jai Bhim?'
Pochiram said, 'Yes I will. Jai Bhim.'
Pochiram's legs were chopped off.

Eventually, Pochiram died
Upholding 'Jai Bhim'
Even at the cost of his life.

Dilemma

My father sang to me
In a language his father taught him
Which is why his rage had clarity
And his love was sublime

But I grew up so greedy
I wrote in English and kept writing
Later Father's words turned voiceless
I became deaf to his song, I grew up mean

Today I imagine
If I have a son or a daughter
What song shall I sing to them
Precisely in what language shall I sing?

Capturing

It is true that
We never had
Photos of our dead ancestors
Inside our homes

What we had
Were the sad memories
Of our brave forefathers
Coming down to us
From conspirators

Now since we have seen the Sun
We know that
Those stories were not true

Now since we wrap our bones
With the flesh of the sky
And pour the Earth into our hearts
Those were buried for ages
We must fill blood in our pen
Instead of ink, and write

Believe me
We can write immortal photos
Of our brave ancestors

These poems were first published in Yogesh Maitreya's collection of poems titled *The Bridge of Migration*, published in 2016 by the Panther's Paw Publication.

Poems © Yogesh Maitreya; image © Sudharak Olwe.

Contributors

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Anand Haridas is a Kochi-based media professional. He has worked with different news dailies including *Kaumudi Online* and *The Hindu*. He has also translated *Kaali Natakam*, a play by Sajitha Madathil. He is currently writing scripts for different web-series and mainstream film industry.

Aniruddha Nagaraj is a PhD candidate at Comparative Literature and Translation Studies (CLTS), Ambedkar University Delhi.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra is the author of several books of poetry including the volume of essays called *Partial Recall: Essays on Literature and Literary History*; the editor of *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets and Collected Poems in English* by Arun Kolatkar; and the translator of *The Absent Traveller: Prakrit Love Poetry*.

Asmaa Azaizeh is a journalist, cultural curator and poet. In 2010 she received the Debutant Writer Award from Al Qattan Foundation, for her volume of poetry, *Liwa* (2011). Her second collection, *As The Woman From Lod Bore Me*, was published in 2015 and her most recent collection *Don't Believe Me If I Talked To You Of War* was published in 2019 in Arabic, Dutch, and Swedish. Her poetry has been translated to English, German, Spanish, Farsi, Swedish, Italian, Greek and Hebrew, among others. Azaizeh is currently a cultural curator in Haifa.

Deepa Onkar is a Chennai-based poet. Her poems have been published in several journals including *The Lake*, *Coldnoon*, *Sonic Boom* and *The Bombay Literary Magazine*. She has also worked with *The Hindu*.

कला साहित्य के क्षेत्र में अपनी अलग पहचान बना चुके दिल्ली प्रशासन में कलाध्यापक के पद पर कार्यरत, सुप्रसिद्ध मूर्तिकार व दलित लेखक संघ के अध्यक्ष **हीरालाल राजस्थानी** का जन्म 9 जून 1968 प्रसाद नगर दिल्ली में हुआ। इनको राजस्थान ललित कला अकादमी से 'कोल्डड्रिम' नामक मूर्तिशिल्प में राष्ट्रीय पुरस्कार (बैनाले अवॉर्ड) 1997, फैकल्टी ऑफ फाइन आर्ट, जामिया मिल्लिया इस्लामिया दिल्ली से बेस्ट परफॉर्मेंस इन स्कल्प्चर अवॉर्ड 1993, साहित्य कला परिषद दिल्ली से युवा महोत्सव में भागीदारी पुरस्कार 1993 और 1994 में, एन्टी करप्शन फाउंडेशन ऑफ इंडिया करनाल हरियाणा की ओर से कला व साहित्य में उत्कृष्ट योगदान हेतु राष्ट्रीय गौरव सम्मान और ग्लोबल ब्रिलियन्स अवॉर्ड 2018 में तथा एक काव्य संग्रह 'मैं साधु नहीं' कदम प्रकाशन से 2017 में प्रकाशित हो चुका है।

Huchangi Prasad is a writer and activist. He currently teaches at the Government First Grade College, Davanagere, Karnataka.

K Satchidanandan is a widely translated Malayalam poet, bilingual writer, translator and editor. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2012 for his collection of poems, *Marannu Vecha Vasthukkal*. He also received the Poet Laureate award at The Tata Literature Live, 2019.

Kanchan Chander studied painting and printmaking and at art colleges in New Delhi, Santiago, Berlin, and Paris. She received the International Print Biennale Award, Bradford, UK, in 1986. She has had numerous solo and group exhibitions all over the world. For more on her work, see kanchansartworks.net.

Kareem James Abu-Zeid is an Egyptian-American translator, editor, and writer.

Kedar Namdas is a visual artist based in Pune. He has completed BFA (Painting) from Sir J. J. School of Arts, Mumbai and MVA (Printmaking) from M.S. University, Baroda.

MP Pratheesh is a Kerala based poet and photographer. He has published four collections of poetry in Malayalam. His poems have appeared in several places including *Kavya Bharati*, *The Bombay Review*, *Kerala Kavitha*, and *Indian Literature*.

Merlin Moli is a Delhi-based artist. She has three decades of sculpting experience with various materials. She has participated in exhibitions both in India and elsewhere.

Najwan Darwish was born in Jerusalem in 1978. He is a poet, journalist, editor and cultural critic. Since the publication of his first collection in 2000, his poetry has been translated into several languages.

Poile Sengupta is a writer, playwright and poet.

Pratishtha Pandya is a poet and translator working across Gujarati and English, whose first collection "*lalala...*" (*ललल...*) has been published by Navjivan Samprat. She is a faculty member at the Ahmedabad University.

S Vijayaraghavan holds an M.F.A. degree with a major in painting from the College of Art in New Delhi. He has participated in various shows, festivals and residency programmes in India and elsewhere. For more on the artist and his work, see [here](#).

Based in Santiniketan, artist **SK Sahajahan** is assistant Professor at Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan. His first solo show of drawings and paintings was held in 2004 at the Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, and Nandan Gallery, Santiniketan. Since then he has been exhibited widely across the country and in Bangladesh, Berlin, Denmark, Munich and New York—in solo and group shows. Sahajahan has received the Merit Scholarship from Visva Bharati, Santiniketan (1993-1998), the Avantika Award, Bronze medal (1998), and the Elizabeth Green Shield Foundation, Canada, Grant (1998 and 2002).

Salim Yusufji was a schoolteacher for fifteen years, and has previously edited *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*, a selection of reminiscences by people in close proximity to B.R. Ambedkar. He is also the co-editor of *Battling for India: A Citizen's Reader*.

Sayed Haider Raza (1922–2016) was one of modern India's greatest painters and abstractionists. He was born in Babaria, Madhya Pradesh and spent most of his life in Paris, before returning to Delhi in 2010.

Shoili Kanungo is a graphic designer, illustrator and visual artist. She has worked on a range of communication design projects in Sydney and New Delhi. For more on her work, see shoilikanungo.com.

Sudhakar Olwe is a Mumbai-based documentary photographer.

Suman Keshari is a poet and freelance writer. She has published four collections of poems namely *Yagyavalkya se Behas*, 2008, *Monalisa ki Aankhen*, 2013, *Shabd Aur Sapne* (e-book, 2015) and *Piramidon ki tho Mein* (2018). She is well known for her rewritings of Indian mythological figures such as Draupadi, Karna, Gandhari, Seeta and Savitri. Her poems have been received with much appreciation at forums like ICCR, Sahitya Akademi, Raza Foundation, Benaras Hindu University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Central University of Gujarat, Bhartiya Jnanapeeth, All India Radio, IIT Mumbai and various literary festivals held at Patna, Ajmer, Bikaner, Dehradun, Port Blair, among others.

Udayan Thakker is an Indian poet who writes in Gujarati. English translations of his poems have appeared in the following journals or magazines: 'Poetry' magazine (Chicago), 'Young Indian Poets' edited by K Satchidanandan, 'Digest of West Indian Languages' (Sahitya Akademi), 'Indian Literature', 'Modern Gujarati Poetry', 'Modern Indian Poetry' edited by E. V. Ramakrishna, 'Breath Becoming Word' (Government of Gujarat), 'Beyond the Beaten Track' (Gujarati Sahitya Parishad) and 'Stand' (Leeds). A volume of English translations of his poems has been published by Onslaught Press, England. He writes a weekly column on world poetry in the newspaper 'Janmabhumi'. He is the editor of poetryindia.com.

Vasudha Thozhur was born in 1956 in Mysore. She studied at the College of Arts and Crafts, Madras, and at the School of Art and Design in Croydon, UK. She lived and worked in Chennai from 1981 to 1997 and in Baroda from 1997 to 2013. She is currently associate professor in the Department of Art, Design and Performing Arts at the Shiv Nadar University, Dadri.

Yasmine Seale is a writer and translator.

Yogesh Maitreya is a poet, translator and founder of Panther's Paw Publication, an anti-caste publishing house. He is currently pursuing his PhD at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

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