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kavita

(POETRY)

International Number

100

KAVITA

(POETRY)

No. 100

*International
English-Language
Number*



**Kavitabhavan
Calcutta 29
1960**



KAVITA 100

INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NUMBER

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EDITOR'S NOTE, NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Translators' names appear in italics at the end of a poem or group of poems.

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Well done,
builder -
now you need
a cup of tea!

কবিতা বর্ষ ২৪ সংখ্যা ২ কৃত্তিক সংখ্যা ১০০

KAVITA Vol. 24 No. 2 Serial No. 100

Bengali
HARD TIMES

An adaptation from RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Music is silenced, the dark descending slowly
Has stripped unending skies of all companions.
Weariness grips your limbs and within the locked horizons
Dumbly ring the bells of hugely gathering fears.
Still, O bird, O sightless bird,
Not yet, not yet the time to furl your wings.

It's not melodious woodlands but the leaps and falls
Of an ocean's drowsy booming,
Not a grove bedecked with flowers but a tumult flecked with
foam.

Where is the shore that stored your buds and leaves?
Where the nest and the branch's hold?
Still, O bird, my sightless bird,
Not yet, not yet the time to furl your wings.

Stretching in front of you the night's immensity
Hides the western hill where sleeps the distant sun ;
Still with bated breath the world is counting time and swimming
Across the shoreless dark a crescent moon
Has thinly just appeared upon the dim horizon.
—But O my bird, O sightless bird,
Not yet, not yet the time to furl your wings.

From upper skies the stars with pointing fingers
Intently watch your course and death's impatience
Lashes at you from the deeps in swirling waves ;
And sad entreaties line the farthest shore
With hands outstretched and crooning 'Come, O come !'
Still, O bird, O sightless bird,
Not yet, not yet the time to furl your wings.

All that is past: your fears and loves and hopes ;
All that is lost: your words and lamentation ;
No longer yours a home nor a bed composed of flowers.
For wings are all you have, and the sky's broadening courtyard,
And the dawn steeped in darkness, lacking all direction.
Dear bird, my sightless bird,
Not yet, not yet the time to furl your wings !

Buddhadeva Bose

Bengali
EIGHT POEMS

JIBANANANDA DAS

WHEN I FOR MYSELF

When I for myself these lines did write
The moonlit dew dripped from the branches, and still in the mist
Lay the pale bank along the Dhansiri river.
The bat's dark wings across the cold moonlight
Drew a sharp line of desire. Came through the night
Manorama, guarding her flickering lamp. Swarmed with her
Forgotten bees and girls, the cool, creamy crab-apple came,
And blossomed the mango-spray in the winter night.
In the dim light I saw them all ; saw, and wrote these lines

Remembering their pale tresses, remembering
The loveliness of their shell-like hands, and to redeem their
hearts.

How many centuries ago did they disappear,
Trailing their yellow saris, breasts like pathetic shells,
Creamily moulded flesh and pathetic hearts,
Into that room most cold and quietly filled
With solace. And yet they often do seem
To strike their sleep against my desolate dream.

Meenakshi Mukherjee

THIS FIELD NOW LITTERED

Some one, some time, had reaped this field now littered
With leaves, egg-shell, snake-skin—cold and desolate.
Across all these I tread, and there in that other field
Some I knew are sleeping—how deep and intimate.

One is there asleep—how often did I meet her,
How often wrong in my heart's malingerings !
And yet this peace ; the grasshopper and the grass
Now cover all her thoughts and dark questionings.

Jyotirmoy Datta and Buddhadeva Bose

ONE STAR ARRIVES

One star arrives. Thereafter, walking alone,
It seems she might come along the rows of fern
On this star-filled autumn night. In the dark
When did my door open
Under her confident hands !
She comes and shows how at evening
Her hand can make night of the entire
Sea, sun, swiftness, and put them to sleep.
Overhead the sky far away,
Prompted by stars and planets dim or bright,
Turns into an autumnal night. Beside such a golden night,
Has history ever remembered anything else ?

The last tram has faded, and the last noise. Now
The whole city is the ultimate night of life, of nature,
Of the universe.
Houses, roads, ruins, cemeteries gather around,
As if along an imperishable road, turned back from
The shores of many oceans, after much waste and weariness,
To return and re-enter the ancient heart,
The newly intimate body of woman.

Sujit Mukherjee

GRASS

The world this morning is filled with soft green grass, gentle like
green lemon-leaves,
Like an unripe orange it is—this green grass—as fragrant—with
the deer ripping it off with teeth.
How I wish I too could drink the fragrance of this grass, like
some greenish wine, beaker after beaker,
Could squeeze the flesh of this grass, rub my eyes against its eyes
and my feathers against its plumage,
Could descend from the savoury darkness of some warm grass-
mother's flesh and be born as grass within the grass.

Buddhadeva Bose

WILD DUCKS

Gray wings of owls beat, starward bound.
Forsaking the marsh, by the moon beckoned,
Wild ducks spread their wings. I hear them hissing through the
night.
One. Two. Three. Oh ! Countless. Infinite.

Down the edge of the night they whirl their tumultuous wings,
Hissing like an express. They are flying on, are flying, are flying ;
Flown away now. Above, the starful heaven gleams.
Floats their wild smell. One or two ducks of dream.

Haunts me the dim face of that vanished village-belle, Arunima
Sanyal.
O fly, fly my phantom ducks ! Under this winter moon let them
silently all

Gather and fly. And when these earthly colours, these sounds
are no more,
O fly, let them fly, under a silent moon, in my heart's secret core.

THE PRIMEVAL GODS

The elements. Wind, water and fire. In their snaky whim
These primeval gods did give you shape.
What a fearfully lonely form they gave you,
And bug-like lechery in men whom you must know.

Wind, water, fire. These primeval gods in their crooked mood
Gave me this urge to write with words:
As if I too were wind and water and fire,
And you too my creation.

Not blood nor flesh nor lust
Is the beauty of your face,
But an island of deodars at midnight ;
A far-away island blue and bare of men.

Yet fondled by flabby hands,
You are disappearing into the dusty earth ;
And I am getting lost in the dimness
Made by stars in a far-away island.

Wind, water, fire: those ironical gods broadcast
Seeds of beauty all over the earth,
And seeds of dreams.

Now I wonder: where are you tonight ?
Why does beauty—that beauty of earthly women—
Never know that island of star-shadowed deodar ?

'Being fondled by flabby hands, being handled—handled—
handled—
Fondled—handled—'
O water, wind and fire ! the crude gods burst into laughter:
'Being handled—fondled—handled—does it turn into the flesh
of swine ?'

I too start laughing like mad.
And laughter all around
Puffs the darkness up like the waves of a sea
Bloated with the carcass of a huge and putrid whale.
All your loveliness, my earth, stinks like a whale's carcass ;
And wherever, tossed on those meteor-waves, I go,
It's strange but I seem at home, so much at home !

THE KINGDOM OF THE EARTH

Far and near, topple cities, topple homes,
And villages fall with a crash.
Long ages man has spent on earth,
Yet his shadows on the wall
Death, destruction, fear
Or merely hesitation seems.

All along the coast of time
Nothing but emptiness.
Yet ringing this our bare desert
Of shame and error, thoughts and dreams,
Strange trees rustle, cool the land.
The heart points the way. And wisdom too. And love.

JOURNAL: 1346 BY THE BENGALI CALENDAR

I have you beside me here
This afternoon, after so many days are past.
Still on the field plays the parting sunlight ; it fades ;
Now an ineffable sleep is pouring into the tiger-beetle's heart,
And a wet clod on the river-bank
Silently dissolves into the breast of the restive waves.

Sleep and the green of the grass calms the dove and the sparrow,
And the field's furrowed lines are gently released
Within the folds of darkness.
Sheds its fruit, the casuarina. An understanding breeze
Blows off the hurtful sun from the banyan's bark ;—
Soon, too soon, the western cloud will claim it.

Whose is that cart with the tidings of hay ?
Facing the river it stands under the *jarul's* shade
On a road strewn with crushed red banyan fruit.
Look, its image in the river—how it cools itself
In the still water—like another cloud beside the silent clouds.

Wrapped in these quiet silences
I find you after so many days are gone.
Leaving this field's close embrace we drift towards that plain
opening up.
From your ruffled hair down to the toe-nails
All grows alive to this widening view, urged on by the afternoon
wind.
And when the *korali* shieks from the *mahanim* tree
You suddenly find lying close to your heart all you once had lost.
'When I heard not your footfalls,' she said,
'It seemed the labours of the universe
Were in debt to the specks of dust ; . . . not so ?
Bother. Let time decide . . .

Those days of warm desire ; those days when even the grass and
sun and dew
Churned up cravings within our flesh.
Those days !
Yearning, like an orphan's face,
Makes one weary and sad and yet yields something rare.'

And raising her clear eyes towards the dark : ' After how long
a waiting
At last the sky drips peace ; no longer boredom haunts the airy
space.'

Gentle this lady's heart, like a stillness strange,
And dark as a stream that has its source in night.

I walk beside her, silent both.
Closed to love and fever, her heart is filled
With another deep discourse. Far have we roved into the plain.
On her maroon sari specks of grassflowers ; leaves of *nim* and
amlaki
Come dancing on the light wind
To land on her hair, packing her face and eyes with her body's
wholeness—
As if this girl of social skill were nature's second self.

She fished my hand from out of the dark,
Laid it on her cheek and said : ' How thin you have grown,
Trampled and lost in the crowd.' Gently she let go
My sorrowful hand. In that Time's emblem, her marvellous
body,
Flows no river now. Exhausted love and pain in her heart.
The stars have pilfered her, never to return again.

Jyotirmoy Datta

Bengali
TWO POEMS

SUDHINDRANATH DATTA

THE VAGRANT

The tree, a shock of red and yellow, shakes its crown ;
The parrot hovers, kept from nest ;
The year is overblown ; the hangdog sun goes down ;
And bones, though old, are yet impressed.
The wind alone is loud with distant lamentations—
An infidel intoning runic evocations,
While Time, at wanton play amidst extinct oblations,
Reiterates his ageless jest ;
And rid of dust from homing kine, the sky transcends the
common noun—
The tree's ambition and the parrot's forfeit nest.

Then all at once, uprushing from the chthonic deep,
The Dark Begetter overwhelms,
The wind grows deathly still, and latitudes of sleep
Disintegrate the charted realms.
Oh, no, the night is not inert: its chronic fever
Breaks out in spangled sweat, as straining at some lever,
It alters far to near ; and subtle like the beaver,
The moment makes of fretted elms
An ark for perfect self-assurance. But, involved in whirlwinds'
sweep,
The parrot strays till Void, triumphant, overwhelms.

1945

I

Predicting victory, you said that, diabolic though
The Nazis were, they too must vanish once their day was done ;
And, true enough, defeated Germany is in the throes
Of total death, while West, it seems, awaits the morning sun.
At least the Russian legions, like a retributive flood,
Engulf exploited lands to aggravate their brittleness ;
And Paris, freed, when not redeeming shame with traitors' blood,
Parades before the tattered world dress after perfect dress.
Become at last an equal partner both in war and peace,
America is lavish now with money as with men ;
And even England, which monopolized the Golden Fleece,
Prepares to found the welfare state and start from scratch again.

II

Of course, the Chinese leaders, selfish as they mostly are,
Persist in letting democratic forces always down ;
And keeping faith with India would have been simpler far,
Had not the creed of Gandhi made the camp of Jinnah frown.
Besides, as Belgium begins to find, resisters all,
The rulers of today are prey to their opponents' ghosts ;
And counter-revolutionaries rally to the call
For Italy's deliverance by anti-Fascist hosts.
But Churchill's fulminations have induced the timely purge
Of Trotsky's heirs in Greece who deviated to the Left ;
And just as Argentina learns that progress is no scourge,
So Turkey draws her sword to prove that she is also deft.

III

Must prophets then equivocate because the moral law
Reflects antinomies inherent in the universe ;
And if, indeed, the good were altogether free from flaw,
How could the bad avoid becoming infinitely worse ?

It is from death, perhaps, that life derives significance ;
And vice is virtue's mirror-image, wrong inverted right.
No myth is born until the brave succumb to cravens' plans ;
And liberty requires the dungeon for its finest flight.
Secreted by the past, invisibly the future grows,
And justice can be rendered only when injustice asks.
To save the world for friends we have to liquidate our foes ;
And man's salvation lies in sweating at appointed tasks.

IV

And yet is earthly life, though brief, so very incomplete
That death alone can make our inspiration plenary ?
And if that be the case, was your existence meant to cheat
When, disciplined, it turned increasingly exemplary ?
And, now beyond the broken arc, have you no further need
For charity, non-violence and conscientious doubt ?
Is boycotting oppression vain ? Does intellect mislead
In positing the good as absolute ? And, left without
Delusions of humanity, have you withdrawn your writ
Forbidding saints from using fraud against the fraudulent ?
And since the Rhine has quenched the blaze that Barcelona lit,
Should not the ban on strikes in Spain cause any discontent ?

V

Then let the calculating Czechs exult while bombs descend
In overwhelming bursts upon defenceless Budapest.
A causal series, air raids reproduce themselves on end ;
And Dresden follows Warsaw, one the other's palimpsest.
The London caucus may conspire against the Lublin rump ;
Who wants may claim at San Francisco Poland as his own,
Dishonest promises may buy exemption from the slump ;
The fields we reap shall give us back whatever we have sown.

As Arjuna the ambidexter found, we are but tools
Denied the luxury of pity for the consequence ;
And, blind like flies entangled in the spider's net, we fools
Expect that individuals can hamper Providence.

VI

For all that, when you spoke of victory, you did not want
The present state of things which cancels profit out by loss,
Reducing them to utter nullity ; and what we flaunt
As peace is but exhaustion of the will, our special cross.
Was it for this that we endured two global wars, rejoiced
In countless insurrections, piled up millions of dead
To rot in shallow graves ? And has the time now come to hoist
Triumphal flags along the cheering streets dictators tread ?
The heavens are extinct ; and darkness has regained its sway.
You too are lost for ever in the emptiness of space.
Who then will answer if the desolation of today
Is cumulative punishment for Adam's fall from grace ?

Sudhindranath Datta

Bengali

THREE POEMS

AMINA CHAKRAVARTY

THE SOJOURNER

Continuous time of morning. Along the blued steel of the tracks
Black fire gleams. The two-twentyfive in sight. The questioning
eye

Of the signal is still—suddenly sees green—the express rushes
headlong

Towards farther time ; the wriggling hurry of the crowd

Stops at the trembling edge ; in a nearby stretch of water
A stork meditates on one leg, thinking fish ; wandering words
Travel along telegraph-wires overhead, on which sits a bird
Swaying a fancy tail ; across the field a red tractor waits.

At present I am by the Mississippi, somewhere in America
The watch on my wrist ticks memories' scraps,
I seek some timeless flashes to capture in Bengali
For ever this stork, this train, this morning's face.

A CONFLAGRATION

Writing verse on smooth paper with a new Parker pen
Is just American : some sunlight outside the window,
Shaded blue curtains, books on a nearby shelf
(Huxley's latest prose, a sea-story by Hemingway
To be read at leisure) , a friend has left behind
Some 'cello records ; a tune of trembling peace haunts the mind,
All distant thoughts have drowned in the lake while coming
home,

There is just a chance that the Korean war might end.

Row after row of mere words flowing from the pen!
I close my note-book. Flashes again the sunlight,
Blue emptiness of curtains, the muted print of books
(Shining prose, a deceptive commentary ;
The stormy yarn of an old man fighting a whale)
Faintly sounds again the invisible, Spanish strings,
Then the fullness of words, drowsed in poetry,
And the lake's glimmer. But Korea is on fire,
And the radio transmits the waves of conflagration.

Sujit Mukherjee

CARMELITA

Often, in your mind, you have crossed the bridge
To this fabulous stone-cemented land,
And arrived, intimate, in stark secrecy,
With miles of weeping waves stretching behind.
And now, at the zero hour, is it you,
Really you in the heart's metropolis?—
Unbelieving, you tread the pavement, sit in a restaurant,
Meditating over a cup of tea,
Scanning the crowd in a vision none can guess.
And yet this is no coming, you are not here:
Carmelita, why still seek the fruit of another birth?

Here they love and laugh in foreign tongues,
Have other prayerful words for giving and taking worship.
In the groceries, on Saturdays,
Are heaped the fruits and flowers of another soil.
Bells booming in the cathedral square
Summon the crowds of our stranger-friends
Under great wooden arches framed in brass.
They come, all numerous, shoppers, shop-keepers, tourists,
And kneel in tears before the figure of Christ,
Lost for a while in a celestial glimmer

Made more deep by rows of gleaming candles
Carmelita, what radiance meets:
Light from east and west in the same, universal sky.

Carmelita, let us return to the land you call your own.
For in this city you come
Like one who walks in sleep
With vague, uncertain movements of a dream,
Tripping across the miles of weeping waves ;—
The bliss you seek is hidden, deep-dwelling,
Only where eyes have faith and you suffice yourself.
This is no coming ; for should you, in the midst
Of the crowds that pace your heart's metropolis
Suddenly chance to glimpse the face
Or hear the voice you once had known—
All that desperate ecstasy
Will yield too soon to the strength of separation.
Far apart they lie, that other birth and this,
There's only a little bridge to come across ;
But look, Carmelita, what wide seas of loving
Flow between the two in endless waves.

Buddhadeva Bose

Bengali
UNLESS TIME FLOWS

PREMENDRA MITRA

A drop of dirty life
on the wall
—the insect pest
with a lust stronger than mere sex
dreams of a fiery mating with
the luring lamp.

The reptile, a cold ugly streak of hate,
waits with its coiled sarcastic tongue.
—Annihilation in ambush.

The heart atremble waits.
Will the breathless counting of moments
end in defeat ?

The insect and the lizard
fighting eternally.
Whom will you champion ?
How far will you argue
with defence and prosecution
both in doubt ?

Sweat if you please
to fit everything
into the chequer pattern
of black and white, and light and shade,
—dyes of your self-delusion.

Plumb the dark depths.
And scale the frozen heights.
—All in vain.

The fancy equation of Aye and Nay
can only be solved by guile.

Who knows !
the lizard and the flea are not foes perhaps
unless time flows.

Don't shake the screen
to peep behind so often.
—Rather watch the show go on.

Premendra Mitra

Bengali
THE EGOCENTRIC

HUMAYUN KABIR

I live alone in my own world of dreams,
alone I spend the long days and nights through months and
years.

It is my sun that shines in the sky,
it is my clouds which gather on its blue depths,
damp green darkness slowly deepens in my world,
when shy evening dons the bride's red flaming robes.

Numberless are the rivers and the countries in my world.
I wander there on many roads through many forests and
mountains.

Sometimes like frozen foam on the crest of the waves
snowpeaks rise up into the infinite sky,
sometimes the earth's affection flowers in golden harvest,
sometimes the fountains rush in gladness from whence to where.

Once I thought I would build my cottage under a shady tree,
life would flow gently in hope and fear and joy and sorrow,
south winds would come and play around my home,
flowers blossom in my garden throughout the spring,
the shy *shephali* flowers droop to earth in autumn nights,
and new dreams of love dawn upon my expectant eyes.

And yet with all this I stay in the prison of my self.
My heart is tired of my own company.
All around me I hear many words and songs,
I sense the smile of joy and the murmur of love,
I feel the swell of suffering in many sorrowing hearts,
I yearn for a path to join the concourse of my fellow-men.

On the lonely shores of my forsaken heart
the waves from the outer world come and beat in vain.
Why are the foam-flecked waters so wild and restless ?
I cannot fully understand what they want to say.
What message is it they bring from across the seas ?
How shall I transcend my own experience and comprehend ?

I look at my fellow-men with wondering eyes.
They are so near and yet so full of mystery.
The secret sorrows which stir in their heart,
I never can endure in my own life.
I can never see the dawn and the twilight which are theirs.
We each follow the path as it stretches before us.

I live alone in my own magic world.
The salt seas swell and roar around me through long years.
Day and night from my small island I watch
And see the evening lamps lit across the waters.
I yearn to sing to you the songs I have made for you,
I yearn to say, 'I love you, O my friends and comrades !'

Humayun Kabir

Bengali
FOUR POEMS

BUDDHADEVA BOSE

TO MEMORY

I

Who but you the goddess? All that is, is yours.
Hidden in your slumber, unfelt and full of hindrance,
Is what we call beginning, cause or source:
Yet should you flick an eyelid, flowers will race like children's

Feet, and blushing vineyards spread like miles of kissing,
That Earth grow ripe in sweetness. Discordant is the lute,
The canvas blank, the marble dull and mute,
Until your breath impels the breathless crossing

Beyond the waves' uproar, to the calm and timeless ocean,
Perhaps to former lives' primordial gloom,
Where shine, like constellations within a mother's womb,

The fate of Man and your jewels without a flaw.
O! the dark that is you, is illumination,
And what your hands let fall, not worth a straw.

II

'Flower', 'tree', 'pond', 'a cloudy day': they remain aloof and
cold
Like algebraic signs: and then you raise the curtain; we see,
you lend the sight:
The vine entwines our bodies; horizons gleam with gold
In a sudden burst of blossom. And thus we possess the earth,
the stars and the starry night.

War tears across; the dweller at home is tossed without a shelter;
Vanished his frozen fortune—mementos, letters, engravings.
But still he has you, the unlosable ; your flag, above the welter,
Shines, an immortal star, the heart of all our savings.

'Forward!' we cry, and march. Ant-like, a toiling crew
Drags through long ages, at green life's expense,
A huge carcass of deeds, dates, documents,

That makes generations drop and fade away.
But the poet who must return has all he needs in you,
For you grow eternally younger, and you can show the way.

III

What can our changes bring
To the flesh, but the worms' old feast ?
The brilliant rise of the Beast
Exhausts all swollen spring

In thrushes of parricide.
Horrid old men conspire
In honeyed youth's attire ;
Progress takes for bride

Progressive diminution.
All that we can reap
Is what you bring to fruition

Within those caves of your sleep
Where the flickering world's withdrawn
Into the first, forevering dawn.

SWEETHEARTS

You'll hear no more the laughter, the spouting girls at play.

Those lightsome birds, the Lottes who did not linger!
Dears, whose rose-bud lips you had but felt with a finger
In that moonlit dawn, ere you crashed the gates of Day—

They too became their children's conscious prey,
Picked up what came handy, pulled the window-blinds,
And woke from sleep to hear outrageous winds

Blowing where gutters breed the daily pay—
Alas, the hour of love ! When is it to be—
If that sweet dupe, the much-too-promising May

Itself should tear the uprising felicity ?
—Go, then, girl, be Nature's food. And when the changing
weather
Has drawn your able sons apart—O lover, virgin-mother,

Return the darkened world its golden ray!

STILL LIFE

What *are* you, O apple, golden fruit ? Red lips that part in
kissing,
Showing anointed teeth, striking the air with lustre ?
Or cool, firm Konarak's heaven, darkened with the rapture
Of an apsara's breast that yields to the hand where sight is
missing ?

So much, yet just begun! This autumn seems unending.
Enough! But there is more. Even the skin is grown
Rich in quiet delight. And when the whole is gone,
The lingering glow recounts the glad befriending.

And is that all? So think the sleepy-natured.
But sometimes, with heavy eyes, the lust-encumbered few
Tear across the veils of basket, bowl and orchard,

And, in a strange spell of light, themselves become in you
Shuddering stars and a sky where asphodels
Suddenly make us wish we too were something else.

To A Dog

Cast not your spell. Separation masters me.
My wreaths do only sunder Far and Near.
The long-awaited kiss of Now and Yet-to-be
Expires at last on a cold, remorseless mirror.

Rather choose one of those who never pressed
On paper-boats across an ocean's deep :
There, rice-and-meat, a home ; and at noontime, sleep,
Swamped with darkening smells, by women's hands caressed.

No?...Do you then fancy I will make
Fantastic flute-like music for your sake,
And paint your gazelle-eyes with memory?

...Only half is true. I know a nymph you are,
Cast away from heaven. But not for me to tear
Your charmed, accustomed veil. Not yet enough a poet, I.

Buddhadeva Bose

Bengali

FOUR POEMS

BISHNU DEY

ASPIRATION

Wipe out the sky tonight,
Smear darkness on the stars,
Blot out the moon in the slough of sleeplessness.
Cover your eyes and come
Through the web of the wind,
Drown the noise
Of the strides of the night-veiled sea
To take my breath away
At each your soundless footfall.
In the quiet-quelled night
Let us meet mouth to mouth
Upon the summit of sleeplessness.
Shatter your world, scatter it in the sky,
And come to me in the dark.

Sujit Mukherjee

FEAR NO MORE THE DARKNESS

Fear no more the darkness,
Cover your face with my hands,
Pass on your grief and joy to my eyes,
Build your triumph within our arms,
Weave your melody on my rhythm.

Today the light hurts, it burns with hate,
None cares to have this polluted light,
Now only the darkness is clean,

Love's orchestra is now dumb in hatred.
Cover your face with my hands.

BEYOND THE ASCENT OF THE STARVING HILL

Beyond the ascent of the starving hill
We reach now this valley
At the end of the precipitous battle of the roads
Does this cool shade construct homes?

Here in trees life is sap.
Here in hutments songs are simple,
Here man's honour is easy,
Have we come to our life's valley?

We have crossed all our beggar days
Crossed with the wind of the azure sea,
We have ended the famine nights.
The cloudy nights, the sun
With which we have won the autumn dawn
There is no desert fear in that light,
There is no flooding erosion in that October,
We are at ease in this valley.

The hill stands an architect holding the sky
With hints of love of the cloud and the sun
Of the farflung air of springy freedom
On this valley by the bank of streaming songs
The light of laughter falls in rays on the land—
Oh this our country is a poem indeed
Beyond the steep and starving hill
Where the beggar days are at an end
In this valley of peace, green peace.

SONNET No. 1 (from *Fourteen Sonnets*)

No more speech off stage in this poetic play,
The herald comes back sad from his frontline tour.
On Kailas ends the wanderlust of May.
Desires crystallise and I come home once more,
Calm from the adolescent lone tirade.
Elective mind tires of the luxuries of Truth,
The nomad finds in his *laissez-faire* trade
His ego's limits, my skylarking youth!

Great Mother! prodigal I now reclaim
My corner in your many-mansioned house.
Strange generations crowd there, yet in the same
Eternal feature shining in your face
I recover my past, recast my future days—

The firebrand bursts into a hymn of praise.

Bishnu Dey

Gujarati

THE POEM

UMASHANKAR JOSHI

There was no time to talk to flowers.
Flowers, the proud heavenward longing of the earth,
Isles of light, colonies of human dream.
Flowers, the ever fresh words of my poem.

The still-unopened eyes of a child in the womb
shine in the mother's face.
Did you ever see a poem
shine so in my being ?

Poetry, the mother-tongue of the soul,
silence embodied, the abiding image of a dream.
—where is the poem ?

Sometimes the words lap up the trickling flow of the poem.
Sometimes there's the annoying stink of smothered hearts,
Indeed the poem is something which is hardly achieved.

That plant opposite my house has grown into a tree.
Oftentimes I have stood staring at it.

Jambu fruits came to it ; to me, tears.
It has grown and borne fruit, I have just grown in years.

A little child romping in the street stopped suddenly and facing
me,
burst into rippling laughter,
unfurling the ensign of man's aspiration through untold ages.

There was no time to be thrilled by the laughter of frolicing
children.
The laughter of children, the measured rhythm of my poem.

The word is there, and the rhythm too.—Where is the poem ?

Great men shout with hands raised high from mountain-tops.
The clear voice travels from century to century.
Hardly does it get down into the heart.
Rarely does it get distilled into a thing of the mind.
The voices of the past, overflowing the valleys, resound.
Echoes reverberate incessantly.
An abode of echoes, this,
where not the word but the echo is worshipped.
Ears deafened by echoes cannot hear
what others say, if ever.

Sometimes the ego smarts.—Why at all should I sing
that person's gloating over happiness,
this man's love and the mad joy of another ?
For me only singing ? For me to gather
the crumbs from life's rich table ?
What fulfilment this !
The poet's life, a life by proxy ?

Is life only what the ego encompasses ?
Life is all that which is assimilated and becomes part of one's
self.

Those trees scattered on the field, green with foliage,
—viewed from a certain spot during a casual walk,
they fell into a pattern.
They were not mere trees then.
Something peeped out from the treeness,
something leaped forth from the eye.
Beauty's very self.
For a split-second I was that tree-pattern myself.
Couldn't I feel the same with all the things in this wide world ?
Indeed, I can, through Beauty,
through the unflinching voice of the poem.

At the turn of the road, car-lights
illuminated a cluster of girls,
returning late from a festival on a monsoon evening.
An old man passing by gazed with wide-eyed wonder
and feasted his eyes on the mysterious hope spread out before
him.

There was no time to hail the ecstatic hope of innocent girls.
The hope of girls, the blood coursing in the veins of my poem.
—Where is the poem?

Umashankar Joshi

Hindi

Now Is NOT THE TIME

JAISHANKAR PRASAD

How can I whisper words that shine to my beloved on tender
moonlit nights?

How can I tell you of the girls who laughed so lightly?
Where is the dream of happiness I beheld before awaking?
It vanished as my arms closed around it.

A fervent and lovely shadow lay on her flushed cheeks
And the adoring dawn took from her its own morning sweetness.
Her memory sustains the weary traveller on his way.

Would you rip open the quilt of my life to see how it has been
stitched together?

How can I tell of the great things that have happened within its
small compass?

Is it not right that I should be silent in front of others?

What good will it do you to hear my story?

Now is not the time. The mute pain in my heart is at rest.

Lila Ray

Hindi

I TOO AM AN ENIGMA

MAHADEVI VARMA

Beloved ! I too am an enigma.
Of all the sweetness, of all the smiles,
Of all the enchantment of your eyes,
Of all the poison in the pulsing of the world
I have partaken, an addict,
Ever thirsty for sorrow.
And I also disport myself in the river of joy !

From every part of me simultaneously flows
Fire that burns and streams that cool.
Attraction and aversion, seeking each other,
Maintain the flow of my breath.
Beloved ! My upbringing
Has been circumscribed,
Yet I play with the unconfined !

Lila Ray

Hindi

YASHODHARA

MAITHILISHARAN GUPTA

O heart, the time of your testing is come !
I entreat you not
to let my resolution fail.
As long as He was not here
It was easy to deny myself.
Where there is no hope there is no temptation.
Hear ; drums are beating His welcome !
O heart, the time of your testing is come !

Great is the Treasure now two feet away,
The Treasure on whom life depends. But how
Can I find the way to Him ?
I am, and darkness is.
O heart, the time of your testing is come !

What can two steps more be to one
Who has travelled so very far ?
Can it be as hard for Him as it is for me ?
He turned His back on me.
O heart, the time of your testing is come !

Those who are with Him know their good fortune.
The sight of Him and His touch gives them salvation.
For my salvation He must come to me. As His servant
I shall stay here.

Lila Ray

Malayalam
THE LOVER

G. SANKARA KURUP

As the moments pass me by, like petals falling from a flower
I sit and gaze into the future ;
Joy and sorrow dance around me, the one flinging her light, the
other casting deep shadows ;
Time, as he goes, laughs lovingly at me, saying, "This is all a
fancy."

But who is he who steals unseen and shades my eyes with tender
hands, whispering sweetly in my ear: "Who am I, say,
who am I ?"

New fancies weave themselves in colour shot through my
gleaming tears.

I try to catch them and put them on Time's canvas, or as buds
of joy and sorrow, to weave them into a garland.

But who is he who steals unseen and holds my shivering hand
in sport ?

I am free from shyness, I am free from fear :

Yet, O my Lord, let her thou lovest, she who leans against thy
beloved breast and drains the coveted cup of peace—

I pray thee let her rest and sleep awhile.

To forget all, to revive all.

V. Raman Unni Menon

English
THREE POEMS

DOROTHY NORMAN

SONG OF THE NIGHT—ADOLESCENCE

There can be no end to this our love
no further goal
no other continuity

This is summation
this is that all-consuming height
toward which all lesser moments had ascended

This is that all-endless addition
for which all smaller forms had been but preparation

Fearlessly to speak out truth in every phase
all unadorned in single purpose
to reaffirm this final ecstasy
in ageless depth on depth

Oh my heart :
The dawn already tears us apart
even as the fear of uttering sufficiently
the total wonder of our love
(fear born in the deceptive shadow
of our dwarfing self-protection)
even as the knowledge
that your beauty can then be seen by all in day
(for who that beholds you will not love you)

even as the resultant creations of our love :
or any new moment of wonder—competing—or old
or the stab of laughter
or the love of all

Where is that space
that time
in which to avoid all otherness
(That cruelly recurring question :
Are you then surely he ?)
To elude those certain thresholds of our foreordained departures
into the swallowing crypts of day upon day
when there may be no return

FOR WHOM WAS THE POEM FASHIONED ?—ADOLESCENCE

For whom was the poem so passionately made
the dedication so exclusively reserved
the totality of love so sacredly promised

There are the unbroken phases and streams of love
each vowedly discrete
the edges crashing touching merging
worlds within worlds upon worlds
so that the growth
so that the citadels
abandoned yet intact
blur the lines of demarcation
into one great and interchangeable song
to be presented in innocence accurately to any new love
as though it were all others
the content strictly unalterable
and as shamelessly virgin

TRANSIENT ORDER

Damp sea sand
bringing rocks to rest
in folds
when tide is low
like an arranged bouquet
of scattered wild-flowers
in a vase
ordering a countryside
bringing quiet form and style
to turbulence

English

WINGS SPREADING FOR FLIGHT

WESTON MCDANIEL

Weep not for birds tossed from the nest,
The nest too small for bones swelling with growth,
For wings spreading for flight. . .
Weep not for birds tossed from the nest
When one false twist of wind
Bears prey to hawk, to fox,
When one false turn of wing
Tempts rodent, snake. . .

Weep not for birds tossed from the nest,
For only the outcasts are free.

English

AT THE READING OF A POET'S WILL

GALWAY KINNELL

Item. A desk
Smelling of ink and turpentine
To anyone whose task
Is to sweat rain for a line.

Item. A sheaf
Of poems, a few lucid,
One or two brief,
To anyone who will bid.

* * *

Item. Praise Jesus, who spent
His last cent
In the wild woods of himself in the try
For self-mastery.

His boast
Is that though he did insist
On principle, in terror and compromise
He taught us what love's limit is.

Item. I built a desk,
I spent myself for a sheaf,
All else I committed I ask
That the Lord forgive.
I took Christ for my pattern,
Once he was kind to a slattern,
If I was led into mazes
Blame and praise Jesus. *Amen.*

English
TWO POEMS

D. J. ENRIGHT

CALCUTTA'S SUN

Like trying to sleep
With lights on all round you.
Infiltration through fingers,
Crooked elbow betrays you,
Sheets diffuse the whole failure,
Pillow will smother you.

Bright star, all too steadfast,
That lights worlds of wretchedness
In black holes and corners.
Trunk without limbs, bones without flesh,
Flesh without skin, limbs without trunk.

Like trying to sleep
With lights on all round you,
The switches all hidden.
Reach out, read a book, then—
Keats, Tennyson, Heber—
That the hours may not maul you,
That no one may call you
Politician : materialist : sentimentalist :
realist :
Pain holier-than-all-you.

With lights on all round you,
There's nothing like reading
To send you to sleep :

Assured that the soul is
The place the real pain is
And we (even the plumpest)
Must all bear our soul.

CHIENGMAI

At my age, not allowable at all
To feel that—God, say ?—smiles on this land:
In the indigo clouds of renescent nightfall,
Saffron brush-strokes that bind and define them.

—A grandeur this race never could create:
Fumbling with slats of timber, dusty teak-leaves,
Scraps of borrowed myths.
Later with corrugated iron, cracking concrete,
Scraps of borrowed politics.

—Who left the greater works to—God ?—
And suffered or enjoyed them decently.

In my age, easily allowed
That—God ?—still smiles on this land.
In the indigo mushroom of evening cloud
The lightning circles, while the children smile.

French

A REQUIEM FOR ASHES

PAUL GILSON

The dust being that of a wall
was in no doubt at all
that it had heard too much
of the time when walls as such
had ears and lost steps haunted every corridor

Still hot from the evening before
the ashes of memory
retained within the embers glow enough
to light up between door and door
phantoms—whether they be
the ruff
of supping people
who met with shipwreck under the table
the dandy's eyeglass
the profligate's little shell or alas
the three curls of the dead woman

The cure-all powder of a quack
did not talk for nothing
but none could hear the shaman
Man too being dust
has just returned to dust

The state of his encampment shows alack
such deprivation
that it would melt stones

but no stones are left either
in the graveyard quarry of nations

Abel and Cain
the whole world has
disappeared altogether

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

French
TWO POEMS

PIERRE REVERDY

LATE IN THE NIGHT

The colour decomposed by night
The table where they sit a shade too tight
The chimney-glass
The lamp a heart that voids itself Alas
It is another year
An added wrinkle
Had you ever thought of that
The window projects a square of blue somewhat flat
At any rate
The door is much more intimate
A separation
Remorse and crime
Good-bye I fall or climb
Into the angle of soft arms which receive me
From the corner of my eye
I spy
All those who drink
I dare not move to the brink
They are sitting
The table is round
And so too my memory
I remember everyone
Even those who have gone

WHITE AND BLACK

How to live elsewhere except near
the big white tree of this lamp
The old man has cast away

one by one his ivory teeth
What good to keep gnawing
these children who never die
The old man
The teeth
For all that it was not the same dream
and when he imagined he had become as great
as God himself he changed his religion
and quitted his dark old chamber
Then he bought some new cravats and
an admirah
But now his head as white as the tree
is in fact no more than a miserable little ball
at the foot of the stairs
From afar the ball seems to move
There is a dog beside it and
in its form seen remotely
when it moves one knows no longer
if it is the ball

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

French
PALIMPSEST

GEORGES GABORY

As from a cold and pensive tree
My life, a leaf, descends above
The path to which I lost one day
The dog and rose and also dove.

Some mistress open at the knees
Received my body, heart and soul,
And now the crown I made of youth
If fading round my shrinking poll.

And every night I seem to hear
The wind of memory lament
Within a garden, grey like ash,
Where lies our love all passion spent.

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

Italian
THREE POEMS

FRANCESCO ARGANGELI

THE ROSE OF MAY

May's light can only ravage :
The green finds no repose.
O dark and silent rose,
You make of me a savage.

Your secret petals smelling
Of blood, no more, no less,
You come to repossess
Your bitter, bitter dwelling.

Eternal, sweet and thorny,
O rose I love to tear,
I give you back your lair,
These ribs so true, though horny.

A ROSE

Sweet bee, O friend of mournfulness,
Refulgent in the blaze of sun
Above these well-beloved tombs,
The lizards shimmer near your hair.
This light that, unappeased, confounds
My memories, will shortly make
The scorched earth harvest thunder, blood
And corn ; but you, forever true,
Uphold in dusky hands a rose.

VENUS

Upon the evening's verdant dust
Descends our planet, skimming hills
Which, set on fire, burn gently like
A lamp of distant hope. And when
She disappears, I follow through
The darkling woods her flicker till,
Consumed by sweetness, she departs,
Investing with her testament
A trepid flame within my heart.

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

Serbo-Croat

TRAINS

IVAN IVANJI

I

Not only at sweepstake times are lottery tickets for sale.
No fingers touch the wheel of fortune as it spins.
On the railway station of life the fates are trains ;
And we just pick at random from the rail.

It's not all like clockwork, as the timetables paint.
But what's the use of lodging a complaint ?
Thursday was the day we expected to arrive ;
But no, it was Friday morning or Wednesday afternoon.
The main thing is that, late or soon,
We got there alive.

It's comforting to know
That everywhere the struggle for existence is still the same,
That nowhere is there danger of the dark from above or below.
When people get lost on a trip,
It's not the trains that are to blame,
But the people who have given themselves the slip.

II

Who knows where anyone goes and why,
When, how, and with whom he will turn aside ?
In the last resort the planets all pass by
In their unending ride
Through space
Never to arrive at any place.

And everyone will find
On railway stations in towns or at halts in the country air
That the fortune which awaits him is quite blind,
(For some will get the larger and some the smaller share.)

Perhaps for half a minute or so
The train will stop and no one will know
Why it won't go.
Then going on, the traveller anticipates his destination ;
But everything will be late on that railway station.

Serbo-Croat

FACE IN THE SHADOW

VESNA PARUN

Though I have forgotten his name, I know it was dear
to the birds ;
And my eyes can remember the lovable smile on his lips.

Men's footsteps pace the landing-place, but I do not
turn my face,
For I am wrapped up in the whispers of long-lingering storms.

Even the sea-gull has forgotten her friend who is dead,
so why do you grieve ?
The sea-gull has forgotten her nest on the cliff and
confuses the North and the South.

I have not drawn the curtain, while the sea is still unquiet.
I seek reprieve from chastisement of the knotted tops
of trees, from terror in the depths of the sea.

Oriya

FOLLOW SLEEP, FALL ASLEEP

SOCHI RAUT ROY

Follow sleep then, fall asleep.
Follow the shadows on the wall.
The remembered and the forgotten, shadow them all.
Climb up the stairs with mark of dead men's feet,
The dark tower—a murderer's retreat.
There ask the killer's bones
If in his closed eyes living face shines.
Half-remembered are scattered skulls,
They are mirrors on which your heavy shadow falls ;
And thus you find your bearings in that darkness deep.

Follow sleep, fall asleep.
Shadow those images that flit across
Images of your face reflected in the glass
Of dead events and scattered time
The dark city where slums lie seam on seam,
The fearful tunnel that endless is,
And on no map charted the untrodden lane,
Only there can you have a whole verandah to yourself alone
For none will mount the stairs to rend your peace.

Where through half-closed lattices
Storm upon storm has pressed through centuries
And the dust on the window-sill carries
Even till today the traces
Of how the howling winds were calmed
In that room where dead emperors emblamed
Stand in row upon row to answer all your queries,
Waiting with their wisdom of centuries
To tell you what even the clearest mirror dares not reveal.

Jyotirmoy Datta

Bengali

THREE POEMS

SAMAR SEN

EVEN NOW

The bright spear of the sun strikes
the burning stillness of the snow :
all those hills ripple away like dreams.

Even now like a scimitar aflame
the moon rises in the sky :
even now, ahead,
life,
as slow as death, lingers.

A GIRL

Today to our dimmed sight
happens the vision of you.
Eyes from a dream, breasts white and lovely,
lips fired by the body's first flame,
and all your flesh hinting bold desire :

On our soiled bodies,
on our sullied souls,
falls the light of your brightness
like a whip's reprimand.

HISTORY

I begged you : Come,
leave your grey existence ;
come across the tired stillness of your night

where the red hope of morning quivers,
where the mountains of night turn blue,
and the deep sea's darkness falls,
and the stars light their sharp blue flames
in the unyielding loneliness of the sky.

You did not reply, you only smiled.
In that tired, burnt-out smile
lay the night's restless, unending sorrow.

Sujit Mukherjee

Bengali

AWAKING AT MIDNIGHT

GOPAL BHAUMIK

What made me wake I did not know
When the night was hushed in sleep
And blindly grope to my little window
To gaze upon the distant void
Where all was still, so still and strange
That my poor darling stirring in her bed
Was to me
The sole reality.

Dull was the sky
In the sickly light of a moon.
And suddenly I saw
An earth gone ghostly sad and cold
As though it were not the same I'd seen
Riddled by the sun,
As if it were transformed
By some dark sorcery.

A shrill hooting floated on the air
Telling of a ship and of men leaving the land.
Enclosed within four walls
I felt that I could hear
Wild hooves thundering through the night
And tearing right through me.
Meanwhile the sky was dull, a hooting rose again,
And no one answered the call.

Gopal Bhaumik

Bengali
TWO POEMS

NARESH GUHA

CURVING SAND

Many are the curving rivers
Which have changed to sand
Since the vague heart of childhood
Through the black hair of story
Crossed a courtyard, patterned
By moonlit hours.
She stands with lowered eyes
At the window on the upper floor.
I turn on the blue light
After evening's shower of rain.
She shuts the window.
In the distance a train passes.
It is rumoured Tapati Sen
Is soon to be married.

The shimmering lake
In the shadow of the pines
Quivers in the breeze
Of the pale moonlit evening.
Finesse is still needed.
Who comes? Who is coming
With light feet over the grass?

No one. I realise my mistake.
The monotonous night
Comes and goes.
(What hand do I have
In the shaping of life?)

Cigarettes and women's bodies
Flare and burn out in the camp
In the city and in the village.
Towards the end of the night
Rain falls on roofs, on roads,
At the corners of lanes
In the metropolis.

Lila Ray

A LITTLE GIRL, RUMI'S FANCY

If I be a flower-petal, or a little beetle, duck,
Or a cloud of very busy, fussy and ever busy, bees,
Then like an erring truant, I'll fly away, be ruined
leave the sums and tables, scientific fables' class.

And

Then drop, hop, I dive, in a blue lake I dive, rove.
Who could keep my track

As daily I go and gather, from flower and the heather
honey?

My hair though is tousled, I am blossomed and all
purpled,

And It is I who really dances on pomegranate branches,
though noon strikes on the clock, father's gone to
work,
It's morning here near me.

Jyotirmoy Datta

Bengali

IN A RESTAURANT

ARUNKUMAR SARKAR

A square sky and afternoon. Everything is fine.
All I recall of the half-caste woman now is the sweat shine
On her downy back in that posh restaurant's glare.
A while ago I noticed the homing clerks hungrily stare
At the movie siren fixed to the poster by the street.
And now from the woodland in my heart floating comes the
sweet
Song of invisible bees : come my naughty wenches jauntily
Where my noonday dreams are stirring up
All my sorrows in a hot tea cup.

Jyotirmoy Datta

German

VARIATION ON TIME AND DEATH

HANS EGON HOLTHUSEN

And still today we have the world before our eyes. We have
Autumn, a ferment in the blood of time forsaken and to come,
And yellow chestnut leaves in the yard. With no exception now,
We all agree that lovely must it be to sally forth ;
And children, four years old, for just a second taste
What they will search throughout their lives and not recapture:
Autumn and homeland, the dusty habitation, this existence
Close to earth's protective crust, the preternatal landscape,
Hilly country, marsh, or granulated ridges
Standing clear of spotted sand darkly gleaming,
Cobbled pavements, juniper and birch, a lonely road
Athwart the heath, a maid in socks of blackish wool,
Her apron full of goat-smell... In old age that is called
one's childhood.

After a whole night of rain the morning clears but slowly,
Sweetish rot, translucent in the air, October, Theseus and
Ariadne,

One of Mozart's golden rondos in a minor key, a figurine of gold.
And this is also when a girl in some ungodly town,
A girl, whose latest letter you have not replied to,
Throws herself across a stony rampart down to the street.
O, no one will ever discover how at that momentous instant
Pallor overspread the heavens, how in frigid concert
All the windows shut themselves behind a glassy stare.
And who will dare inquire how this became the Sunday
When, incredibly, the golden rondo echoed with
The resonance of death ?

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

German

AUTUMN CROCUS

GEORG VON DER VRING

The asters' blue is like the dusk itself,
And round like patience are the apples which
Confront the restless man ; and so he turns
To contemplate the crocuses—those bolts
Of bright September fallen from the skies
To droop or stand erect upon the grass.
And then he starts to feel his proper shaft,
The icy thought within his stricken breast
Of making better love to loveliness.

His asters lose their blue to twilight now,
And big with nightmare grow his apples ; while,
Ungodly from his wound, he gropes along
The walls of earthly innocence, with hands
That clutch the fruits of knowledge tight. And, ah !
The hut, become a silver quiver, whence
The candle signs to him, may once again
Remove the secret arrow, tenderly
Perhaps, but not too soon by any means.

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

German

FALL OFF, O HEART

INGEBORG BACHMANN

Fall off, O heart, fall off the tree of time,
Fall, you leaves, from frozen boughs
Which once the sun embraced ;
Fall as tears from widened eyes.

The landgod's locks, above his brow of bronze,
Fretted all day long, have not yet ceased
To flutter in the wind ; and underneath his shirt
The fist already presses on the gaping wound.

Be, therefore, hard if once again the swarming clouds
Incline their pliant backs to pay you court ;
Be hard if once again the honeycomb
Fills you with Hymettus.

For unavailing is an isolated sprout
When drought compels the husbandman.
And can a single summer make
A race of swallows, or perpetuate the swift ?

What, moreover, does your heart affirm ?
Oscillating in-between tomorrow and
Yesterday, its strange and silent beats
Already cancel out each fall from time.

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

German

MY ROOM

GUENTER EICH

When I threw my windows open
Fishes sailed in—herrings—
Like, it seemed, a swarm of small fry
Swimming past in close formation.
Gambolling, they also spread among the pear-trees,
Though by far the greater number hid within
The woods above the nurseries and gravel-pits.

They are annoying. But a damned sight worse
Are sailors (even those of higher rank—
The captains and the tax-collectors)
Who so very often come to stand
Before my window, begging for a match
To light their foul tobacco with.

I wish to move right out of here.

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

German

A NIGHT-SONG FOR O

HORST LANGE

O slumber soundly now, be one with sleep,
Forget the day, fall out of date ;
Let moonshine and the brew of stars your senses steep,
Turn weightless, cool and indeterminate.

A raft devoid of mast and keel,
Skim over dreams, all soaked with heavy blood ;
And spread yourself above the trees to get the feel
Of skies at long last freed from hawk and flood.

Give way to fear, and know no name ;
Be minor, small, a naked child of dearth ;
Perceive how, caught by hands too hard and apt to maim,
You once were sundered from the womb of earth.

Within the pregnant darkness dangers stir,
Remain concealed, and lose your sight ;
Transform yourself to those that never were—
You are a stranger still to death and life's slow blight.

Rajeshwari Datta and Sudhindranath Datta

German

THREE POEMS

WERNER REHFELD

THE WIND ON THE LIPS

The wind on the lips
Tastes
Of next door.
In the mirror it effaces
Reflected nights ;
Denudes
In the bolster the anonymity ;
Drops into the waves,
Into the couple's rhythm,
Into the curtain
In front of the granted time.

BETWEEN THE FINGERS

The bedless nights.
Between the fingers
The hours circle
Elastic islands,
Figureless behind the hands.

Advertisements in the eyes.
Behind the windows
Pictures loll.
On the stairs
The questions tumble.

WITHOUT TRAFFIC

Between yesterday and today
The bridges are
Without traffic.
Hourlessly
The ships sail
With stolen words.
Between the piers
The rivets break.
Over the anchors
Pictures move
In wavering circles.

Nikolaus Klein

Bengali

THAT MIRROR-TOWN

RAMENDRAKUMAR ACHARYA CHAUDHURI

In that mirror-town my neighbour dwells.
Floods recede, pestilence falls.

A gaudy blouse, eyebrows pencilled,
The sun delights in the palm's conceit ;
To Alipur the ducks fly back
As conch-shells sound and the Pontiac
Speeds with her (6.29) !
To the meeting in Monument Park.

How many placid homes have crumbled.
Panic strikes the cattles' eyes.
On that tall building crawl those people—
The need's for help.

Homes adrift—the need's for pity.
Aeroplanes are ministers.
I am wearied of the infinity
Of sunlight spread between the stars.

O beggars, lovers, palmists, all
Who make this town so warm and full,
Where's the mirror? Where my neighbour?
Floods recede, pestilence falls.

Buddhadewa Bose

The 'mirror-town', according to a Bengali mystic, is the spot between the eyebrows and the seat of the 'neighbour'—the adored one.

Bengali

THE INHERITANCE

ARABINDA GUHA

How rashly did you squander
Your little capital
That night when you went under,
Your body's raft and all.
Too light the raft to tolerate
Your sorrow's dark, secretive weight—
So felt perhaps the watchman who
Refrained from staging a rescue
Although he saw you flounder.

As event, suicide is supreme.
Yet if Hereafter does exist
The future never will redeem
What here you desperately missed.

Your sorrow slips through remembrance ;
The sentimentalists decry
Your foolishness ;—but how can I
Renounce your love's inheritance !

Buddhadewa Bose

Bengali

HIS DEATH

SYED SHAMSUL HUQ

Izdani died when his plane dipped down.
He had dared to hold your crowded world
Like a soft small lemon in the palm of his hand.

His head was stuffed with the titles of books, their jackets,
Memories of Night Light Café. And possibly
Nylon thread a yard or two. But swimming through
All those varying airdrifts he died too young.

You who gather at the nice lady's
Table for tea—
We had mourned his loss at a meeting collectively—
“Are they not come yet?”
“Sweet enough your tea?”

Prattlers follow the wind :
“What was Rimbaud if not drunk and young?”
“Oh, Cocteau ! He is really the limit for me.”
And around their talk floats a mist, his soft ghost,
Seen because it's a trifle heavier than their idle breath.

Jyotirmoy Datta

Bengali

THE HAUNTED TERRACE

ALOK SARKAR

Wide the terrace above but here I am.
“Climb up,” I tell myself. But I know
I won't ever because the miraculous calm
Of that water-tank's neighbour, the pebble-like shadow
Falls into silence if I am anywhere near.

A ghost dwells there. His naked bones have a cruel dry shine.
Terrible his unearthly eyes. White blood mounts his twisted
spine.
One look, and I fly from room to room. Yellow my face in
fear.
I go where they are having tea but their cheer apalls
Because from everywhere the stairs are seen and always the
terrace calls.

I tell myself : “Why can't you be an unspoilt child of nature,
pray ?”
And when the evening comes—the day's cool residue—
You find before you spread a dark childhood view.
Up. Leave your home, the prospect is wide as your wish ;
Return to that first dawn and the river-bank's bliss.

Jyotirmoy Datta

Bengali

BESIDE THE WELL

ALOKERANJAN DASGUPTA

Will you not stand once more beside the well ?
Will you not promise not to go to town
To watch the fireworks whizzing
Or catch the fancy of a foreign poet ?

Not that I know who urges me
Even now to go on talking.
Wrapped in the nights of Magh
Or scorched by the Jaishtha days
I assume the dutiful air of a cockato.

Everything is ordained and to shift a straw
Is not in my power.
Not even a single sparrow
Can I ever subjugate.

Granted the heart is mountain. But then
It is swayed by the suppliant kneeling.
At times reticence too may crush
Stone with stone.

Will you not stand once more beside the well ?

Alokeranjan Dasgupta and Buddhadeva Bose

Magh, the tenth month of the Indian calendar, corresponds to
December-January, and Jaishtha, the second month, to May-June.

Bengali

A CONFESSION

SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY

Widowed at nineteen, she fought temptation till
At twenty-nine she slipped. And shame
Shook her slender stem like a candle-flame ;
It was merely rumour first. But the thing began to fill
Her veins. At last that flood of pain engulfed her.
(I can confess at last it was I the secret seducer.)

I leg the streets all day, a slave to the urge to live,
Tiring the nights arc, tiredness is choking as a woman's
embrace,—

But when tired to the bones I was, her flaming flesh was grace.
As soon as she cast off her heavy veil of grief
Her flesh became a deep and cleansing well.
Frog-like I gloated, my boredom withered and fell.

Her struggle she gave up wearily, her sigh could fill the earth ;
She had followed all the rules ; the gods of the hearth
And that half-remembered stranger, her husband, got their due.
But in her conch-shell breasts a dark priest blew
A fierce song that filled the night's vast horizon-walls.
She gave herself up finally and never again she wails
Though the storm is over now and she is cast
With her secret poison-flower on a heartless coast.

No, the Remarriage Act can't save her. She has lived up to
a code

Which will make her choose death, although it let her not
choose her food.

Opium she may have. Or fire. Else, she can sing the praises
(Blame her not, she was forced) of their tender god, Jesus.

Jyotirmoy Datta

Bengali

TWO POEMS

JYOTIRMOY DATTA

THE BEGGAR WOMAN

Not a woman really but the ghost of a tree
Uprooted by a storm in some forgotten century.
Her bark is now rags, in a beggar's disguise
She sits there all day. And so still she is,
It's clear her secret roots go down beneath the pavement stone.

Often, if it is a deserted noon,
I find not her but something cool and dark on the stone.
She sat there so long ! Has at last the pavement taken
Her deep imprint ? Or, is it the deserted shadow of one
Who is gone on a distant journey absolutely alone ?

Is that a living woman, or merely
The mirage of a distant decade haunting my eyes ?
Or, in noons such as this, the clairvoyant sun betrays
The ghosts in the air, the secret messages,
Written in invisible ink beneath all these apparent lies ?

Somebody had drawn these marks on the city wall
Hoping when it was burned down his fearful prophecies
Would be clear even to our unbelieving eyes.
But it is so hot this afternoon that bared are those dark scrawls ;
See here it's marked : "Beggan woman, the lame and the old
refugee."

A few strokes there—takes shape a scrawny bitch—
And those dots—oh cruel economy !—stand for filthy puppies.
Why suck, my phantom dogs, at the breast of only the sketch
Of a mother ? Could those stiff lines ever be a rich hive of milk !

O sun, angry god, hide in your dark silk
Locks of cloud your fiery face, or else these eyes go blind.

A raven and that woman sit in the rain.
If it rains for ever, if this earth dissolves
In this monsoon acid into a fine sand grain,
Even then neither will stir. Nor utter one groan.

MONOLOGUE OF A DYING MAN

Here is the old fly, more eager than the rest.
They know. Although this glutton is first for the feast,
They all know I am ripe for plunder now.

For them I was born to yield them food.
Now that I think of it, what to one is living blood
Is food to the rest. In God's strange garden grow

Plants that climb upward, politicians and bean,
And those that grow beneath their toes
Could be either poets or potatoes.

What difference then between them and me ?
I hear them now. So the final stillness is
Filled by beetles gnawing and, louder than beggars, the flies ?

But, supposing, after their banquet ends
A little is left no fly can eat,
Something invisible, secret,—

If, for your angels is left a magic residue
Which even the funeral fire fails to singe
Being lighter than air and cooler than dew !

Do as they will with my veins.
I leave them my nerve-entwined bones and those
Secret rills, if only that little remains.

Who knows but this is that alchemy
Which draws from dross a drop of purity ;
This could be God's way of distilling me

From this heavy and bloated carcass of mine.
From this heap of me, he may yet extract a drop
Which, if poured into a flea, would be just enough.

To make it a fiery grain of life.
Spread like a banyan, bowed by leaf and tendril, bud and tender
shoot,
All I yearn to be is a vibrant point at the tip of my root.

So the bugs be gorged and merry be their feast
For they are being used in this brewery, my body, by a gentle
chemist
Squeezing from stale flesh, liquor for his lips.

Jyotirmoy Datta

A NOTE ON MODERN BENGALI POETRY

JYOTIRMOY DATTA

Bengali poetry is the creation of a people who succeeded in almost nothing else. Even the Dutch did more than paint and in South India there is much to engage one's attention besides Bharata Natyam. Neglected in the Sanskrit epics and by the Muslim emperors who ruled from Delhi, eyed with suspicion by the British and treated shabbily by those who negotiated India's independence, the Bengali chose poetry as his revenge upon the world. But because he chose that one art where success is never apparent to the outsider, his revenge hurt only himself.

There were occasional attempts to let strangers into our secret. Rabindranath translated his own poems and those of others into English, and so did some of the later poets. But all our attempts to attract the outsider ended in failure and our poetry remains our private possession.

It is not that the foreign reader was indifferent to our efforts. Instead, we were flooded with sympathy. Every review of, each private reaction to, our translations seemed to follow a set course: "Oh, yes I understand... the language barrier... ineffable ultimately... the sonal element being the heart of poetry... yours is a musical language... one misses the soft vowels..." and then followed the fatal adjective—"Of course it is extremely interesting."

On our part it was hardly the vowels and the labials that we missed as much as the poetic essence itself. We could easily forego the jingle if only we could keep the heart of the poem beating in the translation. We were not naive enough to suppose one could put across the "music" of the original, but the element that is translatable was lost too in transit. It was lost because one can only translate into that language in which one could have written the original poem oneself. When we translated into English we used stock phrases and our style seemed to parody obsolete ways of writing; surprising perceptions, magically evocative images and shockingly true intuitions were amplified, smoothed over, and rationalised to help the foreign reader to understand. We went out of our way to make it sound like English. We had to do so because we lacked the authority to compel our new readers' attention. Our own readers had to strain to understand; they had to guess, be inventive, participate as readers of poetry must. Naturally, they were exhilarated when they emerged triumphant from the challenge set before them by a Rabindranath or a Jibanananda Das.

In Buddhadeva Bose's translations from Baudelaire no difficulty was slurred over; Sudhindranath Datta's translations from Mallarmé retain all the elements that were the despair of the French readers. Their transla-

tions are good Bengali and yet not-Bengali; the grammar, though correct, gives us the feel of a different language; the metre is perfect but it sounds exotic. They could do this, because they use the Bengali language with authenticity, courage and conviction. It was a task delightful to them and profitable to us, for now Heine and Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Ezra Pound have been so well Bengalised that they have become a part of our literary inheritance. A similar success can never be achieved in a foreign language; it might even be presumptuous to try to do for others what they should do themselves.

Those who are responsible for this number of *Kavita* did not for a moment believe that it was possible for them to turn out translations any better than passable. They undertook this task because of a unique fate which forced them to be their own translators. In many ways a precious acquisition, our knowledge of English has become a barrier in one respect: we know the language well enough for others to feel it unnecessary to learn our language to communicate with us. Our poetry is shut away from the foreigner by the very ease with which he can communicate with us on the social level. It is a strange language-curtain which hides the most valuable part of our consciousness because it reveals all that is trivial.

I have never met a foreigner who has not asked why we do not translate more of our poetry—a question which could have never been put to a Baudelaire or a Pasternak. Both chose to use their knowledge of English to translate into their own languages and left it to their English admirers to enrich the English language by translating their works into English. Nor could such a question be asked of a Japanese or a Chinese poet. If it was not for its other benefits, it seems it would be better for Indians to forget English. That would force all those who would like to have a glimpse of our secret thoughts to learn our languages. In our gloomiest moments it seems to us as if that is the only way left to avoid questions that are really impertinent but meant to be polite. That, or else to contrive things in such a way that an atom bomb is dropped on us so that philanthropic foundations try to erase the sins of their nation by sending hosts of translators to India.

But who knows if we might not yet succeed in our aim of exciting the interest of a young English or American poet through these translations, so that he would try to do better what we have done lamely? That is the true purpose of our efforts; if these pale shadows of the original Bengali poems retain charm enough to excite the curiosity of better translators—that is, translators who are poets by their own right in English—if our translations are regarded by a new Ezra Pound as an invitation to him to succeed where we have failed—all that we desired to achieve through these translations would be done.

Doubtless the European poet-translator would find our poetry different enough to be a valuable addition to the literature in his own language and yet not so strange as to have no bearing at all on the problems that concern him as a creative writer. He would find themes that occur in his own tradition treated in an alternative fashion in our poetry; he would discover that problems he regarded as uniquely his own besiege poets in another language who are separated from him by geography and memories of a different literary past, but are one with him in their notion of poetry and its uses.

He would discover that our poetry is not oriental in the sense that Chinese or Persian poetry is. It is recognisably poetry to a Westerner. It has metre and rhyme. It is not misty allegory nor the snapshot of a moment as is much of Far Eastern poetry; unlike Persian poems ours are not the product of an emperor's court, nor are they written for a readership composed solely of men. From the Western point of view its one shortcoming may be that it does not have the charm of the exotic. Our poetry began, as European poetry did, with an epic which described the full cycle of a civilisation. The *Mahabharata* has a sublimity which makes it hard to believe that it could have been created by man; the compass is so great that it looks as if an entire race had secreted all its memories in it; and yet its artistic and philosophic unity convinces one that it is the creation of one who, like Homer, transformed the wisdom and the memories of his race into an epic which was so great that it could take in later interpolations with a gain in bulk but no loss in unity. The *Mahabharata* occupies a place in our tradition that the Greek, Latin and Italian epics do in the European. It describes, as does the *Iliad*, the fall of a city and, like the *Aeneid*, the rise of a new one. Arjuna, like Odysseus, goes on a journey that is symbolic of the marked man's restlessness. And, as in the *Divine Comedy*, hell is harrowed and the grand cycle ends with a vision of heaven. The poet, Vedavyas, surveys this spectacle with the serenity of a god. He ascribes to himself the role of a minor character in his tale who outlives four generations of heroes, who knows everything in advance and yet does not intercede, who steps in only to advise his creations on the vanity of sorrow. Valmiki, the legendary creator of the *Ramayana*, developed a story briefly told in the *Mahabharata*. The legendary Vedavyas is almost a god; Valmiki is sorrowful Man. Valmiki knows the ways of the gods but sympathises with the superhuman sufferings of his heroes. In the *Mahabharata*, as in the Greek epics, there is no room for pity; in the *Ramayana*, as in the *Aeneid*, the compassionate poet's secret feelings are betrayed in every line.

The next great poet after Valmiki celebrated the golden age of Brahmanical civilisation. Like the Augustans, he put intellect over feeling and proved that one could be a great poet although one wrote according to rules. He was Kalidasa, the supreme craftsman and the darling of

generations of commentators, in whose works a dazzlingly rich and sophisticated India breathes the life of its culture into the cold complexities of Sanskrit metres. There is a gap in our tradition too (filled by mystic and devotional poetry), between the decay of Kalidasa's classical literature and the rise of the vernaculars. Near about the fifteenth century a new spirit was abroad in India as in Europe. Religion changed with Vaishnavism, and so did poetry. Mukundaram, like Chaucer, wrote vividly about his times. The first true love-lyrics were written by the Vaishnavas. Rhyme was discovered or stabilised. Jayadeva, the poet of *Gitagovinda*, was like Ariosto a humanist. Some of the Vaishnavas were as earnest as Donne; all of them played with a charmingly ornate and conventional style. Bharatchandra was as clever as his English contemporary, Alexander Pope. Madhusudan Datta tried to create a hero in the true romantic image. He was the first Bengali poet who was acquainted with European literature. He admired Milton immensely—an admiration shared by his immediate English predecessors, Wordsworth and Keats. And after Rabindranath, the moderns.

Thus the story of Sanskrit and Bengali literatures parallels the course of any of the European literatures—the dates of the changes and their direction are fairly identical. It would be interesting to speculate how two peoples who for at least two thousand years were almost unaware of each other, thought and felt in a similar fashion. Are the centuries mere quantities of time or are they vital forces which secretly change the souls of men as the seasons change plants? Are languages merely a group of dead symbols tied together by the laws of grammar? Or does a language possess a life of its own which forces its own modes of feeling and thought on those who use it? Sanskrit, Greek and Latin rose from a common source; is it unlikely that they should evolve in like directions and force Europeans and Indians to create similar literatures?

This train of thought opens up thrilling possibilities of speculation—which I dare not pursue—and yields one certain deduction—which I must record. It demonstrates how baseless is the charge oftentimes made and which galls us most—that modern Bengali poetry is rootless, "derivative", that it is not our spontaneous creation but the result of our English education. Even the briefest review of the history of our literature will show that long before we learnt of the existence of the northern island with its chalk cliffs and Shakespeare, we were inevitably evolving towards the poetry of today. Granted, we borrowed often and liberally from the English. But did not the English borrow as much or more from the French and the Italians? Did not Dostoevsky borrow from "Gothic" novels and Hoffmann and Dickens? Is Chaucer any the less English for having imitated the Italians or is Dostoevsky un-Russian or "derivative"? Or is Rabindranath un-Bengali or "rootless"?

because he admired Shelley and Keats? The gap between the "Westerner", Madhusudan, and the Bengaliest of us all, Ishwar Gupta, is no sharper than that between Coleridge and Goldsmith. And just as English poetry is nearer German than French in spirit, despite all the borrowings from the latter, there seems to exist a deep and secret affinity between Bengali and German poetry, though most of the direct borrowing has been from English. 'Goethe, Hölderlin, Rilke; the novels of Thomas Mann'—so runs one of the most evocative lines in Sudhindranath. Jibananda reminds us of Hölderlin. And Goethe is the only figure in world-literature in whom one can glimpse 'another' Rabindranath.

But it would be rank ingratitude if we did not proclaim our debts to English literature. With Madhusudan began a period of borrowing which happily shows no sign of ending. At least one metrical form, the blank verse, was directly taken over from English. The sonnet, the novel, and the short story were modelled on examples in either English or some other European language which we received through English translation. But we must note that it is not only English literature, in the sense of the productions of Britishers and Americans, that has influenced us, but the whole of European literature to which the English language has given us access. Although Madhusudan was a linguist, and so are a few of the moderns, the majority of the Bengali poets, including Rabindranath, did not have any European language except English. And yet the Bengali sonnet is firmly built on Italian and French patterns, and while the "English" blank verse has withered in Bengali, the continental prose-poem is flourishing. That these transplantations have thrived on our soil is significant, but contact with European literature has given us more—something undefinable but immediately felt by anyone who starts reading the poets after Madhusudan. After the English came, we ceased being provincials and became aware of the wide world around us. Kalidasa felt himself to be at the centre of the world of his time; after a gap of many centuries we too felt as if our thoughts mattered to the world.

It was not to initiate us into Shakespeare that Englishmen came out to India; it all happened because we were ready to receive. The empire of Britain spread all over the world, but not all of the subject nations could use the new contact established with the West in the fashion we did. Already, before the English came, Bengali was a living literature; it had a long past but it was hungry for the new, waiting for materials it could assimilate and transform. Through the influence of the newly opened-up West, age-old memories of the Sanskrit classics were themselves transformed—into something rich and strange.

One of the most exciting chases in literary history would be to follow the career of an image from Valmiki or Dante through our literature. In Kalidasa occur many images and lines from Valmiki which, though subtly disguised, can be recognised easily enough. The ages which

separate these two poets wrought great changes: Valmiki's images vivify suffering held in heroic restraint; Kalidasa seems, almost, heartless. In Kalidasa's gilded paradise no fever torments man except that of love-sickness, no tear is shed except when the lover is separated from the mistress. Those images surface again, fifteen centuries later, in the poems of Rabindranath. The sharp, cruelly clear pictures etched by the cultured courtier dissolve into visions portentuous of disaster. Tagore, the romantic, has changed paradise into a melancholy place and physical appetite into love. A gap of fifty years—and the changeling images crop up once more in the poems of Sudhindranath, one of the first of our moderns, who broadcasts darkness all over the world. The romantic's melancholy becomes the nihilist's despair.

Similarly, an image from Dante that Rimbaud used or one of Milton's that Keats borrowed, could be found in a modern Bengali poem richly overgrown with new meanings and association. In Jibanananda one can trace metaphors and images that had their source in Keats and Yeats; poems by Buddhadeva reveal Baudelaire's influence; there were distinct echoes of Eliot in the early poems of Bishnu Dey; Premendra Mitra's poems show traces of Whitman. It is exciting to observe how these poets, endowed with memories of Sanskrit literature, transform elements gathered from poets of the Western world. The death-wish in Keats becomes an almost religious yearning in Jibanananda. Baudelaire's rag-picker thirsts for God instead of wine in a Buddhadeva poem.

The past seven decades have been the most fertile in the history of Bengali literature. The Vaishnava period was almost as rich in lyrics but not as complex, as agonised, and as intense as the modern ages. The modern poet has discovered more new subjects (and has treated them in a more varied fashion) than was done in the seven hundred years which preceded this period. All the metres now in use were standardised by Rabindranath. He also gave us the prose-poem. Jibanananda opened up the dark world of the unconscious, and the limits of the other half of our consciousness have been explored by Sudhindranath. Bishnu Dey has transformed political events into haunting surrealist verse. Amiya Chakravarty's lyrics are delicate and strong like submarine vegetation; in them dream and reality interfuse. Buddhadeva's later poems are starkly ascetic in their rejection of "the world" and probing into the sources of creativity. Some time or other, each of these has been blamed for being obscure, but Premendra Mitra remains an example of happy simplicity.

The greatest gift of the modern poet to our poetry is his discovery of death and the necessity of sorrow. A Westerner would never be able to guess how shattering an experience these discoveries have been because he, being a Christian and a descendant of the Greeks, had discovered both long ago. But in our culture the death of men and

civilisations had been regarded as a fact almost as inconsequential, or rather, inevitable, as the seasonal shedding of its leaves by a tree. For an Indian it has always been rather difficult to regard disasters in their isolation; seen from their Olympian view-tower all prospects, however unpleasant in themselves, merge into a harmonious cosmorama. It is surprising that neither in Sanskrit nor in Bengali poetry was a suicide mentioned before Jibanananda Das. There have been glorious deaths but no unaccountable ones. Before Jibanananda people sacrificed their lives for love or glory or because their deaths were necessary for the cosmic wheel to turn smoothly. Jibanananda found consciousness an adequate reason for yearning to die. He made us feel the raw and sickening impact of death, he endowed even the flesh of an orange with the agony of living tissues and hunted deer muttered of their pain in his poems. And because he did not believe this suffering to be the just wages of sin (as a Christian would), nor held the traditional Hindu doctrine of karma, his poems provide the most intense experience imaginable. They could have become stifling if it were not for a uniquely Indian quality in his poems: there is the vision of a sympathetic order behind the world's cruelty, which cannot intervene but keeps company with man in his tragic vigil.

Now it seems as if this period of frenzied creativity is at an end. The new generation of poets seems to have lost the enterprise of their predecessors. "Enough of ferment," they seem to say. "Now for settling down." They look tame and bourgeois beside their fire-eating elders, and perhaps they want to be tame and bourgeois. They are writing neo-classical verse in praise of propriety and balance. And this is so not only in Bengal but the world over, and not only in poetry but in history, politics and philosophy. Everywhere the new generation—my generation—seems to be overwhelmed by the achievements of the past, and the sterile attitude of sneering at the heroic compositeness of a Thomas Mann or a Mallarmé's saintly devotion to art seems to have grown into our bones.

And yet, though hidden to an observer from another generation, we can feel a new stirring in our veins. The first half of the twentieth century lived on the ideas bequeathed to it by the nineteenth. Its poetics and the psychology of the deep dark, its politics and the mystery of missing God, are all nineteenth century inventions. These have been used and used till all their possibilities have been exploited. It is no longer possible to write a really new 'modern' poem—modernism can now be only imitated. The present generation refuses to be mere imitators. What appears to be our docility is really humility. We are humbly waiting for the future to take shape; we are secretly preparing for the discoveries that this century can rightfully claim as its own. What else can we do? It is impossible to hustle the future.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In this number of *Kavita* we have drawn upon ten languages, seven nations and all the six decades of our troubled century. This we hope justifies the term 'international', but we do not claim to be 'representative' in any sense of the word. Let alone the big world, our gaps with regard to our homeland are many and obvious. We did want more poems from the sister-languages of India, but our attempts to contact poets and translators produced little result. Thus our choice was determined by the languages known to the editor and his collaborators and the material we already possessed or were able to hunt up. Our aim was to introduce our contemporary poetry to foreigners and that of other nations to Indians, but let us make it clear that the linguistic distribution in this issue follows no definite plan. It is the result of circumstances or accidents, and this, we suspect, would be true of any offering of this nature.

To this there is one exception, however. The greatest number of poets and poems are Bengali, and we intended it should be so. After all, or rather above all, *Kavita* is a magazine of Bengali verse and has been involved in its evolution for over two decades. It seemed to us both natural and right that we should try to make this issue a little anthology of modern Bengali poetry as well as a meeting-ground of nations. But here again we do not claim to be comprehensive or adequate. Some poems we would have loved to include refused to be translated, possibly because of our incompetence. We could choose only those which we found it possible to translate—and also worthwhile. The reader should be told that in our translations we have tried to maintain the forms of the originals, although rhyme had to be left out here and there.

The prose essay in this issue is meant as an introduction to Bengali poetry and is addressed especially to those who do not know our language or the history of our literature. We particularly hope to dispel certain false notions that have gained currency in the West: that modern Indians are victims of a 'hybrid' culture, that the oral tradition is still very much alive and the literature produced by English-knowing Indians is a brief interlude which has no relation to 'tradition'. Even the enlightened *Poetry*, we were sorry to note, printed a remark to the effect that the 'people of India automatically relegated those few poets who imitated T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound to esoteric groups who are little known or appreciated.' In a similar strain a Bengali-born professor living in England permitted himself to say in print that Saratchandra Chatterji, the Bengali novelist, merely imitated cheap English novels. The truth is, though, that Saratchandra, who received no college education, was a very small reader of English novels, whether cheap or elevated. In modern India it is not even necessary to know the English language to be infected by ideas which have their roots in the Italian Renaissance and the French

Revolution; all those our nineteenth century made a part of our inheritance. We cannot vouch for the whole of India, but certainly in Bengal the modern poets are neither 'few' nor 'imitators' of Pound and Eliot (any more than Pound is of the Chinese or Eliot of Laforgue) nor 'relegated by the people' (who are 'the people?') to obscurity. Modern poetry in Bengal is just as much (or as little) read and appreciated as anywhere else: relatively speaking, its influence may be rather more extensive than in Britain or the United States. It is this poetry (specimens of which we present here) which is vitally linked with our past and out of which the future is taking shape. And its writers are persons who have not stopped at their village homes but have experienced the world in one way or another, and by doing so have become better Bengalis and Indians. As for the oral tradition, it is just dead and it continues in its deadness; nothing new has come out of it in the last two hundred years, and hosts of anthropologists and sociologists will not be able to squeeze a drop of real poetry out of its inert agglomeration.

We should like to express our gratitude to those who have given help and encouragement to this project, and among them are poets, translators, advertisers, cultural organisations and members of consulates and embassies. To those who have contributed to the making of this issue, our thanks; to those who will read it, our friendly greetings.

B. B.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

RABINDRANATH TAGORE, the centenary of whose birth we are celebrating next year, occupies much the same position in Bengali life as Goethe in German and Pushkin in Russian. *Hard Times* marks the beginning of the 'dark' period of his middle years. The original, in richly rhymed eight-line stanzas, was published over 60 years ago. Tagore's own (abridged) translation of it is entitled *The Bird*.

JIBANANANDA DAS was one of those rare spirits who could and did succeed in nothing except poetry. His life was lived in an obscurity similar to Blake's or Hölderlin's: his home, a small riverside town now in East Pakistan; teaching, his means of living; his vocation, verse. Hailed by one fellow-poet as a genius, ridiculed by the official critics and neglected by the 'progressive' school, Jibanananda quietly produced seven volumes of verse which by now have worked their way into the destiny of the younger generations. Today he is variously regarded as the first of our modern poets or the only true exponent of 'pure poetry' in Bengali. He was born in 1899 and a street-accident led to his death in 1954, in Calcutta.

SUDHINDRANATH DATTA has worked as secretary of an insurance company, an ARP officer, and as journalist and publicist. The chief 'theoretician' of modernism in Bengal, he has edited a literary review and been the centre of a distinguished coterie. His place in literature is assured by his critical writings as much as his verse and verse-translations. He has travelled extensively and is currently teaching a course on Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, Calcutta.

AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY was an associate of Tagore and Gandhi and has lived and taught in the United States since the end of the Second World War. He resembles Tagore in his multiplicity of interests and passion for travel, but whereas Tagore's poems seldom use a locale outside Bengal, some of Chakravarty's vividly capture foreign places and ways of life. His distinctive use of free-verse has influenced later poets.

PREMENDRA MITRA's poetry, fiction and children's books have won him several prizes and countless admirers. Like many writers of his generation he started as a contributor to *Kallol*, an *avant-garde* magazine of the late nineteen-twenties. He has written for the films and worked as a film-director.

HUMAYUN KABIR is India's Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs. He formerly taught English and Philosophy at Calcutta University and is author of several volumes in Bengali and English. He edited *Green and Gold*, an anthology of Bengali writing in English translation

and is sponsoring a collection of Tagore's essays, to be published in the centennial year.

BUDDHADEVA BOSE's four poems are from his recent book of verse, *Je Andhar Alor Adhik* (*This Dark is more than Light*). His Bengali rendering of 104 poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* will shortly appear in book form. A volume of short stories in English translation is in process. He founded 'Kavita' in 1935.

BISHNU DEY was one of the first Bengali poets to become conscious of being modern, but his later verse shows a yearning for tradition and the grass roots. He has translated from Eliot, Pound, Eluard and many other Western poets and written about poets and poetry in Bengali and English. His verse is widely admired and imitated.

UMASHANKAR JOSHI lives in Ahmedabad where he edits *Samskriti* (*Culture*) and is Director of the School of Gujarati Language and Literature, Gujarat University. He is a leading Gujarati poet and has published short stories and one-act plays.

JAISHANKAR PRASAD was one of the initiators of 'chhayabadi', the mystic school in modern Hindi poetry. Among his best-known works is *Kamayani*, an epic poem of monumental dimensions. He published several volumes of drama and fiction and died in 1957 at the age of 68.

MAHADEVI VARMA lives in Allahabad where she is Principal of Mahila Vidyapeeth. The mystic school claims her as a chief exponent and her volume of lyrics, *Deepshikha*, was awarded the Akademi Prize. She has published two volumes of memoirs.

MAITHILISHARAN GUPTA is a traditionalist and follows the cult of 'bhakti' (devotion). He has published 37 books of verse and translated from Bengali. He is a nominated M.P.

G. SANKARA KURUP was born in 1901 and retired from a professorship in 1956. He acknowledges influence of Tagore whose *Gitanjali* he translated into Malayalam. His home-town is Ernakulam, in Kerala, where he is respected as the doyen of letters.

DOROTHY NORMAN edited *Twice a Year* and chose captions for the 'Family of Man' photographic exhibition. She has visited India and written about Indian art and philosophy. Her volume of poems is entitled *Dualities*.

WESTON McDANIEL has published three volumes of verse. He lives in New York City.

GALWAY KINNEL is a young American poet who is currently teaching at Teheran University. His first volume of verse is in preparation.

D. J. ENRIGHT has taught English literature in Egypt, Thailand, Japan and Germany and is now professor of English at the University of Malaya. He has published novels and essays and his third volume of verse is in the press.

PAUL GILSON is a young poet who works on the Pairs Radio. He has published novels and an anthology of the cinema. His father, Etienne Gilson, is professor of medieval philosophy at College de France.

PIERRE REVERDY came into prominence immediately after the First World War and is now regarded as one of the greatest living French poets. He holds that a poem should be an end in itself and not a parasite on reality. His compositions tend to be circular, the interlinked images seldom reaching a conclusion but returning somehow to the title.

GEORGES GABORY was born in Paris in 1899. Though he has been involved in the modernist movement, he is far from being a *faune*. His verse is regular, but he prefers the octosyllabic line to the alexandrine.

FRANCESCO ARCANGELI's three poems appeared in the Italian original in *Botteghe Oscure*. Our best efforts have yielded no information about him.

SOCHI RAUT ROY joined the nationalist movement and served terms of imprisonment in the British regime. He has published some ten volumes of verse and participated in international seminars in America and Australia. He lives in Calcutta and has published poems in Bengali.

IVAN IVANJI was put in a concentration camp during the Second World War. He has published two collections of poems and one novel.

VESNA PARUN was born at Zlarin, in 1922. She was educated at Split and Zagerb and has published two volumes of verse. Her poem, like that of Ivan Ivanji, was sent to *Kavita* by a former official of the Yugo-Slav embassy in India. We have not been able to trace the names of the translators.

SAMAR SEN was born in 1916 and published his first book of poems in 1936. His handling of the prose-poem and his Marxist leaning influenced other poets, but he ceased writing poetry when still young. His present home is Moscow where he is employed as translator from Russian into Bengali.

GOPAL BHAUMIK has edited a magazine and published collections of poems. He works as Public Relations Officer to the Government of West Bengal.

NARESH GUHA's first volume of verse was widely appreciated; his second is awaiting publication. He is now in the United States on a Fulbright award.

ARUNKUMAR SARKAR, like Naresh Guha, represents the middle generation of the modern Bengali poets, and is noted for his metrical skill. He has written appreciations of his immediate predecessors. His hobby is to organise literary festivals.

HANS EGON HOLTHUSEN continues the great tradition of German lyric poetry at a time when all foundations have been made questionable by the last war. Passages in his poems are often reminiscent of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. His first novel has appeared in an English translation under the title, *The Crossing*.

GEORG VON DER VRING is the only living German poet who participated in the literary movements of the last 60 years. His work is many-sided and he has recorded in verse his experience as a soldier in the First World War and a prisoner in America. In 1942 he published *October Rose*, a collection of lyrics written in a simple and individual style.

INGEBORG BACHMANN belongs to the generation that began writing during and after the last war. The desolation and insecurity of the times are the keynote of the two volumes of verse she has published.

GUENTER EICH was born in 1907 and is the boldest poet of his generation. His two most startling volumes were published in the late nineteen-forties. In them a shattered world is put together through the invention of original ciphers. But in his latest collection the ciphers themselves are in jeopardy.

HORST LANGE's most famous collections describe the landscape of Silesia where he was born in 1904. His poetry is 'elemental' and verges on mysticism.

WERNER REHFELD belongs to a group of young authors who are disposed to both poetry and academic research. His doctoral thesis on Kafka was followed by a critique of Thomas Mann. His present home is Calcutta where he teaches German at three different institutions.

RAMENDRAKUMAR ACHARYA CHAUDHURI will soon bring out his first collection of poems. He teaches English in a college near Calcutta.

ARABINDA GUHA is an entertaining columnist and has published two books of poems. He is engaged on a book on the Bengali theatre of the nineteenth century.

SYED SHAMSUL HUQ lives in Dacca and belongs to a promising young group of East-Pakistani poets.

SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY edits *Krittivas*, a poetry-magazine.

ALOK SARKAR writes in a highly individual idiom and is connected with *Shatabhisha*, an organ of young poets.

ALOKERANJAN DASGUPTA, like Alok Sarkar, has rebelled in content though not in form against the rebelliousness of the preceding generation. He teaches in the department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University.

JYOTIRMOY DATTA is twenty-three and calls himself an illuminist. He makes his living as a journalist and has published verse and criticism in *Kavita*.

MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE studied English literature at Patna University and teaches in a women's college in Patna. This is her first appearance in print.

SUJIT MUKHERJEE says he has two passions: literature and cricket. His translations from Bengali poetry have appeared in American and Australian magazines. He lives in Patna, where he teaches English literature.

LILA RAY is American by birth, Indian by nationality, and Bengali in her way of life. She wrote a short history of Bengali literature in collaboration with her husband, Annadasankar Ray, a noted Bengali novelist. Her three translations from the Hindi were previously published in *The Indo-Asian Journal*.

V. RAMAN UNNI is a sub-editor of *Matribhumi*, a leading Malayalam daily.

RAJESHWARI DATTA, wife of Sudhindranath Datta, was born in the Punjab and educated at Lahore and Santiniketan. She is a distinguished singer of Tagore songs and knows three Indian and four European languages.

NIKOLAUS KLEIN is an Indologist who teaches German at the German-Indian Association, Calcutta.

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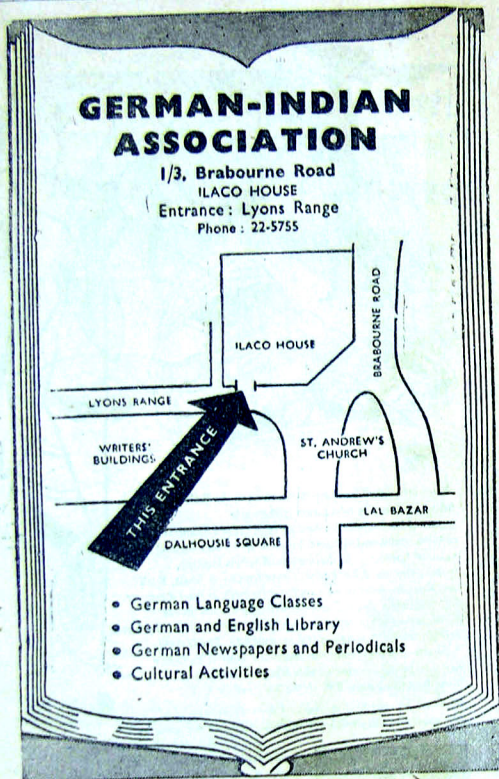
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The translations by different hands of the nine stories in this volume were published in various journals in Bengal, but have not appeared in any book till now. They are here presented in the hope that they will help to convey, to readers not conversant with Bengali, something, at least, of the power and charm of the original stories.

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