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Poetry Will Come

We need rice, salt,
chilly, firewood;
we can do without poetry.

Yet poetry will come back
like rice,
the seed of the earth,
boiled and cleaned of husk and bran,
overflowing every measure
every granary and godown;
like salt,
the memory of the sea,
watering our mouths,
burning us with pain
in order to heal our wounds,
nourishing our roots;
like chilly,
the lust of the clay,
turning hot our lips, tongues,
breasts, waists, veins and nerves;
like the firewood,
the bones of the forest,
their marrow melting sizzling
burning slow with tiny flames,
chanting, in a single breath,
rice salt chilly firewood poetry.
(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

The Unwritten Poem

I am the poem
no one has written yet.
I traveled up to
the fingertips of many poets
but retreated to the dream
like unexpressed love
as I was without script.

I am not afraid of language
as long as it has a future tense.
One day I will find my words:
a wonder-struck child
will see a sail
unfold and rise slowly
on a vacant page
under a new star.

(From Three Poems on Poetry)
2012

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Cactus

Thorns are my language.
I announce my existence
with a bleeding touch.
Once these thorns were flowers.
I loathe lovers who betray.
Poets have abandoned the deserts
to go back to the gardens.
Only camels remain here, and merchants,
who trample my blooms to dust.
One thorn for each rare drop of water.
I don't tempt butterflies,

no bird sings my praise.
I don't yield to droughts.

I create another beauty
beyond the moonlight,
this side of dreams,
a sharp, piercing,
parallel language

2000

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Days of the Week

Sunday comes
flying like lightning
opening the golden doors of heaven
on the wings of sunbeams.

*

Monday rises
from hell's kitchen
with the pungent odour of
the smoke from charred pot of milk

*

Tuesday crawls in
bleeding, from its
dark hole on earth,
its hood beaten and crushed

*

Wednesday swims in
from the coral reefs of
the ocean bed, with its
long tail, sharp teeth and black scales

*

Thursday walks in,
silence frozen on its hairs,
with the quiet steps of the snowman
from the icy cave in the mountains

*

Friday staggers in,
a shivering hunchback,
his beard grey and hair matted,
carrying a knapsack of failed revolutions

*

Saturday arrives
riding a coffin, raising
her head and screaming
in a witch's dark mantle

*

Sunday retreats, closing behind him
the heaven's door, to retire
to his dim disheveled little room
to write a poem
on the days of the week.

2012

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Invisible

I have never seen you;
may be I never will.
Still I know you are there,
like some unseen stars,
like the first wonder-filled flap
of the just-created bird,
like some half-formed words
on the frontiers of language,

like some planets,
fuming fluid yet.

2

Your crystal-voice
quickens my heartbeat,
like coffee, like pepper,
like jazz, like drugs.

3

You are a dripping tunnel
with light at the end.
I long to get wet
passing through you
listening to the songs
of the forest-birds
that thrill the wind.

4

The scent of how many flowers
from your body shining far-away
Is igniting my senses?

5

Let those hands keep moving,
their bangles laughing,
shaping the fragile idols of love.

6

Who said life is a tree
that blossoms just once
and then dries up?
This is that moment,
unrepeatable, of blossoming.

7

I am a grain of sand
and you, the endless sea.
Let me multiply and be the earth
to contain all of you?

8

I tremble all over like
the tallest building
in a quake-hit city.
You are the oldest of its roads.
Split open so that I may
tumble down to be
devoured by your womb
and open my fresh eyes
into the light of a city
yet to be born.

2012

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Old Women

Old women do not fly on magic wands
or make obscure prophecies
from ominous forests.
They just sit on vacant park benches
in the quiet evenings
calling doves by their names
charming them with grains of maize.

Or, trembling like waves
they stand in endless queues in
government hospitals

or settle like sterile clouds
in post offices awaiting mail
from their sons abroad,
long ago dead.

They whisper like a drizzle
as they roam the streets
with a lost gaze as though
something they had thrown up
had never returned to earth.

They shiver like December nights
in their dreamless sleep
on shop verandahs.

There are swings still
in their half-blind eyes,
lilies and Christmases
in their failing memory.
There is one folktale
for each wrinkle on their skin.
Their drooping breasts
yet have milk enough to feed
three generations
who would never care for it.

All dawns pass
leaving them in the dark.
They do not fear death,
they died long ago.

Old women once
were continents.
They had deep woods in them,

lakes, mountains, volcanoes even,
even raging gulfs.
When the earth was in heat
they melted, shrank,
leaving only their maps.
You can fold them
and keep them handy :
who knows, they might help you find
your way home.

2007

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

Misplaced Objects

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

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

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

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

2006

(Translated from the Malayalam by the poet)

John Siddique

Sohni Mahiwal

Part I

Izzat Baig (Mahiwal)

I

Each moment is the first moment.