

K. Satchidanandan

### **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.