

Five Poems of Nilesh Raghuvanshi

Translated from Hindi by Alpna Saini

Father's Voice over the Telephone

Over the telephone
trembles father's voice
quivering like the flame of a lamp

Coming from afar
hiding unease and sorrow

Passing through the telephone cable
cursing, annoyed
over this modern instrument

Twinkling like the stars
a voice breaking off and then reconnecting

How soothing
listening to father over the telephone
how he must have held the phone for the first time

Thundering, lightning-like father's voice
how unsure, afraid over the phone

Like bubbles forming and then bursting
heavy with emotion father's voice

Must have held the phone long
speaking to his own children from afar,
father.

Mother

O Mother
your memories suddenly grip me

When I see some woman
on the platform, frightened
a basket in hand
head covered with the edge of her dress
O mother I remember you

Like my mother
O woman
there is still unease
even at this stage of life
why, but why?

Does the chirping of the birds
give us a mere illusory respite?

A Girl of Seventeen

There are no skies in the reveries of a girl of seventeen
there are no trees, no mountains, not the smouldering noon
not even the warmth of mornings

The girl, like a sparrow hopping about the house,
just dreams of being eighteen and
of being in her marital home

The girl has always looked for happiness in others
never searched anything in herself
she has always been taught to do so
and that her happiness lies within the confines of her home
the girl just thinks about having a home

The girl who is the mirth of the home
would one day become a silent river

would go about her chores silently
her gait would lose the rhythm of dance
her feet bearing the burden of motherhood but not the spring
of dance
would tread cautiously for centuries to come
never would the girl think about earth, while walking on earth.

The Barrel

An old and beautiful barrel
which used to be full of grains
sometimes filled with water
but it was before that a container
filled with dreams

That barrel
a woman had brought with her as dowry
would have pictured the door of her home
in that barrel all through her journey

It was filled to the brim with her childhood
and starry days lay immersed within

The woman is no more
neither are the starry days
the dreams full of desire could not survive
yett the barrel still remains
alive with the life in her father's home
and the home of her husband

The odour of life still remains in it
the cry of the woman is registered in it
how she kept cherishing her home
so the innocent dreams should not break
should not dwindle
could be saved

In this very confusion
the barrel keeps on stumbling all through the house.

The Book

Publishers!
Reduce the prices of books
Books are not expensive wines
Nurture within yourself the desire
that children should run after books
as they do to catch butterflies

I wish to keep the book as close
as are my dreams
Books! Stay with our unfulfilled desires
Lest the solitariness of desires should
get caught in the trap of coins

I wish to gift books to those
Who, about to be mine, disappeared
in a game of hide and seek
and to those who could never be mine
In these twenty two years that I have lived
I could not get my name on a single book

O expensive books!
Be a little less expensive
I wish to submerge myself in your mysterious world.