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A SKY FULL OF BIRDS

BALRAJ KOMAL



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INDIA ACADEMY EMERITUS AWARD COLLECTION OF URDU POEMS

A SKY FULL OF BIRDS

BALRAJ KOMAL



The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, Mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Collection of
Urdu Poems

A SKY FULL OF BIRDS

Balraj Komal

Translated by the author



Sahitya Akademi



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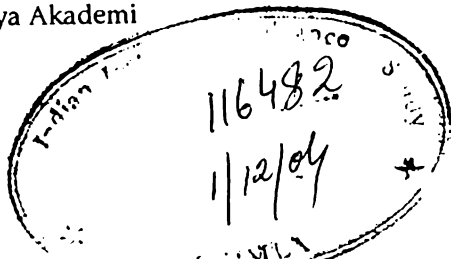
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The Last Sound, The First Sound

The shadow of the last sound
Passes through the nightmare door.
You were dead and gone
But darkness beckons you,
And asks you to account
For your days and nights;
You had thought
Perhaps the night would pass –
And you lost yourself in pointless quest.

The last was, may be, the first sound
Of a new born babe,
Of an opening blossom,
The gurgling of
A holy stream.
When lightning struck the awakening tree
Splinters of a sweet and dainty word
Spread like poison in every vein.

I beseech my heart
My cruel spike,
Free me from the yoke of flesh,
Take away from me the wealth of pain,
Favour me with
A frozen heart;
If this cannot be
Grant me the death
Which fell to the lot of my dearest friends.

But this my heart, a captive of hope
Bleeds all over;
Drunk with hope

I cry for you
My heart ! my heart !
I cry for you.

‘Aakhiri Aawaz, Pehli Aawaz’, 1975

O Mute Pain

O mute pain ! the people around here
Are all strangers,
Edifices –
Merely heaps of stone.
I had some marks of nearness
On my saddened heart
I look for them.

I am aware of the ordeal
Of perpetual quest;
But keep to it;
Not a plaintive word
Against tyrants I utter;
Though one among all,
Never was I
Beyond the pale of all.

The ashes
Of a burnt-up universe,
Cover the pathways far and near;
The melancholy blossom,
Loses its petals in raging winds;
The faces, the loves
The intimate round
All I like.
I am bound to them
In flux of being.
Shall go with them
To the end of the road.
Ask me not of my final refuge :
You barred your doors

Long ago on me.
Ask me not of my final refuge.

'Aiy Dard-e-Benawa', 1975

The Arrangement

Many small and pretty
Things in our home,
By and by,
Broke down right before our eyes –
A tiny doll
Suddenly collapsed;
A horse got palsy
In his legs;
The snow white polar bear
Melted away
In unkind heat.
When glass-ware broke,
We ordered replacements
From neighbouring stores. .
Some household things
Got a lease of life
From caring hands;
The trendy dresses
Kept their pace
With fashion and taste.

While moving ourselves
To a new abode
We made out a list
Of all we had got;
A delicate, innocent doll was there,
A horse, a furious horse, at that
The polar had gone –
A tropical bear
Had taken its place.
The glassware sparkled
In wonted sheen;

All inmates had their things intact –
Boundless greed and shameless lust
Were locked in mirrors;
Eyes and lips,
The spread of flesh,
The flaunted airs,
The trampling feet,
Were all there.

In the new abode,
When things were finally arranged –
Eyes and lips,
Body and soul,
Our favourite stock,
We had them all;
But strangely enough
We found them suddenly
Drained of life,
Of colour and fragrance,
Sad and broken.

'Tarteeb', 1975

Seminar

The quest for peace
Had several hues;
In a crowd of words
We could hardly find
The names for them.
The dilated pupils
Of wide open eyes
Glowed for a while,
Then shrank and froze
And lost their light.

From dawn to dust,
All had waited
For the wondrous babe;
The sprightly alive and kicking child
From a womb unknown
A sun, a sun !
A wave of calm,
An end of hollow, empty words.

As evening came
The scathing tongues had a deadly twang.
In flow of time
The ashes of homes
Would singe and burn;
The eyes of the moon
Were all aflame.
A moment back
Dew drops fell
From heights of a cup;
A mellifluous voice
A refreshing wind

Rose from it –
Those who sleep
Shall shed their dreams,
Shall bake their loaf in a warm pleasant sun,
Shall join their heads,
And trade their words
In changing seasons' perpetual flow;
Some would come,
And some would go.

'Seminar', 1976

The Last Rain

Why does the last rain, this year
Elude us
Like a pleasant dream ?
Prayers are denied
To aspiring hands;
Cold eyes, pale faces, trickle through fingers,
Drop by drop;
The last birds of a dream
Fly from trees,
Are lost for a while
In the charms of the sky.

I still have a prayer, O God, in my heart –
In deluge of death
Proclaim the last
Rain of the year;
Order the sunshine
To move again
On its path of light;
Grant again
An expanse of life
To praying hands;
Proclaim O God!
The last rain
of this year.

'Aakhiri Barish', 1976

Sound is a Leaf

The sky is blue, its shade benign
The tree is green, the sunshine gold –
That face a gem.
A flowing scene,
A fiery brew;
The arms are hewn,
The hair is wild,
The lips are parched,
The window's eye is aflame with rage.
The monster is pale,
The reptile black;
A peeling skin,
And teeth and jaws;
A rainfall of songs
From shattered stars
I move with a stranger –
Phantoms of clouds
Sweep along a frightful path;
A flying deer is a flagrant patch
The image is frozen and dazed and cold,
Its eyes are full of gathering dust,
But wait for a foe
Who said not a word
But never returned.
Before he had left
On roof top he planted
A row of daggers;
The sky was blue
And blood and dust had woven a rag
Across the blue;
The burden of life had come to rest
On a rabbit's frail and rickety frame.

Silence cries,
The sound was a leaf
It fell from a tree
Was lost and gone.

O wind ! you are free
You may blow and blow
O scorching, tearing, blinding
Crazy wind !

'Barg-e-Sada', 1976

The Last Man

The last man was no one to me.
Like me, he too that evening
Was a prisoner of distance;
We aspired for closeness,
But could not move
And span the gap between us.
In a darkened lane
I chanced on him –
We thought we were friends,
Had drifted apart
A long time ago;
Or as strangers we met,
Were lost in conversation,
And emerging from it,
Searched for words;
The hope of nearness
Was an eluding dream –
The dormant doubts were again astir.
Alike we fumed,
Alike we raged,
Were both aflame
The distance gone
On evening sands
A blazing hell !

'Aakhiri Aadmi', 1976

Darkness, Light, Darkness

Darkness and light
Were never apart;
The wave of light
Was scarlet, red
Intent, ablaze;
The wave of darkness,
Menacing and deadly;
Heading, flowing towards its goal
To topple the foe
From a lofty height,
Into a dark
Abysmal depth
A tall-tale sweep
A death, a birth
A blinding rush !

He was the one
Who was caught in and swept
Into a world of dreams;
He looked at the sight with tearful eyes
Was himself turned into one.

He moves with the breeze
For a doubtful while;
The deadly wave
Then takes him along
Again on the way.
The wave of light, the wave of darkness
The wave of light

He awaits for once the triumphant note,
He awaits for once the terror of death.

'Mauj-e-Fana, Mauj-e-Zia, Mauj-e-Fana', 1976

I Move with the Sound

I move with the sound
It creates images
Of your face
Before my eyes,
With blends of elements,
Vagaries of weathers;
Bestows on rags,
A graceful air.
In rush of light and fragrance
I call the angels
With a tremulous heart;
A deaf ear they turn
To all my requests.
I gather your face
In turbulence
Of moments adrift;
I try and try
In silence lost.

The images flow
But never bemoan
The urge to create.
In the moment of dawn
They laugh at me,
But never do they brighten
Your faraway face.

‘Main Sada ke Saath Chalta Hoon’, 1976

The Sight of a City that Called

A moment ago
I was a burning town
In the midst of doom.
Before my eyes
The faces were torn
And bathed in sands of abstracted blood.
The flesh was flesh –
It turned to ashes
In an instant flame.
The vacant eyes
Were filled with grief.

A foe ? A friend ?
Who was he ?
A kin he was
On fateful night
The assassin said,
'O bird of a heart
Of a dormant throb
Tell me his name
The accomplice you had'.

And who was he ?
My friend ? My foe ?
At the torturer I gazed
And said not a word.

'Sada Daitay Huay Shahr Ka Manzar', 1976

Elusive

When I had thought
I would go with you,
I never could find
Where you were ?
Like a candle you burned
In the graveyard of dreams.
Whenever the distant, sad and eyeless traveller
Goes this way,
Shall always feel
Bereft of vision.
Shall call out to some friend
But miss his pace
In echo's spell.
Lost in ecstasy
Of a transient bond,
Consumed shall he feel
In fond remembrance
Of your flower like face.

Should you ever think
You are far beyond
The confines of time
He too, perhaps, may share your fate.

I, a sightless tramp
I roam on shores
The traveller has gone
I too shall go
There is nothing beyond
The barren lands –
A fire shall burn

The blossom of a word
On my tongue.

'Gurezan', 1976

The Roadside Tree

The wayside tree,
My life's tree,
Shall not stir till morning.
In the mute frozen dark,
I nourished this tree
All along
With my own blood;
My defiant heart's quest for light,
I fed it with
My flesh, my mind, my soul,
My longing, my grace;
My whispering tree
A word on your lip
Was all to me.

The tree may sleep
Entwined with a mute and frozen night –
The Sun at dawn
Perhaps may flow
Into a blossom's mould;
I shall offer
The warming wealth of heart
Through an inverted door
At the feet of the Muse
Which brought into being
This green and shady tree.

My bleeding heart,
I am the tree

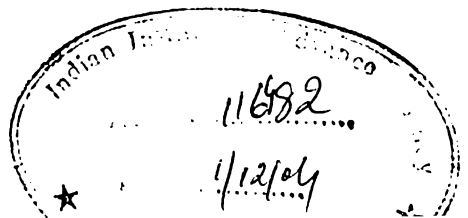
In tumults of life
I throb for you; I sing for you.

'Sar-e-Rahguzar', 1976

The Incomplete Tale

Born of leaf and blossoming bud,
They move towards
An awakening morn;
Wilderness of a dreamful darkness.
Words, plans, ruins
Old half burnt homes
Their ghosts
Go with them;
The caravans move
As if under a spell
Pupils glance in yellow rounds
Scratch the air;
From passers-by
Demand a price
In form of blood.

I ask myself
Am I one among them,
Or a robber of self ?
I shook away the dust of pointless prayers
From flapping wings;
My night, my gloom
Now flow into me.
Into the boundless cauldron
Of my blood
I have to call
The melancholy stranger
Who parted from me,
All at once
A long time back –



These friends
Who go with me
At dawn,
May cross the mortal road –
May tell for once
My half told tale.

'Adhuri Dastan', 1976

The Journey

You may recall
My stranger,
My half-way friend,
I was drawn
In the midst
Of wastes
Of evening gloom.

My light,
Your face had flowed
In veins of my being
And caused a dawn;
I was close to you
Afire, aflame,
But in the conflagration,
Was neither consumed
Nor could turn myself
Into a lifeless clod.
The cry of a throbbing tumultuous heart
I could not hear,
Nor weave it into
The fabric of dreams;
It went into bones
Wherever I moved,
My sands would always
Move with me,

I was lost in heart's endless quest.

'Musafat', 1977

The Semi-Circle

The letters of your name,
Your ravishing curves,
Your radiant face,
A dream of you –
I gathered them all
In fond remembrance.
My restless heart
Would throb with them,
Would hug and kiss,
Your face, your form;
Would often talk of previous birth,
The favours you often bestowed on me.
Death was a hungry ravenous cur
My longing for you
Was more than that,
The thought of you
Had swayed me through.

I passed beyond
The ways of the world;
I never could cross
Your hills, your shores,
Nor keep you in
My yearning heart;
Could not live for you
Nor die for you
I was no one to you
But I lost myself
In the valleys of your being

A constant quest
Is my only lot.

The evening shadows
Were yet far off;
The tale had come
To a darkened end
In a playful din.
The sparkling sun
Was close to me
But gave me up.

'Nisf Daira', 1977

Your Stranger

The barefoot stranger
In your town
Passed through dark and silent wastes
For a glorious dawn;
When morning came,
He flowed into the strains
Of a soulful, waiting song.

When windows opened,
The town was already bathed in light;
The dawn had brought along
A flood of colour and fragrance,
A triumphant note.
A sparkling –, happy –, jubilant crowd –,
The town had put on
A radiant look.

The rising sun,
A bright red leaf,
The silent stranger
In your town
Was caught in throes of
Lingering dark;
A dusk, a fog
Was still in his heart
He bore all this
He fought all this.

Your stranger in town,
Though he seemingly had
A glorious sun
He missed your face

Brighter than sun
That remained beyond his captive eyes.

Your stranger in town
Was no one to you;
But right in the midst
Of radiant sun,
In gathering dark of heart and soul,
On saddened shores,
In gloomy vales,
He lost himself.

'Tumhara Ajnabi', 1977

Trees

Beyond here
There are no trees;
Beyond here stretch
Barren lands –
Graveyards of dreams
Corpses of hopes
Crumbling bones of friends
Indifferent
Days and nights,
Onslaught of skies.

Let's sow here today
Seeds
Of our disturbed minds;
To draw nearer
The doomsday
People say
These lands are not that barren;
The possibility
Of a glorious spring
Still awaits in our blood
The shaping, smouldering
Climax of the tale.

'Drakhton Ka Silsila', 1977

A Scentless Hue

In maddening flow
Of eloquent blood,
On a dark and starless night
I shall create you –
And coax you to move
Closer to me;
Shall tell a tale
In praise of the image
I wrought through me –
It shall be
My anguished journey
Through the night.

When you walk in grace,
When you open your lips
And light up
The darkened soundless path –
You may kill,
Burn all that
Was not like you,
Was not like me,
Was a barren heart
A lifeless glow
A scentless hue.

'Rang Jo Khushboo Na Tha', 1977

The White Blossom

The white blossom
Shall pass through
Dark waters of night,
Cascade of hope
And go tumbling
Over stray rocks.
From your perch
On the mountain top
You may glance at it,
And think for a while
Who was he ?
What happened to him ?
In his mournful descent
Tattered and torn,
Bleeding all over,
Plucked from the branch
And turned into a dream,
Then shorn of the dream –
A lifeless sound
The last cry
Of a sinking heart.
He was green or red,
Or pale or white,
If wasn't black
An accident –
Or a hopeless chance.
I tell you all
You who are an eye,
A radiant face
On mountain top –
I am the blossom,
The white blossom,

Who doesn't belong
To the mountain top;
From sad confines
Of an abandoned cascade;
I rushed down to vales;
Since evening last
My lot, alas !
This fateful night
From mountain top,
May you glance
At my final downward descent;
I am the blossom,
The white blossom,
In vales below.
In a softly murmuring sad stream
I shall always flow,
And merge with an ocean
In confluent sway
Shall bloom again,
A flower of love
From mountain top to the depths below
The journey is long –
I do not know
Where at last
I shall stop !

'Safed Phool', 1977

A Strange Sequence

A quest for identity
Swept me for years
Through barren lands.
I came across my monster
On wasted shores,
From where began a range of
Frozen vales.
I asked my assassin at every step
Why was I chained and perennially chained ?
Something had gone wrong with the elements
And the monster wore a yellowish hide
From sands to snow.
There were several shades;
Why did the stranger
Choose amongst all
The abominable pale
That never could know the anguished self,
That never could attain the passionate glow ?

I talked of cleavage
And bestowed on my alter ego
A rancour, a rage;
Filled his jaws with a voracious appetite,
A thirst for blood,
The subservient gods
Then bowed to him.
I lived in sounds –
Had a name for them
I was drunk with quest;
He hurled at me
His torturous darts,
He pounced on me

And swallowed my torn out, shredded
Unfolding self.

'Ek Ajnabi Silsila', 1977

The Captive of Heart

Through the window aflame,
A stranger descends
Into my room
Every night
I keep awake,
But keep my eyes closed
In expectation of his next move,
Beckon the soft murmuring stream
Flowing in the valley of sleep.
The stranger takes my silent face
As a piece of writing,
And plucks at it
The way it could.

The scene beyond the window
In the terror of the moment,
Bursts into a cry;
The stranger who came
From beyond the window
Leaves in the surrounding quiet;
A love, a solitude
In the desert of night,
Carrying on his shoulders
Corpses of my receding dreams;
He looks for my alter ego
Among gathering angels
My intrusive night.
I am all awake
In dreams afloat
You are clever and quick,
While I a simple soul,
A captive of heart

My night ! O night !
Sing to me
In your softest voice
A pretty and dainty
Lullaby
I need some sleep
My night ! O night !
A lullaby.

'Aseer-e-Dil', 1977

A Softly Whispering Sight

Fond of words
Their attractive weave
Order and sounds,
He lends a hand to the tottering one –
Teaches the wayfarer
To walk in grace,
In skilful array
To go into whirls of a measured dance.
A mortal ! For him
The care of mute and lifeless words,
A turn of phrase
Is a constant delight.

Reared on rounds,
He dances and dances
And craves applause
From gathering crowds;
On nights he thinks
He is the last of charmers
In the land of dreams –
But the night has cracks,
The splinters spread
On roads and streets.

In the rising din,
A unique and wonderous
Stranger is born –
He hates not the foe, nor friend of word
He creates a barbarous unfettered sight;

In the restive town
From ordered rounds

The voices proclaim –
He is perhaps
Not one of us
They cry for his blood
The stranger, however, in whispers speaks,
And creates with his voice a vibrant spell
In the terrified town.

'Neem Sargoshi Ka Manzar', 1977

An Opening in the Wall of Night

A tremulous image
Of the blazing sun,
An opening in the wall of night –
Pleasing and artful
Full of light.

In a moment,
She will be here;
In the awakening town
The crowds have already thronged the streets –
A treat for her !
A hand for her !

For me in town
In glorious form,
She sparkles and shines
A flame, a beauteous, gorgeous glow,
A dawn in the blood,
Her smiling face,
In stream shall flow
Till the final sway
Of the dooms-day.

'Rozan-e-Deewar-e-Shab', 1977

Words

Sad, weak, criminal,
I bury all bad words
With my own hands
In your presence.

The few innocent, delicate beautiful words
Which I had one day
Associated with you,
Wistfully look at me
As if finding them in the company of
Evil ones
I shall stab my heart –
What shall I do with them
In my luckless years ?

I repeat them now
In your blossoming presence
You are beautiful and transparent
In the vastness of your enlightened being
Though only a stranger
I am bound to you, your face, your being
Your voice and all.
You may caress them
Or smother them
With your delicate hands
May do your will
In bonds of pain
They shall live for ever.

'Alfaz', 1977

moment of lights

A festival of lights
The edifices bathed
In glorious hues -
A sparkling face,
A smile on lips,
She moves among them.

My heart ! O heart !
The tale will end in dwindling stars -
Bestow on me
A power to burn -
For ever to burn -
In her lamps;
Till morning crowns,
The journey's glory,
The heart's passionate, maddening rush.

'Charaghan', 1977

The Sweet Word

Bathed in smiles
You gave me one day
A spotless, white, beautiful
Piece of paper;
Dumbfounded
When I gazed at it,
You whispered to me –
If ever you create
A delicate and sweet
Word for me,
Do it on this spotless piece.

I do your wish –
The foremost beautiful and sweet
Word I create
Turns out to be
Only your name;
Your resplendent name:
It lights up my days
And adorns the paper
Again and Again.

'Harf-e-Sheereen', 1977

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In glorious hues –
A sparkling face,
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Only your name;
Your resplendent name:
It lights up my days
And adorns the paper
Again and Again.

'Harf-e-Sheereen', 1977

Every Year

The round of fleeting time
Every year
Stops for a moment :
It's the occasion of my birth,
Or of yours
Or of children
Of our union;
Or of informal closeness
To a blossom of a flame
Which bloomed forever.

I try to stop
This fickle, transient guest –
Offer him my blood
With lacerated fingers,
I pluck out a lump
Of my throbbing heart
And offer him a treat;
The charming bird
For ever fond of spaces beyond
Lands, heavens and vast expanse
Laughs at the fun,
And takes to wings –
In an instant goes
Beyond all bounds,
Beyond my gloom.
In vales of light
Some unknown, unique,
And beautiful stranger waits for him.

'Salgirah', 1978

A River of Falling Stars

I'm a river of falling stars
And you
A destination that cannot be reached
A star or the sun
A distant window under a dark spell –
A burning town on a deserted shore
A wailing forest since the birth of time.
When I whisper into you
That you are my life-breath,
You shudder at my smile;
Are you the void
A breeze or a nameless wave ?
If you are
God
Why were you created in flesh ?
If you are
Feeling
Why be vain
Of your lips, your eyes, your shapely form ?
If you are fragrance
Why do you wish
To tear away
From the blossom's hue ?
I drip and fall
A river of stars –
My only destiny
To flow on and on;
I'm not a raft or a boat
A river of stars, I move on,
Forlorn, I move on
Whenever you dawn on my banks,
A feeling, a delicate fragrance, an elusive charm.

I, a river of falling stars
Shall always see you walk
And shape into glorious forms –
Shall ever fall
Into dark turbulent waters,
Scatter myself
Into bottomless depths.

'Girte Sitaron Ka Darya', 1978

A Sky Covered with Dust

As evening shadows deepened,
An unknown tired sad face
Passed through
An unfolding tale;
The violent vision
Cut through me –
Deep down into my veins,
Lost in obscure frenzy of silence,
The moment of consummation
Was still far off.

I was neither a new leaf,
Nor a coming up crop;
I was only a sequence that evening
In the dust laden sky,
On the path of quest;
Amidst terrors of hell,
I adorned myself in abandon
With a bleeding heart
And a yearning for grace.

'Gard Aalooda Aasman', 1978

A Forest Storm

When we parted
She told me
In a sad, melancholy tone
You have a number of handsome friends
I am no one to you;
Your yearning for me,
Is a stray feeling –
You will forget me soon;
Even if you wished,
You would never miss me.

This happened years ago
But I feel
As if it had happened today;
Yes, I have some friends
And, as you observed,
All handsome and beautiful;
I chatter with them,
Raise jungles of interesting conversation
In their company –
Where my blood thirsty foes
Are in hot pursuit of me,
In a stream of sweet memories
There is afloat
A smouldering image;
It often beckons me
Towards itself –
It's familiar
But, of course, nothing to me.
I lose myself,
In the floating image
Of your flesh,

A forest storm
Tears and rages
In my flesh.

'Jangalon Ki Hawa', 1978

The Coward

When I pass by
The abode of
That green leaf
I am afraid
That I may one day
By accident,
By my irreverent touch,
Or a whimper
Of tearful eye,
Tarnish its grace.

At the peak of my yearning
I chop off my fingers,
Put off the stars
Twinkling in my eye
In reverence to light;
On shores of familiar faces and sounds,
Amidst the rush of a boundless wave,
I drink to the lees
The fateful cup of light.

I am the final
Consummation
Of my recurring voyage –
I am a coward.

'Buzdil', 1978

Fragrance

When the delicate fragrance
Of your hand
Passing through your fingers to my fingers
Permeated my palm
I gathered it
In my possessive fist
As if I would retain for ever
Only for myself
Your blossoming face –
Your resplendent beauty.

I felt you
From probability to a pleasant dream
And was bathed in light
From head to foot.

I unlock today
My yearning fingers
And set you free, O fragrance !
You may freely fly now
In azure expanse
May kiss the skies,
Alight on stars,
Take elements in your arms –
You are fragrance, colour, light
An opening bud,
An awakening new life.

'Khushbu', 1978

Gypsy

Astride the back of a young colt
An image, a light,
Guest-like, elusive, young,
A blazing sun
In a riot of tousled hair,
The delicate frame
Attired in an attractive apparel;
A galaxy of stars,
A flowing flowering sight
A heart brimming with breezy notes,
Rains, valleys, mountains, meadows,
Deserts, blood curdling smouldering battlefields,
Stark, cruel voices,
War cries
All mingling, merging in a stream.

She is now a shattered dream,
Stuck up like a nameless caricature,
In a window frame;
A shadow, a dark leaf,
Wrought out of stone and steel –
A morning without dew
An evening devoid of lilt :
Worn out flesh, a plain outfit, a mere routine
A reptile curled around tired feet,
A cold, lusterless room
Stripped of all familiar colours –
A painful journey
Across the expanse of time.

'Gypsy', 1978

The Night Scene

I sow with a yearning hand
The golden seed
Of my sad wounded heart;
Into the night-scene earth
I water it for long hours
With a glowing stream,
Prostrate myself and pray
The death-wish shoot
May grow into a dream tree –
A morning of buds
May come walking in grace
My damnation :
A stone, may perhaps melt
With my longing heart's warmth

On the night-scene soil
I am born, I die,
I pass through cycles of songs,
Again and again;
A flame of mysteries
I burn through
Constant
Wastes of death !

'Manzar-e-Shab', 1979

Saba's Hands Wear a Bridal Henna Tint Now

Saba wears now
A bridal henna tint
On her delicate palms –
I offer her my blessings, good wishes –
Saba is grateful;
But does not say a word.

Saba's home
Is her apparel now,
She covers her head
With its roof
She bedecks her feet
With the soft touch
Of the marble floor;
She no longer sings
Of mountains, valleys,
Waterfalls, azure skies,
She is seldom drawn
To colourful verdant sights.

Saba, delicate as dew,
Her feet bound
Hangs, like a portrait
In the window frame;
Frail, she flows not
On sun-lit shores
She opens her lips, she smiles,
But says not a word

In whispers
To any one now.

'Saba Ke Haath Peelay Ho Gaiyay', 1979

Ships

Ships
Of sad, forlorn lands
Sail in blood,
Day and night,
Towards their doom –

Moving in gloom,
They look for a star
In a darkened sky :
A saviour, a guide
To take them across
The unknown seas –

Deprived of your grace,
The light of your brow,
They float in a cup,
They flow in blood
Caught in storms,
In lightning flashes
They dream of sails;
Ships
Of sad, forlorn lands !

'Jahaz', 1979

On the Threshold of Feeling

On the threshold of feeling
I adorned my eyes
With the dust of
Shattered angry stars;
Was it a spell of dust ?
Or an accident,
Or a miraculous touch,
That I began to recollect
Meetings with old friends,
Prayers of my throbbing heart
And visions of a sad
Reluctant, apprehensive face,
That chose for sojourn
My tearful eye,
My forlorn heart,
And then set out
On a long and unknown voyage
It never returned.

‘Dar-e-Ehsas Par’, 1979

The Last Sad Stranger in the Yellow City

He was the last sad stranger
In the yellow city;
He would say day and night
One and only one single prayer
O city! sentence me also to death
Let the bird of bright plumage
Feast on my succulent flesh !
I bow down to you, my city,
May you live and thrive
Amidst rising laughter
And continuing hum.

One morning
His tongue, his lips,
His praying hands
Were chopped off in a stroke
Short of death, his sentence commuted,
Bathed in blood
A captive of life
In speechless wonder
Mute, transfixed, lost
He stood.

'Zard Shahr Mein Aakhiri Udas Ajnabi', 1979

An Anonymous Poem

You are caught
In the effort
To find a name
For a place for murder;
You may find one today
But when it comes to name
The assassins,
Fix their identity,
You may, perhaps, conveniently
Talk of the past
Or days to come,
But may take care
To avoid
Familiar names
Possibly which may happen to be
Your name
Or our name
Or of our kin, our friends,
A pretence of innocence.
The assassinated shall be
Obscure, anonymous strangers;
Even if we wished,
We may fail to find
A name
For senseless, pointless death,
For sad, distraught faces –
Burning towns
Bloodied shredded flesh,
Continuing terror –
We the respectable citizens
May never find
A name

For falsehood
And deceit.

'Ek Benam Nazm', 1979

A Meeting is a Guest Who May Not Return

I too, like others,
Shall grow bitter
Towards you
One day,
You would come and tell me
You had said.

The possibility
Like a dagger
Went deep down into my heart
But I continued to be
A recurring sweet word for you.

And today,
Attractive, blazing, enraged,
You stormed in
To carry out your threat –
To blame me for all wrongs,
Like a luminescent apparition
You stood before me.
I took in your words
Felt you through my blood, my heart,
Drained the cup of poison
And still somehow, lived beyond.
You wished to go back,
But could not move –
I had no right
To ask you to stay,
But couldn't by any chance
Send you away.
Forgive me,

Smile
And stay for a while –
Let's talk of wounded birds
Bathed in blood,
Of smouldering, crumbling
Edifice of heart.

It's already evening
The night is perhaps, more
Dangerous and dark
Than the journey ahead
Move closer, nearer –
Say some beautiful, affectionate word
In gathering dusk
In crimson twilight
A turn of phrase !
This meeting is a guest –
A fortuitous wave –
May never return,
To this
Solitary isle.

'Ek Mehman Mulaqat', 1979

On Burning Shores

In pain,
On burning shores,
Yesterday
I had a dream –
A strange one at that.
My head
An irate star,
My reflected face
A lacerated wound,
Eyes
Two flapping windows, opening
Towards towns in turmoil
Limbs, mere weeds
In stretching wastes
A catastrophe !
I myself, my journey,
My destination
A warning sign –
A vociferous colt
Streaming in veins;
The solitary entity,
The naked me,
Shall now I drain
The cup called Sun
Shall breathe in me
The final dew
The last storm - Me !
The last man - Me !
Tomorrow is Me !

'Sulagtay Sahilon Par', 1979

Radiant

Why did I stay
Like a knock at a door
While travelling
Among moons
Of a lustrous star ?
An ominous terror
Hung in the air,
A tree of yore
Was the journey's end;
I froze on a lonely forsaken path
At a speechless door.

A long way I came
Along with moons –
A long way shall I go ?
A knock I had to offer
To the silent door,
To the eerie gloom –
I wait for the fire,
The radiant kiss of the flame of a cloud –
I wait for the bounce,
Of a dancing song.

A long way I came
A long way I go :

'Ziabar', 1980

The Golden Sunshine

On evenings
The golden sunshine
Would grow sad –
Apparently awake
But doze off often,
In haze of drowsiness.

Torn from her kin,
Would travel through various
Previous births;
Would tell some tales
Of obscure folks,
Of terrified
Tearful faces –
On mornings
In whispers she flourished, and shed
Dew drops from eyes;
Towards evenings she moved
And swept in her wake
The fields and barns
The radiant suns of glowing faces.

On evenings
The golden sunshine
Would grow sad –
On mornings she was fragrance,
On mornings she roamed in
Unknown towns
Through evening and night
And break of dawn,

She walked for a while
Along-side me !

'Har Sham Sunehri Dhoop Fasurda Hoti Thi', 1980

The Cold Rotten Town

In the cold rotten town
I walk with captives
Of a sad and gloomy night
They move slowly
Wordless, mute.
The man who knew them
And the ice in their heart,
Is no more.
They gaze at houses
Their closed windows
And strips of light –
They are tired and worn out
But gather not a ray
To guide them or cheer them
On their way.
They drained away the sun
Now they suck into themselves,
Voices from the dark.

Where had they come ?
Where shall they go ?
The cold rotten town
Would hardly know –
I who had come all the way
Even I, am in a row –

All are now trapped
In the cold rotten town;
The spell of the night
The cavernous sad domain.

'Ghaleez Sard Shahr', 1980

A Knock, a Whisper

Doors closed
Perhaps for years;
The inmates,
They say,
Have always lived here.
They retire
Early in the evening,
And lose themselves
Till morning
In the dark quagmire
Of their eyes.

Of late
A light, gentle knock
Whispers at their door
Their dull faces brighten up –
Glued to the sounds
They are all ears,
Doors closed
Perhaps for years.

'Dastak Ki Sargoshi', 1980

The Newcomer

An orange cap
And socks;
A flowery, flaunting shirt
Quite a few small pretty garments,
Smiling, laughing like angels,
Emerged from a sad heap
Of old shabby rags,
Amidst them
We sat
Tired, lost, faceless.

Like a miracle,
All of a sudden
A little boy
Rushed into the room,
Picked up his choice,
And put them on
One by one;
He jumped and danced
In a silvery fount
That kissed the heavens.

In a whirl of lights,
In a vale of colours,
We soon were charmed by joyful sounds.

'Nauwarid', 1980

Faceless

Look at me
From a distance
Only from a distance –
On parting
The stranger had said.
In compliance,
I turned into
Continuance
Of distance –
The sight finally
Swallowed me in.

The stranger,
Incidentally, now
Looks at me
From quite close;
It seems
The stranger too
During wandering
Lost his face

It's an old story –
Now silence
Oblivion
And dark !

'Be Chehra', 1980

The Half Open Window

Dust raising hot winds
Sweep across streets
Odd bits of things
Dry leaves,
Cheerless, tired
Forsaken strangers
Are carried along
Mothers keep their kids
Under their cold, watchful eye
Within doors
Taps are dry;
The electric current
Flows only to a fourth of the street
Two bright eyes
Gaze in wonder
Through a half open window
At the scene without.
The body is in chains
The heart, however, is aflutter, intent
Moves on and on
Burns for hours
In torments of
A blazing sun.

'Neem Shgufta Rauzan', 1980

He was Assassinated

Tonight
Even this was over –
Your duty to weigh
The crime
The sentence.

The man was assassinated
He sliced his tongue –
He thought, perhaps, in perpetual stream
He would flow in being –
The radiant touch
Would make his heart
Dream of murmuring dews,
And bestow on him
An affectionate warmth.

A blossom of a prayer –
The man is no more
Among crowds of lamps
He bowed his head,
In deference to doom;
He hugged his cross
And merged himself
With wayside dust –
A captive of hope
He joined today
The lifeless stones –
He gave himself up
To a waiting legend

'Woh Shakhs Qatl Ho Gaya', 1980

The Long Journey

I work up day and night
Taste of scorched bread
On my lips;
In its company
Perhaps I may
Flow into the crater
Of my declining years
May turn into a yellow leaf
Of the withering crop of the sun
That dreams of seasons
In the endless whirl
Often thinks of desire
The seductive temptress
Who fortuitously appeared
But never could tell
How far she would go
On the hazardous path.

A stream of water,
A cup of wine,
A handful of dust;
Wayfarers
Bound for distant lands,
Towns lost
In distrusting haze
I shall walk with them
To the end of the road
Lullabies shall I sing
To a melancholy and sad
Receding landscape

Shall ever go beyond

The terrible ominous
Forest sounds

'Dur Ka Safar', 1981

A Respectable Citizen

He compiled his face
With paper cuttings, ads.
Bright, eloquent pointers –
He emerged in a trendy outfit
A successful man,
The talk of the town.

When unmitigated darkness
Confronts him
And his rags
Free him from shackles –
Some hidden,
Torturing flame
Flashes like lightning
All around him –
In raging fires of mysteries
He turns the moment
To a morning –
To an evening –
To a count of odds –
To perpetual night.

'Ek Muazzaz Shehri', 1981

The Little Horseman

The horseman,
The little spirited horseman,
Sits perched
Astride my back;
As I tend to stop
With a symphony of notes,
He beckons me to run –
Tired, listless, I move
He spurs me to fly
With songful winds.

A horse
At his will,
I quicken my pace;
I have to take him to the land
Of colours, blossoms, butterflies
Charmed habitats
Where nobody awaits me –
But for my young friend wait,
Tall, green, swinging, whispering trees
The dancing leaves.

Rapturous like a dream,
My little spirited rider
Flies across the landscape.

'Nanha Shahswar', 1981

The Portrait

The house was deserted
Surrounded in mystery
A silent, but visibly
Eloquent portrait –
The same one that
Hung on every wall
Whose portrait was it ?
Was she a child,
Or, a strapping lass,
Or, a tired but attractive woman ?
There was an enigmatic translucence about her.

How had I come across
This sweet graceful face
That I stood transfixed before her ?
A dream chased me in every room –
The night was dark
The flow of moments ominous,
The house deserted !

‘Tasvir’, 1982

A Friend

When I tell him
I have a small friend
He asks : who is he ?

'He has eight front teeth
All bright as pearls;
His luminous eyes
Full of mischief,
Fresh new words every moment
On his lips.
A poet
The first one of an esoteric parlance
He sings eulogies of
Lions, elephants, rhinos
Golden ducks and monkeys
Takes grandma, grandpa
Mamma, papa
For a treat
On busy city roads
In his toy cars.

My young friend
Heartily laughs
At my answer
'I am the young friend
Me, only, me, yes me !
I ask him :
'If my friend loves me
How intense is his love ?'
He stretches his arms
Takes in them
The sky and the earth

'Like this I love –
That much I love –
The horse has stopped,
The pigeon flew away,
I like sparrow's feed
Shall share the thing with her –
I have a biscuit for the squirrel,
And the monkey on the tree
Who may go to sleep;
A parrot I shall see
A scarlet parrot
Green and open beak –
The lion, the dog and the wolf
The mewling tiny kit –
Their pictures I shall find
And show them how they look'

'Dost', 1982

Sunshine Moves

The bright sunshine
Crawls up to me,
And tingles my flesh.
Parted from my heart,
I listen to cries of wolves
From resounding forests,
Out to hurl me
Into darkened caverns.

The crawling sunshine
Has moved onwards,
To tell new tales
To some other bustling homes.

I don't have a mirror
Or a dream like spring,
But an image
Floats in the air around me.

The sunshine has now
Shifted to the distant house;
An unknown word
Flows through my blood –
I wait for the dark night.

The bright sunshine
Has moved further away
Far away

'Sunehri Dhoop Ki Lakeer', 1982

The City Soil

You look alike
In all cities –
Your folk
Sleep all night
On a bed of stripped dreams
During day
They chase through distances –
Colourful tall;
Vagrant news
Inscribe with acidic tongues
A tale
On your face,
Your flesh,
Often sell themselves
For a price.

Seeds of sorts
Are sown in the earth,
But the city soil yields
Only one crop –
One, and only one.
A fresh new style of murder
Leaves a sensational tickle in the air;
On nights
The fairy sleeps
In a stranger's arms,
On mornings she cries
And apportions the blame;
The city soil
Is everywhere the same.

'Sharon Ki Mitti', 1983

An Almanac

During passage through time
In the wobbling chronicle,
An array of flighty names
Appeared on heart's horizon.
They thrived in nearness of love
And friendship
They would tell of wayward intimacies
Would sing of colours
In magical,
Viciously attractive strains
They were happy, successful, handsome folk
In colourful splendour
They one day landed on sands of light
And gradually fell apart
A distraught crowd
Weightless, abandoned
Surged around me.

It so happened,
Each one in the crowd
Was foe of stars,
Of waves,
Of life.
No one could look
Beyond his nose;
A flashing, demanding ego
Cried for blood –
And a spread out feast.

In a climate of falsehood and lies,
Whatever was bright,

Eventually fell
Under a contriving blight

'Taqweem', 1982

A One-hand Clap

Two hands echoèd,
In the one-hand clap
In changing curves
Of lips, eyes and ears
One hand was chopped;
In grief
The mute and deaf
Other one
Wagged its tongue –
A half lit golden hallow,
Surrounded the mysterious finger,
The dusty sky,
Had surging crowds –
Lakes, seas, springs, ponds, boats
Made the landscape
What it was.
The shroud was yellow,
The dark night
Long;
The chopped-off hand
Had far to go –
On distant shores
A heart-rending cry,
The echo of a foul
Cankorous word,
Filled the air,
In noisy streets
The sleazy venomous snakes
Were about !

'Ek Hath Ki Tali', 1982

A Crowd of Midgets

On days
When air did not blow
A naked child
Would make faces
At the stuffy weather
And the angry dazzling sun.
The young flesh
Would put on trendy dresses,
Invite evenings,
And merge with the dark.
Why had the restive wave
An elf like face ?
The weather could not say.
A thundering cloud appeared
But favoured only flowing water with rain.
Who was really tall
Among dwarfs and midgets
That he could declare himself such ?
All needed a pair of feet.
The respectable citizens
Had hidden their heads
In their own graves.
A tall graceful figure was a curse.
A catastrophe, that hearts would not beat.
The surrounding air, people said, was always still
If at all it moved
Only reluctantly it did
God knows what ailed the air.

'Balishtiyon Ki Bheed', 1982

Of Glory of Dreams

In the rainless weather
The sky is somewhat dusty
I had lost a pearl
In the year gone by.
Found from a shell
On unknown shores
It had passed through
Several hands
And was finally swallowed
By walking graves.

The weather of tomorrow
Whispers something
During night
Into the ears
Of the changing hues of the sky;
I sleep,
But it talks to me
Of the moon –
There is an alter ego of mine –
It sings to me
Of glory of dreams.

Faraz-e-Khwab Ki Baten', 1982

The Sunshine Stood Stripped

Who are these people
Who wash in rain
The clipped wings
Of doves ?
For long
They gaze through windows
And bemoan the years
They eventually lost.

The suckling baby
Chuckles;
Grew up
And looked grave;
Though hardly tired,
He dozed off
On wings of dreams.

When it ceased raining,
Sunshine, in an instant
Stripped itself in distant houses,
Shores, and valleys;
The fabric of her flesh
Has blemishes of a distrusting off-spring,
And blood
Fouled by vagaries of yore.

'Dhoop Brahna Ho Gayi', 1982

Lust Celebration

It's celebration, this night –
The account of a teenager's rape,
Shall be repeated on an
Unfolding parchment.

The reptiles, scores of them,
Crept out
This evening
From resounding thick forests.
All pouting, lusting
And stripped to the bone,
All ferociously penetrated her
And wrote in her blood
The tale of their exploits;
They themselves the nightmare
And the nightmarish consequence !

It's past midnight;
Two fugitive shadows
Try to find their way
Across dark wastes of night;
The mother has cloud like hair,
A wounded shadow.
Walks in her wake;
She who was a virgin
A day ago,
Bleeds all over –
A tormented end
Or perhaps a continuation,
Another night of lust celebration.

Meanwhile,
Let's go
And rest till tomorrow;
Some matters of routine
May dispose them too !

'Jashn-e-Hawas', 1982

Stones of Unknown Streets

He used to receive
Heaps of scandalous letters
From distant towns;
The sky was blue,
The sun golden,
The murmuring stream –
A dream !

In the small hours, last night
He suddenly woke up
And remembered
He had not received for long,
From any one,
A delicate, whispering, affectionate word –
Nor did a friend
On stranger call on him
To share his pain;
Holed up in his room
He would listen to his own heartbeat
And count,
Stones of unknown streets.

'Anjani Galiyon Ke Paththar', 1982

The Howling Scorching Wind

In eyes,
Birds of bright plumage,
From darkened domes;
Rising to lips,
New and old
Hostile songs.
In heart,
A furious angry ocean.
Worms
Wriggling in the guts,
Hands, arms and feet,
Captives of
A blighted, constant drift.

But the wave of blood,
Like a notorious slut,
Flows unabashed
Day and night
In the veins;
And a howling, scorching wind,
Blows through doors.

'Shore Machati Garm Hawa', 1982

The Big Dark Lake

In this familiar small town
Where I live,
Young boys –
School children
Went about shouting,
The virgin, the innocent one,
When alone at home
At last took her life
With her own hands.

I, my mother
And members of my family,
Were among the crowds,
On streets.

The little one cries :
A star shot from the firmament –
And plunged
Into waters,
Of a big dark lake.

'Lambi Kali Jheel', 1982

A Sky Full of Birds

A sound has a face
A grace and a form.
The gold of the sun
Beyond the trees,
The naked ripples
Of a silvery moon,
Mysterious song of
The turbulent sea,
Ecstasy of love
A soothing lullaby.
On vicious nights –
A tale of blood,
Crying for blood.
In the wastes of heart –
Shafts of taunts,
Storms of shame.

Images crowd on me :
I recall your face,
The sparkling face –
Resplendent form,
Contours and curves –
A frenzied song
In fleeting stream
Of days and nights;
Evening falls
In distant vales,
Songs and lamps
All are dying,
It's already dark
And quiet, and still;
The earth is old

But warm and green,
The distant calls
The caravans move.
The flesh of sound,
Is a barbarous mute –
A violent craze –
A maddening quiet –
A wave, a wave,
Beyond the walls
Are unknown climes.
The sky is bright
Blue and vast;
The sky is full
Of glorious birds.

'Parindon Bhara Asman', 1983

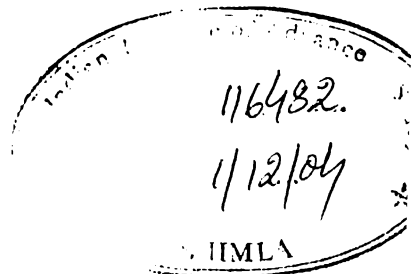
The Holiday

All sounds gradually
Grow feeble,
Or turn into
Hostile vicious notes.

This morning,
The sweet chattering
Of a tiny doll
Echoed in my ears;
A young friend
Talked of happy dreams
To a warbling sparrow;
The folk at home
Were busy –
Only these two had leisure.

The opening window
Was a sight, an instant holiday –
In a moment
I saw at a distance
An unknown, glorious face.

'Taatil', 1983





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