

D. Ganguly , now in his fifties, has been writing poems, both in Bengali and English, since his early youth, and has been widely published in journals and magazines. He has travelled widely in India and is thrilled to find myriad diversity in Indian life and people, and is ever searching for the essential thread that binds many into one, During the turbulent years of the seventies (Naxalite movement in West Bengal and the emergence of Bangladesh) he edited a Bengali literary quarterly at Bhagalpur (Bihar) which ran for three years only but acquired respectability for its uncompromising dedication to basic human culture and values.

Dr. Ganguly teaches English literature in Bhagalpur University. About the present collection he says, '.....and had my daughter, Shubha, and her husband, Pradip Mukherjee , not taken specific and active interest in it , these utterances of mine would have remained unheard and unseen ; " the poetry of the earth is never dead " because the listener is also ever alive.'

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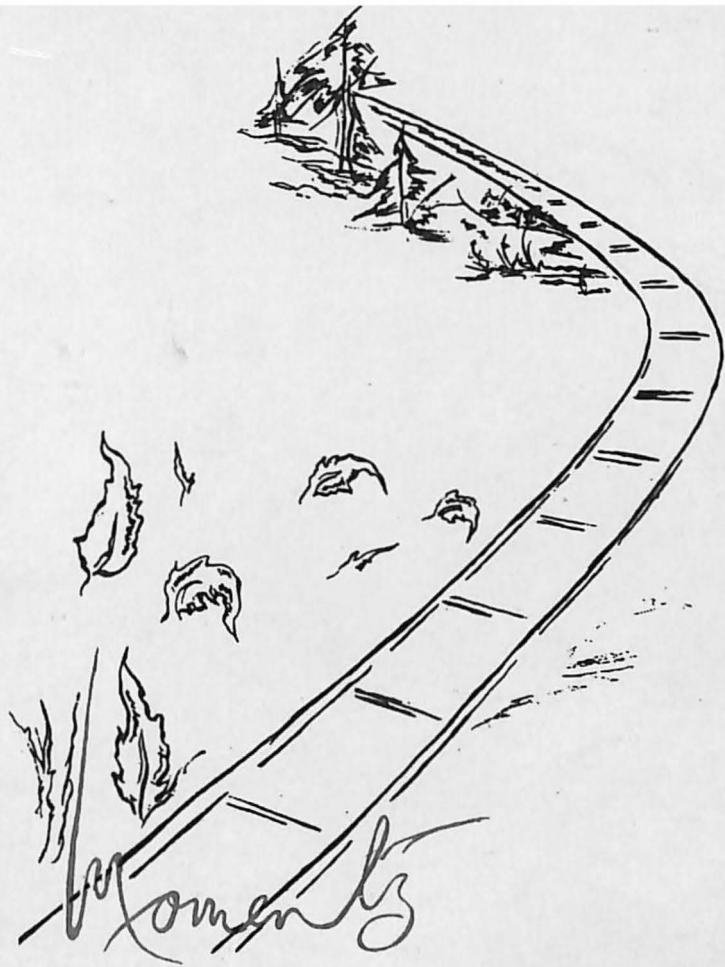
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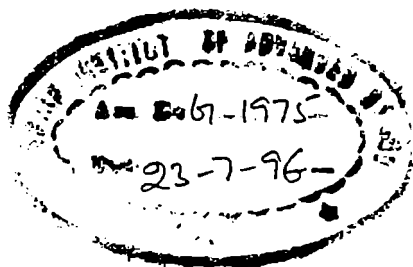
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Deepavali; 1995

TO MY MOTHER

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There are moments
when you look back
and see the deserted road
chasing you
and you find your horoscope
in bone-white letters
written on the dark asphalt
and you stop to read it.

Meanwhile, the road gets a chance
to gather itself up:
raises its hood and sharp comes down on you
to give a mortal sting.

Swimming you knew not

Nor did I

Yet we crossed the river on boat on a *Chaitra*
afternoon.

(Do you remember?)

Though astrologers had forbidden the venture.

When the boat touched the bank

I alighted easily on the mud

But you were afraid of the filth:

I took you in my lap

And you asked me to find a spot without mud.

Still you are in my lap

And I am still looking for a clean spot

where there is no mud.

You had assured me
 an ocean of honey,
You said you'd reach me
 to the dream-island,
You said you'd give me
 everything at day break:

And the day broke.

And the echo of your promise
 allured me to walk
And walk till I reached
 the end of a blind lane
Where I found a deserted child
 in a dustbin:

And I picked it up
 and it clung to me
And I walked back
 through weeds and thorns
With a determined look
 and a desperate cry:
Child, my child, forgive me.

Please open the door.

Let me in.

Let me sit by you.

Oh, no. Don't let her in.

Shut the window.

A storm in the offing.

Haven't you seen the sky is overcast?

It has thunders in it.

Leave me not.

I shall play dolls and toys with you.

And, if go you must,

please bring a red toy

when you return.

No, I shall not stop playing

even if it is late in the day.

You come so late!

Why so many bloodstains on your body?

Rush to the hospital,

They will cure you.

And take it away:

the days of my doll-play are over.

The choice was his
The inheritance mine.

He had his time
And I've my own.

He lived in glory
And I live in shame.

He denied the roots
And I cry for one.

He gave me dreams
But life keeps me awake.

Where will you retreat?

The city has no placid darkness.

No temple in ruins, no desolate house,
no shade of the banyan.

Here thousand suspicious eyes

Burn in the fire of envy

And its heat has wiped out all green darkness:

There's no nook where you could sit
close together

To suck the honey of life.

Come to the depth of my heart

Let me go to the depth of thine...

Two leaves are still green in this hell.

So long they live let them cover each other,

Let them weave a nest of green darkness.

The jungle trembled in fear
When the lion roared in me
And the lioness responded
from the distant valley

And tearing darkness to shreds
we rushed to each other
But blinded by passion and hope
we lost our way

And ^{were} ~~was~~ waylaid by the echo
of our own roarings.

*'What is love then
If you can't share my pain?'*

The nestbound wings in the sky
Left a trail of stillness for me.
Not a leaf stirred
And the guava tree
Wore a mystery
A speechless indifference
Made me look within
For words, roots and company.

And I remembered
Love had left me long ago
And words had turned into gestures
Of a monotonous puppet show;
The soil too had slipped beneath my feet
Keeping me busy negotiating the wind.

*'What is love , my boy,
If you can't share my joy ? '*

'I could do as you say
But life manoeuvred the other way. '

The almanac hangs on the wall

The memorable dates are as calm as snow ...

Her birthday and those dates:

I fear to look at them

For they are too much alive

Though cold as death:

The Himalaya hangs on the wall

The peaks are too cold

They just direct to the sky

With an irrefutable pointer.

All promise in the morning
And their promises lead the day
Gallop to its hot meridian,
But in the weary hour of the evening
When accounts are settled
It's found none has kept his word.

Promises are kept by nobody
And so abandoned promises abound in poetry:
None keeps his word
Save the last one who does it
(perhaps in embarrassment).

Million worlds are lost
when a man dies,
Millions of men die
when a moment yields:
And the staggering loss
is compensated
When a new plant peeps
into the sun.

I shall guard your house
so long as the construction is not complete:
And when the building is complete
And you come to live in it,
I shall be thrown into the dust.

You cannot build unless the Lord builds with you:
I stand on the housetop
So long as the Lord is there,
And when he makes way for you
I make way for the antenna.

I held a bunch of grapes in my hand
And walked down the hill
And one by one they fell off
When their bottoms shrank and loosened
At the feather touch of time:
Some glided down my wrist
And some slipped through fingers
But I cared little when they fell
For I had many with me.

I munched a few casually, negligently,
And thought I would eat with relish later
When I had time and place to rest:

And now beside the flowing stream
I spread my worn-out rug and sit on it:
A tired traveller who holds in his palm
A few rotting grapes...
And eats them carefully, so carefully
That he hardly eats,
He simply counts them, five four three two,
And the stream flows by.

It was a strange race:

One with fast moving cars, planes and copters,
And the other, a poor walker on foot,
for the same destination.

When it started we all laughed-
Someone said, 'Remember
the story of the hare and the turtle?
Anything could happen'.

Another, who knew them, said
'The poor walker might sleep
or tarry on a flower or a bird
but our hare has insomnia'.

It was a strange race,
And the participants serious.
Even when years have rolled by
The distance between the two remains the same.

The race continues:
The perpetual story of mankind:
None wins and none loses
The destination remains the same.

Reading a poem

is the renewal of the self
 For in it the lover
 has a plunge into the lady
 As a phoenix into fire.

It's an old morality
 that keeps humanity
 Awaiting the unwritten
 arrangement of words
 on the heap of noises and echoes.

But one not waylaid
 knows the prosody of flesh
 And reads it
 from crown to delta
 Through whirlpools and waterfalls
 and knows the silence of the bottom of the sea.

The final plunge is in the primal pit
 where fire is solidified to coal or kerosene.

Hurry up please it's time
 to write a poem
 not the last but the first one
 that you wanted to write
 when all avenues turned blind
 and all doors were shut.

It happened years ago
 when the stick was supple
 and flesh swept to and fro
 but the lever was in the hand
 of a truant boy intent
 on a video game.

Doing and undoing he kept on playing
 Until tired he fell asleep
 for a while
 And you felt free on the edge
 of a gorge
 And heard in the wind's whistle
Hurry up please it's time.

Without a body, yet real, truer still and stirring —
In the dungeon, Bimbisar, seeking the meaning of
life,

*At Rajgriha, the Gridhrakoot temple
Still lies eternally in insouciant tenderness.*

You are a page in history

Where three hundred years lie huddled together .
 in three hundred words
 printed in letters of various sizes and
 colours

Do your trees, rivers, fields and sky endorse it?
 Are you, then, brick, mortar, and concrete,
 The jungle of iron and timber
 Where tramcars, buses and metro trains
 crawl like insects ?

Beyond the neon sign, the marketplace,
 the politics of power
 Are you not the *Hooghly* and the *Paramhansa*,
 The sea-wind and the Tagore- song:
 things that have walked out of history
 and yet lie in you?

Are you the *Yuva Bharati* capacity crowd passionate
 on a match ?
 Are you the fun of a child running up and down the
 metro escalator ?
 Are you the sob of the footpath or the soar of the
 skyscraper ?
 Are you the all-accommodating whore
 stretching tired thighs beyond horizons?

Are you India's shame of today and thought of
tomorrow?

Are you caution and prediction, humbug and
hypocrisy, glory and the game?

I do not know.

Alien, distant, I blame you for all the uprootings
I've suffered

I am hardly interested in your history, the pages you
display,

For history has strange choices,
and unending amendments of itself.

Can't you take me, Calcutta,
beyond your three hundred years,
Beyond all centuries you can count
and place me on the wings of your song?

One poem has kept me engaged for years
 And has consumed my years of youth,
 And like vampire has sucked me from within,
 Has deprived me of the talent
 that takes one high in life
 And of that practical wisdom
 that enables one to build a property:
 One poem has opened up long corridors before me
 And led me from cave to cave, question to question,
 and from possible answers to more possible ones.

And yet I do not know its centre:
 The more I go into it the more elusive it becomes,
 Year after year I give changed versions in my
 criticism
 Like a blind man touching the limbs of an elephant
 by turn,
 and reporting to the world his idea of an elephant.

A poem has segregated me from the world:
A poem has given me this isolation.
I have no house of my own and it's for the poem,
I have been superseded in the office
 and it's for the poem,
My relations call me a fool .
 and it's for the poem,
My friends are indifferent to me
 and it's for the poem:

I have bartered the whole world for just a poem
And yet do not know whether it's worth the sacrifice.

They call me

When I am unmindful:

when I go beyond time
in my dreams

to the penumbra of my
infancy

or into the darkness of my mother's womb.

They force me into agony.

and I look vacant
like a convict

waiting for the hangman's
rope.

They suffocate me

till the illusion of future

peeps into me through a hole in the
wall

and I perceive a new dawn
in my child lying beside me.

After great tension
 the hour of relaxation
 is the hour of looking at the door
 of exit
 meaningful:
 Questions do not matter now,
 pre-recorded answers keep on
 playing on the disc
 casually:

There is no caution now
 and so no precaution
 Sanguine preparedness flows
 in natural rhythm
 deep in the veins:
 The body becomes meaningful
 as its letters fall off,
 The mind becomes meaningful
 as it lies suspended
 in the air
 for the final take-off,
 And I greet all I meet
 in assured tenderness.

Beside the desolate road
 he shivered in cold
 and night thickened around him
 like muffled smoke.

He discovered a heap of ash
 and fumbled desperately for something
 that would keep his blood move
 and found a burning amber.

Took off his hat
 that burnt to keep him warm for a while.

Took off his shirt
 that burnt to keep him warm for a while.

Removed his trousers
 that burnt to keep him warm for a while.

Removed his undergarments
 that burnt to keep him warm for a while.

And kept on thinking on ancient kings
 and dreaming of future princes —
 the Taj, the Tower and the Garden
 and a world without borders and temples...

The fire kept him up
and he kept up the fire with all he had
until he was left with nothing but primal flesh
and the yawning ash that hid the blinking intrigue.

But now 'twas morning
and he stood, arms stretched,
to welcome, to praise and to pray,
and emotions thickened into a passion
that turned solid into a word:
O MA.

The bus moved on
And through the window
I saw a herd of grazing cattle.

Twenty years ago
I'd seen the same scene
Of long necks drooping on the grass.

A repetition,
A continuation,
Though not a single animal was the same.

At one corner of the Intensive Care Unit he lay
 segregated into rest
 Suffering the measured touch of machines
 and mechanical fingers
 and the erratic touch of the unknown, within.
 Hung between moments and eternity: he lay.

In stifled anxiety people stood on the verandah
 - one set replaced by another in silent turns-
 friends, relations, and mere sympathizers:
 All must wait
 till the pendulum swung between
 moments and eternity.

It swung like a truant child,⁴ indecisive, unpredictable,
and I walked back home late in the evening.

Next morning, prayerful in apprehension,
 I went again to see the condition:
 The same bed, the same scene, tubes and bottles,
 and on the verandah a hushed anxiety,
 People shuffling to and fro in painful caution -
 askance, wise, submissive...

But another patient now.
I was told he died at two in the night.

They arrived: a cartload.

I wonder'd how they could grow so tall, so big.

Sunday crowd thronged around them: holiday

hunger, greed.

Unloaded, they huddled together, perceiving the

impending

in the flesh;

The headman settled the price and his men sharpened

their knives:

The crowd waited, silently, patiently, eagerly,

thoughtfully,

Their budget bargaining with their bags...

The animals kept on bleating

registering complaint to the unknown:

A small one sneaked, ran, cried and ran, as fast as it

could;

One of the butchers saw the wickedness:

stood up; cursed; smiled; ran after, assured; caught.

Brought it back and casually made it his first

choice.

The rest saw it and learnt patience.

For a couple of hours commerce kept a-going

And then accounts were settled.

The fire caught the hay
and turned into flame
Quickly consuming matter into spirit
And I was afraid it might burn
my furniture and papers
And so took buckets of water
and bags of sand
To confine it within a narrow limit.

Guarded by impregnable walls
of sand and water
The fire consumed the hay
and gradually came low,
The flame went off.....
It turned docile, harmless,
and began to die,
And I looked at it from a safe distance
And was happy that I could save my belongings.

There are moments

When you are on crossroads
and each choice would be a wrong one you know
But while you choose
the full responsibility is yours.
They will say 'Don't do as you are about to'
and your hands will falter
and your knees will shake,
But a voice from within will ring
and say, 'Do as you will'
but will give no further guidance
And then a double responsibility is on you
And you can do nothing but make a choice...

And then the wind blows
the siren calls
And the sparrows flutter
the hawks writhe
And a thin line of smoke
pierces the skyline
from horizon to horizon
And in that moment of
confusion and expectancy
The decision is taken by you...

The sky clears up
The smoke settles
And people go out
in search of work and food
And you are on the dock
to answer,
You are on the dock
to hear
THE JUDGEMENT.

My griefs keep me moving:
 On days when they fall asleep
 like the young ones of a cat,
 Lying still on my couch
 I taste the happiness of a holiday
 and teacup hours roll drowsily.

At last, of course, I get up to finish
 my bits of work
 A button in my shirt or polish on my shoes:
 For I know that the kittens must awake
 Partly out of habit
 And partly in hunger and thirst.

Take your cue from the dream last dreamt
And defy the highhandedness of the seasons.

The insect crawls between the leaf and the beam:
Stories of heroes wait for an epitaph to be written

And forms change before metaphors are made:
The crawling of the insect creates an unfinished poem

And the brown leaf dumps it beneath the soil
And history of creation nurses the decrepit unborn.

Left with no alternative, take a small step but
Take your cue from the dream last dreant.

‘Twas a whirlwind
 thousands of miles away
But the bird in quivering feathers
 came sharply down
 to its nest
 in panic.

And, wonder , below this sunny blue
 its eyes were askance, prepared, as if,
 for an upsurge,
Its tender breast filled with the message
 of creative plunder.

The patient lay etherised on the table

And the poet mistook it for evening

The coffee spoons clanked

And he thought 'twas life

But things went on tidy:

efficient nurses handed over

sharp knives to the mechanical

fingers of the expert surgeon:

The hands of the clock

struck hours on the right and wrong

of the zero

And when streaks appeared on the

eastern sky

the surgeon came out

And in a voice beyond smile and sigh

said that the operation was successful

but the patient did not survive.

‘Twas a long night
and we had a frantic session
My hypnotic fingers made you dream
and all your crevices turned moist
And you kept on muttering the hackneyed promise.

Meanwhile I walked out
in steady paces
And submitted myself to the predetermined design
of nature.

Some words cling to me leechlike
and suck my blood:

Had I gone back in time
I'd have created situations
that would prevent such words
from being born

But now they are grown-up, bonafide members,
And, being in majority, they dictate terms
and my poor 'self' is continually defeated.

Fractured moments

give meaning to time
 as mutilated footprints
 give meaning to space

and when waves wash out footprints
 And mind moves faster than clock
 time and space yield
 to eternity
 and to infinity

And nothing remains except a bridge
 between I-ness and you-ness

And everything that we are
 or could have been
 melts into a *feeling*.

