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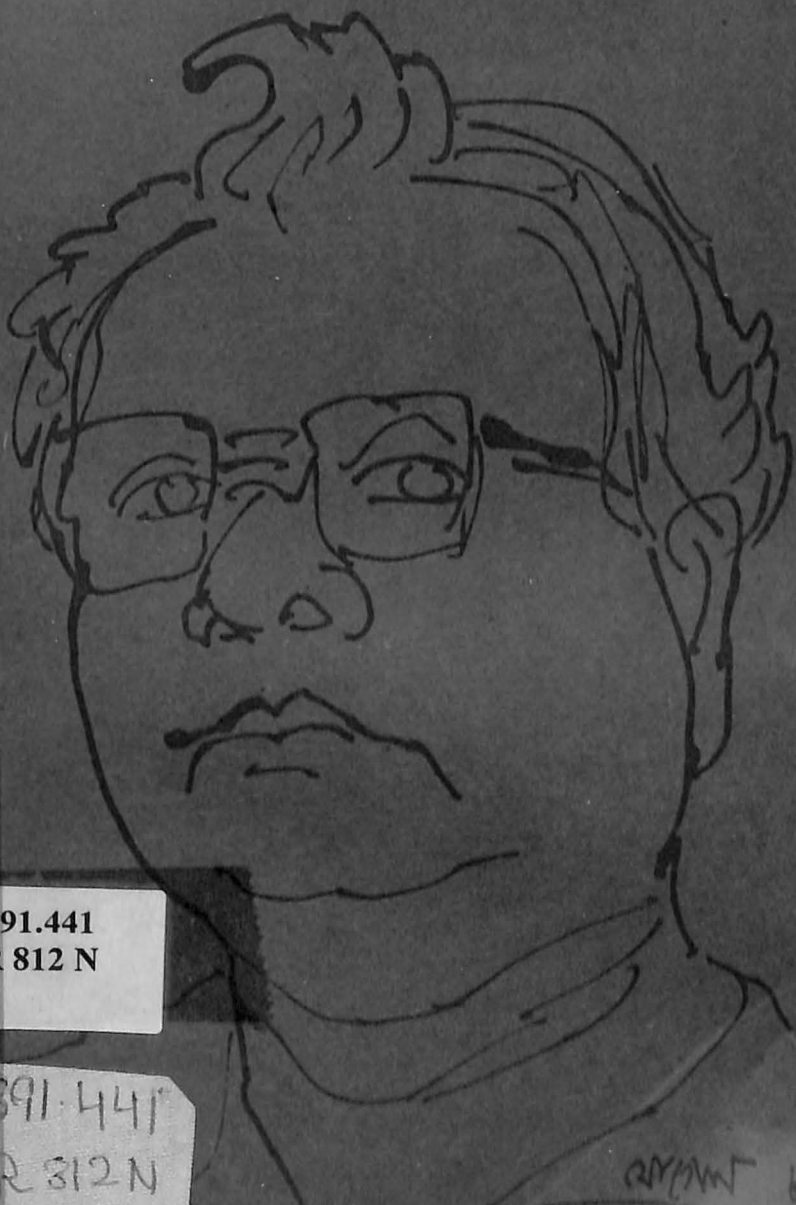
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Sketch : JOGEN CHOUDHURI

POEMS OF DEBI ROY



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POEMS OF DEBI ROY

Translated by
MANISH NANDY

ABARTA PUBLISHERS
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Poems of Debi Roy :
Translated Poems by
MANISH NANDY

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Some of these Poems have appeared in
New Quest, Youth Times, and The Illustrated
Weekly of India. *DEBONAIR*
INDIAN LITERATURE (*sahitya*
Akademie)

Dr. Nemai Sadhan Bose
with
great admiration and respect.

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KING OF KINGS

You wanted just this, in your heart of hearts :
A tiny baby in a cradle
The King of all earthly Kings
To fill this disorderly home with pandemonium
To make its walls resound with noise
Someone to lift up and hug close
Someone to prompt milky waves in your frugal breast.

You wanted just this, in your heart of hearts.
I too understand a child's prattle;
Even a man understands
The furious desire to be a mother
How a little seed in your womb
Overcomes you entirely,
Little by little,
While the large, soft, white and lonely bed
Swallows me
With fearsome certainty.

PROUD. FROM THE MOMENT OF THE BIRTH

Proud. From the moment of His birth.
I know this God who covers
His whole body with the firmament
And crumbles me to dust
Under the steady pressure of his Feet.
Why me alone ? If he cares
just this time
Let Him. Let Him look at me.

YOU STAND FOR REVOLUTION, I FOR REACTION

The widow of the deceased received
a few thousand rupees,
also a promise of happiness.

The main thing, after all : to fill the
belly !

That isn't a trifle.
Go and ask people

Without money, the world is a void,
isn't it ?

Well, everyone will tell you that
in detail, time and again.

You know in your heart
you can spend the night without a
man.

The main thing, after all : to fill the
belly !

But, without money ?
Choose whatever road you will,
straight or crooked.

But, without money ?
You and I
in this world
neither here nor there.

THE DELUGE

Behind the scenes,
behind the barrage,
one day I explode in whitehot murderous
fury :

I am the one—the insane, invading deluge !
Control, control !
Who will stop me, mere humans ?
With some inane mixture of sands
and cement ?

Step by step, I flex my body
and then I leap.

My aim : devastation,
peak success
under silent, awed skies.

My firm touch awakes the dormant,
scores of villages, lazy farmlands
I tear from their moorings,
rootless trees breathe their last...
the earth trembles at the sight of my
waves !

KILL HIM, IN SILENCE

Relationship is really a nail :
two persons stay together
raise a family
for a while,
till the day
once again
the nail raises its stubborn head.

What does the wretch want ?
To come up
be right next to us !

If it won't settle down—
a little pressure, the jeweller's subtle
hammer—
use the crushing sledgehammer fast
cow it down,
in silence.

THEY MOVE ON

Men move on, just as they do
Groups move on, just as they do
Just the way the lone man
gets lost in the crowd.

Who would then
know him for what he is.
Stray desires, all of them ;
One group looks for another
Killer-like.

The stream flows on
in the quiet glory of a stream.
Men move on, just as they do...
On to ruination.

COME LET US FORGET

Come, let us forget the rich and
the famous.

We belong only to—ourselves.

We mumble our poems, create ruckus
over the bar table...

All our travel is in the city streets...

Come let us forget her—
she who has forgotten me
in supreme happiness.

It's no use worrying,
what's to happen
will happen.

We came floating in ;
floating, we will go away.

MADE BY MAN

Table to table
chair to chair

man's desolation
made by man.

Life was alive
words were only

about the unseen moonlight.

I haven't learnt
these radical slogans

only to save my skin !

I shout my dissent
even if it is no use.

I will not
close my eyes and meditate :

I am blind
and I am helpless !

MURDER

Yes, you can go scot-free even after murder,
for lack of proof.

By pulling the right strings in the world
you can easily elude the long arm of the law.

So would you commit murder, "Would you?"
The moment I asked,
you turned furious.

My friend, now I realise your virtue infinite.

REMEMBER IT ALL

All the insults flesh is heir to
All the contempt of this world.
Disregard nothing, forget nothing,
 Hold it all in your heart.

Some one tossed you a packet of cigarettes
Condescendingly.
Someone, from behind closed doors,
Announced his own absence in a different voice.
Remember it all, all,
 Every insult of this world.
All the barbs and slights, the indifference of the elite,
All the patronising. Remember it all.
 Hold it all in your heart.

All the pain will surge like a river one day,
Sweep away the banks in a flood-tide.
 Meanwhile, just search within yourself.

THE SEA AT PURI

At the window all the day
At the window all the night
The moon at the guard
In the whitest moonlight

Who keeps me awake
Who keeps me in tears
In despair day and night
At the window all the time

MUTE WITNESS

Alone every night
next to the window
he wordlessly watches the sky and ponders.

Trains arrive and hurtle away.
Doesn't the deadweight of life
slowly bend the young man ?

On a clothes-hanger, his shirt and trousers,
a pair of shoes below :

the sole mute witness of all his failures.

A MAN AND HIS SHIRT

A shirt hangs on the clothes-hanger,
a shirt, not a man.

And it is
not very special,
for it stains easily.

A shirt serves to cover up.
And a man serves
to disclose little more.
He knows well
he must put a lock to his lips.

Is this the gravity that comes with age ?
Men crave a spurious solemnity,
the mask of the fatuous.

Sometimes the gaudy shirt
is itself a spectacle.
Someday a violent blow
electrifies him
and makes him eloquent.

GOODBYE YESTERDAY

Fear fear fear
Dangerous fear
Men here love that kind of ruination.

Everyone for himself.
Who plays the sitar allegro ?

Goodbye yesterday. The deep gloom tears us
As we walk to the last step of the stairs
Touching hands, we feel no warmth.

We look into each other's eyes
But we cannot recognise ourselves anymore.

CALCUTTA WHAT WILL YOU GIVE ME

As yet
the semblance of eternal compassion.

Quiet
night.

After hesitant steps
stock-still near my head
the traveller.

Sleep.

Now to be reconciled to the rest-seeker
unconditionally !

"What will you give me, Calcutta :
alms or recompense ?"

THIS ROAD IS NOT A HIGHWAY

It's only them. Sometimes they come and gather round,
in a restaurant or on the road, and argue till they froth in
the mouth :

Who is greater ? Who has the greater family or antecedents ?

What is life ? What is its role ?

It floats on a current of endless thought
and watches the whole world in casual contempt.

Is this the rule of the game ?

What endures here ? The road torn apart.
the uncertain crowned head, full of pretence.

Whoever finds a ready stage, occupies it.

You can't persuade anyone to see
that this road is not a highway.

THE DEAR GIRL

Jenny, the cabaret dancer, just thirtythree,
tosses and turns against her dreamy pillow, excited.

All the way from her remote village, in search of a missing
husband ?

The city has taught her she gets nothing until she gives !

Agreed ! Now she carefully throws knives at her cousin—
Jenny, the cabaret dancer of thirtythree.

"I don't know, sir, what happened to the man—it's only the
other day.

The villagers were all starving ; none could help me."

How long can one stand the confessional ghosts, tell me ?
I've showered, eaten and slept enough ; now, surely I need
something more.

Let's have a deal. Or else, burn in your hell.

Jenny wasn't bad, really, but now I know all the hassles.
They say even the touch of a tiger gives you sores.

"My dear girl, do you know what spells happiness in this
world ? Money !

Forget the one who's gone. Let's strike a deal.

In life, money assures all. In any case,
you keep your bangles, the symbol of your marriage."

YOUTH

Even unnatural death is not a sudden, thunderous event any
more
that strikes terror in your heart.

Bargaining settles the price
of the firm unbending neck and the youthful spine.

And it is cheaper than guineapigs,
all the world over as much as in this land.

THE CITY THAT LOST ITS HEAD

The city that lost its head : they wreck you
and re-build you, to make you great and unique.
But does one touch others' hearts at all ?

The halogen lamps are so bright even my imagination flags !
Even intimate relationships erode
Everyone speaks with raised voices.

Rude, querulous faces instead of a free-flowing life
I see vaulting ambition without a shred of dignity
and fawning politics shaded by evil.

I see gross passivity masquerade
as philosophicality. And I see casual contempt
in the pitiless eyes of those that succeed.

Who knows the right icon in this concrete jungle.
A rare voice or two protest the endless blunders ;
I alone foololishly spring in rebellion.

In the city that lost its head
no one has time for anyone else.

TIRUPATHI TO MADRAS

I return to Madras from Tirupathi
On the left a sequence of mountains
We seem to learn from experience alone.

The broken, unsullied series together make a crowd
On the resonant chariot of the clouds.

This creeper : who knows whom it leans on when.

RESONATE, LIKE A TEMPLE BELL

Unsullied, but scattered all over
Headlessly left or trampled under feet

 You must search

 You must find

Some speak only to hurt

Some do not speak except to scoff

You must resonate like a temple bell

Extend the hand of sympathy

Understand others, help understand

Keep searching

Unravel the mystery layer by layer onion-like

May the quest be your only goal

Look with wonder into the curious eyes of a child

Or become the rapt child yourself.

THE LOVER AND SLEEPING PILLS

The lover has lost
the love of his life.

While you mouth polite, placid words
where do you hide, in which cranny,

all your sleeping pills in aluminium foil,
thelong arm of the pharmacist ?

Nothing, nothing is real anymore,
neither the dignity nor the illusion, nor the treasured
sleep.

GETTING OLD

I am getting old

getting old

The impotent rage of the stubborn bull

getting old

My warm blood is cooling down

getting old

I want that spark, Nature's sun

getting old

I want to ignite a holocaust

getting old

Age robs all

getting old.

THEN, RIGHT THEN

At first, the photograph of my deceased father

Then

A brief sigh

Then

A glass of water

Then

A cup of hot tea

Then

A cigarette

Then

Right then

My feet touch the ground.

And up comes—

Another day.

YOU BETTER KNOW

My dear sir,
the times have changed.
Arrogant bluster will
work no more
no more.

Rather a protest march
a protest march
raised fists
columns of men and women
men and women.

Learn to disregard
learn to disregard
learn to disregard
all the rest.

Or else
or else !

You better know about
laws and procedures
rules and regulations
rules and regulations
violence and killing.

Notice people
notice people
learn to forget
learn to forget
the sealed car
the law courts
the show of strength
the show of strength
the possessiveness.

I'll disclose all
I'll disclose all !

My lord, you better decide in public who is the braggart
fool !

HOW MY HAIR TURNED WHITE

In a small house lived my father and my mother

I and my wife

and my young brothers.

Thank God, I had no children as yet.

My younger sister had married earlier and left,

and we had a sense of relief.

It was indeed fortunate !

My chest aches, said father one day, and took to his bed.

The Sombre-faced doctor came, and smoothly wrote out
a death certificate.

A wail rose from the house ;

darkness descended from the skies.

And in a single night

all my hair turned white.

DEBI ROY

Debi Roy was born on August 4, 1938 and fought out his desperate childhood in one of the dreaded slums of Howrah. Had to virtually sweat it out for earning each crumb of the family bread.

Debi Roy who alongwith Malay Roy Choudhury had masterminded the Hungryalist coup in Bengali poetry during the sixties is probably the single Indian poet who has transformed adrenalin into lyricism. Lyrics which are almost brittle, feelings transmitted to you in anguished dribblets. This might be the reason why subsequently he broke off from the other Hungries and branched out into a completely new area of his own.

Debi Roy has participated in the programmes of Door-darshan (TV) and All India Radio. His poems have been translated into English, Swedish, Spanish, German, Russian, Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Oriya, Gujarati and Tamil. Magazines such as Illustrated Weekly of India, South Asian Digest of Regional Writing, University of Heidelberg, Young poets of India, Bowling Green State University, OHIO, ANTARIK USA, INTREPID, Nyork, Salted Feathers, Portland, S. Francisco EARTHQUAKE, N. York, Indian Writing today Oct-Dec. '71 (Centre for Indian Writers, Poona), Indian Poetry today Silver Jubilee Poetry Number, Sahitya Akademi, N. Delhi. Indian Literature, Youth Times, VAK (University of Melbourne, Australia), Pratibha India, N Delhi, NEW QUEST, Poetry time, ASANTAKALI, Poesie, VOICES FROM WITHIN (Berhampore, Orissa) ATALANTIK (USA), UTTARPROBASI (SWEDEN), SAGARPARE (ENGLAND), Indian Poetry today, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi etc.

He has won 'Uttar Probashi' (Sweden) Award for the year 1985.

Debi Roy's published works include :

KOLKATA-O-Aami/MANUSH, MANUSH (1971), Samprotik TINJAN (1973), DEBI ROYER KABITA (1980), BHRUKUTIR BIRUDHEA EKA (1983), UNMAD SAHAR (1984), EI-SEI-TOMAR DESH (1986), PUTUL NACHER GAAN (1987). ARROGANT FROM BRITH (Translated into English, 1978), SRIKANTA VERMAR KAVITA (Translated into Bengali) with Anandam Chakrabarty, Swarnashikha.

He has participated in various poetry seminars, workshops, recitals, meetings, symposia etc. and has been the convener and one of the Secretary Indian Writers' Association.

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THE TRANSLATOR

Manish Nandy

Linguist and translator, has translated some Sanskrit, Hindi and Latin American Verse, but specialises in translating modern Bengali Poetry into English and French.

He has published extensively in India and abroad, and has three books of translation : Kalidasa's Ritu Samhara, modern cuban Poetry and a collection of Sonnets

