

Modern Gujarati Poetry

A SELECTION

This anthology of Modern Gujarati poetry in English brings together poems of over twenty-five poets of the twentieth century who write in Gujarati. The Introduction lays down the framework employed in the selection and translation of poems. The anthology seeks to capture the diversity and vibrancy of twentieth century Gujarati poetry, very little of which has been made available to the English reading public.

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Modern Gujarati Poetry

A Selection

*Translated by
Suguna Ramanathan
Rita Kothari*

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The sculpture reproduced on the end paper 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

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RITA KOTHARI

.



SAHITYA AKADEMI

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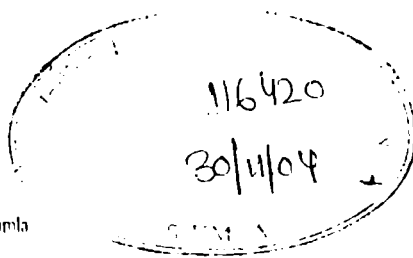
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**Suguna Ramanathan
Rita Kothari**

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Introduction

The sheer quantity of poetry written in Gujarati, published and read, is astonishingly large. Little or none of it has crossed linguistic boundaries and been made available in English translation. The result has been a serious underestimation of the literary output in Gujarati by non-native speakers. Within Gujarat itself, however, there has been an alert and appreciative audience for poetry.

Gujarati has a poetic tradition with well-defined periods stretching from the twelfth century to the present day and comprising a plethora of poetic forms. The formation of a central canon is an on-going activity among critics and poets, and interest in literary matters is no less intense than in languages like Marathi or Kannada. The fact remains, however, that Gujarat has been perceived as a state producing business people rather than poets. The present anthology is an attempt to modify that perception.

Old Gujarati in the twelfth century produced poets such as the grammarian Hemachandrasuri, and, in the course of the next two hundred years, a group of Jain saint-poets, as well as secular poets such as Asait and Bhim who wrote long narrative poems. The medieval period (1450-1850) is rich in different kinds of poetry. There were many Bhakti poets of whom Narasinh Mehta and Mira, the most famous, are only two. Akho wrote a very different kind of poetry – ironic and rational. Premanand introduced the *akhyan* and Dayaram the *garbi*, both forms which become immensely popular.

The modern period has its roots in the latter half of the nineteenth century with Dalpatram, Narmad, Kalapi and Kant. British rule sparked off social awareness and inaugurated a Sudharak Yug which passed into the Gandhi Yug in the early half of the twentieth century. From Kant to Sundaram – the leap is from early modern to modern proper. It is this last period, from 1908 (the birth of Sundaram) to 1997, that this volume attempts to represent. The majority of poems translated here were written after 1947; in the strictest sense, therefore, this is an anthology of contemporary Gujarati poetry; most of the poets in this volume are still living.

Sundaram and Umashankar Joshi are the poets of the Gandhi Yug. Gandhian idealism, his stress on the simple, his concern for the dispossessed, and his refusal to separate the moral from the social and political, inevitably left its mark on a tradition which had heretofore privileged the metaphysical over the quotidian. Of the two poems by Sundaram in this volume, the one entitled *Three Neighbours* suggests something of the preoccupation of that time.

While Umashankar Joshi's early poetry reflects the concerns of the Gandhi Yug, his poetic life spans several decades, and we have chosen a long poem from his post-Gandhian phase. This poem *Quest* points to the complex, self-reflexive process so characteristic of this poet. Fine lyricist as he is, this prolonged meditative dimension is sufficiently rare and therefore interesting. Snehashmi and Ushnas are also poets of the Gandhi Yug who continued writing in the decades that followed, called the Anu-Gandhi Yug.

The most typical voices of the Anu-Gandhi period are Niranjan Bhagat and Rajendra Shah. In fact this period is called the Niranjan-Rajendra era. Niranjan Bhagat's poetry of the late forties and fifties is essentially city poetry, the

work of a man who wanders through Bombay like Baudelaire through Paris, engaged in a critique simultaneously celebratory and disenchanted. Rajendra Shah's output is immense. He is represented here by poems which capture something of the modernist sensibility so typical of the time : the city, the restaurant, people jostling, and faces seen through a haze.

Poetry magazines flourished, and poets met in groups to read their work and talk in a period heady with excitement. Publication in the poetry magazine *Kumar* was a kind of public affirmation of a poet's worth. Chinu Modi, himself an important poet, was the mentor of a group of younger writers calling themselves the Hotel Poets.

Snehashmi (Jhinabhai Desai) popularised the *haiku*; other poets mined Indian mythology to express modernist dilemmas. Priyakant Maniyar's *Nachiketa* uses a traditional setting to evoke a nightmare. Important poets of this period are Balmukund Dave, Jayant Pathak, Harindra Dave and Hasmukh Pathak.

Alienation and anguish are in. Modern Gujarati poets wear the badge of their tribe as they struggle to reconcile the comfortingly old and the disturbingly new. Ravji Patel responds sharply in a back-to-the-earth, colloquial, rustic mode. Saroop Dhruv shakes her fist in anger, discovering her voice as old patriarchal facades fall. Labhshanker Thaker says obliquely that poetry makes nothing happen. Gulam Mohammad Shaikh catches the details of an ancient, ruined landscape with a modern painterly eye. Others, like Anil Joshi, Adil Mansuri, Ramesh Parekh, and Sitanshu Yashashchandra sing, through ghazal and song, of love, defeat, exile, and spring. Rajendra Shukla in *Sounds* plays with image and sound to say the virtually unsayable. And Yagnesh Dave focuses on the magic of the forest.

India's history as a colonized nation is writ large in the

Western influences that have transformed her literary traditions. Gujarati poetry from the nineteenth century onwards testifies to the effect on the educated elite of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. Wordsworth, Shelley and Tennyson were key figures in the poetic consciousness of Dalpatram and Balwantraï Thakore. Sundaram's *Three Neighbours* obviously picks up cues from Thomas Hood's *Song of the Shirt*, a widely-read poem about an over-worked poor woman at the height of the Industrial Revolution.

A nostalgic looking back to Nature, so prevalent even in current Gujarati poetry, derives from English Romanticism, and is different from the unsentimental accuracy of nature imagery in poetry before the colonial period. Jayant Pathak's poem in this volume looks back over its shoulder at Tennyson and Wordsworth.

The second most obvious borrowing from the West is the theme of alienation. T.S. Eliot (and before him Baudelaire) made squalor and alienation fitting themes for poetry, and the poets of the fifties and sixties made these their own. Umashankar Joshi alone remains unswayed, rooted in a high Sanskrit tradition while Western influences lap about his feet. Ravji Patel appears untouched; his sources in Gujarat's rural life are very strong.

Heavy as the Western influences are (Existentialism, Surrealism, Absurdism), they have been not so much overpowering as absorbed and put to use. The ethos of modern Gujarati poetry is unmistakably Indian. The filial tie (mother-son, father-son), deeply held and felt by Sundaram, Ushnas, Chinu Modi, Madhav Ramanuj, among others, is not a Western theme. The plight of women reflected in this anthology is not exactly Western. Mythology is alive and relevant; it speaks to the poet and reader in a specifically Indian way. And the imagery is wholly Indian, whether of

the Pandavas in Virat's kingdom, or women cutting vegetables in the verandah.

In the matter of form, Western influence, though present, is less strong. The sonnet and free verse have been readily adopted, but Gujarati poetry is more closely tethered to regular metre than English poetry. The English lyric ceased to be lyrical i.e. primarily musical, as early as the sixteenth century. Even Thomas Wyatt, Elizabethan song writer par excellence, introduces the speaking voice in his famous *They flee from me that sometime did me seek*; and by the time of John Donne in the early seventeenth century, the rupture with music and substitution of speech rhythms have been fully effected.

Gujarati poetry, by contrast, retains its intimate connection with music. Many of the poems are actually sung; hence the pronounced importance of *chhand* or metre. In English prosody the skilful poet strives to maintain a balance between the base metre and deviations from the base. In Gujarati prosody, on the other hand, adherence to the *chhand* is a sign of virtuosity. A very large number of poets continue to write within strictly regular metres. Vipin Parikh attempts colloquial speech rhythms, as does Rajendra Shah. But far more widespread is the song-like lyricism of Sitanshu Yashashchandra's *Solar* or Suresh Joshi's poet's *Last Will and Testament*.

The ghazal is a poetic form retained in Gujarati poetry and widely used. We have attempted to translate in this volume the ghazals of Adil Mansuri, Ramesh Parekh and Manoj Khanderia, not, we fear, with any degree of success. The ghazal has been for us more difficult to translate than any other form. As a consequence of the distinction between the speaking voice of English poetry and the musical lyricism of Gujarati poetry, the translations in this volume have faced a peculiar difficulty. When we attempt to

retain the lyricism and metrical regularity, the translation tends to turn into pastiche; discarding musicality in an attempt to retain the original force turns the poem into a modernist lyric.

This brings us to our role as translators and the selection presented here. We have attempted to offer a representative sample of the major modern Gujarati poets, but we do not claim to have chosen, in all cases, their best-known or most representative poems. Any anthology is bound to reflect in part the temperament and taste of the anthologists. In the case of an anthology in translation there is the added imponderable of a poem's translatability. Some poems are more translatable than others; poems rich in visual detail more so than poems with an elaborate filigreed pattern of sound. In order to achieve a balance of sorts we have had, in some cases, regretfully to omit a slighter piece in favour of another by the same poet. Priyakant Maniyar's *Squirrels* is a case in point. Not a well-known poem, it catches quite beautifully the movement of these small creatures:

They lie frozen on terrace walls
through wintry nights
And then, in sunlit warmth,
they come,
in such a hurry. Hidden so long,
they frolic,
frisking, rocking,
now here, now there,
now up, then down
(as friends, playing in water dip in and out),
making
silent noises in the air.
That square wall turns
suddenly spherical:

the tail's brush, in a wink,
sketching in my eyes
numberless swaying trees.

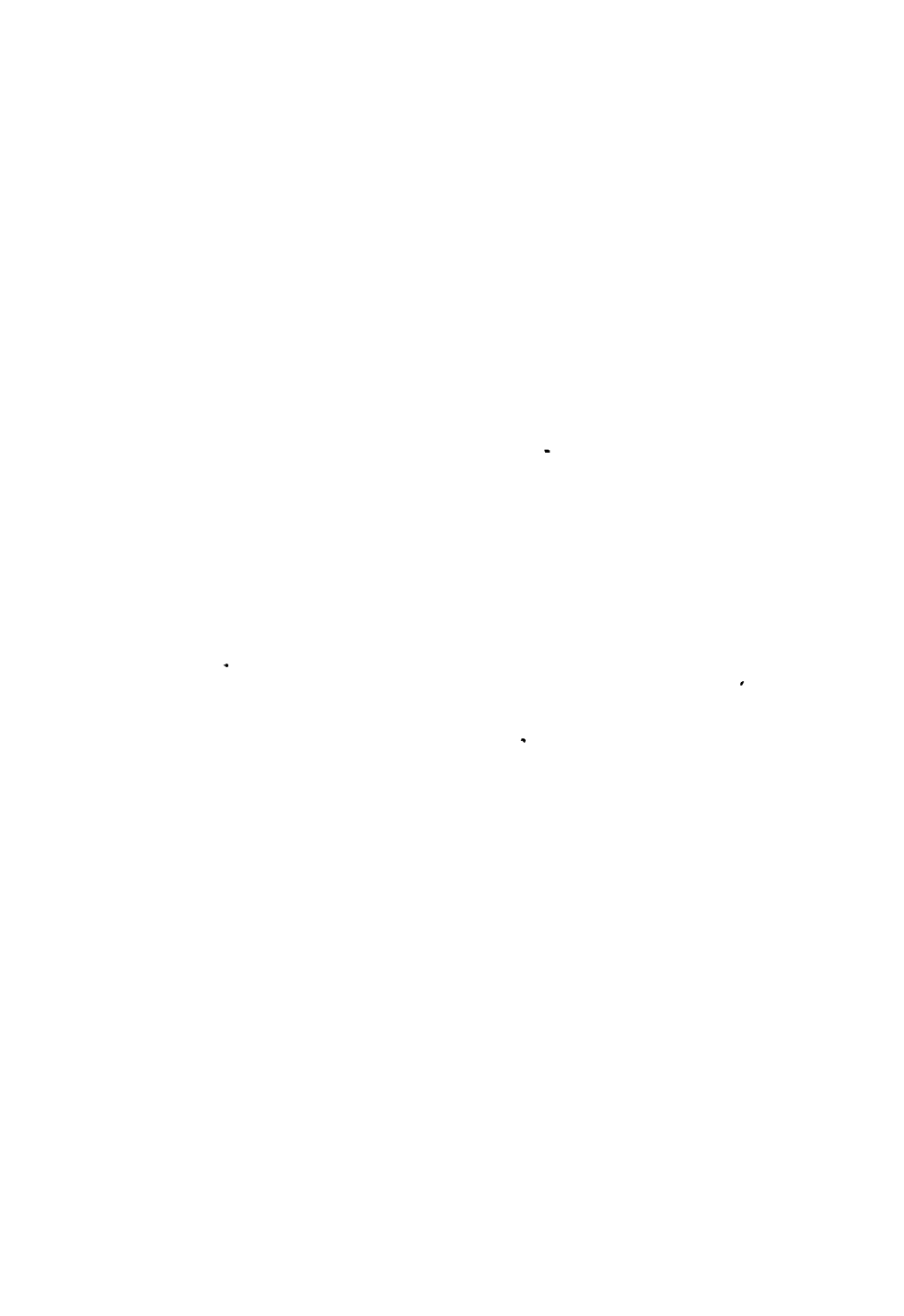
Choices have had to be made, and in the process, some good things could not be included.

The fact that some poets have two or more poems in this volume, and some only one, is no indication of any hierarchical ordering, but rather of our concern to present a variety and range of tones and forms within the limitations of translatability.

Finally, the large storehouse of Gujarati poems and a large reading public are both signs of a vibrantly healthy tradition. Very little of this has been systematically translated into English and published. By contrast, poetry in Bengali, Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam, to name just a few, has been widely translated and is therefore more visible. This may be attributed at least in part to the fact that the above-mentioned languages have produced poets who are also teachers of English, and sufficiently bilingual to engage in translating from the mother-tongue into English. The language policy followed in Gujarat since the sixties has left it, on the whole, without a core group of writers who are completely bilingual. The result has been the marginalization of Gujarati literature in the national consciousness.

We have greatly enjoyed reading and translating these poems. We trust that they communicate to the non-Gujarati reader something of the power and beauty of the originals.

SUGUNA RAMANATHAN
RITA KOTHARI





Three Neighbours

Gongs sound in Ram's temple: you can hear the bells.
In the rich man's palace the gramophone swells.

As the *arati* goes around
And the noise flows around,
Crowds of people come swarming there to stand.

One street holds three neighbours: the seth and Lord Ram
And widowed Makorbai with not a paisa to her name;
She grinds corn for people,
Fetches water for people,
To eke out a living, her bread.

The pride of the village is the mansion of the seth;
And Ram's marble temple glitters till late.
Hidden in a corner,
A squalid smelly corner,
The palace of Makorbai stands.

The seth sleeps in comfort, and with Sita sleeps Ram;
In the early hours of morning all sleep in night's calm.
With the cock's first crowing,
The waking cock's crowing,
Makorbai rises from sleep.

Waking, Makor stretches, and then lighting a flame,
Settles to grind corn and prays in Ram's name.

Lord roars the mill,
The gluttonous mill,
Like the groan of a starving man.

Today's *Gokul Attam*, the day for a fast;
Makor too is fasting, her breath may not last.
To please Sita's Ram,
Save a handful of grain,
She sets her empty belly on fire.

The seth's house and Ram's temple have ghee, fruit and
sweets;
They've given corn for grinding for the next day's feasts.
She's grinding dal today.
The dal is damp today,
And Makor's hungry belly is ablaze.

Her tired body jerking, her breathing comes in groans;
She's the dal being ground between those millstones.
If the flour is not given
No money will be given
And Makor will be fasting once again.

The creaking heavy millstone begins to weigh a ton,
Peg slipping from her tired hand before the grinding's
done.
As the grain goes around
Makor's body goes around
And the sound of the grinding goes on.

The mill devours the grain, yet it gives out food for all.
Makor's Annapurna's angry and the grain will not fall.

See half the grain is left
and half the night is left,
But Makor cannot struggle any more.

The seth and Ram are waking; the whole world's calling;
The burdens of the earth with the saviour's birth are falling.
Sounds of the morning,
Birds twittering in the morning,
Drown out Makor's hungry howl.

Ram is in his forest dwelling; the seth in his palace home.
Temple gongs and trumpet sounds of revelry are blown.
Makor faints to her death.
The millstone sings of death.
A lone black crow laments her gone.

SUNDARAM



Photographing Mother

The two of us, my brother and I, took Mother to be
photographed.
Having settled the cost, we entered the studio,
And in that showy place they put Mother in
An embroidered chair, readying all for the picture.
'Stretch that foot a little: hold your head high, *Ba*.'
Thus the sweet-tongued photographer, fussing about.
Near the sari border drawn over her head
He arranged prettily flowers and books.
Letting light and shadow play upon her face,
He pulled this way and that the curtain from the roof.
Stealing behind the camera draped in black,
He adjusted the focus and fixed the plate.
Not yet uncovering the lens, he said to her,
This silver-tongued photographer we hardly knew,
'Now look here *Ba*, sit still and smile straight here,
Forgetting care and grief; think you are at home;
Remember joyful things. Smile a little, *Ba*.
And please don't blink. You will
Appear exactly as you are.'
And I, turning around to see how Mother smiled,
Went sliding from an unreal present straight into the past.
Weigh smiles and tears, which one will go down?
She lived her life, that's all; no one cared.
Widowed young, dependent in her in-law's home,
Mother lived with her brood of four,
Thankless drudgery claiming all her days;

Nothing outside that cramped and squalid house;
Her children's future alone appeased desire.
No one heard her; she listened to them all.
At last her flattened body breeding disease,
Nurtured by neglect, grew past cure.
We rained compassion down on her and love
Then, to please her any, every way.
Half-love, half-duty led us on. We took
Mother to the doctors in the town;
Showed her the city: palaces, houses, parks;
Cinemas, theatres, rides in horse-drawn buggies,
She had them all. Sensing impending doom,
And as a memorial to our love (or selfishness),
We took her for one final photograph.
Unheeded by husband, sons, and in-laws,
Arre, all the world, poor neglected Mother
Sat waiting for the picture as that sugary
Stranger asked her just to smile.
I, turning to remark how Mother smiled,
Saw two ripe tears there frozen in her eyes.
Angrily he shouted: 'My plate is ruined!'
Plate? What plate? Her life lay round in ruins, *Hari, Hari!*

SUNDARAM



Quest

Little time now left to me
to look at flowers,
those isles of light that upward turn
earth's desires to heaven;
those carriers of human dreams,
a poem's first, fresh syllables.

Does poetry shine through my life
as, from the womb, a child's shut eyes
irradiate a mother's face?

Poetry, soul's native tongue,
bodies silence out, freezes dreams,
flees enclosing space.
And, scattered through a million words
is rarely found.
Saraswati disappearing, the poem
smells unhappy, cowers
in the smoke of smouldering thought.

That plant beside my house is now a tree
heavy with purple jamuns.
I stare at it often and long but bear no fruit;
eat, drink and play, jump freely up and down
on earth-mother.
Where in this melange do I find
the poem?

God caught me once
that time he was painting
the trees with evening sunlight;
another time, me alone at dusk
in a train, a pair just-married entered
and He made
a garden of their faces bright with blooms.
I went off with those hazy, blushing flowers.
Are you pleased, God, with these?
You must be; why else would
you draw me on again, again,
pointing there and there,
without this life will stop.

Unasked, a bird travelling
a thousand miles
stops by me near a banyan tree.
A lakh light years away, a star,
unasked, winks down at unromantic me.
A child's laughter bursts,
unfurling hope. I have no time to hear.
Rhythms and words abound;
but the poem: where I ask.

Hands raised skyward, great men stand
on mountain tops; their voices,
rolling over minds and hearts,
travel from age to age
resounding through the valleys.
A country of echoes this, not words.
Deafened by their sound, our ears
hear nothing else.

What then? And how?
To flow, a river,
offering its song's murmur to passers-by.

Does the ego wince? Does it seem
parasitic, perhaps, this singing
of other's lives and loves,
spewing out scraps, verbal left-overs?
For a life lived by proxy must I give thanks?
Not quite that either. Surely,
no small thing, thus to be drawn
into others' fullness? What these eyes see,
is that all they see? Eyes, after all,
are not for blind seeing, but drinking in.
Those trees there, bending in the wind,
how beautiful they are.

O scattered green and swaying trees
you leave your fields
and entering through my eyes you trace
intricate designs within;
write tree-ness there.

Eyes, did you see that?
What leapt out from behind my eyes
and turned me into a tree-d and leafy thing?
And so with all the world:
I watch beauty's self emerge through word and rhyme
from flowers and children's laughter.
O possibility, now here, now gone,
are you there or no?

A bend in the road
and headlights make a pool

for girls returning, festive, home,
in the dark of a rainy evening.
An old man's eyes, wondering and mad,
see hope ribbon out their future's path:
their hope the precious life-blood of my poem.
Little time indeed for me
to versify their innocent joy.
I still look on, look for...

UMASHANKAR JOSHI



Miles Upon Miles

Miles and miles and miles pass through me
unmoving and still as the train rushes on.
Those distant hills cut their way in, sinking
in joy. Rivers flow in my veins, and behind
my wide eyes entire lakes dip and drown.
Fields flutter; their tremor brushes my limbs.
Houses spread out through my hands, and huts,
their yards rippling with the imprint of palms.
A creeper strays roofward... and
on that girl's blouse, design-like, sits a butterfly.
Thus much only strung out on memory's line
As miles upon miles pass me through.

Worlds upon worlds pass right through me
bound to turning earth in chains of clay.
The Milky Way, herds of stars and planets,
jostling and wheeling, keep coming. In
leaps the antelope, the hunter behind, the scorpion.
Thirsty, I drink all of space. Storm's dance,
lightning's jabs, and the roar of the clouds,
summer's scorching winds and flowers of spring:
someone in there gulps it all down.
A tear from boundless compassion? — some shooting star.
Earth aspires to light? — a flashing firefly.
Thus much hope only in memory's store as
worlds upon worlds pierce me through.

UMASHANKAR JOSHI



Haiku

Sudden showers
cease; the moon scattered
in wet grass.

Night is dark:
a bright raft,
the small town floats.

On a dry branch
sits a parrot: green
leaves around.

Spring in the dark
go singing: bright
starlight swims.

The golden moon
rises: the sun
turns silvery-red.

Music of the ektara
comes in waves:
words melt.

Secret conversation
of two flowers: darkness
like velvet.

In the sky a song:
*from a bird's wings
dawn breaks.

A butterfly
vanished there: painting
the void.

SNEHRASHMI



I, My Father

An amazing and strange new experience,
Entering for the first time a fatherless house,
An emptiness so musty and so vast.
Familiar objects spoke of earlier lives,
Yet curiously, seemed unfamiliar too.
Discarding travelling clothes, I wore an old
Loincloth of father's, left hanging out to dry.
And freshly bathed and dressed, sat down at prayer.

Reflected in the mirror was father's face,
Marked with sandalwood and ashes. I arose
From mid-day sleep—father's habit—athirst for mail.
Slept in father's cot that night, his very mattress.
And clearly saw my bier, my blazing pyre.
I saw my body burn; I my father!

USHNAS



Doves

Ashad rains
beat down
from a bending
lowering
sky.

Tiles
hold the water
with loving care.

Below the eaves
this nest
these frail
and panting
doves!

Skies entire bend to earth
when *ashad* rains beat down
strike down.
Drenched, unfluttering wings,
how they tremble in
the cold
wind.

Like a dying flame
that blinks,
 eyelids droop and lift
 droop and lift
 on red, red eyes.

Swaying neck's pride all
quite
gone.

No movement
whatever.
 Is the place so cramped then?

Nests, though small, are,
surely,
 big enough?

What crowding
squeezes
 them so?

Wing-spreading saunterer
wanderer of the open sky
 your confused
 mind
 cannot
 deal with
 the whole
 sky
 to be fitted—
 where?
 into what?
 this small nest?

What painful knowledge this?
And therefore
no bounds to
suffering,

When fierce *ashad* rains
beat down
the whole of heaven
bends.

NIRANJAN BHAGAT



Flora Fountain

A glass and concrete jungle;
in its midst always
quiet, comely,
with hope-filled face,
she stands,
Flora,
a dream of spring in her matchless eyes,
holding in both hands stone flowers.
About her, in all corners,
iron butterflies fly round and round
and lifeless insects play.

NIRANJAN BHAGAT



Colaba: Evening

The Cafe Royal: clatter of cups, the clink
Of forks and knives, and trams, Museum-bound.
With silent tread a woman passes by,
Inviting the city; her body's stench
Assaults my nostrils; she reeks of discontent.
Linked couples set me trembling; streaming light
From the Regal bathes my eyes. In the far horizon
An angry setting sun slams shut the doors.
A stunned wind freezes, the sea a sheet of glass.
Emptied in a void, the known world drowns
In darkness. Breath stifled, eyes forced shut,
Mind thrashing, I rush to pound the door
Of darkness. Who pulls me down, or pushes
Me back to my world, to myself, to this 'I'?

NIRANJAN BHAGAT



Night in Bhuleshwar

The bed's silk touch, so soft,
cool breezes from the sea,
and I alone in the house.
Eyelids down, I await my beloved, sleep.
The clock strikes ten...
Evening *arati*; the temple resounds
with drumming; drums everywhere,
and radios' blast turned up.
An earthquake...
 (thought *Sheshnag* has not stirred)
midnight (depressed and drab);
iron wheels crank round circling—
 (desire)...
a blinkered horse on an asphalt road...
O Kurukshetra's wicked ghosts!
A second's quiet? — No such luck.
This room's a belly
 of uncooked food
and a running mouse.
Three hours yet left of night!
While cats miaow in narrow lanes
and passers by cry 'la-Ilaah'...
Beloved sleep...
 you'll have no love making
in this open bazaar.
Modest, timid, you need worldless

soundless, wordless silence,
at ease only in the lonely dark!
Sleep, beloved,
here are the morning's *Brahmasutra* hours.
Milkmaid's anklets,
a faint voice singing *Bhairavi*,
and the day's vegetable prices all in one
intricate mix.
Covers drawn over my head,
I try one last time...
(hands over the eyes don't drive away fear)
Then
the door bell.
Through the crack
the Times...
a new date
a new age.

RAJENDRA SHAH



Years Ago

You who, years ago offended,
turned away,
from where have you appeared
suddenly beside me in this restaurant?
Surprise stands still in my unwinking eyes
like exclamation marks. And you,
your gleeful cheeks flush rose,
your curving waist a wound so sharp
victory lies dismembered, head from trunk; so too defeat.
I offer you coffee; you lift it to your lips,
your face more lovely through its rising steam.
In a gold horizon's
thin and wintry mists
I see two suns send out a single ray.
Sweet racket of tears and blood
sweeps you whirling in,
surging through my veins,
rippling in cells.
As I recall the songs you used to sing
your honeyed voice returns to me in joy.
No past this; this moment's now.
It turns now into past!
Jolting my forgetfulness's trance
does someone come and go? —
I cannot tell.
Here is left only a coffee cup.

RAJENDRA SHAH



Moving House

Rummaging through the house again we found
scraps of Lux soap, a toothbrush, an old broom,
a leaking bucket, tin box, and lidless bottles,
thread and needle, specs (broken), clips and pins!
Taking down the name-plate on the door,
we placed it face down in the departing lorry.
We looked around again one last time at where
those first ten years of married life went by:
our son, a boon so long desired, was born;
from where we took him to the fire's last embrace.
Suddenly from some corner came a voice:
'Ba-Bapu, you've left nothing here but me-'
Our eyes were full of pricking grains of grass;
our leaden feet tied down with iron weights.

BALMUKUND DAVE



Evening Song

Like a bird hanging
from tender leafy tree-tops
this evening sun
on gray slopes rocks to and fro.
The wind hums in the ear of a stream.
Smoke-wisps that rise
from a hut spread out on flower-beds
pass through the sky,
slowly moving, pausing, swaying.
The evening sunlight
rocks itself a little.
Like music's quiet lilt,
a girl swings from the waist;
her fair steps shine like stars.
Coming slowly down the slope
She stands and faces the setting sun.
Here, as night's blackness plays on the grass,
what do I look at:
Love's sweet darkness at play on wet lashes,
or night's lovely darkness at play on this grass?

NALIN RAWAL



Is there Anything to be Said?

Walking slowly that afternoon
and jolted into a run by the whip's crack
on the road that runs from north to south
a buffalo, a number round its neck.
From far east, bearing westward
a bus (so full no man can enter) speeds
like a storm on that asphalt road—
at the crossroads that which had to happen, did.
Bits of flesh in bloody puddles,
broken pieces of two horns,
eyes wide in the void and a rattling sob
— the glance tries to sew it all together.
True, Yama came, eventually.
In this hot weather
while the hide is skinned off the carcass,
the blood rapidly dries.
The bus (new faces now), turning
from the west speeds back.
A stain slowly spreads.
On this subject does anyone have
anything to ask?

HASMUKH PATHAK



Nachiketa

Among
these cows that lick (their last drink done)
mud from the dried-up lake
(there is no more)
and eat residual tufts of uprooted grass
(there's nothing else)
their teeth whole and rattling
like dried autumn leaves
with futile rumination;
whose udders milked long ago
have had no drop for centuries now;
who have given
birth to nothing —
among these innumerable
and (surprise)
 ever-increasing cows
 that cannot die
I a present-day *Nachiketa**
returned from Yama with no boon
stand
 and count.
Black and white and red
and crippled, they emerge.
My father who could have donated them is dead.

The brahmins who could've accepted them aren't there.
And so, among
these multiplying
countless
crippled
cows
I stand
alone.

PRIYAKANT MANIYAR

* Nachiketa, in the *Kathopanishad*, is a young boy who, seeing his father donate useless cows to the brahmins, asks him to whom he will donate his son i.e. Nachiketa himself. His father in anger replies 'To Yamaraja', the Lord of Death. Nachiketa then goes to Yama and is given three boons, the last of which is knowledge of the soul after death. Yama tries to dissuade him from pursuing this, but he persists. The result is the *Kathopanishad*.



The Present

Past and future sliced off
Like *Jatayu's* wings
at one stroke.
Disjuncted and blood-filled,
 they ooze.
Between them a trembling
 present,
 half-dead,
 palpitates.
The fighting is all done.
 Small eyes
watch in anguish
beauty's tender vine, Janaki uprooted,
borne away,
 the *ten-headed* one
 running

PRIYAKANT MANIYAR



Horse

Early dawn; sharp and steady *ashad* rains,
and few people on the roads.
Breathing in vapours of a cup of tea from the tea-stall
I pause, seeing at the kerb a single horse-drawn cab,
drenched and soaking in the ceaseless rain.
Dark skies deepen in its dripping, blinkered leather eyes.
Water, pouring from the sky now turns back.
Nothing dries.
How much can that brush-like mane hold?
Much of this strong rain-water must've flowed away.
Just as well perhaps,
or this horse would have drowned.
As the clouds pour down, one by one,
water slides over its smooth and slicked down hair.
Some rests on its shoulder, some on the load.
In this cold spreading everywhere, when
the tail, and more, the whole body stiffens,
what would a moment's shaking flame not do?
The horse would lower its head, then deeply shivering,
raise it again, and again bend down.
Every limb is helpless, such the gloom
of this one horse.
Of those seven drawing the chariot of the sun,
how did this one lose his way to wander here?

PRIYAKANT MANIYAR



Breath of the Jungle

Breath of the jungle in my breathing
Bones of the hills in my frame
On my breast is the nest of the bulbul
Water from streams in my veins.
 Keen Adivasi arrows on my fingers
 Body trembling in the grass
 Breath of the jungle in my breathing.

My leaves the sun's colour are drinking
Roots suck in the smell of the earth
Yellow butterflies half of my body
Half the crickets on the hearth.
 Part in the light, part darkness
 Part in the sky and part earth
 O breath of the jungle in my breathing

JAYANT PATHI



A Poet's Last Will and Testament

If perchance I should happen to die
Tomorrow at sunrise, remember to say
A tear still rests between these closed eyelids
That must gently be dried or wiped away.

When the winds blow tomorrow remember to tell them
The smile of a girl stolen sometime when young
Is a ripened fruit that waits to be shaken
Down from my branches where it is hung.

Tomorrow when breakers roll in from the shore
And the sea surges forward, remember to say
That the pitiless rock of God in my heart
Waits to be broken by waves in their play.

The moon will rise tomorrow. Remember
To speak of my struggle to set myself free;
A twisting and turning fish on a fish-hook,
I longed to slip downward, sliding into the sea.

When the fires are kindled tomorrow please tell them
My pining shadow on the pyre will lie
Awaiting the flames that leap up to the sky.
That is, if perchance I should happen to die.

SURESH JOSHI



Darkness

I will address your darkness today.
Tenderly it sprouts from lips
and convoluted lies
twisted in the masses of your hair;
A dark full-stop, that mole upon your chin.
My lust, a ranging tiger, will roar down
the forest nestling in your veins.
Stubborn dark, hoarded in your derelict heart,
will fly, freed in eyes of owls; my silence and
your darkness, rubbing, strike bursts of flames
from stony blackness frozen in your eyes.
Guiding your feet through darkness flowing down
from spreading branches, I will turn
myself to darkness breaking into you today.

SURESH JOSHI



Solar

Sweet smelling rays shoot out from
that new-risen orange, the sun;
the neem, buried in the night,
a burst of flashing green;
and roots live coals that spark
off blazing birds.

So long now
since
I looked
at you with
desire.

From here that dangling branch
is a bird winging through the wide sky.
It's *chaitra*, and rising gum drips from tree-trunks.
I seal my letter with this fresh and dripping gum.
I wrap up *vaishakh* in yellow cloth
and send the packet, look! — to you.
I am no scribbler of verses but a walker,
do you see, of these straight paths.

SITANSHU YASHASHCHANDRA



The Ocean

I have seen the ocean before
the gods and the demons stripped it plain.
I have seen the waters in the light of fires below the sea.
Fire and moisture cannot be separated:
Drowning and burning, they are the same.
When I come up from the bottom of the ocean
then my hands hold no fistful of pearls.
 I am not a pearl diver,
 I am a poet:
What is, is there only in my eyes.

SITANSHU YASHASHCHANDRA



Sound cannot be dug out

Sound cannot be dug out
nor silence lifted.
O rebellious friends,
we cannot bury our scattered skulls
nor stitch together
our greying worries.
If so,
how long shall we entreat
this wasteland's cactus hedge
to set afloat
our dreams as white as swans?
Trees have begun to fly, that's true,
but is it not also true,
that, given eyes, we have been deceived?
You my friends
who drink handfuls
from the lake of Saraswati's eyes *
and return to work, tired,
is it not true
that sound cannot be dug out
nor silence lifted?

LABHSHANKER THAKER



After the Rains

Drenched and soaking,
from every limb
earth sheds
charm, drop by
glinting drop;
slowly wiped
by white sunlight:
like Radha who,
bathed in the Yamuna,
dripping beauty,
joyously and
sensuously
wears her clothes.
Drinking in
this loveliness
is perhaps
hidden behind
my eyes and gazing
Krishna Kanhaiya?

LABHSHANKER THAKER



That Afternoon

See, the sarus crane has flown
from the patch at the edge of my field.
Mother, let the buttermilk go back into the pot,
and wrap up the bread.
There's no life left in this tobacco and pipe.
Let the fire smouldering below these ashes
die; and let me
lie down in the shade of the mahua tree.
Never mind if the whole sky
comes pouring down,
or the grass grow as tall as myself.
Hey, you there,
don't let the bullocks draw the plough
over that patch at the edge of my field.

RAVJI PATEL



Movement

No stir of tree-shadows.
Here, peace-drenched
submerged in silence,
even sun-rays slumber.
Flowers drown in sleep.
Scents move thus

this way as
the breeze, drowsy,
slow...ly flie...s.

A butterfly
brushing lightly
past

me

alights

on a flower.

Coloured wings move gently
and then

the sky
half-asleep on a petal
now
rocks and
sways

RAVJI PATEL



Elegy

I

Do you know
O you who have gone away into the Himalayas
that the wind now sweeps my room
the moon lights lamps
and the sun each morning
leaves me a cup of tea
nice and hot.

Dew falls by night
and drop by drop
the pail is filled with water.
Rain dripping down my back
bathes and washes me clean.

Streets dogs stop to see
how I'm doing
and cats who steal the milk
rub themselves lovingly
against my legs.

See, O Himalaya-bound one, how many comforts since
you went away!

But

I want,
tenderly like early rays
on fresh green hills
to touch you, hold you, kiss you,

and opening once again that mysterious cave
lie folded, lapped, hidden entire
and safe inside your womb.
What do you say to that?
you'll come back, won't you?

II

Your sensuality's
immense buildings
have disappeared
in the silent
watches of the night
like God.
No, not God, but like
the wind that daily blows,
and I am left
desolate
baffled.
Like the merchant who
missing the temple *prasad*
then lost his ships
I stand
on the shore of this seething sea,
an oar without a hand.
Tears spring to my eyes
that nothing wipes away.

III

How is it with me
that I can't
find you?
Were my eyes plucked out the instant
you closed yours?

Have both my legs turned stumps?
What curfew halts traffic
 on the path
 of thoughts that come and go?

Why
 can my winged words
not trace
your footprints?
Lost
 in your vacant damp void
 your frozen space
 not again to be found
I may, love, find you again
 now lost to me.

IV

Where did they all go:
passers-by on the street,
children playing in the dust of alleys,
wives in verandahs cutting vegetables,
old women who lit lamps near the tulsi plant,
eyes that read a newspaper,
and feet that pushed the swing,
necks that craned out of windows
curious to know:
 all these things — vanished — where?
Thus my love is midnight darkness
 made dark.
Save the shushing silence
 all is very still.
Like a puppy curled in sleep
tumult rests.

Sleepless eyes roving in the dark.
I flutter,
 a single garment
 forgotten on the clothes-line;
 an empty vessel
 left upside-down on the kitchen shelf.
How is it there's no one here?
I've made a black cat out of my shadow.
I take her out through deserted streets.

V

And now
giving up whether
to drown or float
this fish turns water.

CHINU MODI



Father's First Death Anniversary

Why have you gone so far away from me? Time
pushes you slowly away.
The day's first memory was of others who
without excuse, burst into harsh weeping.
The tie with relatives hadn't then come undone.
At home we talked of only one thing. Friends,
when I met them, would recall times spent with you.
Time has gone by now; I don't remember you as I did
before. When, like you, I sometimes drink two cups of tea,
then memory spills into the heart.
The whole house gradually gathers to my state of mind.
I myself am receding from you. Gently
time is pushing me away.

CHINU MODI



Sounds

I hear
my own voice hoarse
and the muttering of leaves
outside the window.
A new-born kitten's wail
startles midnight,
drifting through hospital wards.
Buses rumble by.
I listen.
But where in all this
has gone the rattle of my death
sounded, heard, a minute ago!

HARINDRA DAVE



What Should I Say?

The night
 called out to me
 as it slid slowly by
 when suddenly in the morning's racket
 nothing could be heard.

When evening comes on
 and night on my shoulder
 lays a gentle hand,
 what shall I say then?

HARINDRA DAVE



The Speck

A speck, dreaming itself the sun,
rising, flying eastward, sinks in the west.
With heated gaze desiring
to dry the water into cloud,
and live, some day, a sun-disc in the sea,
it spins in a whirlpool's dark whorl.
Nearing the lamp,
scorched by the flame,
it asks the hurricane's speed, and beauty of the sky.
All watch, astonished,
the speck rise, struggling, to its feet.

HARINDRA DAVE



To Van Gogh

Van Gogh, I admire you.
You have endured
the hearts' many winters;
finding, true, from time to time
some little warmth.
But how much, how long
this warmth
in the bitter cold?

I see your face now,
its colours and lines.
Between those sculpted lips
is stuck a pipe:
smoke rises there
as from a freshly burning
body on a funeral pyre;
your torn ear re-assembled.

For you
one thought alone.
In your eyes not death,
not life's defeat, but
a tired human face.
You paint no
rivers flowing through
the shameless light of day.

Rather, you make
nights' black stream
go glittering by.
If roses bloom in the air
you turn them to scented paper stars.

A peasant family
gathers to eat
by lamplight
at day's end.
Through you we taste their food.
On canvas fields
your brush, unwearied, .
brings to life
a harvest of human faces;
and blesses
a pubescent girl's
beauty.
You release on paper
little coloured boats
all quite empty...
like yourself.

Your face is like a torn sweater.
Bending by night
over an empty glass
on an old table in a lonely cafe,
songs of experience
come streaming in lines
as you cross time's jungle
like some mad cyclone.

SURESH DALAL



Sound

For ages now, I've lived alone,
densely alone in this city of sounds,
this city of sound.
In this house of sounds decrepit I breathe,
In and out; and out and in.
I'm breathing sound, sound swallows sound.
I myself create this sound;
I'm master builder of this city of sound;
The citadel of this city of sound kisses the sky
 and there a flag unfurls
 and then
through cracks in the wall comes slipping in
the memory of your silence; then
it passes me gently by.
I try
to touch that silence. I hear
sounds crackle and sweat with fear.

If I only may
if perchance I could
meet you, O dweller
of silent space,
if I could only
meet you who only
can dispel

petrified sound,
then, only then
can I move or stir.

There must be an end to this ocean of sound;
a kind of horizon somewhere and there
a secret underground,
sounds underbelly like times underbelly.
I try to tear that soft underbelly,
fierce claws tearing hard crocodile skin.

Will I meet you then, O you who live
in soundless space?
As pieces of my heart sweep by
in the molten flow of sound, O then,
I'll meet the one, that one who dwells
in silence.

RAJENDRA SHUKLA



Delhi

On the fort, a nibbled *rotla*,
sunlight like a raw radish lies.
Stones in Tughlaqabad woo the grass.
Arch in shadow and shadow on arch:
 Khirki Masjid.

Jumma Masjid's string of stairs
pierces the eye like a needle.
Rising from stomach's pit to
gullet — Qutub.
From all corners smells
Of food and meat and blood
and palaces and jails
and yesterdays and centuries.
My breath is of this second.
Today's eye soars into
history and alights on the cracks of
Ghalib's tomb;
strays among Khankhanam's decaying bones of powerful
 lords,
and shrouded in Jahanara's ill fate,
hovers among the graves, the graves.
Still so much dust and fog
you can't tell flesh from stone.

Passing through the womb
of a sleeping dove in Red Fort's western arches,
a ray of sunlight
pokes my eye.
Daybreak still, and
dreams are coupling with truth.
What will the morning bring?

GULAMMOHAMMED SHEIKH



The Dull Ring of Brass...

The dull ring of brass's skin
sobs in the Chaitra breeze.
The ruined breasts of sculpted *yakshis*
are teased by white shadows of the fireflies.
On the stairs of the step-well
the love play of copulating jackals
reaches into the neem-trees tickling the leaves.
Very slowly night
colours the white corpses of day
but the skin's pores show through still.
Rather, like mountain streams, they ooze.
Winds of death,
overladen with love's vapours,
melt into cracks on the roads.
Time's thighs rub against clock-hands in the tower.
Dogs are barking.
Over people asleep on the river's sandbed
slumber builds its tombs.
In the thorns of the babul
from the dying body of the black ant
the emerging soul of a prophet
thinly pining, pining, turns back.
Dogs bark.

GULAMMOHAMMED SHEIKH



What did not Happen

Things were neither hidden, nor were they revealed:
flower-drenched hands somehow didn't smell sweet.

Dreams lingered or didn't perhaps in our eyes:
but ceremonies at home were somehow not ours.

Taking measure, we found ourselves digging the sea:
seeking meaning we found merely shavings and scraps.

A raindrop caught and framed was hung on the wall:
dampness in our rooms since then has not dried.

Red sea-flowers bloomed, swayed and were shed:
green twigs burning but no smoke in the air.

The portent today was water in sand:
but pieces of a life still broken lie around.

Don't say, Ramesh, it didn't rain today:
Say: perhaps it did, but we didn't feel the rain.

RAMESH PAREKH



Mother

The wind is teasing
the ripening wheat,
and, mother, I think of you...
Still believing that
the sun's first rays
melt into tender grain
so when it grows
it turns gold,
I hold the wheat
and feel the sunlight warm upon my palm
and remember you, mother.

Walking to the field's edge
in the cold dawn,
your gaze upon my cracked heels
was a peacock's feather
grazing my cheek.
The evening light
glinted in your eyes
and shadows gathered there
before darkness fell.

I never saw you weep
and yet, see,
when the rain pours down
I think of you.

Mysteriously,
as evening comes on,
our village glows, who knows how,
like a lit lamp in my mind.
I seem to hear your voice calling from the kitchen,
and, mother, I think of you.

MADHAV RAMANUJ



The River

Behind my face
in the mirror
still flows the river
Sabarmati.
Hesitating, directionless
it hovers above my sleep.
Mingling with the morning mist,
somewhere below the bridge
it founders,
and in noises of waking
from all corners, loses speed.
Suddenly it disappears
in a sky as old as this city
and returns sliding
to foothills
preserved in memory.
Actually its floods
have risen from the bottom
all the way to the
walls of our house.
But before we open the doors
and come out, they have always
already receded.
At some moment outside this present
through a window left open
its image floats towards the mirror

and flows as far as the Jog falls,
yes, all the way to the Jog falls,
Double images of those waterfalls
seen in times now past
are still before our eyes.
We remember them, yes, but now
we hear the Jog falls are drying up
like this river.
We would like to believe
that the river will flood
but from behind the wall at dawn
or through half-open eyes at night
we see that this river
Sabarmati
is drying.

RAGHUVIR CHAUDHARY



Soaked in Shravan

Tree that sleeps, wind that wakes,
Wind watching over sleeping tree;
And I, like the sky,
An observer of their loving tie.
Fearing to trouble
The quiet, this shravan afternoon,
The sky-kissing peace of the arjun tree
Brooding on these brimming banks,
That tall blue mountain mirrored
In the flowing Balaram,
I cast my glance to where
The cloud is shifting.
A washed sun-beam touches
The breeze that lies on that last branch
And the tree springs to life.
From green shades below
The tree gathers up this child of a breeze,
Rocks it gently in its arms as
Milk rises from root to leaf-tip.
Squirrels scurry, their tails erect,
In agile competition.
See, as stillness embraces the sky
Darkness comes down in a line like
A row of ants filing homeward.
The sky now sleeps in a grass-shadowed field.

RAGHUVIR CHAUDHARY



Birds of Ice

We are birds of ice, we melt
in the heat of the summer winds;
our naked bodies drip
into lotuses as we call.

We shed noon's heat with our feathers
and we fly.

Being birds of ice we melt
with every twittering cry.

We paint the space between
the green woods and the dry woods.
As evening drops from the sky
we're a thread of gold in the air.
Night falls and we call, we call
like koels.

Birds of ice, we melt
with every twittering cry.

ANIL JOSHI



No Leaves Now

No leaves are left on these branches
you can't scare me with talk of the fall.

When Ashad days sweep away
the drifting birds and the leaves

and I seem a withered mango stump,
a tree is still growing inside.

I'm not straw woven into a nest:
you can't scare me with talk of the lightning.

My branches, yes, they are worn:
a tiny red red ant is a burden;

they drop one by one and I ask
how long, how much longer now.

I'm not water turned into ice:
you can't scare me with talk of the sun.

No leaves hang now from my branches.
I'm not afraid of the autumn.

ANIL JOSHI



Hospital Ward

Night wakes here in fits and starts,
a patient groaning in a bed.
Breaths, irregular, come and go,
like autumn's evening winds you'd say.
Each held within pain's cell
waiting for an opening door.
Tap-tapping at the shell, the life within
strains toward the world and light.
As if marching to battle the weary sick
are made safe in elaborate ways.
And consciousness, like a sulking child,
lies curled in sleep. Night wakes
here in wispy fits and starts.

JAYA MEHTA



Afternoon Tea

Far away
a sun-horse breathes heavily
through the branches of the gulmohur.
From the cafe radio a song
dissolves desire, blending
through the afternoon haze
as milk in tea,
words flavouring the wind.
All the world, it seems,
in the clatter of these tea-cups!
I linger over my afternoon tea,
You-and-I-both
hang suspended in smoke-rings
rising from cigarette-ends.
In the distance
the sun-horse
weighs heavily down
the drooping branches of the gulmohur.

YOSEPH MACWAN



Good if Some Clouds do not Rain

Good, if sometimes, a cloud does not rain.
When it's heavy with water
and the earth's pull very strong,
the whole a full stomach
ready to burst,
then, when darkness stands planted
on the threshold, breathing arrested
in the footsteps of the wind,
then, what fun
to keep the future waiting!
Is it every dream's duty to come true?
Every flower prove useful in fruit?
A tree flourish in each flower and leaf?
Flowers can grace a void's bounds;
words resound in a butterfly's silence.
With half-open eyes in dim radiance to
cry halt to a scream:
delaying the poem can be fun!
And that's why I say
sometimes a cloud need not rain.

CHANDRAKANT SHETH



Sojourn in Exile

In the regions of this huge city of Virat
I wander like one thrown away,
unrecognized, an exile. My many forms
merge, melting into crowds; myself
a crowd with faces as if missing,
lost beyond recall.

Yet when I hear from somewhere
the clatter of dice thrown down,
or smells of food assault my nose,
or anklet bells beat out a *taal* in dance,
a horse somewhere is tossing back its mane,
or cows break free and run with tails held high—
then from every body part
my lonely secret cries aloud,
helpless with dreams of a golden throne now lost.

Banishment's cruel enough;
at times like these
it grows past bearing.
I see before my eyes the queen of the world,
a slave now alone and with no help,
walk by, her head bent low,
a trembling bird in Kichaka's lustful gaze.

O you who keep me thus in ignorance,
O unknowable one,
tell me how, how can I attain
your measured, self willed state?
Where will this sobbing self find answer,
answer to still this mind?

Echo awakens echo: *uttar, uttar*,
resounds through endless valleys.
Who flings it back in question form
again, again?

From wordless inmost silence
through revoling Uttara: Uttar: Answer: Reply,
a moment comes to challenge succeeding breaths.
I see then standing in a chariot
Uttar, and in his hands the reins.
Chariot wheels roll on the battle field,
and ignorance finds an answer, exile ends.

How those weapons glitter hidden in the shami tree!

MAKARAND DAVE



In the Sitting Room

I arrange
the sitting room,
make various changes,
with scrupulous care
re-arrange my things:
new place for lamp and sofa;
fresh window-curtains;
wall-to-wall carpeting
in place of the old *durri*.
Pleased with the room,
everything just right,
my mind, all of a sudden, slips:
where, in all this, do I fit?
Seeking a centre where I can sit down
comfortably, I find myself at the window,
watching the street below, standing.

PANNA NAIK



Snapshot

Today I'm happy;
Why I cannot tell.
Can this joy
be photographed, framed,
and hung upon
a bedroom wall?

PANNA NAIK



Flaming Air

I breathe in the flaming air, my friends,
I strike the flint on stone.
Spiced, flavoured thoughts of a thousand years
are my stuffing; I am a corpse, my friends,

A mummy; I laugh with a rattling laugh.
I've inherited only teeth and claws;
I bark in a borrowed tongue, my friends,
I bark in a borrowed tongue.

I am a stone that crashes against
the glittering glass of this mirror-studded town;
I widen it inch by inch, my friends, I am the space
between.

In the morning I tend my weapons, my friends

I test the edge of the blades on my palm.
I'm a python in the darkness of night.
My tail is in my mouth, my friends, it is myself I devour.
My neck is in a noose; perhaps someone

Else is pulling the rope, my friends.
I dangle in a no-man's land.
Not wishing to die, I die, my friends, not wanting it, I die.

SAROOP DHURUV



Letter to Taslima

It's your head they want, Taslima,
isn't it,
your head?

How can they know
that our wrists, our fingers,
our pens, our punching fists
are all?

There's nothing else, nothing.

Tell the dolts this trunk,
even this headless trunk,
will
still

strain and fight
and write and write and write...

SAROOP DHURUV



What do You Think?

Regularly
The guillotine of the horizon
chops down the day,
and the sun,
a severed head,
tumbling, rolls away from the trunk.
Surely the goddess is pleased:
a perfect day
With 32 *lakshanas**
offered up daily
by the ringing guillotine.
So many offerings
over thousands of years
and what has come of them?
So then...
are the sacrificial rites not right?
or the world unworthy of redemption?
or the sun short of 32 *lakshanas*?

SANSKRITIRANI DESAI

*32 lakshanas refers to a person possessing the 32 qualities of the perfect man.



Lack

There is this to say, that
something's been lost in the sky.
I scan the yellowing dark,
eyes freezing,
mouth agape and dumb,
limbs torn in fright,
and I see, on a lump of sugar,
an ant petrified.
Clothes hang lifeless from the peg.
In the tower clock-hands droop and fall
But nothing happens.
The squeak of bats locked in light bulbs
torment me.
Living creatures' screams buried below frightful buildings
and mad prisoners' dead laughter
torment me.
Ghosts of savage desire
my own dead shapes
melt into air, my own remains.
But nothing happens.
School-bags slung from shoulders,
children go to school.
Mother makes *rotis* in the kitchen.
I kiss my loved one's cheek in the evening.

But nothing happens.
From the sky, it has to be said,
something's gone — it's lost.
I was born, and as I was born
something, surely,
died.

PRABODH PARIKH



The City...

This city at play on the river's sandbed
may vanish and never flash on memory's screen.

Let me breathe in deeply this sea of scents,
the smell of this fresh, wet mud.

Who knows if I will ever see again
these familiar faces, this glance, this glancing smile.

This window, this street, this wall, this house,
these lanes — eyes, have your fill of the city.

Embrace these loved ones. Who knows
what final partings lie in the years ahead.

O you who bid us goodbye, you live in our eyes;
what matter then if we find no fellow-travellers.

Touch this country's dust to your head, O Adil,
you may never ever tread this dust again.

ADIL MANSURI



This Moment...

This moment's passing may take years.
So too unveiling this face.

Expunge if you will reflections in the glass.
Breaking the mirror takes too long.

Unwise to snap this lotus-stemmed silence.
Mending will take many years.

This dream is a dripping, melting pillar of ice.
Uprooting the pillar takes too long.

Words carry me, fortunate me, along to your city.
Walking there would take years, much too long.

• MANOJ KHANDERIA



When Amar Died

When Amar died
The sky did not grow sad
The moon did not seek out
a silent space to sob, away from the crowding stars.
The neighbours did not turn down
the volume on their radio sets.
Companies did not edge
their letter-paper with black.
Business deals in the share-market
did not observe a minute's silence.
And
one day, in the morning newspapers
appeared an announcement that
family members regretted their inability
to reply to the many letters
personally
when Amar died.

VIPIN PARIKH



Motisari Forest

The wind from distant places
preens its feathers on the Rayana tree,
and tired, sheds with its quills fragrances
floating in the air of different lands.
Passionately red like a cock, the sun
sets among the trees of the wood.
The blue of kingfisher and jay-
is it of water or sky?
The lapwing's stately tread,
the kohl-smeared eyes of the jungle mynah,
and the orange crest of the hoopoe
gently, gently dissolve in the darkness.
Even trees gather up the spreading shadows
and slowly this tawny forest
glints green like the neck of the dove.
The rest is bound to the mist
like little bells in the browning wind:
nightjar and owlet, wandering nightbird's sounds,
and chime of the cricket's anklets.
Uneasy smells of gorad, harma and babul
are melting into the dark.
Nymphs of the wood and water come to splash
in the rippling blackness of the lake.
Unexpectedly, like sad memories of an earlier life,

the papeeha's plaintive cry
rises like a faint moon and subsides in darkness.
In the blurred light of the planets,
the forest's exhalations, the earth's hazy darkness,
these two wide-open eyes see a dream.

YAGNESH DAVE



In a Refugee Camp

When I was about seventeen or so
my mother would frequently say
this is no home we live in
but a lodge; everyone for himself,
and all quite alone.

I believe we lived not in a lodge
but in a refugee camp
where each one, exiled from home,
has arrived by chance in the middle of the night.
We did not know who
was on whose side nor who
would swop side nor who
We offered each other
limited information.

We had no faith at all
in anything.

After laughing together
we would grow tense.

'Purpose served,'
That was the one fixed truth of our lives.

UDAYAN THAKKER

Notes on the Poets

Niranjan Bhagat (b. 1926) was educated in Ahmedabad and at Elphinstone College, Bombay. He has taught English to many generations of college students. He retired as Head, Department of English, St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad. One of the leading poets of the post-Independence era, he has published many collections of his poems, *Chhandolay* (1947), *Kinnari* (1950), *Alpaviram* (1954), *33 Kavyo* (1958).

Vipin Parikh (b. 1930) was born and educated in Bombay where he still lives. His two collections of poems are *Ashanka* (1975) and *Talash* (1980).

Chinu Modi (b. 1939) was born in Vijapur and holds degrees in Gujarati, Hindi and Law. He has worked as lecturer, scriptwriter, and freelancer in advertising. He has been the editor of *Hreigh*, *Kruti* and *Unmoolan* and was associated with the Hotel Poets Group. Poet, dramatist, novelist, story writer, and critic, Chinu Modi's collections include: *Shapirvan* (1976), *Deshvato* (1971), *Kshano na Mehalman* (1972), *Darpan di Galima* (1975).

Priyakant Maniyar (1927-1976) was born in Viramgam and received his primary education in Amreli. He ran his family business for many years. His published collections of poems are *Pratik* (1953), *Ashabda Ratri* (1959), *Sparsh* (1966), *Samip* (1972), *Prabalgati* (1974) and *Lilero Dhal* (1979).

Harindra Dave (1930-1995) was born in Khambhara village of Kachh, and educated at Bombay University. He was the editor of the daily *Janshakti* from 1951 to 1962. He was also

the editor of *Samarpan* magazine and the daily *Janmabhoomi*. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978. His published collections of poems include *Samay* (1972), *Sooryopanishad* (1975) and many others.

Suresh Dalal (b. 1932) was born in Thana, has a Ph.D in Gujarati Literature, and has taught for many years in Bombay colleges. Poet, critic, essayist and editor, he received the Ranjitram Suvarna Chandrak in 1983. He has among his important collections of poems, *Ekant* (1966), *Tarikh Nu Ghar* (1971), *Nam Lakhi Daun* (1975), *Romanch* (1978), *Visanqati* (1980), *Ek Anami Nadi* (1982), *Koi Rasta Ni Dhare Dhare* (1985) and *Kavya Srushti* (1986).

Saroop Dhruv (b. 1948) was born in Ahmedabad, and educated at St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, Gujarat University, and Gujarat Vidyapeeth. She has been a Gujarati language teacher at the St. Xavier's Education Center since 1974. *Mara Hath ni Vat* and *Salagti Havao* are two of her published collections of poems.

Ravji Patel (1939-1968) was born in Vallabh pura village of Kheda. Novelist, story writer and poet, he died at an early age in 1968. His only collection of poems *Angat* was published posthumously in 1970.

Suresh Joshi (1921-1986) was born in Valod (Bardoli) and educated at Elphinstone College. He began his teaching career at D.J. Singh College in Karachi. After Independence he worked in Vallabh Patel Mahavidyalay. For the next twenty years after 1951 he worked as lecturer, professor and head of the Gujarati Department at the M. S. University, Baroda, Responsible for the new existential trends in Gujarati poetry, he received the Ranjitram suvarna Chandrak in 1971. His collections of poems are *Upajati* (1956), *Pratyancha* (1961), *Itara* (1973), *Tathapi* (1980).

Panna Naik (b. 1933) was born in Bombay and educated at Bombay University. She has been teaching at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia since 1962. *Pravesh* (1975), *Philadelphia* (1980), *Nisbat* (1985) are her three published collections of poems.

Gulammohammed Sheikh (b. 1937) was born in Vadhvan and holds degrees in Fine Arts from M. S. University, Baroda. He received his A.R.C.A. from Royal School of Art, London in 1966. A well-known painter, Gulam mohammad Sheikh is at present the head of the department of Fine Arts, M.S. University. He received the Padmashri award in 1983. His published collection of poems is titled *Athava* (1974).

Anil Joshi (b. 1940) was born in Gondal and educated in Ahmedabad. He has been the chief adviser for Gujarati with the Language Development Project of the Bombay Municipal Corporation since 1977. An eminent essayist and poet, he has two collections of poems *Kadach* (1970), *Baraf na Pankhi* (1981). *Statue* (1988) and *Pavan ni Vyaspidhe* (1988) are his two collections of essays.

Madhav Ramanuj (b. 1945) was born in Pachham, Ahmedabad and educated at the C. N. College of Fine Arts. He has worked in the editorial departments of *Akhand Anand* magazine and other monthly publications, and as designer for publishing companies. He has been principal of the applied art department of the C. N. College of Fine Arts since 1973. His published collection of poems is entitled *Tame*.

Ramesh Parekh (b. 1958) was born in Amreli and has been long associated with the District Panchayat, Amreli. A fine poet, Ramesh Parekh received the Sahitya Akademi award for *Vetan Sood Beej* in 1994. His collected poems are titled *Chho Akshar nun naam*.

Udayan Thakker (b. 1955) was born in Bombay. His first book of poems *Ekayann* won the Jayant Pathak prize for the best book of poetry of the year. He has published five story books for children that won the Gujarat Sahitya Academy award and also the NCERT National Award for the best work in children's literature.

Sanskritirani Desai (b. 1958) holds degrees in Statistics and Business Administration. She has two published collections of poems *Suryoj Suryo* and *Sapna Vatemarguo*, and has translated many Russian and English poets into Gujarati. She has been a recipient of several prestigious awards.

Sitanshu Yashashchandra (b. 1941) was born in Bhuj and educated at St. Xavier's College, Bombay and the Bombay University. He was a recipient of Fulbright and a Ford Fellowship. He has been Head of the Gujarati department at M. S. University, Baroda since 1983. His published collections of poems are: *Odysseus nun Halesu* (1974), *Sanskruti* (1970), and *Jatayu* (1986).

Labhshanker Thaker (b. 1935) was born in Medala. He has taught Gujarati in Ahmedabad colleges and is also a practitioner of Ayurvedic medicine. Novelist, dramatist and poet, he received the 'Narmad Suvarn Chandrak' in 1962. His collections of poems are: *Vahi Jati Pacchal ramya Ghosha* (1965), *Manas ni Vat* (1968), *Mare Nam Ne Darvaje* (1972), *Boom kagal man Kora* (1974), *Pravahan* (1968) and *Laghro*.

Yoseph Macwan (b. 1940) was educated at Gujarat University and he has been a teacher of Gujarati in C. N. Vidyalyay since 1968. His collections of poems include: *Swagar* (1969), and *Suraj no Hath* (1983). He has also written poetry for children and published critical essays and translation.

Umashankar Joshi (1911-1988) was born in Idar and left Gujarat College to join the Satyagraha Movement in which he was involved till 1934. Educated later at Elphinstone College, Bombay, he worked as a teacher in schools, and thereafter as a lecturer in Gujarati at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. He was founder and director of the School of Languages and Literature, Gujarat University and in 1966 he was appointed Vice-Chancellor, Gujarat University, an office which he held for two terms. From 1970-1976 he was a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha. He has published ten collections of poems. These are: *Vishwashanti* (1931), *Gangotri* (1934), *Nishith* (1939), *Prachina* (1944), *Atithya* (1946), *Vasantvarsha* (1954), *Mahaprasthan* (1965), *Abhigna* (1967), *Dharavastra* (1981) and *Saptapadi* (1981). His volumes of criticism are: *Abhiruchi*, *Shakespeare* and *Kavi ni Sadhana*. The leading poet of the Independence – post-Independence period, he received many awards in his life time: the Rajitram Suvarna Chandrak (1939), the Narmad Suvarna Chandrak (1947), the Jnanpith award (1968) and Soviet Land Nehru award (1979).

Rajendra Shukla (b. 1942) was born in Junagadh. He was educated at L. D. Arts College, Ahmedabad, and taught in different colleges till 1982. He received the 'Uma-Sneharashmi' award for 1980-81. His two collections of poems are: *Komal Rishabh* (1970) and *Antar Gandhar* (1981).

Jaya Mehta (b. 1932) was born in Bhavnagar. She is the co-editor of *Sudha* and *Vivechan* and teaches at the S.N.D.T. University, Bombay. Her collections of poems are *Venetian Blinds* (1978), *Ek Divas* (1982), *Akashman Tarao Chhup Chhe* (1985). Her two volumes of criticism are: *KavyaZankhi* (1985) and *Anusandhan* (1986).

Prabodh Parikh (b. 1945) was born in Kheda and educated in Gujarat and Oklahoma University. A lecturer since 1974, he has held exhibitions of his paintings in Mumbai, Oklahoma and San Francisco.

Nalin Rawal (b. 1933) was born in Ahmedabad. He taught for some years in Bharuch and Nadiad and was Principal, B.D. Arts College in Ahmedabad thereafter. He has published two collections of short stories, and a collection of poems *Udgar* (1962).

Raghuvir Chaudhary (b. 1938) was born in Bapupura and educated at St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad and Gujarat University from where he got his Ph.D. in Hindi in 1979. He has been lecturer in the Hindi Department of School of Languages, Gujarat University since 1977. He was the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi award in 1977. A well-known novelist, he is the author of *Purvarag* (1964), *Paraspar* (1969) and *Premansh* (1982). His two published collections of poems are *Tamasa* (1967) and *Vehata Vruksh Pavan ma* (1984).

Natwarlal Pandya 'Ushnas' (b. 1920) was born in Vadodara and educated at M. S. University, Vadodara. He was Principal, Arts College, Valsad from 1968 to 1980. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1976. His volumes of poetry are *Prasoon* (1955), *Nepathye* (1964), *Ardra* (1959), *Manomudra* (1960), *Truna no Graha* (1964), *Spand ane Chhand* (1968) and *Ashvath* (1975).

Balmukund Dave (1916 - 1993) was born in Vadodara and joined the Sastu Sahitya Vardhak Karyalaya after matriculation. He worked as a journalist in *Navjivan* for many years and is now the editor of *Lokjivan*. He received the Kumar Chandrak in 1949. His poems have appeared in *Sahvas* edited by Suresh Dalal. He has published a collection of poems *Parikrama* (1955).

Makarand Dave (b. 1922) was born in Gondal. He left Rajkot Arts College to join the Satyagraha Movement in 1942. Associated with Kumar, *Urminavarachana* and *Jayahind*, he worked as a literary journalist. He received the Ranjitram Suvarna Chandrak in 1979. His published collections of poems are *Tarana* (1951), *Jayabharee* (1952), *Goraj* (1957), *Soorajmukhi* (1961), *Sangnya* (1964) and *Sangati* (1968).

'Adil' Fakirmohammed Mansuri was born in Ahmedabad. He has been a businessman, a journalist in English and Gujarati magazines like *Topic* and *Anjana* as well as a copywriter. He emigrated to the USA in the 1970s. His published collections of ghazals are *Valank* (1963), *Pagrav* (1966) and *Satat* (1970).

Manoj Khanderia (b. 1943) was born and educated in Junagadh. He worked as a part-time lecturer in Law and is practising as an advocate since 1968. His collections of ghazals are *Achanak* (1970) and *Atkal* (1979).

Zinabhai Desai 'Sneharashmi' (1903-1991) interrupted his formal studies to join the Non Co-operation Movement led by Gandhiji. He completed his education at Gujarat Vidyapith where he was lecturer in History and Political Science. He was Principal, Central School, Bombay and was the founder and Principal of the C. N. Vidyavihar, Ahmedabad. He introduced the *haiku* into Gujarati poetry. *Arghya* (1935), *Panghat* (1948), *Atit ni pankh manthi* (1974), *Kshitije iyan lambavvo haath* (1984), *Nijlila* (1984) and *Soneri chaand, Rupei Sooraj* are his published volumes of poetry.

Jayant Pathak was born in Rajgad and educated at M. S. University, Vadodara. He was received the Kumar Chandrak, the Ranjitram Suvarna Chandrak and the Sahitya Akademi Award. His collections of poems are: *Garma* (1954), *Vismay*

(1963), *Sarg* (1969), *Sanket* (1960), *Mrugaya* (1983) and *Shooli par sej* (1988).

Tribhovandas Luhar 'Sundaram' (1908-1991) was born in Amod. He was educated at Gujarat Vidyapith and worked in 'Jyoti Sangh' from 1935-1945, when he went to live at the Aurubindo Ashram, Pondicherry along with his family. He received the Ranjitram Suvarna Chandrak in 1943 and the Sahitya Akademi award in 1968. His collections of poems are: *Koya Bhagatni Kadavi Vani*, *Garibo na Gito* (1933), *Kavya Mangala* (1933) and *Vasudha* (1939).

Hasmukh Pathak (b. 1930) was born in Palitana and educated at the Gujarat College, Ahmedabad. *Nameli Sanj* (1958) and *Sayujya* are his published collections of poetry.

Rajendra Shah (b. 1913) was born in Kapadvanj, and joined the Non Co-operation movement in 1930. After receiving his B.A. in Philosophy from M. S. University, Vadodara, he taught in the schools of Ahmedabad. He received the Ranjitram Suvarna Chandrak in 1956 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1964. His published collections of poems are: *Dhvani* (1951), *Shant Kolahal* (1962), *Vishad ne Saad* (1979), *Kshan je Chirantan* (1968), *Madhyama* (1977), *Dakshina* (1979) and *Patralekha* (1981).

