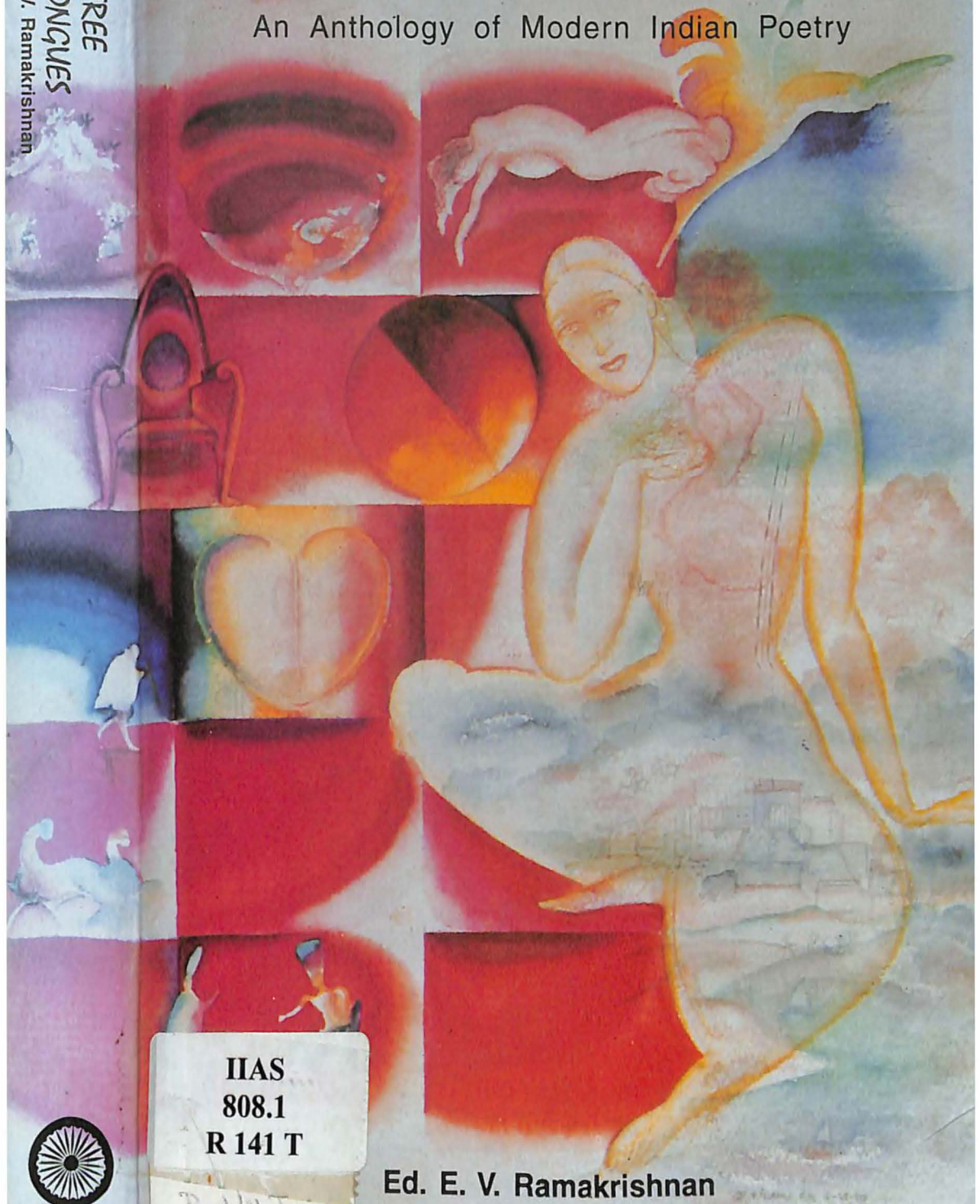


THE TREE OF TONGUES

An Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry

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Ed. E. V. Ramakrishnan



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Edited by
E.V. RAMAKRISHNAN



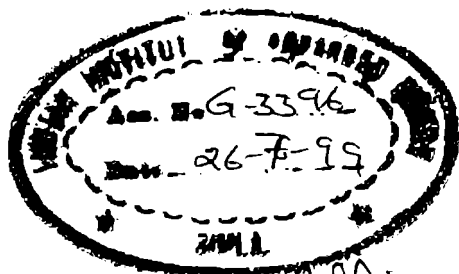
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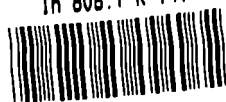
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Foreword

The Tree of Tongues is intended as a companion volume of E.V. Ramakrishnan's *Making It New* which the Institute published in 1995. *Making It New* was a critical study of "modernism in Malayalam, Marathi and Hindi Poetry". While the present volume eminently serves its intended purpose, it does more than that. It has an independent life of its own; besides it includes a wonderful selection of Gujarati poems which did not come under the purview of *Making It New*. Professor Ramakrishnan has made his selection with characteristic meticulousness, and I have no doubt at all that he played a major role, during the many discussions he held with the translators, in ensuring the "aptness" of the translation in many places. Many readers will, I am sure, agree with me that the publication of this anthology of poems is a major event in literary scene of contemporary India.

MRINAL MIRI

•

The Tree of Tongues

The lord of the hill,
The lord of the mouthless hill
Stood silently scanning the sky

And the goddess frowned
The good goddess lifted the sword
And she chopped off the root

The tongue tree had a gash
The gash spurted blood
The blood sprouted leaves

A thousand tongue leaves
Each leaf put forth truth
All those buried truths were out

And the tree spread out
The tree of tongues, far and wide
Far and wide, the tree of tongues

The folks put the name
To the land where it stood
The great tree of tongues:

The land of tongues: Navaya
The sacred land of tongues: Thirunavaya

[Last section of "The Tree of Tongues"
by K. Satchidanandan]

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Acknowledgements

A volume of this kind is largely the creation of translators. I am extremely grateful to the translators for their permission to use their works in this anthology. I also dedicate this volume to the invisible translator who builds bridges across languages and cultures and makes dialogue possible in a complex society like India.

I would like to put on record the help and support I have received from Prof. Mrinal Miri, Director, IAS, Shimla and Dr. K. Satchidanandan, Secretary, Sahitya Akademi. I am particularly thankful to Prof. Mrinal Miri for contributing a 'Foreword' to this volume. I am also greatly indebted to Prof. Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh for permitting me to use one of his paintings on the cover of the book. There are several friends such as Prof. Jaidev, Dr. P.P. Raveendran, Dr. Santosh Bhoomkar, Dr. Pradeep Deshpande and K.G. Sankara Pillai to be thanked for various kinds of help. I desist from naming all of them since it will look very formal. Working for this anthology gave me opportunities to interact with a very large number of translators and poets several of whom have become close friends in the process. If any name is inadvertently left out from the biographical notes provided at the end, I apologize for the same and promise to correct it at the earliest possible opportunity. I am also grateful for the help rendered by Dayanandan, Mahe in preparing the manuscript of this volume through several revisions.

The original title and the year of publication of the poems have been given immediately after the name of the translator, at the end of each poem. When the year of publication of the poem is not available, I have given the year in which the anthology containing the poem is published.

I would like to thank the editors and publishers of the following books and journals where the poems mentioned against them appeared in translation for the first time:

Indian Literature

No.142 (Mar.-Apr.1991) "The Sea", "Orpheus" and "The Woman"
by Sitanshu Yashaschandra.

- No.151 (Sept.-Oct.1992) "The Slant" by Savithri Rajeevan.
- No.158 (Nov.-Dec.1993) "The Animal Trainer" by Vijayalakshmi; "Third World Thoughts" by Anwar Ali; "The Cobbler" and "Voice vs. Voice" by Udayan Thakker.
- No.159 (Jan.-Feb.1994) Special Issue on Gujarati Dalit Writing: "A Man of No Consequence" by Yoseph Macwan; "When Nadir Shah Arrived" by Praveen Gadvi; "Identity" by Yashvant Vaghela; "It is Silent, My Friends" by Mangal Rathod.
- No.163 (Sept.-Oct.1994) "Death of a Rogue Elephant" and "Behold These Sheep on the Road" by N.N. Kakkad; "I met Walt Whitman Yesterday" by K. Ayyappa Paniker; "Boiled Eggs", "Drink Not Your Mother's Milk O Child" and "The Pumpkin" by Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan; "Photos in Various Poses" and "The Trees of Cochin" by K.G. Sankara Pillai; "Freedom" by Balachandran Chullikkad; "Ship" by D. Vinayachandran; "The Fleeting Sun" and "Baptism" by A. Ayyappan.
- No.174 (July-Aug.1996) "Insight": 4th section from K. Ayyappa Paniker's 'Southbound'.
- No.176 (Nov.-Dec.1996) "Vigil" by Narayan Surve; "Old Newspapers" and "The Fuse" by Arun Kolatkar; "The Being Alive of Broken Threads", "Restless Souls of Trees", and "Untitled" by Dilip Chitre; Poems by N.D. Mahanor; "Granny" and "Farewell" by Bhalachandra Nemade; "A Notebook of Poems" and "Autobiography" by Namdeo Dhasal; "Women" by Chandrakant Patil; "From Within the Paper-weight of Onliness" by Manohar Oak; "Metropolis" by Malika Amar Sheikh; "The Sleepless One" by Vasant A Dahake; "Poem" by Anuradha Patil; "About School" and "Grandfather" by Bhujang Meshram; "The Indebted" and "The Pleasure Bazaar" by Keshav Meshram.
- No.181 (Sept-Oct.1997) "Language" by Sitanshu Yashaschandra; "Sunlight" by Labhshankar Thaker; "One Afternoon" by Ravji Patel; "Delhi" by Gulam Mohammed Sheikh; "Speakers of Common Speech"; "God and the World" and "Aphasia" by Kanji Patel; "Afternoon Tea" by Yoseph Macwan; "Mutation" by Kamal Vora.

Haritham

- No.1 "The Prison" by Ayyappa Paniker.
- No.3 "In This Season" by Narayan Surve

“Audit” by Pralhad Chendvankar
No.5 “Bhagavatha” by Vijayalakshmi

SETU

Vol.1, No.1 (1986) “From Angat” by Ravji Patel

Vol.3, No.1 (1988) “The Clock Has Stopped” by Labhshankar Thaker

Survival ed. by Daniel Weissbort and Girdhar Rathi and published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi: “Hindi”, “Privacy” and “Cycle-Rickshaw” by Raghuvir Sahay; “Description of the Missing One”, “Horoscope” by Kunwar Narayan; “While We were Discussing the Political Significance of the Drought” and “One Should See One’s Own Home from Far off” by Vinodkumar Shukla; “Diary” and “Master” by Girdhar Radhi; “Good for a Lifetime” and “Poem of Paper” by Mangalesh Dabral.

People Hanging From Pegs 1976-81 by Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena (Tr. by Vijay Munshi) Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi: “Hand-cart Full of Words”, “Shoes I-IV” and “I Won’t Allow the Sun to Set Any More”.

Tri-Quarterly: “Twenty Years after Independence” and “The City, Evening, and an Old Man: Me” by Dhoomil. Translated by Vinay Dharwadker.

Poetry Festival India ed. Shrikant Verma (ICCR, 1985): “Magadh”, “The Lichhavis”, “A Blessed End” and “Kosala Lacks in Ideas” by Shrikant Verma (all translated by Mrinal Pande).

Bahuvachan ed. by Krishna Baldev Vaid, J. Swaminathan and Ashok Vajpeyi (Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal): “Vasantsena” by Shrikant Verma, translated by Krishna Baldev Vaid.

The Tongue Tree of Poetry

Every anthology tells a story of its own—a story of omissions and exclusions, likes and dislikes, receptions and rejections. The present one is going to be no exception. A collection of 136 poems by 52 poets cannot exhaustively project the diversity of voices and themes available in the poetry of four major Indian languages namely Malayalam, Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi in a period spanning a quarter of a century. Since this is meant to be a companion volume to my comparative study of modernism presented in *Making It New: Modernism in the Poetry of Malayalam, Marathi and Hindi* (ILAS, 1995), my choice of poems has been further dictated by the trajectory of modernism outlined there. However, poetry is not written to illustrate critical arguments. I hope this volume speaks to the general reader as well. Poetry can make things happen.

In his controversial introduction to a recent anthology of Indian writing, while castigating the prose of Indian languages in the last fifty years for its inferior quality, Salman Rushdie had to grudgingly admit that ‘the rich poetic traditions of India continued to flourish in many of the sub-continent’s languages’ during the last 50 years though he had no space for them (Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West 1997: xi). Several anthologies of translations from Indian poetry are needed if its range and reach are to be clearly understood. Poetry, unlike fiction, has greater ‘genre-memory’ and is deeply implicated in its past. This makes poetry translation difficult if not impossible. However, modernist poetry written in Indian languages has greater translatability since it seldom uses traditional metres or syntax. This is not to forget exceptions such as Kolatkar in Marathi, Ravji Patel in Gujarati or Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan in Malayalam. Their richly intertextual poems refer back to earlier poetic traditions creating resonances that are lost in translation. But it can be safely said that modernist Indian poetry has produced a considerable body of eminently translatable poems.

A redefinition of the paradigms of modernism has been underway in Indian literatures during the three decades in which the poems anthologised here were written. There has always been a radical centrifugal impulse in Indian literary culture which looks towards the resources of the regional and the folk experience and forms. In the

post-1960 period, this subaltern realm of subversive voices has acquired a new legitimacy. There has been a shift towards the peripheral and marginal voices in the sphere of Indian poetry. The first generation modernists had failed to comprehend the relationship between poetry and the public sphere in Indian society. The lofty aloofness cultivated by the dense, resonant, imagistic writings of several of these poets subscribed to the same ideology of the aesthetic sublime one encountered in the sloppy sentimentality of the romantic lyric earlier. I have described such poets as 'High Modernists' in my book mentioned above. What high modernists gained by way of perfection in form they lost in their ability to reach out to a larger public. Increasing technical formalism, as Edward Said observes in the context of literary studies, leads to the loss of "a historical sense of what real experiences actually go into the making of a work of literature" (Said 1994: 57). When the aesthetic project of modernism had to confront the ethical problems resulting from the creation of an insular, hermetic realm of art shut off from the everyday world of a turbulent society, it necessarily had to revise its agenda. It is this turning away from the constricted, narcissistic idiom of aesthetic modernism towards more open and socially responsive and responsible forms that is mapped in this anthology. This has resulted in the re-discovery of discourses and voices previously suppressed or marginalised.

The metaphor of the tongue in the title of this anthology is a reminder of the proliferating discourses that erupt into the public sphere from the realm of the suppressed subaltern life. "The Tree of Tongues" written by Satchidanandan during the Emergency invokes the memory of Thiruvarangan, the folk-bard who roams the countryside singing to awaken households. When poets withdraw into 'bunkers of individualism' (D.R. Nagaraj 1992: 108) poetry comes to be privatised and the larger public function of poetry becomes suspect. The ideological location of celebratory individualism becomes visible and available for criticism only when the interrogatory idiom of a radical voice puts it in relief. This is an attempt to dialogise poetry. A poet like Dhoomil in Hindi could do it effectively in a tone that alternates between concern and confrontation:

Twenty years later
 I ask myself—
 how much endurance does it take
 to turn into an animal?
 And move on in silence

without an answer,
for these days the weather's moods are such
that it's almost dishonest
to go chasing the little leaves
blowing about in the blood.

[20 years after Independence]

Dhoomil's self-questionings are directed against the manufactured consents that inhibit our voices and the colonial legacy that we retain in our attitudes and institutions. The cultural space opened up by this self-critical enquiry has made it possible for the Dalit poets of the 1970s and the woman poets of the 1980s to represent their worlds more convincingly. This radicalization of poetic idiom is evident in several poems of this anthology. This is not to say that the poetic tone here is militant or strident. Public poetry can become tedious and tiring when it cannot preserve a certain inwardness as a characteristic mode of resistance. The three generations of poets assembled here—the elder ones were young rebels in the sixties and the younger ones are fighting their battles in the channel-surfing nineties—seem to constantly search for the tight-rope walking tone of tense, taut lines that can balance the private and the public without the safety net of ideology below them.

When poets incorporate their self-awareness about their very medium into the language of their poetry, they problematise their speech. The central motif that runs through this volume is that of loss of language and the need to recover or invent a language. Satchidanandan's "Languages", Kolatkar's "Old Newspapers", Sitanshu Yashaschandra's "Language" and Raghuvir Sahay's "Hindi" restate in personal and political terms the acute agony of Mardhekar's famous line, "Grant me, O Lord, just this one boon: May my tongue be never paralysed". The Dalit writer and the woman writer have understood that mainstream literary language excludes them. They have to purge the existing language of its associations and sub-texts before it can be deployed in their defence. The politics of speech has never been so central to the reading of poetry in Indian languages. What is 'regional' about language becomes a sedimentary layer of cultural memory to be invoked and rediscovered in the struggle against spurious versions of identity fostered from above. The search for a new language and the theme of resistance become inseparable in poets as diverse in themes and styles as Dilip Chitre, K.G.Sankara Pillai, Vasant A. Dahake, Sitanshu Yashaschandra and Kedarnath Singh. It is no accident that several of the poets collected

here retain their access to their dialects and through them to the hidden resources of social imagination.

In a perceptive moment Dhoomil described his village as a Bhojpuri version of 'narak' (hell). He did not, of course, mean Dante's text but the great Indian dream that had gone sour. The Dalit poets in Marathi and Gujarati refuse to translate their particular hells back into the middle-class dialect of poetry. Their historical sense has an undercurrent of anguish and irony. Pralhad Chendvankar calls for a social audit of history in 'Audit':

Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar
 Have audited your accounts
 Have detected the frauds
 On each page of each book,
 Have submitted audit reports
 Of how many journal entries to be made
 You weep your self-same griefs
 Pretending innocence, wearing your sacred threads.

(Audit)

The italicised words happen to be in English in the original Marathi poem. This destroys the illusion of poems as well-crafted artifacts. In several poems concerning history such as K.G. Sankara Pillai's "The Trees of Cochin", Dilip Chitre's "Emergency", Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh's "Delhi", Shrikant Verma's *Magadh* sequence, Pravin Gadvi's "When Nadir Shah Arrived", Attoor Ravivarma's "Re-Call" and D. Vinayachandran's "History", poetry becomes urgent, immediate speech like despatches from zones of civil war where intermittent fighting goes on. Attoor Ravivarma's poem is in fact about civil war and ends with the agonising lines:

I am neither the trigger
 nor the bullet, I am
 neither the monkey
 nor Valmiki.

I am only
 a completely bald
 half-dhoti-clad
 bullet ridden
 question mark
 with no front teeth

(Re-Call)

Mark that tone that captures the cramps in the conscience. It neither panics nor pleads in the face of a moral crisis that has no easy resolution.

The women poets also demonstrate the same ability to turn inward while probing the public world. The troubled conscience becomes their only manifesto. Vijayalakshmi in her (Malayalam) poem "The Animal Trainer" speaks of the caged animal retreating into the silence of the cage out of habit. She is perfectly at home in the metrical idiom of traditional poetry even when she communicates an anger that cannot be easily contained by traditional metrics. Women poets such as Malika Amar Sheikh, Savithri Rajeevan and Teji Grover seem to be looking for more open-ended forms. There is a hint of the free play of surrealist imagination in their irreverent images. They would not like their speech being slotted into pre-fabricated idioms. Savithri Rajeevan in her "Slant" warns us of the dangers inherent in our globalised notions of selfhood. These are poems that remind us that the moral crisis gripping the nation can only be understood by addressing the subject that speaks through us in our daily discourses. Decolonisation, like charity, has to begin at home. History figures as a major theme here since memory, both social and personal, is the site where the struggle against colonised notions of the body and social structures has to be fought.

I have steered clear of the term 'postmodernism' in describing the new poetic trends of the eighties and nineties. It is true that the radical sensibility represented in this volume comes very close to post-modernist sensibility because these trends share 'a set of characteristics that place them in an adversarial relation to high modernism' (Krishna Rayan 1996: 41). But there are significant distinctions to be made. A Euro-centric post-modernist package would effectively neutralise the emancipatory thrust of the poems produced in Indian languages. There is nothing to be gained by blurring the difference between passive acceptance (of Western technology) and active resistance (implicit in domestic production). An Indian postmodernism which distances itself from Western modernism and Western postmodernism on the one hand and Indian high modernism on the other will naturally have a place for the liberating potential of the radical sensibility represented here.

The persuasive power of poetry comes from its ability to infiltrate the collective voice of the community. The poets gathered here do not labour after the false elegance of transcendental visions. They also question the relevance of such supreme fictions and apocalyptic visions.

No attempt has been made here to make these translations particularly presentable. They grapple with the otherness of the source language in their separate ways. They make us aware that it is in the everyday world of living that problems of caste, gender and power are encountered. In a poem titled 'Call Me Caliban', Dilip Chitre presented Caliban more as a precursor than a victim. Those who have to invent a language can turn the disadvantage into an opportunity. The radical sensibility in Indian poetry has the advantage of having no ready-made language to write in. Each blank page affords a challenge and a chance to redeem oneself through speech. When the wounded tongue tree sprouts branches, buried truths gleam on each leaf.

NOTES

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SECTION I
MALAYALAM

Behold These Sheep on the Road

N.N. KAKKAD

Behold these sheep worming their way
along this unending road, bearing
the butcher's seal on their haunches
like the legacy of a coat of arms

Jostling and kicking each other
mating in the open
teeming and spawning
drifting in dust and din.....

With hunger foaming at the mouth
with lust squirming in their loins
crowding and pushing.....

Someone herds them from behind, whipping.
The road ahead is empty; so, they move forward....
They have ceased to feel

They do not feel us.
Nor do we feel them.
Do we feel ourselves anymore?

[Trans.E.V. Ramakrishnan. "Ee Aadukale Nokkoo", 1976]

Death of a Rogue Elephant

N.N. KAKKAD

As the last trumpeting of the rogue
elephant was heard over the foundations
of unfinished houses, he said to himself:

Is the forest far or near?
The darkness of the solitude of the dense
forest stains the evening;
but scattered all around is
the sprawling, unfinished metropolis.

Streets are empty,
infinitely broad, infinitely long,
always criss-crossing.
Only foundations of houses:
a row stretching to infinity.
Somewhere the remembrance of the sea.

The last trumpeting of the rogue
elephant hit by the bullet
slowly dissolved into silence.
The blackness of the dusk
sucked that grief dry
along with the evening sky's blood.

I alone...

I alone walk
not knowing why
along the unfinished walls of these houses.

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan. "Ottayante Maranam", 1970]

The Jester

N.N. KAKKAD

I came to know you
through others' comments:
an imprudent jester of the street.

You have been performing
on the pavement with your
painted face ever since you woke
to the art of hybridising words and meanings.

You howled and hooted,
clapped and leaped
on the stage;
you left midway before the curtain
fell and the lights were put off.
I shuddered to see your face.

You waited unseen
on dark staircases in narrow corridors,
a coiled rope crawling in your hands,
with a false smile on your pale,
stony gaze that had the putrid smell
of death. I faltered
and fell. Life sank
in the mouldy smell.

When I woke up
I saw you turning back
your face blackened
red patches below your eyes
a coiled rope crawling in your hands
your head lowered
like a child without playmates.

When you appeared again shrieking,
with your gnarled, knotted fingers

spread out, I could only laugh.
I could not help saying:
“You stink.
Please bathe yourself and brush
your teeth before you come.”

All these years the same face,
the same stupid smile,
the same putrid smell
and the same gnarled, knotted fingers.
Disgusted though I am
I cannot but pity
the infinite pathos clogging
the swamp of your beleaguered essence.

[Trans. by T.K. Jayanthan and E.V. Ramakrishnan. “Komali”, 1970]

I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday: An Interview

K. AYYAPPA PANIKER

One

Yesterday—or was it the day before—I met Whitman:
the Whitman who talks aloud in solitude
of the multitude.

Casting his long shadow across Long Island
the poet-patriarch was counting waves;
each wave, a generation.
Each bore the semblance
of the American people.

Naked Whitman
Hairy body
Grey beard
Sparkling eyes.

All other limbs
enveloped by the rocking mother sea.

Wailing seagull.

Lilacs blossoming forth.

Frenzied drumbeats.

Hey, Whitman!

I called out.

My friend—the voice had drawn near,
look, he said.

Columbus' geographical error,
history's gain.

Vigorous handshake.

Sturdiness.

Squeeze of rough fingers.

Paniker, I knew you would come again.
I feigned surprise.

The rebirth of the human soul
is nothing new to me...

Tvo

I met Walt Whitman yesterday
the poet-patriarch coming from Long Island,
stretching long hands,
weeds of thought entangled in his hairy person.

How many questions!

Why do your people
turn away from your own people
as if they are not your people?
Do you prefer whites to blacks?
Have you given away
the irony in buying machinery here
all the while talking about
glories of your hoary heritage?

Do you have in your land still
those sages, who,
living on their silence,
counsel their rulers?

Have you gone in search of the Himalayan caves,
you, who hurry now to Niagara?

Atom or Atman
which of these do your scientists
strive after?

We both are preoccupied:
You and I have no time
to think of all these.

We are trying to go
faster than time.

The radiance of
the Vedic culture of old;
Emerson, Thoreau, Martin Luther King and I
have cherished its sweetness; as countless others.

The earth here speaks of the same things to us.
Those who have ears do not listen.
Grasses, rivers, hills, clouds, woods, clouds,
woods, hills, rivers, grasses, hills, clouds and rivers,
woods, bridges, rails, airports and cars,
factories and telephones.....
Come, let's walk upto the Pacific coast.

[Trans. A.J. Thomas. "Jnan Walt Whitmane Kantu:
Oru Interview", 1981]

The Prison

K. AYYAPPA PANIKER

The sea is a prison for the waves; the shore
a prison for the sea; the banyan tree
a prison for the winged kind; the directions form
a prison for the daytime; the day a prison
for the night; the skies a prison for the wind;
the face a prison for the eyes; for hunger
the stomach a prison; the wind a prison
for thought; these mountains form a prison
for this land; the picture a prison for the eyes,
the delicate fragrance a prison for the nostrils;
for the flower the tresses a prison; all words
a prison for the tongue; your entwining arms
a prison for me; don't let this bird out
untwining these arms; don't let its wings
be wrenched in the gale that swallows up swells
don't let the skull be split by the lightning bolt;
hold me, don't let me out of the cage of your mind
to rove about bearing my orphanhood; don't loosen
your entwined palms, please.

[Trans. A.J. Thomas. "Kalthurunki", 1985]

Insight

K. AYYAPPA PANIKER

Listen to me, friends, all of
 you, who have taken the pledge
to set out, what is it
 that stirs within us
to seek the promised land?
Come, chiefs of the clans,
 Gautama, Kashyapa,
Vasishtha, Parashara,
 Vishvamitra, Bharadwaja,
and leaders of the clans to be,
 come, line up one by one,
those ready for the journey.

Pack your bundles
 the load we have to take:
the past we pride in,
the songs to be sung on the way,
folk-tales and jokes
 to be told and retold with joy:
things to sustain us
 through the long travel.

Homeless we are not,
 nor are we out to plunder,
we have no land
 to buy or sell
we are not merchants,
 we go out to seek grace.

Spurred on by the star
 that shines in fiery eyes,
we know and cherish
 the depths of compassion,
we erase and redraw

the calendar of wisdom,
together shall we mould
a new map of culture.
We'll recognize the world
as an ever-changing image,
and seek a foot-hold
along unfamiliar tracks.

[Trans. Chitra Paniker. *Gotrayanam*, Section IV, 1985-89]

Boiled Eggs

KADAMMANITTA RAMAKRISHNAN

When I sat down to lunch this time
and found so many boiled eggs,
I asked her, "why so many?"

She said, "for us to swallow,
just for the two of us alone."

"Do we need this many?", I asked.

"We are to swallow them all", she said:
"Don't you remember, when you came last
I said we should hatch some eggs?"

To hatch them, I collected them
and prepared a basket full of chaff
and arranged the eggs in it.

But then the eggs, staring blankly at my face,
cried in unison (their voice had the dampness of tears
and the swelter of fright):

Don't hatch us in your warmth
don't turn us into beings —
we are content in ourselves as we are.

It is very cruel of you
to put us into this wornout world.

There is man in it:
don't make us swallow his breath.

Our bones won't mature in his sunlight.
The air in his skies will puncture our lungs.
If by any chance we survive all adversities and hatch
and come out on feeble legs and immature wings
and start waddling about:

enmity will be put between man and his fellow beings
on account of us
and they will fight.

We are not only averse to such an eventuality,
but, are filled with consternation.
We have no doubt about
the inevitability of life's manifestations steeped in woes,
and the cycle of birth, growth and decay.

Over and above the prospect of our 'being',
we pray with a burning heart—
eager to bring about world peace—
don't hatch us.

No, woman, you shouldn't.
You can use us this way
and we have no objection to it.
Boil us, peel us, and swallow us
with your mate.

We will have the satisfaction of being ourselves
and you will have the gain in having been able to use us.

Softened by their repeated beseechings
and at the prospect that they could be used
without much compunction,
I accepted their prayer."

While she was talking, she had swallowed, one by one,
the dumb eggs in the dish.

The eggs were finished when the narration was done.
I felt reverence for the prescient eggs.

She said concludingly:
"No, we shouldn't hatch anymore eggs,
and I will lay no more eggs."

[Trans. A.J. Thomas. "Puzhungiya Muttakal", 1976]

Drink Not Your Mother's Milk, O Child

KADAMMANITTA RAMAKRISHNAN

Drink not your mother's milk, O child!
Lie not in mother earth's lap,
or frolic on her bosom.
Yearn not the hill's breast-milk;
look not in the flower's eye
everywhere lurks Poothana's wile.

Laugh not, O child,
or rollick about;
wheels are rolling into you.
Sakadasura is not dead, but
has turned himself into
a thousand smoke-spitting vehicles.

Bathe not, O child,
or air yourself.
Kalindi is tainted by Kalakoodam.
Kalian's pride is not abated;
wonder where Krishna has fled!
The cows and the Gopala boys
lie on the banks like begrimed palmfronds.
Mothers, with tear-streaming eyes,
rave about looking for Krishna.

Listen to the grunt of the axe
at the base of the *Kadamb* tree.
Listen to the soul-bereft wail
of the sky where the billowing smoke
wriggles like a black snake.

Love that courses through germ-carrying veins
and oozes as milk down the udder.
The unabashed, coquettish smile
of the unchaste electric charge
should never allure you;

the magician lurks behind you
with his wand.

Those who shattered the grace of your life
that nurtured at the benign hillslopes;
those who shook up our human race
blasting the atom bomb of knowledge.

Those who burned down ripe paddy-ears
and sowed famine all around;
those who bent us as bloodsacrifice
for strengthening the bridges across rivers;
they are beckoning us, and are
bent on weakening the earth —
they are befriending us
to ensure our enslavement.

Is the earth a throwball or doll?
There is a limit to her patience.
Know that we are the ones who thrive
in the shelter of her benign lap;
know that she will fondle us
feeling our warm breath on her.

We are the shoots buried in the slush
of the new mud-dykes.
We are the crushed-finger key
of each of the turning gears.
We are the ones who are trampled
under the hoof-falls of the spurred up steeds.
We are the ones who are caught up
in the death-throes of the struggling Time.
Know that we are the ones who thrive
in the shelter of her benign lap.
She is always our protecting mother—
in the mountain tops where typhoons sleep
and in the depths of sorrows.

Chop down the vice-gripping hands
that choke her—it is our duty.

Even tears are polluted;
the eyes of flowers are burnt up.

Fall as the fresh male seed, O child,
into the earth's warm womb,
and gain fullness,
through the subsoil
and water sources,
as a tree,
as a human,
as a flowing river,
as a blooming flower,
as fullness of beauty,
as the rays of the sun,
as the glimmer of goodness.

[Trans.A.J. Thomas. "Kunje,Mulappal Kudikkaruthu",1980]

The Pumpkin

KADAMMANITTA RAMAKRISHNAN

Let us therefore talk about
the pumpkin.
I have grown bored stiff
thinking and talking about
this damned earth.
The eyes that had yearned
to see the return of the prodigal sons
are covered with rheum

Not only that —
what is left to think about
the caprices of this life
which has no rhyme or reason?

And I know very little about
the strange situations
of this earth.

Somebody said
the axis of this earth
has mouldered away
and is termite-infested.

There isn't even the respite
to pause
and to draw it out for inspection.

If it has mouldered,
it should be replaced
with a new one!

Then will the true colours be seen.

Shattered pots and broken skulls
are dumb.

If nothing can be done,
let this axis collapse
and let this earth be crushed
like a rotten egg.
Or, let it be frozen
like a still picture.
Let us leave it to its fate.

And let us talk about the pumpkin:

the pumpkin is globular
like the earth.

No, no. Let us not compare the pumpkin
with the earth.
The pumpkin is like the pumpkin.

It is said
that there are many varieties
of pumpkins.
I don't know about all that.
I can talk only about
the pumpkin I saw.
That too, as far as I saw.

It is quite difficult to swallow hearsay.

The paradox that
even the greatest truths
turn into the most grotesque lies
as they turn into words
and then to actions,
is nauseating.

The fault
may be that
words are covered with spittle
and actions with taints.
Words without spittle! Actions without taints!
Are they possible upon this earth!

Therefore, let us think about the pumpkin.

The pumpkin like the pumpkin.

Pshaw! this 'like' won't do.
The pumpkin that's the pumpkin.

It has many qualities.

The pumpkin, as pumpkin itself,
is good to look at.

I have heard my mother say that
cut, quartered
and the kernel with seeds removed
washed and minced
and cooked dry with beans
the pumpkin is excellent.

Should one believe what is heard?

Maybe, because it's mother who said it.
There lies the danger.
It is we who deceive ourselves very often!
'Danger lurks within intimacy'.

This is surely a fault.
Even in this trifle pumpkin affair,
dogmas are belched up.

Anyway, I have seen that
it is beautiful when quartered.
I have seen the seeds
that are entangled in the soft, moist
fibres inside, awaiting to be reborn.

The seed that fell in the garbage dump,
after sprouting, and escaping termites
and grasshoppers
growing growing spreading spreading growing
into
two-leaf, three-leaf, four-leaf
along the stem
and tendrils tendrils
sinking down the soil
growing spreading
again falling prostrate and growing
mixed up with the leaves and crawling

and flowering yellow
barren flowers
blazing flowerpots, unbloomed flowers
pumpkin flowers, baby pumpkins
dodging pests, baby pumpkins; pumpkin
stems and leaves crawling again, stretching
onto the brim of the dumphole
and gasping, rushing down the slope.
The leaves ripening, the stems ripening
the leaves withered and falling
the stem wilting wilting wilting away
and the pumpkin left alone
and the seed caught in the damp
fleshy fibre left alone —
in the garbage dump —
Oh! in this damned world!

[Trans. A.J. Thomas. "Mattanga", 1976]

Metamorphosis

ATTOOR RAVIVARMA

Since long has this dead woman
been rotting within me.

I walk nailing my fingers
into the nostrils, but those
who are near and far
turn away from me.

Ever since I could see
she has leeches on to my eyes:
the mother to the starving one
who gorged itself to death.

She was born with a female
head all right, but no sea
ever resounded
in her ears; no wave ever
inundated her.

The eyes on her face were only
meant to be shut
at midnight; her lips were
the edges of a silent wound.

No star ever went to sleep
before her; and she
stirred out long before every sun.

She is still where she started off
even after walking a thousand miles
She stands upright a thousand times
only to falter and fall again
she has not woken up
despite being kicked
a thousand times in her breast.

A broken broom; a stinking swab;
a bowl with a twisted rim:
she is now a mound of earth.

May her restless soul be
unfastened from her
body like an amulet
and let me tie it on to
another. No, not to a leech-like
woman's body but to that
of a man-eater who descends
on a village in the fury of hunger.

(The children will now be haunted
in their sleep by its growls
from the mountain-side,
from across the fields
from across the door-step.)

Let me tie her tongue
to another throat; no, not
to the bitch living on left-overs
but to a wolf that pounces
on its prey when hungry.

let me blend her bottomless
hunger with the forest-fire
feeding on cities and settlements
and her grief with the pus
and blood of sunsets.

Let her curse become
the scorching famine-striking sun;
and let me drop her death
into the pock-marked sky
like a burnt offering.

Cancer

ATTOOR RAVIVARMA

The college had two gates:
 like the mouth and the anus.
 Boys and girls entered its mouth
 like bunches of orange
 and moved along the pharynx, stomach, intestines—
 those verandahs, courtyards and classrooms.

Its erect posture on the hilltop
 was quite that of a tidy gentleman in white.
 The breathing, the pulse, the temperature,
 the eye and the ear and the tongue,
 the blood, the urine, the stools —
 everything was balanced like a gentleman's.

It began as a headache
 somewhere the calculations were going wrong,
 a mistake in addition, subtraction,
 or in finding the average.

The chest burnt increasingly.
 It disturbed while reading.
 The body temperature rose:
 101 in the morning, 102 at noon,
 103 in the evening, and so on.

In the delirium of fever it went on raving
 the tale told to the prince
 by the shade of the murdered king.
 Something was rotten on the land,
 in the water or in the sky.

Scholarships, loans, concessions etc.
 were dripped into it, drop by drop
 as it lay not feeling the touch,
 not answering the call, not moving.

It did not open its eyes, nor move its lips.
The questions had all leaked out.
The blood of ministers, vice-chancellors and MPs
was transfused into its veins,
but the very blood group had gone wrong.

As a last resort,
masked figures drove in sharp
instruments only to discover
that the disease had already
spread from the throat to the pharynx,
bowels and lungs.
The foul smell that filled the air
of the verandahs, rooms and drainage
pipes spoke of the extinction
of its own race.

[Trans.K.Satchidanandan.1974]

Re-Call

ATTOOR RAVIVERMA

I can hear
what you are saying
what you do not say
echoes in me
we have the same vowels,
consonants
and the same silence.

Our fingers
bend and straighten together
drawing figures
in the courtyard
on New Year days.

On opposite shores
of the same ocean we observe
the rites of death
with shaven heads
we see the same depths.

On this side
a grandmother,
a countryside
and a God wait for you.

Your names are familiar
your places sound familiar
Regal cinema,
Veersimham library,
Bus stand:
all these are my
unseen sights.

When you walk along
the post office road

you are reduced
to a bowl of blood
which spreads like a palm
that complains to me
and screams at me.

It chases me
into the sea
and on to the shore.

I talk to it, beg
and cringe:
I am neither the trigger
nor the bullet, I am
neither the monkey
nor Valmiki.

I am only a completely bald,
half-dhoti clad
bullet-ridden
question-mark
with no front teeth.

[Trans.E.V. Ramakrishnan. "Maruvili", 1989]

The Survivors

K. SATCHIDANANDAN

This house really frightens me:
among the utensils of the dining room
I recognise the cup in which they offered
hemlock to Socrates.
I recognise the fetters that bound the slaves of Rome
as they rowed their masters' vessels,
and the axe that cut off the hands which faltered
while rolling up the rocks for the pyramid.
Here is the cauldron the landlords of China used
to boil alive the defaulting tenants.
Here is the bell that drove the Jewish children
to the human kilns of Buchenwald.
Here are the whiteman's pincers
that castrated the black slaves;
here are the rags the Zamindars rammed
into the mouths of the defiant Santhal girls.
Here is the blood-dripping knife that plucked out
the youthful eyes opening in every Indian village.
Yet here, just outside the house,
is the man who upturns the virgin soil,
the survivor of ten thousand years of torture,
his head raised against heavy odds,
ever struggling forward, ever marching.

[Trans. by the author. "Athijeevikunnavar", 1979]

Languages

K. SATCHIDANANDAN

Languages do not live in houses.
Kashmiri, a sleepless refugee
on the wayside in Green Park,
the green dreams of the valley in her knapsack.

Punjabi, Guru-faced yet illiterate,
blood flooding his memory
his head on the steering, tired and pale.

Tamil, sweating in her rags
sweeping the courtyards
and washing the kitchenware.

Malayalam, his hopes of the New World crushed
walking without shoes,
shivering in the unfamiliar winter
all covered in the factory's soot.

Telugu, decked in cheap satin and marigolds
waiting under the flyover
for a single night's husband.

Languages have no houses.
Haryanvi screams from the maize field,
head in bleeding palms;
she fears her master.

Maithili is still abandoned in the woods.
Chattisgarhi and Braj cling to each other
like two frightened kids
in the shade of a roc-bird
rising from the television screen.

Vaishnavi, stark naked,
her hairs loose, laughs in madness
from her rock-throne.
Urdu sings the last ghazal

standing under the huge thighs
of a Hindi film heroine.

I long to build a palace
for these refugees among the tombs:
I, who am yet to find my own house.
I stammer in broken words,
in distorted sounds from some other body.
Which of the three tongues I use
during the day is truly mine?
Or is it the pure language of mystery
I speak in dream at night?

My language rises from the street:
the obstinate cry of the new-born orphan.
O, Lords of men on earth
here comes my language
his feet dirty with the slime
from the gutter.
It climbs up the steps,
the steps of the parliament house
it climbs up, to rule, to lead,
climbs, climbs the gallows,
climbs, climbs the steps of Calvary.

[Trans. by the author. "Bhashakal", Section 3
of the sequence, *Dilli-Dali*, 1994]

How to Go to the Tao Temple (To D.R. Nagaraj)

K. SATCHIDANANDAN

Don't lock the door.
Go lightly like the leaf in the breeze
along the dawn's valley.
If you are too fair
cover yourself with ash
If too clever, go half-asleep.
That which is fast
will tire fast:
be slow, slow as stillness.
Be formless like water.
Lie low, don't even try to go up.
Don't go round the deity:
nothingness has no directions,
no front, nor back.
Don't call It by name,
Its name has no name.
No offerings: empty pots
are easier to carry than full ones.
No prayers too: desires
have no place here.

Speak silently, if speak you must:
like the rock speaking to trees
and leaves to flowers.
Silence is the sweetest of voices
and Nothingness has
the fairest of colours.
Let none see you coming
and none, going.
Cross the threshold shrunken
like one crossing a river in winter.
You have only a second here

like melting snow.
No pride: you are not even formed.
No anger: not even dust is
at your command.
No sorrow: it doesn't alter anything.
Renounce greatness:
there's no other way to be great.
Don't ever use your hands:
they are contemplating
not love, but violence.
Let the fish lie in its water
and the fruit on its bough.
The soft one shall survive the hard,
like the tongue that survives teeth.
Only the one who does nothing
can do everything.
Go, the unmade idol
awaits you.

[Trans. by the author. "Tao Kshetrathil Pokendathengine", 1994]

Noah Looks Back

K. SATCHIDANANDAN

It was three hundred and
fifty years ago; still, it seems like yesterday.
They called me mad: me,
that had witnessed six hundred winters.
How could I convince
those sinning revellers who
drank and mated on the streets
that God's voice had echoed
in these ears like the wind
in the caverns, that those eyes
had enveloped me, like skies?

Then for forty days and nights
only the heavy rain's
incessant voice followed us
among the roaring lions and the
bellowing cows. God too was silent
until the rain stopped and
the bow was seen in the clouds.

I am on my deathbed now.
I have grown rich in offspring;
my beasts too. They made game
of themselves and of one another.
Blood of the wicked flooded the earth,
of the virtuous too.

Today I wonder:
What was that adventure for? Was
the voice I heard really God's?
The laughter of my mockers
haunts me like a truth I ignored.
Who was right, they who yielded
to their mortal's fate with no complaints,

or me who gave rise to
generations of sinners?
Whose was the true devotion,
the true humility?

I will pass away with this doubt.
This is all I have to give you.

Believers have not saved mankind,
only doubters have.

[Trans. by the poet. "Noah Thirinju Nokkунnu", 1995]

Photos in Various Poses

K.G. SANKARA PILLAI

1

Of people like you
We need several photos, sir,
In various poses of bending, tilting,
Halting, walking,
Smiling, lost in thought,
With a palette and brush in hand,
Staring, smoking, browsing through a book,
Embracing your mate and children
And the now inseparable bosom foes,
Close-ups and long distances
Photos in various poses, sir.

With a new-born child,
At Konarak
Or Belur
Or beside a funeral pyre
Despairing of the ways of all flesh
Turbulent troughs
Plummeting depths
And a glimpse of the distant shore
Lashing the banks, overflowing,
Wielding the axe to reclaim land
Leading a march
Holding hands at a marriage
Folding hands before success
Waxing at one's fond deeds
Crushed under futile tasks
Photos in various poses, sir

Let them see
Those who have never seen us
Those who see us all the time

And even we ourselves:
 All that we sing and dance
 Through the changing seasons
 What we create and destroy
 in our various manifestations.
 Sir, it is under the gaze of men
 That seas swelled to this size
 And rivers became sagas.

2

Vaikkom Muhammad Basheer¹
 Regrets that snap-shots have worn out
 His face.
 But one should not forget, sir,
 Through the same trick
 The stars of our public men have ascended
 From the darkness of anonymity
 To the kindly light of celebrity.
 More exposure, more radiance, sir,
 That is what people say, sir.
 The truth of a life
 Can't be summed up in a snap-shot, sir.
 Those who have never been splashed
 By a flash-bulb,
 Those who do not even figure
 In a group-photo,
 Multitudes
 It is as if they were never born.
 Their life
 A formless blind void.

3

When I face the camera
 I panic.
 Its single eye
 Which is also its tongue, ear, nose
 The solar abyss of cosmic flux

¹Vaikkom Muhammad Basheer (1908-1994) was a major Malayalam novelist and short story writer.

A tunnel of night at its core
The possessed demonic dance
Of a ruthless Circe...
When I face the camera
My eyes swerve
Away from my eyes
My lips wither and fall
Ears itch as if they are grafted
A fly settling on my nose
Treads it down to the underworld.
As I stare at one
I splinter into many
Instead of the river's harmony
I become the rain's scatter.

4
Thank you, sir.
A few more, sir.
As a solitary tree in the scorching sands,
As a beacon on the dark shore,
With a bunch of spring flowers
In Ooty or Kashmir
With a Lenin's goatee
Or a Poonthanam's beads.²

As an idol in the pageant
As a blowing horn
Or as an elephant's trunk.
To keep the world fettered
In polemics,
Photos in various poses, sir.

[Trans. E. V. Ramakrishnan. "Pala Posilulla Photokal", 1988]

²Poonthanam, a *Bhakti* poet who lived in the seventeenth century, is well-known for his devotional songs and poems in praise of Lord Krishna.

The Trees of Cochin

K.G. SANKARA PILLAI

Once
 the passage from Thrikkakkara to Cochin harbour
 exuded the faith and truth of a straight line.
 From the docks one could see
 the temple lights of Thrikkakkara.
 And the lights in their turn saw
 the blue wave bowing down in obeisance.

Long ago
 before the turns and twists of
 Tippu
 Gama
 the Varma dynasty of Cochin
 before 'the pristine glory of the land
 where no thieves, no cheats and no liars walked'¹
 before the serpent with the fruit of knowledge
 and the great leaps
 of printing, English and allopathy
 the passage from Thrikkakkara to Cochin harbour
 was lit by the adage-like phosphorescence of moonless nights.

And flanking it
 Grand Old Trees
 'ramarama' 'maramarama'² in the breeze
 flapping ears switching tails waving trunks
 arrayed in majestic stature.
 At noon the shady boughs arched over the wayfarers
 —The blessing hands of forbears.

Some of them became chants for Rama

¹ There is an echo of an old Malayalam folk-song in this line. It says that when King Mahabali ruled over Kerala, there were no thieves, liars or cheats.

² 'Maram' in Malayalam means 'Tree'. The sound of leaves rustling in the wind is evoked in the words: 'ram-maram-maramaram-mara maram'.

some figures of gods
claws of demons
racks for the condemned
palanquins
rafters and doors with fretwork
some became lamp-posts
some the fragrance of sandalwood
in Egypt or Greece
the frenzy of drumbeats
the abode of the bird that sang of primeval sorrow
'the lyre turned to the West Wind's Ode'³
Some grew up tall and sturdy
pioneers spreading out in the sky
Others branched off into clans
of emaciated seeds and rotted cores paling the foliage
Some became poles for pennants
some scaffolds.

In the graveyard
under the demon of a Bodhi tree⁴
fallen Time lay cursed,
her bewitching beauty chopped off limb by limb
waiting for the redeeming lips of cruel compassion.
On the refuge of the skeletal branch
Edappally hung like the drooping banner of despair.⁵
With the teeming birds of the sky and the earth
Changampuzha grew lush and rich.⁶

On the taut strings of the gypsy's harp,
stretched from the root to the fruit
Vailoppilli throbbed as an electric charge.⁷

³ In the original poem, the phrase 'a Veena to the Western Wind' is put between single inverted commas. The Veena is the well-known musical instrument.

⁴ The reference is to a long narrative poem by the famous Romantic poet in Malayalam, Kumaran Asan.

⁵ Edappally Raghavan Pillai, a talented poet, committed suicide in his youth, by hanging himself from a tree.

⁶ Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, an accomplished Romantic poet noted for the musical quality of his verse, died in his youth at the height of his fame.

⁷ Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon's poetry is cerebral and emotional, realistic and romantic at the same time.

'P' became the spring thunder of words,
 the tree blossoming in the Hades,
 the resurrected emperor of words.⁸
 Footprints fed the paths
 and the feet grew bolder with each untrodden path.
 As in the spiral descent to Inferno,
 turns, twists and excitement grew
 as chimneys belching smoke sprang up
 on either side of the road.

Fertilizer plant
 Drug manufacturing plant
 Law manufacturing plant
 Degree manufacturing plant
 Dogma-refining plant

From the new stately mansions
 smoke rose
 never touching the earth
 as apparitions of trees.
 Smoke spread like the sheet of algae
 which once in my small pond hid from view
 the dance of fish and the glittering
 grains of starry sand.
 The smoke spreads from eye to eye,
 changing directions and shape with each new wind
 as sophisticated rusticity
 as banners that droop in weariness
 as poison on the prowl.

On a pyre lit by the raw firewood of excuses
 our life-long cremation.
 In our eyes, nose, tongue
 in our little obstinacies⁹
 around the bag, the watch and the dream of the future

⁸ P. Kunhiraman Nair is a poet of nature whose search for the deeper layers of Kerala's identity is being increasingly appreciated now. The phrase 'The resurrected emperor of words' is also a reference to King Mahabali whose annual visit from the Hades heralds the great festival of Onam in Kerala.

⁹ Here the poet uses a Malayalam saying which literally means, 'The rabbit I caught has three horns'. It highlights the cocksure attitude of a person who refuses to accept reality.

on the tiny feet long before the shoes
—the octopus arms of smoke wind up for the crushing embrace.
No, don't be in a hurry to get up!
Still there is enough time!

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan and K.M. Sheriff.
"Kochiyile Vrikshangal", 1984]

Between the Nectar and the Poison

K.G. SANKARA PILLAI

The bird decided
to return from Utopia
when it could reach nowhere
after flying all its life.
If you have a place
to return to, you are free

But where will the bird
return today?

There are hunters
waiting with invisible nets
There are those calling you
with the-same-feather principle
There are those waiting
at the mast of poetry
to turn you into a flag of solitude.
There is daylight on the canvas
and a branch to roost
The finger and the brush are alert as ever.

Where will the bird return
today?
To whose dining table
as a favourite dish?
To the hymn of which non-God?
To the cage of which pavement-astrologer?
On which branch will
the bird returning from
Utopia roost?
Where will it doze
like a tired thinker?
Will it go back to the sacred
text of the forest

for its customary consultation
with the green leaf
as always before each journey

The dusk hadn't come calling
Nor was it sure where it was going
Still the bird set out
on its return trip.

Like moonlight which is in no panic
to prove anything in particular,
like a new flame rising gently
from the embers of love,
the bird arrived
on the floating language of inertia
between the flight and the fall
crossing the idle orbits
between the sun and the earth.
It roosted on a timid branch
of my joy.

3

My meanings are in the present
between the heaven and the hell
My day's meal is in the fruit
between the nectar and the poison
My nest is in the vision
between my tears and dreams

Thus grew my bird-thoughts
Feathers in multi-dimensions
Eyes in several worlds
Lips moving in many songs
The ballad of the rain
sung in the linear chill of
flowing rivers

All this carried bird-ness
to my soul and consoled
the unfamiliar gardens
within me

All in perfection

4

Love

a wing that cools the road
 from the unknown heights of memory

Love

a song that rains on the waste land
 of the world coming from the depths
 of blood

Voiced compassion

The private spring of life

A fragrant gate to the primordial
 forest of knowledge, for the soul
 — such and similar display of dreams

All in great perfection.

5

A gentle tilting of the head,
 Alternative listening to some
 message from long distance

A sudden jerk as if the hunter,
 who has set a trap
 forgetting the myth of the bird's sorrow
 and the first poem,
 has been sighted

And the final flight and disappearance
 into clouds
 over the fields where I cultivated
 the polarities of joy/sorrow, past/present

All in absolute perfection

That is,

through
 the stone

the sling

the arrow

compassion

and devotion to Rama in
 the epic of the bird-song

the cloying words spoken in the garden

romanticism

pacifism

and meat-dreams

I could not transplant my

humanity into the bird

Nor could I sleep like a child.

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan.
"Amrithinum Vishathinum Idayil", 1995]

Freedom

BALACHANDRAN CHULLIKKAD

A disciple asked the tailor:

Sir, what is freedom?

Is it the calf frolicking in the fields?

The bird that flies up to build its nest in the sun?

The train that runs, whistling, north?

The street-lamp the wayfarer in the dark pines for?

A sleep without cares?

Or is it my redemption from the endless

lengths of cloth, the wheel that turns

non-stop and the relentless needle?

The tailor replied:

Freedom is food for the hungry

water for the thirsty

coat for the one left out in the cold

a bed for the weary

The word for the poet

the arrow for the hunter

society for the loner

courage for the frightened

death for the eunuch

and a son to perpetuate the family for the married man

are indeed freedom.

Wisdom for the ignorant

Action for the wise

Self-sacrifice for a man of action

and for the martyr his life

are freedom.

But

one who stitches not will lose his dream-vision.

There is freedom at the illuminated

tip of the stitching needle.

It is the grain the sower reaps.
The bread for the one who sweats his brow.
The shirt for the one who stitched it.

Then the master resumed his stitching
The disciple, his doubts dispelled,
started threading his needle.

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan. "Swathanthryam", 1983]

A Labourer's Laughter

BALACHANDRAN CHULLIKKAD

One

You are a stranger to me
though we are neighbours! You
who build the roads of the earth
for the wheel of time to race by
raising a cloud of dust in its wake.

You will go by the bus bound for the city
before your off-springs are awake.

And return at dusk,
with rice and provisions
on unsteady steps
from the arrack shop;
your body baked and cracked in the sun,
you who swallowed the black smoke
of melting tar.

Two

I searched in many books
for the truth concerning you
and I learnt that
cities and sagas
were made by you.

And I learnt that
all banners were starched
in your life-blood;

And I learnt that you
are the lord and master
of the spring to come.

I waited, at dusk, many a time

to chat with you,
feigning acquaintance.

Three

While the children learned
their 'a's and 'b's
around the kerosene lamp

And waited for supper
reciting the rudimentaries
of eternal woe,

And housewife, closeby,
blew into the fire,
smoke stinging her eyes,

What thought burnt in you
with 'bidis' burning on your lips?

Or, your yearnings all
might be burning steady
in today's pyre.

Four

I saw you one day
on the teeming path
behind an advancing procession

Holding aloft the flags
and going berserk shouting slogans
for your rights.

I just enquired:
"what's today's struggle for?
Just to rule"?

"We should intimidate them a bit
to get a raise, my child,
when the monsoon famine
is afoot."

"Fool", said I,
"it is for the birth of a new world
you should raise the banners

and make the killing yell
and willingly lay down your life”
You passed on lowering
your dull eyes
and flashing an ever inscrutable smile.

A smile! I churned my
sleep many a night
in search of its sense.
The truth of your ambiguous smile
is not found
in any of the books.

Five

One day you appeared
dressed in black
and in beads
shouting ‘saranas’ loud.

Furious, I told you:
“the gods are the myths
of the upper-class.
No son of god will
come to your help
don’t wait for that.

You alone will be there
for your release;
your sense of justice
is the only hope”.

“My child, you will feel so
while you are young,
but it will subside when
you are my age”.

Derision? You went on
with your usual laugh
shouting ‘saranas’ loud.

The meaning of your tantalising laughter alone
is never found in the books.

The romantic aura
around you in many histories
is just wonderful!

The only truth about you
is the penury-stench of your body
when you return from work.

While I feign grief
at the plight of
the minutest human destiny,
life rolls on along the paths
you have built, with your
untiring hands.

[Trans. A.J. Thomas. "Koolikkarante Chiri", 1982]

The Fleeting Sun

A. AYYAPPAN

This ancient river
is a footpath today
from the jungle to the city.
The traveller rests here
stretching his fossil-stained legs
forgetting the breeze
filled with the fragrance of forest flowers
and bird-songs.
The companion
who came walking over the sword-tips
of crime and punishment
faints into the map
with his bloody legs.
The child
knows nothing.
He offers an apple:
the gift of dawn
with its blooming lotuses
which Apollo brings
into this 'what-is-to-be-done'-inert life.
Suddenly
streams of water flood dry river-beds;
woods burn in the monsoon rains.
A giant tree
of white-eyes stares.
On the floor
the white feathers of doves
The child
is enchanted by the wild flower
and the bird's song.
He forgets the apple
in the bleached hands of joy.

The lion kills two men
and satisfies its appetite
(The screams of the victim and the roars of hunger)

An angel
picks up the pearls dropped from
the lion's claws.
The hungry lion is on the prowl again.

Now
only the apple remains
where the child stood.

The word points
to the invisible grief of language.
A martyr to will and regrets,
the fool makes his appearance.

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan. "Kshanika Sooryan", 1985]

Baptism

A. AYYAPPAN

Is the exile drifting in the night rain
 a summer which forfeited
 its appellation, tongue
 and warmth of heart to sit
 in judgement over the uninitiated?

One without fangs in his smile
 shall befriend you who is
 confinement, affliction,
 estrangement and hate.
 His body is full of soil.
 The soil is soaked with blood.
 The blood brims over with poetry,
 the poetry bearing foot-prints all over.
 He who was done in by a loaded
 dice and went into exile
 leaving his brothers and wife behind
 shall light the blown-out torch.
 Shall tell friend from foe,
 instilling love, faith and awareness
 of eighteen parchments.
 Shall proclaim
 the end of summer's reign.

[Trans. E. V. Ramakrishnan. "Jnanasnanam", 1982]

Meditation

D. VINAYACHANDRAN

I am a palm-tree
on the bank of this paddy field.
My voice is lost in the wind.

On the hill-top
I am a monastery.
My head is tonsured
in the prayer of Thathagatha.

The sea-shore is my love.
Soaked in sunset
we walk towards the moon.

The cry of this unseen bird
is my life. In the slant
of the sky it becomes deep blue.

This blind old man
is my prophet.
Like my alphabet
he keeps asking:
“What is your name?”

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan. “Dhyanam”, 1992]

Ship

D. VINAYACHANDRAN

When you board a ship
you have to renounce
certain things;
curry, leaves,
the street on which
second hand books are sold,
the girl in the horsedrawn carriage,
the Holy Mass,
ancient metre carefully
framed and preserved
by school teachers.
Still, take along:
the nail cutter,
the guitar
the fan which
you are in two minds about.
After the cruise,
wind up your watch again.
Along with us,
disembark:
the sea's ebb and flow,
fisherfolk,
stars,
the dolphin-winged girl.
When we step ashore too,
we leave behind certain things;
pearls and oars
green seaweed
and the song of the restless waves.

[Trans. A.V. Varghese. "Kappal", 1984]

History

D. VINAYACHANDRAN

Nobody noticed it in the beginning.
Before everyone woke up
the village blacksmith
blew air into his furnace.

The furnace fire turned red
The iron in the furnace turned red
The day in the furnace turned red like the fire.

Nobody noticed it in the beginning -
before everyone woke up
the village blacksmith forged fire in the furnace.

The blacksmith hammered on red-hot iron
He renewed his pledge on red-hot iron
He repeated his revenge on red-hot iron

Nobody noticed it first -
Before everyone woke up
the village blacksmith breathed air into the fire.

The day grows from red-hot iron
Time changes in red-hot iron
A thousand shapes grow from the hammered red-hot iron.
The day becomes day when red-hot iron is hammered.

At first nobody noticed it:
Before everyone woke up
the village blacksmith breathed fire into furnace.

On red-hot iron the blacksmith
keeps hammering
keeps renewing his pledge
keeps repeating his revenge

Nobody notices it in the beginning.

Martha

VIJAYALAKSHMI

Distraught man
shuddering at spectral scenes,
I am Martha, the migrant sparrow
who died in the penal seclusion
of Cincinnati's zoo.

I broke my head
at the glass windows of its cell.

Once we traversed the full sky
like black clouds
in large numbers.
We are extinct now, man unkind,
by your needs of bed and bread.

I did not lose my poise
in the final moments
at the vanishing of a race
without a trace.

But now, perching on the shady branch
of this otherworldly tree I die
every moment at the stroke
of my earthly memories.

[Trans. E. V. Ramakrishnan, "Martha", 1993]

Bhagavatha

VIJAYALAKSHMI

At dusk you take your holy dip
and away from the noises of the world
you read aloud the sacred book:
Bhagavatha.

Why don't you come, come on
listen—you keep calling me.
But I am busy by the fire,
cooking the meal for you.
A hundred plates and pots
remain to be washed
and a hundred little things,
chores for tomorrow.

With my soot-blackened hands
I turn the leaves of a mighty
Bhagavatha that will end
only when my life ends
and willingly go on reading it:
But you never come to hear me!

[Trans. K. Satchidanandan. "Bhagavatham", 1989]

The Animal Trainer

VIJAYALAKSHMI

I am scared of you.

Swirling lash in your eyes
 Chastisements at your fingertips.
 Is your heart soft? E'en if it is so,
 I do confess:
 I am scared of you.

My body quakes eager to flee back to the jungle
 But this red fire-ring before my brimming eyes
 Now I must leap through it unhesitating
 For long I've done it and I am used to it now
 But ever so often my yearnings break loose.

Atop the rock, behind the bamboo-clump
 Flashes the black-and-yellow stripes
 And the reflection in the brook below,
 How grand and matchlessly beautiful my face!

From beneath the canopy of green foliage
 Where the cold moonbeams lay frozen
 Softly beckons my lady-love;
 The muffled growls, dense moments;
 Exhausted lolls;
 The frolicking young ones—

Suddenly the whiplash rises and falls
 Searing pain like lightning flashes.
 No! The blazing eyes spark rebuke.
 As the body burns, my pride weighs down my shoulder.
 Without my voice rising, I growl thus:

I am scared of you.

Don't look me over, with
 The flint-like eyes of the Stone Age Man;

Though an animal, no more
Can I languish in this cage.
As I press down the prey underfoot
And grip it hooked in on my teeth
I am sated to fullness.
My claws and fangs itch to drench
My face with the spouting blood.
Many are sitting facing me
And my body twitches to kill them all.

Tell me, is an animal a doll?
Tamed, I have turned servile, but
Often that animal ancestor
Resurrects in my wild instincts,
The primeval one breaking the foliage
And vaulting up to snatch the sun.

My eyes drop at his stare
My body goes limp at his mock;
I cannot but bow before him, Can't face his glowing countenance
My eyes will go blind if I look at him.
Before it happens, let me myself
With these claws, gouge out my eyes!

Can't even do that! Fear,
Only fear remains; and I a slave.
I am beaten and bent
Switch your lash on my back! I stay
Alert and ready to leap through the ring.

[Trans. A.J. Thomas. "Mrigashikshakan", 1991]

The Slant

SAVITHRI RAJEEVAN

This slanting light at four o'clock.
On the tiled roof,
with the eye of a palmist
the cawing crow, head aslant.

Alongside the crow
its shadow also sits—
sits at a slant.

In the courtyard
like a trembling hand
the slanting shadow of the coconut frond.
In my room
the thin shadows of the window bars,
they too lie aslant.

Outside the gate
a stranger walking along,
the sound of his footsteps—
why is it slanted?
The forecast of the crows
the sougning of the seabreeze
the footsteps of the passerby—
why are they slanted?
I've become suspicious.

Finally
on my table
on its own axis
I saw the earth slant
but I sit straight
in front of it.
On this slanting earth
where everything is slanted
why is it
I alone am straight?

[Trans. Ayyappa Paniker and Arlene Zide. "Charivu", 1977]

The Body

SAVITHRI RAJEEVAN

After death,
where does your body disappear,
you need to ask.

For infinite are
the prospects of its travel.

It may go into
fire, sea or sky.

It may change form
to soil, snow or breeze.

It may move in
search of heaven or hell's
chariot. It may be

born again as the *bodhi* tree,
enlightened, invisible
oracle among the clouds.

It may indulge in the garden
as lovers or flutter by
as butterflies.

Or, revolve
around the earth
as undying desires
or the song of soldiers.

A body no longer warm,
what does it do,
you needn't ask.

For infinite are its options in action

As touch, silk-soft,
as snuggling-solace, an old song,
Falling molten in its own mould,
water-jug or flower vase,
as chant or lamp,
on a pedestal

it may perch.
On the wall
a portrait, smiling, garlanded,
it may evanesce
into memories
like a magic-trick hare.
Infinite are the prospects
of a body.

A body, bereft of movement
what does it merge into
you needn't worry.
Not only
among vanished men,
or vanished women,
but among the unvanished
it may stay
stay
so close to the earth.
Infinite are the prospects of a body.

[Trans. Udaya Kumar. "Udal", 1995]

Krishna

SAVITHRI RAJEEVAN

Krishna—
how should I love him?
He has mothers
more than one—
Yasoda, Devaki,
then Poothana and Kalindi,
cows and cows and
flowers and flowers
All of them mothers to him.

Krishna—
how should I love him?
His fathers
more than one—
Vasudeva and Nanda and
Brahma and Yama,
Incarnations,
then unincarnations,
All these fathers to him.

Krishna—
how should I love him?
His lovers too
not one,
many—
Bhama, Rukmini,
then Radha and Meera,
sixteen thousand eight girl friends,
kids, all
girls, all
friends to him.

Krishna—
how should I love him?

As the breeze, moving
 as the mind, still
 as the peacock's plume,
 as sweet sound,
 as deluge,
 leaf floating
 on deluge,
 as butter, milk pail,
 Or else,
 as the poet, with song flowing,
 Which way should I love him?

As a foe, valiant
 as a friend, chariot-borne,
 as devotion, as detachment,
 as sculpture, as stone
 as night, moon's riverbed
 as fear, as shade
 Or else,
 a cuckoo, the source of song
 By which tune should I love him?

Krishna—
 how should I love him?
 cloud shade on the skin,
 yellow clothing the body
 lotus petal in the eye
 love in the mind
 and
 curse on the head—
 Which arrow should I love him by?

Or else,
 Krishna—
 why should I love him?

[Trans. Udaya Kumar. "Krishna", 1995]

Third World Thoughts

ANWAR ALI

Let us first turn clowns, and
then, oracles.

Let us become the crows that quarrel
on the mango tree;
the evenings outside the window;
the folds in the moonshine wave;
a debt buying *beedis* on credit.

Let us encroach on the glances
of a girl who won't lend herself.

Let us first turn clowns, and
then, oracles.

Let us walk around
looking for the night's slender fingers
that open the blue doors, and,
then become a seven-wick lamp
until the wee hours.

As we hear the footfalls of tramps
let us pay respects to the sleepers
and leave behind us hatreds, paths,
and simply wander around the city, village too!

Let us chant a talisman, then
dig out destiny. When hungry,
go around the four walls of
a non-existent house, and snarl—
and thus become wildcats; then let us
wander about in all the fourteen worlds.

Let us weep, then lock the doors of weeping
behind us, and to her who waits
let us tell others to plant plantain shoots,
then let us go in search of woods
along the routes where
prophesying parrots screech.

Look for seas in the rolling waves,
 and, then, count the waves.
 When the head reels, scratch it.
 Shout obscenities, and then melt
 ourselves in a poem. If the head
 turns anticlockwise, while
 the clockhand turns around once,
 reach the southwing fast,
 to find there a crowd.

—Let us clown around...

Blazing evening, quarrelling crows,
 the rhythm
 of the great-sea-moonshine-wave
 pawning for the debt
 love for the girl who won't lend herself...

—Giving birth and raining down
tharikita thitthom killing and dying
 differentiating man and monkey
 in a jungle's context,
 let us become a lightning bolt
 for the branch we sit on, then—
 Let us first turn clowns
 and then oracles.

Then, in the end, when fire ranges on the stage
 comrades, audience, Kali and all, are outside
 and *komalikkalidasan** inside
Kali outside and *dasan* inside
dasan inside and *Kali* outside...

Let us first turn firebrands
 and, then, curry-leaves
 to be thrown out after use
 (and for a time of no curry-leaves
 let us provide a eucalyptus shoot)

*The reference is to a folk myth.

When Organs are Severed

ANWAR ALI

When organs are severed
Don't grieve or lament.

Memories may knock,
Don't remove the latch.
On thoughts-shut windows
Teardrops may tremble
Reflected on them may ooze down
Stray streams of emotions.

Don't permit anything moist
Organs are desires.

The lie that chews the cud
Like the cow in the neighbour's shed
Let's cut, first of all, chanting Bismi;
Let the banquet of Bakr-id
be prepared

Let us breach the dyke and flood away
Like the pilgrims let loose into the desert
The growls and groans of hot blood and flesh
Hidden away behind the facade of the face.

Gray-haired light, a plume-like lamp, senses in tombs,
Shrubs in throats where utterance
Falters in its step, on the heart's arena
Missing a beat, in a vain bloody attempt.

Poison glands which soak hunger .
The cellar of life where exhaled breath
Comes to a halt, the prison bars
Of the ribcage and backbone
The sewer of maggot-ridden entrails...

One can sever everything

With a sword tempered in
The calming pit of karma
Wait
Think
What organ is there in you
That's yet to be shed?

You, the naked one, circumcised
And yearning to be clad
You the connoisseur
Who put a wig over your split pate

You, angling for fish-signs
Keeping your hands dry
Even in a rushing current.

You, who tamed
Treks in the forest
Within their confines—
Cutting ankles

In your person,
What organ to be cut
What battle to be fought?

Now
Cut away
Cut the mango tree
Between the room and the full-moonlight.
The way,
The new moon that darkens, swallowing up the way.
The road that is clad in tar by the dark times
The metallic-kadamb branch at the road's crest
The hoarding outcrop
The strings played upon
By the vehicles that progress
In a faint—and unsteady of speech—
Emerging from chasms to courtyards.
The magical costumes hung to dry
On each string;

Cut away
The ancient electric lines

The electro-magnetic dove-wings
Of melancholy that left the lines.
The wild gestures of Govindan*
Who beg beating on a tin-drum
In the boundless stretches of space

Cut away
With a simple nail-cutter
The sea, the woods, the dreams
Being tanned in the memory-machine

With a simple nail-cutter
The heart of the god of love,
The metaphor of the heart,
The metrical beat.

With a simple nail-cutter
Your play-fan, in which children
Were the leaves-

Appu,

Ammu,

Anna,

Aparna...

Likewise

Likewise

O

R

G

A...

[Trans. A.J. Thomas. "Avayavangal Murichumattumbol", 1997]

*Remembering Govindankutty of N.S. Madhavan's short story, "The Fourth World".

SECTION II
MARATHI

Death of Grandmother

DILIP CHITRE

My grandmother has died. A short frail woman
Of eighty one. Now she is lying on the cot.
It's summer. Flies buzz around her head.
My grandmother looks terrible
Amidst the crowd of insensitive, indifferent
People who radiate emotions
Like incredible rumours.
I look at her face. Fallen teeth showing
Through parted lips. Her eyes are open wide;
I see a sparrow flying away in the wind
Out into the sun, forgetfully.
I suffocate and fall apart to see
An old woman lying cold and still.
She is ancient and happens to be pious
Soon she will be laid on the pyre.
And soon we shall set fire to the wood.
It is summer. She will go up in smoke in no time.
My grandmother will perish layer by layer
She will leap into fire from the wooden logs
She will soar into the sky against the force of gravitation
She will go down into the abyss in due course
My grandmother has left home, she has become
Contemporary to all things
She will become forgetful like the sparrow
Flies will keep buzzing around the pillow
Where she used to rest her head
My grandmother she is dead
Is she my grandmother? The dusk has
fallen teeth and the air is wrinkled all around
And I am seated comfortably in this heavy easy chair.

[Trans.R.J.Bhongle. "Aajeecha Maran",
Kavithenantharchya Kavitha,
Poems written between 1958 and 1977]

Shakespeare 1964

DILIP CHITRE

Nothing of that sort. Possible. It can only be like that
 But no, nothing of that sort. You can be
 Anything. If you are bold enough, that is
 I dare not do anything - neither in the morning.
 Nor at noon, nor in the evening.
 Not even in the darkness of the night.
 But if I dare, I am sure I can be
 Anybody. But why should I ask? What for?
 Fire. Reality. They say that anything
 Can be achieved by scribbling some words
 On paper, and then, rubbing them out.
 Anything can be achieved by digging pits
 On the road, crossing over them.
 Crave not for the fruit of your deed.
 That is my privilege. I do not
 Utter a word. They say, I am mortal.
 And shall be uprooted like a tree.
 For ever. What after death? Everyone leaves,
 One by one. None is of any use
 I sometimes accept that welcome rose
 Thorny and thick with petals.
 Large rosy insomnia of petals the size of dawn.
 I accept the wall. The machine and man, birds
 And animal. The lust of fluttering spirit.
 The colossal burden of birth.
 I say it is possible. It can be.
 Anyone, since anytime. Further and for ever.
 I am an open trap, without and within.
 Nothing of that sort. Should be. Even may not be
 May dare exist. Here is a question. Answer it.

[Trans.R.J. Bhongle.From *Kavitenantarchya Kavita*]

Emergency

DILIP CHITRE

The sun and night revolve round these palms
O my luckless children, your parents
Could not mend themselves. Your lives
Blossom and perish within these thorny fences
Outside the black cells of your youth
They keep vigil - the police sent by providence
This is the law of destiny
With a stroke of pen every future
Can be wiped out. And the guns
Are ever ready to shower blessings
Which no one asked for.
Today I am dumb and cannot
Speak out. My children,
Let this strangulated epic be your
First lesson. No more of A B C D
No more of all that. All your
Great poets will howl in the darkness
Of the night like country dogs.
And when they are felled by bullets
This divine calm,
This collective slumber
Will live happily together
With your innocent biographies.

[Trans. R.J. Bhongle. From "*Kavithenanthyarchya Kavitha*"]

The Moon and the Mule

DILIP CHITRE

On a harrowed plain
animals graze darkness taking it for grass....
In the night dissolves my clod
turning the surroundings turbid. But then
my eyes become limpid, seeing
the glowing moon and a mule complacently stupefied
by its own shadow....
In the water, the letter wept by the moonlight
becomes a waveful line of fish
and swims in the turbid surroundings of
my leaky clod... Such is the hour.
And thinking it to be grass
the mule is grazing the moonlight of its own shadow..
My crumbly earth sinks and settles on the bed of the night
The hook of the space itself
angles the wave of the gushing dive of fish
Thinking it to be moon, I saw
the grazing moonlight of that mule stupefied in complacence.

[Trans. Pradeep Gopal Deshpande. "Chandra Ani Khechar",
from *Kavitenantharchya Kavita*]

Untitled

DILIP CHITRE

Like a whole family crowding a window
Damp wounds gather in the eyes
To watch a procession in the street

Democracy has triumphed once more
As though it has long since developed
The winning habit in this country

Locking up his youthful wife
He goes out to work the night-shift
And gets tired by the time
He signs for the wages received

On a bench in the pub thick specs
Gleaming orange-coloured benches
And a heap of blackish burnt chickpeas in a dish

As soon as the machines stop one feels like running berserk
The enemies of the machine-worker lurk
At the gate, at the street-corner, with crow-bars
In the city skulls get cracked, guts get spilled
If an innocent guy tries to cross a street—
What the hell's that? A truckload of bananas, a dead body
under the wheels!

[Trans. by the poet. From *Daha by Daha*, 1983]

The Being Alive of Broken Threads

DILIP CHITRE

The being alive of broken threads
Of heat inside ash-covered embers
The life-long insistence
Of an oil-wick soaked too well
That bears the noose of a flame
The struggle
Of a bee
Against an empty flower
The despondency
Of a well that has been dry three seasons
Notwithstanding these insufficient arms
This embrace is total

[Trans. by the poet. From *Daha by Daha*, 1983]

Restless Souls of Trees

DILIP CHITRE

Restless souls of trees hang over the desert
Like a mist

In a forest of an absence of trees
An absence of birds twitters

In this wordless dancing wilderness
An absence of words sits crouching its body

The meaning of togetherness is
Not accompanied by a shadow

The shadow is only accompanied by
The unending rustle of a destroyed forest

[Trans. by the poet. From *Daha by Daha*, 1983]

Old Newspapers

ARUN KOLATKAR

Beware of the old newspapers
stacked

On that little three-legged stool over there.

Don't disturb them.

I know it for a fact

that snakes have spawned in between those sheets.

Don't even look in that direction.

It's not because of the breeze

that their corners are fluttering.

It's alive, that nest of newspapers.

Newborn snakes, coiling and uncoiling,

are turning their heads to look at you.

That white corner has spread its hood.

A forked tongue

shoots out of its mouth.

Keep your eyes closed.

Get rid of the whole goddam pile if you want to

in the morning.

[Trans. Chandrashekhar Jahagirdar. "Raddi", 1977]

The Fuse

ARUN KOLATKAR

A rotten smell was coming from somewhere.
I gagged and reached for the handkerchief in my pocket
When my little finger dropped to the floor.
I picked it up with one hand
pressed the handkerchief to my nose with the other
when my nose came off. I wrapped it up
in the folds of the handkerchief and stuffed it in my pocket.
That rotten smell was still very much in the air.
The nose twitched in my pocket,
I thought I will take a closer look and see
if there be any maggots in my little finger.
That's when the fuse went.

[Trans. Chandrashekhar Jahagirdar. "Dive", 1977]

Celibacy

ARUN KOLATKAR

Most of the oldies are dead
Only Balwant has survived

Still some oldie runs into me
even now on a street occasionally
Walks bent, his mouth completely toothless
Can't even see, no question of placing others

Ask him how are you, *chacha*,
by shouting into his ears

Hold the old man tightly first
and feel free to ask any question

You blow into his ears
but what if he flies aflutter

Training his lenses on me
he gropes for my nose, mouth, horns,
taken aback, he says, oh Balwant
are you still alive?

What is so surprising about it, Gondya
I've maintained celibacy of a sort

Never kept it in cage
it comes and goes of its sweet will.

[Trans. Chandrashekhar Jahagirdar. "Brahmacharya", 1993]

Vigil

NARAYAN SURVE

Your eyelashes keep a vigil on my words
That is why in the lines of my verses
there is no bit of adultery
Forever, in my poems, there dwells truth.

You hoard all that is earned and care for me as a boil
is cared for as a tree minds a flower...
as the sky preserves the sun
In joy and sorrow too, the incense
and flame of your affection burns on.

Like a sculptor, the pen begins
to carve out the nest of desires
Around it, I go on winding the sackcloth
of your-and my-desires
Bent down like a green bough is the cool of your cheeks.

The moonlight begins to descend into the nest,
I myself become a peacock
Spreading the plumage, I take a flight towards stars
Delightfully, you laugh in merriment
and the soul pines in the eyes.

At times, battalions of words
take rifles on the shoulders
Sometimes, they become swaying fields,
sometimes the rebelling workers
Words flight like eagles...
and your fist commands the cloud and the rain.

[Trans. Pradeep Gopal Deshpande. "Pahara" from *Sanad*, 1982]

In This Season

NARAYAN SURVE

I have a shirt of yours—
Which used to fit you and me
When we were jobless,
Used to help each other.

I have kept the old lantern, under whose
Light, words used to visit us,
A well-wrought togetherness
Used to make us happy,
Some letters—and a note-book
Of your manuscripts
Which you were going to dedicate to me
—many such stories.

Then I got your letter from outside India
You had written: “Somehow we managed to reach Europe,
Now, going to Madrid—
I find India everywhere, but—
—but the place and I are broken off from each other.”

—now in this season you too are not near...
Not even your letter...
Only ... a few poems and,
The lantern with which we used to read life ...

[Trans. Aniket Jaaware]

Poems

N.D. MAHANOR

One

This farm has been so affectionate
that I have rejoiced and moaned
at my joys and griefs accordingly.
Now my whole being is so enmeshed
that I have become
the very word of its green language.

Two

While fiddling with the knots
of her taut blouse
she cares for the erotic moon-signs
on her fair, snowy breasts
and then accommodates them
by slackening the knots.
The wild flowers
can't meet her challenge.

Three

Oh my bosom friend
how to put it in words.
My man was insistent
though it was day-time
(even I was excited)
His sensuous hands caressed my body.
Under the mid-day sun...
In the open field...

Four

When the evening scatters in the eyes
dark desire augments in the abyss
I mutely see in the gaps of leaves,
the pathos of unbearable grief fluttering in the wings,
Shadows engulf the dark and dense night,
Somewhere a single glow-worm, still expiration,
Everything scatters far away, no halloing,
There is no one I can embrace without words,
The scattered evening drips in the eyes,
The lamp extinguishes in the air,
The night collapses.

Five

The untimely gathering of darkness
was too heavy for her.
Once when she smiled
I saw the tilted sky in her eyes.
Again I saw her whole body,
Her blouse was decorated with shining stars.
I forgot myself.
The ripened Jowar crop trembled in the embrace.
Yet again she met after so many days.
Now she was carrying inside her some Prince's burden
When I saw slightly in her eyes
The moons drowned in their darkness.

[Trans. Santosh Bhoomkar, 1967]

Granny

BHALCHANDRA NEMADE

Granny, my sobbing childhood, its face buried in your lap
 disappeared along with you. Gone is the centre
 of my life, my secret
 kept covered beneath your shoulder-cloth.
 Now this ring of the remaining life—
 how long shall I bear? Cherishing your long-life heredity,
 carrying on the back this valedictory bedstead
 of dreadful old age
 how long shall I wander?

The sweet smell of the wood-apple brought for me,
 carried the whole day in the tuck of your sari
 Your fatigued hand moved round the sore wounds of my life
 You were the midwife at my birth, you puffed the
 first breath
 into my lungs and blew the cornet of this life
 You pierced my earlobes, you tied Satee on my wrist
 You decked me with bashing*
 The tender puff of your palm on my singed foot,
 your tears covering my head-wound
 Your monstrous remedies—courtiers of hot ladle and
 over my bursting heart-rending scream,—
 the prolonged wing of your absolute compassion
 fanning flapping.
 Ninety years old, you were abandoned and dumped in my care
 by my parents who left saying—
 'If she dies, cremate her here itself,
 and don't you even inform us'.

*Satee is a female divinity, whose visitation is feared, because she is believed to inscribe on the forehead of the infant its fate on the sixth day after birth; so an embossed image of Goddess Satee in gold is tied on the infant's wrist for her appeasement. *Bashing* (literally 'horns') is probably the relic of a Harappan religious custom; it is an ornamental crown worn by the bridegroom and bride during the wedding.

'I stay where you keep me, I live till I die', you said.

That whole year you were my backing
 Behind my study-chair the horizontal support
 of your bed to my vertical backache
 The acrid smell of the pain-balm
 and loud chanting of God Vithal whining
 on the back and belly, night and day.

You would recite from the memory:

Such a wicked home of my husband,
 such bashing and beating I endured,
 O daughter, so you have this pleasant
 maternal refuge after marriage.

Excavation of ninety buried years, maps of generations
 stretched into domains of death
 Daughters sons-in-law grandchildren in-laws
 sisters-in-law grandfathers great grandfathers
 whosoever dead

You were living your life and I mine—
 in the same time and space.

Those were my bitter days too—
 days of insults, of knocks, of head-on confrontations,
 of hurts,
 of movements, of principles, of doggedness
 The days of plaiting the cares of housekeeping
 of sleepless nights tallying the monthly earnings,
 of looking ahead, of wakefulness.

Granny, I couldn't give you anything else—
 Only made you hear with me film-songs folk songs
 gramophone-records
 tapes from all over the world, wordy discussions
 on research, on literature. Gave you meals support shelter.
 As you pushed along the wall I let you move
 your caressing trembling hand over my head
 —the trunk touching the leaves—

And, at last, fulfilled your yearning of going back home
 With the blind hands you were getting ready every day
 Delaying it for one whole month, finally,
 —just as you did to me as a child, I took you
 on the knee and brought you home.

Couldn't meet you again. The clerk conveyed the message
"A trunk call for you sir, your grandmother expired
last evening....

She remembered you so much, they said."

Granny, when you died, nobody wept, no throat choked up
with emotions

I saw your broken bedstead petticoats bodices
An aluminium plate from which kittens would pull
and nibble at the chapati fearlessly
And saw in the niche the gap-toothed wooden comb—
becoming your widowhood of years
Your silver-white hair that wouldn't disentangle from
the comb clung to my fingers firmly.
Granny, ninetyone years old you cowdung-cake,
turned ashes in the side stove
of our ever-blazed-family
May the curse of your simmering agony
befall my luckless brow which
time and again before torturous trifling campaigns
touched your peasant feet that
I fretted begging for success
which you never saw and 'live long' was
your only blessing
which I got but in my life-time
never understood its value.

[Trans. Pradeep Gopal Deshpande. "Aajee" from *Dekhancee*, 1991]

Farewell

BHALCHANDRA NEMADE

In the roaring surf of this cosmic awareness
 may the charming, multi-coloured bubble of our life
 not turn out all empty

May these inflamed suns wrapped in dawns,
 peeping through thick foliage not sink

May the savage aroma of dust
 raised from underneath the soil
 by an untimely, colossal cloud-burst
 linger in the sweep of this sad law of annihilation
 May the precious lumber of living fill our home

Ways of clinging are many, my dear,
 how and from where they came together
 how abstrusely the mutually attractive
 fleshy dubbers of our genes united
 Entering into each other, how these blind flocks
 of larvae held fast the flux of life

The everyday-twisting-slippery nuts and bolts of housekeeping
 have gradually reduced the distance between us
 Our bodies have been electrified by the huge generator
 of Purusha and Prakriti

Preserve like a boa in a basket
 the ferocious sloth that overcame us
 after we got rickety, having stifled each other
 in the bog of orgy—
 the sloth that overcame us
 after we went on clasping the sand of night
 having scattered ourselves in the surf, colliding

We raised the water soaking deep down to high bio-altitudes.
 We sprawled out far away over the soft sand
 receding with pleasure

retreating from our passing prime unknowingly
spilling ourselves towards senescence

Sustaining the day and night roar of the household work
without being gutsy, without being flighty

You didn't let this rolling life turn upward, my love

We have let nothing to be exchanged between each other,
Except the one heavy, cold farewell.

[Trans. Pradeep Deshpande. "Nirop", 1991]

A Notebook of Poems

NAMDEO DHASAL

You do not open the door
Though I have arrived at the destination
How can I write the alphabets of constellations
On this old paper?

I have handed over my notebook of poems
long back to Kabir.
There is no Kabir in this market.
Only I stand here.
This tradition does not accept
The promise of liberation,
The wings of desire are just growing
In this empire of darkness!

[Trans. Santosh Bhoomkar. "Kavitechi Vahi", 1995]

Autobiography

NAMDEO DHASAL

The shaky image in the mirror of water is my own.
The pure, white mass of foam on the top of the waves
touchingly pass through space and time.
The bulwarks of hellish agony slowly collapse.
After making myself miserable
I sit on this shore of misery
carving the shapes of wounds.
The transparent clothes of existence flutter
With the wafts of breeze,
The game of darkness and light arouse commotion.
The transparent birds of dreams
make the shapeless sky nostalgic.
Flowers, without fragrance, of innermost awareness
suddenly begin to bloom.
Even I shed off my skin, like a snake.
This chill touch of water snaps the rope of desire.
Don't blow the water.
The face of my autobiography will be lost.

[Trans. Santosh Bhoomkar. "Atmacharithra", 1995]

. . . From Within the Paper-Weight of
Onliness

MANOHAR OAK

The perpetual rain within the paper-weight of onliness
 The suspended firmament glittering with air-bubbles
 Searchful, the shapely eyes like black-bee
 hum and bee-bore through sheet-rocks and hills
 Flushing youthfully, idols and sculptures get gingered up and arrive
 rapidly at fingers
 The paper-weight painfully throbs within and without...
 ... the light spreads through and through...
 Such stone-locked wails

The lustrous pure flagrant paper-weight
 that can be put aside any moment
 like the untouchable: Cowered, gentle
 Its wrathful squinty unseeing opaque eyes closed within
 so as to prevent the enchanted
 bits or papers of yesteryears
 from being blown away
 ... Preserved lumber, or the soul in guise of God...

[Trans. Pradeep Gopal Deshpande.
 "Ekulteapanachya Paperweight Madheel"
 from *Manohar Oakchya Ainshee Kavita*, 1996]

Metropolis-24

MALIKA AMAR SHEIKH

For years
people in the city haven't slept.
By night men are transformed
into different kinds of hungers
and one kind of hunger swallows another
Countless men suspended from the tree of passion
begin to fly by night
in the direction of blind bodies
We've often lost ourselves
in the jungle of intestines
Even a white hot bread
conquers us completely
Robots rule the city by day
and women by night
Yet only a poet or two seem to suspect
that we live.

Metropolis-41

MALIKA AMAR SHEIKH

Men covered by frozen words
they're seen to cross to the other side
through the mirror of truth
These days, therefore, one doesn't see the difference
between the mirror and the door
Moreover, of late, there are no faces on bodies
that is you don't know who is who
Add to it the lordly smile of debonair deception
At times not to understand men
is a great advantage in the city
and once man begins to know another
the city turns into a genuine tragedy inevitably
It was good not to know the streets
but the realization was later to this knowledge
While naming men and streets
take care not to forget your name
Through your own independent door
or through your own truth
you return decidedly to your own house without mistake
Where the face you had put down awaits you.

[Trans. Ravindra Kimbahune. "Mahanagar", 1994]

Nails

VASANT ABAJI DAHAKE

The complacent rulers
That walk with relaxed strides
Are unaware of the whispers
Growing gradually around them

Though they are cautious—
Their sharp ears always erect
And their cunning eyes always searching
For something defensive

They are vainglorious
With the thought that the prevalent
Calm is due to their terror

In the far-off fields
Not even a straw moves
But, if you listen carefully
You can hear tiny animals
Sharpening their nails.

[Trans. R.J. Bhongle. "Nakhe", 1987]

Machine

VASANT ABAJI DAHAKE

I opened a weekly
I was annoyed to find a few middle pages missing
Went to the seller with a complaint
he got disturbed and staring somewhere at a distance, said:
Nothing doing. You can leave the copy.
No other copy is available.
And, he warned me further, please do not linger around.
It's time for business.

Went to another shop. The same thing there.
The magazine without the pages, the disturbed seller etc.
Then I went to the publisher's office
And learnt that the sellers are not at fault.
Those pages are missing in all the copies.
'But, how come?', I enquired.
'It's a mystery even to us', replied the publisher,
'All the pages were printed. Maybe while stitching
or cutting...'
'Was there anything which the machine could not digest? I asked.
A man stepped on with a copy and said—'Here are all the pages'.
Taking the copy out of his hands I hurriedly turned the pages—
And found that those pages were totally blank.
Not even a single line on them.
Oh, the printing machines too....

[Trans. R.J. Bhongle. "Yantrana", 1987]

The Sleepless One

VASANT ABAJI DAHAKE

Taking it to be dawn
the crows inside the head
Woke up and
began cawing.
It wasn't dawn yet.
It was only the light of the moon
seen perhaps in a dream.
The crows saw it
and went to sleep again
on the tree inside the head.
But the sleep lost once was lost forever.
Perhaps the crows lost it too.
Because of the suddenly awakened crows
on the tree inside their heads.
The head had gone utterly heavy,
like a tree
with a thousand crows.
Outside
the cruel light of the moon.

[Trans. Ravindra Kimbahune. "Nidraheen", 1987]

Women

CHANDRAKANT PATIL

My face
which you loved so intensely
has behind it yet another face
but divided
and cracked

Did you never feel like
scratching the sophisticated surface
and looking inside at the dividing line
or did you never have breathing space for it?

Even the one who suffers does not know
such is the terrifying fire of guilt
and the disease of hiding it
by keeping awake perpetually

Around us
is the delicate screen
of civilization
which is not that bad
otherwise you would have to
piece together my face
by picking up innumerable bits

I know
warmth and wetness are impossible
without woman's womb
but what shall I do with this guilt
burning everything entirely.

* * *

The woman who never found
a rhyme for living
erected a huge geodesic dome

and constructed in it
a multi-coloured city of dream

For her desires,
the sky inside was the limit
her ambitions would echo
around the whole dome
the woman would turn into
Menaka, Madonna or Munro
dressed as Gargi, she would
talk like Maitreyi

The woman would say, as for me
Indra serves as my water-carrier
Brahma makes pots for me
Vishnu and Mahesh plant
saplings in them

She would say,
instead of lamps, I have hung up the Sun
in the dining room
and the moon in the bedroom
as for the stars, I just hate them

The woman would say, as for me
I never can tell where I will be
Manas-sarovar and Paris Hanovar
all are the same to me

She would say, I am not afraid of anyone
I, the self-contained, I the Maya, I the Brahma
I the non-duality of Shiva and Shakti

The woman would say—
but the woman would only say all this
and get lost in self-complacency

But whenever the woman stepped out of her dome
and forgot that she was outside it
she would stumble against a stone,
injuring her toe
even a minor scratch would give her a wound

The woman was a sovereign empress

her right to live was absolute
tantrums, irony, histrionics
were her only protective armour

Only once did I peep into the geodesic dome
it was full of thick, dense, loneliness
sitting in a corner, helplessly,
the woman was crying like a little girl
she could not bear her loneliness

This loneliness of woman
this life without a rhyme
this male environment
this tilted balance
between the mind and the brain

Woman,
even now it is not too late
the road of naturalness
passes by the houses of the ordinary
dismantle your geodesic dome
and dissolve yourself
into the unlimited crowd outside

[Trans. Chandrasekhar Jahagirdar. "Bayika", Sections 3&4, 1993]

Poems

ANURADHA PATIL

One

In a poem
you can't even say
why you feel so sad
in everybody's company.
The deep touching grooves
of a poem
become so deep
that even its words
can't tolerate
the glaring hubub
of the world outside.

Two

If at all you wish to give something
then give me an everlasting grief
so that your memory will always return.
This will be like continuing
a religious observance,
and yet somewhere
the rare green shoot
sprouts in this life
and the red nascent leaves of moments
eager for life
bloom on the branches of mind and body.
Today I once again remember
those days on which
your memories had faded.
Now I wish to claim you
though you are the root-cause of grief.

[Trans. Santosh Bhoomkar. 1992]

Only Then the Cursed Draupadi in Me

ANURADHA PODDAR

Today eyes are turned inside
to seek you hidden in myself
Life-breath closing on my eyes
the soul has come to the ears
listening for your foot steps
If you could be pulled out from my heart
like Draupadi, hair undone
into the open assembly
and if each superfluous cloth that
covers your naked skin
could be clawed away with these thorn-like hands
Only then will the cursed deprived Draupadi
in me be pacified.

[Trans. Aniket Jaaware and E.V. Ramakrishnan.
"Tarach Maaghyatali Hee Shapith Draupadi"
from *Cactus-flower*, 1971]

The Indebted

KESHAV MESHRAM

When faith in myself and the world peters out,
becoming the womb of the mother,
words themselves take me close.
A shameful life of insults I go on dragging
sucking the soul, only the stifled
words become pals and boost me up.

The obfuscated directions darken: Four walls... a roof
sink into darkness; mutely, trees allow themselves to be bashed...
The clammy earth, the rapping-slapping-feet...
like a wound with a throbbing pain.
... So does become the mind, and
words themselves become travelling companions.

At the beginning of the journey,
by the curve-mad ways comes death
Taking it into embrace —
even before me, words welcome it
Indebted — with all that is mine, I give myself as a
hostage to words...

In the showers of the light of fate,
I sing the song of debt.

[Trans. Pradeep Deshpande. "Rinayeet", 1963]

The Pleasure-Bazaar

KESHAV MESHARAM

Where the bazaar of pleasure is I do not know
What are the goods to be transacted?
Don't know the rates either!
All I understand is only a crammed bazaar...
On the plateau of the heart,
the weeds of pains limbering everywhere.

Steps of everyone are wrenched... suppressed
although they seem veteran, upright, callous-skinned
The visible and invisible joints of minds join each other
and rattle
Intersecting each other, rubbing and jostling they shrink
shyly even while running.

Just as a wisp of breeze gently alights
upon the juncture of light and darkness,
so does some existence spread waves of pleasure
Drops tremble on the fingers sometimes,
sometimes they deceive...
The whole mind becomes a crystal and oozes within

However, the green eyes are mollified
within by the weeds
The continuous journey of my feet knows no end now
Where does the bazaar of goods...
of pleasure... assemble? I do not know.

[Trans. Pradeep Gopal Deshpande. "Anand Bazaar"]

About School

BHUJANG MESHARAM

The kids in my school asked me
about the Great God.
When I replied, they all flashed their teeth.
One said, "See, we have hundreds
Of gods, and still
They are all somewhere... in books, or stone...
Where's your god hiding?"
Then I asked them about their teeth
And they all said
The Wild Neem tree cleans them.
Then I asked them about the Neem, and Mother.
All my friends scattered then like clouds!
They don't know, do they
Nature is the Great God
And we are all restless birds...

[Trans. Sudhakar Marathe. "Shaale Baddal", 1992]

Grandfather

BHUJANG MESHARAM

“When they arrived in their hands was the Bible.

In ours our land.

There’s no Black or White for God.

Come, let’s pray with our eyes closed.

Wonderful.

Unknown to us our eyes closed.

With hope they opened again.

Now in their hands was the land, and in ours the Bible.”

There’s no other fairy tale

to tell our grandsons.

At such a time, to try to teach grandpa

how to suck eggs—Great! Still I

Do want to attempt a small venture.

Having communed with yourself

For a quarter century, now you’ve come

calling. You are now leaders of the *Adim*^{*} folk.

Do you really want to see aboriginal Bharat?

On the Republic and Independence days

dances in the Capital *Adim* art,

While ‘civilization’ does cabaret in palaces.

Its procession

And our spectacle both march on

the same Royal Mile. Feels great!

Now the jungles, our prisons, everyone just loves.

Although the trees are cut down

Everyday we cannot do any song

and dance. Nor reject this exile.

You are welcomed, ceremonially,

^{*}*Adim* means ‘the aboriginal’.

Mandal is sent to Coventry.
You are shown Rajghat, Jyotiba and Baba stay hidden.
Responding to the felicitation,
you narrate your story — ‘All day long we
Bicker with each other. Come evening
we ask God for pardon in the church. And
Pray!’— The whole auditorium
resonates with the clapping.

Grandfather, there’s nothing worth telling you.
“When they arrived, all they had
was their wandering and we, History.
They said — ‘Let’s all do an exchange,
and change the whole world’.
We trusted, and now they possess History and we, Freedom.”
Grandfather, do you at all know the Buddha?

[Trans. Sudhakar Marathe. The original title is in English. 1992]

About Their Speech

BHUJANG MESHARAM

In the course of their speech, they happened to say:
 “The rays of the sun touch the peaks first
 and then reach the soil below.”

Predictable the four directions of their argument
 in whose reasoning, words merely swing like a rainbow of sophistry.
 Or they can draw self-centred maps in extrovert rays.
 Do they know the seasons of cardinal points?
 Do they see the spiked world hanging on the wall?
 Neatly tied-up their meanings
 Straight like a stick
 as it appears in the waters of the lake,
 they can draw circles of meaning,
 can abort truth,
 and with pride write the ethics of parroting
 or at best, with journalistic crutches
 line up with intellectuals.
 How people in the hot sun escape their glasses!
 They do not hear the fury of the lava underground
 Or the sound of light in the dust!

...As they spoke they drew applause, of course,
 thunderous, clappings rained,
 but they remained dry, unaffected.
 In the course of their speech, they forgot that
 The peaks of inequality are raised on the soil
 and then are lighted up by the rays.

[Trans. Ravindra Kimbahune. “Tyancha Bolne Baddal”, 1992]

Audit

PRALHAD CHENDVANKAR

Our breaths
Pressed under your feet
Are still suffocating
On the garbage dump outside town
How much we have to give,
Show us the accounts,
O inheritors of history,
We ask for a reply now!

Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar
Have *audited* your *accounts*,
Have *detected* the *frauds*
On each page of each book,
Have submitted *audit reports*
Of how many *journal entries* to be made
You weep your self-same griefs
Pretending innocence, wearing your sacred threads;
The rotten *stamps* of earlier lives
Have become *outdated* long ago
And the *gandha* on your foreheads
Has been *boycotted* even before:

It is possible, even now,
Let us forget all errors,
Write off the *excess balance*
Of your sins;

Do only this much:
Behave like humans,
And if you can't,
Declare your insolvency rather.

*Italicised words are in English in the original, though written in Devnagari.

[Trans. Aniket Jaaware. 1976]

SECTION III

GUJARATI

The Clock Has Stopped

LABHSHANKAR THAKER

The clock has stopped.
Table-legs dance
Cups and saucers pirouette.
Curtains flap and fan blades clash
Tinted bottles ring
Oaken chests reel.

Today, the stairs are tumbling
The ceiling brimming
Bombay's bewitching nest
is on the wing.
On the tongues of five ants, foul words cling.

The tower lounges
and streets stand up to collide.
Telegraph poles doze
Parks go rolling by.
Shops start dissolving
Bridges go flying
Machines feigning silence
settle into sleep
Cars dangle on trees
and trees begin to walk
A gust of wind crashes
like a mountain,
A leaping frog is suspended in mid-air
The clock has stopped.

City colliding with city
crumbles to the earth
Seven dams burst in unison.

Offices clang their anklets
A mill's siren mourns

Mosque mingling with temple
begets charms and spells
Two shrieking trains
glide into each other
Tracks are mixed up, flanks ruined
The clock has stopped.

Two oceans are crushed between shores
A python comes pilfering
shadows of mountains,
Planes smash and sink
Flags tremble underground
Barren lands wither
in caravans of newspapers
Fire fighters' vans turn crows
to sing fire-songs
Hoses drown in water
Water sinks in water
From an open seed raw and ripe fruits
fall in heaps
Hills stride into fruit
The Ocean's head lowers its shield
Its neck chopped off
All philosophy is annulled
The spider is reduced to nought, the web too.
The clock has stopped.

[Trans. Saleem Peeradina and Gulammohammed Sheikh.
From the volume *Mara Namne Darvaja*, 1972.]

Sunlight

LABHSHANKAR THAKER

In the morning dew sunlight
melts.
Melts melts a mountain of shadows.
And in tears
the green thorn thistle
drowning floating
floating drowning
colliding whirling comes
near the wild thorn thistle.
On the thorn thistle,
a sandgrouse sits sandgrouse sits sandgrouse sits
its wing trembles trembles trembles.
In the grandfather's eyes, light dims.
In the dim dim dawn dawn
light light
oho I hear again oho I hear from a distance
in the thak... thak... thak... sounds
I become a flower and blossom
blossom
become a tree and swing
swing
become an ocean and drown
drown
become a mountain and jump
jump
become the sky and shatter
shatter becoming sunlight
becoming sunlight scatter
I touch the deep of the morning's dew-ocean.
My crunched crunched edge goes on melting.
Melts melts a mountain of shadows!

[Trans. Roomy Naqvy and the author. "Tadko", 1967]

The Sea

SITANSHU YASHASCHANDRA

I have seen the ocean
Before gods and demons simplified it.

I have seen water in the light
Of polar submarine fire.
Fire and moisture are one.
To burn and to get wet are one and the same.

When I emerged from the sea
My palms held no pearls.
I am not a diver.
I am a poet.
That which is there, is there in my eyes.

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan and Anjana Desai
"Samudra", from *Jatayu*, 1986]

Orpheus

SITANSHU YASHASCHANDRA

The eagle incessantly moaning with sharp piercing cries
The eagle desperately searching for the lost beloved.

Masses of rock shift, lava cascades down,
Cave-roofs splinter
Past follies howl; eyes beget only dreams.
The mind turns blank.
In a sudden torrential descent
Sky-eagles reach the under-world.

The venomous empire of the underworld snakes
Entranced by the fatal music, grants
The boon: the beloved is yours
But do not look behind.

Blind eagles unable to look behind
Grieving eagles bereft of their beloveds
Eagles incessantly moaning
Underworld eagles reach the sky.

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan and Anjana Desai. From *Jatayu*, 1986]

The Woman

SITANSHU YASHASCHANDRA

Like loam the woman
Spreads herself on all sides beneath me.
I infiltrate her layers like flood-waters
and she is nourished.
She drinks me thirstily
and then as seeds
Swallows me.
And yet I feel she is my sovereign possession,
My wealth.
She is clever
Clever, helpless or entrancing.
Her body's earth is charmed,
easy
And simple.

Released are her fragrances with my kiss.
Miraculously she brims over with my being
Within her thighs or eyes.

I know not where or when
Does she know herself?

This woman knowing me better than herself
Envelops me with her bestowal
Like soft collapsing clay
Of her welcoming thighs.
I am preserved, a talisman, between her breasts.

Nubile, she is inviolate.
Kneading her breasts, clasping her waist
Stretching her knees to the sky
I subjugate her.
But the next instant—once again nubile
she allures me anew.

I her greatest lover
She, my sworn enemy.

[Trans. E. V. Ramakrishnan and Anjana Desai.
“Sthree”, from *Jatayu*, 1986]

Language

SITANSHU YASHASCHANDRA

I have always liked her: this our Gujarati speech.

We talk of the bitter-sweet of life, the question
of school-admissions; the departure time
of the State Transport bus from Mangal Mahudi village
to the city of Godhra; vitamins and minerals;
our Jibonanando Dash's Bonolota's poetic beauty;

honourable minister and supplication; the gossips
about the virgin's saltless fast which Kalubha's girl
recently observed;

and in many more incessant melodies
I have heard her music.

Once, I was just sitting around, reading
from *Purvalap*¹ of 'Kant', dear poet.

I thought I would read on, the entire afternoon,
his narrative lyrics, kawwalis, anjanigeets,² songs, what not?
I read "The same star in my nightly sky",³ when suddenly,
look, how this naughty Gujarati tongue
takes the great poet for a long, swift ride!

Overwhelmed emotionally by the endless grace of our Lord
the noble poet wished to thank the One,
but spoke out instead:

"Thou bathed me, Dear Father, Thou bathed me."⁴

¹ *Purvalap*, collection of poems by Manishankar Ratnaji Bhatt, 'Kant', a highly acclaimed Gujarati poet.

² Anjani-geet: a metrical composition, a lyric in that metre.

³ "The same star in my nightly sky" (the first line of an Anjanigeet lyric by 'Kant').

⁴ "Thou bathed me, Dear Father, Thou bathed me" — a line from 'Kant'. He had converted to Christianity. The line, in all seriousness, celebrates the baptism, and suggests the shower of grace and love from God to the poet. In Gujarati, however, the line would unmistakably mean, "You have swindled me, cheated me, out of my money." Somehow, inexplicably, this common meaning of the phrase escaped the great poet.

—Over, right there.

My reading of *Purvalap* was over, right there.
Small, ceaseless bubbles of laughter
would keep rising from near my navel
never to stop!

I like this one, our Gujarati tongue,
who makes fun of even her dearest son.

Who would be her most beloved child?
—A speech-disabled girl of sixteen or so?
Seated next to her, softly, she would
caress the girl's long hair, slowly,
on a lonely evening, silently,
this mother tongue.

Be quiet, if you want her love.

How was she born, this language?

“Shooing away the crow, suddenly she
saw the loved one (come back from his journey)”⁵

But, then,

“it was good, O sister, that he was killed (in battle),
I would have been put to shame amongst my friends
had he come back home, fleeing in defeat.”

—Was she born an orphan?

But, surely, she transcends all beginnings.

Joys and sorrows,
these tales, bitter and sweet,
they cross the line of all beginnings.

Beyond all beginnings, this Gujarati speech,
these languages all.

⁵ “As she was shooing away the crow...” and “It is good, my friend, that my husband was killed” are two dohas from *Siddha Haima Apabhramsa Vyakarana* of Hemachandra marking the pre-beginning of Gujarati language and literature. The first celebrates the arrival of the husband to the wife. The second laments the death, proudly, of the brave husband slain while fighting on the battlefield. A very important question which arises is whether the ‘child of this couple’ was conceived after the first doha and born after the second?

A single, unbroken, massive upsurge of amrit,
call it Mandakini, call it Ganga, call it Hoogly,
if the mind is startled, call it the sea.

Endless even it is—Gujarati language.
Merely language.

Startless, unbroken, endless talk of bitter-sweet,
on the evening's verandah, we sit and talk,
or talk in restaurants.

Speech — what it says it hides.

Hides, covers up and then flashes out in half-a-gesture

a look of your mother's eyes, a tone of father's voice.

Language is the way you speak.

In each word spoken, you find a full man.

“The eyes of the child in womb sparkle in the mother's face”⁶

—and have you ever seen another's entire self
leaning out of his unfinished word?

It is a difficult moment, to hear that sound.

—You need strength, a life time's concern for man:

His language is man's humanity.

“Animals cannot use language. Only man
is capable of using significant words”, say
the linguists. That, here, is not the issue.

To speak language may well be a human trait.

Humanity is in listening to what is said

—and what remains unsaid.

How much remains unsaid within you, sister, my
brother, I know that.

From the ‘Poets’ with a monopoly to speak on your behalf,
count me out.

Speechless I hear your unsaid words.

I honour your silence

I love you for being too human.

⁶“The eyes of a child in womb sparkle...” (a line from Umashankar Joshi's poem,
“Shodh”).

Authentic man

like dogs, cows, cats, horses and shrubs,
is a living being who can hear others speak.

And is capable of keeping quiet.

How was this Gujarati language brought up?

She, maybe, walked along, right to the dungeon, holding on
to Narasimha's finger in her small hand.

In that pitch-dark cell, she perhaps learnt her alphabet.

The next day, at dawn,
she must have shifted residence
from the vocal cords of God
to the throat of man.⁷

That it took the shape of a golden necklace
for the outer round of the neck—that's all mythology.
Actually it all happened inside.

Then

bit

by bit

the necklace

was shifted to the thick neck of the icon.

With a sharp eye, I see...

with an alert ear, I listen...

but man's throat seems emptied,
his voice, silenced.

Who, then, speaks this Gujarati language?

Printing machines, radio valves, vibrating machines?

A face formed of T.V. dots—it faces me,
eyes wide open, yet does not see me at all.

If I were to have a heart fail, right before it,
it would not utter a single "hey!", but would

⁷ "She, maybe, walked along.../to the throat of man" is a reference to "Har same na pado", 'the lyrics of the necklace', by Narasimha Mehta. The saint-poet was forced by the ruler of Junagadh to perform the miracle of making Lord Krishna shift the gold necklace from the idol's neck to the saint-poet's. He sang his lyrics all night. By dawn, when the deadline to behead the bhakta (devotee) was set, the necklace miraculously flew from the idol to Narasimha's neck.

keep reciting some poem, or talk show, or a soap opera.

So, who speaks today this Gujarati speech?

The heart has already failed.

The machine has been switched on.

The necklace has gone back to the icon's neck.

And the harsh, greedy eye of the new Sultan
is fixed on it.

Daughter of Hemala Patel,

O sister, my mother, bhakha Gujarati,
as the arrow strikes and the cow moans,
so, you softly moan.⁸

Does it hurt much?

Has it gone in too deep, the deadly arrow?

Hold on, hold on, darling, bear with it, a bit longer yet...

He will come,
soon he will come,
the performer, the poet, the man.

Printing machines will excommunicate him.

Let them. Speak,

O man, speak,
speak your Gujarati tongue, speak up
in Gujarati speech, say it
in the speech of man.

[Trans. Roomy Naqvy and the author. "Bhasha" from *Jatayu*, 1986]

⁸ "Daughter of Hemala Patel..." is a reference to the story of the origin of the Bhavai plays, in the medieval period. Hemala Patel's daughter was abducted by the local chieftain, a 'Sultan', and was rescued by a brahmin who pretended to be the father of the Patel-farmer's daughter. He shared a meal with her in the Sultan's presence to prove his contention. He was excommunicated for this. Later, he wrote Bhavai plays supported by the girl's father.

The Saffron Suns

RAVJI PATEL

The saffron suns are setting in my eyes

Oh dear! decorate the bridal chariot

And light the farewell lamps.

My last breaths stand before me

Glowing with golden gowns.

The saffron suns are setting in my eyes.

The green horses have been drowned

In the yellow autumn leaves.

Drowned are my glorious kingdoms

And sweetly smiling dreams.

The saffron suns are setting in my eyes.

A shadow seen in the courtyard

Beckons me not to go

It captured me by half a word

And captivated by the sound of anklet bells

The saffron suns are setting in my eyes.

[Trans. Deepak Mehta. "Maaree Ankhem" from *Ankat*, 1971]

While Leaving for the Hospital

RAVJI PATEL

I don't want to move away from here, darling
 Not even one step!
 Like the neem tree which rises in the middle of our field,
 I look you all over;
 I would not shift even an inch, if I would,
 Bake a *vedhami*, as soft as the touch of your palm
 Keep it ready—I shall be back right now!
 Don't weep like this
 See how that water sings
 As it comes out of the well
 Let your heart stream forth
 And join in its watery song

.....
 There is no one—none at all with me
 How can there be any one here?
 And I tumble back into the bed, what's all this?
 Please come here, rushing in
 Like the scent of new grass
 Reaching us through the window of our home
 Please come, my dear,
 And help me, gently to sit up
 Gently....

[Trans. Sudarshan Desai. 1971]

Poetry

RAVJI PATEL

I think I have walked
On this road before:
The road from which now
Poems have been dug out!
I do remember
The flocks of dry, dry sighs
All along the bank of the waterless river
And there, the stillness of unfluttering feathers
Of hungry, frightened birds
They brought me here—
Yes, just to this spot
Through the melancholy unreality
Of this crowded clump of trees
And then, all of a sudden?
Whatever happened?
And where-where-where have I been since?
And this tomb
Pushing it along
Where had I reached?
At last!
The sound of bird-song fills my ears and flows out
The wells are brimming over with water
And the breaths are full deep and lush.

[Trans. Sudarshan Desai. "Kavitha" from *Angat*, 1971]

One Afternoon

RAVJI PATEL

From the hedge of my fields
 hey, the she-crane flew away!¹
 Ma
 pour the buttermilk back into the pot.
 Wrap the rotis.
 There's no taste left in this chillum's tobacco;
 cool down the fire
 preserved under the ashes.
 Let me lie under
 the shade of the mahudi tree.²
 So what if the whole sky rains,
 or grass grows high upto neck,
 hey
 do not yoke the oxen to the plough...
 From the hedge of my fields—

[Trans. Roomy Naqvy. "Ek Bapore", from *Angat*, 1971]

¹'She-crane' refers to the female sarus, a large, red-headed crane which is found from India to Philippines. It is bright red in colour.

²Mahudi is a kind of tree, the fruits of which are used in manufacturing wine

Delhi

GULAMMOHAMMED SHEIKH

Over the fort like a broken loaf
sunshine sharp like radishes.
Grass and stones nestling in the ruins
of Tughlaqabad.

Shadows within arches: arches shadowed: Khirki Masjid.

Steps in rows fleeting through the eyes like a needle
at Jama Masjid.

The Qutb erect, stretching from root to throat.

Smells all around,

of food, flesh, blood, prisons and palaces,
yesterday's, centuries'.

Breath caught and fixed to this moment,
the eye alive, wheeling through the past
enters the cracks in Ghalib's tomb,
seeking Khankhanan's fossilised bones,
wanders from tomb to tomb
with the restless fate of Jahan Ara.

Still, dust and mist
still, nothing separates flesh and stone.

A sunbeam
slipping through the vagina of a dove
asleep upon the western arches of the Red Fort
pierces my eye.

Still, dawn.

Dreams mate with reality
what will be the face of morning?

[Trans. Mala Marwah and the author. 1973]

Father in Dream

GULAMMOHAMMED SHEIKH

Father I saw you again, yesterday
thousands of miles away from home, here on the shore
of the Baltic where I lie asleep.
You stood by my bed in this strange land
in the same patched, wrinkled coat
you wore when you reconciled quarrelling brothers.
On grandfather's death you must have stood exactly like this
holding the lonely old man's shrivelled hand.
When did you migrate from Kathiawad
to join the refugees of Crimea?
Leaving behind the Bhogavo river, crossing Bhadar,
climbing bastions of Roman forts
with a postman's bag on your shoulder,
you descended down here.
And look, the cemetery has followed in your wake.
(Why do I see your grave in every burial ground?)
Brothers come shadowing your trail.
(Is the dispute not settled yet?)
And there, on the edge of the horizon,
supported by a cane, mother struggles through the glaze
of her cataract to locate my bed.
Mother, I too have lost my sight.
The childhood I thought I held
in the palm of my hand, has just fallen
somewhere under this bed.

[Trans. Saleem Peeradina and the author.
"Swapnaman Pita", 1975]

Untitled-1

GULAMMOHAMMED SHEIKH

Before
the heaving passengers
vanish into the train
it shudders through the bowels of each.
Resting his ochre elbow upon
brick-stained windows.
Vacant tracks, tunnel, bridge
again the latch on the waiting room door
rattling.

The odour of two humans
about my body
evaporated in a moment
and took with it the smell of my own.
Travellers do not leave alone,
each departure taking something
of the watcher along.

Returning
the house enclosed me
like a blank envelope.

[Trans. Mala Marwah and the author. 1973]

Untitled-2

GULAMMOHAMMED SHEIKH

To go
departing meanwhile
with sigh-smearred feet.
Once more having
slipped into my pocket
What I had wanted to say.
It couldn't be written in a letter,
I had wanted to say it in person.
Couldn't bring myself to say it with
my hand in yours.
Our eyes suddenly meeting
sent it away.
Chatting then, we saw it curled up in the corner.

So we waited
for a fresh wound
for it to come shrieking out with blood.

Today
that old, barren talk
unspent
is up my trousers
like a lizard.

[Trans. Mala Marwah and the author. 1973]

Bahuk Section 3

CHINU MODY

Nal Speaks:

The birds have flown away snatching my cloth,

Naked, naked am I.

Recede, oh river waters

Recede to the mountain-top

Oh! mountain-like sacred tree,

Sink to your roots

Go back, oh! water-bearing clouds,

To the sky, go back.

I am naked

again as at the time

of birth

I am defenceless

as at no time before.

Why do I remember

my compassionate mother

when I am naked as

at the time of my birth?

Beloved, will you drape me like my mother?

Will you teach me the language that tames?

Can you restore dead fish to water

Alive once again to swim for ever?

Why this all over again, again and again, in the same sequence?

With all my might I should shatter

these frightful bonds

So that the pictures

as yet undrawn

yet to be drawn,

will surface on the canvas of time

Moaning like a female lapwing,

alarmed like a deer pursued
 by a piercing arrow,
 she stands near the Ashoka tree,
 unable to shed her sorrow
 abashed
 in the tatter covering her
 praying
 to the patriarchal mountains
 to look around with their lofty gaze;
 babbling to a group of saints,
 ablaze in the flames of separation;
 This is the daughter of Bhimak,
 so close to my heart.

Can I stand the sight of her
 lost in the desolate forest
 confused and frightened?
 How can the beautiful garment be pierced?

I am defenceless
 as at no time before.

And this.....

This city of Nishadh
 so tender to her children,
 in whose hands I frolicked as a child,
 who welcomed me as a king in my youth,
 She is benumbed like a woman
 receiving the dead bodies
 of her husband and son
 at the end of the day's battle.
 All that was familiar
 in the garb of directions
 has turned inscrutable.

*

These bonds are like the strong
 perfume of strange forest
 flowers trying to become familiar
 —hard of hearing and blind to boot

*

These bonds are like the trees

set on fire by their nearness to
a burning tree
—of little faith and blind.

Thus,
before this green forest
turns to ashes
under the curse
of my proximity
let me flee
with clenched fists
and clipped lips
let me flee somewhere.

*

Before I scorch this blossoming city
And this tender creeper with my
Burning skin, let me renounce them all
Let me accept the colossal cursed stillness
Of solitude, though its sting

Be fatal—NAL WILL BE ANNULLED.

[Trans. Hetal Mody, Anjana Desai and E.V. Ramakrishnan.
From *Bahuk*, 1982]

Incarnation

DILEEP JHAVERI

Trees of utter lies
Leaves of flames,
Flowers of ash
Lead me out, someone, from this forest!

I have wandered a lot
Carrying a couple of damp words
Stumbling over steamblind treks
Feet hurt by
Rusted vessels broken tiles halfcocked meals
Tattered clothes, roofless screams, broken bones
Bent bodies turning to stone at the touch

I roam everyday
Like some ghost from stammering past
Or some everhungry never propitiated
Unknown evil deity
Blind to himself
a lost sun or death

From these woods
Of ulcer-oozing, burning, cracked mirrors
Someone,
Lead me out of this forest

[Trans. Ranjit Hoskote and the author. "Avatar", 1992]

Oh, Name

DILEEP JHAVERI

I didn't know,
That around your simple and ordinary name
would be strewn stones,
Of these broken yet spear-sharp teeth
Lacerated sandy palate,
Torn-flagged lips
Bitter slimy saliva,
And the coiling snakes of breaths and sighs
To utter that one name
To search for that single name,
This dry tongue
Attired in sharp spikes since ages,
Would need to fare all alone
In this fading solitude,
Leaving behind the lifelong company of
Dented pots, cracked jugs, patched rags, burnt huts,
twisted sheets
In the bridal palanquin of smoke
With every thorn decked up,
Covered with scarlet veils of blood-tinged spittle
Wearing flame-feathered wedding robe,
Holding a fist-ful of native earth
On departure
to whisper
in the end
Just one Name!

[Trans. Ranjit Hoskote and the author. "He Naam", 1994]

Straight and Simple Tales

DILEEP JHAVERI

1

For sale

a house
with furniture and fittings
westward windows
original life-sized mirrors
electricity water air flowerpots plants birds
and on the walls
daguerreotypes of elders holding laughing children

Anyone
interested
may come
even without prior appointment
at the following address

2

When everything has collapsed
only then
meaning
again comes to dwell
in simple things

Only after falling down the dizzy stairs
vibrating mirrors
would realize
that
a door is meant for exit too

After the chaos of noise and silence
would appear a lonely boat
in the shadow of a face
bending over

a handful of water of the first word

After everything is submerged
in the flood
would fly out
from a breath barely saved
the first little bird.

[Trans. by the author. "Saadi Seedi Vaato", 1990]

Speakers of the Common Speech

KANJI PATEL

The crescent moon
 slid down in the sky
 but
 would not sink
 even though the sun is about to rise

Beating drum slows down
 the drum-beating Holi-revellers
 flow in the intoxication of the early streak of light
 teathed creature gnawing in the wooden-beam
 does not rest
 for a moment
 the night is meant for the act
 that the wooden-beam be gnawed
 that the saw be dropped
 that the consanguine black night too
 be dripped along with
 Creator of the night
 by dancing out till late in the night
 you have held the breath high
 in such a naked darkness
 mane of the white horse
 has touched the eyes lying awake
 Brother,
 it is this very drum
 that invites it all
 in the rafters and the ridge-pole of the house
 in the loft of the mat woven from bamboo chips in the granary
 in the carts and godwits
 in the plough and the yoke in the roof-beam and the threshold
 it is the drum again
 that kindles the vessel
 of the later years of youth

and at times brings back to mind the childhood days
that divides the corpuscles in the blood
and sub-divides them
that nurtures the longing
for the routine rituals
for sucking the soil
for being sucked oneself
that sharpens the sword edge
in the pitch-dark night
that cultivates indulgence and renunciation
The bedstead
has leaned against the pillow to sleep
the other face of the sun
has stretched itself out in the tree-trunk
Let us, the speakers of the common speech
keep flying in the darkness till then.

[Trans. Karamshi Pir. "Ek Bolina Bolnara", 1993]

God and the World

KANJI PATEL

Jaggery is sweet even in drunkenness
death too cannot sour the addiction
And what darkneses!
one cannot make out either coming or going
this much could be known: a water reservoir descended
from the sky:
ever increasing
ancient mountain milk
extraction of earth sky and being
joy after joy
not water
nor time
over there space-time were fuel in the needle
which one was fire among them?
God was the fire
and who was God?

God was
so was the world
distilling the mind, God was
consuming the world
the world turned out into god
and in turn created a new world

Let me be saved
let me create a tree
let me climb up the tree
let me go down the roots
not a seat of space to be found at the treetop or the roots
time is not there
only the wind-bright notes
that too not unaccompanied
are full of light smell and smart touch
and a soul in addition

meanwhile god arrived on the wings of wind
he also brought the world
the world consumes the fire.

[Trans. Karamshi Pir. "Dev Ane Loke", 1992]

Aphasia

KANJI PATEL

It is like what was never imagined.
Its shadow is half inside, half outside.
A bundle of clothes.
Squeezed by the darkness,
the earthen lamp struggles.
Sixteen manas of stone in the lap,
a niche in the wall,
in it, a small hookah.
After climbing a bamboo's height,
it shows the jewel of the head.
On the periphery, it is a cockroach,
and once inside, a mango-blossom.
There would be a skirmish, it was expected.
All this happened in-between,
on its being sighted,
it jumped and fled.
I chased taking the tong along,
when doused, there was a lull.
If it burns, a roti could be baked.
From afar, it would vroom a stone with a sling.
Thundering the air, it would dash the skull.
Stretching my tongue out
I tasted the red, salty trickle,
went on tasting it.
All sense of the self was lost.

[Trans. Roomy Naqvy and the poet. "Dachooro", 1988]

Crow-2

KAMAL VORA

far in the distance
a blue line
of waves

exactly midway
a crow
the sky of molten gold
casts shadows on its feathers
if
the crow flies away
the sea rushes over me
roaring
at a thunderous speed
if the crow remains in repose
the sea-water in slow motions
transfigures
into dark boulders solid in blacks

daggered in the chest
by a long pointed beak
i cross
through and through the crow
at the far end
i face
incalculable crows in glaring gold
the beaks reverberating
echoes of the roaring sea
blue suns in the distance
behind them the black skies
if
i turn away my back
the crows
whirl and encircle me
if

i remain standstill
the crows
change into smog of misty blues
within me something water-like resplends
i find myself of blue stone
in front of me lies
a golden mist
at far distance flies
a black crow

[Trans. Karamshi Pir. "Kaagado-2", 1988]

Mutation

KAMAL VORA

1

Ink-drenched pen
glides
A feather
in a mirror
Images of butterflies
on a black rose
Waters on the move
flow by
Vapour
amid stones
Grass
drizzling as fireflakes
Molten sky
inclines spills sprinkles
Handwriting
smallish and dim
rendered on paper
A dewdrop settles down then exudes
Wind
sets in blowing bubbles
Mist in ink-pot
A golden line looms up
dissipates
fades out.

2

Mountain
converted into vapour wind cloud
waters into feathers
and a bird into stone
Trees get uprooted take flight

Wind turns into fogdrip
Fire
surges swells flows and stones, remaining
mute
Sea-bottoms slide
Wild fire in waters everywhere
accompanied by wind causing soundwaves
Suns
get coagulated in eyes then ooze
Limbs get forms of steel
Membranes of enchantment move aside
Rains choose to dwell in the sky
Godhead in the body
Essence in brilliance
Word in nothingness
Solids get transformed into fluids
so do banks into bottoms
Incomprehensible no longer remains incomprehensible
Involved becomes simple
and a moment becomes non-moment.

[Trans. Karamshi Pir. "Vivarta", 1991]

The Cobbler

UDAYAN THAKKER

Look at the cobbler
Sitting in the busy street
Like a bus-stop, long cancelled;
Lines of smile torn from his face,
Like a strap from an old sandal.
He is laid in a corner
Like some monument to a martyr.

The cobbler sits under his leaking fate
In the monsoon,
Putting a stitch or two
Across the stomach.

When he tries to pamper his body at night,
He is taken for a ride,
And pays a premium of Rs. 2/- over the going rate;
Because of body-stink.

Why doesn't this cobbler
Make a bag or two in the idle time
And raise extra cash?
But he has sat at life's feet
For too long now
To ever look up high and far.

There's no sick leave for the cobbler, no pension plan,
So the next time you find
The corner of your lane empty
You may take it, he is out visiting
The big village above.

[Trans. by the author. "Mochi", 1987]

Voice vs. Voice

UDAYAN THAKKER

Voice I : There are some evenings, some moments, when one
Swims the orange and glowing currents of the sun,
You and I live in the very same world.
At the very same time; now isn't that great fun!

Voice II: The wife to escape, and then shoulders to scrape,
In the train, reaching office in sorrowful shape
To touch a rupee note and to bargain, and quote,
With yourself to promote; now isn't that great fun?

Voice I: On sandy roads strolling, when rains are a-falling
And old chums are loafing and laughing and calling,
On ponies to mount, and to let out a shout,
And to rollick about: now, isn't that great fun!

Voice II: Well-versed in culture and shapely in stature,
We are the women so comely by nature
In a marriageable mask, we are made to ask,
'Coffee, tea or me?'; now, isn't that great fun?

Voice I: To go out at night and to fly a big kite
And with lanterns of laughters to set it alight...
To send down the river, earthen lamps that quiver
Like hopes do they shiver, now isn't that great fun!

Voice II: Children to be tended and temples attended,
(Please refer to the annexure of duties, appended),
But in the bee-hives of the heart, it survives
A droning bee thrives: now isn't that great fun?

[Trans. by the author. "Awaj Same Awaj", 1987]

It is Silent, My Friends

MANGAL RATHOD

There is a word
Which when uttered
Shatters the tongue into a thousand pieces:
Trapped in the smoke-clouds of
Some rocket launching pad,
This silence—our silence!

And the truth that emerges from it
Struts about in the street
In broad daylight
Without a stitch on!
And like chaste, pious women
Casting furtive glances at it,
Like the daydreams of maidens,
Our poetry too is silent, my friends!

[Trans. K.M. Sherrif. "Maun Che Mitro", 1980]

Here

MANGAL RATHOD

Abandoning their boats
The fishermen have left.
The evening mist
Spreads on the river
Like a loner's grief.
The coconut palms have stopped all movements
And relapsed into a restful silence.
The old pensioners, leaning on their walking sticks
Rise from the benches.
The wave of birds which just passed overhead is
Perhaps the last.
How long shall that bridge stand,
Planting its legs in the river?
If it collapses some day,
This river, which flows between two villages,
Will come to know the distance that separates them.
Whom shall I tell this?
Whom shall I convince? For here....
Like a raw 'seethaphal'
The half-moon stares at me from behind.
Perhaps it is listening to my monologue!

[Trans. K.M. Sherrif. "Yahim", 1980]

A Man of No Consequence

YOSEPH MACWAN

I am a man of no relevance.
Every morning I figure on the printed page.
I raise a din, rattling pebbles of words.
I am chopped to pieces by the sharp blades of paradoxes.
I savour the instant coffee of meanings.
Amidst collocations I place my watch wound up.
I have forgotten who I was.
I am swollen like an ulcerous boil;
I spray the 'Intimate' of courtesy
I claim to myself that I exude the fragrance of humour.
I wonder what this business of writing poetry is all about.
No matter what the questions,
No matter what the answers,
On the shores of my heart
The reeds of my pride
Chop the helpless stretching shadows
Then I feel
I am a man of no significance.

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan.
"Sandarbh Vinao Hum Manavi Chum", 1985]

Afternoon Tea

YOSEPH MACWAN

Far away
the sun's horse breathes heavily
through the branches of the gulmohar.

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's horse
weighs heavily down
the drooping branches of the gulmohar.

[Trans. Suguna Ramanathan and Rita Kothari.
"Baporni Cha Pachi", 1983]

The Panther and the Poster

JAYANT PARMAR

There is
A poster of panther
On my drawing room wall and
A granite replica of Dr. Ambedker
On my table.
Whenever I sit with
Paper and pen
I stare at the poster
Long, sharp spiky teeth
Terrifying eyes — the panther.
I enter
The panther's hide and
pace the veranda.
Atrocities on my people
Make me boil with rage.
I clench my fists, bang the table,
Spit my anger.
Sometimes
Baring sharp, spiky teeth
I roar.
In the panther's hide,
Often at midnight
I pace my veranda.

[Trans. G.K. Vankar. "Panther Ane Poster", 1992]

Temple

JAYANT PARMAR

All the sacred rivers
Flow in my veins.
Sun Moon Stars
Twinkle
In my eyes.
All the places of pilgrimage
Lie within it.

I have yet to see
A temple
More beautiful
More radiant,
Than My body.

[Trans. G.K. Vankar. "Mandir", 1995]

My Poetry Is a Sharp Stabbing Knife

JAYANT PARMAR

Be it
A lane, crossroad or
A street

Sniffing my words
Police reaches
Ahead of me as if terrorists were to strike.

Whole lane and street are
Crowded with khakhi,
My poetry is
Recorded by police.

They are afraid,
My poetry is a sharp stabbing knife.
One day it shall plunge in the bottom of night.
On that day I shall present
All the pages of my collection to the mind.

[Trans. G.K. Vankar.
"Mari Kavita Dhardaar Khanjar Che, 1989]

When Nadir Shah Arrived

PRAVEEN GADVI

We were seated in *Diwan-e-am*, intuned
 To the beat of *mujra*, intoxicated,
 Swaying like the serpent before the snake-charmer.
 Someone suddenly cried, 'Nadir Shah has reached India Gate'.

We shrugged, and laughed it off.
 Let him, we also once came crossing the Hindukhush.
 The news was conveyed to His Majesty.
 He was bathing in the *Hamam* with the houries of heaven.
 All dressed up, perfumed, we went to the camp of Nadir Shah.

We prayed, 'Your Majesty, please settle down in this country!
 A cool breeze wafts across this land
 And its *mujra* is enchanting.
 Whoever came here, has stayed back.
 The Aryans, the Sakas, the Persians, the Huns, the Turks, the
 Mughals.

There is magic in the eyes of this land'.
 But Nadir Shah paid no attention.
 He took into possession the courtesans we had brought.
 We were stripped and driven away like dogs.
 He lifted the sword
 Against the Mughal sun blazing above the Red Fort
 And cried: 'Kill! Kill! Kill!'
 We cowered in terror like chickens.
 We laid the pomp and pride
 Of Delhi at his feet.
 The emperor too brought gifts: diamonds,
 Gems, pearls, the silk of Ahmedabad,
 The perfumes of Navsari, princesses and much more
 Rivers of blood flooded the Chandani Chowk.
 There we stood watching our naked reflections.
 The Iranians raped Mumtaz Mahal
 On the Aurangzeb Road in broad daylight

Like the Pandavas, we stood with bulging eyes,
We wept, prostrating at the feet of Nadir Shah,
We brought the Peacock Throne for him to recline,
We gifted him the carved glory of the Mughals.
Still he wouldn't listen—
It was a momentous decision.
Looting, killing, breaking,
Flinging the naked bodies of the princes on the road
He went away like Chengis Khan.
We felt relieved.
Then we listened to the *mujra*
Of vultures above the blood-dripping Delhi.
When those who had fled returned,
A wretched *Ghazal* rose from our lips:
'Let the courage of faith ignite the crusader's heart
And the sword of Hindustan will conquer London!'

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan and K.M. Sherrif.
"Nadir Shah Aavya Thyare", 1985]

Identity

YASHVANT VAGHELA

Here
They know
Who I am.
But feigning ignorance
They ask me:
Who are you?
I tell them:
This head is Sambooka's,
These hands are Ekalavya's,
This heart, Kabir's,
I am Jabali Satyakam.
But these feet are still untouchable.
Today
I am a Man.
Isn't that good enough?
Well, who are you?

[Trans. K.M. Sherrif]

SECTION IV

HINDI

Hindi

RAGHUVIR SAHAY

We were fighting
a language battle to change society.
But the question of Hindi is no longer simply a question
of Hindi—We have lost out.

O good soldier,
know when you're beaten.
And now, that question
which we just referred to in connection with the so-called
language battle,
let's put it this way:

Were we and those on behalf of whom we fought
the same folk?

Or were we, in fact, the agents of our oppressors—
sympathetic, well-meaning, well-schooled agents?

Those who are masters are slaves.
Their slaves are those who are not masters.

If Hindi belongs to the masters,
then in what language shall we fight for freedom?

The demand for Hindi
is now a demand
for better treatment—
not rights—
put by the agents
to their slave-masters.
They use Hindi in place of English,
while the fact is
that their masters
use English in place of Hindi—
the two of them have struck a deal.
He who exposes this hypocrisy

will dispose of Hindi's slavery.
This will be the one who, when he speaks Hindi,
will show us what simple folk really feel.

[Trans. Harish Trivedi and Daniel Weissbort. "Hindi", 1982]

Privacy

RAGHUVIR SAHAY

When you hope to find someone alone,
to hear him say something honest,
he is not to be found on his own.
At home, he's always surrounded by others,
members of some secret organization evidently.
It feels like 1975 all over again,
the secret service everywhere,
except this time it's not official.

No one knows what to do with the plain honest truth—
Unless it's been adulterated, so to speak.
It's on this basis even childhood friends talk to you.
Life's journey remains a mystery.
Whether one arrives depends on
how and when he gives someone the slip.

[Trans. Harish Trivedi and Daniel Weissbort. "Eknath", 1989]

Cycle-Rickshaw

RAGHUVIR SAHAY

It may sound like socialism to say
we should treat horses like human beings,
especially when one of them happens to be a human being.
When we jump guiltily off a rickshaw,
and then feel sorry we've deprived the poor man of his livelihood
and finally tip him out of pity—
in all three cases we're a trial to him, and he has to endure us.
It is only when we haggle over the fare
that we approach equality.
Come, you engineers of the twenty-first century,
let's invent a cycle-rickshaw in which
the passenger and horse can sit side by side
and just go for a spin.
And what good will this do, you may ask?
Well, if there's a disagreement between you and the horse,
at least he won't have to turn round and get a crick in his neck.

[Trans. Harish Trivedi and Daniel Weissbort. 1989]

The Bridge of Majhi

KEDARNATH SINGH

The bridge of Majhi
Can be seen from my village

I first noticed its towering
Brick-red arches
While returning from school
It was a day in early winter
When the bridge of Majhi soars slowly
In the eastern sky, spreading wings
Like a flight of cranes

Nobody knows
When it was built
Who built the bridge of Majhi
This question still bothers
The people of my village
'Before you were born'
Grandma used to say
'Once darkness fell during day
Before even that'
The aged chowkidar says

Isn't it true
The bridge of Majhi was discovered
Standing on the sands
One fine morning in this very form
Bansi the boatman's eyes seem to say
Just when Lal Mohar
Reaches out for tobacco
While ploughing the land
The bridge of Majhi comes into view
Through the space between the bull's horns
Weary of grazing

Japasi's sheep raise their heads
And start gazing
Towards the bridge of Majhi

How many pillars has the bridge
Nineteen—says Jagadish
Twenty—observes Ratan the barber
Often it grows to twenty three or twenty four
Can the pillars of the day
Disappear in the night?
Or do they get added at dawn?

How many bricks make the bridge of Majhi
How many billion grains of sand
How many mules
And bullock carts
How many eyes
How many hands have been offered to
The bridge of Majhi
The people of my village
Have no accounts
The truth is
For the people of my village
Idling at noon
The bridge of Majhi
Is only a ripe field of millet

But what is a bridge?
Why does it lure man?
When the last night-train climbs
On to the rail-bridge of Majhi
Why do the people of my village
Begin to rock
Even in their deep sleep

After a great disquiet
I have often wondered
Where is Majhi in the bridge of Majhi
Where is its boat in the bridge
Can you put your finger precisely at the point
Where the boat lies concealed in the bridge

Is there a word for bridge
In the language of fish?
What have allegator and porpoise to say?
How do turtles feel the bridge
As they spread their backs
In the afternoon sand warming
To the glow of its arches
I know how comforting it is
For the people of my village
To have this bridge in the quietness
Of the eastern sky, suspended
In their pre-natal past.

I often shudder at the thought
What if all of a sudden
They discover that
The bridge isn't there

I ask myself
Who is greater
The bridge of Majhi spanning across the river
Or the one hanging within the people.

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan. "Majhi Ka Pul", 1979]

The Tiger

KEDARNATH SINGH

They fear that one day
The tiger will be extinct
A day will come
When there will be no more days
And the tigers of the world
Will be lost to children's books

I too have the fear
But I have another fear
Which shines brighter than any tiger
Where will the hands be
Where will be the eyes that read books
Where will be the press to print books
Where will be the cities
To hang the type
Where will be the paper
On which the letter A precedes
The bouncing dancing letter PPLE
Which the wind will listen to
And commit to memory
A complete, perfect word
Which the leaves shall recite
And which, passing through the earth's
Invisible wires shall become
A song of life on the lips
Of a dying man by a hospital window.

I have a fear
A very simple, plain fear:
Where shall the fear be?

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan. From the sequence titled *Bagh*, 1984]

Remembering the Year 1947

KEDARNATH SINGH

Kedarnath Singh, do you remember Noor Miyan?
The fair-looking Noor Miyan
The dwarfish Noor Miyan
After selling *surma* at Ramgadh bazaar,
he would be the last to come home ...
What, you remember such trivia too, Kedarnath Singh?

You remember the school ...
The tamarind tree ...
The Imam bada'..
You remember from the beginning to the end
the multiplication table of nineteen
Can you, from addition and subtraction on your forgotten slate,
deduce why
leaving your colony one day
Noor Miyan had gone away?

Do you know where he is at present?
In Dhaka or Multan?
Do you know how many leaves
fall every year in Pakistan?
Why are you silent, Kedarnath Singh?
Are you weak in mathematics?

[Trans.Pradeep Gopal Deshpande.
"1947 Ko Yaad Karte Huye", 1983]

The Plain Paper

KEDARNATH SINGH

On a plain paper
There is neither dawn nor dusk
Ever a midnight sun
Shines on the other side of the hemisphere
On the plain paper

Look intently
Two brown eyes are glowing
The glare of an elegant tiger's hair
Spreads on your writing desk
Stretch your arms
And run your fingers through the savage hair
There is no need to fear
Warm as your own skin
Alluring is the blank page
Primitive as your love
Unbound like your bitterness
Refined as your nails
Salty as your own blood

Touch it
You feel as if you are touching
Your own jugular

Poetry does this plain but perilous job
So that despite all his words
Man can still keep the paper plain

[Trans. E.V. Ramakrishnan. "Sada Panna", 1980]

Shepherd's Face

KEDARNATH SINGH

Arriving here
I have forgotten so much
So much which was essential
to remember.

It is indeed hard for me
to say why the face of an old, sad
shepherd still sticks to my memory
after all these days.

I had seen him one day
at the river where his sheep
were drinking water.

I saw that in the wrinkles
of his face there was still
some space left,
enough for a sparrow to nest.

Then the sheep remained
where they were
and that face live with water and mud
came along with me.

Water still drips within me
from that face even after
so many years.

Now, what shall I do with this face?
Is it possible for me to go back
and leave it at the same river
and come back? Shall I
hang it on the wall?
Is there a peg that can
sustain a live face?
What shall I do then?

My friend, how difficult it is
to drift like a leaf in a crowded
street, and wander in the city of Delhi
from morning to evening,
carrying the old, sad face
of a shepherd within one's consciousness.

[Trans. Pradeep Deshpande. "Gadariye ka Chehara", 1983]

A Few Do's and Dont's from a Peasant to His Son

KEDARNATH SINGH

My son
never peep into a well
And never go
Towards the side where
Black crows are hovering over

Never pluck
A green leaf
If you must
Let not the tree feel
Even the slightest pain

Whenever you break the bread at night
First bow your head
And call to mind the wheat plant

If red ants
Are seen
Know that
A storm is on the way

If the sound of jackals
is not heard for several nights
Be sure
Evil days are ahead

My son
Never fall like the lightning
And if it can't be helped
Then be like the grass
Ever ready to rise

If in darkness
You are lost

Trust not the pole-star
But the barking of dogs
In the distance

My son
Never go north on a Wednesday
And west on a Sunday

And the most important thing, my son
Wipe off these words
When they have been written

So that when the day breaks tomorrow
Your slate sparkles
Clean and
Spruce
As always

[Trans.E.V. Ramakrishnan.
"Kuch Sutr Jo Ek Kisan Bapne Bete ko Diye", 1988]

Cranes in the Drought

KEDARNATH SINGH

At three in the afternoon
They arrived
And when they did
None ever imagined
Cranes could come like that

One after the other
They came gradually
Flight after flight
They spread slowly
Over the entire sky
By degrees the whole city
Filled with their crackles

They hovered over the city
For long over the roofs
Over the porches
From their wings there
Kept falling the smell
of dry paddy leaves

Suddenly
An old woman noticed them
Certainly they have come
In search of water
She felt

She went to the kitchen
Brought a bowl of water
And kept it in the courtyard

But the cranes
kept hovering over the city
They saw not the woman
Nor the bowl of water

Cranes had no idea
Down below people lived
And they called them cranes
They had come from distant
Lands, searching for water
They were bound for distant
Lands, searching for water
So they raised their necks
For once they looked back
There is no telling
What there was in the look
Pity or enmity
But, while departing
They did give a look
Turning their necks towards the city
Then, beating their wings
In the air, they were
Lost in the distance.

[Trans. E. V. Ramakrishnan. "Akai Meim Saras", 1988]

Description of the Missing One

KUNWAR NARAYAN

Wheat-coloured, a peasant's ways,
scarred brow,
height not under five feet,
talks like he's never known grief.

Stammering,
if you ask his age, he'll tell you—
several thousand years, give or take a few...
Seems crazy, but isn't
Has fallen off high places more than once,
and got all broken up, so

looks glued together,
like the map of India.

[Trans. Daniel Weissbort with the poet.
"Lapata Ka Huliya", 1979]

Horoscope

KUNWAR NARAYAN

Lying in a field of flowers,
I have often thought about the dew,
fluorescent dots
dripped onto the petals
with nibs of light.
What astrologer designed this complex horoscope
of the glittering firmament?
And why do these luminous signs vanish,
from one to zero?
Whose is this cynical, geometrical yawn?

And then I thought
about the bedraggled leaves under the trees—
Who thought up this mathematical puzzle?
The wind is counting:
it gathers leaves anywhere,
and deposits them anywhere.

At times, it snatches a few leaves from the tree,
crumples them and tosses them carelessly away.
At times it spreads out a new sheet,
and doodles its trees, trees, trees...

[Trans. Daniel Weissbort with the poet. "Janmakundali", 1993]

The Key to Success

KUNWAR NARAYAN

They both carried loaded pistols,
were afraid of one another,
the hearts of both
filled with an old enmity,

At that time there were only these two.
But when the shots were fired,
a third was killed—
he was standing at a tea-stall...

Then a fourth was caught,
who was not even at the tea-stall,
but at home, and on his testimony
a fifth was grilled whom a sixth,
identified by a seventh, had implicated,
an eighth being tried
and a ninth convicted—
the tenth, who got off scot free,
fell to his knees before the eleventh.

The latter
had found the key to a new success,
which he nonchalantly twirled around his finger.

[Trans. Daniel Weissbort with the poet.
"Saphalata ki Kunji", 1993]

Remaining Human

KUNWAR NARAYAN

Actually, I'm not the one you saw
writhing on the ground.
You must have seen me take to my heels,
looking for a protector?

In evil times, it's hard to remain human.
He too must have been human,
a man like you and me. But, as I said,
he meant nothing to me whom you too
heard cry out, in extremis, for help,
until the breath left his body.

Perhaps it was then, in that dark moment,
when, like a scared beast,
I had abandoned him,
that he, run finally to earth,
turned into a wild thing.

[Trans. Kunwar Narayan and Daniel Weissbort.
"Jab Aadmi Aadmi Nahin Rah Jata", 1979]

Magadh

SHRIKANT VERMA

Which way lies the city of Magadh?
Listen, O rider of the horse,
From Magadh I come
And to Magadh
I must return.

Which way shall I turn?
To the North or South?
Or to the East or West?

Lo, there lies Magadh!
And now it is gone!

It was only yesterday
That I had left Magadh behind.
It was only yesterday
That the people of Magadh had said,
Do not leave Magadh.
I had given them my word
That before the sun rises
I shall be back.

And now there is no Magadh.

Aren't you looking for Magadh as well?
Brothers,
This is not the Magadh
That you have read about in books
This is the Magadh which you
Like me
Have lost forever.

[Trans. Mrinal Pande. "Magadh", 1979]

The Lichhavis

SHRIKANT VERMA

The Lichhavis are gone
The Lichhavis will be back.

Once again the palaces shall spring to life
And the Queens' quarters resound
With the sound of jingling bracelets.

Once again the festive markets shall come up,
And with them the loud bargains
And the alms,
And *beggars begging for alms*
And desires
And desirous folk.

Then why are the widows in mourning?
And why does Vaishali lie deserted?

The truth is that nevermore
Shall the Lichhavis return,
And even if they do so,
They shall pass by repeating,
"We are Lichhavis....
We are Lichhavis"

And so on.
It is only once in a while that
The Lichhavis happen,
And therefore the Lichhavis are.

[Trans. Mrinal Pande. 1984]

A Blessed End

SHRIKANT VERMA

I have to go to Kashi
And I say
I'm going to Kosala.
After all, what is there in Kashi?
Except the burning ghats of Manikarnika?
Where only the dead bodies come and go,
No,
I do not want to go to Kashi.

I want to go to Kashi
And I say,
Luckless is he, who goes to Kashi
And not to Kosala.

Have you seen Kosala?
Come along,
I'm going to Kosala.
Between Kosala
and Kashi,
There is a difference.
Kashi is not Kosala.

I say,
Blessed are they
Who come to a blessed end in Kashi
But I
Want to die
In Kosala.

[Trans. Mrinal Pande. "Sadgati", 1984]

Vasantsena

SHRIKANT VERMA

Vasantsena
is
going
up the stairs

You will not
understand
Vasantsena
You are young

The stairs
up and down
are
endless

The stairs in and
the stairs out and
the stairs
to the end
the stairs to the ego
are endless

You won't understand
Vasantsena

Going
up the stairs
is as tough as
going
down. The stairs
we go up are
the stairs
we go down

The stairs do not care
who is going up

who is going down

They do not care
Whether he is up
When he is
going down or
Whether he is down
When he is
going up

They do not care
how many
he has left
for going
up or down

The stairs do not
listen
The stairs
do not count

Vasantsena!

[Trans. Krishna Baldev Vaid. 1984]

Kosala Lacks in Ideas

SHRIKANT VERMA

Congratulations Maharaja, may you be victorious!
 There was no war.
 The enemies
 Have turned back.

We were fully equipped though
 With four million foot soldiers
 Ten thousand horses
 And about as many elephants.

We had left nothing to chance.
 Had there been a war,
 The result would still have been the same.

They had neither arms,
 Nor horses,
 Nor elephants.
 How could there be a war
 They were unarmed!

Each one of them was alone,
 Each one of them claimed,
 That he was alone.

Whatever it may be, Maharaja,
 Victory is unquestionably thine.

Congratulations!
 The *rajsuya* sacrifice is complete,
 Thou art now a Chakravarti,
 The emperor of the emperors!

Maharaja,
 They have left
 Only a few questions behind,
 For example this—

Kosala will not last for too long.
For Kosala lacks in ideas.

[Trans. Mrinal Pande.
“Kosal Meim Vicharom Ki Kami Hai”, 1984]

Twenty Years After Independence

DHOOMIL

Twenty years later
those eyes have come back to my face
which have shown me the jungle
for the first time:
a solid sea of green
where all the trees have drowned,

where every warning
has overcome the danger it foresaw
and turned into a green eye.

Twenty years later
I ask myself—
how much endurance does it take
to turn into an animal?
And move on in silence
without an answer,
for these days the weather's moods are such
that it's almost dishonest
to go chasing the little leaves
blowing about in the blood.

It's afternoon now,
there are padlocks hanging on every side,
a disaster's written in the language
of the bullets buried in the walls
and the shoes scattered in the street,
a cow has slopped its dung
on the map of India
flapping in the wind.

But *this isn't the time*
to measure a frightened people's shame
or ask the question—

who's the country's greater misfortune,
the policeman or the saint?
No, this isn't the moment
to go back and put on the shoes
left behind in the street.
Twenty years later and on this afternoon
I pass through the deserted lanes
like a thief
and ask myself—
is freedom only the name
of three tired colors
dragged by a single wheel
or does it have some special significance?
And I walk on in silence
without an answer.

[Trans. Vinay Dharwadkar. "Bees Saal Baad", 1972]

The City, Evening, and an Old Man: Me

DHOOMIL

I've taken the last drag
and stubbed out my cigarette in the ashtray,
and now I'm a respectable man
with all the trappings of civility.

When I'm on vacation
I don't hate anyone.
I don't have any protest march to join.
I've drunk all the liquor
in the bottle marked
FOR DEFENCE SERVICES ONLY
and thrown it away in the bathroom.
That's the sum total of my life.
(Like every good citizen
I draw the curtains across my windows
the moment I hear the air raid siren.
These days it isn't the light outside
but the light inside that's dangerous.)

I haven't done a thing to deserve
a statue whose unveiling
would make the wise men of this city
waste a whole busy day.
I've been sitting in a corner of my dinner plate
and leading a very ordinary life.

What I inherited were citizenship
in the neighborhood of a jail
and gentlemanliness
in front of a slaughterhouse.
I've tied them both to my own convenience
and hauled them two steps forward.
The municipal government has taught me
to stay on the left of the road.

(To succeed in life you don't need
to read Dale Carnegie's book
but to understand traffic signs.)

Other than petty lies
I don't know the weight of a gun.
On the face of the traffic policeman
doing his drill in the square
I've always seen the map of democracy.

And now I don't have a single worry,
I don't have to do a thing.
I've reached the stage in life
when files begin to close.
I'm sitting in my own chair on the verandah
without any qualms.
The sun's setting on the toe of my shoe.
A bugle's blowing in the distance.
This is the time when the soldiers come back,
and the possessed city
is now slowly turning its madness
into windowpanes and lights.

[Trans. Vinay Dharwadkar.
"Shahar, Sham aur Ek Budha: Maim", 1972]

Shoes

SARVESHWAR DAYAL SAXENA

I
My shoes are torn
here and there.
The ground hurts
I stop to
ask them —
'Why don't you move ahead?'
Prompt comes the reply —
'We are ready even now
if you move.'
I am silenced.
How should I say
I too am torn
all over?

II
Ever since
I brought new shoes
my gait has changed.
The world's has remained
just the same.
Friends say
I lean
on my left foot,
the fact is
I avoid the pain
in the right one.

III
He said—
in my polished shoes
you can see your face.

Dazed, I think
fortunate are those
without a face.
A thought comes later
they are good people
who wear no shoes.

IV
Tar and gravel embedded
it lies on the road
a worn-out, shapeless shoe.
I think of the feet
it has protected
and bow
in reverence.

[Trans. Vijay Munshi. "Jootha"
from *Khuntiyon Par Tange Log*, 1976-81]

A Handcart Full of Words

SARVESHWAR DAYAL SAXENA

My father
gave me a notebook,
I have filled its
fifty pages.

I have crossed out
more than I have written,
some pages are half blank,
some carry ink marks,
there are figures of men and beasts
on the margins, all mixed up;
some pages have stains of dirty hands,
sometimes a single word has been
traced over and over again,
nailing it to a cross;
Thus have I filled these fifty pages.

All this is not my fault;
I have done my best
to keep my hand steady
that my writing be legible
that once written a word
is not crossed out;
but in weak, malignant moments
white pages look black
and words slip out of the line.
It appears as if the journey
is halted for sometime.

The pages ahead
are blank —
barren fields
or dense jungles.
It is snowing

I have to wipe the words clean
and drag this handcart
full of words,
filled with all that
I wish to give you—
one and all,
but let me first reach your homes.

This notebook has a strong binding
sweat and tears
have left it unharmed!
If this hand too falls off
like words
in this forsaken place
please come to the cart
guided by the twinkling light
of this gleaming notebook
and take it away,
the notebook my father gave me.
I have filled its fifty pages.
I have a request to make:
Please do not bring along
your shaggy wild dogs
which can only see
what they have been trained to smell out,
and not what exists.

[Trans. Vijay Munshi. "Shabdom Ka Dhela"
from *Khuntiyon Par Tange Log*, 1976-81]

I Won't Allow the Sun to Set Any More

SARVESHWAR DAYAL SAXENA

I won't allow the sun to set any more.

Look, I have broadened my shoulders
clenched my fists
and I have learnt
to stand
on slopes, digging in my heels.

Don't be afraid—
I am going to the horizon
and when the sun
is just about to roll down the hill
I will put my shoulders across.
You will see
it remains still.

I won't allow the sun to set any more.

I have heard
You are in its chariot
I want to bring you down—
you are the picture of freedom
of courage
and the riches of the world,
you are the love of the past ages,
you are my pulsating veins
and my consciousness,
I want to bring you down
from that chariot.
The chariot horses will breathe fire
yet the wheels will not move
now that I have broadened my shoulders.

Who will stop you?
I have made the earth large.

I will deck you up
with golden ears of corn.
I have opened out my heart
I will praise you in my love songs,
I have broadened my vision
dream-like you will flit in every eye.

Where can the sun go after all?
It will have to be here
here—in our breath
 in our determination
 and in our vigils.

Do not be sad
I will allow no sun to set.

Evenings will not prick you
like nails in a shoe.
I have made the journey long
I have broadened my shoulders.

[Trans. Vijay Munshi. "Ab meim sooraj ko nahin doobne doonga"
from *Khuntiyon Par Tange Log*, 1982]

While We Were Discussing the Political Significance of the Drought

VINODKUMAR SHUKLA

While we were discussing the political significance of the drought,
I kept mum about
the flock of sparrows that had
risen from the river bank,
like a wave fragmenting.
But noticing a sparrow perched there
among the people dozing side by side in their seats,
I hollered that there was a fragment of wave on the table.
In a chorus, ten of my friends pointed out
that the fragment had come in through the window.
It settled on a wall peg,
wanted to wash its face and hands, and so forth.
And the wave's face is almost like a river.
The bucket filled with water has the face of a river.
With parliament assuming its comb shape,
the government had no hair on its head.

[Trans. Dilip Chitre and Daniel Weissbort.
"Rajnitik Bahas Meim Sukhe ko Lekar", 1981]

One Should See One's Own Home from Far Off

VINODKUMAR SHUKLA

One should see one's own home from far off.
One should cross the seven oceans
to see one's home,
in the helplessness of the unbridgeable distance,
fully hoping to return some day.
One should turn around, while journeying,
to see one's own country from another.
One's Earth from space.
Then the memory of
what the children are doing at home
will be the memory of what children are doing on Earth.
Concern about food and drink at home
will be concern about food and drink on Earth.
Anyone hungry on Earth
will be like someone hungry at home.
And returning to Earth
will be like returning home.

Things back home are in such a mess
that after walking a few steps from home,
I return homewards as if it were Earth.

[Trans. Dilip Chitre and Daniel Weissbort.
"Dur se Apna Ghar Dekhna Chahiye", 1992]

Diary

GIRDHAR RATHI

A diary has no regrets
What it was was all paper
What it had was theirs, nothing of its own.
What it will cause will just be theirs
If it will be, will still be paper,
Maybe within covers, hard or soft.
All it can have on it is eyes, theirs.
It has nowhere to go.
Maybe eyes pierce it through,
Maybe not.
And as for the ink,
It cannot but fade
One way or the other,
One day or the other.

A diary is no soul
Nor does it have any.
It will go on
Fluttering.

[Trans. by the poet. 1976]

Master!

GIRDHAR RATHI

Master!
(Whether you are one or many,
are or are not)
Enough!
I'm tired of changing my face.

I may ride a Maruti car
Or walk along the Janpath,
Chew millet,
Or just stay put:
This face of mine
Fits in nowhere.

Enough, Master!
I've twisted my tongue
Enough! I've been through fashions
Enough your carpets! Enough, your floors!
Enough! Enough! your see-through doors!

Master!
Leave a bit of fragrance in the flowers
A little taste on my palate
A bit of longing, a sense of belonging,
A few coins in the wallet... suffice.

Master!
Exhort no more, exert no more
They can't, can't change the colour of my skin.

Tired, O, Master!
I'am tired enough.

[Trans. by the author]

Good for a Lifetime

MANGALESH DABRAL

Perhaps there was a bit of moisture there
or a pastel shade
Perhaps a shiver, perhaps hope

Perhaps there was just one teardrop there
or, as a keepsake,
a kiss

Perhaps there was snow there
or a small hand
or the attempt to touch

Perhaps there was darkness there
or an open field
or standing room
Perhaps there was a man there
struggling in his own way.

[Trans. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. "Ek Jeevan Ke Liye", 1988]

Poem of Paper

MANGALESH DABRAL

One day we find sheets of paper that once were important lying everywhere around us. We see them even as we go to sleep. They put a stop to our dreams and cause insomnia. Much as we'd like to, we cannot sell them to the ragman, for in them our everyday lives, those things we hesitate to admit to ourselves, are buried. We have to sit down and tear them up instead.

This is how old letters get torn, written by sympathetic friends when we were down and out. Declarations of unrequited love, along with some poems by major poets, words we believed would remove the world's hunger, get reduced to shreds. This paper now won't make a child's boat or his airplane even, the kind that goes a short distance and turns back.

We've become worldless, and all but lost our speech. We go on tearing the paper. It's our only hope.

[Trans. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. "Kagaz ki Kavita", 1995]

You Will Say, Night

GAGAN GILL

You will say, night
And it will be night

You will say, day
And the day will turn white

You will say, colour
And from everywhere the butterflies
will come up flying

You will think, love
And the sky will reveal
a hidden rainbow

You will be sad
And her skin
will get burnt
in another city

You will say, night
And memory will crumble down

You will say, day
And the earth will turn empty

You will fall silent
And the rock will split apart
even of the moon

You will look through
And she, invisible
will choke the wind

You will say, night
And on the sand
A house will come up
on its own

You will say, day
And the body will be bared
gnawed away by age

[Trans. K. Satchidanandan and the poet.
"Tum Kahoge, Rath", 1997]

Going Away

GAGAN GILL

One day, love will visit your home and the house will have no food.
One day love will visit your life and all its leaves will have been filled
up. One day love will come to you and you will not know it is love.

Its face will have changed, coming all the way to this life. Its head will
have been tired. It will have been filled with a whole life's sleep.

On its way back, love will look at you with its strange, empty eyes. Its
eyes will become dreamy near death. And moist.

[Trans. K. Satchidanandan and the poet. "Jate Huye", 1998]

Taking Leave

GAGAN GILL

Now she is taking leave of you

Birds are falling
from the sky

Water is drying up
inside water

Thirst is piercing
thirst

Now she is taking leave of you

Dream is drowning
in dream

Bone is coming apart
from bone

The glass is coming back
to the wound

Now she is taking leave of you

Nail is being driven
into the heart

The feet have gone down
into the netherworld

Breath is getting
lost in water

*Now it is only left
to descend the last steps
of this world*

Now only her

*crimson is to be
left on your cloth*

Now she is taking leave of you

[Trans. K. Satchidanandan and the poet.
"Ab vah tum se", 1998]

As Many Birds as in That Birdstream

TEJI GROVER

The boat won't dock at this shore today
on whose sail that sunlight creates itself

that sunlight
which washes the waterbirds
who fly just like the waves

those waves—whose sparkling stream
is lost to the eye
so much sooner
than just ordinary birds

Lost to that eye
which opens with the dawn on that shore
the eye of the fisherman's daughter—
that daughter
who, on her meagre fingertips
counts waterbirds flying in the stream

Then says,
God, can I have as many fish
as there are birds flying in the birdstream?
Count them, god
look, count them, they'll fly away!

God, let me have as many fish
as there are birds flying in the birdstream

She says this to the same god
who is the boat with a white sail
on which the sunlight creates itself
in which the sunlight-washed birds
fly just like the waves.

She says it to the same boat
that won't dock on this shore today
And the birdstream will fly apart
She says it anyway.

[Trans. Arlene Zide and the poet.
"Jitte Pakshi Ki Yah Pamkti", 1994]

Silence

TEJI GROVER

This silence
spoken out
would grow denser.

Peels, tossed away in the wind
Inside, the fruit ripening with juice.

On the screen of the eye
around the flame
Wavelike, a rising breath
should sweep off my words

There, where the ebbing waters
ferry breath for the fish

Let my words be there
in the retreating wave
where fish rise, leaping for breath
to the surface...

Let the words be just those words of mine—
spoken out—
the silence would grow denser

[Trans. Arlene Zide and the poet. "Moun", 1994]

Thinking of Sakhis

TEJI GROVER

To collect the ashes of the real
the sons have arrived at the burning ghat

Mother,
our good mother
we're unhappy that love inhabits the earth.

On that wall of Dasasvamedha¹
do you see that eye of Shankar's snake-garland?
Right up to it, clouds had lifted the river.
It was during those floods, we had seen the weavers
put off their weaving to think of god.²

We are unhappy, mother
that we can't put off our weaving
to think of our sakhis³
We've chosen such colours
the looms have gone crazy
dreaming their costumes.

Look, here come the sakhis
feigning blindness
Look—how their limbs are beyond loving
Here the loom vibrates
with the raga of longing
In their hair, the flower-like fragrance of indifference.

In which air did our lifebreath get caught
What is this, mother, Bodiless,⁴
in the midst of colour

¹Name of a ghat; ten-horse sacrifice.

²Alludes to the saint-poet Kabir, a weaver by profession

³Girlfriend, beloved (f.)

⁴Bodiless (ananga [bodiless]); the bodiless god of love, Kamadeva)

So mother, are these colours
running out then?

[Trans. Arlene Zide and the poet.
“Sakhiyom Ke Dhyam Meim”, 1994]

Don't Tell Me a Poem was Here

TEJI GROVER

So here's a drop
 touching some false
 inspace with a moist
 -ening wish that stays
 Let's call it Sambari
 just like that
 then watch out what's up
 and about
 with a call

Here we go—Sa...ambari*!
 Watch out if fruit juice
 -ns instantly
 and greens mellow to illusion
 -ing in the sun

Let's call out
 Sambari
 dewfed
 footloose
 droplitooze

You'll drench until
 the duping
 oblivion of love
 is all teary, won't you!

A drop, you—
 that fills cucumbers with
 froth disconsolate
 then halt in time at a taste
 of peace
 evanescent sweet in silenced cucumber

*Sambari—a witch

Sambari O Sambari
A rabid dog
Subdued before the bite
by infant dew in a puppy's eyes
is silenced cucumber

Fruit now cucumber dog now silence
Listening Sambari
to this image panting
and runaway
How sad yet
this meagre flow in the heart
Call it sad and now a wish
to drown returns this call

Sambari ah Sambari
generous
sibling of uncertain hours
Drying up, already—aren't you!

How can I tell
what all what all
Mustering senses galore
in censer and all
austere or not shall be feigned.

On the withering drop you flee
what doom forever will come to sport.

[Translated by the poet]

Notes on Poets

Malayalam:

ANWAR ALI (b.1966): He belongs to the young generation of Malayalam poets. He is involved in the media and theatre as writer, actor and director. He has won the Kunchupillai Award for poetry. He lives in Thiruvananthapuram.

AYAPPAN A. (b.1949): He is a member of the younger generation of poets who came into prominence in the 80s. Among his well-known volumes are *Chittarogashupatriyile Divasangal*, *Buddhanum Attinkuttiyum* and *Karuppu*. He lives in Thiruvananthapuram.

BALACHANDRAN, CHULLIKKAD (b. 1957): Besides being a poet, he has acted in Malayalam films. He has published four volumes of poetry. He was a journalist before he joined the Kerala Government service. His wife, Vijayalakshmi (see below) is also a poet. He has visited several foreign countries for poetry readings. Among his recent volumes of poetry are *Gasal* and *Dracula*. He lives in Cochin.

KAKKAD, N.N. (1927-1987): He was a pioneer of the modernist poetry in Malayalam. He worked at the A.I.R., Calicut as a producer for about three decades. He was a scholar of Sanskrit and was closely associated with several progressive movements. He received the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award and Vayalar Award for poetry. Among his well-known works are *1963*, *Vajrakundalam* and *Saphalamee Yatra*.

PANIKER, AYYAPPA (b.1930): His long poem *Kurukshetram* marked the beginning of modernist Malayalam poetry. He has been an innovator in poetry and has experimented with a wide variety of forms. He has also been an eminent critic, translator and editor. A widely travelled academic, he retired as the Professor of English from the University of Kerala. He has received Kabir Samman, the Central Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award and several other honours. He has been the editor of *Kerala Kavitha*. Among his well-known works are the three volumes of *Ayyappa Panikkarute Kritikal*. He lives in Thiruvananthapuram.

RAMAKRISHNAN, KADAMMANITTA (b.1935): A major modern Malayalam

poet with several volumes to his credit, he is well-known for his poetry readings. He has translated Octavio Paz and African poets into Malayalam. He has deep roots in the oral culture and folk forms. He worked in the Postal Accounts and was associated with several cultural organizations. After retirement, he has been elected to Kerala Legislative Assembly on a CPM ticket. He has received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry.

RAVIVARMA, ATTOOR (b.1931): His collected volume published in 1996 contains 50 poems published in 35 years. A poet who has consciously rejected Sanskritised diction and syntax, he has experimented with poetic forms to expand the tonal resources of Malayalam poetry. As a Professor of Malayalam in Kerala Government service, he worked in several parts of Kerala. He translates from Tamil. He has received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry and translation. He lives in Thrissur.

SATCHIDANANDAN, K. (b.1946): He is an eminent Malayalam poet and critic who has played a seminal role in the shaping of modern sensibility in Malayalam poetry. He has published over fifteen volumes of poetry in Malayalam, besides several volumes of translations and criticism. Among his recent works are *Deshatanam*, *Malayalam*, *Apoornam* [all poetry], and *Muhurtangal* [literary criticism]. He taught English for several years in central Kerala before moving to New Delhi as the editor of the Sahitya Akademi journal, *Indian Literature*. He is now the Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. He has travelled widely. Among his well-known works are *Ivanekkooti*, *Kavibuddhan* and *Apoornam*. He has received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Awards for poetry and criticism.

SANKARA PILLAI, K.G. (b.1947): He is a pioneer of modern poetry in Malayalam. He has contributed significantly towards transforming its vague romantic idiom into an uncompromisingly radical and secular voice. He edits a poetry journal called *Samakaleena Kavitha*. His volume of poetry titled *K.G. Sankara Pillayute Kavithakal* (1997) has won wide critical acclaim and has received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award. He is a Professor of Malayalam at Maharaja's College, Ernakulam.

SAVITHRI RAJEEVAN (b.1956): She is one of the prominent young poets with one published volume, *Charivu*. Her poems articulate the anguish of woman in Indian society without identifying with any overtly political ideologies. She received Kunchu Pillai Award for poetry in 1990. Her

works are included in the Penguin (India) *Anthology of Women Poets*. She now lives in Delhi.

VIJAYALAKSHMI (b.1960): She is the author of two well-known volumes of poetry namely *Mrigasikshakan* and *Tachante Makal*. Even while using traditional forms she has been able to communicate the alienation a woman feels in a patriarchal society. She received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for *Thachante Makal* in 1995. She lives in Cochin, with her poet-husband, Balachandran Chullikkad.

VINAYACHANDRAN, D. (b.1948): He is a prominent poet of the young generation. He has over ten volumes of published poetry. He is equally at ease with traditional metric verse as well as modern free verse. He also writes fiction. He has translated Lorca into Malayalam. He has received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry. Among his well-known volumes of poetry are *Kayikkarayile Kadal*, *Veettilekkulla Vazhi* and *Disasoochi*. He teaches at the School of Letters in M.G. University, Kottayam.

Marathi:

CHITRE, DILIP (b.1938): He is an eminent poet and critic in Marathi. He also writes in English. He has translated Marathi saint poets into English. He has over five volumes of poetry in Marathi, besides several volumes of short stories, criticism and fiction. He has taught abroad and also attended the Iowa Creative Writing Programme. He has directed a film and has written columns for the press. He received Central Sahitya Akademi Awards for poetry and translation. He lives in Pune.

DAHAKHE, VASANT ABHAJI (b.1942): He is a poet, critic and novelist. He has published two volumes of poetry. He teaches Marathi at Elphinston College, Bombay.

DHASAL, NAMDEO (b. 1949): He is an eminent poet as well as political activist. As a founding member of the Dalit Panthers, he was among those early writers who pioneered the Dalit literary movement in Marathi in the seventies. He has published seven volumes of poetry and one novel. He lives in Bombay.

KOLATKAR, ARUN (b. 1932): He contributed significantly towards advancing the frontiers of modernist Marathi poetry. He is a bilingual poet. He won Commonwealth Poetry Prize for *Jejuri*. He works as a commercial artist in Bombay.

MAHANOR, N.D. (b.1942): He is a poet, novelist and short story writer in Marathi. He also writes lyrics for films. He has received several honours including Padmashree. He is a farmer by profession and lives near Aurangabad in Marathwada.

MESHAM, BHUJANG (b.1958): He is one of the prominent poets among the young generation of Dalit writers. His volume *Oolgulaa* (1991) has won several prestigious awards.

MESHAM, KESHAV (b.1937): He is a well-known poet, critic, novelist and essayist. He has been prominent in the Dalit movement. He won a state award for his novel, *Hakikat Ani Jatayu*. He has published four volumes of poetry, four novels and six collections of short stories. He teaches Marathi at Bombay University.

NEMADE, BHALCHANDRA (b.1938): He is a major novelist, poet and critic in Marathi. His seminal essay on the Marathi novel is considered a landmark in criticism as it inaugurated the movement of nativism in literary criticism. His *Kosla* is now available in English under the title *Cocoon* (Macmillan). He has published four novels, three volumes of criticism and two collections of poetry. He received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1991 for his critical work *Teekaswayamwar*. He has taught English at Aurangabad and Goa. He recently retired from the Tagore Chair of Comparative Literature at the University of Bombay. He lives in Bombay.

OAK, MANOHAR (1933-1993): He is a poet and novelist, with two collections of poetry and two novels.

PATIL, ANURADHA (b.1953): She is a Marathi poetess with three volumes of published poetry. She has received several literary awards. She works in Aurangabad.

PATIL, CHANDRAKANT (b.1944): He is a Marathi poet, critic and translator. He received Sahitya Akademy Translation Prize in 1991. He teaches at Aurangabad.

PODDAR, ANURADHA (b.1927): She is a poetess and critic. She has published three volumes of poetry and several books of literary criticism, including one on the early 20th century novelist Kusumavati Deshpande. She taught Marathi at the university.

SHEIKH, MALIKA AMAR (b.1959): She is a Marathi poet known for radical views with two volumes of poetry and an autobiography. She lives in Bombay.

SURVE, NARAYAN (b.1926): He is an eminent Marathi poet with five volumes of poetry. His *Maze Vidyapeeth* was a landmark in modern Marathi poetry. He is a political activist. He has received several State Awards and Padmashree. He lives in Bombay.

Gujarati:

GADVI, PRAVIN (b.1951): He is a Gujarati Dalit writer with two volumes of poetry and one volume of short stories. He works in Ahmedabad.

JHAVERI, DILIP (b.1943): He has published one volume of poetry in Gujarati. He practises medicine at Thane, near Bombay.

MACWAN, YOSEPH (b.1940): He is a Gujarati poet with twelve volumes of poetry including *Svagat*, *Alakh na Asvar*. He lives in Ahmedabad.

MODY, CHINU (b.1939): He is an eminent Gujarati poet, novelist and columnist with more than 60 published works. He taught at M.S. University, Baroda and Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. He lives in Ahmedabad.

PARMAR, JAYANT (b.1954): He is a Gujarati Dalit poet and translator. He writes in both Gujarati and Urdu. He is also a painter. He works in a bank in Ahmedabad.

PATEL, KANJI (b.1952): He has published two novels and a poetry collection in Gujarati. His *Rear Verandah* has been published by Macmillan. He received Katha award in 1994. He teaches English in a college at Lunawada near Baroda.

PATEL, RAVJI (1939-68): He was a highly gifted Gujarati poet who died young. His poetry is notable for its use of folk-motifs and striking images. His well-known volume *Angat* (1971) appeared posthumously.

RATHOD, MANGAL (b.1939): He is a prominent Gujarati poet with several published collections. He received Gujarati Sahitya Akademi Award for *Bagman*, a volume of poems. He has been associated with the Dalit movement in poetry. He teaches Gujarati at M.T.B. Arts College in Surat.

SHEIKH, GULAMMOHAMMED (b. 1937): He is a prominent painter and a poet. He taught art history at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda from the early 60s to mid-80s. His works have been exhibited in all the major galleries in India and abroad. He won the National Award from Lalit Kala Akademi in 1961, Padmashri in 1983 and Emeritus

Fellowship from the Government of India in 1998. *Athawa*, his collection of poems in Gujarati was published in 1974. His poems have contributed significantly towards the development of a distinctive modernist idiom in Gujarati poetry. He has authored several articles and papers on art. *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, edited by him, was published recently. He lives in Baroda.

THAKER, LABHSHANKAR (b.1941): He is an eminent poet, critic and play-wright in Gujarati. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his poetry volume, *Tolan Awaaz Gonghat* in 1991. He was a prominent member of the group of poets who rebelled against the literary orthodoxies of the fifties. He practises Ayurvedic medicine in Ahmedabad.

THAKKER, UDAYAN (b.1955): He is a young Gujarati poet. He received Jayant Pathak Award for his first collection *Ekavan*. He also writes stories for children. He lives in Bombay.

VAGHELA, YESHWANT (b.1954): He is a well-known Gujarati poet and critic, with two collections of poems, a biography and a collection of criticism. He has been associated with the Dalit movement. He teaches Gujarati in a college in Ahmedabad.

YASHASCHANDRA, SITANSHU (b.1941): He is an eminent poet, critic and playwright in Gujarati. He received Sahitya Akademi Award for *Jatayu* in 1987. He was the Vice-Chancellor of Saurashtra University, Rajkot. He teaches at M.S. University, Baroda.

Hindi:

DABRAL, MANGALESH (b.1948): He has published two volumes of poems and a translation of *Siddharta* in Hindi. He attended International Writing Program in Iowa, U.S.A. in 1991. He is the Magazine editor of the Hindi daily, *Jansatta*.

DHOOMIL (1935-1975): Pen-name of Sudama Pandey, who lived and worked in Allahabad. He published only one book of poems during his lifetime. He was a prominent modernist poet remarkable for his political poems.

GILL, GAGAN (b.1959): She is a prominent poet in Hindi. Her volume, *Ek din lautegi ladki* appeared in 1989. She works as a journalist in Hindi and Punjabi. She is married to the Hindi novelist Nirmal Verma and lives in New Delhi.

GROVER, TEJI (b.1955): She is a Hindi poet and translator with two volumes of poems. She received Bharat Bhushan Agarwal Award in 1989. She has represented India in several poetry meets abroad. She lives in Chandigarh.

NARAYAN, KUNWAR (b.1927): He is a pioneer of modern poetry in Hindi. Among his well-known volumes of poetry are *Atmajayi* (1965) and *Apne Samane* (1979). His short stories are collected in the volume, *Aakarom ke aas paas* (1971). He has received several awards and honours. He is a businessman by profession, living in Lucknow.

RATHI, GIRDHAR (b.1944): He is a poet and critic with two volumes of poems and several volumes of translations into Hindi. He edits the quarterly Hindi journal *Samakalin Bharatiya Sahitya* for Sahitya Akademi, Delhi.

SAHAY, RAGHUVIR (1929-1990): He was a prominent poet, critic, translator and editor remarkable for his activist role as a poet. He translated *Macbeth* as *Barnamvan* into Hindi. He was editor of the popular Hindi weekly, *Dinman*. He had received the Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry.

SAXENA, SARVESHWAR DAYAL (1927-1983): He was a prominent Hindi poet with seven volumes of poems. He was a teacher, an editor and a producer in AIR. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry in 1983.

SHUKLA, VINOD KUMAR (b.1937): He is a prominent Hindi poet with three published volumes. He has also written two novels. He held Nirala Chair of Literature at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal.

SINGH, KEDARNATH (b.1934): He is an eminent Hindi poet with over seven volumes of poetry, and two volumes of criticism. He teaches at the Centre for Indian Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has received several honours and awards including Vyas Samman.

VERMA, SHRIKANT (1931-1986): He was an eminent Hindi poet with over twenty published works, including a novel and several collections of stories and essays. His important poetry volumes are *Jalsaghar* (1973) and *Magadh* (1984). He received several honours. He was a member of the Rajya Sabha from the Congress Party.

Notes on Translators

Malayalam:

JAYANTHAN, T.K.: He has written poetry in Malayalam and also translates from Malayalam. He works in a bank in Kerala.

PANIKER, CHITRA: She is a critic as well as a translator. She has translated poetry from Malayalam into English. She teaches comparative literature at Central University, Hyderabad.

RAMAKRISHNAN, E.V. (b.1950): He is the editor of this volume.

SATCHIDANANDAN, K.: See under poets.

SHERRIF, K.M. (b.1960): He translates from Malayalam into English. His translations of Malayalam fiction have appeared in *Katha* volumes. He has translated Anand's Malayalam novel, *Marubhoomikalundakunnathu* into English under the title *Desert Shadows* [Penguin, 1998]. He is a senior lecturer in English in Pondicherry Education Service.

THOMAS, A.J. (b.1952): He writes poetry in English and translates from Malayalam. He has won the *Katha* award and AKMG prize for translation. His translations of Zacharia's stories is being brought out by Penguin, India. He is presently the assistant editor of the Sahitya Akademi journal *Indian Literature*.

UDAYA KUMAR: He has written criticism in English and Malayalam. He was a Fellow at the IAS, Shimla during 1996-98. Presently he teaches English at Delhi University. His book on James Joyce was published by Cambridge University Press.

VARGHESE, A.V.: He translates from Malayalam into English.

Marathi:

BHONGLE, R.J.: He is a poet, critic and translator. He edits a literary journal called *Indian Literary Panorama*. He is a Professor of English at Bombay University.

BHOOMKAR, SANTOSH KUMAR (b.1953): He has published poetry in English. He also translates from Marathi. He has done research work on Larkin's poetry. He teaches English at Aurangabad.

CHITRE, DILIP: See the entry under poets.

DESHPANDE, PRADEEP GOPAL (b.1951): He is a well-known translator and poet. He has received Sahitya Akademi Award for translation. He teaches English at Aurangabad.

JAWARE, ANIKET: He has written fiction and poetry in English. He has published a novel in Marathi. His book on literary theory is soon to be published by Orient Longmans. He teaches English at the University of Poona.

JAHAGIRDAR, CHANDRASEKHAR (b.1944): He is an eminent Marathi critic and translator. He has contributed scholarly articles to several reference works. He is presently Professor and Head at the Department of English in Shivaji University, Kolhapur.

KIMBAHUNE, RAVINDRA (b.1946): He is a well-known Marathi critic and translator. His criticism is remarkable for its thorough scholarship. He teaches English at Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad.

MARATHE, SUDHAKAR (b.1944): He has recently translated Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosla* into English in the Macmillan series of Indian Novels in English Translation. He is a Professor of English in the University of Hyderabad.

Gujarati:

DESAI, ANJANA: She is a well-known Shakespeare scholar who retired as Professor of English from South Gujarat University, Surat. She has published several articles on modern literature. Her translation has won a *Katha* award.

DESAI, SUDARSHAN: He translates from Gujarati into English. He lives in Baroda.

HOSKOTE, RANJIT: He is a well-known Indian English poet and art critic. He has won the British Council Prize for Poetry. He is an assistant editor with *The Times of India*, Bombay.

KOTHARI, RITHA: She teaches English at St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad. She has published several translations of Gujarati poetry in English. She has co-edited *Modern Gujarati Poetry* published by Sahitya Akademi.

NAQVY, ROOMY: He translates from Gujarati into English. He received *Katha* award for translation in 1996. He teaches English at Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi.

PEERADINA, SALEEM: He is an eminent Indian-English poet with three volumes of poetry. He now lives in the U.S.A.

PIR KARAMSHI: He translates from Gujarati into English. He is a photographer by profession. He lives in Bombay.

RAMANATHAN, SUGUNA: She is an eminent academic with two books of criticism and several research papers in English. She translates from Gujarati into English. She co-edited the anthology *Modern Gujarati Poetry [A Selection]* published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi in 1998. She is the Head of the English Department at St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad.

SHERRIF, K.M.: See above under Malayalam.

VANKAR, G.K. (b.1953): He translates from Gujarati into English. He works as Professor and Head, Dept. of Psychiatry, Medical College & S.S.G. Hospital, Baroda.

Hindi:

ANAMIKA (b.1963): She is a poet and translator with eight published titles. She has received Rashtrabhasha Award 1987 for her novel in Hindi.

DHARWADKAR, VINAY: He is a translator and poet. He has co-edited a volume of Indian poetry with A.K. Ramanujan for OUP. His translations from Indian poetry have appeared in several foreign journals. He teaches English at Oklahoma University, U.S.A.

MEHROTRA, ARVIND KRISHNA (b.1947): He is a well-known Indian English poet and translator. Among his works are: *Middle Earth*, *The Absent Traveller*, *Prakrit Love Poetry from the Gathasaptasati* and *The Transfiguring Places*. He is also editor of *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets*. He teaches English at Allahabad University.

MUNSHI, VIJAY: He is a poet and translator. His work has appeared in several Indian Journals. He lives in Pune.

PANDE, MRINAL: She is an eminent Hindi writer and media personality. She has published fiction and poetry in Hindi. She lives in Delhi.

TRIVEDI, HARISH (b.1947). He is a critic and a translator. He has translated Premchand's biography and Muktibodh's novel into English. He has edited three books of criticism including *Colonial Transactions*. He has lectured abroad on Indian literature. He is Professor and Head of the English Department at Delhi University.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Anantha Murthy, U.R., Ramachandra Sharma, D.R.Nagaraj, (ed.), *Vibhava: Modernism in Indian Writing*. Bangalore: Panther Publications, 1992.
- Chitre, Dilip, (ed.). *An Anthology of Marathi Poetry*. Bombay: Nirmala Sadanand, 1976.
- Dahake, Vasant A. *Yogabhrashta: A Terrorist of the Spirit*, (tr.) Ranjit Hoskote and Mangesh Kulkarni. Delhi: Rupa, 1992
- Dangle, Arjun, (ed.). *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Hyderabad: Orient Longmans, 1992.
- Dharwadkar, Vinay and A.K. Ramanujan (ed.). *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry*. Delhi: OUP, 1995.
- Ezckiel, Nissim and Meenakshi Mukherjee, (ed.). *Another India: An Anthology of Contemporary Fiction and Poetry*. Delhi: Penguin, 1990.
- Govindan, M. *Poetry and Renaissance: Kumaran Asan Birth Centenary Volume*. Madras: Sameeksha, 1974.
- Indian Council for Cultural Relations, *Indian Poetry Today, Vol. I to Vol. IV*. New Delhi, 1978 to 1981.
- Jussawalla, Adil, (ed.). *New Writing in India*. Delhi: Penguin, 1974.
- Ramanathan, Suguna and Rita Kothari, (ed.). *Modern Gujarati Poetry: A Selection*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1998.
- Ramanujan, A.K, (ed.). *Poems of Love and War*. Delhi: OUP, 1985.
- Rubin, David, (tr.). *The Return of Saraswati: Four Hindi Poets*. Delhi: OUP, 1998.
- Satchidanandan, K. *Summer Rain: Three Decades of Poetry*. Delhi: Nirala, 1995.
- Satchidanandan, K. *How to Go to the Tao Temple and Other Poems*. Delhi: Har-Anand, 1998.
- Tharakan, K.M, ed. *Malayalam Poetry Today: An Anthology*. Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1984.
- Vaid, Krishna Baldev, J. Swaminathan, Ashok Vajpeyi, (ed.). *Bahuvachan*. Bhopal: Bharat Bhavan, 1988.
- Vajpeyi, Kailash, (ed.). *An Anthology of Modern Hindi Poetry*. New Delhi: Rupa, 1998.

Also see special issues of *Chicago Review* [1992], *World Literature Today* [Spring, 1994], *Journal of South Asian Literature*, *Vagartha* (1974-1979), *Daedalus*, 118 (no. 4, 1989), *Tri-Quarterly*, 77 (Winter 1989-90) and *Indian Literature*.

