Poems

ON THE PASSING OF MY FATHER

He had not slept for forty nights.
Dreams loaded on camels
he kept moving along into the waste-
lands of the night
he kept burning on the pyres of moon-
light.
On the table
dentures resting in a glass kept smiling.
From a realm behind the dark glasses,
the cataract bud strove to raise its head.
Darkness began smirking in his eye.
The hand of the soul pierced by the tip
of a needle.
The lamps of desires were stilled in his body.
Fluid shadows of green water, moment
by moment,
began descending into his body.

\footnote{Poems selected from his Ḥāibr ki Ṣubḥ Darakhshān Hō (Allahabad: Shabkhūn Kitāb Ghar, 1996).

2"Cataract bud” may sound a bit odd, but the original “mōṭiyē kī kālī” employs a subtle play on words: “mōṭiyā” is a variety of jasmine and derives its name from “mōṭi” (“pearl”) for its pearly-white color; “kālī” is “bud.”}
Under the shade of ten stars embedded
in the ceiling of the house,
images relinquished contours;
images withered.

(“Vālid kē Intiqāl Par,” 36–7)

I Await You

In veins devoid of blood
under the blanket of flesh
On ladders fashioned from bones
On pathways of breath
I await you.

(“Maiṅ Tumhārā Muntazir Hū,” 180)

Who Is It?

Concealed behind the square breasts of
the room
Who is laughing?
The conception of whose shadow is lost
in the depths of the soul?
On whose slippery back rides the naked sky?
Why is the tongue of dark desire tied?
Through whose scorching caress has the frozen blood found life?
A longing for whose body churns in the heart?
Who has deposited burning embers on my lips?
Who shatters the mirrors of pleasures?
Who is it?

(“Kaun Hai,” 184)
Bosnia 1

The way to the hospital pants
spread-eagled in sixty thousand virgin
bellies.
Smeared in blood—smeared,
lies each moment,
each epoch,
each body,
each dream—
In the severed hand of a child
the bucket of water overflows with
blood.
In the palpable darkness,
nothing sane occurs—
Not the road of return;
not even the minaret of the ruined
mosque;
not even the hue of blood smothered
on the horizon;
the vista of being born;
not even the nation wrecked and prostrate in sixty thousand virgin bellies.

Bosnia 3

All the walls, riddled with holes.
Each house, a ruin
Placing the head lying on the earth
back on the neck, I ponder:
“All contemplation is now futile.”
Pushing my hand through the yawning
gap in the rib cage,
I fumble around.
Who throbbed in here?
The hand finds its way across my back.
With the hand fallen in the dust below,
I balance the head
which is in the process of rolling down
my neck—
All the walls, riddled with holes.
Each house, a ruin.

(50)

Now

The journey of black sun is over.
Now, dreams shall descend to the earth
from the eye of the heavens.
Now, windows of space shall be
opened;
the earth shall be cleansed with moon-
rays.

(“Ah,” 156)

IN HOTEL NATRAJ

Two fingers of wax,
dissolved in cups of black coffee.
Solitary rays of the evening sun,
absorbed in Coca Cola.
An ocean shrieked in the carafe of
water.
Thorns pierced the heart of a sandwich.
Tomatoes on a plate started giggling.
The dark melancholy of evening
wafted away as steam from a kettle.
Winking its eye,
it turned towards another table.

(“Hōṭal Natrāj Mēṅ,” 149)

GOD LIES AWAKE

Unclean melancholy of the dove’s eyes,
dilapidated in the sorrow of your absence,
will presently sound out from the corners of the house.
You shall not be able to hear.
I shall not be able to speak.
On the infamous streets of black cities,
shadows will stalk you—
Place the earth of darkness on their palm saying thus:
“This is your share in this world, and in the afterlife.
No damsel shall know the taste of your lips.”
Wait,
Where are you headed?
Look at me intently and say:
“God lies awake.”

(“Khudā Jāgta Hai,” 81)

A desire to Open the Door of Ancient History

I remember my existence in the womb.
Even today, the pain of the exact moment of birth
is conscious beneath my skin.
The lament of deaf darknesses within the four walls of the void,
My destiny scribbled over with the curse of the sun.
If only someone would cast me into the eyeless cavern of touch.

(“Purānī Tārīkh kā Darvāza Kāhōlnē kī Tamannā,” 166)
Who do you await in the desolation of ruins?
The tree has long since withered.
Who drags away, casting a noose around the neck?
To whom do you display the wounds of words?
Roads are closed;
the measure of directions not traceable.
There is no arrival, no parting—
Shadow is the neighbor;
is a lunatic.
("Bāikeṭ kā Ḍrāmā Dēṅb Kar,” 130)

... In the streets of Banaras,
wrapped in khadi,
the connoisseur of marijuana wandered in search of his self.
On the ghats,
all mendicants savoring unripe sunlight—his companions.
In the swirling exhalations of marijuana,
spread hesitantly his fragmented magic.
Through the overgrowth of hair and beard,
pierced the biting intensity of charcoal eyes.
Shrouded by small glasses,
eyes spewed hatred;

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3Samuel Beckett’s: *Waiting for Godot.*
A dirty expletive rolled between the palate and teeth—
Running down Gautama’s thighs,
drops of pale, cold blood
crawled along the stretched out branches of the peepal.
Stop, Stop.
Get your thumbs severed before returning to America.
What is mortal? What is eternal?
Water colored red?
Here he comes, the one who reads verses on footpaths.
Here he comes, the one who progresses treading upon the corpses of his shadows—
The connoisseur of marijuana behind the wall of shadows;
Holding a few crumbs of dry bread, he stares at everyone from the aperture of the sun.
Run, Run!
Flee, Flee!

(“Ginsberg,” 163–4)

A Poem

In the half-opened door of City-Light Books,
the night spread on the yellow paper of “Howl” and other poems gravitating from the churning skies reflected in the squinted eyes of the python wrapped around Allen Ginsberg’s neck, (standing with his fists clenched) slowly spreading over the elongated face of the Empire State Building.
Black ants taking in the world’s stickiness,
licked from U Thant’s thick, black lips
try to seek refuge in the chillums of the
tonsured mendicants of Banaras.
Objects of Marlon Brando’s objectionable movements
have begun to rain!

(“Ěk Naẕım,” 161)

—Translated by Riyaz Latif