

RIYAZ LATIF

Poems

BAT¹

Though not a bird
I weave a geometry of dreamless nights
Winding up the anathema of wings in
my circumambulations.

In the realm of blind worlds
Stringing vision into hearing,
I lie awake.
I lie awake
Relinquishing the body on frontiers of
orbits
In my face reside the gleaming sparks
of hell.
My voice, in its ascendant
reverberations
has shattered the forlornness of your
domes and vaults.

Though not a bird,
I weigh my absurd wings
in an obscure revolution.
I am invented
From the shadows
Of a dispersed dusk
The sky is my foundation.
In the relative spaces above

¹“Āimgādr,” in *Shab-Khūn*, No. 248 (Sept. 2001): 31.

my legs are shackled.

Heavens lie beneath my feet.

SPIDER²

Each way out—entangled in eight legs
of mine.

Who knows what distance may flourish
now!

There

Where wall crawls to the ceiling

Turning the corner into a *limbo*!

I, therefore, with my saliva

Weave a web of worlds

Weave multiple presents

from a single past—

And in this web

For my nutriment today

I select you!

POEM³

Come

Across the frontiers of languages

Where the sea of silence

Churns in itself, lonely.

Exists in its nonexistence.

Across the frontier of languages

No one arrives—no one.

²“Makī,” not yet published.

³“Is Pār,” in *Shab-Khūn*, No. 208 (July 1997): 62.

Merely a perpetual web of
 boundaries—
 But no frontier.

BODY'S POEM⁴

Winds, when they traverse my body
 They caress the dense sea
 Converse with quiet waters
 From moment to moment, in my vein-
 alleys
 Enter into a dialogue with
 a thousand broken truths—heavy.

Winds, when they traverse my body
 Flesh then opens its confines!
 All the stars of body's night
 All open their doors.
 Someone continues to reside in me
 The infinitude of someone's arrival
 Yet desolation remains ...

Winds, when they traverse my body
 The constitution of forms—absent!
 As if from the breath again
 A headstrong eternity has vanished ...
 All elements of the journey have
 vanished!

TOUCH⁵

In the hazy sanctuaries of sleep,

⁴“Badan kī Nazm,” in *Shab-Khūn*, No. 194 (May 1996): 70.

⁵“Lams,” in *Shab-Khūn*, No. 208 (July 1997): 61.

ages have condensed into a point;
and moments have made their abode
from the wet clay of emotions,
from the agitated sands of intensity ...
where waters converge
and make whirlpools of touch
to discover ruins in droplets.

the echoes of fluid stones
traverse through each body,
flourish in their own annihilation,
die, prostrated in a civilization.

And your touch is a potent vortex.
Attaining birth in its revolutions,
 spreading,
being cast in all directions,
we throb in your kisses,
we await your vistas ...

But drop within drop, there is nothing
 here.

All ages have contracted to a point,
and each touch, each whirlpool—
 unfamiliar.

Whose breaths are we aligned with?
Through whose vision are we sprawled?
In whose eyes do we wander?

FIRST CONSTRUCT IN CYBERSPACE⁶

Seven skies, rootless, immersed in the
 womb.

Births—previous and yet to come—
 dimensionless.

⁶“Pahlī Ta‘mīr Sā‘ībarispēs Mēñ,” in *Shab-Khūn*, No. 208 (July 1997): 61.

All ancestors began to be chiseled on
 rocks.
 Sands, deserts, ruins, they are still
 unformed ...
 How, then, seven heavens take form!
 Such is the intensity in this act of
 creation
 that bricks nurtured fingerprints!
 It is a web of boundaries here.
 Look, there is nothing else on the
 screen;
 there is a severe loop in the system.
 In the featureless, voiceless dimensions
 of the womb
 someone commanded “Be” and became
 unattainable.
 We began comprehending the dialect of
 distances.
 We completed the tower of Babel.

BIG BANG⁷

The core of the heart spreads eternity
 Relics of the receding worlds
 Shadows of milky ways estranged from
 their station
 In motion over the provinces of
 shriveled souls—
 Planets journey far from breath.
 Resplendence of stars wrapped in its
 own weight
 Adorns absence upon itself
 Spaces lift their veils from new frontiers
 ...

⁷“Big Baiṅg,” in *Shab-Khūn*, No. 220 (Oct. 1998): 68.

The core of the heart has spread strange
distances ...
Waning in a wasteland of stormy
moments
As if we had attained extinction!
As if we had been penalized
for trampling upon our ancestors'
breaths ...
And we, becoming distances,
disperse beyond ourselves,
fix our gaze on our names in dying
fires—

The core has planted a lot of grief here.
Blood, displaced, exhausted, has just
gone to sleep ...
And we witness the frenzy of your axis!

In the whispers of receding worlds
We have seen the silence of stars in
each eye
We *know* loneliness

A NUCLEAR POEM⁸

Then we shall show the world
how oceans vaporize and fly away from
eyes
how bodies cave in, becoming
netherworlds
how cities of breath, bit by bit, turn to
dust
boiling away from pores, how skies
conflagrate
how nonexistence, as a *mushroom*,
ascends from cells

⁸“Ēk Nūklīār Naẓm,” in *Sarsabz* (June 2000): 29.

These puppets,
intoxicated by a droplet of an uprooted
 evolution
negotiators of the destiny of our two
 worlds
we have brought our silence for the
 very same midgets.

For we are silent
for we are casting
a veil over the face of an unstable
evolution;
for we are still flushing out
Hiroshima from our souls.

REVOLUTION⁹

Spilling
from the soul's horizon
meaningless: margins of life
I have no color
I have no sound

I am where I am not.
A dweller of self-negation—
Countless ticks of time, rays,
milky ways, centuries
have grown up with me
dense forests, green leaves,
ruins, stones, caves,
springs dance
to my breath's rhythm.

An ocean within an ocean I am
hidden

⁹"Gardish," in *Zehn-e Jadid*, No. 11 (March–May 1993): 62–3.

as agony of roiling waves,
raging, disintegrating on my own sand
on sand-houses, on earth, on times
becoming ether in flights,
voice in cultures
blood in veins
expanse of emotions,
and crisis in carnal life—

in the deserted ruins of past lives I exist;
traversing many annihilated worlds
breaking paths of nonexistence—
far ahead ... far ...
beyond *Aum* crooning in the primal
waters;
beyond the heavenly hues of the Vedas,
oblivious inscriptions
engraved on the pyramids
Plato's tongue, like zephyr
emancipates every Greek column;
beyond the melodies of Orpheus' lyre!

beyond the myriads of decay, death,
nascent civilizations
every base of queries—
why does this earth revolve around an
unknown axis?
shall the heavens quiver if atoms are
split?
who fixed directions?
why don't moments flow in reverse?
why does love sadden?
can a computer cure melancholy?
what has made us so lonely?

beyond every new plaint of blood
beyond every root,
every invention
beyond myriads of wars
I lie inert

at times, in Hitler's breast,
the clamor of Jewish bones, I become.
As Gandhi
I slip from dimwit tongues
lament in African mouths
as an embodiment of hunger

beyond the crumbling axis of a
dilapidated revolution;
beyond the motions of history falling
apart;
every expression of times ... beyond.
I have reached far
but have no claim to voyage!
the illusion of flow is mine.
Wherein I churn
an ocean within an ocean;
the passion of roiling waves,
within some wayward deluge
of extinguished creativity,
within the fortress of mortal emotions—

but now we must revert
to the same origins
to the primordial epoch
to illuminate the cipher
to turn everything eternal
we have to submerge again
in the lake of voids;
to recede into the womb
Of negation.

BANARAS—I¹⁰

Wandering spirits of Time,
from the surface of your stone-ghats,
emerging akin to the sounds of epochs,
become one with quenched waters—
Streets within streets within streets
sprung from the highway of your
breath!

As if someone has woven a net of veins,
where, with perpetual wanderings
there is no journey.

Journey is but an interval; journey is but
an obstacle.

It is here where existence is.
It is here where extinction is.

It is here
Through this interval
through this stage
where water flows as a potentiality ...
all have gently begun to exhibit the
relics of their antiquity;
all have begun to adorn
their lofty loneliness on your horizons
a melody of silence has been
commenced—

Sacrosanct wasteland! Center of bodies!
In the fathomless, cold corner of your
soul
Ages continue to defecate.
Banaras, all your abstract deportments
Continue to thrive attaining a charming
death!

¹⁰“Banāras,” in *Shab-Khūn*, No. 194 (May 1996): 70.

BANARAS-2¹¹

Fire, water and earth—a trajectory!
 Heads raised, they sniff the dust
 Of a meaningless eternity.
 Kissing the foreheads of these ghats
 All faces of water have decayed.
 Perpetuity, resting
 In the eye
 Of a half-burnt pyre
 Glued to the aged shores
 Now demands:
 “In dust-lanes, how long, how long,
 shall Bengali sweets, perfumes,
 and refuse of drains, embracing,
 strangle the system of wayward breaths
 pissing on the roads?”

From the palm of a strange, dilapidated
 mansion
 From the red squirts of a juicy paan
 How shall I gather up fragrances of
 days and nights?
 How shall I gather up the desolation of
 obscure faces?
 The excess of odors
 The antiquity of each smell
 That resides in temple-chants
 In the platter of prayer-rituals
 In sounds, in charms,
 In permanence, in nothingness ...

What all shimmers beyond
 the horizon of each odor!
 The epoch—visible on Star TV—entices
 us

¹¹“Banāras kī Bū,” in *Zehn-e-Jadīd*, No. 22 (Dec.–May 1997): 72.

God populates a world on computer
screens
Say, how many more souls shall you
dispatch through e-mail?
For there is an adulteration
Of estranged flavors
In my Being.

Banaras had shed all clothes in my
nostrils!

—*Translated by the author and
Moazzam Sheikh*