

QAZI SALIM

## Seven Poems

SALVATION<sup>1</sup>

thundering  
pouring clouds  
ceaseless shower of hailstones from the skies  
lamenting walls and doors  
wounded ceilings  
drop by drop, spreading, advancing water on glass  
tiny rivulets, breaking, sliding  
akin to the folds of tired hands  
continually conjuring wondrous forms

the void of heart does not remain empty even for a moment  
whatever it avails, it amasses in the heart  
desire, after all, is desire  
be it for death  
the very same tempests of blood in sore veins, crashing,  
the very same spreading expanding webs on glass

other than one last lifeless  
flapping of wings  
what are these complaints and laments?

I know, when Time flows,  
when does it discriminate between waves?  
be they full of repose  
or breaking their heads over some shore  
passing, sniveling and crawling

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<sup>1</sup>“Muktī,” from the poet’s collection *Najāt sē Peblē* (Allahabad: Shabkhūn Kitāb Ghār [1971], 24–26.

in agitation, merging into sands  
whatever they do  
what difference does it make?

sliding, breaking, these tiny streaks  
have descended to the ground from closets, but  
how far can they crawl thus?  
solace, velvety epistles, dream-laden desires,  
how will they become shields for this shower of hailstones?

myriad worlds are done, undone, each instant  
sinuous trees fall  
rocks, pulverized, rankle in each nerve  
windows, blinded by the ceaseless onslaught of rain  
surroundings are mute, deaf,  
okay, this existence and death, both, are not mine from today  
the vision of my eyes  
the tenor of my voice  
hearing, touch; they are all not mine from today  
ok, I too am a witness to my own hell  
my world is a spectacle  
in front of me, I am capable of seeing myself tormented,  
    in anguish,  
and am so content, as if this birth, today,  
had been handed to me moments ago  
—and from some unknown world  
as if I had arrived with the pouring clouds

#### MIRRORS<sup>2</sup>

freezing night  
cold darkness in the windows  
beneath the mirror of darkness  
an abode-less environ  
profound—how profound  
simple—how simple

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<sup>2</sup>“Ā’inē,” from *ibid.*, 51–54.

beyond my range  
hovering over my soul

in each tree, in the wild, in the mountains  
gushes, flows  
our blood  
a deluge—  
measureless deluge  
split from the swarm of travelers  
unaware of me  
without want from you  
our unveiled reflections  
resplendent until far  
they have their own life  
their own dreams  
from the emission of a single ray  
jade, scarlet, azure, violet,  
how many hues—  
such unrealized inscriptions  
shaped out of a fluttering gaze  
melted by a fluttering gaze  
and then  
the expanse of the night turned over

travelers, discarding year-old faces,  
donned new ones  
how fortunate are they  
the ones who have  
no mirrors  
for whom  
Time is merely Time  
there is no succession  
no good no evil  
how fortunate are they  
they metamorphosed  
in one year  
earth's womb longs for the sowing of seeds  
—the last crop has been reaped  
the expanse of the night turned over

“Salim” a primeval cry

the expanse of the night overturned

let's gather up  
let's gather up  
sparkling reflections  
—radiant likenesses  
a teardrop  
a teardrop from benevolent eyes  
let's gather it up

or how, from our sepulchers,  
shall we be raised on the day of reckoning?  
how shall we be raised?

what calamity is this?  
how split are we from our own selves?  
what calamity is this?  
what calamity is this?

#### RECOLLECTION<sup>3</sup>

silence woven as soft silk  
yet again began to rend hither and thither  
from the nest of the body soared birds  
bathed in fresh warm blood  
—began to flap their wings  
for long, color took wing

#### TOURIST<sup>4</sup>

we have nothing  
Go; we have nothing now

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<sup>3</sup>“Yād,” from *ibid.*, 62.

<sup>4</sup>“Tūrist,” from *ibid.*, 78–79.

in frosty ashes of past pristine epochs  
 there is not a single ember  
 not a strand of thought's vestment  
 on stain-riddled life  
 throbbing throbbing throbbing  
 when the beat may be struck  
 when multitudes of naked savages  
 break into frenzied dance  
 on the city's pavements  
 heads chopped like carrots

on snow-capped peaks, ancient vultures  
 are flapping their wings—  
 now we have nothing  
 ruins and remains excavated  
 all treasures exhausted  
 adorned in your museums

we have nothing now—  
 snake-charmers, maharajas, sorcerers  
 have become Air-India mascots  
 Go; we have nothing now

#### FRUITLESS<sup>5</sup>

step out of sleep  
 —let's bear Time  
 lock our eyes with the eyes of the night

step out of sleep  
 there is a pursuit in sleep which persists always  
 on the other side of skies  
 beyond the traversing of seven seas  
 swaying, like swans gliding with clouds,  
 many of the same appearance

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<sup>5</sup>“Bē-Šamar,” from *ibid.*, 83–85.

hide while peeking at me  
as if this entire play of horizons  
was enacted on some parchment

step out of sleep  
amidst young dreams  
let's bury somewhere in barren memories  
no one grows—nor flourishes—here  
merely shadows abound  
—in the dense forest of shadows  
again a caress of wings on cheeks  
—must be angels  
must be the same guileless angels  
who, in the waters of darkness,  
come to fetch me  
—but I am “I”  
my forebears were my forbears  
—surely they were not shadows

step out of sleep  
—but who is there?  
—this grounded heartbeat  
why did it emerge from the left rib?  
let's bite the finger between our teeth  
—and see  
in the womb of the wound must be my likeness

step out of sleep  
let's bear Time

#### HERITAGE<sup>6</sup>

(to a sculpted figure at Ellora)

you are the substance of twenty centuries  
enigmatic substance of twenty centuries—on which

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<sup>6</sup>“Virśa,” from *ibid.*, 92–94.

only remorseless winds had swept their tongues  
 now it's my hand  
 —and this sentient warmth of the hand, maybe,  
 you may sense as changed season  
 you would suppose that a hunk of sunrays,  
 as it does each day, had caressed you  
 or it was a weary bird  
 —who had rested  
 now don't gaze at me from such heights that my hands too are  
 fossilized

with a quiver the boughs of veins  
 awakened for an instant  
 luxuriant—as if again  
 they had bonded with their ancient roots

immersed in themselves  
 —soundless, in caves  
 —beneath dense trees  
 I keep searching; say, where have you vanished?  
 —at the wave of a finger  
 akin to a toy spinning counterclockwise  
 this world gathers round into the eyes

each day the morning paper impresses  
 —that on this earth  
 all doors have been closed  
 the hands of the heavens shall not descend in the nights ever  
 there is no one to share the sorrows of truth  
 there is no one to reap the harvest of pristine epochs

look at me through the eyes of the cavern  
 carrying the corpse of the perennial phantasm  
 I have returned  
 —look after this heritage of yours

I might be a sapped weary bird  
 but you too stand akin to a scarecrow in the field of  
 contemplation  
 without reason sparrows are awed  
 and fly away ravenous

are the sparrows breathing or the scarecrow?  
—who knows?

TODAY ONWARDS<sup>7</sup>

today onwards if you want to live  
you must abandon everything of today  
in a flash  
in a blink  
let this wounded sieved figure  
conflagrate  
in the fires of its blood  
let it decompose  
step out of yearnings  
move past your own selves  
alight beyond boundaries  
... look  
such unfettered vistas  
as if in all things  
there was buried a seed of worlds to come  
trees from seeds ... gilded trees  
in each cavity of trees  
birds hatch eggs  
listen to the resonance of soundless melodies  
emanating from the hollow of the eggs  
and weave your songs from it

—*Translated by Riyaz Latif*

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<sup>7</sup>“Āj kē Bā‘d,” from the poet’s collection, *Rustgārī* (Hyderabad: Siyāsāt Publications, 2004), 114–15.