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Translation Issue

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FOREWORD

The Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation, which publishes *Kavya Bharati*, has always taken seriously the responsibilities implied by the final word in the Centre's name. One evidence of this serious concern is the fact that almost every issue of *Kavya Bharati* includes some poetry that has been translated into English from one or more Indian languages. But in the current *KB* our focus is *entirely* upon translation.

The two essays which begin this issue set forth in some detail a number of obstacles and dilemmas that one might encounter in attempting to translate poetry from one language to another. These essays are followed by English verse translations from the poetry of *twelve* different languages of India. A perceptive reader will find a wide variety in the degree of success that these translations represent. The translations will, then, consciously or otherwise, document and illustrate many of the difficulties and problems that the two introductory essays discuss.

Much of *Kavya Bharati* 9 can therefore be regarded as a kind of laboratory undertaking in this discipline that is so essential to bring readers from all parts of our country into touch with each other. The achievements of some of this "laboratory" work, and the unfinished nature of much of it demonstrate what needs to be and what can be done to develop better translation strategies.

But, so as not to leave the matter at that point, the final section of this *KB* issue presents several instances in which poetry translation has achieved professional recognition. This final section includes reviews of two individual published volumes of translation, and an extended essay which analyses the work of a master translator who translated not only between languages but from one culture and one era to another as well.

Contributors to this issue reside in fifteen different Indian states and three other countries overseas–a fact that is appropriate, perhaps, for a volume on translation.

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Editor : R.P. Nair

KAVYA BHARATI
a review of Indian Poetry

Number 9, 1997

CONTENTS

LAKSHMI HOLMSTRÖM

ISSUES IN TRANSLATION

If we look back over the last couple of decades, it is startling how much the theory and practice of translation have intervened in, and changed, the way we see modern Indian Literatures. We could trace the beginning of this intervention to a number of individual classics which appeared in translation in the 60s and 70s: *Pather Panchali*, Bibhutibhushan Banerji, translated by T.W.Clark and Tarapada Mukherji, 1968; *Godaan*, Premchand, translated by G. Roadarmel, 1969; *Chemmeen*, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, translated by Narayana Menon, 1964, and *Samskara*, U.R.Anantha Murthy, translated by A.K.Ramanujan, 1976. Another landmark was A. K. Ramanujan's *The Interior Landscape*, 1967. In an important way, these were--or became–classical texts as translation, too. And following them, in the 70s and 80s, a number of other works appeared–produced regularly by such publishers as Jaico, Sangam, and of course by the Sahitya Akademi–which gave us the reading experience not only of isolated individual authors and their works, but helped to flesh out a sense of regional language literatures. During these twenty years and more, it is remarkable how much our reading habits have changed, so that more and more people in India read works in translation. Publishers have recognized this, and played an important part in marketing for and developing this readership, while journals such as *IRB* have a high percentage of their reviews devoted to works in translation.

There have been other developments as a result of this encouragement and proliferation of translation from regional languages into English. Not only do we begin to have a notion of the linear development of one particular regional language, Malayalam, let us say, and the way it impacts on modern Indian writing as a whole; we begin to be aware also of pan-Indian, lateral connections; above all, the writing by women and by Dalits. I think too that it would be fair to say that through works in

translation, a sense of Southern Indian identity, of parallels and connections between the southern languages has begun to be established; particularly between Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada. It would certainly not be possible to chart these new maps of modern literary histories without having read works in translation.

Critics such as Harish Trivedi have warned us against a spurious confidence about regional literatures that we only know through translated works: "To have read half a dozen works in translation from a foreign language can only too easily induce a false confidence in the reader that he or she *knows* that literature" (Trivedi 32). But given our multi-lingual wealth, very little comparative study would at all be possible without making use of works in translation.

So much for what has been achieved by translation. For translators themselves, it must be of significance that the way we view the process of translation itself, and the kinds of questions we ask about our practice has shifted radically during this same period. It is striking that the translators of an earlier time, of the 40s and 50s, thought of translation into English as a necessary process of 'Englishing', that is to say, all the words and phrases in the source text were found conventional and suitable substitutes in the translation; the role models who were followed were the well meaning Orientalists of a still earlier generation. The 60s and 70s translations I mentioned earlier were certainly landmarks. Translators since then have questioned the whole process of 'Englishing', and at least some have examined the reason and purpose of their work. A. K. Ramanujan said, in a much quoted passage from his Translator's Note on *Samskara*, "A translator hopes (against all odds) to translate a non-native reader into a native one". Hence the discussion shifts away from the adequacy of 'Englishing' a text, and towards the strategies by which one 'carries over' the cultural world of the source text into the translation. Much of the early discussion in the 70s and 80s focused on the lexis: to what extent do we keep words in the original

language–words indicating concepts, for example, and then kinship words, forms of address and so on. Starting from this acknowledgement of crucial difficulties in finding equivalent words and meanings, arose the whole vexed question of fidelity to the source text and what exactly this means in regard to the traffic between texts in two different languages which do not have an equivalent lexis, nor sentence order (with its implied logic), nor cultural assumptions.

Such questions have an important political dimension. They acknowledge the conceptual systems which are embedded into the language of translation (in the case of English, these could be Christian, Post-Romantic, Post-structural, etc.) and which could colonize the source text, and subsume it into a different cultural context altogether. Or else, the translation could use a formula which 'orientalizes' the source text, turning it into something quaint, exotic and 'Eastern'. Tagore himself was guilty of this when he translated his own work, at times.

Such questions certainly problematize the notion of the 'transparency' of all languages which underlies a translation theory based on equivalences. They foreground, instead, the asymmetry between languages; most of all they force us to consider the imbalance between English and the regional languages of India. ("Formulations that set up the problem of translation as one of judging how faithful a translation has been to the original, or how well it reads in the target language, divert attention from the fact that translation takes place where two, invariably unequal, worlds collide, and that there are always relationships of power involved when one world is represented for another in translation" [Tharu and Lalita xx].)

Critics such as Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana have pointed to the continuing power imbalance between Indian languages and an increasingly international use of English. On the other hand, other critics who have written about the colonial and

post-colonial use of English by Indians have also pointed to the different sorts of subversions inherent in such a use. The argument of *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et. al.) is that post-colonial writing defines itself "by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place"(38). The editors suggest that there are two distinct processes by which this is achieved: abrogation and appropriation. By 'abrogation' the editors mean a refusal of the notion of correctness of usage, fixed meanings and assumptions dictated by the categories of imperial culture. 'Appropriation', on the other hand, is the process by which English is adopted and adapted to express cultural experiences which are very different from imperial ones. The strategies adopted by a number of Indian writers in their 'appropriation' of English include retaining the speech rhythms and movement of regional languages; privileging the complex of speech habits which characterize the way English is spoken locally; naturalizing a number of words both from the regional languages and from Sanskrit; and replicating a whole range of mythological and other literary references.

It has taken longer for translators to take this route and to accept that an appropriated or Indianized English might be the most suitable and natural venue for translations from the regional languages. (Given that these works are being translated into English.) It is notable that certain strategies which have now been taken for granted in creative writing–the naturalizing of words from the regional languages for concepts, named rituals, kinship terms and forms of address, for example–had to be re-rehearsed over a long time, and quite acrimoniously, in the context of translation.

And here another set of problems begins. By translating into an appropriated language or Indianized English, as more and more we are doing, we translate into a language that has become opaque not only to an international readership, but to readers from other regions of India, too. So, on the one hand, the requirements of cultural, social and political authenticity which may impel us

into using a language which becomes more and more opaque; on the other hand, the inherent requirement of translation that it should communicate. And translation rests on the belief that communication is possible. So it seems to me that the post-Independence translator has to work out rather more self-consciously than the creative writer what the parameters of Indian English will bear. The very process of translation is a continuation of the process of appropriating and changing the target language. We should not forget this creative dimension to the process of translation.

Meanwhile we need to address the problem of the politics of the 'outwork' of a work in translation–that is to say, the function of glosses, footnotes, and all other augmenting materials such as introductions and afterwords. Several positions are possible between the extreme exclusivity of determined opacity, and the over-patronizing attitude of glossing or footnoting every other word in the supposedly translated text.

First of all, there is the question of the necessity at all of such outwork. It is assumed sometimes that all footnotes and glosses are a craven concession to an internationalist readership, part of an enterprise by which Indian literatures are packaged and commodified for First World consumption. But surely it is better to gloss or footnote than to use a bland or homogenized language. And if we reject 'Englishing', if we adopt, to whatever degree, an 'appropriated' English, instead, it seems to me that some contextualizing of the source text will be necessary . Unless, that is, we take the extreme exclusivist position that the reader must somehow make the cultural leap by faith alone.

The simple fact of the matter is that only if the reader of my translation from Tamil is herself a bilingual (Tamil and English) speaker, or at least a reader from another part of India will the negotiation of meaning be feasible, without these supports, if I am using an already appropriated language. For in such a case, I

will have a reader who will be able to participate in the translated text's meaning directly, because we share a number of cultural and political assumptions; or at least it will be possible to negotiate her entry into the text. But as appropriation becomes more and more local and we get regional variations of English as the venues of translation, then the problem of accessibility of such translations becomes more and more acute. And here it is as much the reader from other parts of India who is disadvantaged, as the international reader.

Ramanujan claims that the Notes and Afterword to his translation of Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* are a part of the effort– as quoted earlier– "to translate a non-native reader into a native one". He uses two sets of notes, aimed at two different kinds of readership: a) glosses on myths, names, food, ritual etc. of Kannada–terms which are retained in the text (e.g. *saru*: glossed as a well seasoned sauce, regularly eaten with rice); and b) the original Kannada or Sanskrit word which has been replaced within the translated text by English glosses (e.g. holy legend, *purana* : a tale of the past, about gods, saints etc.). Ramanujan adds, "a) is meant for the unspecialized non-Indian or non-Kannada reader; b) for fellow Indians and Indianists" (Anantha Murthy 145). It is an ingenious solution, and one which at least confronts the fact that translations from the regional language literatures of India are often targeted at a variety of readership.

For Tharu and Lalita, the onus is on the reader, and the reader's translation into a socio-political or socio-historical world. They have deliberately opted to keep glosses to the barest minimum and have required instead that the reader work with and use the context of the story or the poem, "which the other pieces and introduction fill out and complicate"(xx). In this case, the supplementary material, or the editor's perspective becomes an important meta-text, supplementing the language of the translation and commenting on it, performing in a different way, and with a different political agenda, the same facilitating function that

Ramanujan's notes and glosses (along with his extended Afterword) do.

We need a balanced view, keeping in mind that contemporary Indian Literature is an incredible compendium of literatures in different languages, that this multi-lingual scene is probably like no other. Because something like fourteen languages are involved, most of us depend on works in translation to make some sense of this contemporary picture. At the same time, there are important, agreed commonalities from which we start as informed readers. So it seems to me that there is another question to ask about the outwork or packaging of a work in translation. And that is, whether it is intended as a means of contextualizing, and of enabling a variety of readings, or whether it is reductive, and worst of all whether it dominates and overwhelms the translation, and swamps the source text with meanings that it will scarcely bear.

This brings me to other important shifts in the way we look upon the process of translation now, in comparison with the orthodoxies of a decade or so ago–and these shifts seem to follow on from the dissolving away of the notion of direct equivalences between languages. Such a notion of direct equivalence suggested also the possibility of a single definitive translation, standing by itself, and of the best translator also being an 'invisible' translator. In recent times, though, the emphases have been rather more on an acknowledgement of the translator's subjectivity and historicity.

Tejaswini Niranajana (*Siting Translation*) has reminded us both of the 'instability' of the original texts, and of the historicity and effective history of the translated text. To approach this notion of historicity slightly differently, we need to acknowledge that a text may be the product of its time, but that it also speaks to us differently at different times, and we see different relevances in it. Similarly, the translator's perceptions change; few of us read today as we did 20 years ago.

To acknowledge this is only part of the acknowledgement of the over-all subjectivity of the translator, and the individuality of the reading which becomes the translation. The individuality of the reading must be the beginning of the process. As Gayatri Spivak says, ". . . translation is the most intimate act of reading. Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text" (Spivak 183). It is in response to the 'special call' of the text, or what she also describes as its rhetoricity, that the translator engages in the activity of interpretation and re-writing across languages, meanings and cultures in order to achieve a translation.

And that subjectivity is also, in the end, the personal element that provides the coherence that any translation demands. "Translation is a continuation of what Jean Genet called the adventure of writing as opposed to the familiar and prosaic bus journey, and it cannot but include subjective, imaginative transformation. It is high time that our attention to (and reviewing of) literary translation moved on from patronizing chatter about deftness, readability and errors; rather we should focus on the quality of that transformation"(Bush 11). Gayatri Spivak also writes of the risk-taking involved in achieving that transformation, of resisting both the solemnities of chaste Victorian prose and the forced simplicity of Plain English. It is this risk-taking that connects with the way we continue to appropriate and change English, disturbing expected patterns, suggesting new experiences, charting new maps.

To acknowledge the nature of the translator's subjectivity, it must be emphasized, is not to take away the discipline that translation demands; that is always there, by virtue of the integrity and coherence of the source text. To acknowledge translation as translation means affirming the coherence and separateness of the source text, but also the densities and complexities within it as understood and interpreted by the reader-translator. Not to blur these in the interests of the translator's position, political or other,

but rather to be clear both about shared positions and acknowledged differences. And in the end, it is this that allows the visibility of the translator. The translator's note or preface does provide a place for clarifying certain choices, and many translators such as Gayatri Spivak have used that forum abundantly.

We are all still learning about translation; the aims of translation, the implications of translation, and the many relationships between source text and translated text, particularly in the extraordinary multi-lingual context of India. Hence it is important to re-visit these questions, and to continue to re-visit them. There are also a number of practicalities which we need to take on board: for translators to think of themselves as a professional body, but also to share practices; for publishers to formulate some consistencies of house styles and transliteration practices in regard to translation; for review journals possibly to provide some guidelines for reviewers, particularly in distinguishing between original text and translation.

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LAKSHMI KANNAN

ON TRANSLATING POETRY

The P.E.N. Manifesto on Translation in May 1970 described the translators as "the lost children in an enchanted forest of literature" but emphasized that it is through them that one gains an access to other cultures and that indeed, "without the lost children, we are all lost". For literary translation is a cultural communication that transmits meaning across space and time, bridging cultures and civilizations, promoting an appreciation of differences and a discovery of surprising similarities. In drawing a writer out of his/her cultural shibboleth that identifies and contextualizes a writer at the same time as it confines him/her to a particular language, translation gives this writer an alternate space to breathe in, a chance to appear under different lights and, of course, a chance to be evaluated by larger criteria. It liberates a work as much as it liberates a reader, opening new worlds for both. One recalls with much pleasure the poems of Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz and many others that one got to read in English translation.

Translation is a parallel creativity involving a creative leap from the spirit to the letter, and again, from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). It calls for seemingly contrary skills from the translator: vast reserves of flexibility in the use of language and, at the same time, a strict restraint over the same. After *experiencing* the language of the original text, the translator tries to render it in the TL in an idiomatic way which may entail syntactic and structural changes. A translation of a sentence from Tamil into English usually changes the sequence of the subject and the predicate, till the line, visually, may look like a reversal of the original. The translator, therefore, lives the word on two planes, on the level of the SL and the TL. The translator may often get a discouraging feeling that he/she is up against the inherently conservative nature of language, any language, for that matter. And yet, the translation may eventually succeed in surprising ways. This is largely because of the 'hidden intelligence' of a language which philosophers of language point out as a kind of 'intelligence'

that far surpasses the intelligence of the user. It finally makes a good translation succeed vividly, often with an unexpected freshness.

Translating poetry has always been difficult. There was a time when it seemed to be so forbidding that extreme ideas were postulated, one of which is that poetry is best translated by practising poets. While there is some truth in this remark, one has seen sensitive translations done by translators who may or may not be poets. They invariably have a feel for language, an ear for rhythms and cadence in the very curl of a word, or the echo around words. The tonality and pitch also become more crucial for poetry. The challenge is further complicated if one is translating into English from the vernacular. In Tamil, for instance, what may sound perfectly normal by the 'norms' of the language may sound somewhat plaintive or even hyperbolic in English, if the translation is done rather literally. Kamala Hemmige, a poet in Kannada, writes with remarkable restraint, irony and a self-directed criticism in her poem "Gini" (The Parrot). The English translation preserves this deceptively casual tone which is more effective for the irony that never gets heavy-handed. The tone therefore seems to be just 'right' for the contemporary style in verse:

GINI (The Parrot)

Kamala Hemmige

Since the door lies
wide open
I can freely fly. Can float
away, easily, like a boat.

Wonder why
I don't. She doesn't keep me,
like Khanderaya, hasn't
clipped my wings.

I don't complain
that she gives me daily
cashew nuts and guava.

My fault
that I suddenly demanded
ripe tamarind.
My fault
that I remain silent,
knowing how to speak.

(*Translated from Kannada by Tejaswani Niranjana*
[Tharu & Lalita, Vol.II 582-83])

Translating from classical texts is particularly difficult as the ethnicity tends to get diluted and it may get reductive in effect. Even a highly localized, rural language may have a distinct style– a saucy impertinence, a salty tang, a rise and fall or even a sing-song in the speech rhythms–all of which may not come through in an English translation. Some words may go way back to centuries in their etymological root and it may be hard to find apt equivalents in English for them. But the limitations of translations are acceptable in the larger interests of reaching a wider readership.

Translations can equally, and inadvertently, reveal the flaws in the original. Issac Bashevis Singer, the gifted story-teller in Yiddish, has an amusing observation to make about this hazard: "Also translation undresses a literary work, shows it in its true nakedness. An author may fool himself in his own language, but many of his shortcomings become clear to him in another language. Translation tells the bitter truth. Unveils all masks. Nothing can prove the greatness of the Bible more than the fact that it has been translated into thousands of languages and it can be enjoyed in all of them"(111).

Translating classical texts is again a daunting task, not only because of the atmosphere that has to be evoked, but more for a sense of time, a cultural time that has to be recreated in the TL. Sidney Alexander, who translates from Renaissance Italian, describes how an ancient work can be made up-to-date "spatially, temporally, horizontally and vertically" in order "to domesticate works from a foreign hearth, to give them all a citizenship, so to speak, in our native tongue". He talks about the folly of rendering an ancient Greek verse in Swinburne lyric. A special language has

to be invented to preserve the past in its definite differences from the present and yet to make it interesting in such a way that "it shall be present to us in the present." He warns that an empathy with the time of the original work should not lead a translator to modernize the text in such a way that an Ovid would sound "like an exile from Haight-Ashbury". A good translator avoids these pitfalls and succeeds in giving us a sense of time.

Irony, humour and ideolect are particularly difficult to translate. So is piquancy in style. The translator has to be very inventive if he wants to bring about these qualities in the TL. The sonic element which is of great importance for poetry also calls for inventiveness. It may come through with an alternate cadence, an alternate rhythm in the TL. The most difficult item perhaps is the title. To come upon a neat, inspired title, one has to wait. And wait indefinitely too. It may come within a second after taking a pen. Or long after the translation has been published.

What then is a "good" translation? Is it something that just avoids all the pitfalls mentioned? A translation may qualify in all the criteria mentioned and yet fail to catch that elusive, indefinable thing called 'the spirit' of the original. And unless it does that, it cannot stand on its own, as a surrogate, or a substitute text. This quality of 'independence' comes about if a 'third element', a 'third presence' is made manifest in the translated work. In the interaction between the SL and the TL, a third element is born, an alien element that shines through the TL and lends a 'presence' of its own to the translation. George Steiner detected this early in his discourse on language: "A translation from language A to language B will make tangible the implication of a third, active presence. It will show the lineaments of that 'pure speech' which precedes and underlies both languages"(89). Actually, Steiner caught on from where Wilhelm von Humboldt had defined it, way back in 1816. As one of the earliest philosophers of language, Humboldt defined the 'third universe' as something "midway between the phenomenal reality of the 'empirical world' and the internalized structures of consciousness", bringing about a "material and spiritual simultaneity"(89).

One can see this "spiritual simultaneity" in the following poems. The two poems are divided by centuries between them, but have a similar theme–the domestic drudgery that marks the 'role' of woman against which both the protagonists in the two poems protest vehemently. Vimala, a contemporary poet in Telugu, calls her poem "The Kitchen":

VANTILLU (The Kitchen)

Vimala

Our kitchen is a mortuary.
Pans, tins, gunny bags
crowd it like cadavers
that hang amid clouds of damp wood smoke.
.....
.....
Mother floats, a ghost here,
a floating kitchen herself,
her eyes melted in tears,
her hands worn to spoons,
her arms spatulas that turn
into long frying pans . . .
.....
.....
Luck, they say, landed me in my great kitchen,
gas stove, grinder, sink and tiles.
I make cakes and puddings,
not old-fashioned snacks as my mother did.
.....
.....
Damn all kitchens. May they burn to cinders,
the kitchens that steal our dreams, drain
our lives, eat our days–like some enormous vulture.
Let us destroy those kitchens
that turned us into serving spoons.

(*Translated from Telugu by B. V.L. Narayana Row*
[Tharu & Lalita, Vol.II 599-601])

We have another poem, an ancient one in Pali dating as far back, possibly, as the sixth century B.C., which comes through with an amazing readability:

SUMANGALAMATA

A Woman Well Set Free! How Free I Am

A woman well set free! How free I am,
How wonderfully free, from kitchen drudgery.
Free from the harsh grip of hunger,
And from empty cooking pots,
Free too of that unscrupulous man,
The weaver of sunshades.
Calm now, and severe I am,
All lust and hatred purged.
To the shade of the spreading trees I go
And contemplate my happiness.

(*Translated from Pali by Uma Chakràvarti and Kumkum Roy* [Tharu & Lalita, Vol.I 69])

A good translator then is endowed with a bilingual, bicultural sensibility which gives him a mastery over the source and the target language. He/she invents or devises a simulacrum which makes the translated work a substitute text. On rare occasions, this substitute text can even read better than the original in its refinement and finesse, however upsetting this may be to the original writer. But the best translator is the one who has an insatiable curiosity about expressions and phrases that unveil a people and their mores for him/her. And the best translation also has a flair for preserving the silences in the original text, allowing the unsaid portions to have an eloquence of their own.

It is the area of criticism that lets down translations badly. Critical evaluation of translations is yet to come of age. It needs to sensitize itself to the many limitations that are inherent in a translated work. A translation cannot, first of all, read like the

original, so where is the sense in making this rather obvious point look like a big flaw in itself? One recalls the words of Brendan Kennelly: "Translation is, in any case, the art of fascinating failure" (Kennelly 107). It takes both courage and skill to 'fail' in a fascinating way, if 'fail' is the right word for it.

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RANJIT GUPTA

[Ranjit Gupta has been a poet of repute for quite some years now. He's known for his effort to evolve a new genre of poetry in Bengali. His poems have been published in various prestigious literary magazines, though he prefers to stick to the little magazine culture. He has also published several collections of his poems, among which *Bhinna Akash* (A Different Sky) is probably the most popular.]

WARMTH

Standing on the banks of wreckage
Someone calls someone else;
Was that a friend's face?
Walking along the banks of wreckage
I look at the distant star
And say to myself:
Your light doesn't save me from the winter's chill,
But I can certainly feel the warmth of your affection.

MY MOTHER'S FACE

When the boy trudges home in the dead of night
The roads are all quiet and forsaken then
Only a lone star shivers on the sky
And on the earth. Your breast
Lighting the lantern with your affection forever
You keep shining like that lonely star.

PAINTED ON A SCROLL

The days get celebrated
But not the oaths
False castles are erected
To defeat false foes

Days, you're but pictures
Painted on scrolls
Days go blowing in the wind
The victory mask palls.

Thirteen fests in twelve months
This Bengal still remains
Woe-begone all through the year
Soaking her hair in tear-rains.

THE FACE-MASK

He takes off his wig
When he goes to bed at night
But the mask remains,
For
His face itself has become his natural mask.

(*Translated from Bengali by Paramita Banerjee*)

AMALAN BISWAS

[Amlan Biswas (b.1960) is a central government employee by profession. Amalan has been writing poems since 1978. These poems are published regularly in various little magazines like *Kaladhvani*, *Jalangi*, *Anandam* etc.]

FRIENDS

Friends – don't let doubt linger in your hearts.
Though the sun is hidden behind the horizon now
The apathetic termites pay no heed to time.
What a huge mound they've built along the banks of the
Jalangi river!
The juvenile boy walks step by step.

The boy has walked, enthralled by audacious tunes
A white fresco drawn in the lace's tassles
And the dot on the forehead floating in dew –

Still,
I've rubbed my heart against stones, thorns here and there
My life forever pinned by the torn alphabet.

If I stand on the road, specks of darkness beckon to me
Unconditional thorny creepers seek to suck up
In bloodthirst, my honey-filled grasstips –

Friends,
Don't doubt my good wishes at least.

HERE GOES THE UNPARALLELED

You'll also go away – what's so new in that?
In the scroching sun those arrogant and
Straight, red, fire-of-the-forest flowers
Wave at the martyr's tower to say
We're going.

The wretched sky had no time
To note, to taste,
To touch those petals with unparalleled sense.
Swerving off the Fort William the bus that had picked up speed
In its frenzy to cross the new Howrah bridge
That also hasn't returned.

In the meantime, minutes and seconds bring
Fragmented waiting forever
Only the eager waves of the Bhagirathi river
Pick up that history with care.

Does no one ever return?
Only memory the demoness
Devours the Jalangi's banks – cities, bodies, all my creations
In a grand feast of yearnings!

(*Translated from Bengali by Paramita Banerjee*)

SABARI GHOSH

[Sabari Ghosh has done her Masters in Bengali Literature and her M.Phil in Comparative Literature. She is a Lecturer in Bengali in City College, Calcutta. Her poems have appeared in various prestigious literary magazines and she has published two books of poems entitled *Tahole Jaler Dharma Pele* (So You Get Water's Essence: 1993) and *Bhanga Chakmaki* (The Broken Flint: 1996). She was invited as a participant from Bengal in the third poetry triennial 'Kavi Bharati', organized by Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, focusing on women poets of India. On this occasion, she also published *Illuminated Moments*, a booklet of some of her poems translated into English. This poem is from *Bhanga Chakmaki*.]

FAMINE

Don't you step out of the room into the courtyard, girl–
Beyond the courtyard is the wall, and
Beyond the wall is the brazen sky, shameless light,
Through fissures peep the sticky eyes of snakes
They'll lick your whole body, ravage it!

Come to the backyard pond instead, girl;
There, buzzing from girl-friends' ear to ear,
Gossip, scandal, folkways–
The world for your knowing.
Who gives you more than this much right?

Oh girl
Your artistry will warm cold limbs as quilt,
Your songs will soothe children;
Your dreams will accompany your husband in his trade tours of the seven seas
And your son in his victory trip on a chariot of gold
Their achievements will fill up your pitcher of cooling water.
You stay imprisoned in a vessel–the free-roaming demon's life in darkness;

Your salvation comes from the days and nights you spend
surrounded by ovens
Posing as a goddess even as you break down.

If you still choose to disobey, girl
Then you better keep in mind–
The army of Manu's sons,
The third *avataar* of omnipotent Man,*
Are alert with their sticks behind the door!

* As per Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu appears in some form whenever immorality and lawlessness reign supreme on earth. Ten such reincarnations or *avataars* have been mentioned, the third one of which is as a hog.

(*Translated from Bengali by Paramita Banerjee*)

RUPA DASGUPTA

[Rupa Dasgupta (b.1963) is a central government employee by profession. Rupa has been writing poems since 1980. Her poems are regularly published in various little magazines like *Kaladhvani*, *Kavita Pakshik*, *Parichoy* et al. This young poet has already published several books of poems such as *Rode Bhengechhi Aynay* (I've Broken Sunrays on the Mirror: 1985); *Barshati Nei* (There's No Raincoat:1987); *Segun Kather Pa* (Legs of Teak: 1989); *Kashbon* (Catkin Forest: 1994) and *Abu Hosener Kalam* (Abu Hossein's Pen: 1995). All of the following poems are from her latest collection.]

IN THE YEAR-ENDING FAIR

People, people's faces and people's dresses, furnitures, hobbies
And anything that people seek to buy . . .

Animesh, you are the only one with no such year-ending fair!

In this city of worthless hooliganism
You are moving around here and there.
Somehow your familiarities beat you hands down . . .

You look at the weaver bird's nest and chuckle alone. And some time
Reach some shelter or the other, managing to get some *chapatis* for dinner.

In my side back I've hidden a real knife. Tell me, is its handle
Broken again?

Don't think about a new knife yet. Animesh, the roads
Continue to be slippery still . . .

One day the sky will remove its canopy from above your head as you walk.

Fine then, this is the last time, absolute last. People, people's faces and
Limbs – let them live and choose as they will.

Happy, just live happy.

FOR MY MOTHER
TAGORE'S BIRTHDAY, 1994

Before I write a poem about you, let me talk about an entire paddyfield
Getting burnt

I was attending an invitation when fire raged on their tips

As the aals* stretched longer, you turned into a lump of flesh
Deaf and dumb . . .

The roots were self-generating. And my two hands were cold, murderous axes

But I couldn't locate the face of any moment. Moments too were burnt as I
Dug myself up time and again under the moment-tortured wheels.

Doesn't Mother Earth have any mercy either? Is she too suspect?

There's nothing, then, to confess? Is everything just the hurt pride of the axe?

*An aal is a ridge of earth set up between cornfields to demarcate boundaries

The one you've given your warmth and wings to, is she all that undependable?

Delirium and annihilation stretch for miles. Wounds on my poem's back,
Beheaded sleep . . .

EVENING

Hi Evening, it's been so long since we met!

How the night salutes the fading light, how the crows find
Their nests – memory lapses have robbed me of all these. Memory –
Wiping some tears, like rubbing sawdust against ice. Memory
Is like an old aircraft with broken wings.

I've faded while I dreamt. This untouchable woman
Waits forever, bliss never walks her way.

However late at night I return, arrogant clouds accompany me. And my shadow
Stays attached to me without rains.

Beauty, security – just name it and you still haven't
Lived like that, dear Evening!

VOYAGE

Who would like the story of unrelenting fatigue
Unless fatigue reached some solution?

Solutions occur not just in arithmetic. Solutions roam
In situations, events and characters too.

And solutions are worthwhile only when they do not craft wood
With the guilty saw of yes and no,

Rather, some people's fatigue teaches them better weaving on the day
Of going around the world.

(*Translated from Bengali by Paramita Banerjee*)

DEBI ROY

[Debi Roy was born in 1946 in Howrah. He has published Bengali poems and their translations in more than twenty journals in India and overseas, and eight volumes of his poetry have appeared independently. His poems have been translated into English, Swedish, Spanish, German, Russian and half-a-dozen Indian languages. A former convener and secretary of the Indian Writers' Association, he currently lives in Calcutta.]

A BLOOD RED EVENING

The gust of wind that rushes in with the pride
of an angered, agitated honey bee, is full of
spikes of envy. Amid the quizzical flutter of
clouds one has to accept this sign of the wind
as its own accidental explosion.

And then comes in the rains, ceaseless rains of
fortune! I treasure this sign, tracking it amid
that ghost-dance, as I pass by I look up and
behold : the transparent patches of cloud, and
over it the fairies wing their flight and the
tanks full of water! yet beyond the tops of
the trees over the face of a blood-red afternoon
lie scattered the shades of shining aluminium.

PURI

Surely a pair of eager lips and thirsty
longs for someone.
The sweat-soaked forehead
suckled by an unending thirst
gets parched by the unfeeling wind.

That parrot-like nose,
those two hands, ripe with the expectancy
of a tender touch--over the parts
or over the body entire.

In the distance the touch
of the blue waters of the sea.
Someone in the dance-room
is busy in tuning out his own music.
The sea, listening to this minstrelsy
dances wildly, its fangs
swaying up and down, as though
it were drunk. And someone
from the distant haze is seen
approaching faster and faster,
running and running,
as though being eagerly awaited
or cordially invited.

WHAT'S YOUR ROLE?

No, no temple in the Salt Lake City,
No church or mosque. I've verified
it minutely, wandering through
its smallest lane.
Does it matter?
Does it prove anything?

Has the fear of sin vanished
from the men who only wish to have
the goodness of the worldly things,
who only implant an infinite
hunger for matter? No, no,
no correct answer has been
received yet. All at once, the vistas of
the purgatorial pain of Dante!

Have all the religious-minded, pious
people of the world given up drinking,
given up going to the brothels?
Have they become oblivious
of the fragrance of female flesh?
Have they stopped telling lies?
Have they ceased to sleep
with other women?
Have they forgotten pride?
Forgotten to fling glances
at the prattling child
or at the blooming blossom?
Even to endear them,
caress them?
No, no, no need to live that way!

When someone in disguise
adds fuel to the burning flames of riot,
or when the revolutionary houses a camp
in the nearby school, or when AK 47 rifles
glisten before the eyes of mothers and sisters,
and when my countrymen bleed,
no one asks–what is your role,
Oh shrine?

Oh, arches of the church
and mosque why are you silent now?
What is the cause of your muteness?

WOMAN

Every man needs a woman.
Certainly he needs her.
Or else he won't get any
social recognition. He won't merit
any weight, prestige.

Unto whose ears shall he whisper:
"Let's go then you and I
when the evening is spread out
against the sky....."?

To whom shall he say:
"Hasta La Vista!"?

(*Translated from Bengali by Niranjan Mohanty*)

HIMMAT KHADSOORYA

[Himmat Khadsoorya is a leading Gujarati Dalit poet, who lives in Ahmedabad.]

NUMBERS

Figures assaulting the eyes on waking up
Figures stampeding the closing eyes at night
One, ten, hundred, thousand, millions – a maze of figures
Coiling around they twist themselves into a million shapes.
Let the thoughts drift to love or friendship
Figures descend from nowhere to disrupt them.
Likes and dislikes are both forgotten
Figures are heaped on both life and death.
Nothing is left to fathom man.
I do see man, but figures distort the vision.
Come, let's learn a new science of numbers from scratch
Figures compiled with man as the measure.

(*Translated from Gujarati by K. M. Sherrif and E. V. Ramakrishnan*)

MANGAL RATHOD

[Mangal Rathod (b.1939) is a well-known Dalit poet in Gujarati with three published volumes. He has won the Gujarat Sahitya Akademi Award.]

CITY

This city wearing the hoardings
Of brassieres on its plaster of paris
Breasts always provokes us

Someone tells me,
It has all become transparent
It will break into pieces
Like this glass pane.
Oh, city of charming marble,
Nothing remains opaque anymore
Therefore perhaps I have
Nothing to break to pieces.
Oh, Vinoba Bhave,
I too am a detached onlooker

And I witness: here
The glory and dignity are
sold out for the price of brassieres,
My marble beauty.

(*Translated from Gujarati by K. M. Sherrif and E. V. Ramakrishnan*)

JAYANT PARMAR

[Jayant Parmar (b.1954) is a Gujarati Dalit poet. He also writes in Urdu. He works in a bank at Ahmedabad.]

MARINA BEACH

As the evening sets in,
Dislodging
The burning stone of sun
From its shoulder,
Tired from the daylong toil
Releasing colourful balloons in the sky,
Whistling,
Barefooted,
On the Marina Beach,
There comes for a stroll–
The blue sea.

(*Translated from Gujarati by G. K. Vankar*)

SITHAMSHU YASACHANDRA

[Sithamshu Yasachandra (b.1941) is an eminent Gujarati poet and critic. His *Jatayu* won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1988. He also writes plays. He has edited the *Encyclopedia of Comparative Literature*. He was the Vice-Chancellor of Saurashtra University, Rajkot, and now teaches Gujarati at M.S.University, Baroda.]

IN THE YARD

Perspiring, clenching the fist, rushing blindly
Runaway railtracks
For a moment tumbling down, colliding, bumping, puzzled
With a broken shin groaning, moaning
Scattered on all sides.
Voracious
Open iron eye-balls
In the midnight's flooded search-light
Barricading that extreme boundary of time
Along pre-destined lines
Horrifying with single-minded stillness
Lengthening the hungry shafts of light only towards this side
On each waggon of the goods train.
Lying across the length and breadth of countless railtracks
On the diseased back of its rusty bottom
Hoisted on the decayed hands of its unhinged doors
Startled at the rough shadows taken for ghosts
The sum of my mind's time
Now wailing, screaming, fainting, forsaken.
Meanwhile some wheels are stirring
(Clockwise and then anti-clockwise).
But on the tracks, softened with fear
Round and round, suddenly, in a flash,
Collapsing there once again.
In the tone of desperate dogs tensed up towards the southern sky

A hollow, piercing, vacant howl. . . .
–That,
Holding back one leg into feathers;
Enveloping the eyes with whiteness;
A supernatural pigeon
Chanting *mantras* intermittently
Flies away, startled, fluttering.
Addressing the one who is fleeing,
In a last desperate effort,
Closing the eyes, not caring for the shaft of light
Each track
Pointing its tightened forefinger
The tense nerves breaking
Staring eyes seeing nothing
Pointing
Once again
To the limits
of vision. . . . . .

(*Translated from Gujarati by Hetal Mody and E. V. Ramakrishnan*)

STARS

I know the awe
the sages felt
as they figured out the constellations
and gazed at the stars scattered
all over the cosmos.
Stars are indeed awesome
or beautiful
To reach us through light
they take hundreds of years
more than our life-span.

Though,
at dawn,
as stars depart one by one,
the fragile fresh leaves on the high branches
of the neem tree comfort the eyes.
How ephemeral is beauty
When it is not frightening.
So,
at times,
it occurs to me
I should pluck out my eyes
from their sockets and set them
on the summit of a mountain
To see the lustre of the stars.
Unmixed with fear
In the ugly streets of the sun
A blind man's stick will do.
But then
I remember the fleeting face of my beloved.
I NEED MY VISION.

(*Translated from Gujarati by Anjana Desai and E. V. Ramakrishnan*)

A.G.KHAN

TRANSLATION: PURSUIT TO RECAPTURE THE 'UNSAID'

(Editor's Note: The following essay, the Hindi poem that it discusses, and the subsequent three attempts to translate and revise the poem form a single unit. This exercise illustrates the struggle with the sensitivities required when one attempts to translate a poem that is focused on a delicate subject.)

A contemporary critic has suggested that for a creative writer "the sign has to disappear in order to give meaning . . . each sign is half adequate and half inadequate because it does not convey the ideas perfectly but it has to be used under necessity since no more sign is available. . . (each sign) is written and crossed out "(Das 165-66). So begins the writer's crusade to capture the 'essence', and for this "huge, threatening expanse of empty space"(Kannan 29) he has to take an "inspired leap"(Kannan 29). Because of several reasons the writer drops the hints and leaves much 'unsaid' trusting, on the one hand, the "hidden intelligence of a language"(Kannan 30); while on the other, he assumes the reader's competence to read between the lines as he takes for granted the reader's "intuitional seepage"(Chandran 46). He therefore deliberately creates lacunaes, blank spaces, gaps or voids (Ivir 36) because very often when he has to confront establishment or fundamentalists who are unwilling to listen to the voice of reason, instead of calling a spade a spade he resorts to linguistic devices–metaphors, similies or other figures of speech. Since he does not want to remain a mute and passive spectator of the absurd drama going on around him, he pours forth his agony, disgust and wrath through "manifold echoes and dimensions of meaning"(Srivastava 16) to enable the reader to arrive at the perfect interpretation. He exploits what Srivastava calls "tone value" or "pulse of suggestion"(Srivastava 17). Readers of the source language are able to fill in the gaps if the event described is a recent one–especially a significant political or social issue. For him the text is a transparent text causing practically no semantic loss. People will not find it difficult, for example, to recognise the

"Mainduck" (Raman Fielding) in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, or Gangaji, Priya Duryodhani or Kanika Menon in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel.* Mary Snell-Hornby regards the painted world as a "gestalt", a "web of relationships", a "part of a given situation against a particular socio-cultural background"(93).

But with passage of time amnesia creates a barrier and much of the 'unsaid' becomes a riddle for the people of the source language. Hence for people removed by time and space the text becomes opaque, almost unintelligible. And if there are cultural issues the entire work becomes a burden for the readers of a different language.

The translator at such a juncture steps in to play the crucial role of a "cultural ambassador"(Pattanayak 15) who while "'liberating' a text from the confines of its regional context" (Kannan 30) attempts to absorb and assimilate the "cultural facets" (Kannan 30). Ivir quotes Casagrande to emphasise "one does not translate LANGUAGES, one translates CULTURES"(Ivir 35). He has to employ a few "cultural filters"(Reiss 50) before he "re-programs" in order to attempt . . . "retrospective translating" (Reiss 50). In such situations the translator is the "receiver of the original 'message' and the 'source' of the translated one" (Pandit 57). By his "creative transposition"(Pandit 60) he creates a "meta text or a text about text"(Zellermayer 75) because in absence of a creative interpretation there will arise poor readability–a "zero zone of translation"(Kannan 29). K. Narayana Chandran quotes Hugh Kenner in considering the translator a seer who can "see the poem before the poet writes it and marvel at the success of his wrestle to subdue his own language to the vision"(Chandran 45). The translator is not a traitor as is commonly believed : on the contrary, he is "neither the unsophisticated 'common reader' of Virginia Woolf, nor the hyper-intelligent, gestalt forming reader of Woolfgang Iser. . . . the translator reads more responsibly than either"(Chandran 44). By doing so he "re-interprets the dominant culture", an act which Maya Pandit terms "critical intervention"(Pandit 61, 62).

In light of the fore-going discussion Swapnil Shrivastav's Hindi poem titled "Punrutthan" (*India Today*, Special Annual Literary Supplement 1995-96) presents a challenge for the translator. The poet himself walked on a tight-rope as he was handling an extremely sensitive and explosive issue. It is a succinct account of the Indian psyche during the turbulence of 1992 climaxing in the demolition at Ayodhya. Repercussions at Mathura and Kashi are reverberating even today. Shrivastav manages the tight-rope walk superbly well because he mentions neither names nor places, but 'universalises' the entire portrayal.

Shrivastav's poem imposes a similar restriction on the translator who too must neither disclose names nor places yet must be able to communicate the poet's agony. Vermeer considers that to translate "means to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances" (Vermeer 29).

The translator has a triple responsibility. He has to adhere to the 'untold' facts conveyed through metaphors and other literary devices on the one hand; while on the other, he also must ensure that the text does not get reduced to a "non-aesthetic interpretation"(Srivastava 19). At the same time the translator has to take adequate precautions to ensure that his rendering of the poem does not spark any flare-up. He therefore must explore the "semantic range and distribution of (the terms) in the language, the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships"(Pandit 58) in order to locate equivalance at the three levels of linguistics, stylistics and pragmatics. This compels the translator to undergo the task "to read and re-read as he writes"(Chandran 46).

Instead of giving the final draft the present translator here presents the three drafts that evolved during his pursuit to recapture the 'unsaid' without any 'transmission loss' and, of course, without the explosive fall-out. Change of form, syntax, rhythm and inversions became inevitable in the process. Some popular idioms in English have deliberately been rejected lest they should be misconstrued in the prevailing charged and tense circumstances. Subsequent variations have been underlined.

पुनरूत्थान

चेहरा समय के सामने हो
ओर आदमी के उल्दे पांव
चलते चलते ऐसी जगह
पहुैच जाए जहॉ घुप्प अंधेरा हो
इसे कहते हैं पुनरूत्थान
एक अंधे कुएं में पानी तलाशना
पत्थरों को इबादतगाह में रखकर
उसे ईश्वर की तरह पूजना
इच्छापूर्ति न होने पर दविारों से
सिर टकराकर लहूलुहान करना
ऐसी क्रियाएं हैं जो इन तथाकथित
पुनरूत्थानवादियों में पाई जाती हैं
पुनरूत्थानवादियों की हरकतें सभ्य बंदरों के
पूर्वजों से मिलती हैं
वे झुंड के झुंड हाहाकार करते हुए
आते हैं,और संक्रामक रोग की तरह
लोगों के दिमाग में फैल जाते हैं
वे मुर्दो की बस्ती में दिखाई देते हैं
इतिहास की खोदते हुए कब्र
वे हमारे कालवृक्ष की जड़ों में
दीमक की तरह छिपे हुए हैं
रक्षा का दंभ भरते हुए
दिखते हुए सफेदपोश
मोहलत मिलते समूची कायनात को
नेस्तनाबूद करने को तत्पर
वे शंख बजाकर बर्बर समय को
आमंत्रित कर रहे हैं.

Draft I : Renaissance

Facing the time-mirror
Man while retrieving the past
Arrives at a point
where reigns darkness
And this we hail as Renaissance

To search water in a dry well
To install stones at places of worship
To cling to them as Gods
And run one's bleeding head against the walls
if wishes remain unfulfilled
These are the activities to which
the alleged revivalists resort
The antics of the revivalist armies
Resemble those of the ancestorial monkeys
Howling they storm in hordes
And as contagious disease
Infect the minds of people
Troupe they in the valleys of death
Exhuming the graves of history
The Civilised gentry posing as Saviors
Infest as termites the roots of time/ tradition
Determined to raze the cosmos to dust
Should they pounce on an opportunity by chance
Blowing the conchshells they invite
the Huns of History.

Draft II: Revival

Face to face with time
Man while retrograding
Reaches a place
Governed by none but a black-out
To dazzle into Resurgence

Trying to trace water in a blind well
Installing stones at shrines
Worshipping them as Gods
They dash their bleeding heads against the walls
When their prayers go unanswered
These are the actions to which
Resort the Revivalists so called
These civilised apes
In their antics resemble their ancestors.
They storm as hordes chanting menace
And as contagious disease they infect
the minds of people.
The white collared haunt the ghost towns of history
To exhume the past
Branding themselves as Saviors.
As termites they infest the roots of harmony
Fully committed to reduce
the entire globe to ashes,
Should such opportunity befall.
Blowing their own trumpets
They invite the Huns of History.

Draft III: Resurgence

Facing the mirror of time
Man while retrograding
Arrives at the dead end of a tunnel
Where reigns a black-out,
To awaken into Resurgence.

Trying to find water in a blind well
Installing idols in shrines
To worship them as Lords
Dashing the bleeding heads against the walls
When prayers are lost unrewarded
To such actions resort
The Revivalists so called
The civilised apes
Resemble ancestors in their antics
They storm as locusts with slogans of chaos.
Infecting the psyche as contagious disease
They haunt the graveyard of history
To exhume the past.
Branding themselves as Saviors
As termites they infest the roots of harmony,
Determined to destroy the entire globe
Should such opportunity befall.
They invite the barbarous time
By blowing their conch-shells.

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VIJAY VISHAL

SELF-SEARCH

Among the deepening shadows
Of deceit and dishonesty
In myself and around
I often search for
The strayed proverbial wood-cutter
Who insisted for his lost axe
Not of gold or silver
But of iron
To axe poverty
And earn pearls of sweat
Which won him and his clan
Square meals,
Wealth of priceless peace,
And sweet sleep
Without demanding
Anything in return.

(*Translated from Hindi by the Author*)

A. K. RAMANUJAN

[A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1994) is a well known poet and translator. He wrote both in English and Kannada, and translated from Tamil. He was a faculty member at the University of Chicago. He has produced three anthologies of poetry in Kannada. The poem translated here is from *Hokkalalli Hoovilla* (Dharwad: Manohar Grantha Mala, 1989). He received Padmasri in 1976 and the prestigeous McArthur prize in 1982. He died of cardiac arrest in 1994.]

ART AND AESTHETICS

In the dusty streets of Madurai
This leper husband
Walks disfigured face
Face devoid of nose
Hands sans fingers
Foot without heel
The eye soaked in *sillu*
flies feasting on it
The oozing wound attracting
multicoloured flies as if it is a flower
Beside him stands his wife
with a new *thali* around her neck
Behind him stands the ancient monument
on which leans a voluptuous *Apsara*
Below her broken nose
The mouth flashes a smile
Radiating a thirty-second *Sutra*
Time–Khilji's grandson
Broke her thighs
Between the thighs
Picaresque Tamilian rogues
Have scribbled in Sanskrit graffitti

Kavya Bharati 1997

I recollected these two images
And spoke in America
On art and aesthetics
On which poured plentiful applause.

Sillu – Ye!low discharge from the eye
Thali – Sacred chain symbolising marriage
Apsara – Divine spirit, personification of beauty
Sutra – *Kamasutra*: Indian treatise on Sex

(*Translated from Kannada by Bhargavi Rao*)

A. K. RAMANUJAN

[A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1994) is a well known poet and translator. He wrote both in English and Kannada, and translated from Tamil. He was a faculty member at the University of Chicago. He has produced three anthologies of poetry in Kannada. The poem translated here is from *Hokkalalli Hoovilla* (Dharwad: Manohar Grantha Mala, 1989). He received Padmasri in 1976 and the prestigeous McArthur prize in 1982. He died of cardiac arrest in 1994.]

ART AND AESTHETICS

In the dusty streets of Madurai
This leper husband
Walks disfigured face
Face devoid of nose
Hands sans fingers
Foot without heel
The eye soaked in *sillu*
flies feasting on it
The oozing wound attracting
multicoloured flies as if it is a flower
Beside him stands his wife
with a new *thali* around her neck
Behind him stands the ancient monument
on which leans a voluptuous *Apsara*
Below her broken nose
The mouth flashes a smile
Radiating a thirty-second *Sutra*
Time–Khilji's grandson
Broke her thighs
Between the thighs
Picaresque Tamilian rogues
Have scribbled in Sanskrit graffitti

Kavya Bharati 1997

I recollected these two images
And spoke in America
On art and aesthetics
On which poured plentiful applause.

Sillu – Ye!low discharge from the eye
Thali – Sacred chain symbolising marriage
Apsara – Divine spirit, personification of beauty
Sutra – *Kamasutra*: Indian treatise on Sex

(*Translated from Kannada by Bhargavi Rao*)

PRATHIBHA NANDA KUMAR

[Prathibha Nanda Kumar (b.1955) is a prominent, progressive, poetic voice from Bangalore, the capital city of Karnataka. She has published three collections of her poetry, the latest of which, *Rastheyanchina Gadi* (1991), from which the poems translated here are taken, has won her several awards. It is published by Kannada Sangha, Christ College, Hosur Road, Bangalore 560029. She works for NGEF, Bangalore.]

A BIRD

All I needed was a feather.
A bird, on its own, came
And startled me by perching
On my hand,

And flew off immediately.
I don't still have the feather,
But the live touch lingers on.
I don't need
The dead feather now.

CART AT THE ROAD'S END

When the cart is at the end of the road
There is no need for the whip
It'll roll ahead in lanes and by-lanes
The horse does not protest

I gathered the teeth mark on the flesh
Pounded it finely and let it float
on the water and shed a condolence tear
the warmth of the chain once loved
had turned into frost cold

Kavya Bharati 1997

These very same fingers
Turned my skin black and blue
Touching me rudely, now loosened
To a soft balmy touch, to which
I respond, body opens up

Going through the thorny bush
Wading in the muddy slush
I uphold the Red Sun

Perfuming the whole body, once
Provoking through eyes,
Beseeching your love.
Then my rainbow had only one colour
Now, let me know the colour of your magic brush
Beware, think before dipping it into red.

(*Translated from Kannada by Bhargavi Rao*)

SOSO THAM

[Soso Tham (1873-1941) is considered by many the uncrowned poet laureate of the Khasis. He has two volumes of poetry to his credit, one titled *Ka Duitara Ksiar* (The Golden Harp), a book of lyrics from which the two poems published here are taken.The other volume, titled *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniewtrep* (The Olden Days of Hynniewtrep or Khasis), consists of a single poem of epic proportions.]

THE GREEN, GREEN GRASS

Quietly in the wood,
It grows among the weeds,
An uncommon blossom, U Tiew Dohmaw, *
A thing of lofty thoughts.

Quietly by shadowy streams,
To be a fragrance when faded,
The joy-giving fern
Remains green for twelve moons.

Tell me twilight, beloved of the gods,
And you, the motley clouds,
Tell me where is that star
That first speckles the sky.

Quietly he lives, quietly he dies,
Amidst the wilderness;
Quietly in the grave let him rest,
Beneath the green, green grass.

* A wild flower, symbol of great wisdom.

PEARLS

Dew drops on the grass,
In the morning they glitter;
I too from home will depart
To hunt for these pearls.

From the grass that is green
They take off with the sun;
Like them then I'll plunge
To an unknown region.

The thorns though they prick
In a faraway street,
From home I'll depart
And return long after.

The heart though it hurts
Alone faraway,
The tears that gather
Will turn into pearls.

(*Translated from Khasi by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih*)

K. AYYAPPA PANIKER

[A biographical note on the author will be found on page 75.]

ON MY DEATH-BED, WAITING FOR YOU

when, on my death-bed, waiting for you,
I light a wick of golden thread,
of moonlight thread,
in my eyes going blind with darkness,
you hearken to the murmur of my heart,
alone, and hold back the flood of grief
within the guardian lids of your moist eyes,
like a shooting star suddenly
stunned and stuck in the sky,
as though, while walking down the steps,
your feet dragged you back,
and your silence spreads,
unable to caress the ears
that longed to hear your words–
my mind dozes off again–
worried how heavy was this ancient life–
on my death-bed

on my death-bed,
in the I.C. room,
as I begin to tell a tale
to the drops of blood
freezing within each sprouting moment,
and you, feeling bored, get ready
to say farewell, commenting,
"how long have I been hearing
such tales," the words of the nurses to th doctors,
"this is a serious case," fall upon my ears,
on my death-bed . . .

on my death-bed, in the I.C. room,
you will not visit again, will not call, or see,

or whisper a little complaint, or beg for sympathy,
will not come back again, nor feel pain; gently
have I said good-bye to every grain of sand,
to air, and to fire, and am going to bid farewell
to every drop of water, and to the sky,
and seeing this nest of five senses take leave,
I lie in my death-bed

on my death-bed, in the I.C. room,
what star is there to give me shelter:
rohini, atira, bharani, ashvati? long is the way,
but once you reach there, will the fears vanish?
on which planet shall I seek refuge?
jupiter, venus, sun, saturn? unable to find a nest,
what zodiac sign will my divorced soul
haunt and wander around, on my death-bed . . .

from my death-bed I keep asking–
what is there that can offer protection?
energy fills the deep, dark caves, says the scientist–
and so flourishes this infinite universe: caverns–
empty, frightening, gigantic holes–I have them
in my mind too–and if they are filled with energy,
what a dynamic spirit indeed! my mind wonders:
on my death-bed . . .

on my death-bed, as I look around for letters
of the alphabet to be put together to compose a farewell,
hearing them say in an undertone, "don't go away,"
I tightly close every little opening of my mind,
leaving no gap, and sit in the posture of deep meditation,
in the supreme wheel of concentration, hoping
and not hoping to reach the height of consciousness,
focusing on your silhouette in my eyes,
covered with darkness and exhausted and closed,

not for parting at all, but not knowing where once again,
not waiting in expectation either, I lie in my death-bed . . .
like that old flower in your dream, bereft of honey,
bereft of fragrance, bereft of colour, bereft of sap,
like that little flower, on my death-bed,
waiting for you, not knowing nor remembering
where the talk had broken off in mid-sentence . . .

AARATI

When shall I see you again, O sweetheart mine,
who, leaning on my shoulder, dozed off but yesterday?
When shall I hear again those delicious words,
which he whispered into my ears before dozing off?

The face had appeared to be a little pale or tired;
and it seems he perspired a bit when he lay down to sleep.
And yet an expression like the moonlight sliver of a soft
smile was seen lingering for a while on his lips.
Slowly bending his head on to my shoulder by himself,
saying, "let me relax a little on your chest for once,"
and gently shrinking himself within my folded left arm
and then closing his eyelids softly, while between them
a long throbbing beam of light kept hovering about,
as though he were seeing some vision in the far distance:
all these have turned into sights that are no longer visible;
true, for the eternal bride of time death is a honeymoon.

"Wake up, look here, the little flower is calling you;
say 'hello, hello,' as usually at the frequent calls.
Will not the telephone receiver also that mumbles such
numbers as seven, four, five etc. get the warmth of your lips?
Who could it be that telescoped the distances that never
draw closer? Who set aflame that unextinguishable darkness?

Who gave significance to silences and enhanced their value?
And who indeed tuned the songs and harmonized them?
Wake up, look now, open your eyes, and hold my hand,
without interrupting the rhythmic beat of your heart."

As you lay there, unable to listen to this mere lamentation,
the neighbours arrived one by one, and tried to explain
its principle: "There is a crisis called separation;
for a long time till now you could live together: the golden age;
now, here, experience the sweet taste of lonely seclusion."

"I know, my dear neighbours, what constitutes death;
and I also know it will never happen to my beloved.
He will never go away, leaving me here alone; but
you have never come to know my faith, my truth."

When neighbours pass away, we take it as a light affair;
and merely observe it as a routine ritual of no value.
They hold aloft the wreath of flowers with loud laughter
for the photographs: all told, a festival for the elders.
Until the end comes, we strut about as immortals and
celebrate this life, weaving frills and filigrees around.

"That golden vision, which used to protect me, gave
me stability with the bonds of prayers, paid me obeisance
with lamps moving in circles like a deity in the chamber
of worship, offered me the delights of the imagination
and kept me in the centre of a magical universe,
woven with a thousand gossamer threads of delicate love:
that vision will never forsake me and leave me behind."
Muttering to myself such words ever so indistinctly,
I lay; and around me I could sense vague movements;
I searched through the ages, waded through ancient sagas:
but when I came around and woke up, it was all empty.

When shall I see you again, my blessed beloved,
who leaned on my shoulders and dozed off, but yesterday?

THE DEATH ANNIVERSARY

A second time the death anniversary
stalks at the gatehouse and piteously
tries to light up a smile: I know it.
When various novelties climb up the stairs
of day and night, erasing old associations,
still lingering in memory, and shout in triumph,
did anyone take me for a thoroughbred idiot,
incapable of forgetting everything old?

Casting shadows on the playground
dawnlight and moonlight renew the view.

One day, forgotten perhaps, these are old stories–
please forgive–while trying to eat certain sweets,
don't, it's not fully cured, hasn't the senior doctor
advised never to change the diet regulations?
Haven't old friends said you should keep away from
harmful ways? I've put all in the bank locker of oblivion.

Someone outside clears his throat–the soft tread of steps:
who could it be? I should be able to forget the hand
that knocks at the door like this in the middle of the night.

The B.P. keeps shooting up; to bring it down,
the Lord of Guruvayur should be propitiated relentlessly–
at the *nirmalyam* ceremony at night–made light of the joke:
do you perform *tulabharam* with *karuka* grass?

Once, many years back, when a wound on his forehead
took long to heal, I mixed morning light with midnight leaf
and applied it gently with my fingers, which he caught
with fervour and frantically showered kisses on:
how soon have I forgotten that honeyed moment too.

Turning into ice, hardened, without melting, oblivion
tramples under foot and crushes memory's sprouts.
Those who can find some pleasure in that too
are absolutely free from anguish and doubt.

At last, that night, as the morning star lighted
the wick of the small hours, and kindled the little
country torch in the heart with the blowing of the breath,
he was leaving, as he repeatedly used to say;
and today it is completing two years.
Where are those tears that used to pour forth
in continuous spurts? Have my eyes gone completely dry?
Whose whistle is heard in the ears?
In what direction do the feet throb to move?
Should I commit sati and give praise to Fate?
Or should I stay on as a widow and condemn Fate?

When morning comes, how do I walk along
to the old temple–to worship after bath–
the big footprint on the path–he it is–
that revered face before me–that tricky smile
in the small eyes–long fingers stroking the beard:
never again shall I let this simple portrait
to emerge into my memory even once.

No further remembrance do I have now:
I have quite forgotten whose death and when.

Is there any memory that does not vanish into oblivion?
Sometimes it is said that forgetfulness is a blessing.
I have known that memory is death: what is there
in my smile then? Is it remembrance or death?
Tell me, my reader, you too have a place
in this tale; so tell me, before the critic turns up
to disgorge his stupidity, not understanding the tale.

(*Translated from Malayalam by the poet*)

K. SACHIDANANDAN

[K. Sachidanandan (1946-) is a poet, a critic and a former lecturer in English, and is currently Secretary of the Central Sahitya Akademi. The latest collection of his poetry, *Summer Rain*, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.]

METAMORPHOSIS

We couldn't yet believe
this would happen to our comrade. Ever!
When a tooth turns a toothed-wheel
Who could tell it presaged such a grand
metamorphosis? We sensed trouble of course
when receivers appeared in the place of his ears.
And then, it was all so sudden. A piston
appropriated his nose; his neck coiled into
a spring. We didn't quite register these,
as he crawled about on his legs now become
steel-rollers: his blood-vessels becoming
electric wires; his large intestines, belts; his
small intestines, tapes; or how a computer
had begun ticking where his heart once
was. We talked to him as always.
The usual things. As youngsters do. Love. Art.
History. He spat out long as someone
mentioned *love*. Two ounces of oil. The jokes
made no difference. He began to
hate all that they count "beautiful,"
"human:" Valmiki Ramayanam, the
Book of Job, the Jataka Tales, haikus,
Shakespeare's plays, the Van Gogh pictures,
Lorca, Mahabalipuram, Ananda Bhairavi,
folksongs, white horses, palm-parrots, wild
roses. . . . When he saw leaves and children
gambol, he raised his lever-hands

as if in rebuke. He shouted 'left-right'
to the undulations of river and sparrow-wings.
His head, shaped like military boots, held
a melange of accounts, names, theorems.
Earlier, no one suspected that he meant *plastic*
flowers when he spoke of "a hundred flowers"
in wide-eyed wonder. But now, when the
Pengan came asking cure for the
child down with fever, and our comrade
held forth to him on multinational monopolies,
we broke down. We could see the point, though.
For, the child was dying, the child
is dying still!

Pengan - a common enough male name in the Malabar for one of the Pulaya caste. *Pengan* climbs the coconut tree and runs errands for his master.

(*Translated from Malayalam by K. Narayana Chandran*)

K. AYYAPPA PANIKER

[K. Ayyappa Paniker (1930-) is probably the best known among the poets writing in Malayalam today. He is a retired teacher of English; a translator; an editor of innumerable volumes of literature, culture and the dramatic arts; the editor of *Kerala Kavitha* (annual); and the chief editor of the forthcoming volume of medieval Indian literature to be published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi]

I MET WHITMAN YESTERDAY

1

Yesterday, or was it the day before?
I met Whitman.
The Whitman who talks loudly in solitude
about the multitude.
Throwing his long shade across the island,
the *dwaipayana* poet was counting the waves.
Each wave, a generation.
On each, a reflection of the American nation.
The naked Whitman
the hairy body
the hairy beard
the shining eyes.
The mother-sea, concealing those other
organs, one by the other,
rocking the cradle.
The wailing love-bird
the blowing lilac
the mounting rhythms of drum-beat.

Hei Whitman!
I called.
Friend! That voice had come so near me.
Look, he said.

Columbus's geographical error,
history's gain.
The strong hand-shake
the hardened bones
the jagged hands
the finger's press.

Paniker, I knew you'd come again.
I feigned surprise.
Rebirth of the *jeevatma*
is nothing new to me.

2

I met Walt Whitman yesterday.
The long arms stretched,
the mossy thought entangled on that hairy body,
the *dwaipayana* poet coming from Long Island.
How many questions!

Why do your people slip away
when they see your people
as if they weren't your people?
Do you like white people more than the black?
Telling us of a civilization so hefty you can't bear
you buy machinery from here–
have you ceded the joke of this all to others?
Do your sages who feed on silence
still counsel the rulers?
You who hasten towards the Niagara–
have you sought the caves of the Himalayas?

Atom or the atman:
which of these do your scientists seek?
The two of us, you see, are rather preoccupied:

you and I have no time
to think about these things.
We try to outrun time in its speed.
The mighty glory of a theological civilization.
Emerson and Thoreau, Martin Luther King and I,
a few others too,
have relished its sweetness.
The earth here at once tells us the same things.
Those with ears don't hear.
Grass and rivers and hills and clouds and forests
clouds and forests and hills and rivers and grass
hills and clouds and rivers and forests and bridges
rails and airports and cars
the factory and the telephone . . .
come, let's walk up the Pacific coast.

Translator's note:

Dwaipayana : literally, one born in a dweepu, the island. The poet of the *Mahabharata* was known as Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa. Vyasa and Whitman were island-born.

Jeevatma: the individual soul as distinguished from the *paramatma* or the Oversoul.

(*Translated from Malayalam by K. Narayana Chandran*)

D. VINAYACHANDRAN

[D. Vinayachandran (1946-) is a poet and teacher of Malayalam, and is currently head of the School of Letters of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala.]

NĀTAKEEYAM

Nāndi

The child watches
the golden deer catch fish.
He is neither the golden deer, the fish
nor the haunted, the prey.
We always hunt
we are always hunted.
We make the seed blossom
we wake from
the book of Genesis.

The medicine eats the disease,
death eats life.

We build memorials for the dead,
gift cradle to a bride.
We gobble salt, quaff water.
The child watches
the golden deer catch fish.
When he realizes what it is to hunt
he is exiled from the garden of Eden.

Pravēsakam

Our relatives are on that shore,
the boat is empty at the jutty.
There is no boatman.

The strong winds clamour,
we clamour against ourselves.

Our relatives are on the other shore,
the boat is empty at the jutty.
Not knowing how to row
we have begun to row.
The strong winds clamour against us,
the oar and the boat clamour against us.

Our relatives are on that shore,
Not knowing how, we've begun to row.

If all goes well, we shall reach the Nile;
otherwise, Cuba or Hong Kong.

Not knowing how
we've begun to row.

Our relatives are on the other shore!

Bharatavākyam

We climbed the hills,
we'd friends.
They joined us
in eating apple, drinking honey.

Son, soldier
poet, patient
twenty, A.D.
one name carried several names.

With friends we crossed the sea.
They joined us
in cutting the pine, killing the bear.

The tree was full of stars.
To apply salve on wounds
the fishermen and genies.
Now, in the end, I remain
in order to crucify.
I remain–I alone.
In the mirror
neither fate nor shade.
I. Alone.

Translator's Note: The title and subtitles of the original help us read this scenario better. *Nātakeeyam* in Malayalam means both "dramatic" and "dramatique;" the former is literal. *Nāndi* is a piece of dedicatory verse in drama; it is also a ritualistic scene preceding the formal opening of a play. *Pravēsakam* is a scenic mediation or an "advanced" supplement; ususlly it introduces the first act of a play. *Bharatavākyam* is the last *sloka* of a verse-play, usually a benediction. Literally, it is a verse sung in deference to Bharatamuni of *Nātyasāstra*.

Vinayachandran's rhetorical figures seem to enact small scenes among themselves. Each scene locates and relocates its agent, action, and circumstance. The irony of the last lines thus proceeds from the actor's realization that he must play these scenes alone and be their sole witness.

Although nothing really may be said to suggest what "Nātakeeyam" means, it is useful to recall a line from Blaise Pascal: "Man is neither angel nor brute, and the unfortunate thing is that he who would act the angel acts the brute." (Pascal, Blaise. *Pensees and The Provincial Letters*. Trans. W.F.Trotter and Thomas M'Crie. New York: Modern Library, 1941. 118.)

(*Translated from Malayalam by K. Narayana Chandran*)

M. GOVINDAN

[M. Govindan (1919-1989) was a Malayali poet, humanist, critic and socio-literary activist. He pioneered the Little Magazine movement in Kerala (*Navasahiti*, *Gopuram*, *Sameeksha*) which mediated between Malayalam and other Indian literature and literatures from other countries]

FAREWELL

If, as a mercenary lawyer
in a hut
in the city of Durbar
you'd lived on;
if the Salt Satyagraha
hadn't commenced in the 30's;
if the Quit India resolution
hadn't been drafted;
if you hadn't been shot at thrice
and killed in Birla House;
what's more, if you had
never been born in this blessed land–
what, pray, may have
happened to us, Indians?

Nothing,
nothing,
nothing,
O venerable Mahatma!

Ishwar, however–no,
that god with national name–
decreed otherwise.
You were born here
you were raised here
you were killed here

your mortal remains
deposited nowhere but here:
in cement,
in white lime
in *Ramdhun*!
Yet, and yet again, we
look for you elsewhere
in the centennial of your birth–
in the dead Martin Luther King,
in Badshah Khan's banned writings,
in each of those street corners
of Prague, of Bratislava
surrounded by the red brigade.
Once again, as if
you must fall by
a new Ghodse's pistol!

We exiled the Buddha
putting him on a mule.
We flaunt now
a collection of Mao's sayings–
mantras we learn to mouth
against a Mahatma.
History is not blind,
nor is she a whore.
Her revenge, no vile itch.
We now send you abroad
during centennial celebrations
(an export commodity) consigned
in an air-tight Air India crate.
Leave us be, please,
Mohandas K. Chand!
We are too poor, you see,
the Indians of these days–
we can't stand even much

of a remnant Gandhi.
So long then!
Bye for ever, our Father
(of the nation)
For we know what we
are doing. Quite well indeed.
Jai Hind!

(*Translated from Malayalam by K. Narayana Chandran*)

VIJAYALAKSHMI

[Vijayalakshmi (b.1960) is a prominent poetess of the young generation in Malayalam. She has published two well-received volumes of poetry. Her second volume was given the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award.]

MARTHA

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 other worldly tree I die
every moment at the stroke
of my earthly memories.

THE ANIMAL TRAINER

I am scared of you.

In the eyes the whip whirls,
with all manners of torture at your
finger tips. The heart is tender?
Still I have to admit–
I am scared of you.

My body rears to go back
into the wild open forest.
But before my tearful eyes looms
this crimson loop of fire
I have to leap through
without looking left or right.
For long have I learnt this.
Still I long to break out
into the open.

Black and yellow stripes glitter
behind the bamboos, on the craggy
rocks and black boulders:
the image of my face that glistens
in the stream below
blooms with a rare, sombre grace.

The tent of foliage is wafted by chilly
cool moonlight. My darling calls me
softly; gently growl dense moments,
restful sleep, the murmur of
frolicking cubs.

A sudden twirl of the whip;
pain pierces like lightning.
"Don't": those burning eyes seem to say.

Commands wriggle out. My body burns
and my sense of self respect crashes.
I growl out my voice choking inside:
I am scared of you.

Please don't fix me with the riveting
eyes of a savage. I am a beast,
all right, but no more can I bear
this cage. I feel fulfilled when my
paws pin down the prey and my teeth
tear into flesh. My nails and molars
tickle for the splash of blood
with the rows of eyes hunting me;
my body rages for blood.

Tell me, is a beast no better than
a doll? When tamed, it shrinks
like a slave but, at times,
in the wild interiors of my mind
the ancient beast stirs up again,
the primordial one that leaps
over foliage, galloping after the sun.

My eyes droop before his gaze.
My body trips at his jeer.
My palms fold in salute and kneel.
No, my eyes cannot bear the glare
of the dazzling one. Before they break
let me pluck them out with my nails.

No, I cannot do that: dread.
Nothing but dread. I am nothing
but a slave. Broken, I bow
before you. Lash me with your whip.
I am awake, and ready
to leap through the loop.

(*Translated from the Malayalam by E. V. Ramakrishnan*)

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and my sense of self respect crashes.
I growl out my voice choking inside:
I am scared of you.

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(*Translated from the Malayalam by E. V. Ramakrishnan*)

K. G. SANKARA PILLAI

[K. G. Sankara Pillai (b.1947) is one of the pioneers of the modernist movement in Malayalam poetry. His recent collected volume of poems written in the last three decades has won wide critical acclaim. He teaches Malayalam at Maharaja's college, Ernakulam. He edits *Samakaleena Kavitha* from Trichur.]

NOT ALWAYS ON THE CROSS ALONE

The chain on a foot
the string on a wing
the sting in a word

can crucify

the woods
the sky
and companionship

for ever

in a swamp of blood
or in a life-long trauma

with no hope of
resurrection

FAVOURS RETURNED

I renovated tradition
In return
Tradition rendered me an antique

ERRATA

I wrote: 'trees'
They printed: 'frees'
The printer said:
How can you say it is all wrong
A tree is all free, isn't it?

I had written:'expanse'
They printed it as 'expense'
On second thoughts,
expanse can cost you dearly

'Farcical' I wrote
'Fanciful' they printed
well, what can be more farcical?
(or fanciful?)

'For me' was printed as
'For you'
Are you not me, still?

GOORKHA

My dear dream
It is time for us to part
I have to report for duty

My job is
to suspect and strangle
the dreams that roam around
at odd hours
This uniform–
the stick, the knife and the torch–
is meant for that

The dog that can smell death
is my companion
The owl that preys on the mouse
that crosses the fence
is my companion

Some dreams come
as silence clothed in sound
as darkness in darkness
as colour in colours
as vigilance in wakefulness
Some fruits of knowledge come
with no trace of time
However awake I am
they do not become my vision
Dogs and owls
do not see them
They will renew the sand
and the air
widening the path

enlivening the existence
making the silence vibrant
These arrivals
which I do not see
renovate my vision
without my knowledge

Some dreams go undetected
till they crawl up to you
and flash their hoods
like Godse in a crowd
They can be caught
and killed
but what is the use,
when nothing remains

The dream that drops in
on house no. 4 at the 9th cross
on the 6th street leaves
jumping over the wall
The dog and the owl have noted this

The dream that staggers on drugs
sinks into the gutter and rots there
I need not run
The dreams of wrath that move on
empty stomach will not die
however you may try
to lynch them
A drop of rain
the smell of fresh soil
a grain of darkness
a touch of star-starch
–It will be back on foot
Poor human soul!

Oh dream,
the desperate other of my
uniformed self
I have caught you now
I will sacrifice you
to the baying, polar bears
of moonlight

Oh dream,
Where shall I bury your remains?
Your sweetness: on which
sad note of the stick striking the lamp-post
Your beauty: in which fable?
Your freedom: in which post-modern poem?
In whose forgetfulness?

DEEP WITHIN

How fortunate we are
that there are walls
walls have gates
And gates have locks

A small garden
and bird-song
The courtyard sleeps like
a dog, I am alone within

With folded fangs, observing
my domestic seclusion, the black
beauty of an alluring serpent
descends on the colours of the garden

Kavya Bharati 1997

How fortunate that
we have walls
Walls have doors
Doors have bolts
Lucky indeed that I can be
locked within by my near
and dear ones when they
go to work

Otherwise
without wasting my life this way
reading *Femina*
counting my bangles
and watching star t.v.
I would have crossed
the door, the street
and the city and gone out
of this solitary confinement
to regain my paradise
with the black serpent

(*Translated from the Malayalam by E. V. Ramakrishnan*)

TUKARAM

WHAT TUKA SAID

Adaptations from the Marathi ABHANGA of
Tukaram (1598-1649)

{Note: The numbers and first lines in parentheses identify the Marathi originals in the recension prepared by Vishnubua Jog Maharaj (Bombay: Keshav Bhikaji Dhavale, 1909, 7th edn 1990)}

THE SACRED

{1 *sundara te dhyana ubha witewari*}

Beauteous that face in reverie
Him standing there,
Hands resting on hips,
Feet planted on a brick,
Garland of basil for his neck,
Blaze of sun-shot yellow round his waist.

I could fill my eyes with infinite gladness
Just looking on his face,
Fish-shape glistering at either lobe,
Resplendent jewel gracing his throat.
This, Tuka says, is all my joy
Rapt in the reverie of his gaze.

{77 *bhaktawina deva kaiche rupa ghade seva*}

God without a votary
Could devotion take shape?
Diamond shines brightest
Inlaid in gold.

Bedesman without God
Could desire dessicate?
Mother to child, Tuka says,
So the web Love makes.

{78 *wishwacha janita mhane yashodesi mata*}

The world's begetter
Calls dear Yashoda mother!

This Reckoner of devotees
The Aroused arouser

The Desireless Other One
This Inflamer of girls to passion

I like, Tuka says in wonder
All the ineffable forms of this Maker!

{79 *kay dinkara kela kombdyane khara*}

Does the crowing of the cock
Make the false dawn true?
Dear God, does beatitude
Rise to my head from you?

Does the chattel get to block
The suppliant of food
When succour, Tuka says,
Takes by the hand infinitude?

{99 *harihara bhed nahi karu waad*}

Between that man's god and this man's god
What does Difference tender?

Each may taste in the other's heart
The sweetness sugar can render.

The long and short of a vowel
Is all two Gods sunder

When left side and right side
Is all that Self's symmetry will surrender.

{127 *kela maticha pashupati*}

Make of earth a Shiva
Earth recks it not

The worship reaches up to him
The clay remains clay below.

The oblation you offer me
He takes as his own

I the missive his the missal
Disciple not saint.

Vishnu made of bluest stone
Remains a stone in blue

Devotion offered through stone
Worships not the stone.

Refulgent in bronze
The goddess not the bronze

The mother not the metal
Intercedes in response.

I sup on wholesome broth
Tuka of his joy.

Each take as truly his own
What our souls intone

That we leave behind
Mere forms of flint and stone.

{1029 *kai tuze weche maj bheti deta*}

Would it hurt much to meet me?
Give and take just a word or two?

Would I rob you of your self
That the fear keeps you hiding?

What use on earth your heavenly Abode
That you fear difference and tarry?

Not a tithe do I ask. But I would
I could see you.

{1032 *nijlyane gata ubha narayan*}

If supine I sing
There Narayan stands
If sitting chant
There he sways.

Stand and be still
Speaking his name
And Govind will be yours
Skipping, larking.

Walk his path
Intent on his name
Before and behind he stands
Divine wielder of disc.

His tooth is sweet
For song, Tuka says
He will plunge
In love, leap when urged.

{1213 *watwat keli na wicharita manaa ali*}

I babbled witlessly
Of all the foolish things
My tongue knew of
That never crossed my mind.

Only a soul divine
Forgives me now, Tuka says,
For I have abandoned all rectitude
To this eager tongue's solicitude

And now I babble ceaselessly
Of all the outlandish things
Tongue knows of
When drawn across your mind.

{1238 *devache ghari deve keli chori*}

Himself the house he stole from.
His own the body he stripped.
The nakedness he sought his own.
Foreclosed the beggary he disowned.
How shall we catch him who never fled?
How shall we fetch what is at hand?
I live with a thief in the house he stole.
Nothing abides where God made his abode.
Can Tuka say who is more naked
When we are all stripped to the bone?

{1246 *fal pike dethi nimitya wariyachi bheti*}

Only a fruit yellow at the stalk
Will greet the lightest wind calling
And not fear falling.

But pulled when green
What shall keep it rotting
Where it lies?

Thus action to fruition:
The mind intent
On the rondure of one thought.

{2534 *ammha ghari sakala dhan shabdanchich ratne*}

In our home

Words the jewels we hoard
Words the skills we profess
Words the food we eat
Words the wealth we dower

Tuka says

God is the word
Words the glory
Words the worship

In our home

{2538 *nimbachiya zhadaa sakareche ale*}

Circle bitter lime with sweetest water
It yields no fruit but bitter.
How shall the soiled of heart
Not spill the goodness you offer?

There is a kind of soilure
No alchemy can recover.
Shrub and sandal-wood planted together
Are still but sandal and shrub forever.

{3115 *pandhariche bhoot mothe*}

The great ghost of Pandharpur
It waylays every passing soul

Fearsome that forest possessed
Crazed the mind going through

Let no one dare to go
For none return who went

Like Tuka lost to Pandharpur
Done with declensions of his soul.

THE PROFANE

{10 *sukhe wolamba dawi goha*}

Contented slut feigns dis-ease,
Weeps of neglected husbandry.

Besotted fool fawns eagerly,
Contemns conjugal sloth utterly.

"My only diet milk and rice" she avers.
Sugar and clarified butter she prefers.

"I have my whims two times a day."
Dizzy spells help keep the husband away.

Sleep comes to this cow all laid down in flowers.
Nerves ravel nicely when no calf clamours.

The wretched girl oils every pore
With sandal-wood paste,

Oil soothes temples
Megrims have laid waste.

"Food, my dear, I scarcely abide,
Eating hardly suits me."

"Flesh once could hide
The fragile bones supporting me."

"Last week you set ten pounds of sugar aside
My dear, it is gone now."

"Three tureens of porridge spiced
My dear, is all I am going to take now."

"The travails of this my life ...!"
Tuka says, is there any surprise

If the ass she rode all his life
Hell now in his own folly fries.

{80 *jewitahi dhari naak hagtiya pari*}

If you pinch your nose to eat
As others hold their breath shitting
The only ass in sight will be your own.

If you see no difference, Tuka says,
Between spilling and filling,
Drink buttermilk for milk.

{624 *chorte kache nighale chori*}

Caught stalking your neighbour's house
As if it were his own,
Green thief now has one hand,
Foot and ear less in self-possession.

Who shall neighbour someone
Bereft of all wit or sense?
One always having to thieve
A use for himself.

{1022 *jalo tiche tond aisi ka te vyali raand*}

Flames devour that face!
Why was that bitch
Littered so!

Fury knits her brows!
Spleen sloshes in her gut!
Her face a split cow-dung cake!

What can ease or please
The fire
Eating her soul!

{1023 *tonde khaye faar paade bocha kari maar*}

If you stuff one mouth
The other will fart

But there are these smug ones
Slave to their senses

Furious if the world laugh
At their gloriously opened arses.

So she plays games with Chance
Then yells Foul!

Comes in heat to the groom's bed
But calving curses him dead.

Are these not, Tuka says,
The despoilers of all human sense?

{1153 *chaalti aadwata anika dawiti je nita*}

Of those who prefer crooked ways
Referring straightness unto others

Peerless the fool who would
Think of them with less than gratitude.

Served poison for the eating
They warn you as they lie croaking,

Drowning shout
"Keep out!"

"Here where I sink
The water is deepest I think!"

Peerless the fool who would
Wish such aught but gratitude.

For why, Tuka says, cussedly sacrifice
Their virtue for their vice?

{1210 *laaj na wichar bajari tu bhandkhor*}

Shameless, reckless,
Quarrelsome wretch
Of the marketplace -
Whoever goes thus

Only him will you meet.
Stripped of your last rag,
You wag nakedly at the world.
Thief, Tuka says, thief,

Bereft of warp and woof
Of what cloth are you cut
Who keeps his inside out
And welcomes all out doors in!

(*Translated from Marathi by Rajeev S. Patke*)

SAINT TUKARAM

[Editor's Note: The following three *abhangs* of Tukaram have here been rendered in rhymed verse to approximate the rhymed originals on which they are based, although the original rhyme scheme has not been strictly followed.]

THE YOUNG BRIDE

The young bride sets out for her In-law's house
But keeps looking back in vain,
Such is my state, O Kesava,
When will I see you again?

The lost child longs for its mother
And can't wait:
A fish snatched out of water
Gasping: Such is my state.

IT'S WAR FOR US, WAR

It's war for us, War,
Day in and day out,
War with the self within,
And war with the world without.

Blows keep raining on us,
Heavy are they;
We ward them off, as they fall,
From day to day.

Says Tuka, "We recite
Your holy name,
And armed with that
Put all hard knocks to shame."

IN THE DEEP POOL OF BLISS

In the deep pool of Bliss
Arise ripples of Bliss
All Bliss
Is the body of Bliss.

How can I describe
This miracle of being
Which has annihilated all taste
For what now life to me may bring.

The foetus's need is matched
By the pregnant mother's craving
Thus holding a mirror
To her love for her darling.

Says Tuka, "This experience
Stamped on my soul of Bliss
Has likewise found its tongue
When I say this."

(*Translated from Marathi by M. K. Naik*)

ANURADHA PODDAR

[Anuradha Poddar (b.1927) is an eminent poet and literary critic in Marathi, has published three volumes of poetry, and several volumes of criticism. He is a retired professor of Marathi.]

FROM EACH FLOWING BLADE OF SWAYING GRASS

From each flowing blade of swaying grass
nods the green poem of Balkavi
watches its own image in the showers
of 'blue-black stream'
becoming the flower-queen
These eyes with cool green *kohl*
are now fully soothed
But the involutions of that wounded
heart coagulate
in this disoriented being's
cocoon of fragrance
Fetters of darkness are heard
clanging in the deep abyss of the earth
and in veins dissolves that tender
blood which sweetens even death

THIS HOUSE OF MINE UNDER WATER

Have you not seen this island of mine
in deep dark water
That way even I have to search its corners
Hasn't the ship anchored in this harbour just now?
No, no stormy waves crash against the island now
Even before it comes I see each wave
And as it touches the shore
it turns into a lovely lamb
Didn't this island rise from the belly
of a deluge-making wave?
That is why this house of mine
in water does not float

(*Translated from Marathi by Aniket Jaaware and E. V. Ramakrishnan*)

SUDHAKAR MARATHE

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF INDIAN COUNTRY WRITING: A CHALLENGE AND A DUTY

[Editor's Note: This essay, and the translated poems which follow it, constitute a single unit. The translations are an attempt to show the possibilities of putting into practice what the essay discusses.]

It is said that some seven generation ago (the figure may be an old wife's tale), my family migrated from a small, 'no account' village in the Konkan to the Deccan Plateau, eventually settling down in Poona. In the very recent past, in comparison, a classic of Dalit autobiographical writing has come from that same village. Yet the fact is, I know almost nothing of the circumstances and ethos of that village or any other like it. Add to this the fact that I know at first hand nothing at all of the life of the Dalit communities in my ancestral village or anywhere else. Similar descriptions will faithfully define the situation of a considerable proportion of India's urban and 'English-possessed' people. Other urban English users in India cannot claim even the sort of tenuous link with the countryside in India that I described above. There are others again who do come from the country, have homes, relations, property in the country. Some of them periodically live in the country but really think little about the experience and do even less about it. Others are essentially unconnected with their countryside even in other superficial ways, as they live in the cities and bear the same sort of relationship to the country that English landlords bore to Ireland in Swift's scathing descriptions of it. This situation has existed, with growing separation between city and country, since India's urbanization–even citified Dalits participate in this distancing process.

This has been the situation in India both before and after Independence where creating literature *about* the country is concerned. Already, always of course, country literature has

flourished everywhere and has indirectly participated in the making of urban literature without ever really being given the status of 'literature'. Urban writers have plagiarised from it but never allowed the notion to arise that country compositions are either 'art' or otherwise socially valuable documents. Whenever an undeniable force emerged in the country, some Kabir or Tukaram, for instance, the city has always managed to universalize the writer-composer, instead of acknowledging him or her specifically as a country phenomenon.*

With some degree of anticipation before Independence (e.g., Premchand in Hindi or S.M. Mate in Marathi), however, the last fifty years or so have witnessed an astronomical rise in many Indian languages in the production of quantity and quality of scripted (as opposed to oral or composed) literature. My first proposition is that as long as English is one of the languages of translation, we must give a reasonable account of ourselves in translating this literature as well as in translating 'city' literature. Such has hardly been the case in many of our languages so far.

My second proposition is that we must recognize and acknowledge that there are three strands in this 'new' writing–Rural writing, Dalit writing (meaning thereby writing by and about non-urban Dalits; urban Dalit writing and life-situations are another matter altogether), and Nature writing. The two terms so far used in discussions of such writing, sometimes mutually exclusively, sometimes one including the other–namely Grameen and Dalit–are inadequate because at least in Marathi there is both nature writing and its infusion into the other two veins. I believe we need a term like 'Country' writing as a more inclusive generic description for these non-urban kinds of writing.

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* There are a few exceptions to the lacks I have mentioned here; but not enough to affect the argument I have made.

The third proposition I wish to present concerns the most noticeable absence of such writing in English in both pre- and post-Independence India *by Indians*. But during their stay here the British did a great deal of such writing on these subjects. Their writing has been scientific, professional-descriptive (as in government department or similar reports), as well as creative. In dealing with country India, then, a considerable body of writing is available which could be used by translators as training ground or as resource. Perhaps it is necessary to remind ourselves also that within Britain English has had a long and varied tradition of country writing (even excluding conventionally 'pastoral' writing), even though substantial 'Dalit' writing in English has really only come from America and that during the last four decades or so. This tradition too is available as linguistic and stylistic resource for translators of Indian country writing.

My fourth proposition is that, while we have recognized (I hope) the neglect, the contempt and oppression that have been the lot of the countryside in general, we must also recognize that to neglect this new writing in the activity of translating into English would be tantamount to perpetuation of the situation. It will not do to neglect this writing. What is more, it will do even less to urbanize this writing in translation (as we are almost certain to do for want of appropriate English for this task). We must mine English country writing, Anglo-Indian country English, and also of necessity employ such ingenuity and creativity as we possess to *create* the rest for our own 'country' languages. That is to say, this process means both an education and an expiation–at least for the English-educated urban translators–they must *learn* what their countryside *is*; they must learn the social and political (not just literary) value of the country writing (even bravely making relative judgements among different works when necessary); and they must make special effort to do their work of translation with appropriate humility (it has been my view that a translator must always experience a degree of humility toward the creative, social and linguistic dimensions of the work he chooses to translate).

What I say next, my fifth proposition, is I believe true always for all languages in comparable situations. What we need to emphasize is that modern, en-crutched and dated-bookish language, which is what most English-educated Indians use, proves quite plainly inadequate for translation of the living tones and textures of these new three-dimensional linguistic originals. This is so with country writing more than with urban writing in our languages not only because of the new vitality of this literature, but also because of the translators' unfamiliarity with the 'spoken' or 'heard' dimensions of both these languages (i.e., their own country tongues, and English). Therefore, I am convinced, translators must ensure that in the process of preparation, their own English too becomes more flexible, supple, responsive, fine in all aspects of language–not only writing but, and particularly, its spoken existence. By this I do not mean the lifeless-ELT-Phonetics type of view of language familiar in pedagogic situations. If we consider the automatically spoken shape(s) into which any piece of literature is normally cast by readers of a language, even during silent reading, we shall see the shapes into which our translations must attempt to transform this new writing. It seems to me that increased sensibility to the sound of literature is called for here. Every available linguistic resource and trick will be needed in the translation of Indian country writing.

My sixth proposition (born out of bitter and instructive personal experience) is that publishers will also need to be educated in the process of bringing out such country translations. (I in fact wonder if this is not the time for vernacular publishers to grab a piece of the market by publishing translations in English, instead of leaving the task to English language publishers in India.) They will have to learn to understand that a new English is being created in such translations; that they are also engaged in a pioneering task and must respond with appropriate perceptiveness and creativity. There is real danger here, in a country which harbours many strange notions of 'standard' language (whether English or one of our own), that in fact bad, flat, bloodless translations may pass muster while good translations are detained and fail to appear in print.

Collaboration with authors, collaboration with other translators, help from discerning readers, any amount of constructive criticism that we can obtain, will all be required. Our 'standard' languages themselves will have to enhance their resources substantially, in dictionaries and encyclopaedias dealing with country matters. There is a considerable lack in this department in my own language (even though it has hardly been idle). Such linguistic-cultural aids are indispensable, because not only is country language synchronically different from urban language; country language also retains the past in different ways and this part definitely needs translation.

If anyone wonders whether I am cavalierly heaping further burdens on translators, let me add that translators of Indian country writing will need to be brave beyond normal calls of duty.

VINAYAK TUMRAM

SETTLEMENT OF GRAVES

On a stormy no-moon night
As I hunted for pathways leading to the regions of the sun
By lighting up the clouds in the shrinking sky
Suddenly then
I discovered a whole settlement
Of my kith and kin's graves.

Tumram, Vinayak. *Gondvan petle ahe* p.1. "Thadgyanche gav"

VARNABALI SURYAPUTRA

Karna! Because you were a Sutaputra
Occurred the cruel travesty of your existence
That like the flame from a lit brand touches my blood
And then, instead of spewing out tears, my rebellious eyes
Spew out a thousand streams of blood.
You lived as a victim of the Varnas
You lived the life of a chariot driver
You lived as a son exiled by mute motherhood.

Son of the Sun!
The rebel person within you must have woken up then
And the revolt in your feeling self must've caught fire
And those who strutted about as men, flaunters,
Must have seemed to your searing pain like enemies.

Karna!
Perhaps you do not know the history of this Aryavarta
See, here the bravery of heroes has been accursed
And desolate the humanity of mankind

And the 'civilized' places of the dead
Have consumed innumerable corpses–
Of the innocent lives here.
Your bull's eye itself was off, dear friend!
And you lost your being
In the terrifying darkness of Varnabheda
In this world Motherhood must've seemed to you heartless
And grotesquely frightful the nature of Gurus who asked to know your Varna
And pointless the meaning of this life.

Mrutyunjaya!
You gave away your impregnable armour as boon asked
And then the radiant Suryaputra in you was brutally murdered
And then it was you remained merely Radheya
Just another middling manhood at Kurukshetra
Even at that time, Karna,
Proved triumphant the perverse bravery founded in Varna!
The deadly Varna-ridden night in your life
Seems to me just as frightful.
Having to witness the dousing of your life by pain
Even Agnimitra, the sun in the womb of dawn
Must have lost its spark of life.

Tumram, Vinayak. *Gondvan petle ahe* pp.2-3. "Varnabali Suryaputra"

TO GONDVAN

O Gondvana!
This bloodied living of the First Sons
Of your soil
Throws before my living a new gauntlet
And shows my orphaned agony
This criss-cross map of new ways to freedom.
At such times I feel like razing to the ground
The hoary rules of venerable tolerance
And it feels that I must destroy
The sterile step-life of those who govern this land.

O Anaryavana!
You have bathed the wounds of my blood-brothers
And covered them with soft garments of bark
You gave them respite in the darkling nooks of mountains
And you shook awake the victims of the Aryas,
Who were just an episode in history.
Show me today, turn
All the seared pages
Of the dodgy and destructive history of Aryas,
Of the rending cries of the hosts
The Anaryas bloodied by a thousand cuts and blows.

O Abhayavana!
You were witness to battles,
Keeper, haven to Aboriginal life here–
That is why I demand from you knowledge
Of the cruel beastliness of Aryas
The heart-rending struggle of bodies of First
Sons under Arya spear and blade
And the wordless flapping lids
Of eyes being put out by pain.

O Mitravana!
Let me heal with your words the deep welts
Of past centuries
On the core of my feeling earth
O let me erase in your presence
The dark marks of centuries of defeat.
On your soil has flourished
The kingdom of the First Sons here
Those marks haven't yet been erased
The remains of those battles not yet broken up.
Yet I have not seen that Anarya glory
I have only witnessed
Among the spreading wood and brush
Wandering flesh-and-blood silhouettes.
You know the betrayal of friendship even
By this, my own century,
The division by Varna wrought by
The kingdom of Aryas–
Like Agnimitra, the setting sun,
Sets every day the meaning of our lives,
Like a night that has lost its moon,
While our dream-epochs darken–
In the age of the Aryas
Of Manu
Of blood-sucking–
All those who spurned
The hapless life of the Sons of your land
Made cruel travesty
Of their way of life aboriginal–
I swear upon oath to you, Gondvana,
In the coming era of revolt
They will all be my enemies.

Tumram, Vinayak. *Gondvan petle ahe* pp.7-9. "Gondvanas"

MY LIFE: A BATTLEFIELD

I incinerate
All those shameless philosophies
Which inquire about the caste of my existence.
I cremate that sterile civilization
That scatters salt over my wounds.
I douse–those magic lanterns of traditions
That have never tallied
The darkness in my desolate exile.
I have obstructed–the all-conquering Stallion Death
And flung into battle all my hostility
Against naked brutality in the universe.
You never let me achieve freedom from the forest
Because you are true sons of this century.
Yet you may not know, really,
I am that Pralaya-inducing venom
That Rudra, Shiva, obstructed in his blue throat;
I am the fiery arrow strung on his bowstring,
Aiming, by Ekalavya the Vanabali.
My very life has now become
Like a gory-bloody battleground
Where in my sight there's only
The unsexed neuter in you.

Tumram, Vinayak. *Gondvan petle ahe* p.23. "Maze ayushya: ek ranabhumi"

MY EXILED EXISTENCE

When I came I came as man,
As I lived I lived a slave,
Endured as exiled son of the forest
Outside village walls.
Stubbed my toes, found again
My bloodied naked feet,
Walked once again–the same paths
Of abortive ages,
Bore on my body many a 'rainy day'.
No one befriended me then,
In blazing sun my naked body
Burned, burned–and on my blameless back were
Raised welts of injustice.
At that time motherhood itself
In the whole wide world became heartless
And humanity, even the word, a victim of Time.
And those who lived here as men
Turned out to be–just criss-crosses
Of flesh and bone.
Numberless nights of my life have I endured
On the lifeless massifs of Gondvan
In the deep, dense dark
That gathers in hut after hut,
With sunset, of exiled folk sucked dry.
Even then never did I
Curse the dark–
Because I know, don't I–
That the life-and-death of exiles here
Was determined long, long ago–
In the bloodsucking civilization
Of the 'well-bred'.

Tumram, Vinayak. *Gondvan petle ahe* p.25. "Vanvasatle maze jagne"

(*Translated from Matathi by Sudhakar Marathe*)

BANSHIDHAR SARANGI

[Banshidhar Sarangi (b.1940), an Oriya poet, is widely translated into English. He has published four books of poems in Oriya and one translation in English, and is recipient of the Orissa Sahitya Akademi award for his *Savari Charya* in 1991.]

PLUCKING FLOWERS

The blossoming of a flower
is not the end-all of things,
a day will come when someone will pluck it
to place it somewhere only he knows.

It seems perfectly worthwhile for us
to guard it, staying hidden somewhere,
or else no one will ever know
when this stealer of flowers
would come in stealth
to complete his mission.

For plucking a flower
is not such an arduous task
nor is it such a priceless object
that we'd worry about it so much.

Whatever you might say,
there is some mystery
behind the plucking of a flower,
and who can deny the two-fold role
that exists between the flower's blooming
and its dropping to earth?

It's unbecoming to keep a watch
for the flower to bloom,
for who can tell the moment of flowering?

can one say
that it will rain for certain
when clouds spread across the sky?

It's not easy to assert
there is a last word for everything.
Simply raise both your palms upward,
may be you'll find a flower
falling from somewhere.

(Translated from Or ya by Jayanta Mahapatra)

BIPIN NAYAK

[Bipin Nayak (b.1950) has authored two volumes of poetry. He has been variously published in India. Nayak teaches Economics in Khallikote College, Berhampur.]

BANGLES

All that gleams and glistens
on your hand, represents
my blue longevity.

A little carelessness may
shatter them into pieces.
But, you can pretty well
buy them from the local market
paying only two rupees & a half.

A LETTER

I love you.
Such an humble confession
has become so trite, and hackneyed
that in order to articulate
what I treasure for you,
I pine for words anew.

To say "I can't live
without you" has become so usual,
so habitually unmoving that,
surely, this time, I'm being impelled
to write "I can't die without you."

DEFINITION

Whatever we have not achieved
so far, is heaven.
Whatever we have left behind is history.

Whatever we have already expressed
is now our silence.
Whatever we failed to articulate hither to
is poetry.
All our piled up laughter
is now satire, self-deceit.

Whatever unhesitatingly we have gifted away
is our desire, passion.
Whatever we failed to fling apart
is our memory.

Whatever we have survived
is only a deep darkness.
Whatever we have bought so far
is the grocery of our selfishness . . .

Whatever we have not built so far
is our home.

(*Translated from Oriya by Niranjan Mohanty*)

JAGANNATH PRASAD DAS

[Dr. Jagannath Prasad Das was born in 1936 at Banpur in the Puri district of Orissa. Completing his education from Utkal University and University of Allahabad, Dr. Das joined the I.A.S. He took voluntary retirement from his administrative assignment in order to dedicate himself to creative writing and research. He did his Ph.D. on Art History.

If contemporary Oriya poetry has acquired a new dimension and sophistication, in terms of vision, technical integrity, and innovative use of the creative medium, it was because of Dr. Das's contribution. An unusual blending of the sense of beauty and the sense of joy in living and loving makes his poetry extremely readable and accessible. His passion for the diverse facets of life and existence makes his poetry vibrant and rejuvenating. A sense of rhythm that he tries to capture in his poetry is very close to the colloquial speech.

He has won the Central Sahitya Akademi Award. His works include *Pratham Purusa* (1971), *Anya Sabu Mrutyu* (1976), *Je Jahar Nirjanata* (1979), *Anya Desha Vinna Samaya* (1982), *Jatrar Pratham Pada* (1988), *Anhika* (1990), *Sthira Chitra* (1991) and *Sacharachar* (1994). Dr. Das lives in Delhi.]

THIS DAY

It's simply because
you appeared for a while
in my morning dream,
that I dedicated
this entire day to you.
That's precisely why,
I'm sure,
the newspaper would carry no news,
except your face
that would peep through
the column-compacted pages
of the daily.

All the calls that I receive
on my phone
would be from you only.
All the letters
that the postman delivers
would have come but from you.
And from all the taxis
that would halt near my house,
you alone would get down;
and all the knocks on my doors
would be yours alone.

If today,
this world gets lost and destroyed,
and all of a sudden,
the race of homosapiens
goes extinct,
and if only a fraction
of man's dreams remains,
I'm sure,
you'll come to me even then
assuming the wholeness of the relics
of that dream.

PHOTOGRAPH

With a compelling need
to watch you as I steal a glance
at you, your eyes fly abiding mine,
towards a constellation of memories
which were being born anew
in the sky of some other lost time.

Your gesture is already fossilized
in your own encircling environs.
The trees, the creepers around you,
are lifeless, though the tea cup
in your hand holds no storms.
All my queries get shattered
against the unflowing current
on the horizon of your body.

It is but from your face
that I search for a solution
to my own ignorance. What a stir
of desire is wrought
in your flaming, blazing hair?
What exactly does the piercing
silence of your eyes intend to articulate?
For whom is the vermilion mark's patience waiting?
Who brings in the half-opened morning
of smile to your lips? What does this
hide-and-seek of untimely sunshine
on your cheeks signify? How do the easy
flowers bloom on your sari?
Your face on the photograph reveals nothing.
My destiny only elicits a shake-up
on the floating shade colours on your face.

Kavya Bharati 1997

My unfulfilled wishes, my shortcomings
come back to me stumbling against
undulating prohibitions of your body.
And the cup beneath your lips is listless.
Like the old questions that wounded me
the storm comes swaying upon me
shattering and tearing me into pieces.

No longer do I wear patience or courage
to steal a glance at the geometry
of your body that has been pardoned by time.
I turn away my eyes from your face.
I treasure you carefully beneath my chest
so that you, like a judge, won't seek an immediate answer
from me to all those questions
which you never asked.

(*Translated from Oriya by Niranjan Mohanty*)

MANORANJAN DAS

[Manoranjan Das, in his middle thirties is the author of one collection of poetry, *Mahuphena* (Beehive). He is readying two more collections of his poems for publication this year. He is additionally working as a script writer for documentary films.]

AN ELEGY

Which bird's call-note
possessed me?

Do you know it
at its time of return
to another guise:
wings of marble, granite claws and beak
and flights, speckles of memories.

The kingfisher calls.
For whose death are you responsible?

One among many bends
of the river Daya,
the mossy stone under its slow moving water
and in its crevices
fish, legend, sands like history
and a floor of rotten leaves.

In the neck-deep water
if you look this way
a narrow strip of sunshine
where prophecy lies
like a twelve-hand-span sword.

In the neck-deep water
if you look that way
a small patch of cloud
drifts in like sobbings
and a small fish gets startled.

In space
whose pointed gaze is this?
And does the river destroy
what it creates?

(*Translated from Oriya by Rabindra K. Swain*)

RAJENDRA KISHORE PANDA

[Rajendra Kishore Panda (b.1944) is the author of ten original works and two anthologies (One Malayalam poetry, the other Oriya poetry in Hindi-English translation). He edits *Varnamala*, a Hindi-English occasional journal of poetry and creativity. He has been recipient of the Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters) Award for 1985, Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award (Calcutta) for 1989 and Senior Fellowship from the Union Department of Culture (1994-96). A senior member of the Indian Administrative Service since 1967, he is serving in the Orissa State cadre. He resides at Bhubaneswar.]

THE GOD TO THE OWL

Had there been no night and dark
you, as an inhabitant of the daylight,
would also have walked the street
without fear and doubt;
this much then is your complaint?

What is darkness, after all?
A light completely black
where there is no difference between
big and small, one's own and others',
where a sod of earth is as good as
a heap of gold
and warmth of touch is all pervasive,
where the night is safe
to some extent as the most
ferocious of all the creatures
on earth–the man–slows down
his cruel spread of noise
and falls to a drowsy sleep
in fatigue as the night and dark
envelop him.

The birds of the day
fall from the sky
in a festival of gunpowder
and blood,
the creatures of the day
are tied, as usual,
and are hung from the ropes of butchers
with their skins peeled off.

They whimper on golden plates.
They neigh with immense pain
in the bloody horse-sacrifice
of a pitiable history.
There is no other horrid sound
as the belching of a human being.
The hungry goes on a rampage
for his next meal.
Affection, friendship, love, everything
are as if offered rice for a beast
killed as sacrifice;
if chance be it,
the beloved is also offered.
And what a delicacy is the God!

How egotistic!
As if in the entire living kingdom
only man looks like me.
Look at me minutely, owl,
and admit,
don't I look like you,
in your own eyes?
Are you not sullen
thinking of yourself as a nocturnal bird,
enveloped as you are with soft, thick darkness
like the inside of an egg,

like the fetus of the mother;
on every leaf of the dense branches
is smeared the solitude of the forest.
The intimacy between us is transparent.

Don't you complain with your hoots, owl,
the sleepy mankind might wake
in spite of the unassuaged dark.
His fatal throw of a stone
will strike your soft heart
and the casket will break open.
I have made the night, yes,
the dark I have created.

Look into thick dark
and listen, how I myself keep hooting
sitting upon my own illusory tree;
I owe nothing to mankind.

A POEM FOR MY DAUGHTER

You have to go a long way.
Who are you sullen with, my dear daughter?
Your life waits at the kitchen door.
Open the door, come out, you have to go
a long way; oh, my dear,
you will have your own home, won't you?

To think of being an imaginary tree
is almost becoming it. Think.

Why should you shrink
like mimosa into yourself?
Touched upon, you will spring up
like a tree, come into leaf,

open up in flowers and fruits,
spread into branches
for the birds to build up their nests,
also spread into a wealth of thorns;
you will give and let others give,
you will believe only in giving.

There will be vultures in your sky
with their wings menacingly spread;
if now you will be tortured,
then you will be a hive
of honey.

If your in-laws spit out
the well cooked food
served to them, you will
suppress your sobs and smile instead.
The bowl of your nectar won't be poison, dear,
for nectar can never be an ort, my daughter;
serve only the worthy.
You will live like that old demoness in the folk tale
who puts one leg into the hearth
and basks the other one in its fire.
Never ask the earth to crack up,
daughter, the sky will be buried there.

Like a fish fried on the pan
spend your lonely night there
where dark is the wall, dark is
the roof, the floor, the bed, where
the moon is even black;
spend there your fullmoon night of autumn.

Rising in the early hours of the morning
and coming to the garden, you will
find in one corner dew drops
on cobwebs and in each drop
the glittering reflection of the sun.

And while contemplating the cobweb,
shivering in the wind, your look
may be fixed over the preying jewel-spider.
Rather strange is this mysterious world,
dear daughter, only when you metamorphose
into a wounded small creature
can you know, you shiver
more in delight than in pain.

Be you always the autumn.
Do not let yourself grow old, daughter,
You won't curse yourself, nor your fate.
So delicate, so subtle is your life,
poetry will vanish
dreams will be rippled and lost!
Even at reaching the bottom of your suffering,
don't you ask the earth to crack up,
daughter, the sky will be buried there.

Rather, if you can, be yourself all udder
Poke your own self a little.
Just with a scratch
the Patala Ganga will gush out, daughter,
and once the dark is concentrated
and petrified and then scraped
it will reveal an eastern sky
bursting forth with the rising sun.

Never ask the earth to crack up,
dear daughter; rather, you yourself
burst like Devaki and open the door
for the birth of the God.

(*Translated from Oriya by Rabindra K. Swain*)

JAGANNATH PRASAD DAS

[For biographical notes regarding Jagannath Prasad Das see above page 129.]

PATHER PANCHALI

Open your eyes
and before you is life,
take the first step
and before you is the world,
go out of the house
and you have footpaths
stretching in all directions.

Each road
leads you to new discoveries,
wherever you look
there is wonder;
the peeled-off eyes
get scattered into colourful scrub
of fairy tales
and coming on their own,
all the voices, smells and colours
heap in the remotest corner of mind.

Plucking miracles in their hands
come fairies and monsters,
the painted kings and queens,
worms, insects, rain, winter, sun, moon,
stars, planets, milkyways,
birth, disease, old age, death.

In the unprepared, stunned moments
the promises of the future
leave you overwhelmed
and eyes take stock of things again:

how much of storms and destruction
are there in one drop of rain,
how many worlds in one small circle
on the yard
and how much of overwhelmingness
to be collected in tiny palms.
Mind opens up, steps forge ahead,
the invisible hand
takes you towards
the unknown bends of the village,
the deep mysteries of young age
remain at the other side of *Kasatandi* field
where in one palpitating time of waiting
a coal-engine train
appears suddenly
to whisk away childhood
into the black-and-white
world of adults.

ANOTHER COUNTRY

No respite from emptiness.
Standing upon the seashore
as I put my questions
to the sea
all of them and their echoes
vanished into its blue.

As for the answer
the waves laid before my feet
another stillness.

This is also a strange country
where all the feelings
go sad
and all the voices solitary.

(*Translated from Oriya by Rabindra K. Swain*)

BIDYUT PRABHA DEVI

[Bidyut Prabha Devi (1926-77) has written poetry that won the Sahitya Akademi award and other recognitions from the Central Government and the Government of Orissa. She excelled, most of all, in depicting the rural landscape and ethos of Orissa, and expressed a powerful humanism that distinctly makes her an outstanding pre-modern figure in Oriya Literature. Many of her books like *Marichika* (1948) and *Utkal Saraswat Pratibha* were prescribed as text books, and her individual poems like "Khadyotika", "Palli Maya" and "Mitira Manisha" continue to appear in Oriya text books. Her other works include *Sabita* (1947), *Kanakanjali* (1948), *Bihayasi* (1949), *Bandanika* (1950), *Swapnadeepa* (1951), *Jharasiuli* (1952), *Jahakujie* (1957) and many other writings in *Bidyut Prabha Granthabali* (Friends' Publishers, Cuttack, 1983), from which the two translations below are taken.

A grateful state has unveiled the portrait of Bidyut Prabha in Sri Ramachandra Bhavan of *Utkal Sahitya Samaj*, Cuttack. The Central Sahitya Akademi has commissioned a monograph of her life under the "Makers of Indian Literature" series. Orissa Sahitya Akademi is also bringing out a biography of Bidyut Prabha.]

DILEMMA

"The grinding is half done.
Where are you,
eldest daughter-in-law?
Unmindful of chores
that lie piled up
until nightfall!"

"Am I a bonded labourer?
Am I to be sold daily
Only for this house?
Work, work and more work!
From morning till night!
Tell me,
is there nothing else
to life?

Is the life of a woman
meant only for childbirth?
Only for drudgery and fuel?
There is no joy
in holding a pen,
and no pleasure
in its abandonment.

Writing is the greatest
elixir of all.
Whoever has savoured it,
can she escape its lure?
Never mind the many pitfalls
on the way.

Our life a constant turmoil.
The soul, consumed for ever
with disease and death.
How can there be in all this,
time for poetry?

Today, it's the son's health.
And tomorrow, it's
the daughter's stomach ailment!
Can there be
amidst all this,
the meeting of pen and ink?

Writing, I know
cannot fetch me
food and clothing.
Nothing in it
to interest the family.
It remains
despite this
my pleasure, my cynosure!

Let people say what they like.
I shall go on flowing.
Like the mighty river,
I shall cross
what ever comes my way
with a smile
for ever on my lips.

Writing is the balm
for all my pain.
It's the glory of my sorrow.
Writing is rain-soaked woods.
It's the music of cloud bursts
during the month of *Shravana*!

I wish I could speak of
the joy that gathers in my heart.
Like a flame
in the mouth of storm,
my poetry–
a luminous lamp!"

ROMANTIC POET

Ah romantic poet,
you wandered
far and wide.
You went beyond
the land of dreams.
And yet,
not once
did your gaze
rest upon
reality.

You saw much.
In the womb of the earth
you glimpsed
the naked smile
of the moonbeams.
In the lips of the sun
you saw,
the courtship
of *Madhabi* flowers.

Laden by sleep
in the magical world
of dreams,
you lay still,
in the golden palace
bedecked by flowers.
You did not see,
not even once, O poet,
how in the broken hut
the old woman
braved the cruel winter
in the month of *Pousa*.

There is much
that you took in.
Not just the powerful
and intoxicating
winds.
But did you ever hear
the sigh
of the *Badhuli* Flowers?

O romantic poet,
you never rested
your gaze

upon the emptiness
that lay
in the heart of the
forsaken woman.

You saw for long
the face of the green grass
bathed by dew.
But did you ever see
the flood of tears
of a thousand eyes?

You travelled O poet
the seven seas.
And crossed
thirteen rivers.
And every where
you saw
the picture of luxury.

What good is it
to luxuriate
in the world of dreams,
if your pen cannot inscribe
the sad song
that lies
in the heart
of things?

(*Translated from Oriya by Sachidananda Mohanty*)

SOUBHAGYA KUMAR MISRA

[Dr. Soubhagya Kumar Misra, born in 1941 at Berhampur in the District of Ganjam, took degrees from Utkal University including a Ph. D. for his dissertation on the novels of Bernard Malamud. His many distinctions include the *Jhankar* Award, awards from the Orissa Sahitya Akademi and the Central Sahitya Akademi, and the Governor's Plaque of Honour in 1993. He was participant in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa (U.S.A.), and Senior Fellow in Literature in the Department of Culture of the Government of India's Human Resources Development Ministry. He currently is professor of English at Berhampur University.]

FOR A LONG LOST FRIEND

I do not know where he is,
Whether he is in the country or abroad
If only I could hear that he is somewhere
The beginning of the evening would be less lonely
The cracked prehistoric bronze cup of the museum.

It is not important for him to be somewhere
or other
Only for my feeling of incomplete fullness
But why couldn't he be one of the two
sitting at the dark distant corner of the bar?

After suffering many deserts, oceans, skies
The moon, stars, flowers, fruits and rains
Why do I keep on looking at his face
From various directions; the hands are restless.
I have built castles in sand, like children,
dug wells, built nests for birds
lest the Sea water would rush,
My dreams would collapse with a sudden
encounter with him.
Let it, let his noise ransack
the nest of sticks and straws.

Whatever becomes full, breaks
After the ceremony, the carpets, canopy, and arches
are taken out, people return.

He was perhaps there with them.
I would never know.
There is not even any reason for me
to know. Even then he is there
some where, certainly he is floating,
Sinking, and rising somewhere.

Putting my hand, coins through the
ticket counter
I see that the ticket seller
sporting a moustache like him, smiling like him
My carriage is hurtling towards
the station, like an arrow, whistling.

THE FISHERMAN

Neither I, nor the Sun–who watches you–
Have got anything from any one throughout
the day.
The sun is about to set
on the river bank, I am sitting alone
we are defeated. What about you?
How much fish have you caught,
or is the basket empty?

Your boat is floating in deep waters, halting
and floating again.
Whether or not I can grasp
the geometry of your mind,
you splash your net with a flourish.
I must admire the strength of your elbows.

After jostling through the crowd,
I found nothing.
The magician's show was over.
Packing his boxes, straightening himself
he was about to leave.
So far I have been saying this–
whatever came on the way
I have compared with the real fish of your
imagination–neither bright nor glistening.

What I think, my gaze fixed on you,
You are perhaps able to know
But that knowing is not enough.

At least till we return, I to my home,
you to your market, then to the tavern,
Sun to the west
we will know
how it feels that we have been shortchanged;
we will suffer in pain.

We have caught each other in our nets
Therefore we are immortal.
Whether we hear the temple bell or not
Tomorrow we'll come here again, gossip,
May be we will lose.
It would be indecent
to ask for more from the earth, water,
sky and the wind.

(*Translated from Oriya by Aurobindo Behera*)

PREM KUMAR

I SING THE TREE'S SONG

This season
the gulmohurs are slow to bloom.
Children do not come to play
under the cold splintered moon.
(they have to go out at dawn
to glean the paddy fields)
I wait for friends in distant lands.

This season I walk alone.
(a lump of broken clay
I fell from the potter's hands)
This season I sit under the sun
and dream of drifting clouds
of dark rivers, of misty woods.

Winter spring summer long
I brood on wasted memories.
A branch springs from my lips
a tree grows around me
and I watch the leaves
whisper to the breeze.
I gather words fallen in the wind
and I sing the tree's song.

And I welcome every day
and I sing to dew-eyed stars
and when the rains come
the tree holds out its arms
lets me drink from its palms.

Sometimes it seems
the tree will strangle me.
Sometimes it seems
I am finally free.
Although trapped in the tree
I am whole . . . I grow within
as less and less remains of me.
Rooted in the earth I am the sky.

(*Translated from Punjabi by the author*)

SUNDARA RAMASWAMY

[Sundara Ramaswamy (b.1931) writes poetry under the pen name Pasuviah, and is also a novelist, short story writer and critic. He has published two novels, and a collected edition of his poetry titled *107 Poems* has appeared. His short stories also have been published in a collected edition. He has translated stories, novels and poems from Malayalam into Tamil. He participated in the Indian Poetry Festival at Paris, and was awarded the Asan Poetry Prize in 1987. His first novel, *Oru Puliamarathin Kathai*, has been translated into English under the title, *Tale of a Tamarind Tree*, and published by Penguin. His second novel has been translated into French.]

THE CLOSED SHUTTERS

The closed shutters
Will get stuck.
The fault of not opening them
Now and then.
Fist them hard
With all your strength.
The nerves will throb.
Still,
Fist them.
They will throb.
Don't give it up.
Search for some implement
And do open them.
You've many places
To look at the sky.
But
To look at your room
The sky has no other way.
Open the shutters
That get stuck.

THE FIRE THAT BURNS IN THE PAINTING

Without the least wink
That child looks at the flame
Burning in that painting.
An excitement
In the child's fingertips.
Its mind yearns
To touch the flame.
The child takes its fingers
Quite close to the flame.
Still it hesitates.
And with great hesitancy
it looks at its mother's face.
The child doesn't understand
How that flame
Doesn't burn the painting.
The child doesn't understand
How that flame
Didn't burn the painter's fingers.
How did the flame learn
To burn without destroying,
And to glow enchantingly?
In the child's fingers
Wonder grew
Even then.

FAITH

In the far distance
I saw that gait.
The spit image of my friend.
I was shocked.
How could one
Who had vanished
Have come here?
Perhaps
Someone else.
Hadn't I thought so
He himself would have come.

(*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*)

VAIDHEESWARAN

[Vaidheeswaran (b.1935) is a poet, short story writer, and a painter. A collected edition of his poems and a volume of his short stories have been published. He has exhibited his paintings and drawings in the Gujarat Lalit Akademi and Madras Art Club.]

THE SPRING

A patch of sky
ceaselessly moving
between
two flying crows;
an unbiased mind
breaking the bounds
widening the length
lengthening the width
trying to bend
that & this;
a moon
struggling amidst clouds
for some moments
and then
shining
in brilliance–
At such wondrous state
sing up man!
Words bubble up.

(*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*)

SIRPI

[Sirpi (Dr. P. Balasubramaniam, b.1936), is Professor and Head, Department of Tamil, Bharathiar University. He is a poet, critic, translator and editor. His publications include 12 books of poems, and a comparative study of Bharathi and Vallathol. His poems have been translated into English, Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam.]

SPEED . . . SPEED

The scientist says:

"You're stationary
in the fast moving train
And your speed
is only that of the train

The speed of your
inanimate suitcase
lying inside the train
is also the same

One thing more I'll say
The train hurtles fast
A butterfly comes
through the window
spreads its wings
lengthwise
breadthwise
flies
inside the compartment
at the same speed!"

O
Scientist,
All that is quite right
But a doubt lurks in me.

My body sits still
And my mind
runs back in a trice
touches the point
wherefrom it started
returns
leaps ahead
circles the destination.

I travel in a train
And my speed is
that of the train itself
Even then . . .

When the mind flies onward
should my speed be added
to that of the train?

And if my mind turns back
should its speed
be less?

(*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*)

SAINT THIRUNAVUKKARASAR

TWO HYMNS

I

He
The dark-necked One
The skull-bowled One
The One who kicked
The god of death
The One who wrapped Himself
With the elephant hide
Who wore a garland of skulls
Surrounded Himself
With an assembly of sages
Visited every courtyard
Plucking the veena strings;
His faint smile gripped my heart
He didn't glance back at me
But charmed me with His eyes
Entered Valampuram
Stayed there. 6.58.6

II

He
Wore a silk cloth,
wet sandal paste
all over the coral-like body,
Took a little step
then another
Tiring Himself out
danced
Came here

I asked:
Lord,
which is your native place?
He looked at me hurriedly
snatched my soul away
And
as though
He was going to some other place
Walked with swings and sways
Charmed me with His eye-talk
Entered Valampuram,
Stayed there. 6.58.7

Note: There is a singularly significant and beautiful bronze of Bikshatanar in the Siva temple at Melaperumpallam near Kaveripoompattinam in Tamil Nadu. It is shown as playing on the veena and wearing a piece of cloth around the waist, features generally absent in such images. Also there is no kapala in the palm. The lower two arms depict the posture of playing on the veena. While the left leg is shown as firmly placed on the ground the right is slightly bent, suggestive of moving around. In this temple there is an inscription of the 12th year of Rajadhi Rajadeva II (1178 A.D.) stating that some lands were gifted for offerings to the images of deities set up in the eighth year (1174 A.D.) by a native of Menmalayapalayanoor. The image of Bikshatana mentioned here is named as 'Vattanai Katta Vantha Nayakar'. Saint Thirunavukkarasar sang hymns in praise of the Lord in this temple which was then known as Thiruvalampuram. The words "Vattanaikal pata natantha" occur in one hymn (6.58.7). This must definitely be the source of inspiration for the artist to create this wonderful bronze.

(*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*)

TAYUMANAVAR

[Tāyumāṉavar (1704-1742) is counted as one of the foremost Tamil Saiva poets. As a youth Tāyumāṉavar must have received thorough training in Tamil and Sanskrit philosophy and devotional literature, for his poems show his mastery of these traditions. Popular lore has it that he succeeded his father in the king's service at Trichinopoly and soon rose to a high rank. Later Tāyumāṉavar quit the court and took up the life of a mendicant. He spent his last days in Ramnad, living in a small garden hut where he wrote out his poems on palm leaves. Subsequently these poems were copied and disseminated by his disciples.]

PRIMORDIAL LORD

Becoming weaker and weaker,
  weeping,
    my body getting goose bumps,
      rising rising O Lord,
        I reached your feet.

Don't abandon me now, I take refuge in you.

My mind dissolving,
I stand still as the image in a painting.

When will you come after me and make me your slave?

O light !
O Primordial Lord!

(*Translated from Tamil,* Civaṉ Ceyal 3 *by Swami Sevananda*)

SATCHIDANANDA SATGURUDEV

Sometimes I think,
"Nothing is my action.
Everything is your action."

Another time,
deluded by the *maya* of bad actions,
I think,
"These *are* my actions."

Or,
I lie still,
like a mad man,
without the thought of any action.

So that I reach the good state,
you must complete everything as your action.

O Satchidananda Satgurudev!

(*Translated from Tamil,* Āranam 8 *by Swami Sevananda*)

LORD SHIVA

King with the white crescent moon and laburnum buds
shining in your matted locks.

Flame which rose to dance in the great hall.
Sweet one for the eyes of my mother –
the daughter of the Himalayas.

You are the deity I worship.
You are the guru.
You are my companion.
You are the mother and father.
You are the birth into which I sink.
You are goodness.
You are my body and soul.

(*Translated from Tamil,* Collaṟku Ariya 5 *by Swami Sevananda*)

VAIRAMUTHU

[Vairamuthu is a prose writer, a novelist, an essayist and a poet. But it his cini songs that have given him international popularity. He has received a national award four times from the President of India for his songs in *Mudal Mariyadhai*, *Sindu Bhairavi*, *Roja* and *Karuthamma*.]

IRON-SMITING ROSES

Revered Nehru!
We must celebrate children's day
Call the children
Call those roses wherever they're smiting
the iron throughout the nation . . .
Flowers carrying cartloads of burdens . . .
Those infant Jesuses nailed to the cross . . .
Infants, earning to pay for mother's milk . . .
Call them all, Nehruji
We must celebrate the children's day.

In the godowns of Sivakasi where gunpowder is stored . . .
They burn themselves for someone somewhere
The children burn themselves
They explode as crackers in rehearsal for Deepavali
The children explode
Sandal flowers in the sulphur pits
Call them
Call those seven thousand flowers
Call them now itself.

In the Carpet factories of Kashmir . . .
Those lotus flowers as carpets trodden upon
Those salaried calves, carrying the carpets
Their lungs full of infections
Call them
Call those one lakh tender flowers
Call them at once.

In the brick kilns of West Bengal . . .
Our precious gold melting in the clay
Mixing the red sand with red water–their sweat–
Scorching the bricks with their fiery sighs
Call them
Call those forty thousand tender saplings
Call them quickly.

In the gem factories of Surat . . .
Our delicate stems cut the hard gems
Those soft tender hands
Carrying a universe of weight . . .
Colourless the gem seems, but
What colour have these children in life?
Call them
Call those thirty thousand buds
Call them at once.

In the tea stalls of Delhi . . .
Cleaning, and cleaning the plates
The children fill their stomachs . . .
There'll at least be a little tea
left in the left-over cups
What else is left in the life of those hired ones?
Call them
Call those sixty thousand tender beings
Call them in a hurry.

In the bangle industries of Ferozabad . . .
The tender saplings, the cheap-rate children
Bits of glass tearing their lungs
Salary and death in equal instalments . . .
Truants from school
They make zeroes from bangles
Call them
Call those forty thousand saplings
Call them softly.

In the lock factories of Aligarh . . .
The flies carrying iron
Small key-like kids lost amidst locks
Tubercular, spitting blood prematurely
Call them
Call those ten thousand flowers
Call them all together.

Still. . .
As ransom captives
loose-changes of life
angels cheated by lusty men
bent arrows of sugercane in the bow of Manmatha
flesh trunks transporting drugs
talking bowls abegging
How many, how many kings of this country are here . . .?

Alas! Call them
Call them all
Then may we celebrate children's day

Nehruji!
If children's day is celebrated
Without all these tender beings
Then will I wear on my shirt
A black rose.

I'LL SING FOR YOU, TREES

An ode on trees

Oh! Dear Valluvar! Come, Be here.
What did you call the inhumane humans?
Trees.
You think the Tree is that inferior?

Accept my salutations dear Avvai!
What did you call an illiterate
who never can read?
You called them Trees?
Is the Tree that disgraceful?

Oh! Who is by my side? Is it Bharathi!
What did you call the uncultured
who couldn't rescue Panchali?
You dared to call them tall, still Trees!
You think Trees are that ignoble?

Tree
A multihued painting in nature's creation
A mark of exclamation on earth
Branches that hook the stars high above
Leaves that are sprayed lavishly with laughter
Flowers that are bubbling with life
The tree'll provide me
The Wisdom that a human can never furnish.

The tree is senior to man
It is our big brother
Don't dare abuse an elder brother.

Human life
Is just a tent inside a bubble
Is the tree so?
The tree has a longer span of life
than all regenerating living beings.

There comes an end for human growth at thirty
But a tree
Blossoms till its last day
Bears fruit till its last breath.

Severed and planted
A branch grows into a tree
Severed and planted
Can a hand grow into a human body?

Cut down a tree
The rings inside will tell you its age.
Dissect a body
The organs will tell you your life is gone for ever.

A tree too will turn bald
Only to spurt again
Think of us!
A hair falling and a soul parting
are one and the same.

If trees were wiped out
Where to wash the air of dust?

If there were no trees
Where to send a petition for rains?

If there were no trees
Can there be a lake beneath the lap of earth?

Can man harbour bird and beast as a tree does?
Tree, it's the first friend to man
Man, he's the foremost foe to the tree
On trees man has most used his weapons.

Fruits for taste–shade to repose
Medicine for health–a feast to senses
House to retire to–a door to enclose
Fence to admire–swing to rock on
balm to rub–oil to simmer
paper to write with–fuel to burn
It's the tree
It's the tree
Everything's the tree
Man has forgotten this.

Born we were
The cradle
Tree's gift.
Learning to walk
The walker
Tree's gift.
Practicing writing
Slate and pencil
Tree's gift.
Getting married
Garland and sandal
Tree's gift.
Conjugal felicity
That cot is
Tree's gift
Sleep we did
Silk cotton in the pillow
Tree's gift.

Walked a lot
The rubber in the chappel
Tree's gift.
Died (in the end)
The litter and coffin,
Tree's gift.
Burnt we were
firewood on the pyre,
Tree's gift.

It's the tree
It's the tree
Everything's the tree
Man has forgotten this.

O Man!
If you wish to become a man
come to the tree
Every tree is a Bodhi tree.

(*Translated from Tamil by G. Dominic Savio*)

K. SIVA REDDY

[K. Siva Reddy (b.1943) has published seven poetry collections, and has influenced a generation of Telugu poets with his innovative experimentation in framing poetic statements. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection *Mohana O Mohana!* He is currently working as Lecturer in English at Vivekavardhini College, Hyderabad.]

WHOEVER SHE IS

Whoever she is
How can we wake her?
As though angels are moving around her,
Fanning her with a white whisker
Quietly, reverentially,
When she is asleep like a folded flower,
Lulled, not even bothered by dreams
How can we call her?
Does it matter who she is–
Whether my wife, or neighbour, or mother of many children–
How can we disturb her, wake her;
How can we call her name even on our lips?

After a treacherous day,
The agony-monument of a day
Devoid of any charm, mercy, tenderness or pity
When she is taking rest, blissfully,
How can we disturb her?

When she is extracting energy from herself
Silently, the pith and patience,
To face up to the morbid, mechanical,
Purely ordinary, utterly remorseless tomorrow
From that freedom-grove, from the deep comfort
That came to her without volition
How can we move her, wake her?

When she is asleep like a melting ice-cube,
A streaming water-drop,
Like the marvel of a scene transfixed in the eye
When she is asleep, let her be.

Let us go round her and offer our prayers for her well-being
For her safety from any disturbing dreams
From any contaminated thought of tomorrow.
When she is regaining her strength, all her stamina and substance
To face up to the brute of a tomorrow
We shall not wake her up, we shall not call her, silently even.

(*Translated from Telugu by K. Damodar Rao*)

DEVIPRIYA

[Devipriya (b. 1949) has published three poetry collections, and is known for his experiments in mini kavita. He is currently working as a journalist.]

DIFFERENCE

You think
originally.
He sells
his thoughts
for a price.

You work hard.
He rests assured
behind currency
curtains.

You create
words.
He owns
laurels.
You consume
yourself
in his service.
He raises
himself
on your tomb.

SYMPTOMS

It
drowns you
in your own sweat.

It
hangs you
with your own veins

It
shows your reflection
convoluted
with the light of
your own eyes.

You
better find out
whether you can counterattack
the mirror.

VOICE

My palm
has a throat-box,

Otherwise
how can these
sound pictures and
literary dreams
flow from my pen
onto the paper

making rhythms
marking movements.

(*Translated from Telugu by K. Damodar Rao*)

SIVALENKA RAJESWARI DEVI

[Sivalenka Rajeswari Devi (b.1955) worked as a teacher for some time. She produces a fine tapestry of personal experiences, feminine sensibility and social awareness in her poetry.]

THIS RASTHA

I salute this rastha
Manasa, *Vacha*, *Karmana*
With all my heart, words and actions.
I bow my head reverentially to these trees
On this side.

This rastha, these trees
The all-pervading one in the Church by that side
Knew who I am, what I am;
I grew up walking by this rastha only.
What all I felt during my childhood,
Youth and ripeness
That stream knew everything.
This rastha used to nod to fleeting moments,
My feelings.

In those days
While wading through the waters
Carefully holding my saree-ends,
Filled with glittering sheen in the eyes
And affection in the heart,
As I used to share anxious moments with my friends–
That bustle and that flurry
Everything that stream knew.

This rastha stood a witness
To pain, suffering, tears and humiliations.
This rastha knew intimately
My strong urge to question the world with silent rage,

Sometimes recklessly, raising my head defiantly:
'Yes, then what? Do I care? Get lost.'
In the meanwhile my Goutama will convert
My eyes into clear crystals. A message comes forth:
I should understand like the earth
All the ups and downs of human emotions.

This rastha knew the news of my eyes filled with
Beautiful dreams. It also knew
I was engrossed in Sankarabharana Ragas.
From the interior of strong bonds of emotions, rasas
Expressing through enchanting ragas
From the haunting note of tragedy
Emerging from the mandolin's background
I chiselled those stones one by one in a row
Conquering hunger and sleep
Banishing childhood.

What if the painful stories of
The foot of the oppressor stamping them out
Are so familiar?
Patience Waiting Living out–
You may not know it
But having known the secret, the heart becomes
A Ganges of tears.

(*Translated from Telugu by K. Damodar Rao*)

AFSAR

[Afsar (b.1964) is a poet and critic who has published two volumes of poetry and a collection of critical essays, and is currently working as a journalist]

BLOOD-SMEAR IN THE MIRROR

Mortally afraid of the mirror we are.
Hatred of our own bodies smeared in blood.
Odour of death and charred bodies
Miasma of corpses carried on our shoulders
still haunts us.
Incense-smoke turns the wind into circles.

On the death-like road is spread
the fear of scattered petals of roses;
our fear is, their last tip of fragrance
might pierce through the walls of the heart.
The one who succumbed to a brazen attack in the street,
in full public view,
the Mahabodhi's wounds make our dreams wet with tears.
We are afraid of the mirror.

The illegitimate children of ballot-boxes
The changing colours of flags on faces
Wearing a face of darkness even during the day
The desert-bodies of jaded wings dried up in the streets–
We are afraid of the mirror.

Out of the words, printed letters, and TV lights
a relentless downpour of promises.
The vulture clad in khadi gentleness
settles before the huts of the poor even before sunrise.
The words gliding from his lips

The words reverberating from the fellow's voice
as if each part of his body brimmed with glittering sheen of tin–
We are mortally afraid of our indignation.
Our fear is, the thoughts that were getting buried
between heart and throat
might enter the street and organise a procession.
Our fear is, the ones that were searching for souls
in thick jungles of alienation, even with severed bodies,
might get multiplied into twos and threes
and become the writings on the walls
pecking at all cardinal points, directions.
We are afraid of our indignation.

If four people gather at one place
some new slogan might be created.
The words might assume flesh and blood.
If four people gather at one place
some effigies might be burnt, some feet
might metamorphose into war-horses.
We are afraid of the shrieks.

They are afraid of the ocean overflowing
from the heart-interiors, from narrow-throated thorny paths.
They are afraid of the water-fall jetting forth
from the peaks of lips onto the plains of people.
They are afraid of the damp letters of blood
that slide down from dreams to the dry papers.
One might wish to kiss the tender, milk-like fresh letters.
But words might become an ocean
an inundating flood, we are afraid.

You build barricades for every written word.
Silence, silence! Let the sound be banned.
How you cherish the word that stands guard
like a dog in front of your massive fortress.

Words might facilitate fury, and cause a tumult.
Let the curtain be drawn between words.
Silence, silence! Let the word be excommunicated to the finish.
Won't you wear words as golden-rings of citations on your fingers?
But if words become khaki shields, won't you like it immensely?

You are really crazy!
Words are always unfaithful hunting dogs.
Sniffing, they will pounce on you.
If you pierce through the word, it will unfurl wings of the sky
If you hurt the word with wounds, it turns into a vicious viper.
If you aim your weapons on the hardening heart
and tensed up voice,
the entire route will be burnt out.
The street that became weary of carrying you,
your protected pot-bellies,
your polluted minds and oppressive power,
will turn into a sharp-edged bayonet
pinching you with vengeance.

(To the memory of Safdar Hashmi)

(*Translated from Telugu by K. Damodar Rao*)

MOKKAPATI SUMATI

[Mokkapati Sumati is a poet, essayist and short-story writer who deals with different social issues, especially those of women.]

FRIENDLY CONTRADICTION?

Who said this is a friendly contradiction?
Who is that cheating with well-orchestrated,
Colourfully decorated words?
Like the priest who points the mysterious Arundhati star
On the day of marriage
This one deceives by showing half of the sky.

Who said this is a friendly contradiction?

Class enemies expect only my labour.
This vicious one exploits my whole being.
That one at least creates a dream-world.
This fellow takes away all my dreams even.
Class enemies treat me as a human who can turn the wheel.
But for this one, I am only a machine.

Who said this is a friendly contradiction?
Who is that cheating with well-orchestrated
Colourfully decorated words?
Like the priest who points the mysterious Arundhati star
On the day of marriage
This one deceives by showing half of the sky.

Who said this is a friendly contradiction?

(*Translated from Telugu by K. Damodar Rao*)

BALRAJ KOMAL

[Balraj Komal is a Sahitya Akademi award winner. He has edited three volumes of Urdu translation of *Contemporary Indian Short Stories* for the Sahitya Akademi and has edited the Urdu section of the first two issues of *Uttara*, an Annual literary digest of North Indian languages published by the Sahitya Akademi. His award-winning book *Parindon Bhara Aasman* is also available in English and Hindi. *Agla Waraq* is his latest collection of poems.]

THE SOLDIER

Triumphant, else vanquished
I who amidst wailing and crying
had somehow scraped through all wars
have neither a victory memorial
in my honour
nor a refuge
to bury my shame.

I as man had the right to choose my way
and the accompanying
pain or pleasure
of the course I take,
but as things did go
I remained for ever
Deprived of it.

The moment of decision
has eventually arrived
I assert my right
here and now
I choose my reward, my retribution
and
my moment to depart.

Metamorphosed into a different mould
I may perhaps be swept back again
one day
by some fortuitous wave
to this
ignominious earth.
May be it's a tale
and a long rambling one at that.
Meanwhile
you may if you could
save and sustain
the patch of sunshine
bestowed on you.
I on my part shall carry with me
my share of gloom
to awaiting doom.

(*Translated from Urdu by the poet*)

JAYANT PARMAR

[Jayant Parmar, an accomplished and representative young Urdu poet, has been widely published. He is best known for his short poems.]

THE SEA

The whole day
The blue waves
kiss the feet of the bare shore
break the tiny nests of sand
and caress the glittering sands of the shore
embrace it and whisper into its ears
the grandeur of the brown sea

And the sea
fills its palms and lavishly bestows
its treasure on all

I too filled my bag
with the sea-shells
with the conch and the pearls

Whenever your memory steals in
I place the conch on my ears
and listen to your voice!

(*Translated from Urdu by Bhupinder Parihar*)

SHEEN KAAF NIZAM

[Sheen Kaaf Nizam (b.1947) has six volumes of poetry to his credit. He is a founder member of Urdu Academy, Rajasthan and has represented Urdu poetry in the poetry festivals held in Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal and India International Centre, Delhi. He has published critical writings in leading literary journals. *Bayazain Kho Gayee Hain* is his latest collection of poems.]

URDU GHAZAL

I had once a desire to meet you
I met you dear, now what should I do?

You too have a body and I too
Like your vestures, how can I adore you?

I see no path I can take and traverse
In my own coil I remain confined for births

There was suffocation before, never so menacing
I now pine for a window to unclose

There are a thousand ways to die
Why don't I rise and embrace desire?

The moments have given way to subterfuge
Memory is casting a spell on all sides.

(*Translated from Urdu by Bhupinder Parihar*)

KRISHAN KUMAR TOOR

[Krishan Kumar Toor is the editor of *Sarsabz*, a literary journal devoted to poetry. He has five volumes of poetry to his credit. A senior Urdu poet, he lives in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh.]

URDU GHAZAL

I crown thorns with roses
The gift of a book
I offer to the world

In every heart
I light a sun
In every eye
  a dream

To those
I hold so close
I show my wounds

I bow my head in prayer
This is how
I acknowledge the sun

I combat winds like a savage
I beckon a mirage for my eyes

With my own self
I am annoyed
What a score I am settling!

I light my palms with letters
O Toor! You are bestowing a book

(*Translated from Urdu by Bhupinder Parihar*)

MAJAZ

[Israr-ul-Haq, pen-name *Majaz*, was born in 1909 in Rudauli, a township near Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. He joined A.I.R., Delhi, and also became the first editor of its magazine *Awaaz*. This was the time when the freedom struggle was in its full momentum and Majaz left his job after a year to return to Lucknow where he became actively involved with the magazines *Naya Adab* and *Parcham*. In 1939 his volume of poems entitled *Ahang* was published. This was a new voice in Urdu poetry. While on the one hand his poems are romantic and lyrical, on the other, they exhibit a rebellious spirit, hitting out at the oppressive system. However, an unsuccessful love-affair and other disappointments drove him to excessive drinking, leading finally to his death in 1955. His collected poems have been published under the title *Saaz-e-Nau*. He had mastery over both the ghazal and the nazm. His nazm "Aawara" (The Vagabond) is one of his most popular and representative compositions.]

THE VAGABOND

At night I roam the city, sad and woebegone
A vagabond on the lively, glittering streets
In an alien land, how long can one wander ?
O this sorrow, this despair!

The glittering lamps stretch like a chain
A mellow image of day on the palms of night
But in my breast is a flaming sword
O this sorrow, this despair!

This silvery shade, this web of stars above
Like a Sufi's imagination, a lover's fancy
But who feels, who understands my pain?
O this sorrow, this despair!

Once again a star breaks, with a trail of fire
In whose lap will fall this bead of pearls?
Something strikes the heart and a painful sigh rises
O this sorrow, this despair!

Everywhere is a carnival of colour and beauty
At every step I encounter pleasure and joy
But disgrace approaches with open arms
O this sorrow, this despair!

To stop for rest is not my habit
To retrace my steps is not my nature
And to meet a companion is not in my destiny
O this sorrow, this despair!

A devastating beauty waits for me
My touch can still open many doors
But my vow of fidelity comes in the way
O this sorrow, this despair!

Often the thought of breaking vows
Destroys the hope of winning her love
Breaks the castle I have built in air
O this sorrow, this despair!

From behind the castle rises the yellow moon
Like a muezzin's turban, a money-lender's ledger
A pauper's youth, a young widow's beauty
O this sorrow, this despair!

A flame rises from my heart, what to do?
My endurance has collapsed, what to do?
The fragrance of my wound cries out, what to do?
O this sorrow, this despair!

At times the impulse to pluck the dead stars
Starting from one side and reaching the other
Not here and there, but a total demolition
O this sorrow, this despair!

Poverty stares at such scenes of plenty
So many tyrants are having their way
Hundreds of Chengez and Nadirs flourish
O this sorrow, this despair!

To snatch a Chengez's sword has become an urge,
Break the jewel glittering on his crown
If no one else, then do it single-handed
O this sorrow, this despair!

To destroy the despots is my aspiration
Burn their chambers and pleasure-gardens
Ravage their throne, their entire palace
O this sorrow, this despair!

(*Translated from Urdu by S. A.Hamid*)

KRISHNA RAYAN

READING YOUR POEM IN MY LANGUAGE

K. Satchidanandan, *Summer Rain*. Ed. Yuyutsu, R.D. New Delhi: Nirala Publications, 1995. pp.188. Rs.150.

Satchidanandan was born to what he calls "a cold, orphaned, green Indian childhood," a lower middle class life of struggle, marked by alienation from the community–himself filled with fear of natural forces like floods and darkness and, as he grew up, with an acquired disembodied despair. This last was nurtured in him by his reading of Sartre and Eliot, Neruda and Lorca and also, predictably, of Ayyappa Paniker, the first high modernist in Malayalam. He was also attracted to Marxism. His earliest poetry, belonging to the sixties, was predominantly formalist, motivated by an urge to innovate in rhythm and vocabulary. In the present selection of Satchidanandan's poems, translated by the poet and some others from the Malayalam into English, this high modernist phase is represented solely by the well-known "Five Suns." In the narrator's blood is a crimson sun "scattering sparks," and in his eyes a blue sun "prancing and dancing." In his bones a small, dim sun "pours forth a yellow glow," signalling the transition from vitality and power to their opposites that follow. In his nerves there is a white sun, pale, hunched and trembling, and in his soul a black sun, cold and empty. Having taken note of the bipolarity in the imagery, the reader has to admit that that is about as far as she or he can go; the poem maintains the hermetic inaccessibility of high modernist writing.

At the end of the high modernist phase in his development, Satchidanandan experienced a crisis rather like the one that Wordsworth did at the same age (the middle twenties) and of the same duration (roughly two years). The cause in Wordsworth's case was the failure of the idealistic phase of the French Revolution; in Satchidanandan's case it was something more general–an awareness of the failure of language as a medium of poetry. If Wordsworth turned temporarily away from poetry to

geometry, Satchidanandan sought refuge in painting. And with both poets, the therapy that worked was contact, current or remembered, with nature—with Wordsworth it was the countryside of Dorset and Somerset, with Satchidanandan it was "the birds, the rain, the plants and some of the pleasanter aspects of my childhood" in the Kochi area. The parallelism, however, ends here. On recovery, Wordsworth turned away from reason and despair to the company of nature and to human relationships; Satchidanandan turned away from the academic modernism of the sixties to a politically conscious modernism. There is no real difference between the two departures, as the Romantics' absorption in nature need not be seen as a loss of interest in the political issues of the time. As Jonathan Bate says, enunciating the basis of "Green Criticism:" 'I see them (the Romantics) as "green" in the modern sense of the word, and I think a false distinction has been made between writing about nature and writing about society.' In Satchidanandan's case, despite his breaking out of the ivory tower into the turbulence of radicalism, the iconography of nature—rain, sun, trees etc.—continues to dominate his poetry. All the same, the pressure of radical activism on literature in the seventies was intense. Latin American writing and African writing had already initiated a revolutionary trend. It was a reaction against the modernism of the sixties which as Terry Eagleton puts it, 'brackets off the referent or real historical world, thickens its textures and deranges its forms to forestall instant consumability, and draws its own language protectively around it to become a mysteriously autotelic object, free of all contaminating truck with the real.' One of the chief moves in this reaction was (to quote Eagleton again) 'to dismantle the institutional autonomy of art, erase the frontiers between culture and political society and return aesthetic production to its humble unprivileged place within social practices as a whole.' Satchidanandan calls this a new kind of modernism with a revolutionary political strain. It can also be called the 20th Century avant-garde. Satchidanandan for his part does not quite approve of the categorization of poets into high modernist and avant-garde, as poets, particularly in the Indian situation, often cross the boundary between them.

Among Satchidanandan's best known poems of this phase are "Fever," "The Miner of Dhanbad," and "The Beggar of Konark." In the first poem is the child laid up with fever; set against this microcosm is a fever which engulfs "men, trees, rivers, all"–a universal sickness afflicting all matter, living and inanimate, all the way round the globe from Chile to Japan and all the way down the centuries from the Buddha and Christ to the present day. The political reference is unspoken but clear. In the second poem, there are, on the one hand, "the acid and the dust / gathering the form of death" in the miner's lungs, and on the other hand, the passing train which, even as it crushes under its wheels his and his forefathers' dreams, has its headlight, a single burning staring eye resembling a sunrise—hope blazing above the darkness of despair and pain. And in "The Beggar of Konark" is a feeble deformed destitute amidst the famed timeless sculptures—the lion, the elephant, the warhorse, the peacock—of the temple of the sun. All three poems are structured around a pair of opposites each, imaging the deprivations and disparities of human society.

The selection includes three poems written during the Emergency years. The well known "The Tree of Tongues" is a bitter denunciation of censorship and in order to elude the censor's blue pencil and scissors, has recourse to the opaque language of symbols. The poem is a medley of folk tale, parable and ballad. The English version, done by Ayyappa Paniker and Perry, is a triumph of translation, capturing the directness and vigour of folk narrative and some of the lilt and swing of ballad rhythm:

> The good goddess, the mother of all
> She cut off the tongues, all through the hall
> In the grove there went a thrill
> For the lord of the mouthless hill.
> When the plague spreads every where
> In the bathrooms, in the hall way
> When the mother of all, the good goddess
> got all the tongues cut off,
> One of the tongues put out a sprout;

It grew long, and long it grew.
From the bottom rock
A tap root did sprout.
The tender leaf, the slender leaf
Like Unniyarcha's rolled up sword,
The little leaf, the fluffy leaf
Like the shield of Kannappan,
The third leaf, a green leaf
Like the hand of Karimpandi,
The fourth leaf, a spotted leaf
Like the hood of the serpent King
The fifth leaf the top leaf
Like the heart of the sungod,
Fold after fold of crimson leaves
Like tongues dripping with blood.

The poem "Non-Commitment" is aimed at the fence-sitters of the Emergency period and is as unsparing as Wilfred Owen's "Insensibility." It ends with a highly significant allusion to the two moments of "neutrality," respectively sought and imagined by Arjuna who declined first to fight and Pontius Pilate who washed his hands:

If non-commitment is the black flower
the sceptic saw in the battlefield,
I prefer the haste of the charioteer.
If non-commitment is the red hand the judge washes,
I prefer the bleeding Friday of the Man on the Cross.

Although neat periodization can at times be suspect, it is true, if only at a high level of generality, that while the sixties are associated with high modernism, and the seventies with revolutionary modernism, the eighties can be said to have witnessed the rise and dominance of "nativist modernism," to be carefully distinguished from postmodernism which has been contemporaneous with it. Satchidanandan's poetry, following the contours of the shift, turned to the kind of discourse that

foregrounds the history, culture and landscape that define Kerala. The present selection, however, exhibits the continuing cosmopolitanism of Satchidanandan's concerns, and the themes of the eighties' poems range from Kim Chi-Hai to Salvador Dali, and from Punjab to Moscow, Sarajevo, Rome and Frankfurt. Only a very few poems, I think, have explicit reference to Kerala: "The Tree of Tongues" with its invocation of Thiruvarangan and Thirunavaya; "The Tree of Justice" which is about the Rajan case; "The Empty Room;" and "Ezhimala" which tells of a mountain facing occupation by the Navy. Merely looking at names and the declared themes is a superficial approach, and I am sure that readers who are on the right wave-length can sense the way Satchidanandan's poetry of the eighties and since touches at countless points the unique civilisation that we call Kerala. In fact, Satchidanandan has written several poems on Kerala's folk heroes, on Malayalam poets, and on Kerala's haunting landscape. But these are culture-specific in a more intimate way than this overworked word would indicate. Their "tentacular roots" reach down to the recesses of Kerala's racial memory; and the semantic nuances of the Malayalam lexis and the native cadences of Malayalam verse are so much part of them that they can be said to be beyond translation. The translator, even when he happens to be the poet himself, can only try to recover what the text has appropriated from sources outside the culture and the material of a lower degree of consistency that has passed through the finely meshed texture of the poem. The present selection has–I think, wisely–left the nativist corpus largely alone.

An obsession with phases and categories can blunt our perception of an identity that persists in Satchidanandan's work through its successive changes and multiple guises. It is significant that the earliest poem in the selection, as we noted, presents five suns of different colours; in a middle-period poem, "When the Poet Died," the poet's body is covered with a white flag, a green flag, a blue flag and a red flag; and one of the last poems, "The Star of the Infidel," speaks of five stars–the blue one, the red one, the black

one, the yellow one and the green one. This is but one of the countless recurrences signalling the remarkable continuity which makes Satchidanandan's voice in the nineties indistinguishable from what it had been in the sixties—an idiom which, despite the evangelical intent that reigns, scorns transparency and is energized by vivid, throbbing, if at times over-emphatic, imagery and which, because of the missing tenors and the hiatuses and indeterminacies, is able to support a high level of intensity. Iterative images of blood, rain, death, despair and angst dominate the text. The resemblance to Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry cannot be missed, despite the important differences—"The Beggar of Konark" could be mistaken for a section in *Relationship*, and not solely because of the common location. Satchidanandan's utterance is fired by a revolutionary ardour and a faith in human perfectibility that hold their own in the age of the market when competition, profitability and consumption are all that matters and those who shall be more equal than others shall wait patiently for the benefits of growth to trickle down. It is, however, the spiritual rather than the material destiny of humankind that Satchidanandan contemplates with an abundance of faith that belies his obsessive concern with the forces of darkness and extinction. In his series on the saint poets, he has been, as he puts it, 'almost naturally striving towards a counter-hegemonic spirituality that rejects all man-made differences and dreams of an egalitarian society where there are no human masters.' One does not know which to salute with greater admiration; this unconquerable passionate utopianism, or the savage irony which can stand the great parables and symbols of religion on their heads. The apocalyptic vision, "The Holocaust," (very ably translated by E.V.Ramakrishnan) which twists the myth of Genesis into its opposite, must be one of the most powerful statements in modern Indian poetry.

AYYAPPA PANIKER

Lakshmi Holmström, *Silappadikaram, Manimekalai.* Madras: Orient Longman, 1996. pp.182. Rs.575.

> Let us praise Puhar, Our beautiful Puhar.
> For its fame is entwined always
> With the glorious lineage of its Kings
> And spreads to the sea-fences of this earth.

That beautiful Puhar (Kaverippoompattanam) is no longer there on the shore of the Bay of Bengal, but it is well preserved in the exciting *kadais* of two magnificent tales. The twin epics of ancient Tamil--*Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*--are the most important long narratives in the Dravidian tradition. Coming in the wake of the Sangam classics, they exemplify an epic structure and design, different from the North-Indian (Sanskrit) and the European (Graeco-Roman) models, yet neglected by Indian as well as Western scholars, barring a few significant exceptions. There is no mention of these major texts or even the Sangam anthologies in *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol.I, ed. Ainslie T. Embree (Columbia Univ. Press and Penguin, 1958, 1988). Excessive attention paid to Sanskrit sources has led to the near-total neglect of the non-Sanskrit part of the Indian heritage. And this, inspite of the fact that *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai* are steeped in Buddhist and Jain philosophy, though written in Tamil against South Indian locales.

A right kind of corrective to this sorry state of present-day scholarship is provided by Lakshmi Holmström's retelling of the two epics from old Tamil into contemporary English. There have been earlier translations, more authentic and complete perhaps: *The Shilappadikaram: The Ankle Bracelet* by Alain Danielou, *The Anklet Story* by Ka. Na. Subrahmanyam, *Cilappatikaram* by V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *Manimekalai* by P. Pandian, and *The Tale of an Anklet: An Epic of South India* by R. Parthasarathy immediately spring to mind. Lakshmi Holmström's retelling addresses itself to a long-felt need for a readable, layman's version,

free from the heavy shackles of abstruse scholarship, written in contemporary English prose, and yet making the literary and ethical aspects relevant and meaningful to the average modern reader not yet initiated into ancient Tamil culture. Orient Longman has done well to bring out these redactions within the same covers, since the two texts go together. The printing and format make it appear that the book is meant for young readers, although there is no attempt to play down the moral and psychological concerns as if the work is meant exclusively for the entertainment of the young. The map and the illustrations by A. V. Ilango enhance the value of the book in visual terms, but the strong point of the two epics in this version is the profound simplicity of the narration. Every episode is selected and retold in a style that has the quality of clarity–*prasadaguna* as Anandavardhana calls it. The narrative smoothly moves forward, and even in *Manimekalai*, where the plot is a little involuted with so many disguises, the story line is kept well under control. *Silappadikaram* is dramatically unfolded in eight crisp chapters, and *Manimekalai* in twenty-two chapters, taking nearly the same space as the other. The "Interlude" and the "Afterword" help to link the two grand narratives and carry minimal information about Ilango, the author of *Silappadikaram*, and Sattanar, the author of *Manimekalai*. The "Afterword" contains some critical comments on the two stories so beautifully interlinked, which gives the readers of the translation a closeness to the original, and which is relevant, necessary and useful in a composite work like this. Within the limited space at her disposal, Lakshmi Holmström has tried to project the more profound aspects of the narrative. Young readers will find sufficient entertainment in reading these condensed versions, but they will also confront a few important studies of human character, namely Kannagi, Kovalan, Madhavi and Kavundi, truly archetypal roles in the first epic; and Manimekalai, Udayakumaran, Madhavi and Aravana Adigal, in the second. Of the two, *Silappadikaram* is more literary in spirit, more dramatic in structure, and more aesthetic in appeal, while *Manimekalai* is more edifying, more didactic and less poetic.

The translation (?) incidentally brings out the distinction between the two poets, who are said to have been contemporaries and friends. Both works highlight the social background too, without deviating from the main narrative channel. The folk elements are as far as possible retained in the translation, which, inspite of a handful of misprints, holds the attention of the reader, ringing the changes of feelings in the characters. There is ample justification for presenting the two texts side by side: the similarities and differences are brought home to the reader in clear focus. Most translators confine themselves to either of the two, but Lakshmi Holmström may be congratulated for getting the parallel narratives bound together. This will help the readers understand the nature of the Dravidian epic as a distinct genre--different in structure, design and tone from *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* or *Iliad* or *Beowulf*. This, I believe, is essential reading for all Indians as well as foreign readers interested not only in India's past but also in the essentials of South Indian poetics.

K. CHELLAPPAN

A. K. RAMANUJAN: THE TRANSLATOR - CREATOR

Every good translator is a creator, or at least a co-creator, just as every creative artist is a co-creator of the cosmos through imagination. In another sense also there is a parallel between the translator-creator and the creator-translator. Just as a translator translates a text from one language to another, every creative artist is seeking a symbolic language for a half known 'idea' or 'vision', and in creation there is a translation from the inner to the other language. To quote Jean Paris:

> And I do think that a poet is at first a translator, the translator of an unknown world to which he gives tangible form, a sensitive expression. But it is clear that if we cease to mistake the poem for the secret order it more or less translates successfully, the translator finds himself in a similar position, and becomes the co-creator of the work of art, as the artist is the co-creator of reality (Paris 62).

In the case of A. K. Ramanujan, this creative collaboration between the creator and the translator was very strong–more than in most translators or creative artists. In fact, this link between creativity and translation is central to the achievement of A. K. Ramanujan, and I propose to highlight only this aspect of his work in this essay.

A. K. Ramanujan's translations include the translations into English of ancient Sangam classics such as *Kurunthokai*; medieval devotional lyrics in Tamil and Kannada, such as the poems of Nammalvar and the writings of the Virasaivites of Kannada; and Ananthamurthy's *Samaskara.* Of these, his translations of Sangam poetry as well as Kannada, Saivaite poetry show a close kinship with his poetry in English. In fact, his translations of Sangam poems look very much like modern poems embodying an ancient culture.

Let us look at the translation of a well-known poem.

> What could my mother be
> to yours? What kin is my father
> to yours anyway? And how
> did you and I meet ever?
> But in love our hearts are as red
> earth and pouring rain:
> mingled
> beyond parting. (Dimock 171)

If we compare the translation with the original poem (Kuruntokai 40), we can see how Ramanujan has almost transcreated the original into English. The poem speaks of the union of two lovers, whose parents were unknown to each other, as the lovers themselves had not known each other. But in a sudden upsurge of love, they become one as inseparable as the rain pouring on the brown earth. The original uses simple rhyming words as *Yāy/nāy*, *entai/nuntai*, *cempulam/anputai nencam*. The rhymes signify affinity with difference and in the last but one line the rhyme in *cempulam/anputai nencam* reinforces the union of the different selves into one. Of course, the translation does not maintain the rhyme but the rhythm is close to the original. But more important is the image. The Tamil phrase, *Cempulappeyal nir* (*cempulam* + *peyal nir*) is a wonderful compound in which *cempulam* + *peyal nir* is richly ambiguous. It may mean the water poured on brown earth, or the brown earth-poured water. The absence of particle of location after *cempulam* is significant because the emphasis is not on water pouring on brown earth but the compound water-earth. Again, the red/brown may modify both water and earth. Ramanujan gets the idea of oneness in twoness, and the meanings compressed in the original are analysed and recast in the translation, and the rhythm and the splitting of words in the second part recreate the idea:

> But in love our hearts are as red
> earth and pouring rain:
> mingled
> beyond parting.

But whereas in the original Sangam poem what is more important is compression and synthesis, A. K. Ramanujan creatively analyses and recreates the whole. Mukarovsky said that the function of literary form is to "creatively deform" the usual, the normal (Hawkes 62). And in good translation, there is a creative decomposition and recomposition of the original, and recovery of the archetypal that underlies the original text.

We find a similar recreation in the following poem:

Bless you, earth,

field,
forest,
valley,
or hill,

you are only
as good
as the good young men
In each place. (*Poems of love and War* 159)

If we compare it with the original poem (Puranāṇūru 187) of Auvaiyār, entitled "Natakonra", what is significant and striking in the translation is the foregrounding of the words denoting the variety of land, such as 'field', each in one line (whereas in the original they are put in two lines). But the separation is creative as it focuses on the uniqueness of each area, and this technique, though modern, conveys the spirit of the ancient poem. In the second part also there is the separation of the land and the people who live there, and the word 'good', occurring in both the contexts, links the two. What the translation shows is an ability to create a modern equivalent of an ancient poem, without destroying its spirit in any way.

The essence of Sangam poetry is in its understatement as well as its use of sculpturesque images. Every poem enacts an instantaneous flash into reality, by creating an interior landscape in which the mind of nature becomes coextensive with the nature of the mind of the speaker. Ramanujan catches the very spirit of an Aintinai poem:

O crab with crooked legs
I ask you please
do not efface the wheel-tracks
of my lord's chariot,
he is the lord of the seashore;
please
let me look at the trace
of his wheel's designs. (Dimock 180)

The translation is as literal and descriptive as the original, but it is also suggestive and packed with irony like the original. The crabs are said to have crooked legs as they can efface the wheel tracks of her lord's chariot. The poem is, and is not, about the seashore. It is the separation on a sea shore or the sea as separation.

Another poem translated by him also conveys pathos in a very subtle way:

My mother asked me
why I wept.
I told her
the waves have washed away my doll
and my house of sand. (Dimock 180)

The simplicity and brevity of the translation match those of the original. The phrase "house of sand" is very effective because the very literal description is suggestive and symbolic. This creative fusion of the literal and the symbolic of the abstract and the concrete is effectively brought out in the translation. And that is why this is a translation of not only a few words, but of a culture.

Finally, let us compare his translation of a poem (*Kuruntokai* 47) having *iraicci* or 'metonymous metaphor' (*Poems of Love and War* 247) with the translation by G. L. Hart of the same piece. A. K. Ramanujan translates the poem as follows:

O long white moonlight
You do him no good at all
as he comes stealing
through the night in the forest

where the black-stemmed *vēnkai*
drops its flowers
on the round stones
and makes them look
like tiger cubs
in the half-light! (Dimock 176)

G. L. Hart translates it thus:

Flowers have fallen from black-stalked venkai trees
onto round stones
so they seem tiger cubs in the forest
where he comes at night
to do what he should not. (Hart 58,i-v)

Again, Ramanujan's translation is more analytical, but at the same time more suggestive and closer to the spirit of the original, whereas Hart's translation, though more condensed, is less suggestive. The last two lines particularly

where he comes at night
to do what he should not

are very prohibitive in content, and that is because he is not aware of the semiotics and conventions of the Sangam poetry.

There is a close parallel between Ramanujan's effort to recreate his past in his translations and to create a poetic self in relation to the past in his poetry. But whereas in his translations an ancient culture is recreated in an idiom which is both alien and personal, in his poetry he tries to relate and also to reinterpret both his cultural and personal past and his present, and vice versa again, in the same idiom. But the temporal journey is also a spatial journey.

Like Arnold, he too is torn between two worlds, the Eastern and Western. In his poetry there is not only temporal translation of the past into the present, but a spatial translation of the Indian landscape in the American poems, and an American flavour in his Indian poems.

Similarly we can also see in some of his poems an Indian sensibility encountering the American milieu, and sometimes the reverse: the Indian experience being reinterpreted through the Western idiom. And this cultural and linguistic counterpointing leads to 'a precision of words' in his poetry.

A. K. Ramanujan on his poetic voyage in his 'relations' becomes a travelling poet standing midway between America and India spatially, culturally and linguistically too. In the poem, "Poona Train Window" (*Collected Poems* 80-81), Ramanujan sends us happily away from Poona, with an acute and precise observation of the landscape and inhabitants of Poona, images and words and even clichés converted into genuine metaphors through encounter and existential rediscovery. Proceeding with active verbs like 'I see', and 'I drink', the poet is able to crystallise the whole effect (with the abstract verb 'I think') of the thought in the last lines:

I see a man

between two rocks.
I think of the symmetry

of human buttocks.

Sewn upon the fabric of a kind of a visualisation, 'I see', the traveller 'drank' the 'Indian Language' and is now suddenly sick of it.

The tea
darkens like a sick
traveller's urine.

The cold tea sets the image of time in motion and the poet now no more can 'see' or 'drink' but has to 'think' of the man between the rocks and the 'symmetry of human buttocks'.

The journey of the Indian becomes a continuum in which the perceiving mind is bent on reading the Indian landscape as a foreigner would read it.

In Ramanujan's poetry presence signifies an absence, and the self becomes the other so that one can come to grips with the deeper self. The poem is designed in a simple fashion and phrases like 'a rush of whole children', and 'white hair in a red turban' supply the characteristic Indian essence to the poem. The scenery is quite Indian, as that of one of the three women,

> with baskets . . .
> balancing
> between the slope and
> the basket on the head
> a late pregnancy.
> Buffaloes swatting flies
> with their tails.

and the syntax and vocabulary also enact this Indianness. But in the final phase, there is a significant change. The landscape is also interiorised when the poet refers to "Six gulls sitting still". The concrete and noisy landscape mellows into a meditative stillness, the gulls providing an image of the mind in its still serenity. Thematically, we find an Indian sensibility coming to terms with its own land, though there is also a sickness of the alien. The imagery of the tea darkening like a sick traveller's urine suggests the alien experience, but that is counterpoised by the Indian image of "Six gulls sitting still". Stylistically too we see the synthesis in the choice of words like 'urine' on the one hand and 'still' and 'gulls' on the other. At the deeper level we may see the pattern of Sangam poems where the landscape provides an image for the mind, but there used to portray a modern consciousness. The final juxtaposition of 'see' and 'think' also shows the evolution from the concrete to the abstract, and the speaker's reference to

I see a man

between two rocks

could very well stand for the traveller-poet on the cultural cross-roads.

The Indian landscape, more specifically, the 'Chameleon emerald wilderness' of Kerala, is transplanted in the American poem, "Love Poem for a Wife, 1". Brilliant memories crowd his thoughts, and to get over the nostalgia, he has to go

> ...back again in the albums
> of family rumours, in brothers'
> anecdotes of how noisily
> father bathed,
>
> slapping soap on his back . . . . (*Collected Poems* 65)

The lines are a retrospective photoflash, bringing alive the "picture of a father in a turban", and the Indian milieu finds its completion in the homely lines

> mother standing on her bare
> splayed feet, silver rings
> on her second toes . . . . (*Collected Poems* 65)

This is similar to the ultimate portrayal of the mother in "Of mothers, among other things"

> . . . when I see her four
> still sensible fingers slowly flex
> to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor.
> (*Collected Poems* 61)

In all these intimate portrayals the vocabulary is touchingly Indian. And the Indianness can also be seen in "Love Poem for a Wife" in large constructions like "father's father's house", "bathroom was in the backyard" and the last stanza of the poem where he culturally exploits the tradition of the living past:

betroth us before birth,
forestalling separate horoscopes
and mothers' first periods,
and wed us in the oral cradle
and carry marriage back into
the namelessness of childhoods.
(*Collected Poems* 67)

But again what matters is not their exclusive Indianness, but how they get integrated with the pictures from the other world, just as

. . . the two of you
got down to the floor to draw
blueprints of a house from memory
on everything, from newspaper
to the backs of envelops
and road-maps of the United States
that happened

to flap in the other room
in a midnight wind. . . . (*Collected Poems* 67)

Some of Ramanujan's word combinations and phrases in this poem are also interesting from this point of view. Similarly, when he speaks of

mother's mouth
working red over betel leaf (*Collected Poems* 93)

in "Any Cow's Horn Can Do It", we find an instance of a recalcitrant Indian experience forged into a powerful image. That is done by the synthesis in the verb phrase "working red", which could be simple translation of an Indian idiom. But here it extends the richness of meaning by ambiguity: 'working' could be taken both transitively and intransitively, and 'red' also both as a complement and an adverb. And this doubleness leads to a real enhancement of significance.

In his 'translation' of time between past and present, Ramanujan is not simply content with the *recall* of the past. The

past also *alters* its meaning in relation to the present as in "History", in which the little dark aunt's search for something–maybe a rolling pin–is later revealed as part of their attempt to pick the ornaments from their dying mother's body (*Collected Poems* 107). In "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing", there is a growth in meaning when the woman protagonist in the poem recalls how

> When she was four or five
> she sat on a village swing
> and her cousin, six or seven,
> sat himself against her;
> with every lunge of the swing
> she felt him
> in the lunging pits
> of her feeling . . . . (*Collected Poems* 19)

The Poem comments: "Now she looks for the swing/ in cities with fifteen suburbs/ and tries to be innocent/ about it".

That there is no romanticization of the past in A. K. Ramanujan can be seen in "Breaded Fish", in his memories of childhood and the dead body of a woman "on the beach in a yard of cloth, / dry, rolled by the ebb, breaded/ by the grained indifference of sand". And this scene from the past is evoked when his wife prepares some breaded fish specially for him (*Collected Poems* 7). The juxtaposition is significant as there is the altering of meaning of the present with the past, and the past getting illuminated in the light of the present. Here we can see the Sangam technique of metonymy becoming metaphor.

Though some of his memories show an attempt to liberate himself from the past, the past keeps intruding into the present. But in "Still Another for Mother", as in Eliot, time past also becomes time future:

> something opened
> in the past and I heard something shut
> in the future, quietly,

like the heavy door
of my mother's black-pillared, nineteenth-century
silent house, given on her marriage day
to my father, for a dowry. (*Collected Poems* 16)

The "heavy door" becomes an objective correlative to a complex relationship between the past and the present, as well as between the father and the mother, and the syntactic pattern and rhythm enact the zigzag relationship. The use of one physical image for a world of associations is also reminiscent of Sangam poetry.

This kind of complex relationship also exists between his cultural past and present. For example, his "A River", to quote Bruce King, "is about truth, the reality of the river and kinds of relations between the present and the past"(King 210). The river symbolises a continuity of myth and reality, and the conflict between the two, between the poetic river and the real river, though the river has water enough to seem poetic only once a year. The term is poetic, but in an ironic sense, and then the flood destroys so many things about which poetry is silent. The new poets still mention the old poets but no one mentions how

it carries away
in the first half-hour
three village houses,
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins
with no moles on their bodies,
with different-coloured diapers

to tell them apart. (*Collected Poems* 39)

A complex relationship between the past and the present is pivotal to his poetry. According to Parthasarathy,

> Ramanujan's repossession, through his poetry, of the past of his family and of his sense of himself as a distillation of that past is to me a signal achievement (Parthasarathy 193).

But Bruce King seems to be closer to the complex process which takes place in A. K. Ramanujan. In his analysis of Ramanujan's poem "Self Portrait" (*Collected Poems* 23), King points out that the poet is as complex as the tradition that impinges upon him:

> . . . he is . . . a stranger to himself. As there is no fixed, essential being, rooted in an unchanging 'namelessness of childhoods', so there is no pure existential product of personal choice. The core of the essential self remains as an inner world, but this is modified by changed circumstances and decisions. The essential self develops, evolves, changes; it grows from seeds in the past towards a future which while unknowable is already being formed (King 215).

The contrast between the changing self and a changing centre signifies a still centre of the poem itself as a symbol. To quote King again, in poems such as "Still life" (*Collected Poems* 12),

> spacing and line breaks are important, to produce a self-contained artifice in contrast to the changing stream of time and memories of the past which are their subject. The poem itself becomes the stability, the fixed point in contrast to the self, its anxieties, other persons, India or the past (King 219).

Ramanujan's poetry thus enacts a synthesis out of a conflict between the self and the other, between the East and the West, between the past and the present. This synthesis is further enacted in his wrestle with English. While searching for one's roots in an alien language might appear to be a paradox, an honest struggle can convert that conflict itself into creativity, and that is what is achieved in most of his poems. Whereas most critics agree that Ramanujan's bifocal vision or ironic mode is a positive gain for the poet, as there is a real interpretation of two cultures, there is,

nevertheless, no unanimity on the final achievement of poems such as "Prayers to Lord Murugan" (sometimes called Ramanujan's "Ash Wednesday"), in which the ancient Indian past of the Hindu mind collides with his present, as he tries to reincarnate the Dravidian God Murugan in contemporary ironic idiom (*Collected Poems* 113-117). He says,

> Unlike other gods
> you found work
> for every face,
> and made
> eyes at only one
> woman.

Then from the personal, he moves to the petty:

> give us
> a hand
>
> in our fight
> with the fruit fly.

The poem moves swiftly swaying backward and forward between man's achievement and failure. And the impersonal synopsis of man's importance finds its drive in the lines

> Lord of the twelve right hands
> why are we your mirror men
> with the two left hands
>
> capable only of casting
> reflections?

The poem has not only absorbed the potentials of the overall pattern and the syntactic structures of Christian hymn, but has also included in its perspective

> the peacocks we sent in the Bible
> to Solomon . . . .

and we find a virtual reincarnation of Murugan in the Western idiom. The paradoxes as in

Lord of lost travellers,
find us

and juxtapositions such as

Lord
of faces,

find us the face

are reminiscent of Eliot's poem. There is a verbal echo of Eliot's

Teach us to care
and not to care

in Ramanujan's

Lord of solutions,
teach us to dissolve
and not to drown.

Here there is superficial opposition of 'dissolve' and 'drown' whereas in Eliot 'care' is used in really two opposite senses. The pun implied in 'solutions', 'dissolve' and 'drown' adds to the absurdity of a really grave situation.

One cannot deny that Ramanujan achieves a strange synthesis of the Indian myth with the Eliotean irony and we cannot expect the exact Eliotean tone in Ramanujan's poems. After all, Ramanujan seems to be doing two kinds of translation–translating Eliot into his situations and translating Murugan into the Eliotean frame work. Possibly, Ramanujan is more self conscious in this poem and hence there is more artifice in it.

Finally, a comparison of this poem with his translation of the Muruga poem by Nakkīraṉār from *Tirumurukārṟuppatai* will be illuminating. The translation follows:

his hands large
as drumheads
hold gently
several soft-shouldered
fawnlike women;

he gives them proper places
and he dances
on the hills:

and all such things happen
because
of His being
there.

And not only there. (*Poems of Love and War* 228)

In both the poems, he is only translating, but strangely, the translation seems to be more creative than the original he wrote– probably and paradoxically because here he is more a translator than a creator. But as S. Krishnan puts it,

> There was no problem in his mind about the different intellectual activities he was engaged in because all of them in one sense or another were translations: "to translate is to carry across", and not merely from one language to another, but from one mode of thinking to another (Krishnan xvii).

It is this continuum from translation to creation and vice versa that we would like to emphasise in Ramanujan's works. Translation and creation are not compartmentalised in different poems. The translator-creator collaboration is there in every line he created as well as every line he translated. It is this creative collaboration between the two faculties that gives a unique flavour to Ramanujan's translation-creations and creative translations.

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References are to page numbers