

Srijato BANDYOPADHYAY
POEMS

From the collection '*Uranta Sawb Jokar*'

Mama, papa and me

A

I never visited the sea nor ever
did I travel the hills with my parents,
not the zoo gardens or the book fair.
I only returned home and
changed in my room and realized
that every day, my parents
moved away from each other and
allowed me to traverse on.

B

When on some nights gravity seems inactive
in my nook I float
on the road when it is late, street dogs,
cats, rickshaws float by my side,
somehow I open the door and enter the house,
surprised by the floating utensils when all
edibles are left on the floor, and right along me
my mama is floating in my father's lap,
no hassle, no disgust, as if I am yet to
be born ...only the fragrance of peace
and joy filling in the whole house...
I too float into a corner of the kitchen
In shy pleasure and slowly fall asleep,
until everything settles into normal, until
they quarrel, waking me up.

[...]

D

Papa was once a good friend of mine
and mama was that friend's better-half.
Then, as it happens naturally,
a friend becomes distant
and his wife closer.

Thus father now often sits idly on the steps,
with his hand under his chin,
and I and mama speak, watch television,
sleep together.

E

The newspapers are closed,
TV channels closed,
institutions are closed

Only my home is open. I get in.
On the ground floor mama in her musical air,
she is a prophet there.
I pretend to sleep in my room.
At the close of night, almost at dawn,
I bite the throat of the sleeping mama in the next room.

No song. Fresh, hot blood.

And, unable to get through, locked out for ten years now,
Papa waits a few yards off, aloof, a cup in hand.

F

An urge to push is there within my parents.
They blink throughout the day, slumber cornered.
Concerned with milk and fish soup when awake,

shouting at each other in ever louder voice,
Even pouncing at each other once or twice.
How long is this to be borne? I think of hauling them
off on my way to the market, grabbing their necks.
Let them feel the fun!
Then I think, they aren't actually cats, my parents,
They might fail to find their way back.

G

My father was refused when he proposed to my mama,
and took refuge to the sea shore – to Puri.

There, he drank a lot alongside his fried fish,
When, with her huge coiffure and big eyes,
on her way back from college,
my mama lamented not having said 'yes.'

This year I was in Puri and wished to search
for that wrecked papa of mine, and bring him back besides the mama of, say,
25 years ago. But the locals exclaimed that in the past thirty years the sea has receded,
and nothing like that can now be arranged.

H

One day, maybe I was asleep and papa not at home,
Mama's ex visited our place, looked at me and asked –
'in which class?'

Another day, maybe I was asleep and mama was away,
papa's ex visited and exclaimed – 'looks exactly like you.'

Years flew away, I woke up
Yearning for those two exes.

Have the two ever met?
Loved each other?
Maybe they coupled in some suburban shack.

Could I now be part of their family?

I

Staying abreast in life, I carry my parents on my shoulders
passing wedding parties, traffic signals, service commissions,
wakes.

I falter, bleed, but never lose my senses.

There on my left, mama is singing her light classics. And on my right
Papa is watching TV – an action thriller.

And yes! It is me who stands on the shoulders
of such overwhelmed parents.

I, who do not care for a good job, or poetic fame, never bother about love or its tragedy,
only wait for a picture of this earth's final day.

*

From the collection 'Uranta Sawb Jokar'

From this side of the sea

Anonymous. Age--68 years. Occupation--fishing.
Cataract on one eye. Wife--passed away last year.
Son--missing.

The cough has gotten worse since morning. Incessant rain.
Perhaps it won't be possible to go out fishing.
In that case – starvation.
Sitting numb on the shore, hands on cheeks.

How strange, this gentleman is not aware that right on the
other side of the sea, we, a bunch of eight boys and girls,
have come to be his supporters.

*

Nothing can be changed

Nothing can be changed by writing two poems, brothers
chaa – aa – aa – aa
the microphone has stopped working
switch over to the next microphone.

Nothing can be changed by writing two poems, brothers
chaa – aa – aa – aa
the microphone has stopped working
switch over to the next microphone.

Nothing can be changed by writing two poems, brothers
chaa – aa – aa – aa
the microphone has stopped working
switch over to the next microphone.

Translated from the Bengali by Binayak Bandyopadhyay

*

From the collection 'Chhotoder Chiriakhana'

Those who can no longer cry

Those who can no longer cry
become ridiculed by others
and no-one believes them.

It is asked, 'if it's true, then why is there no tear?', it is demanded 'demonstrate or bring in testimonials to be believed.' On this vast earth, in all lanes, and the small rooms near them, people with no tears in their eyes feel how urgent proof is. It seems that one day they will stop, and gather together. In the middle of a forest, they will play with broken glass, old records and eye glass frames – there shall be no value to tears.

*

The ocean bath

No- one looks for a new island, a drowned ship, a shining sunbeam
inside the deep, or in a mermaid. Everyone thinks of going back to the hotel.
Keys to the manager, board the train, the public bus, a public car.
But before all this, everyone takes an ocean bath.

Only the ocean knows the bath is a plea. Someone sneezes, someone spits and another, with secret pleasure, pees. The unpaid-for humiliations are digested and paid for, with a vengeance, by the ocean in one hour of bathing. They return to the city. The ocean, protesting in vain against billions, lies dumb, and from a satellite view we see the earth, a future planet, bearing land on its 1/4th, the remaining 3/4^{ths} being diluted humiliation.

*

Tiger

I know, once upon a time this whole place was full of tiger smell,
Aroma from their bodies, smelly breath, the stench of their gait – all these.

Then, one by one, human habitats appeared. Deforestation gave birth to human shelter, we came here to live.

Gradually the smell of tiger was replaced by other smells. Smells of mouths full of toothpaste, the smell of talc and soap on bodies. Perfumes and deodorants smell from groins and armpits, smellblends filled our lives. Having gotten used to and bored with these, I gave up on toothpaste, perfume and deodorant. Even, gradually on brushing teeth, taking baths and wearing clothes. What a surprise! From my mouth, my body and my gait wafts the aroma of tiger.

*

Playing the game of telling lies

Playing the game of telling
lies and telling you not to play
yet a couple of doubts hover
in my mind around one or two questions.

Looking at a few signs
her eyes come to know me thoroughly from above
the dream of my lie is burnt flesh
when the past is wrapped up inside the jeans

In the wrong direction, willingly, every evening,
strange, as if the road were not known,
the beloved is blessed by always waiting,
digesting lies is his destiny

Still, every day he is your faithful,
comes to swallow the lies and
hopes you will give him time
to learn to speak untruth.

*

From the collection 'Katiushar Gawlpo'

Page No. 58

It's a drudgery that the day
daily caresses the evening.
Some hurry home, others
gossip, play, wine, club.

Cars are pouring down in street
There's a signal in every crossing
cabs are thronging like worms.
Green light – again they speed.

It is not easy to tell from far away
which one has no breaks

*

Page No. 51

The light was unbearable,
A burning feeling in the eyes.
Then, huge waste pits, broken bottle-glass,
A/C payee cheque, wings of spacecraft, window grills,
Watches watching night, random laughter – pierced my retina –
Blind!

Now the light cannot bear my look.

*

Page No. 29

My poem got laid under an afternoon-tree

My eyes closed
Awakened I didn't find it

Perhaps with the wind, with the fallen leaves
With airy news has it gone a far long way...

You too, I have heard, live far off
If you find it, tell it to come back soon.

I'm shedding my irritation.
May it return now that the anger is extinguished.

How to recognize it?

Clad in kurta-pants,
With a mark of proof cut into its left cheek.

*

Page No.34

Again the age of ice has come
Wherever I look I find stony ice
Frozen fog...piercing wind...
There's no one on earth
No, not quite. Beside me
A lone wolf is alive.
With faint steps it has come and sat in front of me
It gazes at me. I gaze at it.
Thousands of years pass by in the twinkling of an eye
Still nobody knows
Who will eat up whom.

*

Page No. 86

The sea, which the rickshaw puller has never seen
Glass alone quenches his thirst

No rider does he ever get to the sea
All get off before.

*

Page No.96

'Just ten minutes more'. 'I'll get back in ten minutes'.
'I'm almost there, bear with me for ten more minutes'. 'Wait ten minutes please'.
Bus-train-streets-office-theatres-place
Wherever whoever speaks over the phone
Will get back in ten minutes, he informs you.

Waiting on the other end of the line, he too perhaps
I assured by someone he'll be reached in ten minutes.
It seems
Any place on earth is now just ten minutes away from another.

*

Page No. 88

There's a man who can eat bulbs
He has gotten his name in Guinness.

In front of thousands in a studio
He has been brought to testify—
Ten or twelve bulbs on a plate, he starts eating.

First the glass, then the tungsten, even the base,
Crunching and munching and biting and sucking
All those twelve he gulps in one go.

Opening his mouth he then shows--
Not a speck of blood anywhere.

In interviews, in the morning, at noon and at night
He lets us know
How much he loves to eat bulbs.

There's a man who can eat bulbs
But he can't ever consume the light.

*

Page No. 46

They all are your men, I know

Still, I am mine.

*

From the collection 'Barshamangal'

The Rain Ballad

A lone guitar, a little road and it's raining.
Three kids being drenched busy in hail gathering
from split hills a breeze is flapping chill
a tourist in the room left forlorn,
with a tea cup, vacant but warm,
far-flung grief gets closer to the heart.
three kids being drenched gathering hail.
who cares about being drenched. Loose hail,
snowy smoke, a gesture of coming back,
way back, someone way back
halts in that scene - -
A lone road, bit of rain, and a drenched guitar.

Translated from the Bengali by Abani K. Banerjee
