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HOME FROM A DISTANCE

hindi poets in english translation

edited by girirajkiradoo&rahulsoni

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ARUN KAMAL

Translated by Giriraj Kiradoo & Rahul Soni

THIS IS THE TIME

This is the time
When the harvest is over
And there is still time to sow anew

The fields lie bare
The land is distracted, stunned by the sudden sun—
At intervals, shade from the hedge—
Fallen stumps gleam

The herd grazes at a distance
And molehills
And scattered sand around anthills

This is the time
When the old remains no more
And the new remains to come

INTO A NEW LOCALE

In these new settlements
Where a new house crops up every day
I often lose my way

Old landmarks betray me—
The gazing peepul,
The collapsed house,
The vacant plot where
I had to turn left,
And two houses on, a one-storey house
With an unpainted iron gate...

But I end up stumbling

To the house before or the one
Two houses after
Here, something gets built everyday
Something is removed everyday
Here, you cannot trust memory
The world becomes old in a day
As though it was spring when I left and now it is autumn
As though it was Vaisakh when I left and now it is Bhado

The only way out is to knock on every door
And ask—
Is this the house I am looking for?

I do not have much time
The sky is collapsing, it's about to rain

Is there someone I know, to see me from above
And call me in

A POET'S GRAVE

For Nazir Akbarabadi

There are no arches, no spheres
Just a grave jutting out from the sand
As if someone fell asleep lying here
As much sunlight falls on this grave, as much dew and rain
As on the rest of the earth
And there are two trees, berry and neem

Children, lambs and sparrows hop around all day
And by evening, the whole mohalla gathers here
Sellers of amulets and laddoos of sesame
A man with a dugdugi and his bear cub
And at night, a weary beggar who sleeps beside

Inside the grave, he listens to everything
The tremors from every footfall, the movements of insects,
The sound of every particle sinking in
And the stirring of kites in the sky

A part of celebration and mourning

It is merely a grave, a poet's grave
Where every spring brings fairs and fetes
And two trees, side by side, berry and neem

THE TALLEST ROOFTOP

The rooftop littered with dust, guano, feathers
At the top, after many storeys

You will reach it at the end of your breath
And then you will find that sunfilled roof
And you will feel for the first time
When there is no wind anywhere, there is still some here
The greying hair on your chest will quiver

At the top, after many storeys
There is silence
All the sounds of the earth have sunk
Except a movement of feet on the shore—
Look up
The sky stretched out on so many wings
The roiling air
The sun overhead
And below, water from a well

From here I can see
Courtyards, thresholds, corridors
Into kitchens even
But it is hard to recognize my own house
My own neighbourhood seems unfamiliar
Like the ruins of a lost civilization

With both hands on the parapet, I peer below
My head spins
Someone drags me down
With the hooks of a jhaggar
The air suddenly thin, my vessels bursting—
This body of clay cracking in the sun
All my blood could not give life to a dying bird
I will turn into hundreds of bed-bugs, drop by drop

Maybe this is how the end has to come
Turning back to the stairs, I am scared
Someone is hiding behind the door
When I try to go down, he will make his move—
Who will listen if call for help
This tallest roof on earth, my grave

Nobody lives on the last floor,
Full of fallen feathers,
It is where the house dies

A statue is immersed in a dry well
Air incubates life on earth

ASAD ZAIDI

Translated by Giriraj Kiradoo

1857: SEARCH FOR MATERIAL

the battles of 1857—
once so distant,
are now the battles ever so close

in this age of remorse and crime
when every mistake appears to be self-done
one can still hear
the trumpets of rebellion—
a pure Hindustani cacophony:
the murmuring of brokers and informants
and the restless moves of seat holders
ready to change loyalties—

perhaps this is an imprint of later novels
and popular cinema—

but this surely is not the cacophony
of those 150 crore rupees
that government of India has sanctioned
to celebrate the 'first war of independence'
penned by a prime minister
who is ashamed of all wars of freedom
and goes apologetic for that, around the globe
who is ready to sacrifice anything
for the national goal of a better servitude

It is the remembrance of that fifty-seven
which was wiped clean by a pan Indian elite
by Bankimchandras and Amichands and Harishchandras
and their descendants, placed comfortably on their seats
they too desired nothing
more than a better servitude

of that fifty-seven
for which
Moolshankars, Shivprasads, Narendranaths,
Ishwarchandras, Syyed Ahmeds, Pratapnarayans,
Maithilisharans and Ramchandras
had nothing but silence and disdain
and of that fifty-seven
which was remembered first in the elite canon of Hindi
by Subhadra
a good seventy-eighty years later

It is the remembrance of a continuum
made alive, 150 years later, by
the suiciding farmers and weavers of this land
whom it's difficult even to call rebellions
and who, in a sad, grey, anarchic parade
are marching from the Special Economic Zones
out to collective graves and cemeteries
swallowed on the way by the data
of National Development and National Hunger
Who has made them so lonely?
Dust and dirt was perhaps
common people's destiny in 1857—
accepted by all
but now
it's to be a terrible crime

Battles are often left unfinished
to be fought later—
in some other times
by some other means
And sometimes,
challenging the living—
who are perhaps more dead—
the dirty-dusty dead
themselves rise to resume the battle
They inquire about their platoons, battalions and commanders
or mistaking them as sympathizers
start telling that now they head to Nazafgarh
or ask which way leads to Bakhtavarpur?

The dead of 1857 say
forget our feudal leaders
forget the lost estates for which they were fighting -
if this is what we died for.

Speak of your own

is there no injustice in your times
or is it just that you don't know what to do about that?

ASHOK VAJPEYI

Translated by Rahul Soni

NEAR

Near the Stone was the Tree
Near the Tree was the Bush
Near the Bush was the Grass
Near the Grass was the Earth
Near the Earth was the High Cliff
Near the Cliff was the Fort's Tower
Near the Tower was the Sky
Near the Sky was the Void
Near the Void was the Cosmic Sound
Near the Sound was the Word
Near the Word was the Stone

Each was near the other
But Time was near none

FAR

Far from the Window was the Temple Wall
Far from the Wall was the Narrow Lane
Far from the Lane was the Water Source
Far from the Source was the Forest
Far from the Forest was the Settlement
Far from the Settlement was the Graveyard
Far from the Graveyard was the Garden
Far from the Garden was the School
Far from the School were Sins
Far from Sins was Poetry
Far from Poetry was Prayer
Far from Prayer was God
Far from God were Words
Far from Words was Absence

All were far
But close to Time—

DHOOMIL

Translated by Vinay Dharwadker

TWENTY YEARS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Twenty years later
I've got back those eyes
that have shown me the wilderness
for the first time:
a dense green flood

that has drowned all the trees,
where every word of caution and warning
has averted danger
and turned into a green eye.

Twenty years later
I ask myself the question,
"How much endurance does one need
to become an animal?"
and move forward silently
without an answer,
because the climate now is such
that it's almost dishonest
to chase after the little leaves
blowing about in the blood.

Already it's afternoon,
there are padlocks on the doors
on every side,
a violent incident's inscribed
in the language of the bullets
buried in the walls
and the shoes lying in the streets,
a cow has slopped its dung
on the map of India
flapping in the wind.

But this is not the time
to gauge a frightened people's shame,
or even to ask
whether the country's greatest misfortune
is the policeman or the saint.
This is not the time
to go back and put on the shoes
discarded in the streets—
twenty years later
and on this afternoon,
I pass like a thief
through the lifeless lanes
and ask myself the question,
"Is freedom merely the name
of three exhausted colours
dragged by a wheel,
or does it have some special
significance?"

And I move forward silently
without an answer.

LYING BESIDE THAT WOMAN

I felt for the first time
that nakedness
is a desperate measure
against going blind.

Lying beside that woman,
I felt that in the place
where candles and disgust
have proved to be useless,
and the shadows of melted words
have changed into the face
of some frightening animal,
my poems have survived
on a diet of darkness and mud and meat.

Bodies humping in bed
aren't enough
to scour and rub out time
when we find ourselves face to face
with the broken pots in the kitchen,
and the night isn't a road leading anywhere
as it carves up watermelons inside us
and our heads on the pillows
turn to stone.

Lying beside that woman,
I felt that home is made up
of a mockery of small conveniences,
a place where one isn't allowed
to walk around in one's shoes,
I felt that it's grass,
the grass of green fear,
that forces me to think this way,
I felt the comfort of thinking
that at this very moment
my neighbours have had
all their teeth knocked out,
that the wanton lust of their limbs
has withered away
like a bunch of pea-pods
bitten by frost,
that their healthy eyes
have been devoured by the walls.

Lying beside that woman
(when the bells of the fire-engines
have suddenly fallen silent
before the extinguished houses),
I've felt that discovering a jungle
on the edge of the panting quicksands
isn't a human habit
but simply our commonplace
helplessness,

that what's inside me
is a cowardly brain
which keeps me safe
and inherits my buttons.

A CHANT FOR PEACE

I've smoothed out the crinkles in the newspapers
and now I draw a new line of darkness
across the map of the world,
on the plateau of my future
I drain my swamp of self-abasement.
My fear grazes on me.
My true being flowers
in the armpit of the hatred next door.
To prove that I'm unarmed
in the suicidal solitude of my brain
I've killed all three of Gandhi's monkeys.
I fire the kiln of patriotism
and cast my cold muscles in foreign moulds,
before the atomic bomb explodes
I boil its scheme in the cup of argument.
I'm protected by the caution of prostitutes
and the cruelty of dangerous times.
I distribute rock-candy
and the extract of oregano seeds
among pregnant women.
I send young men to kill themselves
in the Department of Labour,
then use a sheet of paper
to cut the hard rock of Five-Year Plans.
I teach old men pride in the past
and children the idiom of thick-skinned resistance.
Having escaped the bloodshot cries of vultures' eyes
and the kinship of cold people,
the McMahan Line now sleeps next to a corpse,
while I shine the world's shoes
and its ambassadors of peace
with the polish of tradition.
I line my eyes with kohl

drawn from the walls of the womb
where culture makes its home.
I see that the treachery of right hands
has laid mine-fields across Asia.
In its four corners—north south east west—
Korea, Vietnam, Pakistan, Israel
and several other names
glisten like bloodstains.
But I've hung out my starving intestines in the wind
and I'm completely ethical
in enduring the putrefaction of my limbs.
I call the wolf my brother.
Foreign instigators of war
have repaired our freedom's broken-down machine
by sticking a dove's feather on it.
It has begun to circulate the air again.
I'm neither rope
nor armour
nor prosody,
I've been squeezed and crushed in the middle.
I'm shut tight on all four sides.
I know that these words can't fabricate
either a chair or a crutch.
My rage is a rotten log
on the flooded river of public opinion.
Like a rattle-drum at a monkey-show
beaten rhythmically
by the beaded tassels of London and New York,
my life is an English figure of 8.

POETRY

She knows that countless faces
have been stripped naked
behind the facade of words—
that murder is no longer
a matter of people's taste,
it has become a habit.
Born of a rustic's boredom,
she moved to the city with a literate man.

As she passed through the ritual
of praying for conception
even before she became a full-blown woman,
she learnt that love is a search
in densely populated neighbourhoods
for a home to rent.
Soaking continuously in the rain,
she learnt that every girl
becomes a highway hotel
after the third abortion—
and every poem
after the third reading.

No—it's pointless now
to look for any meaning there,
to look for meanings
in the secret codes of crafted style
and the hogwash of diction.
But, yes, if possible,
say to the man passing at your elbow—
here, here's your face,
it had fallen off
in the demonstration's wake.

At this point in time that's enough.

It was a long time ago
that a primal animality would scream
in a wilderness somewhere
and stun the whole city—

but now she understands
that poetry today
is merely the monologue, cut short,
of a man exploding in rage
at a sit-in strike.

TO BE HONEST WITH YOU

Orchards flutter in the wind
like pennants on split bamboo staves,
just as the names of the people killed
in the name of religion
flutter on the pages of history,
that's all there is to say,
every road that leads to the bathing ghats
on the sacred river front
passes through the red-light district,
and we're forced to stand like eye-witnesses
precisely in those places
where nothing's left to happen,
indifferent for a while in our boredom,
only to be pulled out of the crowd again
after the return of miracles.
Between time and the people,
the question isn't one
of measuring the level of noise,
but of the distance between the two
that's protected even at this speed,
we think that most of the time
honesty escorts us
all the way to the edge of crime
and leaves us there,
the most valuable moment of a man
oppressed by habits and advertisements
is weighed against doubts,
there's a secret exit in every faith
that leads straight to the outhouse,
and what an ugly mockery it is
of the morality that chooses to go
merely with the flow of opinions,
that our noses are placed on our faces
right under our eyes.

KAMLESH

Translated by Teji Grover & Arlene Zide

VISHNUPRIYA

Eye-light gone at dawn! Flowers
gazing into lakes, striving to pick
these, we forget how to swim. Newborn
faeries of the seas sweet-talk us into their
land where a river issuing from every
fibre is there for us to swim. But
we forget to. Oh, eye-light gone at
dawn! Rays of the sun slide off your
brow endowing us with darkness. Faeries
dupe us in that land where issuing from each fibre
is a river for us to swim.

In which cell of your
body are we imprisoned
Oh Hariraka! gone at dusk! Where every
night the stench of tigers wafts
up from the bed and restive in this
cell pacing up and down we
count ourselves once, twice,
a hundred times. Oh Hariraka, gone at
dusk! A sign of your abhisara each
day and we are caught in this
cell and when your body gives off this scent
how restive we
grow on islands of coral letting insects
feast on our bodies! Every night at
the signal of a hundred guards at the door
we forget how to
swim in which cell of your
body. Oh Hariraka!

Vishnupriya of midnight, the stones of these
hills resound with your breasts. A world

a little heavier, more substantial than
dream, leans on a memory dozing
in a cave where roars of
sound approach like a hare leaping
over unequal empty spaces.
Where springs flow
on in milk-white intensity, serpents
coil round your sandalwood
feet whose poison inhabits every sinew of my
body. Animals bewitched in the
wilds of your body have the power to
scale your heights, descend into your
depths—my body is their
dream, my soul their food.

Oh Vishnupriya, we, wounded by the growling of
tigers, toss about in those
rivers that have blinded us with their
milk-white intensity in the land of the faeries at the
signals of guards every day we are
caught in the prison of
your body letting the sea-
creatures feast on these bodies of ours...

INABILITY

Seeing you off at the edge of the city leaving forest trees behind
wandering about in neighbourhoods of an entirely different city, on
the streets
inventing the forgotten city in the layers of my mind, all over again

Building new houses, new quarrels, doors and streets all new
I think I have been leaving empty spaces in between
When I go back there one day I see—in an empty patch
someone has dug a hole in the ground and in the rain
children of the neighbourhood could drown there
I grieve that I can't quite invent
the city in the same way—
in every attempt some patches remain empty
where just anyone could come and dig a hole
let thorns grow

LET IT BURN

Don't stop it, let it be spun
Let the silk worm go on weaving
Let this silky world
spread all around

In the earliest watch of the daylight hours
Let the yellow sunlight of winter
heat up
Let your household
simmer.

Let the squirrels come and nibble
every flower and fruit
Let the sparrows
peck at nut and seed
in the courtyard
Let the mouse chew on each moment
of the thread of life.

Let dreams be made real, in the drowsy world
Let all their ventures turn to gold

Even before ripening, mustard
will crack open
and be strewn/scatter all over the earth
Even the rain, daydreaming
will bring back the green to the leaves.

Without even opening the door spring will pass by
Autumn arrive on the scene
Only the veined shapes of moth-eaten mulberry leaves
will rest on the earth.

A happy pyre
will present itself
suddenly, at the right hour
Sunflower-like the smokeless flames
will fill the void

Breaking open the bound caterpillar
the seven-coloured butterfly
 will take flight
having found the sky.

Let it weave
 let the worm weave
 its silky universe
 Let the yellow sunlight of winter
 heat up
Let your household
simmer.

THE FIFTH DAY

This moon
 that
 has been hung
 upside down
 in the sky
These necklaces
 silvery
 round the neck
Diamond specks sparkle
 in these eyes
 pictures of mine
 thousands
 take form

This moon
 (that)...

This frost
 has been spreading
 has been dissolving
 each place each picture
 in its own image
 into itself
but for these trees
 on the roadside

in which every dream
is overcast
divided
capturing
every single object
deluding you
even in your own familiar world

The fish in the night
go crawling
on the streets
If the vixen
 didn't have a lair
 she too would fall asleep
 right here for the whole night

There are clowns there too
 where even forlornness
 beat its wings

The pendulum-clock
 dong dong
 told twelve
Near our feet
 scattered bits of broken glass
keep us wandering
keep tempting us to stray
 into who knows what meanings
Even donkeys smile at the discovery
The moon's
 glaze
 thick
 still there

The whole night our road lay straight
we kept wandering around in the light
circling right back to the same spot

The light on the street
 more silvery
 than the moon

The moon
 hung there
 in the night
 upside down
by whom?

JARATKARU

They left in the night on their horses
We who saw them off to the edge of the village, lanterns in hand
We returned
Listening to the retreating clatter of hooves
fading into the distance, for a long time; we fell asleep
exhausted, then for the rest of the night we
dreamt our odd dreams.

Our journey circled around a small island, searching for a lake
where we could cup sweet water in our hands and drink
The edges of our weapons
blunted, that on some ancient whetstone we might hone; our horses
needing green expanses they could graze

Why, at the end of the day, were we so weary
We had not made any distant journeys at all

All our ancestors lay suspended, clinging onto banyan roots tied to
their feet
the weight of boulders, their supporting lifelines.

KEDARNATH SINGH

Translated by Vinay Dharwadker

THE CARPENTER AND THE BIRD

He was sawing logs

After spending several nights
in the damp jungle
he'd decided to do it
and now he was sawing logs

His saw often strayed
into the log's roots
into its sleep
his saw often struck
a bird's nest

He could feel
the flick of a squirrel's tail
inside the log
he could hear growls
a tiger's cubs were sleeping
inside the log
a bird had lost the seed
it had been pecking

At each stroke
his saw pulled the seed
out of the grain of the wood
and the seed dropped
from the saw's teeth
and disappeared

He was sawing logs
and the world was falling down
on either side of his saw
like planks of wood

The seed
wasn't outside the log
that's why the bird was sure
it was still somewhere inside the wood

He was sawing logs
and the bird was somewhere
inside the wood
and it was shrieking

AN ARGUMENT ABOUT HORSES

The three of them were sitting in the sun
and arguing about horses

The horse is beautiful—the first one said
You're wrong—the second one retorted
the horse is simply solid—very solid

The third man who'd been silent until then
said softly—It's so solid
that you can't argue about it

Why can't we argue about it—the first one shouted
Of course we can argue about it—the second one agreed

The third man was silent
rather he was very pleased
flicking the ash from his cigarette he said—
But where is the horse?

So what if it isn't here
at least we can argue about it
the first one said

We can argue about it
but I'm sad I haven't seen a horse in so many years—
there was a strange kind of pain in the third man's voice

There are fewer and fewer horses
the first one said

Right—the second one replied
that's precisely the question
why are there fewer and fewer horses?
They're sold off—the first one said

But who buys so many horses
the second one asked—
there must be statistics about this somewhere

There are—said the first one
emphasizing the are—
but we can't get to see them

Why—why can't we get to see them—
the second man was shaking

Because the horses trample down the statistics
the first one said

His voice was so faint
it seemed he wasn't speaking to the others but only to himself

The third man who'd been silent all this while
screamed suddenly—
My friends
one day those statistics will rise
and trample down the horses

For a long time
after that
there was no more argument

BETWEEN NEEDLE AND THREAD

My mother's brooding on my loneliness
It isn't raining now
but it could start at any moment

I have to go out
and she's tight-lipped
because I have to

It's certain that going out
will put her out of my mind
will make me forget
her bowl
her glass
make me completely forget
the white sari with a black border
that she and only she
in the whole wide world
wears

Winter will be here in a while
and I've noticed that when it's cold
she bends over
a little closer to her shadow
Her thoughts about wool are harsh
about death are tender
About birds
she has nothing to say
even though in sleep she seems
so much like a bird

Whenever she's weary
she picks up needle and thread
I've noticed that when
everybody else is asleep
her fingers ply the needle
late into the night
slowly—slowly—stitching time
as though it were
some frayed old kurta of mine
in need of repair

For the past sixty years
my mother has been squeezed between
a needle and a thread

even though she's a loom
that has slowly—slowly—woven
length upon length
of this cloth of sixty years
so thick and coarse and dense

WORDS DON'T DIE OF COLD

Words don't die of cold
they die from a lack of courage
Words often perish
because of humid weather

I once met
a word
that was like a bright red bird
in the swamp along the riverbank in my village
I brought it home
but as soon as we reached the wooden door-frame
it gave me
a strangely frightened look
and breathed its last

After that I started fearing words
If I ran into them I beat a hasty retreat
if I saw a hairy word dressed in brilliant colours
advancing towards me
I often simply shut my eyes

Slowly after a while
I started to enjoy this game
One day for no reason at all
I hit a beautiful word with a stone
while it hid
like a snake in a pile of chaff

I remember its lovely glittering eyes
down to this day

With the passage of time
my fear has diminished
When I encounter words today
we always end up asking after each other

Now I've come to know
many of their hiding-places
I've become familiar
with many of their varied colours
Now I know for instance
that the simplest words
are brown and beige
and the most destructive
are pale yellow and pink
Most often the words we save
for our saddest and heaviest moments
are the ones
that on the occasions meant for them
seem merely obscene

And what shall I do now
with the fact that I've found
perfectly useless words
that wear ugly colours
and lie discarded in the garbage
to be the most trustworthy
in moments of danger

It happened yesterday—
half a dozen healthy and attractive words
suddenly surrounded me
in a dark street
I lost my nerve—
For a while I stood before them
speechless
and drenched in sweat
Then I ran
I'd just lifted my foot in the air
when a tiny little word

bathed in blood
ran up to me from nowhere panting
and said—
'Come, I'll take you home'

IN THE ABSENCE OF GOD

What a wonder it is
that it's only 10 a.m.
and the world's business is already in full swing
even without God
that the buses are all packed
that people are already frantic with haste
that the postman's in the middle of his rounds
with his bag slung over his shoulder

Banks do open on time
the grass never stops growing
in the end everything—no matter how convoluted—
can be accounted for
those who have the will to live stay alive
those who wish to die pass away
even in the absence of God

What a wonder it is
that the trains are running
even though they reach
some arbitrary station only late in the morning
that elections are still held
that planes continue to fly in the sky
even without God

Even in the absence of God
horses go on neighing
the sea constantly synthesizes salt
a bird wanders aimlessly all day
and then returns with precision to its nest at night
even in the absence of God

Even without God
my grief runs deep
that woman's hair
is just as black as it was
when I loved her ten years ago
there's as much tugging at my heart
each time I leave this house
as there is when I return

What a wonder it is
that this stream is a torrent
and that bridge over there
stands in the middle of the flow
with its arms raised to the heavens
even in the absence of God

KRISHNA MOHAN JHA

Translated by Robert A. Hueckstedt

EVEN NOW

If you're on a mountain
Put your foot on the wind's back and come
If you're on a riverbank far away
Become a piece of straw and ride the current
If you're in an unknown world
Hold tight to the thread of your
Weeping and wakefulness and come

Whoever you are
Wherever you are
However you are
Come

If you have words
Nests are here to protect them
If you have silence
Distress is here to break it
If you have pain
Here's a pillow for crying
A cot for sleeping.

Not like a soldier desperate
To seize the whole world in his fist
But if like Tulsidas you know the art
Of making a corpse a ferry
Then on the other side
Of this deep ferry-less river
A glowing path will bring you here

Here you'll find
Your eyes filled
Not with pain or terror
But with your life's first genuine thrill—

Though the green forest be ripped to shreds
And this pond cut back to its heart
At the threshold of the house
In which you were born
A brass lota full of water
Waits for you even now.

MY BROTHER'S WIFE

1.

Gnawing a green mango, singing the season's songs,
Staring at her hands drenched in dreams,
A girl one day
Is covered from head to toe
In a sari of silk
And is told what
It really means to be female.

Stories of fairies gambolling in mango groves,
Fear of ghosts in the toddy grove,
And becoming a fish and splashing in the pond—
All those comforting memories
Fall centuries back,
And naturally skulking
Like a tin of salt in the cellar,
She realizes that
This is her life's stock in trade
And to circle around tethered
To a worm-eaten silk-cotton post
And to bear quietly
The leaking roof
The flaking plaster
The dilapidated well.

2.

A twig from the holy banyan tree,
Vermilion paste on the twig,
Sacred grass and holy rice,
Lac bangles and the forehead dot,

Squeezing in her hands the end of her sari,
Bowing, her eyes are wet.
Lying helplessly on the cot
Brother Satyavan coughs and coughs...
With each inhalation
The cage of his chest
Puffs out like a bellows.

Boring her third eye
Into an invisible point,
This is how my brother's wife
Stops her heart from tearing
Apart like paper,
And she performs this ritual every year.

3.

My brother's wife wakes up with a start
Then breaks into tears—
In a dream she'd seen brother writhing,
Hair dishevelled like a madman
Lips crackling like dry leaves
And on his dried-up, wrinkled face
A maze of tears

In her silk sari
The insects of time have cut a thousand holes
Her life rolls on in a cascade of memory-dust,
A reddish foam touches the fringe of her heart's desire.

They say
That every evening
After lamplight
On a fig tree in the dark woods
A Satyavan begins banging his head.

What happens after that
Will cause you too to shudder,
So it's best I still my tongue.

MITHILA

... so may the hero of the story forgive me
For having to write a screenplay about this place
Where pewits scream in the sky
Where ragged twenty-twenty-two-year-old men
Go from veranda to veranda
Spewing songs of Gopichand,
Where hunger renders us bodiless.

Pots dreaming on the potter's wheel
Shiver from some unrecognized fear
And break into pieces,
A leaky bucket
Dives into the well
And nearing Shesha the snake
Flips over;

Where women sharing the bloodline of Sita
Still entrust their stories of luck and misfortune
To the latticed window, the domestic shrine, the hearth and the earth;
Into their souls I must enter like dense despair
And search for that primeval bond
Between tongue and blood.

How difficult it is to describe this fear
Where seventy kids in a hundred
Come out of the womb
With a packet of ganja on their backs
And a clay pipe in their hands

Where people rise up in the oil refinery's smoke,
Or move like quadrupeds even at the age of twenty;
And based on the number of ponds and bamboo groves
How even more difficult has it become to say
That on the night of the last new moon
How many young widows disappeared along with their newborns.

You will have observed that man wandering
Carrying a dented aluminium lota

With broad stripes of sandalwood on his forehead
And blessings for the world on his lips
Who calls himself a descendant of Shiv Singh-
Great King of Mithila. In his eyes
Fish continuously writhe
Pierced by their own bones,
In his speech fall withered leaves,
On the threshold of his memory
Slither innumerable serpents.

Unending is this hero-less story
It has no historical eminence
It has no victory nor the joy of victory
It is the anguish of wandering from the path
So my eyes are not on some banner
Flapping in former grandeur
But on those footprints
Where every voyage begins.

KUNWAR NARAIN

Translated by VinayDharwadker

THE FORT AT JANJIRA

The fort at Janjira encircled by the sea:
the underwater foundations of the bastions
that have borne the waves' slapping for centuries
are still solid today.

The palaces of the Abyssinian
slave-trader Surul Khan:
the obstinate roots of wild vegetation
climbing fissured walls,
cannons prone and rusting
on tall gun-platforms.

A memory
of the anchors dropped around the fort, or
his ships laden with slaves
crossing the Arabian Sea—
cheap labour exported
from poor lands to rich lands.

Sometimes history
repeats itself so soon
that a sound in the distance
is clearly audible in the silent nights
on the edge of the sea—
sometimes the sound of coins,
sometimes the sobbing of humans.

THE REAL REASON

Asleep, but without repose,
with the desire born of intermittent needs
politely under cover.
Or awake—and if so, to what purpose?

The world was so big,
but it proved to be too small
whenever I wished to spread myself even a bit beyond
the ready-made boundaries around me.

Frightened by the sum of vulgar experiences,
I drew myself in
like the neck of a tortoise
under the hard-backed shell of self-confidence,
or else I ran in confusion
toward some abyss that opened out
within the reach of my understanding.

Caught between arguments and raucous laughter,
I sat apart and took stock of the situation
from a special standpoint—
it was pointless to try to keep the world under my control,
it would be better to get up and leave
with a little consternation, saying, 'What place was that?
From what date to what date. . . ?'

The true bone of contention
was what didn't happen.

All life long we remained stuck
in the testimonies, the recommendations, the safety-nets
of enervated conversations.
What sort of freedom can one find from minds
imprisoned in their beliefs, cities, businesses—
that no one can traverse
on the inside or the outside?

I ask you one last time—
what was the real matter
that resulted in such a long punishment?

Just the silence? . . . Okay, let it go . . .
What's there in reality . . . ?
Like a schoolteacher's net balance
of income and expenses,

reality's decision is the final judgment—
make do with that and no more, when in bed
stretch your legs only as far as the sheet will go.

I can't believe
that the difficulty I survived—
that the life I spent—
not by resting my brow against another brow
but by holding my head in my hands—
was such a small thing,
reduced to a document
that listed every pointless antic
but included no crime—

with the sole exception
of my daily self-destruction.

THE FLOWERS OF THE NEEM

A bitter-sweet medicinal smell
would spread throughout the house
whenever the neem in our courtyard blossomed.

The small white flowers
would blow about in the breeze like soap bubbles,
and one or two would stick in Mother's hair
as she returned from her ritual,
offering water to the holy basil in the yard.

It is odd, but whenever I have thought about those flowers
I have imagined them in the plural.
I never saw them withering—but then
I did not see them bursting
into a riot of colour either, like the blossoms
of the gulmohar or the kachnar—but there was
something in their shedding, something even more
modest and dignified, which was neither
joy nor melancholy.
Whenever I recall that huge ancient tree,
I think of the Upanishads—I remember

a clean and simple way of life—that somewhat strange
noble virtuousness in its perpetually peaceful shade,
which cooled us in the summer
and warmed us on winter days. I recall a sharp
but alluring fragrance, like Father's temperament.
I remember the two or three cots
strung with rough rope that always lay
under the tree for everybody's use—a childhood spent
playing with its bitter yellow berries. . . .

I remember the cascade dispersed by the wind
on Father's mortal remains
laid out under the neem
—as though it were a shower of flowers from Mother's hair—
tiny, tiny blossoms that seem
not tears but drops of consolation.

MAHA BHARAT

Dhritarashtra, the king: blind.
Vidur, the adviser: his ethics, failed.

Yudhishthir and Duryodhan, hero and villain:
gamblers, both of them.
Shakuni, the cheat: his entry into politics,
to the sound of rattling dice.

No Field of Dharma, no Field of the Kurus:
just the Field of Elections, straight and simple.
The thunderous cacophony of conches
blown by great warriors in chariots
gathered in this field
because of their powerful quests for victory:
the blessed commencement of war.

Waging battle
in the marshes of political factions:
eight religions, eighteen languages, twenty-eight states...

On one side, in a tranquil frame of mind,
standing in a chariot, holding the Gita: Lord Krishna.
On the opposite side,
holding the bow Gandiv in one hand,
and his head in the other: Arjun.
Both watching
a nation transmutate
from 'India' to 'India the Great'.

WON'T IT HAPPEN AGAIN?

Will exactly what we were afraid of
happen once again?

Will what we hoped would come about
fail to happen?

Will we continue
to be sold in our bazaars,
slaves to our own stupidities?

Will they buy and ship our children
to distant lands,
only to have
their own futures built?

Will they show us shiny pieces of glass
and dupe us of our gold once more,
exactly as before?

And will we continue like this,
generation
after generation,
to proudly display for them
the ruins of our antiquity—
our temples, our mosques, our gurudwaras?

MANGLESH DABRAL

Translated by Asad Zaidi

THIS WINTER

Last winter was difficult
Remembering it I shiver this winter
Though the days are not so severe

Last winter mother departed
A love letter went missing a job was lost
I don't know where I wandered in the nights
The many telephone calls I made
My own things kept falling
All over me

This season I unpack the clothes worn last year
—Blankets cap socks a muffler—
I gaze at them intently
Sure that those days are past
This winter can't really be as hard.

OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

What is it in these old photographs
When I chance upon them I can't stop looking
Is it the luminosity of youth alone
A full crop of hair a soft featured face
That still retains the traces of parental gifts
Eyes brimming with eagerness to see deep and far
Un-ironed clothes from those times
When life itself was in wrinkles

In this picture I represent my real self
Dream-like, wearing my heart on my face
With friends who share the same casualness
A light cloud that comes floating from somewhere
And rests a while
No hardness no cleverness

No greed in the eyes
The picture is of a morning at a street corner teashop
The world around it also transparent and simple
Like the teacup, the street, the morning
There are several such pictures that I occasionally show
To people who come visiting

What has passed I now avoid being photographed
I say leave it
I don't photograph well
I get uneasy as if
There is a mirror before me
Is it fear that I won't look as I did
Will my face reveal the harshness of the world
The cleverness and greed one sees everywhere these days
To resist this I sometimes try
To use old photographs as only armour

THE MISSING

In the urinals and other frequented places of this city
One still comes across posters of the missing people
Who had left home quietly many years ago
At the age of ten or twelve
They are shown possessing an average height
Complexion wheatish or dark but never fair
They wear rubber slippers
A scar on the face from some old injury
Their mothers still cry for them
Finally it is mentioned that anybody
Providing any news about the missing
Will be suitably rewarded

Yet no one can identify them
They do not resemble the faded images
On those posters anymore
Their initial sadness is now overwritten
With the endurance of suffering
Their faces reflect the changing seasons of the city
They eat little sleep little speak little

Their addresses keep changing
Facing the good and the bad days with equanimity
They are in their own world
Looking with faint curiosity
At the posters recording them as missing
Which their parents still issue from time to time
In which they continue to be
Ten and twelve

NAGARJUN

Translated by Manoj Kumar Jha

FAITH IN ME STANDS VINDICATED

With Kaartika setting in
The milky white buds of Agahani paddy plants
Rich laden with dewdrops of the closing night...
The soft touch of the rising Sun's beams
Will make them eloquent in beauty.
I'm on my stroll towards the bank of river Parmaan
Moving on and on by the sides of paddy fields.
I've returned to my days of childhood
After decades, the morning Sun of autumn
Would accord me a reception!
And would shine for a few moments or so
On the drut-vilambit waves of the river Parmaan.
And my unencumbered pair of feet
Shall indulge in fun and frolic across the sandy banks.

They will leave traces of shallow grey footprints
And I would begin to laugh within myself
As I would come down immediately into muddy wetland
The signs of heavy foots of animals already beckon me.
And my head would bow down in memories of milk-blessed buffalos...
Lo, somewhere after, in the midst of sheesham trees
Has appeared the graceful Neelkantha.
Will it move away or rest nearby?
Just behind the twig of a young Pakar tree?
Or on the aged Peepul tree's grotesque fringe
Or will it soar on and on,
Till it reaches the front-yard of a temple around Vishnupur
Only to disappear in the midst of thick-leaved twigs of the Moilishree tree
And rest there!

Leave them there! Come on Ratneshwar
And we will watch the morning Sun's
Pleasant radiance in its perfect form

To our heart's Content.
Since when I had missed
The sight of the glory of just-born Sun.
Don't be in a hurry, my friend!
We are to return, I know
Where do we come across such a rare sight?
I often pass many mornings in sleep
I have nearly lost the soulful touch of countryside.
(Ah, me! Chronicler of countryside)
However, at least today, we will watch the sunrise to the full
And, for quite sometime, to our heart's content
Besides we will watch the Ceremony of offering arghya of flowing water
And chant, in unison, the verse of invocation:

“O Sun God, the giver of light to the
Universe, I bow down to thee in reverence
I once again offer my prayer to thee god Savita
O dear Ratneshwar, do not be impatient
We will return in a relaxed mood
Today the atheist in me stands floored.
A young postgraduate like you
Has been a witness to this deviation in a confirmed heretic
Nay? Do I lie?
Perhaps I may yet recant all this in future.
Where? I did never surrender myself.
Where? I did not offer arghya to the Sun God
If I recant, Ratneshwar, don't
Contradict or refute but only maintain
an enigmatic smile on my professed lie.”

PANKAJ CHATURVEDI

Translated by Rahul Soni

ONLY ONE FACE

there is a famous statue
of Buddha in Kushinagar

seen from one angle it seems as if
Buddha is smiling
from a second angle he seems
lost in melancholy thought
from a third angle there is
the blessing of nirvana—
inviolable peace

do not think of this as the sum
of three expressions
Buddha could not just smile

his smile was melancholic
and in between
the radiance of desirelessness
or of the middle path

great the skill
that sculpted this stone
but greater still
the understanding of this art
which could discern
that in these three images there was
only one face of Buddha

THE FIRST WHITE HAIR

I saw the first white hair
in Bhopal

and remembered
according to one of Buddha's jatakas
when Makhadev the king of Mithila
saw his first white hair he handed
the kingdom to his son
and renounced everything

similarly, once
while adjusting his crown
King Dashrath of Ayodhya
saw white hair in the mirror
and decided
to crown Rama

and that woman in Kundera's story
who meets her lover
after fifteen years
her hair was going white
so she was loath to love or was she
embarrassed to undress

as if when the secret was revealed
the monument to her beauty
which that man had kept
secure in his soul for so long
would fall

but in the end she decided
to love
because "monuments are improper"
and life is more important
than monuments

and what do I do
I have nothing to renounce
nor can I crown anyone
but you are welcome
to a monument of beauty
my first white hair!

DUSK

in his 42nd spring
Nirala felt
loneliness
dusk closing in

on her 42nd birthday
I asked a woman
what do you think
was the great poet right?

she said
my solitariness increases
and it seems like night
has come, not dusk

between these times
whatever else may have happened
the lights have dimmed
the semidarkness of dusk
has deepened, Poet
since you've gone

I DO NOT HAVE

I do not have
a crown of peacock feathers
nor the strength to break a bow
my neck is just a neck
no venom could turn it blue

no peaceful bed laid out
on a sea of milk
no friendship with riches
no asceticism that could make
the gods jealous so that
your pretence of love
would be called upon

to break it
not Yayati's youth
fervently returning
nor the prowess
to pierce an eye
from its trembling reflection

no flute
to mesmerize you
nor the artfulness
that is a veil of water merely
upon your body that is
a lotus drenched
in your dreams

STILL BEAUTIFUL

some things
are still beautiful

not the journey, not the train

but your voice announcing
the train numbers and their times
of arrival and departure

is still beautiful

SHIRISH DHOBLE

Translated by Teji Grover & Arlene Zide

THE EARTH

You'd like to
turn over
but those mud houses
resting at your body's edge
won't let you
Perhaps you'd like
with your hands, to brush away
the snow at the poles.
but you can't
because who knows how many
luminous birds and snakes
encircle your arms

On your navel
the golden gaze of the sun
and the unrestrained festivals of the people who live there
awaken in your bones
an ancient tremor
It's your nayak, Krishna
his dusky diamond body
that comes to mind

Radha is there
somewhere
in your thoughts
Nayika, you, forever young.

Somewhere in your thoughts
there's Radha
you can't say it
Radha can never say it

Being on the earth
is perhaps not as simple
as being the earth

SHADOWS OF SANDALWOOD

In water

Not the shadow-breeze
flowing from tree tops

a touch of the fragrant breeze

In the water
not the tree
in the water

On the shore
the frost of indecision
and
trailing wines of
yojangandha

SHIVA PARVATI

Shiva
Parvati

Having finished writing down your names
I am not
able to write
my story.

Shiva Parvati
whose names
did you write
before
writing your story?

Shiva Parvati
you are not my words
I don't choose you
to tell
my story
Shiva Parvati
are we
the words
you have chosen
to tell your story ?

Shiva Parvati
I am not able
to write
anything besides your names

Shiva Parvati
Do you also
find
our names
as compelling?

Shiva
Parvati
I cut out
unwanted words
and
lying back, as I write
at times I
distort
my letters.

Shiva
Parvati
Do you also cut out
unwanted words
Do you also
write, lying back
sometimes distort
your letters?

Shiva Parvati
You
are my
story
Shiva Parvati
am
I your story?

FLOWER-BIRD

How could
an entire army have been
routed
all weapons useless
all arsenals emptied
Only twelve leagues had to be traversed
Or was it only four

Nothing would have happened perhaps
if
frightened,
it hadn't suddenly taken to the air
that
flower-pecking bird

YOU PLAY WITH THE COSMOS

Solving
the tangle of your hair
with your fingers
you play with the cosmos

Sometimes
it's the earth
now
the moon
now
the sun
I happen to kiss

YOUR WORDS ARE NO

Your words are
no

The body of your words
yes?

The reluctance
of a river
a split second
before
it falls from the mountain.

SHRIKANT VERMA

Translated by Vinay Dharwadker

PROCESS

Where was I
when everyone was cheering?
I too was there,
cheering,
fearing the consequence
of silence,
 like everyone else.

What did I do
when everyone said,
we're Hindus,
 Muslims like Aziz
 are our enemies?
I too agreed,
I'm a true Hindu,
 Aziz is my enemy.

What did I say
when everyone murmured,
keep your mouth shut,
 silence is safe?
I too concurred,
don't risk words
since words betray,
 say
only what the others say.

The cheering is over now,
Aziz has been lynched,
the mouths are silent.

 Aghast,
everyone asks,
how could this have happened?

And I,
 like everyone else,
repeat the question.
How did this happen?
 Why?

KHYBER

There's room enough on earth for everyone—
saying this, the noise died down
and joined the feast.
For years I wrote lost in error
and came to see
there was no other tongue.

Fame and the lure of carrying all before me
brought me to the place where I found
nothing
(armies have crossed the Jhelum,
trampling on the dreams of others,
or is this my delusion?)

except this celebration, in a phantom world set up by scoundrels
freed of the burden of virtue and sin,
of action, inaction.
Any day it can change, any day,
there's hardly any difference—
in the language in which their slogans are printed
we have poems.
Two-bit Time says to me,
live with integrity.
It never ends
(far into the distance you can see
the trail of Alexander's footprints),

stop it if you can, stop the universe, stop
the accursed momentum
that dreamt of passing down the streets of Paris,

stop these screams
that had to arise in Howrah, in Sealdah,
entering and leaving
the countless offices of death.

They will come again this way, the Ionians, in search of the key
to the puzzles of geometry,
this time in space-age camouflage,
women sit watching the way
(whoever among us is a warrior
is free to leave),

opposing no one and nothing, yet opposing all.
The ethics of war
can go to hell—
and they, who've come with plans to conquer
a mansion ready to topple down.
Burdwan! Burdwan! Just three bucks per passenger to Burdwan!

The solutions that were possible are done with now,
only the desire is left—
in every scheme of things there's sorrow and strife.
For what are you laying a new foundation stone?

Babur, returning once more to Samarkand,
pauses to pray for a moment, and then
nothing,
whether you come or go through Khyber,
there's hardly any difference.

BABUR AND SAMARKAND

Samarkand remains on Babur's way,
and Babur on the way to Samarkand.

At frequent intervals
 he asks,
'How much further still to Samarkand?'
Babur's question finds
no answer anywhere.

The air, ascending, shimmers overhead,
underfoot, the earth
 is dust,
his horse, oblivious, remains absorbed
in plodding on.
 Babur screams,
'How much further still to Samarkand?'
No answer anywhere—
 only Babur's horse
whinnies, whines.

The news of his arrival has arrived
ahead of him,
 the streets are dense
 with crowds,
Babur parts the crowds and passes down the streets.
'For Allah's sake',
 he pleads,
'how much further still to Samarkand?'
His question winds
back through the air to him.

Babur goes down on his knees,
stops short
 as he sees
the city and the city's domes
rise before his eyes,
 and cries,
'Samarkand! my Samarkand!'

Passing close to him,
Prince Shaharyar
 murmurs to the king,
'Samarkand's been left behind'.

Samarkand remains on Babur's way,
and Babur on the way to Samarkand.

ANONYMOUS IN AVANTI

Will it make any difference
if I say,
I don't belong to Magadh,
I belong to Avanti?

It will certainly make a difference.
Everyone will assume
that you belong to Avanti,
you'll have to forget Magadh.

And you,
you won't be able to forget Magadh.
You'll spend a lifetime in Avanti
and still won't be able
to get acquainted with Avanti.

Then over and over again
you'll say,
I don't belong to Avanti,
I belong to Magadh,
and no one will believe you.
You'll whine,
"I'm telling the truth,
I belong to Magadh,
I don't belong to Avanti,"

and it won't make a difference.
No one will believe
that you belong to Magadh,
and you won't be recognized
in Avanti.

COMING AND GOING

Whenever he went
from Kosal to Magadh,
on the way back

from Magadh to Kosal
everyone asked him the same thing—

are you going
from Magadh to Kosal,
or are you coming
from Kosal to Magadh?

He tried to evade the question
by saying,
What difference will it make?

But some questions
can't be evaded—
especially when we pass
so often
through Kosal on our way to Magadh,
through Magadh on our way to Kosal.

The most important question
is this—
Where are you going?

Then the question—
Who are you looking for
in Kosal and Magadh?

And then—
Will Kosal come first
or Magadh?
The fact is
that no one knows.
Why does he go
from Magadh to Kosal,
from Kosal to Magadh,
over and over again?
Why does he repeat
the same scenes
over and over again?

Why does he shout
slogans for Kosal
while passing through Magadh,
against Magadh
while passing through Kosal?

On the broken bastions of Kosal,
why does he raise
the tattered flags of Magadh?

When there's no answer
from anywhere,
he too joins the ranks
of those who catch hold
of every passer-by and ask—

Are you on your way
to Magadh through Kosal,
or are you on your way
to Kosal through Magadh?

TEJI GROVER

Translated by the Poet

PUPPET'S EYE—1

A feeble note

A single bee-eater shedding feathers

A single footprint by the water

With a puppet's eye,
someone watches from afar

Traces of those
who left in the night
rise to the surface

Thirst appears
But from behind the mound no telling
whose

Unquenchable

Asking its way around
it pursues the traveller.

PUPPET'S EYE—2

Everywhere light begins to chirp
and the birds take on a glow

Those who departed
went while asleep in their own shadows
They left, having dried up like tears

Inside the clue
no clue either

The puppet could just go off to sleep
in the sun-breeze.

PUPPET'S EYE—3

Their departure
flashed in the puppet's eye

They were so full of colour
that anyone at all could subdue them

So alluring
there was no synonym for their departure

If they'd wanted
they could've let their dancing
go in their place.

Could've frozen in a pose
and loosed their abhinaya like an arrow

The softness of their speech
The feigning of their bodies
Their acts of love

All in the puppet's eye.

PUPPET'S EYE—4

It watches them
They let it watch

That gaze
shows in their limbs
not in the mirror

The dogs go a long way staring after a scent
A sword quivers in the hint of a breeze
a butterfly of air falls to the ground

It watches them
They let it watch
That gaze
shows in their limbs
not in the mirror

In a frenzy they stand up
and have some water

The moon
pulls back the reflection
from the lake.

PUPPET'S EYE—5

One desire was to create without image

And desire
true to itself went chasing after image

That's the way
they came
and went hissing
from place to place

Howling, they burst into flames
And ablaze
they set all ablaze

Became so full of words
that calming them down
turned into yet another piece of work

Then so quiet
that even awakening them won't awake them

Even so
the fire blazed

The hissing went on.

UDAY PRAKASH

Translated by Robert A. Hueckstedt

TIBET

Having come from Tibet,
Lamas keep wandering around
These days, mumbling mantras

Their herds of mules
Go down into the gardens
They do not eat marigold flowers

How many flowers
On one marigold plant,
Papa?

When it's the rainy season
in Tibet,
What season
Do we have?

When it's three o'clock
In Tibet,
What time
Is it here?

In Tibet
Are there marigolds,
Papa?

Do lamas blow conch shells, Papa?

Papa,
Have you ever seen lamas
Wrapped in blankets
Running quickly
In the darkness?

When people die
Lamas stand
On all four sides of their graves
And bow their heads

They do not recite mantras.

They whisper—tibbut
tibbut tibbut
tibbut tibbut
tibbut tibbut
And they cry
all night long.

Do lamas
Cry just
Like us, Papa?

UDAYAN VAJPEYI

Translated by Alok Bhalla

ARRIVAL

“Let’s make a home which seems prosperous,” she said or perhaps that’s what I heard. I had a fever. She was tired after a day’s work.

Darkness spread over her forehead and seeped through the rain.

There wasn’t a guest who hadn’t seen us quarrel.

“Let’s make a home which seems prosperous,” she said over and over again.

Water boiled uselessly on the stove.

There was still time for the train to arrive.

In the streets, drunkards murmured incoherently. Beggars slept on the dirty fringes of the city. A spider spun the night on a dark neem tree.

She cried out from the kitchen, “Look, look, the dead lizard on the wall has begun to move again! Wake up, wake up, our walls are still covered with grime and cobwebs!”

A QUESTION

I crossed the city square and reached the house which was lit up.

A widow sits in the empty veranda in front of the kitchen occupying as little space as possible. Her head rests on her knees.

She has come to attend a wedding at her sister’s house.

She urges me to leave as she looks at me with tear-filled eyes.

“Are you able to recognize her? She is my mother. No, no, don’t ask why she is in that condition. She hears everything. She has withdrawn into herself so much that if you were to ask her a question out of curiosity, it would not let her sit even there in peace.

FATHER

Late at night, father stands at the door. Half asleep, I open the door.

I sense mother’s presence behind me. Further back, under the shelter of clouds, she seems to scatter like random threads.

Father places his hand on my head and blesses me just as he had done before his death.

When I see him, I cry out, “Father, I couldn’t save you even then, and in my countless poems too I have failed to save you once again.”

From somewhere far away, Mother’s presence gathers close around me, spreads over my soul like a shadow.

SITA’S TEARS

Father is unhappy if I wander far from home alone. He buys me a cycle but doesn’t let me ride it anywhere.

Every other day, grandmother’s servant steals money from grandfather. He ignores the theft and concentrates on rowing the boat of his old age.

Mother tries to run the house with very little money. In order to pass journey, she reads Ramcharitramanas over and over again.

Then suddenly one day, as Sita sits in the Ashoka forest, the silhouette of father’s sick face appears through her tears.

VINOD KUMAR SHUKLA

Translated by Teji Grover

YOU SHOULD LOOK AT YOUR HOME FROM A DISTANCE

You should look at your home from a distance
from where you can’t come back even if you must.
hoping fully you can come back some time
you should cross the seven seas.

From another country, as you keep going
turn and look back at your own country—
this earth of yours from outer space.
Remembering what kids are up to at home
will then be what kids are up to on the earth
Is there food at home, this thought
will be if there’s food on the earth
Someone hungry on the earth
will be someone hungry at home
And coming back to the earth
will be like coming back home

Everything at home is such a mess
that I walk a short distance before I come back home
as if towards the earth

IT FLEW OUT OF THE SKY

It flew out of the sky
a tiny little parrot
as if a green shoot had popped out
from the sky
and sat down in a tree
The tree was full of green
I couldn’t see the parrot
only the lush green of the tree.

I FLUNG MY KEY

I flung my keys
to the sky
Then I saw
the sky opening up
One of my keys must
be the key to the sky
It could be the key to my box

In the open sky
way up
five bombers came
and went
Two or three cockroaches
were seen
in my empty box
Turn the box upside down
they still don't fall.

ON THE WALL

Sitting on the wall
I'm tired
and hungry
And right next to me
is a crow
with a piece of bread
in his beak
his own share
that he has snatched
I think
what a pity!
I'm neither a crow
nor have I a beak—
After all what facial lines does a man like me have
that I can't snatch my share!

IN THE SEA WHERE THE SUN WAS SETTING

In the sea where the sun was sinking
it was sinking in a way
that along with it even the West
was sinking
So for the sun to sink in tomorrow
the West won't be there
It can sink in some other direction
If it can sink at all.

In the sea where the sun is rising
it rises like a seabird
that's trying to rise
from the slick
Its wings smeared with oil
It can't rise

To see this not-being-able-to-rise sun
No tourists thronged
No tourist souls
After this not-being-able-to-rise sun
Once the day is over
The not-being-able-to-rise sun goes down

WHEN I WENT TO SEE BHIM BAITHAKA

When I went to see Bhim Baithaka
we were all together
And in front went a corpse
in an open cart -
no way could we drive past it
When I managed to leave it behind
then all of us left it behind.
When I reached Bhim Baithaka
we all reached Bhim Baithaka.

In the rock shelters it was the leisure time of early man
deer-like, horse, monkey-like group-dancing-like time.

Up above, from a hollow in a stone, out flew
a flock of pigeons flapping their wings.
This was our time in nests of stone
with them
When I came back—
then we were together all of us.
On my way back, I saw the pigeons
going back to their nests of stone.

VIREN DANGWAL

Translated by Rahul Soni

RUKMINI OF THE RIVERSIDE AND HER MOTHER: THEIRFRAGMENTED STORY

I am tired
the morning star whispers
I am tired of shining in the solitude
of this washed out sky
dust swirls in the dry bed of the Ganga
a camel ambles towards the city
with its load of shining deep green melons
its bells ringing in the cool breeze of dawn

it is the month of Jeth
with its nightlong festivities

the villagers' love
for bells and ghungroos
is surprising

tiny bells on a coloured string
around the necks of oxen cows goats
and some children even garland
the long neck of a duck
with a weightless solitary ghungroo

it is their love
the music of their soul
that sounds in these bells

this information is only for the learned
ordinary people already know it

but the route that I have chosen is different
not shorter not easier

just an irrational absolute certainty
I chose a different route

when I descended
into the rocky bed of the Ganga
the kashyaps dheemars nishads and mallahs
were like always growing
melons cucumbers and gourds

crossing the bridge
with an elastic click clack
you must have also often seen
from the window of a train
spread in the blotchy expanse of white sand
beside the weak flow
this soft unripe green world

in the evenings
smoke rising from the thatched roof of a hut
and the even smaller-seeming
naked dark children—
this sight entrancing
travellers going to far lands
filling their hearts with longing

in just such a hut
lives Rukmini barely fourteen
with her widowed mother

her elder brother is in jail
for making hooch
the younger brother's rotting corpse
was found two years before
in the thick blade-like grass of the riverbed
which cuts even the legs of cattle

the boy had been kidnapped
by the Kalua gang from across the river
for a ransom of ten thousand
which could not be paid

pleading and prayer—nothing worked

now even the mother has become an expert
in brewing hooch by burying draff in the sand
like the rest of the riverside hut-dwellers

the grampradhaan of Babhiya
the village by the river
in whose perimeter Rukmini's hut falls
is Somwati wife of Ramkhilauna
pradhaanpati—a new word
of our now mature democratic vocabulary

Ramkhilauna has
with guns and the support of the community
managed to strike fear
into the hearts of the thakurs
who had forever reigned over the village
the profit he brought to
his community's ragtag entrepreneurs
by organizing the hooch industry
is praised in every home
all this has increased his standing greatly
he calls Rukmini's mother chachi
and the way he averts his glance
from the daughter who is growing like a green cucumber
makes the mother's faith in his good character
even stronger

Rukmini is barely fourteen
she feels like saying brother and throwing her arms
around Ramkhilauna
then a thought occurs to her
and she stops herself

I have heard Rukmini's voice
calling her mother like a child sometimes
sometimes like a young parrot
that eagerly greets the morning
even from inside a cage

sometimes just a muffled cry
I have often seen at her door
the middle-aged policeman
with the area's infamous young
smack smuggling lawyer on whose jeep
is a sign saying press or MLA representative
as the fancy strikes

they or the old mother's curses and abuses
must be the reason why
the riverside's smack-addicted loafers
only look at this hut from a distance
with fear and longing

this is the way in which
Rukmini has understood without knowing
the many complex and ugly secrets of her society
through the medium of her soon to be ragged
life and body even though
she does not know the meaning of the word society

what a farce such a future is
green-golden scum longing to float
like cream
to the top of rotting water

and a woman's body
you don't know but whenever you touch her
no matter what your intention
you take away a piece of her soul
against the hollowness of which
she beats her head

this is the story of this rotting water
going past which is my separate route

Rukmini's state is what it is
but even at her age her mother has not lost
the habit of dreaming
sometimes she sees
her man Naresa fourteen years dead
punting in the shallow water of the Ganga
returning home
his arms were like iron
sometimes she sees
her son running through the grass
shouting I'm hungry I'm hungry
as blood flows
from his shredded young skin

sometimes she sees
a wedding procession at the door
and Rukmini's heels stained with aalta

the old woman's habit of dreaming hasn't gone

getting a cow and tending to it
drinking its milk and giving it to her daughter to drink—
all this has remained only a dream
she has to tend to her daughter instead

looking for wooden shelter all the time
in the riverbed's parched sandy wilderness
filled with razor grass
how that mother's heart keeps burning like dung cake
only she knows
or those distant unseen kindhearted people
whom she does not know but in whose eyes
rainclouds still gather inspired
by the warmth of the heart's sun
to them even the night is kind and gives light

and even though it may seem trite
for them humanity sings a silent song of waiting
grinding a millstone in darkness

that is why I have chosen a different route
an irrational absolute certainty
that is why the tired morning star is eager
to drown in the light of day

VISHNU KHARE

Translated by Rahul Soni & Giriraj Kiradoo

KRISHNA, TO DRAUPADI

how long it has been since you last called me
the two or three times you did required no great valour
from between embarrassed timidity and arrogant cowardice
just an ordinary courage and the desire to be near you

and every time as I returned I knew that all you said to me
would be debased by people calling it a prayer a plea
you, the pious wife of five warrior husbands
I, the louche lover of countless gopis and queens
and the hero of countless stories that speak of Radha's rapturous love
the very mention of which would later unsettle and annoy me
but who would believe that there was always something about you
so that when we were left alone in the palace
in full understanding of our mutual intent
we would not even desire each other's touch
and as I would return in silence
on the long road from Indraprasth to Dwarka
it was not the chariot's rattle
but the echo of your voice the light of your eyes
and my charioteer vexed from turning back again and again

and then I saw before my very eyes
your kin and mine the people we loved dying
I saw you returning to camp tending to your wounded husbands
all this as I was speaking to Arjun
and watching Kripacharya succeed
both Kauravs and Pandavs must have been baffled by my smile
but I could see your eyes over all of Kurukshetra
and it was because of them that I came to live
in Dwarka, far away from friends

it is my moment now
fulfilling every prophecy every curse every ill omen
my charioteer, always vexed, has gone

and I sit waiting for that imprudent hunter
to mistake my foot for the head of a deer
my queens whose names I cannot even properly recall
who are now well past their youth
I have left to Arjun
my aging friend your now feeble husband
the impatient sea keeps turning back from Dwarka's shore
I have no message for you but when
were messages ever necessary between us
yes, I see your husbands setting out with you in tow
and that you will be the first to fall, you will be left behind
in their well-meaning pride these descendants of Kuru
have seldom turned to look at truth
then, leaving your body, you will say Krishna and find
that I am as close to you as I always was
we will walk together watching your husbands fall one by one
and listen to the familiar pietism of your eldest husband's words
seeing their last sublime presumption you will look at me
and I will smile remembering suddenly, neither you nor I will know
why
my long forgotten flute and Radha
drawn to its music

HOPE

if I had been born in the romantic age
of European classical music and if I had feudal riches
I would call Beethoven, Haydn or Mozart and ask
how much will you take
to write a new piece
which shall, of course, have a full orchestra
but space too for a piano solo
one female and one male voice
and a chorus
with men women and children at once

they would say
it is not a question of wages
but your request is absurd
it violates all rules of composition
a symphony has no solos

vocals have never been heard of in concertos
an opera can have a chorus and all sorts of singers
but where will we fit
a piano or any other solo in it

I would reply
why else would I trouble great composers like you
when I hear your symphonies
I miss the piano and solo singers
or suddenly while hearing a concerto
I start hearing many voices together or separately
and did you never feel
how much better it would be
if the aria in an opera was not accompanied by a symphony
but by a single piano violin or oboe
playing softly

what you will call such a composition
I leave up to you
our language does not lack in musical vocabulary
so can you compose such a piece?

they would look at me and at each other
and would not let their expressions betray what they thought of me
you will have to excuse us they would say and leave
from distant corridors Beethoven's curses
and Haydn and Mozart's laughter would echo

surprised and appalled by the prejudices of great artists
ignorant of technique but somewhat familiar
with the endless variety and scope of music and notes
and dedicated to them
I would then create in my heart and listen
to a composition of words and sounds in the hope
that perhaps one day someone would really create it
and give it a name

THE MISSING

in the Shradra up-parv of the Mahabharat's Stree-parv
there are two shloks that hold special interest
for scholars interested in obscure figures -
the second of these is more intriguing

after the war when Dhritrashtra asks Yudhishtir
how many died in the great war and how many lived
it is a sign of pure scientific curiosity
despite the near total destruction of clan and civilization
and Yudhishtir's answer too
is an unprecedented example
of receiving and remembering facts
objectively amidst the horrors of war

when he says in this war o king of kings
one billion six hundred million and twenty thousand warriors have
died
there is a precision to his answer
from the billion right down to the thousand
that gives it rare authority
even further, in the second shlok
when he says the number of soldiers missing after the war
is twenty four thousand one hundred and sixty five
it is probably the first time in human history
that missing soldiers are mentioned
and such a precise number not only seems authentic
it vexes us and makes us curious

it vexes us because he does not ask
how many of these missing are Pandavs
how many Kauravs
how many maharathis, athirathis, ekrathis and others
and throws no light
on which kingdom they belonged to, which legion
in the rest of the Mahabharat one never finds out
if any attempts were made
to find these missing and absconding soldiers

today we want to know
where these 24,165 went
where did they hide or what happened to them when they returned
had they run off in fear or in frustration
were they disillusioned or distressed
or did their platoons keep fighting for years
among themselves a number of little Mahabharats
even when the mother of these battles was long over

the missing of Kurukshetra are still missing
they probably did not think it right to fight and go to heaven
they embraced life, it is just as well
because the Mahabharat is also silent
about the names and the families
of the one billion six hundred million and twenty thousand
who did go to heaven

who carries the seed and ideas
of those unaccounted for
who can say
and is there an estimate
of what they contributed to what civilization
and the contributions of those who lived
because they did not fight

who knows whether some or all of them
individually or together
wrote their own Mahabharats partial or complete
who knows whether some of them
defeated Arjun as he was returning with his queens
because the Mahabharat as we have it
is one-sided despite its greatness
or two-sided at best
and if not Balram or the people of Dwarka
at least one of these 24,165
should have left behind their version

but to find a place in history
it is almost essential to be found alive or dead
the missing are never mentioned

a single shlok by one of them if found
can cast doubt over
Sanjay's official accepted and convenient
eyewitness account
who knows one of us might be their descendant
and say that single shlok someday

SCORE BOOK

my two greatest moments in cricket do not appear
in any book of statistics or records

who takes a Sunday match among
middle-school boys seriously
teams of less than eleven
bats old new too big too small bound with tape
a leather ball made by the cobbler at Town Hall
stumps uneven and at only one end
no question of half-matting
we had never even seen much less touched a score book
score was kept on the last pages of a rough notebook

nevertheless a hat-trick is a hat-trick
at least for the one who got it
even if it was in the conditions described above
forty-one years later and for life
what happened that evening at four o' clock
how three successive balls landed on the same spot
off-broke in the same way and how
Ramesh Surendra and Madan were clean bowled (clean bowled!)
one after another in the same way
Ramesh was our Tendulkar
what do thirteen year olds know of playing of batting and bowling
but that day a god must have been watching out for me
over that corner of the school grounds
now buried forever under the new building
as if someone had complained

the other historic moment was at a college tournament when
after getting out for a duck on a full-toss in a very unhistoric way—

because of which already my stock was beginning to fall
among my doubting friends and the spectators from school in the
pavilion
to the extent of possibly losing my place in the side—
I suddenly took three catches of Burhanpur's team
the first at cover-point the second at mid-on the third at short square-
leg
of these the first was possibly Jayprakash Choksey and was not easy
I can't say how I ended up catching three
someone whose place in the side has become insecure
finds everything on the ground difficult seems perplexed
more so when he takes a brilliant catch
and his friends start laughing in disbelief
even those who weren't won over after the third
were amazed
and that was how my place in the team was cemented
(how I got the captaincy—fast becoming a dubious distinction—is
another story)

a whole philosophy has come up around sports
in which sportsmanship team-work friendly rivalry
you win some you lose some and more such misconceptions are
included
but who will explain to me my hat-trick and those three tumbling
catches
and even more
why these petty successes get recorded
in some score book

SINGLE WICKET SERIES

I have just taken guard once more
made sure my shoes gloves helmet are secure
evened out the pitch with my bat
a little confident a little nervous
I have been beaten a couple of times now
but I'm waiting for the next ball

thousands of lights from four towers illuminate the stadium
giving everything on the ground four shadows
and I in the centre of my four-shadowed crosshairs

the fifth
strange silence in the galleries
is everyone holding their breath at this moment

and then he appears at the other end
fast as a horse-rider yet almost moon-walking
a cape fluttering behind his black costume
he hurls the ball with a toss of the head
his claw revealed for a moment
the lines of his jaw and temple becoming clear
his eyes are sunken and appear like black holes
his teeth shine who is he I have never played him but
it seems as if I have seen him before

my feet have turned to lead
my bat to stone
my heart and hand to ice my lips cracking
and I hear behind my legs and on my chest that familiar sound
as if a gust of wind opening the door to a lab
rattles the skeleton on the wall

who turned off the lights suddenly
why have the spectators gone dumb
is it just the sound of wind in the stadium
how have I come out of my petrified paralysis
as if released from all encumbrances
and in his unbound momentum he has come right up to me
I feel on my shoulder
his encouraging but strong insistent hold

then still in the darkness finally recognizing his black shape I say
well bowled sir
the pitch the ground the unlit lights the dark stadium
everything seems to be going down
and he keeps throwing the ball into my hands and I back to him
till we disappear
to play some solitary game in some other place...

ABOUT THE POETS & TRANSLATORS

ALOK BHALLA

Alok Bhalla is, at present, a visiting professor of English at Jamia Millia Islamia. He is the author of *Stories About the Partition of India* (3 Vols.). He has also translated Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug*, Intizar Husain's *A Chronicle of the Peacocks* (both from OUP) and Ram Kumar's *The Sea and Other Stories* into English.

ARLENE ZIDE

Born, 1940 in New York City. Former editor of *Primavera*. Currently putting together an anthology of Chicago area women poets, *Chicago Fire*, with Carolyn Rodgers. Work published in a variety of journals in the US, Canada and in India such as *Meridians*, *Rattapallax*, *Evening Street Review*, *13th Moon*, *Colorado Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Rhino*, *Xanadu*, *Primavera*, *A Room of Her Own*, *Oyez Review*, *Off Our Backs*, and *The Women's Review of Books*; in anthologies such as *Kiss Me Goodnight*; *Where We Find Ourselves*; *In Love United* and *Rough Places Plain: Poems of the Mountains*; [on-line: *The Pedestal Magazine*, *ChicagoPoetry.com*; R-K-V-RY; *Red River Review* etc.] Her translations of Hindi poets have appeared in e.g., *Exquisite Corpse*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Salt Hill*, *Rhino*, *Paintbrush*; *Smartish Pace*, *Per Contra*, *ezra.com* etc.; and in the *Everyman Series: Indian Love Poems*, *Oxford Anthology of Indian Poets*, *Chicago Review*, *Modern Poetry in Translation (UK)*, *International Poetry Review*, *Malabat Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Chase Park* and in *Language for a New Century*, (*Norton Anthology*).

ARUN KAMAL

Arun Kamal (b. 1954) has published four collections of poetry *Apnee Keval Dhaar* (1980), *Saboot* (1989), *Nayellake Mein* (1996), *Putaleemein Sansaar* (2004) and a book of literary essays. A recipient of the Bharat Bhushan Agrawal Puruskar (1980), the Soviet Land Nehru Award (1989), the Shrikant Verma Smruti Samman (1990), the Raghuvir Sahay Smruti Samman (1996), the Shamsar Samman (1997) and the Sahitya Akademi Award (1998), Arun lives in Patna where he teaches English at the Science College of Patna University.

ASAD ZAIDI

Asad Zaidi, born in Karauli (Rajasthan), has lived in Delhi for the last 35 years. He has three books of poems: *Behnauranyakavitaen* (1980 & 2008), *Kavitakajivan* (1988), and *Samankitalash* (2008) and has edited a number of collections including *Das Baras: Hindi kavita Ayodhya ke bad* (2003). His interests extend to education, literary criticism, occasional social commentary and publishing.

ASHOK VAJPEYI

Eminent Hindi poet, critic and editor Ashok Vajpeyi (b. 1941) has published fifteen books of poetry including *Shaher Ab Bhi Sambhavana Hai* (1966), *Tatpurush* (1986), *Bahuri Akela* (1992), *Ibarat Se Giri Matrayen*, *Ummeed ka Doosra Naam* (2004) and *Vivaksha* (2006). He has also published five books in literary and art criticism: *Filhal*, *Kuchh Poorvagrab*, *Samay se Babar*, *Kavitaka Galp* and *Sidhiyan Shuruho Gayi Hain*. His poetry has been translated into Bangla, Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu, Rajasthani, English, Polish and French. His awards include Officer of the Order of the Arts and Letters (France), Officer of the Order of the Cross (Poland), Sahitya Akademi Samman, Dayavati Mody Kavishekhar Samman and Kabir Samman. He is the founder of the multi-art center, Bharat Bhawan, in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, was the first Vice Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, Wardha, and is currently the President of the Lalit Kala Academy. He lives in New Delhi.

DHOOMIL

Dhoomil was the pen-name of SudamaPandeya, who was born in Khevali, a village near Banaras, in 1935. He was educated in the village and in Banaras, and taught electrical engineering at an industrial institute (polytechnic) in the city for several years. He died of complications from one or more undiagnosed illnesses, possibly including damage to the brain, in 1975. Kedarnath Singh knew him as a young poet just beginning his career in Banaras in the early 1960s, and KunwarNarain, then based in Lucknow, was one of the few people able to reach his bedside at the time of his sudden and painful death. Dhoomil published one collection of poems in his lifetime, *Sansad se sadaktak* (1972), which is among the most original and enduring books of poetry in modern Hindi. His later poems were collected and published posthumously in *Kalsunanamujhe* (1977), and VidyaNiwas Mishra subsequently edited and introduced a representative selection of his poems for a new generation of readers. Dhoomil appears to have been socially marginalized by many of his urban literary contemporaries in the 1960s and 1970s, probably because of his strong personality, 'rough' manners, and rural background, but after his death his poems had a great impact on the political left in India, especially on activists at the grassroots level. Hindi criticism, however, has not been able to do justice so far to his language, technique, thematic invention, psychological depth, and political foresight; as a result, Hindi readers have been unable to appreciate his full significance for world literature in the twentieth century.

GIRIRAJ KIRADOO

GirirajKiradoo (b.1975) has published poems, criticism, translations and few short stories in *Bahuwachan*, *Alochana*, *Poorvagarah*, *Poetry International Web*, *Tadbhav*, *NayaGyanodya*, *Hindi, India Today*, *SahityaVarshiki*, *Sabit*, *Vaak*, *Indian Literature*, *SamkaleenBharatiyaSahitya*, *Vagarth*, *Vimarsh*, *Akaar*, *Kathakram*, *Dishabodh*, *Janpath*, *Jansatta*, *Rashtriya Sahara*, *DainikBhaskar*, *PrabhatKhabarVisheshank*, etc. and some of them have been translated into Urdu, Marathi, Catalan and English. He was conferred upon the prestigious *Bharat BhushanAgrawalSmruti* award, for his first published poem in 2000. He is a translator in Hindi, English and Rajasthani currently translating two novels—HanifKureishi's *Intimacy* into Hindi and Gitanjali Shree's *Tirobit* into English. Also translating two SahityaAkademi Award winning Hindi poets, Shree Kant Verma and Arun Kamal into, English. He was Associate Editor with Rajasthan SahityaAkademi for a brief period. He has also organized some memorable literary events as Creative Head, *SabridayaSamvad*, and is the founder of *Udaharan*, an alternative publisher and independent forum. Besides teaching English at a University, he is an editor with *Siyahi*.

KAMLESH

Kamlesh's poetry has been appearing in various prestigious literary journals since 1958. He has also written essays and criticism and has edited various magazines and journals. Two collections of his poems have been published: *Jartkaru* (1980) and *Khule Mein Avas* (2008).

KEDARNATH SINGH

Kedarnath Singh was born in 1934 in Chakiya village in District Baliya, near Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. He received his early education in Chakiya, and then moved to Banaras for high school and college. He earned his M.A. in Hindi from Banaras Hindu University, and went on to complete his Ph.D. in 1964. Over the next decade, he taught at various institutions in the region, including UdayPratap College, Banaras, and Gorakhpur University. He accepted a position at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in 1976, and taught there until his retirement in the late 1990s. He continues to live in New Delhi. Singh began writing poetry in Banaras around 1952. Among his collections of poems are *Abhibilkulabhi* (1960); *Jaminpakrahilahi* (1980); *Akal meinsaras* (1989), which won the SahityaAkademi poetry prize for that year; *Uttar Kabirauranyakavitaen* (1995); and *Tolstoy aur cycle* (2004). His *Pratimidhikavitaen*, a volume of selected poems edited by ParmanandShrivastav, appeared in 1985 and was reissued in 2000. He has published three influential books of scholarly criticism and essays in Hindi, and has also edited volumes of poetry in Hindi translation. His awards include the KumaranAsan Prize (Kerala), the MaithilisharanGupt Prize (Madhya Pradesh), and the Dinkar Prize (Bihar). His

poems have been translated into several Indian languages, and also into such European languages as Spanish, Dutch, German, Russian, and Hungarian.

KRISHNA MOHAN JHA

Born 1968. MA in Hindi Literature from Delhi University and PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Writes poetry in Hindi (*SamaykoCheerkar*, 1998) and Maithili (*EktaHerayalDuniya*, 2008). Was awarded the KanhaiyyaSmritiSamman (1998) and HemantSmritiKavitaPuraskar (2003). Presently, Reader at Assam University, Silchar's Hindi Department.

KUNWAR NARAIN

KunwarNarain was born in 1927 in Uttar Pradesh, and was educated in Lucknow, receiving his M.A. in English from Lucknow University. He managed a family business in that city for several decades, and now lives in retirement in south Delhi. Since the early 1950s, Narain has published poetry in Hindi, as well as essays, literary criticism, short stories, essays on film and the various arts. His books of poetry include the collections *Chakravayuba* (1956), *Apanesamane* (1979), *Koi dusaranahim* (1993), and *In dinon* (2002), as well as two book-length poems, *Atmajayi* (1965) and *Vajashravakebahane* (2008). He has published three volumes of criticism and essays, and one collection of short stories, *Akaronke as pas* (1973). He has edited several significant journals in Hindi, among them *Yuga-chetana*, *Nayapratik*, and *Chhaya-nat*. In addition, he has served as the president and vice-president of the BharatenduNatya-kendra in Lucknow and the Uttar Pradesh SangitNatakAkademi. Among his many awards are the SahityaAkademi poetry prize, the Premchand Prize, the Lohia Distinguished Award, and the National Kabir Prize. Narain has travelled extensively in Europe and North America, and has read from his work and participated in conferences in Sweden, Poland, Italy, and England, among other countries.

MANGLESH DABRAL

MangleshDabral was born in 1948 in a village in TehriGarhwal district in the Himalayan region. He has spent all his adult as literary editor in various newspapers published from Delhi and other north Indian cities. His books include five collections of poems, *Pabar Par Laltein* (1981), *GharKa Rasta* (1981), *Hum Jo DekhateHain* (1995), *AawaazBhiEkJagahHai* (2000), *MujheDikhaEkManushya* (2008), and three collections of prose, *EkBaar Iowa* (1996), *Lekhak Ki Roti* (1998), and *KaviKaAkelapan* (2008). His poems have been widely translated and published in all major Indian languages and in English, Russian, German, Dutch, Spanish, French, Polish and Bulgarian. He has received many honours and prizes including the *SahityaAkademi Award* (2000). He has translated works of Bertolt Brecht, Hans Magnus Enzensburger, Pablo Neruda, Ernesto Cardenal, Nicanor Parra, YannisRitsos, TadeuszRozewicz, Zbigniew Herbert, and Dora Gabe, StancaPencheva.

MANOJ KUMAR JHA

Writer, translator and researcher Manoj Kumar Jha writes in Hindi, Maithili and English. He has published poems and translations in various magazines and journals. He has translated Aijaz Ahmad's *Reflections on Our Times* into Hindi and has done research on madness, *Vikshipton par PadtiNigahonkiDastan* for CSDS. Recipient of the *Bharat BhushanAgrawal Award* for poetry in 2009.

NAGARJUN

Vaidyanath Mishra (1911–1998), famous as Baba Nagarjun, is considered one of the greatest Hindi poets of the twentieth century. He, along with Trilochan and KedarnathAgrawal, forms the great Progressive trinity. He also wrote in Maithili under the pen name 'Yatri'. He published more than a dozen volumes of poetry and six novels. He was awarded the SahityaAkademi Award for his Maithili book *PatraheenNagnGaachh*. Some of his well-known works are *Yugdhara*, *KhichdiViplavDekhaHamne*, *PyasiPathraiAankhein*, *Is GubaarkeeChhayamein*, *SatrangePankhonuaalee*, *HazaarHazaarHathonwalee*.

PANKAJ CHATURVEDI

Born 24 August, 1971, in Irawa, Uttar Pradesh. Graduated from Lucknow University (1992) and went on to do his M.A. (1994) and M.Phil. (1996) in Hindi from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Has been teaching Hindi at V.S.S.D. PG College, Kanpur, since 1996. He has published two collections of poetry—*EkSampoornaKeLiye* (1998, AadharPrakashan) and *Ek Hi Chehra* (2006, VaniPrakashan)—and a book of criticism—*Aatmakatha Ki Sanskriti* (2003, VaniPrakashan). He was awarded the Bharat BhushanSmritiPuraskar in 1994, and the DevishankarAwasthi Award for criticism in 2003.

RAHUL SONI

Writer and translator, currently based in New Delhi. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Almost Island*, *Biblio*, *Poetry International Web*, *Hindi*, *Indian Literature*, *DhauLi Review*, etc. Currently translating Geetanjali Shree's novel *Tirohit*, Dharamvir Bharati's novel *SurajkaSaatanGhoda*, and Shrikant Verma's book of poems *Magadh*. Founder, editor and publisher of the bilingual literary journal *Pratilipi*, and the independent press *Pratilipi Books*. Awarded the Charles Wallace Visiting Fellowship in Literary Translation at the University of East Anglia, for the year 2010.

ROBERT A. HUECKSTEDT

Robert A. Hueckstedt teaches Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit at the University of Virginia. His translations from Hindi have appeared in *Concerning Poetry*, *raddle moon*, *Pig Iron*, *Paintbrush*, *Indian Literature* and *Nimrod*. The Hunted, his translation of Mudra Rakshasa' novel *Dandavidbaan* was published in 1992 by Penguin Books India. His recent translations from Hindi are two short story collections of UdayPrakash, *Rage Revelry and Romance* and *Short Shorts Long Shots*. He is currently working on a translation of the novella *Hariya Hercules kibairani* by ManoharShyam Joshi.

SHIRISH DHOBLE

Born 1960, Indore. A heart surgeon by profession. Has published two collections of poetry, *Ret HaiMeraNaam* and *Uchcharan*. Recipient of the Raza Award (1987), the Katha Award (1996) and the Bharat BhooshanAgrawal Award (1997).

SHRIKANT VERMA

Shrikant Verma was born in 1931 in Bilaspur, formerly in the Central Provinces and the state of Madhya Pradesh, and now in Chattisgarh. He was educated in Bilaspur and Raipur, and received his M.A. in Hindi from Nagpur University in 1956 (which he attended on the recommendation of GajananMadhavMuktibodh, a leading Hindi writer of the previous generation). Verma then moved to New Delhi, where, for a decade, he worked as a journalist and in various capacities for political organizations. Between 1966 and 1977, he served as a special correspondent for Dinman, a major Hindi periodical then edited by S. H. Vatsyayan (Agyeya). Later, he was elected as a member of the RajyaSabha on a Congress (I) ticket in 1976; and served as an official and spokesman of the party in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. He was Indira Gandhi's national campaign manager in the 1980 elections that brought her back to power, and he worked as an adviser and political writer for Rajiv Gandhi after 1984. Verma passed away while being treated for cancer in New York City in 1986. He was a central figure in the NaiKavita movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and published an influential short novel as well as collections of short stories and literary interviews and essays. His important volumes of poems are *Jalasagar* (1973) and *Magadh* (1984), the latter perhaps the best-known book of Hindi poetry in the 1980s. He was a visitor at the Iowa International Writing Program twice (in 1970-71 and 1978), and won the TulsiPuraskar (Madhya Pradesh) in 1976 and the SahityaAkademi Award, posthumously for *Magadh* in 1985.

TEJI GROVER

Born 1955, Pathankot, Punjab, is a Hindi poet and has also written some fiction. She has published five collections of poetry, one novel, and her first collection of short stories is due out soon. She has translated several Scandinavian classics into Hindi, most of which have been published by VaniPrakashan. Currently based in the township of Hoshangabad, at one of the ghats of the Narmada, she has also been painting obsessively for the last five years. Her awards include Bharat BhushanSmritiPuraskar, the Raza Foundation Fellowship, and the Senior Fellowship from the central Ministry of Culture. She was also the writer-in-residence at PremchandSrijanPeeth, Ujjain 1995 through 1997. Her novel *Neela* has been translated into English and Polish, and her poetry into English, Polish and Swedish. She has done readings and delivered lectures mostly in Scandinavian countries, and has been invited to international literary festivals in Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

UDAY PRAKASH

Born in 1952, UdayPrakash is an independent writer and filmmaker (and formerly a translator, an editor, a journalist, an academician, and even a Government officer). His publications include *PeeliChhatriWaliLadki*, *Raatmein Harmonium*, *DariyaiGhoda*, *Paul Gomraka Scooter*, *Aur Ant meinPrarthana*, *SunoKarigar*, *Tirichh*, *IshwarkiAankh*, *ArebaPareba*, *Mangosil*, *EkBhashaHuaKartibai*, *Mohan Das*. He is one of the most translated Hindi authors and his books have appeared in most Indian languages. His books in English translation are *Short Shorts Long Shots*, *Rage Revelry and Romance*, *The Girl with the Golden Parasol*. He has been honoured with many awards that include the Bharat BhushanAgrawalPuraskar, the ShrikantVerma Award, the PahalSamman, the SahityakaarSamman and the MuktibodhSamman.

UDAYAN VAJPEYI

Born 1960. Hindi poet, essayist, short fiction and script writer. He has published two volumes of poetry, a short story collection, a book of essays and other miscellaneous publications (including a book of recreated folktales and an account of an extended conversation with filmmaker Mani Kaul). His work has been translated into Bengali, Tamil, Oriya, Kannada, English, French, Swedish, Polish and Bulgarian. He teaches Physiology at Gandhi Medical College, Bhopal. He has translated works by Octavio Paz, Borges, Chekhov, Brodsky, Jaccottet, TadeusRozewicz, among others, into Hindi. He has been invited to various festivals in India and overseas, the most recent being a seminar on the folk imagination in Moscow and the International Book Fair in Paris in 2007. He has received various awards for his writing, including a Senior Fellowship from the Government of India (1994-96), the KrishnaBaldev Award (2001) and the Raza Foundation Award (2003).

VINAY DHARWADKER

VinayDharwadker was born in Pune in 1954, and educated at schools in Mumbai, Delhi, and Jaipur. He attended St Stephen's College and Delhi University, earning his B.Sc. (1974) and M.Sc. (1974) degrees in physics. He began a parallel career as a poet and translator in the early 1970s, and moved to the United States in 1981. He received his Ph.D. in literature and South Asian studies from the University of Chicago in 1989, and is now a Professor in the Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His books include *Sunday at the Lodi Gardens* (poems, 1994); *The Collected Poems of A. K. Ramanujan* (co-editor, 1995); and *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan* (general editor, 1999). Among his most influential works are *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (co-edited with Ramanujan, 1994) and *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture* (editor, 2001). He is a co-winner of the American Culture Association's Ray and Pat Browne Award for the Best Reference Work in Popular Culture published in 2007, for Volume 6 of *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Popular Culture*. He is also the winner of the 2007 Translation Prize given by the SahityaAkademi, New Delhi, for *Kabir: The Weaver's Songs* (Penguin Classics).

VINOD KUMAR SHUKLA

Vinod Kumar Shukla was born on 1 January 1937 in Rajnandgaon, Madhya Pradesh. Publications include three novels—*Naukar Ki Kameez* (1979), which was made into a movie by Mani Kaul), *Khilega To Dekhenge* and *Deewar Mein EkKhirkeeRahatiThi*—the short story collection *Per Par Kamra* (1988) and the collections of poetry *Lagbhag Jai Hind* (1971), *Vah AadmiChala Gaya NayaGaram Coat PehankarVichar Ki Tarah* (1981), *Sab KuchHonaBachaRabega* (1992) and *AtiriktNahin* (2002). Awards include the theDayavatiModyKaviShekharSamman, the ShikharSamman, the Muktibodh Fellowship and the SahityaAkademi Award in 1999 for *Deewar Mein EkKhirkeeRahatiThi*. Currently lives in Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

VIREN DANGWAL

VirenDangwal (Born 1947, in Kirtinagar, Uttaranchal) is one of the leading Hindi poets. He has published three collections of poetry: *Isi Duniya Mein*, *Dushchakra Mein Srashta*, and *SiyabiTaal*. Recipient of *RaghuvirSahaySamman*, *ShrikantVermaPuraskar* and *ShamsherSamman* and the *SahityaAkademi Award* for *Dushchakra Mein Srashta* in 2004.

VISHNU KHARE

Born 1940, poet, translator and critic Vishnu Khare has published five collections of poetry, *Pathantar*(2008) being the latest, and a book of criticism *AlochanakeePahleeKitaab*. He has been a prolific translator in Hindi, English, German and other European and Asian languages. Book-length English collections of Hindi poets ShrikantVerma and Bharat BhushanAgrawal, a collection of Hindi poetry in German (with LotharLutse), collections of Nottebaum, Czeslaw Milosz, WyslawaSzymborska and MiklosRadnoti in Hindi, and Finland's national epic *Kalewala* in Hindi are some of his published translations. Goethe's *Faust* in Hindi is his latest translation, to be published soon. Khare began as his career as a college teacher (1963-75), served as SahityaAkademi's Deputy Secretary (1976-84), and ended a journalist at Nav Bharat Times (1985-1993). A member of the SahityaAkademi, Kalewala Society and UNESCO's Cultural Commission on India, he has been awarded Finland's national honor Knight of the Order of the White Rose, RahguveerSahaySamman, MaithilisharanGuptSamman, and Hindi Akademi, Delhi's highest honor, the ShikharSamman. Widely traveled, he has also written art and cinema criticism for Nav Bharat Times, The Pioneer, The Hindustan Times and Frontline. Presently he is writing a film for his son. He lives in Delhi.