

# **Forlorn Melodies**



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**Forlorn Melodies**

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MA in English

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Summer 2022

## **CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arifa Ghani Rahman', is written over a horizontal line.

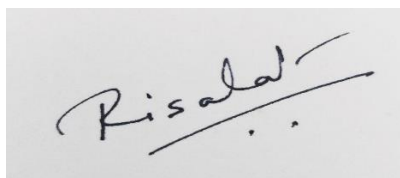
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## DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read "Risalat Rahman Hridoy". There are some small dots and a horizontal line below the signature.

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(Risalat Rahman Hridoy)

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## **Dedication**

To my parents

## **Acknowledgements**

Foremost, I am grateful to Almighty Allah for always showering his blessing upon me. “Indeed, my prayers and my sacrifices, and my living and my dying are all for Allah, the Lord of all the Worlds” (Quran 6:162).

I thank my parents for all their contributions in my life.

My profound gratitude goes towards my thesis supervisor Ms. Arifa Ghani Rahman for taking me under her supervision. I did not have the privilege of attending her classes as a student. However, her diligent guidance as my supervisor has more than filled up the void, and I shall remember it for a long time.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my teachers Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, Professor Kaiser Haq, Dr. Sohana Manzoor and Ms. Sarah Anjum Bari for being admirable figures in my tenure as a postgrad student at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation titled “Forlorn Melodies” is a collection of my original poetry covering various genres. This is a fruit of my passion for poetry I developed over the years. In an age where human beings are surrounded by machines, poetry works as an antidote to relieve people from the mechanized lifestyle. It is important to have compassion towards people and the nature to write poetry and one common aspect in my poems is expression of intense emotions. Through the different themes I explored, I tried to dive deep into human emotions and presented an outlook on life that deals with both natural and urban lifestyle. The poems I wrote, are based on my own experiences, as well as a result of my imaginative route. I attempted to cover both free verse poetry as well as poems with rhyme and rhythm. To me, poetry is any word or sentence that has a purpose. Being a conductor of chaos, it is a poet’s job to contribute a verse for the greater good of the society, and through my poems I tried to do that.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

In my childhood, my father used to tell me, the breeze in the morning is a cure to the human body that cannot be purchased with money. I try to wake up each morning and take a stroll down the roads and look at the stillness and scenery around me. I stand by the lakes and look at how the water moves along with the breeze. The leaves, the dust from the street, my hair, touched by the gentle wind of the dawn, calms my soul. To me, poetry generates the same feeling. In the age of mechanization, we all require a feeling that stirs our emotions that lies deep down within us. How mere words help stimulate our inner emotions speaks volume of the power of meaningful words. No matter which generation, human beings are hungry for love. They run towards the force where they receive even a little bit of love. Poetry does that to human beings, generating love and emotions in them.

Even though I have not perfected the art of writing poetry, I feel that writing my dissertation on my own collection of poems would do justice to the emotions I generated in the years gone by. For my thesis, I wrote poems based on various themes, starting from spirituality, nature, loneliness, love, rejection, feminism among many others. However, the aspect that is common to all of them is the expression of intense emotions. The purpose of poetry should be to move the readers, and through that, bring out a change in their mindset, eventually bringing out positive improvements to the society.

In many cases, I witnessed, writers begin to write poetry for their own pleasure, not keeping an audience in mind, solely to express their innermost emotions. In my case, it began the same way.

However, as I studied extensively about poems and the lives of poets through sheer love for this art form, I saw their poetry left a mark on society and defined generations. Poets, through their substantial studies and multidimensional knowledge, could foresee the future.

The ability to foresee upcoming changes in society not only requires education, but spirituality as well. Spirituality is an integral part of English literature, and it is not only limited to endearment towards a higher power, it may be towards other forces too. English poetry was motivated by Christian ideals in the 16th Century. Poets presented Christian principles in their writing to reflect their unearthliness. Being a Muslim, and a firm believer of my faith, I have always found solace in God. Facing several hurdles in my life, God's influence worked on me as an antidote and my faith became stronger. I extensively studied works of Jalal-al-din Muhammad Rumi, the 13th century Persian poet, to learn more about spirituality and mysticism that adhered to my faith. I was mesmerized. He told stories of the Prophets and their companions through his poems that had a moral lesson. With my poems, "My Lord," "The Light," "Her," and "A New Man," I tried to express my spiritual side and how God has been the cornerstone of hope in my life and many others. Also, in the poem, "Stop! Stop! (Zam Zam)," I narrated the story of how Mecca was graced with the holy Zamzam waters through the painstaking struggle of Prophet Abraham's wife Hajar and their son Ismail. Such stories are inspirational and work greatly to emotionally move the readers.

Love for nature is also part of my spirituality, and guilty of producing it are works of William Blake, John Keats, Lord Byron and P.B. Shelley among others. "Forlorn Melodies," which itself is an allusion to John Keats, is the title I chose for the thesis, for my sheer fascination for Romantic poetry. English Romanticism began in the late 18th century as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. To make a living, people had to move to the towns to work at factories.

Human beings were becoming physically and mentally unhealthy. This is why a number of poets started glorifying nature in their poems, as they believed human being's true self lies in the countryside. Because country or village "is the figure of nature to culture, of rustic past to citified present, of rural 'culture' to urban 'society' and 'civilization', of tradition to modernity" (Mitchell 248). That is why, in order to glorify natural settings in their poems, the Romantics presented "flowers, trees, birds, fields, rivers, mountains, seashores and the innumerable 'prospects' that invite the traveler to stop and stare at the countryside," helping to showcase "rural customs, folklore and peasant life, antiquarian research into the traces of vanished civilizations," that cannot be seen in urban settings (Mitchell 246).

In order to pay tribute to my love for nature, I wrote a series of poems that deals with the Romantic school of thought. In "Ode to Grass," "Cuckoo Story," "To the Pigeon," and "The Long Walk," I tried to present the phenomena of nature. Nature can be beautiful and at the same time be cruel. But it has its own course, and manipulating its course can lead to severe ecological problems. I described stories with vivid descriptions of picturesque visuals and imagery in those poems.

However, of all the Romantics, William Blake can be described as the poet "of the metropolis," because of the way he describes in his poems, "the unevenly expanding city that" invaded "the countryside" (Mitchell 250). Machines were taking over nature. Similar to that idea, Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, once an area full of greenery, has been slowly grasped by newly built factories and commercial areas. Among the poems that I wrote for my thesis, one of the recurrent motifs is Dhaka. Having spent half of my life here, I see how 19th Century London is similar to 21st Century Dhaka. Reading William Blake's poem "London" for the first time, I thought, this is Dhaka in its entirety. Thus, paying homage to the poem, I wrote "Dhaka," a poem that

explores the artificiality that the citizens of Dhaka are surrounded by in this age. Moreover, in the poem “Slaves,” I tried to show how such urban areas, people worship the clock and have become slaves of time.

In Romanticism, “the language of feeling, with its key terms of sentiment, sympathy and sensibility, was central to the discussion of man and society, manners, ethics and aesthetics” (Brewer 21). Apart from that, “in many conventional accounts of romantic poetry,” the reader often finds the poet “in isolation, standing on the mountaintop, waking from a dream, or drowsing beneath a tree listening to a nightingale” (Cox 265). This helped the poet enjoy the fruits of nature in solitude. However, the portrayal of a solitary speaker was simply the embryonic form during Romanticism, which fully bloomed during the Modern period.

In the post- World War era, the language of scenic beauty, which was a form of escapism to the writers and readers, was mostly rejected and people started accepting the horrors of war, portraying them in their poetry. The speaker in a Modern poem is often alone, surrounded by machines, leading a materialistic life. In “In a Station of the Metro,” Ezra Pound writes,

“The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals on a wet, black bough.”

This describes how human beings have turned into ghosts, devoid of feelings, simply minding their own business. The speaker is surrounded by people, yet alone. Late modernist poets like Wallace Stevens and Philip Larkin wanted to bring back the Romantic touch again, and to escape from the aftermath dread of war and go back to the sensibility of storytelling. However, Russian Modernist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky preferred showing the realities of the society, because the early 20th Century was indeed a tumultuous period.

In order to portray loneliness in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, I wrote poems like “Alone,” “Birthday,” “Come to My Home,” and “Nocturnal Observer,” where the speaker is surrounded by a lot of people, yet a lonely person, lost in the self-serving world of economic wellbeing. This is the harsh reality of this age and cannot be escaped by portrayal of natural settings. Moreover, vivid descriptions of love and rejection in Romantic poetry that were susceptible to a natural setting, started to transpose in Modern and Postmodern poems, as it catered more to a grim urban milieu.

I was greatly influenced by the works of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Modern poet Pablo Neruda to attain more knowledge on how to approach love poems. I admire the way he took a surrealist approach to describe the theme of love in his works. Taking inspiration from his style, in “Love is Janus-faced,” I personified love and expressed my dual emotions of love as hellish at one time and heavenly at another, through the use of Biblical references as love as a concept is sacred. However, once a lover faces rejection, he can turn into a mad man, which I did at one point in my life, and I tried to express those emotions through my poems.

Besides, I wrote poems such as, “Ode to Sadness,” “Tears,” “Remember Me,” “Dead Hearted,” “Best Friend,” and “To the Affectionate,” based on the theme of love and rejection. Using metaphors, imagery and other literary devices I expressed the intensity of the agony caused because of rejection from love. In “The More Loving One,” modern poet W.H. Auden expressed his emotions on being a one-sided lover, as he writes,

“How should we like it were stars to burn

With a passion for us we could not return?

If equal affection cannot be,

Let the more loving one be me.”

A poet reflects “on the problems of life, on human experience” (Lotspeich 300). When he expresses his idea, he does that with full generosity without a judgmental mindset. It can be understood that, despite not having his love reciprocated from the other side, Auden remains to be the generous one, describing the true nature of how a poet should be. However, my approach might not be the same, since I complained more about my rejection rather than embrace it.

One other 20<sup>th</sup> Century phenomenon was the rise of feminism, which was a movement to achieve equal rights for women as a reaction to facing years of repression. This ideology was reflected in poetry as well. In my lifespan, I too have witnessed unequal treatment of women by the society which is predominantly male driven. To express my frustration, I wrote “Janaki’s Valour,” a retelling of the epic *The Ramayana* where Sita instead of waiting for husband Rama to rescue her, gets herself rescued and goes back to her mother, mother nature, and not her husband. Widely revered as a love story, I felt the angle of love in the epic is debatable, as performing *agnipariksha* to prove her chastity does not construe love in my opinion. Thus, I showed Sita to be independent and self-empowered in my poem.

While writing poetry, I do not limit myself to a singular school of poetry or follow a fixed pattern, rather explore poems of various ages and study several themes. However, I keep the emotional factor intact in most of my poems. The poems “The Cycle of Life,” “A Noble Man,” and “Winter to Me” presented stories of a person’s growth, success, trauma, through intense storytelling. In “The Flower of Shame,” I alluded to the story of self-obsession of Narcissus from Greek Mythology and changed it to the context of racism in modern society. It is a long poem describing the story of a person obsessed with her fair complexion and her obsession, at the end,

teaches her a lesson. “This House” is a poem where I presented gothic elements mixed with horror and through the use of olfactory imagery, I showed the transition of time.

What is beautiful about poetry is that it does not abide by any prior conventions. Poets of every era changed the ways in which their predecessors wrote poetry and came up with their own distinct styles. They made their own versions of defining poetry. Similarly, in my poem, “What is Poetry,” I tried to define what poetry is according to me, referring to poets from other generations.

The way poets of different generations have inspired me, so did my teachers. I was profoundly motivated by my teachers Ms. Nishat Atiya and Professor Kaiser Haq. Ms. Atiya made me fall in love with literature with the compelling way she taught in the class. On the other hand, Professor Haq’s compound knowledge and zestful personality impressed me eminently. Thus, I wrote sonnets on each of them, and writing on them, I feel, is something least I could do to their contributions.

I did not follow a particular pattern for the poems I wrote in my thesis. Some I wrote in free verse, and for some I followed rhyming patterns. Initially, when I started writing poetry, I strictly followed rhyming patterns. However, during a lecture, I heard Professor Haq talk about his fascination for the poem “Snake,” by D.H. Lawrence and how the poem is narrated beautifully through free verse. This captivated him to write poetry in free verse as a writing technique. Studying the poem, I too, was mesmerized by the sheer power of storytelling of Lawrence, and embraced free verse technique for writing some of my poems.

However, I also follow certain rhyming schemes and rhythm for some poems, because “rhythm will aid in rendering” the readers’ “appreciation of the ideas more vivid and intense” (Lotspeich

302, 303). “Rhythm reacts to intensify the mood,” which is why I mostly prefer using rhythm since it is “a positive aid in the producing of effects” (Lotspeich 303).

The poems I wrote for my dissertation are a stepping stone for my goal for pursuing poetry for a greater cause. Even though I try to cover several genres of poetry, I would still like to call myself a Romantic poet because of my love for nature, distaste for technology and immense compassion for people. Spiritual hollowness has grasped people because of direct intervention of science. This is why it is important to keep poetry alive. It is important to contribute a verse to the grand play of life. I am doing my part.

## Chapter Two

### The Poems

#### Prelude

In the midnight, when I look at the sky,  
Through my terrace and see the stars and the moon.  
They are so high, and I count them in array,  
Wait for the sun to rise, as the moon would vanish soon.

Countless galaxies that are yet to be found,  
And I wonder, one galaxy– is my mind.  
So I jump in the milky way of several thoughts mound,  
And look for the brightest star I may find.

So I take my pen and paper with pleasant sigh,  
And write about stars unexplored.  
The stars– the stories of lives not seen by naked eye,  
And have my long gone pleasure restored.

## **My Lord**

When my heart pounds

When I suffer in helplessness

When melancholy strikes me to the core

When life slips at the edge of meaninglessness

Seclusion seems to be the only option

Hands and feet become cold

Rivers of tears flow

I close my eyes in search of hope

Even when there is no hope left

I bow down my head

And the one who comes in the form of hope

And takes the plagues of life away–

Is my Lord

The Father to all orphans

The Caretaker of the indigent

The Reviver of lives

The Punisher of the corrupt

Master of the ecosystems

Master of the world

Master of the galaxies

My Lord, fill my heart with love for you

So that the worldly charades don't worry me

Make me worthy of your love

Let worldly sensations not devour me

And when I am worthy

Take me to you, my Lord

Where I can see you

And stay under your feet

For eternity

## **The Light**

We live in the same city,  
And see the same clouds everyday.  
Hear the same honking of countless vehicles,  
And endure the same scorching heat.

Yet, I do not see you,  
You do not see me.

We live under different ceilings,  
While I look at my ceiling,  
I see your reflection.  
Whereas, you see someone else's.

We watch the same movie  
Inside a theatre,  
While I watch it alone,  
You, with someone else.

My clothes have your smell,  
But yours have someone else's.

I feed the stray dogs, still;  
They look for you.  
You feed stray dogs too,  
In some other street,  
With someone else.

I walk on the footpath  
Alone,  
Getting the fragrance of the Tuberose plant  
From the grounds of the nearby mosque,  
Where I prayed for you.

Now, when I smell the flowers  
And they fall on me;  
In the western sky,  
Amidst the crimson sun  
Where I saw you-  
I see the Light.

We live in the same city,  
Yet, I do not see you,  
You do not see me;  
I do not want to see you either.

## **Her**

A junior female student from my university,

Dejected, with a bad history,

Found her muse in me.

Since the time we began fraternizing, She

Poured her heart out into telling me

About how messed up her life is...

And I, helped her emotionally

As much as I could.

Apart from discussing studies, we

Talked about her family and relationship crises—

I was a counsellor to her.

Whenever I asked her, “How are you?”

I would naturally expect her to say, “Not good!”

Because it had been going on like this for a long time.

For months we did not talk since I got busy.

Once, all of a sudden, we talked

At two o’clock in the morning,

And when I asked her how she was,

For the first time she said,

“I am good, Alhamdulillah!”

I was surprised and glad to hear that.

We talked for a long time

And it seemed she was

Content with her life.

After a while, she told me,

“Bhaiya, give me ten minutes,

I will pray and come back.”

“Isha at this hour?” Said I.

“No, Tahajjud,” said she.

I did not need to ask the reason

For her happy life now,

I got my answer.

## **A New Man**

In the torrid May of Dhaka,  
It is not only the soil but the heads of Dhakaites  
That turn into Vesuvius.

Ten ceiling fans aren't enough to suffice  
The warm bodies,  
The warmth from the humid weather,  
That makes the heads hot.  
Where sleep is not an option, how could people dream?  
How could I dream?

Waking up at six, travelling to my workplace,  
I take a rickshaw to the bus stop, take a bus,  
Again, a rickshaw to reach my workplace.

No, there are no birds in Dhaka;  
Only at zoos and safari parks,  
Which I cannot afford to see.  
Thus, listening to them chirp  
Is a luxury.

On one such sleep deprived, debilitating Dhaka day,

My superior caught me sleeping at my desk

And told me,

“I could pay a woman to do your job

And she could do it better.”

I was infuriated.

It felt I was compared to a donkey,

And I could not handle it.

I went out as the office ended,

In the windless afternoon

To seek validation.

I went to a place where sportive women performed.

Chose the one older than me,

Possessing physical features larger than usual;

My anger and desire grew.

I performed; performed for hours

I beat her,

Choked her,

She screamed, screamed till she was in tears.

But cannot say anything to me,

For I am a client;

A superior.

Reaching the climax, I felt enormous relief,

As if it were a new day.

A Spring Day, with pleasant breeze

Touching my undressed body.

I threw the cash on her wet face.

Without making eye contact;

She left.

However, I could not tolerate such insolence.

I dragged her hair

And pinned her down to tell me,

Thank you.

She did, and left

Without making eye contact.

With great vanity, I was going out of the sportive house,

Trying to make eye contact with other performers

With a suggestive smirk.

But they stood still

Without making eye contact,

With me.

Gradually Spring turned to Summer again.

Days of May, nights of May

Days of June, nights of June

Are all the same in Dhaka—

Hot, humid, horrendous.

While I was on my way home

I passed by a mosque,

And all of a sudden,

I felt my soul has been taken

To the gusty gates of heaven

And Jibrael blowing air on me;

It was the air conditioner.

It was time for Isha,

And the believers were entering the mosque for prayers.

With an unclean body and unclean soul

I entered.

Not to pray,

But avail the opportunity of cooling my body,

And head.

I didn't even remember the religious verses,  
And simply imitated the believers around me.  
During the final prostration, while my forehead touched the ground  
I could feel I have entered a speed force  
Quickly taking me somewhere;

I was flying

Flying and flying

Until I reached a gate; a luminous gate, winsome,  
Sparkling, shiny, that pleases the soul,

I was glad.

Until I heard a voice,  
That told me

*"You are forbidden*

*to inherit women against their will.*

*Nor should you treat them with harshness."*<sup>1</sup>

I was petrified.

I shook,

I shivered

Again, when I heard,

*"The fire of hell is even hotter if you only understood."*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quran 4:19

<sup>2</sup> Quran 9:81

I cried, I howled

In fear, In dismay.

Then I heard,

*“Seek help with patience and prayer –*

*though this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble.”<sup>3</sup>*

And then I stood still

With my heart beating faster than usual;

And I closed my eyes.

The ground beneath my feet vanished

And I was falling,

Falling and falling,

And I was screaming

Until I fell on the ground.

I opened my eyes, while my forehead was still touching the ground.

I got up and saw people gathered around me,

Asking me if I fell asleep.

I told them I did,

But while I was sleeping, I was awakened.

I went out of the mosque

Preparing to endure the Dhaka heat once again,

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<sup>3</sup> Quran 2:45

When I saw, a small girl child,  
With a pack of small water bottles  
Asking me, “Brother, will you have some water,  
The weather is warm, you will feel well.”

I admirably glanced at her,  
While she once again asked me,  
“Brother, will you have some water?”

I did.  
I bought one bottle and handed her a big boon,  
One fourth of which she kept and the rest returned.  
I told her, “The entire amount is for you.”

She told me,  
“The Prophet taught me to take only what I deserve for my work,”  
And left,  
Left me teaching what I did not learn in the past.

And I walked  
Again, in the grim Dhaka weather,  
Towards my home;  
A new man.

**Stop! Stop! (Zam Zam)**

Beneath the blistering sun of barren Mecca,

For days Hajar and Ismail readily sat.

Only few dates and water did they carry,

On their faces, no signs of worry.

Days went by and the dates were consumed,

Hajar rushed from Safa to Marwa for water,

As the water too was finished;

Ismail kept on crying, as he felt severely famished.

He hit the barren soil of Mecca with his legs

In pain, out of thirst;

And the ground cracked and water burst out,

Overwhelmed by that Hajar did shout.

“Stop! Stop!” as there’s boundless water.

Collected some and fed Ismail.

Dry Mecca flourished with water since then,

And with the test of God, looked back never again.

## **Ode to Grass**

Gorgeous green plant, monarch of the soil,  
Despite being squashed beneath men's feet,  
Your regality doesn't foil—  
Your nutrition every livestock does eat.

How your blades have spread their wings  
Long and slender,  
That sheep and goats find so tender,  
After chewing you, a cow gladly sings.

Your florets are like a mother's womb  
That bestows precious gifts to the nature,  
And spikes; in a king's hat a plume—  
A majestic feature.

I would gladly give you to my lover  
And not a red rose.  
Pastoral prophet; as our woes  
You make us forget with your vibrant colour,  
That eases the eye, from far far away,  
And to the nature I wholeheartedly pray,

You stay alive– your omnipresent power,

All hunger and sorrow take away.

## **Cuckoo Story**

In blooming spring, the male cuckoos sing  
And bewitch the female ones afar,  
I too listening to their melody feel a zing,  
And slowly heal my prevailing scar.

They meet and lay eggs in nests  
That are not their own,  
And the owners' eggs are dumped by the guests,  
In sorrow makes the owners moan.

I am a listener to their melody no more,  
As it stories of horror remind.  
The melody that once touched me to the core,  
Now in them murder I find.

**To the Pigeon**

Mistress of the sky

In union you fly

With your regal stance

And queenly glance

You fly and fly and rest

And prepare for another quest

Whole grains you pick

With your royal beak

Your wings light and dark grey

Like the sky on a rainy day

And you are an ornament to the sky

In flock when you fly high

## **The Long Walk**

I walk—

I walk and walk and walk,

Amidst hills and woods in the stony passage ways

Of Sandakphu; alone, as I'm ahead of my pack.

Pensive, I've walked for three days,

Touching with my hands the green moss

On stones, and memories of my beloved keep;

As if in a garden, both laying on the dewy grass,

Glancing at the sky,

And see the sparrows fly,

And close our eyes till we fell asleep.

I walk and walk and walk,

And no signs in me of exhaust.

The sky is crimson and weather cold,

Miles and miles have I strolled.

For once, I stopped and saw

Sitting on a stone, a girl, seeing the sunset in awe.

It was my beloved;

Methought,

She too might have come for a walk with a pack  
And lots of friends brought.  
In sweet woe and great shock  
To her I did queerly ask,  
“How? How have you come back?”  
She said, “back from your heart, beloved mine,  
Where you've kept me sealed for months nine,  
And now never shall I leave you ever,  
And take you for a swim in the nearby river.”

I walk and walk and walk,  
With my beloved, and see the brilliant blue brook  
Ahead,  
Took off our clothes and put them on a rock,  
I wanted not to go there in immense dread;  
Yet, she held my hand—  
Took me inside the waters and both half dipped,  
The way she dipped herself  
And got herself erased.

Slowly and slowly was I  
Drowning into her pleasant eyes,  
The ice seemed warmer and no signs of sigh;

Teary eyed I smiled and to my beloved

Did I want to go,

Then a yell came from the horizon that called out, “No!”

Worrisome, my companions came,

Held me up from the waters and laid

Me on the ground;

One of them slapped me, yet I felt no shame.

Then with wet eyes embraced me

And said,

“The soil might get wet after it rains,

But when the sun peeps behind the clouds,

The soil dries too; just like the problems of our lives.”

## Dhaka

Hopeful, I went to a flowershop to purchase a rose.

Dusty, the fragrance did not reach my nose.

Hopeless, I went to a giftshop and buy a plastic hibiscus,

And put artificial fragrance, for it to timely last.

She would go to the eatery with feigned trees & grass,

I took paid motorized vehicle to go to her wearing a mask.

Very less the rider & I saw between pointless skyscrapers & begrimed roads,

Also, half naked ladies on capitalistic billboards.

Red! Red Blood! Blood was in the streets all over,

Hands & legs scattered; skull & skin did hover.

Catastrophic scenes, a road or Panipat?

Despair on faces, a walkway or Mahabharat?

In union the poor women walk from their hood,

Working in garment factories to make their livelihood.

Some are househelps and some bricklayers,

Working until dusk, till they begin to tire.

I reached the eatery and sat amidst people

Smoking and backbiting, and amoral couples,  
She arrived and I hand her the hibiscus,  
A false smile she gave, I assumed, in total disgust.

Hopeful, I proposed to her for wedlock,  
She ignored me and my emotions mock,  
Left the table, I saw when called her did someone well-to-do,  
Looking at his stature, a wealthy man, she previously knew.

Hopeless, I headed out and did motionless stand,  
A child appeared and advanced her right hand.  
Lots of food to her I gave,  
She smiled and thanked God; a girl brave.

I reached home and tried to peacefully sleep,  
Hours went by, I did not weep.  
The feeling of rejection, I could not take,  
Everything in Dhaka is nothing but fake.

My sleep is interrupted by mechanical honks, human yell.  
Insignificant arguments, irrelevant stories they tell.  
Silence I seek, and in my ears a lover's words.  
I want to be awakened by the chirping of birds.

## Slaves

Dear God! They taught me since childhood,  
You are shapeless– you don't have hands  
Legs, or eyes; yet we worship you out of love;  
We imagine your existence.  
But dear God, I think I know how you look like,  
Because, whenever someone looks at you,  
They become wide awake.  
They look at you in fear, and in happiness.  
As you stay hung on the wall with your different shapes–  
Round, rectangular or square; with numbers in the middle,  
With three hands, sometimes two.  
Human beings wear you on their hands too,  
With leather straps or stainless steel.  
How beautiful you are!  
With your gold, silver coated bezel and bracelet,  
Sometimes encrypted with diamonds and rubies.  
Nowadays you are digital too.  
God are you a material?  
I thought you were invisible.  
I was taught you are always to be feared.  
I can see that now dear God,

How everyone is a slave to you,

How they fear you,

Moving around according to

How your hands move.

## Nocturnal Observer

When the clock hits four in the morning  
When everyone is in the midway of their prolonged dream,  
I do not shut my eye  
As sublime peace at nights I find.

Soundless, soothing are the nights.  
No needless noise of the fugitive world.  
I enjoy the motionless moments  
And expect everyone to sleep,  
But the world does not allow some to sleep.

I go to my balcony.  
Light a cigarette and watch the view around.  
Electric pillars and swarm of cables  
like tapeworms hanging on them.  
The electric lights hitting  
The cement concrete road without asphalt.

On it, I see a rickshaw puller  
Riding his empty ride, and I wonder,  
Does he expect a passenger at this hour?

Immediately I see another rickshaw,  
Carrying a son and his old mother  
To their destination.

Later, I see a truck carrying water containers,  
And a boy sitting on top,  
Glancing at me as the truck was going,  
While I exhaled my cigarette puff.

A middle-aged man on a motorcycle,  
With a helmet on his head  
Riding at a low speed on the dry vacant road.

An auto rickshaw with the capacity of four,  
Carrying six passengers  
With bulky luggage,  
Probably going to a bus stand.

The dogs in my ally and nearby  
Start howling as they hear the azaan,  
And continued till it ended.  
Once, I heard that the jinns fly furiously  
When they listen to the call to prayer,

And the dogs can see them fly;

Thus, they howl.

I see an elderly man, in white kurta and headpiece,

Limping towards the mosque for prayer.

After a while another man, in light green kurta,

Running to the mosque.

Both with one intention— pleasing God.

Clearly not everyone has similar lives.

Not everyone sleeps at night,

The world does not let them sleep.

## **Alone**

What a fine day at work!

Had a jovial time with all the colleagues—

Shared drinks together.

Later, met school friends

Reminisced old memories

Laughed till our bellies hurt.

Got home

Freshened up

Watched some TV

Went to bed

Alone—

But couldn't sleep

An emptiness I felt

Something was missing

A partner?

A friend?

I took my phone

Looked up my contact list

And found

I can't share my feelings

With any of them.

## **Birthday**

It was my birthday today,  
The most special day in a person's life.  
11.59 pm and I,  
Waiting for that one minute to pass by,  
So that people start wishing me.  
And once the clock hit 12,  
Calls and text messages started pouring in.  
Some important people and some not.  
Yet, the wishes made me feel exuberant,  
And I slept with an exhilaration,  
For the night  
To quickly pass by.

I woke up to my parents  
Standing beside my bed with a beautiful cake.  
They embraced me  
And wished for my good health.

In my office I saw,  
Everyone looking glum,  
As if someone had died,

And no one approached to wish me.  
To my surprise, they all were pretending  
So that in happiness I cry,  
And I did,  
As all of them brought a pleasant cake,  
With cards in their hands  
Where they wrote well about me;  
I was delighted.

I spent the evening with  
Three of my closest friends,  
From school,  
Who brought a cake and gifts for me too  
And we spent hours  
Laughing with joy.

And on my way home  
On the rickshaw,  
As I was leaving them,  
I felt I left a chunk of my heart  
In there.

I felt downhearted, hollow,

And all the memories of the day  
Started to vanish.  
I looked back at them  
Which felt like a camera  
Zooming out and losing its focus  
On the object with melancholic music  
Playing in the background.

Why is happiness given to us  
When it is meant to be taken away?

I slept on my bed looking at the ceiling  
Remembering the memories of the day  
And smiled, and shut my eye  
Realizing, if happiness was permanent  
How would we learn to cherish it?

## **Come To My Home**

Come to my home...

It's a 2100 sq. ft. flat with

Beautiful interior design.

There is a large bookshelf

Fully covering the west side wall

Of the drawing room, where

There is a huge collection of

Books from all over the world.

There are three balconies attached to each bedroom

With several types of plants are kept in the tubs.

I water them each morning.

The dining space is long, and children can

Sprint from one side to the other.

There are lavish paintings

I purchased from my foreign trips.

They are eye pleasing.

Come to my home,

To give me a nail cutter,

I don't have one.

Come to my home,

Bring tea,

Bring soft drinks,

Bring anything.

Come to my home,

And bring along a comb.

My water bottle just cracked,

Please bring one.

Please, come to my home,

My TV remote control malfunctioned.

I need a new pen,

Please bring one.

I implore, come to my home,

As my voice has been echoing

In this house for years.

**Love is Janus-faced**

Love- what devilish entity are you  
Causing torment in a man's heart,  
As if I am already in Sheol.  
Why are you so wicked?  
Whispering false notions of happiness into my ear,  
And trap me into pondering pleasure in the forbidden.  
You are worse than Azazel.  
You made me live in hell, as  
Putting on your fiery shoes of reckoning  
Had my brain boiled.  
The eyes with which I saw you,  
Were gouged out of me as punishment;  
And you observed and did nothing.  
You stayed in my heart, and planted a flower seed  
In the river of molten lava.  
  
How stubborn are you?  
How astonishing are you?  
  
Your persistence indeed caused  
A fragrant flower to bloom,

As you— love; became the reason to rise up and fly,  
Fly towards the ethereal gates.  
To a good man, you induce blissfulness.  
You made me live in Eden,  
You fed me bowls of delicious grapes and pomegranate,  
And made me swim in the endless river of milk,  
You sparkled my eyes with pearls and dazzling stones.  
You filled my heart with joy, that exceeds  
The limits of Gabriel's royal wings.  
Love, you are heavenly.

## **Best Friend**

What does he possess  
That I don't  
That you chose him over me.

Am I not a good person?  
Not good looking enough?  
Did I not care for you?  
Spending hours helping you  
With your studies  
And gave you money when  
You were down and out.

I took you to places  
You never went,  
Did I not make you laugh  
And listen to you cry?  
Did you not sleep on my shoulders  
Countless times, holding my hands?

I was your first,  
Yet you chose him over me.

Am I overqualified for your love,

Or are you simply blind?

“You are my best friend,” she said.

## **Remember Me**

Remember me for how much I loved you,

Remember me for how much I have done for you

Selflessly, selfishly, without giving much thought;

Instantly, because it was for you.

Had it been for others, I would have not done the same.

But you, because it was you, I changed my passion,

Sacrificed what I loved the most, and made you my passion.

I prayed to God to never separate us.

I prayed for your good health, education and job.

I prayed for the best to happen to you.

Yes, that is how much I cared for you.

Had I the chance, I would have given my eyes to you

So you could see how much I love you.

I would have gladly donated my organs to you

If required– kidneys, liver, lungs or the heart,

Even at the cost of my life.

I would do anything and everything for you.

Alas! You never understood an ounce of my emotions.

Whatever good I wished for you, turned opposite,

And left me to die, inside, and I wish outside.

Emotional pain is severe than physical pain,

And you left me to die, both emotionally and physically.

But I did not die. It took me time, but I was awakened.

A better man, a strong one; yet broken.

Yes, a side of me is still broken. But still...

Thank you. Thank you for making me stronger.

I am better now;

I will be the best.

## **Dead Hearted**

Hiding in my own crib I silently sob,  
Far away from the people pleasing mob,  
It is only I who see my sorrow in silence;  
Not even my mother, father or my friends.

I am severely struck by the bolt of love one sided,  
Battered and bruised, I was half dead  
Inside— and I die each day even more,  
When I remember our rhapsodic times of yore.

Half dead yet conscious, as I wake up daily with signs of hope  
For a life new, with someone who would throw me a rope  
Of love and bind me with it; and not untie ever, as I need  
To stay alive; inside my heart, planting a true love's seed.

## **Tears**

All those months, I kept my emotions hidden.  
But they came back, like haunting dreams,  
In a state of agony, I live every moment,  
All I want is the pain to end.

My tears go unnoticed, night after night.  
I cannot sleep, for I wake up after a while,  
With a tormenting beat in my heart.  
My body becomes numb in anguish.  
And I constantly look at the ceiling,  
Without any blink of the eyes.

I have shed my tears, so much so  
That, my eyes have become dry.  
There is a constant heaviness in the heart,  
That prohibits me to smile  
I cannot enjoy even when I am enjoying.  
As if I am the Monster, and she is Frankenstein.

She has not seen my cry, neither will she.  
She knows I am jealous of her company.

So many hidden emotions!

So much anxiety!

My tears are like that of the herbivorous animals,

That goes forsaken.

It is like the tears of a cow before getting slaughtered,

Like a goat before its butcher,

Like an innocent rabbit before being devoured,

And a heron, before being hit by an archer.

I stay in my room, my solitary fortress.

Watch the clock tick, as seconds go by.

And remember the rapturous moments we had,

That won't be there anymore,

After months eight and a half.

I loved her, she did not.

I touched her, she did too.

I kissed her, she did not.

I cared for her, she did too.

I still cry, night after night.

Write letters to her that I burn.

For this is unrequited love,

Two souls; lost friendship

Ah! Such a shame!

## **Ode to Sadness**

I see in the streets no vehicles making a sound,  
On the footpath no pedestrians talk,  
The muggers in the alley cease to hound,  
Nor in the sky chirps the birds in flock.

The clock does not tick in my room confined,  
Nor buzz the house flies.

The water neither drip from the tap,  
And I hear not the baby cries.

All I hear are my sighs.

Sigh of distress, sigh of behaviour unkind.

Melancholy has me zapped

So profoundly that, the lover in me

Has given his life in the sea.

Lynch me, my beloved, before I hear you

Mouth your mouth with that loathsome man.

Drag my corpse in the channel and throw it

For the piranhas to eat,

Which is more peaceful than

Hearing you, break a promise

That was long due;

You will give me a hilltop kiss.

Talk to me not, betraying woman, in the morning

As you are the promise to shatter.

Keeping me in dismay, and have me mourning

Cries of sorrow, that would I never utter.

### **To the Affectionate**

Forbidden you are; your soul not.

In the purest forms, I imagine making love to you.

Tear the necklace of faith, which on your neck you've got.

Love me divinely, not as a Mohammedan, or a Jew.

In the greenery, lying with you I imagine

Gazing, at the clouds in the sky.

And the fall amidst the mountain

Where the rainbow, rises up high.

In the cold delta waters of midsummer,

With you, fair princess, I imagine swimming.

Dipping ourselves in the immaculate waters; and when came the hour

I knew not, we started kissing.

In the populous academia of a suburban land,

Sitting with you in the book room, I imagine

You, schooling me, while I hold your firm left hand.

Realising my intentions, you could not hold your grin.

Each day we go to the alley,

Where at the corner we'd smoke.

You will lip your lip in mine freely,

That is what I would hope.

You would bid goodbye to me,

And naive mistress, meet your other desired men.

Leaving me behind, like in a desert a single tree.

And enjoy yourself for hours, six to seven.

I hand presents to you, being affectionate,

You take and give a sweet smile.

And keep them in the corner of your closet,

That I expect you to use, once in a while.

You put holy water on your forehead,

While in the west I prostrate.

Yet I dream to carry my dreams with you.

Giving your cheeks, lips; my passionate kisses few.

## **Boys Don't Cry**

Blessed, blessed are women for their power to cry;

Burst out seas of sorrow,

And lessen the burden in their breasts,

And emerge with newness tomorrow.

I, a man— know not how to cry,

Storing all the anguish in my heart

Being deadpan; that is devouring me from the inside,

And making my heart darker than dark.

I was taught not to cry.

If I cry, less of a man am I?

Yes, they said, only women and children cry,

Be strong as a stone, who always strength supply.

But I want to cry, cry my heart out

As I am in pain, but my eyes are bone dry,

And if within a while I cannot cry,

It is for sure I will die.

**Janaki's Valour**

Far from her motherland Mithila,  
Abducted in Ravana's Lanka,  
Beneath the banyan tree she sat, Janaka's daughter.  
Waiting for her spouse, Dasharat's son, to reclaim her.

Feet naked, only a gerua robe she wore,  
Fasting all day, she would eat no more.  
Day and night at the sky did she stare,  
Soon expecting her man to be there.

Rebuffing Ravana's every advance,  
Not even the slightest touch, not giving him a chance.  
Prevailing her honour each time did Janaki of Mithila.  
Pining for her husband's arrival, in desolate Lanka.

One day in Lanka did Hanuman come,  
Looking for Sita in *Ashokavanam*.  
Assuring her to be rescued soon,  
Just after the end of monsoon.

Monsoon ended, her agony did not.

Bemoaning her solitude and some assuage she sought.

Befriended Trijata, a noble Rakshasi

Who told her, “Rama will come walking on the sea.”

No one arrived as her patience took a halt

Rama let her down, whom she did exalt.

Humiliated she felt, enraged was she,

The rebirth of Lakshmi, decided to set herself free.

Penances she performed to Brahma,

To obtain power to fly away from Ravana;

And Brahma did bless her with a boon,

A glorious knife to kill Ravana, and that right soon.

In a pretending jolly mood

For a feast Sita, invited the Rakshasas in her hood

And fed them food that Trijata acquired; a natural herb juice,

Consuming them outright, awareness did they lose.

She walked alone, gracefully, like a queen

Like no other Lanka had ever seen,

And at the gates did Ravana she meet

Who seemed tiny in front of her, stature beneath her feet.

“Future queen of Lanka, why? Why go away from me?”

He said, “why run away from the bravest man you’ll ever see?”

“Man! You abduct a queen and call yourself brave?”

She said, “I am Goddess Lakshmi, I need no man to save.”

“O Ravana! You will see my wrath fall upon you,

Likes of which you’ve seen only a few.

Come not near me while to my home I walk

With honour, that is solid as a rock.”

Ravana’s amour propre she shattered

With words, with her mouth uttered.

Furious Ravana approached with ill intent,

Valorous Sita stood still unblinking, unbent.

Blankly witnessed by the Gods above,

In his navel the glorious knife did she shove.

Fell on the ground, dead, with his pride shattered

Along with the forts of Lanka, their honour battered.

She walked alone— She walked alone and alone

From Lanka; walked on the sea on her own

And crossed forests, mountains and land  
No fences in front of her could stand.

And to her mother Bhumi did she go,  
Away from the world she felt she did not know,  
And in her place found peace did she,  
As she placed herself in her throne once again, Goddess Lakshmi.

## **The Cycle of Life**

A soft, celestial being on earth is the mother.

Her divine drink does the son sip.

Her love boundless, like none other—

Life's journey with her is a heavenly trip.

Step by step, holding the little finger,

No trouble with her the son ever sees.

Here and there, they both do wander

Till the end, till the mother last breathes.

And when to heaven goes the mother;

For days and nights, the son does shatter.

Until the time he becomes a father,

The daughter to him the most does matter.

For she is the mother born again,

The lost light of life he finds.

He becomes her guide through wind and rain,

And like the cycle of life, their love forever intertwines.

## **A Noble Man**

Loving his family is what a noble man does,  
Through thick and thin, through lifely wars,  
Massage the mother's soft feet when they hurt,  
Serve the father dearly when he becomes inert.

Hand presents to his lovely wife—  
An important pillar of his life.  
Adore the children when they study and play,  
Living an honest life is a noble man's way.

But when the noble man embraces noble death,  
No longer sees and no longer does breathe,  
He is taken to the grave and kept for eternal rest,  
To receive gifts in the afterlife for doing his best.

And when his soul meanders around the house,  
And sees the faithful mourn— parents, children and spouse;  
He cannot wipe their tears, and make them see,  
He has come to the place, where it was meant to be.

## **Winter to Me**

I knew winter as a phenomenon

That always happened

In my hometown,

And I hated it.

In the freezing dawn of Panchagarh,

I was kept seated at the courtyard

for the morning sun

To give me some heat.

“Have some tea,” my father would tell me,

“Eat hot pitha, its tasty.”

I loathed winter because I loathed

Applying lotion on my skin.

“Put some balm on your lips

Otherwise, they will turn into a desert,”

My mother would tell me.

I tore the dead skin off my body

And played with them like snowflakes.

Winter was like a bad dream,

That breaks a good dream

While sleeping on the bed

Wrapped up in a quilt,

Because,

“Wake up! Its school time”

“Five minutes, Mommy”

“Not even one!”

Walking on the road,

Looking for a rickshaw.

“Oh! It's chilly.”

The breeze would enter

Through my oversized uniform

And freeze me.

Winter was painful to me.

Walking up for sehri

In the midnight to see

Mommy has cooked veggies

And not chicken?

“Eat what Allah provided,”

She told me.

Winter was beautiful  
Only in the afternoon  
When I played with my friends  
And enjoyed ourselves jubilantly.

Winter is coming, said Hemanta.  
Winter is gone, says Basanta.

Now, Winter is like any other season  
Dusty, murky and hazy.  
Winter is Dhaka city.  
City centre on one side,  
Korail slum on the other.

“Can you give me some clothes?”  
Says the impoverished kids.  
In other seasons they say,  
“Can you give me some money?”

Winter is purchasing the most expensive jacket  
From Yellow, Cat’s Eye, Ecstasy,  
“Get out you bloody beggar!”  
Huh! Ogling at me”

Says the privileged people from Gulshan, Banani.

Winter is their friends discussing,

“Is your jacket made of velvet?

Mine’s corduroy,”

“Mine’s denim”

“Mine’s made of crocodile skin.”

Winter is greedy NGOs

Donating twenty percent on the needy,

And spending on themselves eighty.

Winter is unfriending people

Who once were important

And now not.

Winter is Fitzgerald’s *Winter Dreams*,

A season of separation.

Winters never change

Only now, I have the eyes to see.

## **The Flower of Shame**

In my balcony I stand, and gaze at the frontal building still,  
Two children play, one dark, the other white;  
Without their teeth they smile, euphoric joy they feel.  
They tickle each other, and roll in the mattress laid,  
I see them and cannot but unknowingly smile bright,  
Equal, thinking how equal we are made.

Belal, childhood friend of mine, I remember  
Gentle, kind, brilliant was he  
And his beautiful mother,  
Like a family did they treat me.  
Not his father, who laid his hands on them, and sinned—  
Because both the mother and son were dark skinned.

Belal willed for matrimony at twenty-eight,  
The match-maker did find a potential bride.  
We went to her apartment in Olympus tower.  
Upon entering her home, caught my sight  
A huge aquarium, and kept beside  
In a tub, one yellow narcissus flower.

We sat, and for the bride did we await  
And I saw, a lady in white,  
At the aquarium she gazed  
And gazed and gazed and gazed,  
And entered the room after minutes eight,  
Glancing at her beauty, Belal was amazed.

Glanced at Belal too did she,  
Fiery, foul, fair was she.  
Brought a mirror and kept it in front of Belal  
And said, “look at yourself pal!  
Can diamonds be kept with bronze?  
No matter what amount, tons and tons!”

At the mirror did he glance,  
Remembered the curse of his father once,  
Silent– his silence spoke words many,  
That only his mother and I could hear.  
We left the house, without words any  
I looked at him and saw in his eyes a drop of tear.

The teardrop fell on the narcissus flower  
And more radiant it became,

I could not but wonder,  
It's a flower that feeds on shame—

Years passed, and the girl a fair man married.  
Wealthy, all her expenses he carried.  
Never ending demands of her took a halt  
Since they ran out of money in their vault.

Dry, desolate, desperate for work,  
She applied at an office, renowned in town.  
For the position of a clerk  
Who listens to the chief's orders, up and down.

The chief; a lady dignified, beautiful like night.  
In a muslin saree, a woman of might.  
Wearing a silver necklace; on her right arm  
A tattoo of Athena, full of agency and charm.

Day and night together in one space,  
The night shined with stars,  
And the day did ablaze  
Of the night, as it shines fierce.

Denied work was the girl by the lady  
Chief of the office, “You can leave,” said she.  
Discontent she was leaving the room,  
Hurrying soon to go to her groom.

On her way out, she looked at the mirror  
And saw her fruitless face fair,  
And saw a person entering the room in the mirror  
A familiar man she saw, with silence in the air.

Entering the room, the chief’s forehead he kissed  
Both embraced and smiled, whilst  
The girl in shock on the ground did fall,  
Witnessing it was none other than Belal.

Belel did become aware  
Of the girl’s identity,  
As he saw her face fair  
And felt for her pity.

“What happened to the narcissus flower?”  
With curiosity he asked her.  
“It was hoisted with pride,” she said,

“And fell in the aquarium long back and died.”

Standing in my balcony I cannot but think,

What day? What night? Beauty is in the might

Of one's intellect; as pride dies in the blink

Of the eyes, and success comes to those who are right.

## **This House**

This house, once full of laughter and joy,  
Now no more— I enter and feel estranged.  
The musty smell I sniff; exhausting,  
All my comfort does take away.

All alone, I spend the day reading books,  
And at night, in my room light six candles only—  
No electricity, I did not drink water,  
In fear of going to the lavatory.

No sleep, I stay awake till it's almost morning  
Suddenly I see from my room, a man in his seventies,  
White beard and hair, hobbling through the dining room  
On his way to the other lavatory.

I get up, but leave the room not, looking at the candles,  
Thankfully not yet burned out.  
Sitting with my legs crossed on my bed  
Till I hear the door of the lavatory close.

I do not close my eyes, hardly blinking;

Only to later see an old hunchback lady  
Comfortably walking through the dining  
Room towards the kitchen.

Then I shiver and chant verses  
That I remember from the Godly scripture.  
The windows are closed and the wind pass through  
The ventilators, yet I profusely sweat.

Waiting for them to return to their rooms,  
The husband and wife, but they never do.  
I am fatigued by the lack of oxygen,  
And see, all six of the candles, quickly burned out.

I scream God's name out of fright,  
While I feel two hands, one big and one soft, small;  
Touching my shoulders, holding me tight,  
Laying me on the bed; I am appalled.

A strong smell of coconut reaches my nose  
From one side, and from the other, fragrant attar.  
The pungent scents combined calms my nerves  
And I doze off quickly.

Waking up, in the radiant morning, with a bright smile,  
I see my younger cousins running around the cabins  
Exuberantly, while my uncles and aunts sitting at the dining table  
Enjoying rice with lentils, eggs and lemon as breakfast.

The aroma reaches my nose, and I fly towards the table  
Following its taste. I take a morsel in my mouth  
And close my eyes, in wonder, and gulp down  
An entire plate of food for its taste so divine.

Gives me my uncles some gleaming new cash,  
That smells so aromatic— Those I would never spend.  
My new clothes too, imbues floral scent.  
While my shoes shines and smells of newness.

I go out in jubilation and with my friends play,  
Run around the ground, making sandstorms with  
The dust that enters my nose and I sneeze.  
Going dizzy, falling on the ground, with clothes made messy.

Doddering towards our house, I enter with my grandfather,  
A man in his seventies, with white hair and beard,

Glancing at me, along with my grandmother,  
A graceful lady humpbacked, both holding me tight.

Takes me to my bed, the two holding me from both sides  
And lie me down, washing off the dirt from my clothes.  
The old man pouring his attar on me and the lady,  
Caressing my hair with coconut oil, till I fall asleep.

Waking up in the bleak morning in the dampened house,  
I see darkness around me, with little rays of light,  
Entering through the ventilator, and waxicles  
On the tables.

I stand and walk towards the lavatory,  
Getting the smell of the same attar and coconut oil  
On the way– and I stop. Run towards the main door  
Of the house in fear, and open it wide.

A sudden burst of southern wind, mingles in the house,  
Gliding through the rooms, with the fresh scent of mango,  
And my soul could not but awaken, with me gazing  
Outside at the colourful fruits among the green leaves.

I run towards the mango tree and shake

The branches, as mangos fall on my head,

And I grab one from the ground; make a leak at the bottom

And sip it– sip through my intimations of childhood glee.

**To Nishat Atiya**

In what times of harrow, you arrived, and  
How pleasantly you preached words of wisdom,  
Nishat Atiya; that your light had cast from  
You to us— on our feet we learnt to stand.  
Erudite peacock, with your etiquette  
Have you enriched our souls, the way Aisha  
Did with her doctrines in Arabia  
To her apostles, and examples set.  
As like a banyan tree provides shadow  
In scorching summer, and during tempest,  
Saves people from calamity; stand still  
And watch over us, vigilant sparrow.  
Yet, rest too, rest from flying all the time, rest—  
Rest well, white pigeon, or you will fall ill.

**To Kaiser Haq**

Enlightened scholar! Your artistry envies ten peers,  
As with your linguistic prowess you reached atop,  
Your meticulous guidance won't ever stop—  
And admiration you've gained for years.  
Freedom fighter! How valiantly in '71 you fought  
The lucifers and drove them away to their den.  
You aided with dignity the local children, women and men,  
And to us, courage and bravery have you taught.  
Therefore, heroic guide, guide us as you've guided us  
For so long, like a full moon does show the path to a pilgrim.  
Awaken our conscience with your verses, the way Jesus  
Elevated the spirit of his followers. And if anytime it does seem—  
The road has been eclipsed by Erebus;  
You rise, great Helios, and help us with your sunbeam.

## **What is Poetry?**

Poetry begins when a baby cries for the first time  
And the parents and doctors become the first audience of the recital.

The first poetry I heard is the Call to Prayer,  
When the muezzin praises the Lord and invites the followers to prayer.  
Moved me did his mellifluous voice to the core,  
I loved the poetry of it and loved the Lord more.

I hear poetry when my mother shouts at me;  
It has love, it has loathe  
It has her care for me assured.  
I hear poetry in my father's hush  
Because poetry is abstract,  
It says much without saying anything.

Poetry is in the laughter of childhood games;  
In the happiness of winning, and sadness of losing,  
In the silence of the ones who are not playing,  
In the holler of one who is hurt,  
In the care of the ones who are helping.  
Poetry is friendship that begins in childhood.

It goes on and on and on--

Till everyone grows and gets separated,

Poetry is in the quietness of separation.

Poetry is the ridiculous rhymes you write as a child

Falling in love with the first girl in your life.

You think, she is beautiful, she is charming,

You compare her with actresses– Jolie, Winslet, Salma Hayek.

One day she doesn't share her homework with you,

And you don't find her beautiful anymore.

Poetry is the hatred you scribble about her

On the wall of the school toilet

And get punished by the teacher for that.

And you learn, you grow.

Poetry is in the apology to the girl.

Poetry is in the Old and New Testaments, and the Quran;

When God commanded Abraham to follow the one true God,

Noah to build the arc,

Moses to move the ocean,

And Muhammad to spread peace.

Peace be upon them all.

Their words, big or small, they are with us all.

Poetry is in the protest of the man on the street

When he asks the police to, “Stop!”

That single word is poetry;

Because it has a purpose.

Every word that has a purpose is poetry.

In Wordsworth’s spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling

In Eliot’s mature poets’ stealing

In Larkin’s celebration

In Shelley’s jubilation

In Arnold’s criticism of life

In Blake’s innocence and experience

In Tagore’s song offerings

In Nazrul’s prison bars.

They spoke their words of wisdom in verses

Poetry is about rhythm and beat,

There is rhythm in every step of life.

In the marching of sailors in the parade ground,

In the sweeping of sweepers round and round,

In the chopping of vegetables on the chopping board,

Some rhymed, some not; some long, some short,

Iambic pentameter, iambic tetrameter; hexameter?

With symbols, allusions, metaphors and what not?

Some, with plain simple words

For the common man—

But each has a motive.

For love, nature, war, hunger, mocking and joking

Stream of consciousness,

Art for art's sake, Art for people's sake,

Whatever it is.

They give us pleasure...

Poetry is the cry of the beggar,

His hunger that gives rise to music,

His tender words on God

That manipulates you to pay him.

Poetry is from Byron, a wealthy Baron

Poetry is from me, a nobody.

But poetry is poetry in any shape or form,

Written with love, with hundred pages torn.

Poetry was always there, and it shall be,

Even if we do not exist, you and me.

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