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Selected Poems

Manglesh Dabral

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Acknowledgements
Nirupama Dutt is a poet writing in Punjabi. She is also a well-known translator from Punjabi into English. Her translation of revolutionary Punjabi poet Lal Singh Dil and an anthology of Punjabi short stories are published by Penguin. Nirupama lives in Chandigarh, where she also works as a journalist. Sarabjeet Garcha is a bilingual poet writing in English and Hindi. He translates from Hindi and Marathi into English. He has published three collections of poems in English and participated in various literature festivals. Sarabjeet lives in Delhi.
केशव अनुरागी

यह ढोल एक समुद्र है साहब केशव अनुरागी कहता था
इसके बीसड़ों ताल है सैकड़ों सब्द
और कई तो मर-खप गये हमारे पुरखों की ही तरह
फरी भी है संसार में आने और जाने अलग-अलग ताल साल
शुरू हो या फूल खंधली तो उसके भी अलग
बारात के आने-आमे बलली इसकी गहन आवाज
चढ़ाई उतराई और वशिष्ठाम के अलग बोल
और झोंका बच्चे पांडूरंग नृत्य और जामा के ये गुढ़ सब्द
जनिहें सुनकर पैड और प्रवकत भी झुमते हैं अपनी-अपनी जगह
जीवन के उत्सव समार इसकी आवाज के बनी जीवननीन
यह जातिना भावर बजता है उतना अपने भीतर भी
एक पाखें से पूर्वते बोल सुनकर बज उठता है सूरे पाखे का कोई ढोल
बतलाता उस तस्वर के हालचाल
देवताओं की नींद से जगाकर भुजूहुय जातमें शामल बनता है
यह कार के विशाल पर्यंत को बजाता हुआ
और जब कोई इस संसार से जाता है
तो मृत्यु का कार्य ढोल सुनाई देता है
This dhōl is an ocean, sir, Keshav Anuragi used to say
It has tens of beats hundreds of percussions
most of which have perished just like our ancestors
Even then the beats for coming into
and going out of this world are distinct
So too those for the time when the year
begins or when flowers bloom
Its deep sound preceding the marriage procession
its diverse thumps for ascent descent and pause
and those abstruse beats for jhōrā, chācharī,
pañḍav nritya and jāgar hearing which
even the trees and the mountains sway
in their individual places
All of life’s festivities are lifeless without its sound
It thumps with the same intensity within
as it does without
Hearing the sounds erupting from one hill slope

a drum on the other beats too
and tells about the state of things there
Beating the enormous tympanum of Time
it rouses gods from sleep and
assimilates them into humankind
and when someone departs from this world
the dismal dhōl of death is heard
calling people from far away to
join in the funeral

People used to say that Keshav Anuragi lived inside the dhōl
He was a peerless singer searching for forgotten strains
of the Dhōl Sāgar who also spent some time
in the company of Kumar Gandharva
who propelled the songs of Garhwal to classical dimensions
His talent astonished one and all
How was this master of music born in an outcaste family?
And when he was slightly drunk he would play
with the beats of the dhōl as if they were a ball
He would say Listen up this is the roll of thunder
and here is the first soft drop of water
here comes pounding rain
here a river starts flowing
here forms a vast ocean and the resounding nature
But I am an untouchable. Who would call me an artist?
All my life I alone will have to genuflect
and say I touch your feet, Maharaj
Hail, my lord

When properly sozzled
Keshav Anuragi the guru without a disciple
would make us listen
to the sounds of a futureless drum
Nobody made his art their own
Written after many years of devoted practice
Ḍhol Sāgar\(^1\) never saw the light of day
In the meantime the ḍhols in our villages
took to dwindle
Some burst and some didn’t get new skin
stretched onto them
Many of the players went away in search of new vocations
The inebriated Keshav Anuragi remained slumped
in a chair at All India Radio, Najibabad
One day he became alarmed
to see that he existed
One day his foot stuck in mud
He unawares ran into someone on the street
One day he broke out of the ḍhol of humans and gods
He now lives inside the ḍhol of death

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\(^1\) Keshav Anuragi’s unpublished manuscript on the art of the ḍhol.

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Rāg Durgā

A memory of listening to this rāg sung by Bhimsen Joshi

राग दुर्गा

(भीमसेन जोशी के गाये इस राग को सुनने की एक स्मृति)

एक रासुला उस समय जाता था जगह-जगह चमकते दिखले थे उसके दूर-दूर
जंगल में घास काटने गए बालकों के भीतर जाने की तरह
बाहर आ रहे थे
कानों में समर्पित होकर उसे फोकस किया था
अगस्त गान में आवाज से चोटी तक जाती थी
दूर कोई लड़का बांसा रखते थे बजता था वैसे ही स्वर
एक शब्द कोने में सहितकर खड़ा था
कमरे में थे मेरे पति
अपनी युवावस्था में गाते सखी-भरी बांसे-घुम
dोहरते इसे गाने से जल्दी बढ़ती है घास

सरलता से बुद्धिःत होता रहा एक कदन्नी जीवन
वहाँ छोटे-छोटे आकार थे
बच्चों के बनाए हुए खिळ-खिलावने घर-द्वार
ऑनः जैसी खिड़कियाँ
मैं उनके बीते जाने की कोशिश की
देख लेकर उस संगीत में खोजता रहा कुछ
जैसे वह संगीत भी कुछ खोजता था अपने से बाहर
kसी को फुकरता कसी आलमन के लारे बढ़ता
बीच-बीच में घुमाहार उठता था हार्मोनियम
tबनते के भीतर से आती थी पृथ्वी की आवाज

वह राग दुर्गा थे यह डुबे बाद में पता चला
जब सब कुछ कठोर था और सरलता नहीं थी
जब आखिरी शब्द भी औज़ार होने को था
और मैं जगह-जगह भटकता था सोचता आया वह कहा था
जिसकी याद नहीं आयी
जिसके न होने की पीड़ा नहीं हुई
तभी सुनाई दिखिया मुझे राग दुर्गा
सम्पत्ति के अवशेष की तरह तैरता हुआ
मैं बढ़ा उसकी ओर
उसका आरोह घास की तरह उठता जाता था
अवरोह बहता आता था पानी की तरह.

Translation of the poem 'Rāg Durgā'
by Sarabjeet Garcha

A path went up to that civilisation
its pebbles could be seen glittering all over
the songs of the women cutting grass in the forest
were gushing forth like water
a sparrow sitting under a rock would startle
with its call and fly away
far off in the distance some boy used to play
the selfsame notes on a flute
a tree in a corner stood quivering
in the room was my father in his
youth singing Sakhī Morī Rūm-Jhūm
he used to say this song makes grass grow faster

difficult life kept getting articulated easily
tiny shapes existed there
games 'n' toys plus
houses 'n' premises made by children
window-like eyes
I tried to enter them and
kept searching long for something in that music
just as that music also searched for something
outside itself calling out for somebody

and stepping forward for an embrace
now and then the notes of the harmonium swirled
from inside the tabla rose the sound of the earth

that it was Rāg Durgā I came to know later
when everything was callous and there was no simplicity
when even the last tree was on the verge of dimming away
and I rambled here and there thinking what it was
that did not come to mind and
whose absence did not cause pain
only then did I hear Rāg Durgā
floating like the relics of a civilisation
I moved on towards it
its ascending scale rising like grass
and descending scale flowing like water
Gunanand Pathik
गुणानंद पथिक

एक झलक में ही दिख जाता था गुणानंद पथिक का पूरा जीवन
कितने ही लोगों ने देखा होगा उन्हें
खंडहर हो रहे दशहरी कस्बे के मुख्य सड़क पर
बस अड़के की मीड़ में स्वरों की कितने ही लहर की तरह प्रवेश करते हुए
gले से लटकता था पुराना हारमोनियम
और कंधे पर झोले में सुरचित गीतों की पुस्तकें
पहले चार आने और फिर पचास पैसे में एक
gुणानंद पथिक गाते थे फिर बैठे-बैठे बजाने लगे
बस अगले जगह से लोगों के सामने लहराई जाती थी
उसे पढ़वाए हुए जाते बस में बैठ घर की ओर
sसुनने जो गाती है उन्हीं धुनों पर
gुणानंद पथिक ने बनाये अपने नए गीत
जैसे तुरानी चीज को नया बनाकर लौटाने में हो सकता का आनंद
कहतीं ने चीख उनसे संगीत का पहला पाठ
रामलीलाओं में अलग से सुनाई देती उनकी बहते तवील
लोग पहचान जाते बजा रहा है संगीत का बह चारीगर
जो तरिक सुनाता नहीं बदल भी देता है राम को
उनके गायन से ही शून्य होते हैं देशपुन्नसिट पार्टी के जल्द समाप्त
देशराज टहली हजार तक नाटक लगाते-लगाते
sफैल में भरता था उनका छोटा-सा संकलन

गुणानंद पथिक जान नहीं पाये उनके जीवन में बदल रहा था कुछ
yा बदलते-बदलते रह गया था कुछ

Translation of the poem ‘Gunanand Pathik’
by Nirupama Dutt

In just a glance one could fathom
the whole life of Gunanand Pathik
Many must have seen him on the main road
of the decaying Tehri town, entering
the bus stand in a wave of musical notes
The old harmonium hung from his neck
pamphlets of his songs in his shoulder bag
that he sold first for a quarter of rupee
and later for a half.
Gunanand Pathik used to sing songs spelling
change for the mountains
calling out to the village folk to wake up
for with them would awaken the still mountains
he would sing songs that told the difference
between the rich and the poor
Listening to him
people would forget the toffees and lemon drops
buy his book of songs and read it
on the bus journey back home.

Gunanand Pathik had composed his songs
to the tunes of the women’s folk songs
as though all joy lay in changing the old into the new
Many learnt from him first lesson of music
His voice was heard at the Ramila
and people would know that these notes were
made by their musical craftsman
who knew not just to sing a raga
but even change it
With his songs began all the Communist Party rallies
from Dehradun to Tehri to Pauri
travelled his little dream always.

He knew not that something was changing around him
or that something had refused to change
Many new musical instruments resounded
in the mountains
Money was making its own music and
half a rupee became more powerful than
the book of songs
the Communist Party got big loudspeakers
A dam came up on the Bhagirathi in Tehri
Gunanand kept singing the old song
This was the last glimpse of his life
then his voice started growing faint
the notes of the musical instrument were lost
he started forgetting the songs
he had himself written and composed

The leftover Communists kept planning
a big reception to honour him
But Gunanand Pathik had given up his harmonium by then
and people had forgotten him like they forget a folk song.

Manglesh Dabral is a poet, journalist and translator. He is the author of five collections of poems, two collections of literary essays and sociocultural commentary, and a book of conversations. He also published a travel account of his experiences in the USA, where he resided for three months as a University of Iowa International Writing Program Fellow in 1991. His poems have been widely translated, and a selection from his collection, This Number Does Not Exist, was published by Poetrywala in India and BOA Editios, Rochester, New York. He has participated in numerous poetry festivals in India and Europe, and one of his poems was engraved at the entrance door of the city centre in Eislingen, Germany.

Nirupama Dutt is a poet writing in Punjabi. She is also a well-known translator from Punjabi into English. Her translation of revolutionary Punjabi poet Lal Singh Dil and an anthology of Punjabi short stories are published by Penguin. Nirupama lives in Chandigarh, where she also works as a journalist.

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