

Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Collection of Hindi Poems



# **The Laughing Flames and Other Poems**

**Ramdarash Mishra**



*Translated from Hindi by*

**Umesh Kumar**

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The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

*From: Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.  
Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi*



**SAHITYA AKADEMI**



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by Umesh Kumar from the Hindi original of Ramdarash  
Mishra's Sahitya Akademi Award-winning poems *Aag Ki Hansi*.  
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Ramdarash Mishra (b. 1924): Author  
Umesh Kumar (b. 1986): Translator

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## Translator's Acknowledgements

At the time of writing these lines, the COVID-19 pandemic has created havoc in human life. Literally consigning the whole human population into house arrest, the virus has presented itself to be the most powerful challenge for human race in over a century. Quite strangely, humans—considered to be the most powerful and intelligent of species, find themselves in utter helplessness. The situation seems to have busted quite a few established myths. One of them, of course, is that one does not require nuclear arsenal or other sophisticated weapons to destroy mankind. A sneeze is enough!

The crisis has also opened floodgates for an urgent reassessment of *human condition* and *attitudes*. It is pertinent for us now to introspect and critically evaluate our relationship with nature and fellow human beings. It is not a mere coincidence that the work presented here makes a plea for similar reassessment from a variety of standpoints. It has been my good fortune to translate Ramdarash Mishra's *Aag Ki Hansi* into English. During the course of this translation, I have incurred debt from many quarters. Firstly, I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to Sahitya Akademi for roping me in for this project. I am thankful to Prof. Anita Singh for her sincere encouragement and faith in my abilities.

An early draft of this translation was prepared during my tenure as British Council's Charles Wallace Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH), the University of Edinburgh between September-December 2019.



I was there to work on a separate project but the institute's generosity in allowing me special access to the office premises on Saturdays and Sundays provided much needed space and privacy to work on the text. I am grateful to the staff and Co-Fellows at IASH, especially, Prof. Steve Yearley and Dr. Ben Fletcher-Watson for looking after my comforts — necessary for thinking and writing. At Edinburgh, parts of this translation were read by/to Maria Trompers and Helen Tyrrell. Those parts have been benefitted by their suggestions.

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I wish to appreciate the perennial support and encouragement of my companion Nilekha Salunke. She has always been the first reader and critic of whatever little I write or translate. Pramod Padwal, Namdeo Gapate, Tariq Khan, Dipti R. Pattanaik, Manoj Yadav, Jagadeesan T, Hephzibah Israel and Rahul Chaturvedi for having faith in me — sometimes more than what I deserve. Dipti R. Pattanaik read the introduction and suggested constructive changes. I am thankful to him.

Ramdarash Mishra Ji has been very enthusiastic and supportive during the course of the translation. He has been just a call away to answer my calls and doubts. I am thankful to him.

I am grateful to my family especially my mother. Without her care and support, it would not have been possible to complete this translation in the allotted time. The committed translations of Maya Pandit have had a strong positive influence on me over the years. I humbly dedicate this translation effort to her.

— Umesh Kumar  
Varanasi

## Introduction

### *The Laughing Flames and Other Poems: A Collection of Multiple Arrivals*

Umesh Kumar

### Of 'Missing' Writers: In lieu of an Introduction

Every translation carries a story. A story often relegated to the backstage unless the translator has the willingness and also the 'space of her own' to narrate it. Opportunely, I seem to have both. What follows in the following few pages is an account, delineating the text and context of *Aag Ki Hansi* in English translation. A collection of poems in Hindi, *Aag Ki Hansi* was first published in 2012. Subsequently, it was given the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2015.

When Sahitya Akademi approached me for the English translation of *Aag Ki Hansi (The Laughing Flames and Other Poems)* in 2018, I was both anxious and excited. One of the reasons for my nervousness was my unfamiliarity with Ramdarash Mishra's literary repertoire. In fact, I heard his name for the first time! Without a doubt, it made me realise my comparative illiteracy. With humility and concern, I do not hesitate to submit that comparative illiteracy is a common



trend in the scholars of my generation, if not that of the past.<sup>1</sup> And I am not entirely sure about the past because how can the present be so drastically independent of the past? Indeed unfortunate, the literary and aesthetic relationship of 'give and take' among Indian languages including English is shrinking by the day.<sup>2</sup> However, I can only dare to speak on the English literary scene for I am a part of it.

Barring a few exceptions, students and teachers of English departments are hardly interested in getting to know the health and 'affairs' of Indian languages. The structural entitlements bestowed on the learning of English language and literature during the colonial period seems to linger on, still. The stakeholders of this learning continue to wear their 'Englishness' like a jewel over bodies and minds—turning a blind eye to the literatures produced in our own languages. We must understand that the actual realisation of an idea called 'Indian Literature'—an important mandate even for Sahitya Akademi, cannot be realised fully unless there is a formation of powerful dialogue not only amongst English and Indian languages but also between Indian languages themselves. Sahitya Akademi, through its varied projects and publications, is attempting to bridge this gap for a long time

1. For instance, in an interview with me, noted Odia short-story writer Dipti Ranjan Pattanaik connects multilingual proficiency with society's material and utilitarian needs. According to him, today, most of the teachers/scholars are trained in such a way that they are extremely competent in one language and not much in the second. People in the past learnt multiple languages with equal proficiency because it was their need. Pattanaik maintains that the kind of social engagements that we make today, we can live 'meaningfully' with one language only. However, for the sake of creating meaningful intellectual capital we need more and more scholars who are conversant in one global language and at the same time deeply rooted in the culture and literature of their own language(s). See, Umesh Kumar, *Dialogues on Translation with Dipti Ranjan Pattanaik* (2020: forthcoming).
2. I have collaboratively written about the fallout of this growing phenomenon elsewhere. See, Padwal and Kumar (2019:13-14).

now. At a personal level, I felt Akademi's invitation to be a valued opportunity that could link a (local) Indian writer with the global. On a different plane, attempts such as these will also decolonize the (English) literary studies in India.<sup>1</sup> I am aware that translations solely will not be able to jettison the colonized landscape. However, my purpose here, like many others, is to foreground well-meaning translation activity as one of the potential tools for decolonization.

Still, not knowing Mishra Ji all these years was a personal shock. More, for I have continued to relatively identify myself with Hindi literature. My assumptions of keeping a track of the recent and past developments in Hindi literary scene went for a toss. In retrospect, I realise that I was trapped into the *buzzwords* and *buzz names* of Hindi literary criticism, propagated especially, by the celebrated critics. To be fair, this buzz culture is not specific to Hindi criticism alone but 'an ailment' in all Indian literatures. I shall return to this observation with evidence in a short while.

The arrival of 'modernity' in Indian languages started to bifurcate literary production in somewhat two groups. The first group, as we know—has been in existence all along—identifying to a certain degree with the so-called 'classical' mode of writing. The primary purpose of which has always been to entertain the readers coupled with the classical purpose of developing the aesthetics and sensibility in mankind. It is like a *Mirror* to humanity—as the well-known American critic M. H. Abrams would have called.

It would be unfair to say if the second group abandoned all these 'classical modules' completely. But there is no denying the fact that a certain categorization of literary

1. In this connection, the pioneering works of two bilingual critics, Bhalchandra Nemade and G.N. Devy is well known. Heavily rooted in India's *bhasha* traditions, their intervention consistently attempts to liberate Indian literary criticism from the overarching influences of European dominance.



output began to emerge particularly from the second decade of the twentieth century, with a suffix called *vaad* (-ism) attached to it. Breaking away from the first group on a variety of parameters, the initial phase of the second group was termed 'modernism'. Likewise, as a part of it, Hindi poetry went through a series of successions namely — *Chhayavaad* (literally shaded, approximated with the word romanticism in English?), *Pragativaad* (progressive), *Saathottari Kavita* (literally the poems written after the sixties), *Samkaalin Kavita* (contemporary poetry) etc. The mere nomenclature of these literary 'movements' (termed so by the critics and literary historians) is sufficient enough to reveal their 'focussed' and exclusive treatment of the subject matter. The fashion of similar trends in literary production across genres started to manufacture and define literature in a new light now. Needless to say, these diverse literary trends came into existence with their own requirements and commandments in relation to the theme, language and subject matter of literary production, among others.

It needs to be mentioned that the class of critics that followed the '-ism' literary productions were also divided on a variety of lines and ideologies. Yet, their writings have been instrumental in creating intellectual-literary capital for a host of writers. It is because of such influential tendencies that I have termed them as carriers of 'buzz culture' in the beginning. To further understand the complexity of the issue, the possibility of an alternative reading of literary histories should be explored. For I assume, such an exercise has the dormant potential to lay bare the underlying politics of critical circles. For instance, the issues of over-representation and under-representation are perennial issues continuing to cast clouds over the ethical choices of the critics. Hindi literature is not bereft of examples where a particular group of critics promoted a particular group of writers. If an X writer failed to be swayed by the reigning ideologies of the critics — the critics would also see him excluded from the canon formation. In

other words, he will be excluded from the buzz culture that grips the popular imagination.

Ramdarash Mishra appears to be a victim of this buzz culture. During a creative career spanning almost five decades, he resisted pigeonholing himself under a flag or a group; a particular ideology or an -ism. His sole intention has been to walk with time and the conscience of the society — of which he considered himself to be an important spokesperson. Of course, apart from a handful of critics, the so-called 'mainstream' critics ignored his writings. Holding positions across publishing and other power channels in academe and research, the mainstream critics can determine the writers they wish to ignore. Unfortunately, the younger scholars/readers like me continue to consume the judgments of such critics without casting an inch of suspicion. Sadly, not only we consume it for ourselves but also pollinate it across generations. At this juncture, a question must be raised: if writers are held answerable to the critics, why shouldn't the critics be held accountable for their pronouncements? It is high time that we also devise mechanisms and methods to crosscheck and counter the hegemony of mainstream critics in the realm of literary production. It is in situations like this that the role of Sahitya Akademi becomes much more critical. Translations like these will break the glass ceilings of buzz culture and will provide visibility to hitherto 'ignored' writers like Ramdarash Mishra.

### **Ramdarash Mishra: A poet of humanity and much more**

During one of our conversations<sup>1</sup>, Ramdarash Ji shared one of his ghazals<sup>2</sup> (not part of this collection), which in his own words describes him the best. It is worth quoting here

1. The perspectives appearing on behalf of Ramdarash Mishra during the course of this introduction are based on these conversations.
2. The original title in Hindi is: *Banaya hai maine ye ghar dheere-dheere*. My translation.



in full though I am not an enthusiast of quotations during conversations. Barring these lines, I refrain from quoting in the rest of my discussion — a deliberate attempt not to play spoilsport before the actual poems!

I made my home, at a snail's pace  
 The wings of my dreams opened too, at a snail's pace  
 I neither kicked nor tossed anyone  
 The journey of my life passed too, at a snail's pace  
 The place you reached by leapfrogging others  
 I reached there too, at a snail's pace  
 Never I wished to defeat the mountains  
 My wish was to walk slowly, keeping my head high  
 Never I attempted to outsource my pain  
 Drank my own poison, at a snail's pace  
 I too cried lonely at every failure  
 My wound healed too, at a snail's pace  
 I carried the soil from my fields  
 A town emerged from it, at a snail's pace  
 O life! Could you stop me?  
 I too got everything, what if at a snail's pace?

Ramdarash Mishra was born on 15th August 1924 in Dumri village of Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. Like most belonging to his time, childhood was spent in poverty and in the scarcity of other earthly requirements. According to Mishra Ji, one reason for this deprivation could have been his father's attitude that refused to surrender in front of material needs. In his own words, "My father was a misfit for our world. He was innocent and emotional; loved his music and social commitments only. Whenever he would see pain and misery, he will not waste time thinking about it. Rather, he would go and join that pain and misery."

Similarly, Mishra Ji recalls his mother to be a very hardworking woman accompanied by a strong religious

orientation. Like her husband, she too had a strong hand at music and often led the village women during festivals and religious rituals. She carried colossal knowledge of folk wisdom especially that of folk tales. It seems Ramdarash Mishra inherited the best from his parents: sensitive and committed attitude from his father; music and wisdom from his mother. The music of his poetry and the numerous folk elements that appear in his creative writings — he credits it all to his rural upbringing. A self-confessed rural inhabitant all his life, Mishra Ji displays a strong urge to go back to the village. Village — he recalls, is the *buniyad* (foundation) of his existence.

Ramdarash Mishra has been a voluminous writer. There is hardly a genre of literature that he did not lay his hands on. Be it poetry, novel, short story, essays, travelogue, diary, memoirs, autobiography — he wrote enough and wrote consistently. All his collected works are now published in fourteen volumes. It is an impossible task within the scope of this introduction to touch upon all these genres. Therefore, it will help our cause to focus on Ramdarash Mishra — the poet. Further, it is not a mere coincidence that he primarily identifies himself a poet. However, even in poetry, I could trace twenty published volumes. Naturally, we shall focus on *The Laughing Flames* here. It is not only one of his latest collections but as Ramdarash Ji said, "[*The Laughing Flames*] is a condensed version of most of my life concerns".

At 88, Ramdarash Mishra published the first edition of *The Laughing Flames*. The collection chronicles the poems written between 2009-2012. It is heartening to know that even in his late nineties — considered typically the twilight of one's life from all perspectives; Ramdarash Mishra's collection displays a unique poetic freshness, landscaped on the fertile soil of human experience. He is a poet of humanity, for humanity. Most of the poems here chant the songs of life and nature in varied ambiances. Without a doubt, he celebrates the village life but his empathy with the 'ruins' of



the city-life is on display too. On the one hand, he finds it difficult to conceal his nostalgia for the idyllic rural life and on the other, he is extremely troubled by the negative vibes of contemporary urban life.

Nowhere in *The Laughing Flames* does Ramdarash Mishra come across as a poet of superheroes. He sides with the troubled, suppressed and the ones in need of a spokesperson. For instance, in the title poem, the poet argues: the fire of the hearth does not spread fire; does not burn humanity. On the contrary, it extinguishes the fire of the hungry bellies. Once the hunger is pacified—the same fire now metamorphosis into a gentle smile—visible on the lips of same hungry bellies. On the contrary, the so-called members of the elite class too unleash a 'gentle smile' but none is able to decode its pretention. Their 'gentle' 'sober laughter' ultimately turns into a mighty fire without coming into notice—engulfing all directions. Sadly, innocent people never get to know the modus operandi of this deep fabrication. They get swayed by the outer illusion weaved by the elites. Eventually, the illusion makes everyone believe that the 'mighty fire' must have been originated from the hearth i.e. the working class. No one even has the slightest doubt that the genesis of this havoc could have been administered by the 'gentle laughter' of the 'gentlemen' elite. With his subtle application of fire metaphor and pungent satire, the poet attempts to provoke as well as sanitize the readers against the prevailing class stereotype in our society. Irrespective of the situation and the context, it is only the poor who are ultimately held accountable for every misfortune that they are forced to confront. The rich, without failure and fear, are able to deposit their loot in the safe heavens of Swiss banks and also manage the safe passage of exile if the need arises.

The title poem also sets the tone for a number of other poems in the collection, spread sporadically on the concepts of *varg-chetna* (class consciousness) and *varg-sangharsh* (class struggle). It is the common man and his concerns that sustain

the poetic cosmos of *The Laughing Flames*. As one would see, the central emphasis of quite a few poems concerns with the issues of poverty and hunger—juxtaposed directly with the relative concepts of *ann* (food) and *shram* (work/production).

Closely aligned with the poet's concern of *varg-chetna* is the exploitative economy of the modern marketism. However, Ramdarash Mishra makes a distinction between market and marketism. To live in the market (economy) and not be influenced by it is one thing; to become one with the market while living with the market is another. He once said, "I could neither become one with the city even after living in the city; nor could I associate with the market after being with the market for that long." He considers market to be an essential part of people's lives as long as it is in tune with people's essentials and not with their surplus and accumulation. For example, the weekly *bazaar* in a village setup is not only a site of sales and purchase but also an important platform for socialization. The poet does not deny that in urban life too one has to venture out to markets for essentials. But the urban market journey to *bazaar* cannot be undertaken without negotiating an army of advertising hoardings that come on the way. The modern marketism encourages people to consume more and more, accumulate more than what they require and eventually turn their homes into a dumping ground. Ramdarash Ji alerts us about the increasing intrusion of market in our homes. A few poems in this collection highlight this growing trend and alienation of modern man vis-à-vis marketism.

Ramdarash Mishra establishes close links between human beings and nature in *The Laughing Flames*. Against the exploitative machinery of capitalist market forces that continue to milk nature and its invaluable resource, the poet attempts to revisit the umbilical cord between nature and her varied species, including humans. Some of the titles in the present collection reveal this connection: *The Sunshine*; *Cat, Sparrows and Flowers*; *The Tree and Me*; *Our Earth*; *The Flower*; *The Seed*; *Jasmine*. The poems here advocate



a close-knit parallel co-existence between man, nature and other species. The readers will discern these poems to be a bit different from the other eco-poems known to them. Refraining from discussing nature either an enabler or victim, the poet is arguing for her non-negotiable presence amid us. In a similar streak, a host of other poems discuss the existence of God but not in the normative theist mode. Poems like — *The Stone Gods*; *The Temple Palace*; *The House and the Peepal Tree*; *Hanuman* may sound normatively religious by titles but in fact very subversive in nature. Through these poems, the poet is successful in revisiting religious symbols and infuses a rational angle to their long-standing existence.

Any good art or the artist must possess high levels of self-reflexivity. She must not leave anything unexamined. Ramdarash Ji keeps his eyes glued to the acts/art of poetry as well as the poet. Strangely, in poems such as *Poetry Makes Us Sensitive*; *Poetry is the Tune of Humanity*; *Along with Poems*; *A Poem on Women's Plight* he finds both the parties wanting and gives a shout out to poet and his poetry — compelling an examination of artist's role and character in the society. Such an examination, Ramdarash Ji believes, has been a work-in-progress throughout his creative writing career.

In the course of translating *Aag Ki Hansi*, I got an opportunity to know Ramdarash Ji as a poet and a person. However, in retrospect, my own assessment fails to make a difference between the two. During a telephonic conversation, Ramdarash Ji said once, "*Ab toh srijan hee saans ban gayi hai* (poetry (writing) has become my life now)". I deliberately use the word poetry as a substitute for writing here. On the brink of entering his 97th birthday, Ramdarash Ji hardly ventures into any other genre now except a bit of diary writing. On the writings that I could chance upon in the last two years, he came before me as a writer who wishes to see the world changed — for the better. A life-long defender of the ordinary, he enthusiastically discussed his future projects with me once. One of these is to write poems on the often forgotten and

neglected — yet no less important items in our households: a spoon; mug; gas stove; flower pots, doorbell and so on. Picking up broken things and energies rather than discarding them, Ramdarash Ji's poetry and concerns strongly remind me of the Japanese *Kintsugi*. Like all writers in the classical mould, the poet in him wishes to see us turn fairer, wiser and kinder. *The Laughing Flame* shall go a long way in proving that. Hopefully.

### **Translating Aag Ki Hansi into English: A Note**

All endeavours of translation carry their own opportunities and challenges. In the past few years, I have made humble — though no less sincere, attempts at translating fiction between the following language pairs: Hindi-English-Marathi — on either ways. Actually, *Aag Ki Hansi* is my first attempt at translating poetry in any language. When I first came to know that the assignment is a collection of poems, I got jitters! Nonetheless, the initial sample text translation sent by the Akademi eased my nerves. I felt at home to see the prosaic nature of *Aag Ki Hansi*.

Ramdarash Ji once told me that he always makes an attempt to walk with his poems all along — so as to establish a conversation with his characters and concerns. Similarly, almost all the poems in this collection are composed in a dialogic style producing a distinct dramatic effect. To enhance this effect, he makes ample use of *thaa*, *thhey*, *thhee*, *hai* (was, were, is etc.). In the English translation as well, I have made conscious efforts to keep the spirit of the original without infusing the usual standardisation of English. There was a temptation to costume the translation according to the rhythms of English. Indeed, I translated a few poems keeping that 'coaxing' in mind initially. However, a revisit to those poems made me look at my translation effort 'too small'. To me, translation provides new clothes to the source text, not the soul. Likewise, it hardly makes any sense to exchange the soul, just for the craving of a few new clothes?



Consequently, the English readers will hardly see any full stops or other punctuation marks in the poems. In the Hindi version, Ramdarash Mishra seems to desert a poem rather than completing it. Or maybe he seeks to create a continuum across all his poems through their open-ended structures? All the poems in the collection are individually dated except for the last two. As a translator, I consider these stylistic features important for the overall cosmos of the collection. Thus, I have consciously retained them in English too. I have taken the liberty to improvise on the English title so as to accommodate poems that are distinct from the ethos and concerns of the title poem.

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## The Laughing Flames (Aag Ki Hansi)

I can't be befooled, for I know  
The fire of hearth produces only  
The hot and blazing rotis<sup>1</sup>  
Rotis that extinguish the fire of the belly  
And slowly and gradually  
Transcend into MAN'S LAUGHTER  
But YOUR LAUGHTER is not the same  
Look into your mirror gentleman  
There you will see — how gently and slowly  
A different fire is making an appearance  
Through your calm and sober laughter  
And how slowly and gradually it is engulfing  
All the directions into its lap  
By turning itself into a mighty-fire  
And full credit to your mystery  
For people still think—  
That the hearth unleashed the fire  
Your mystery is beautiful, O mysterious!

(20.9.2009)

1. A type of flat, south Asian bread. In this context, it seems to be made from the wheat flour.



**I Get no Letters Now**  
**(Ab Nahi Aati Chitthiyaan)**

I do not wait for the post any more  
For now it comes like an unwanted luggage  
Again by today's post, I have received —  
Some known-unknown magazines  
Some unwanted books  
Some invitation letters for seminars and conferences  
And also — my telephone bill  
But still, I did not get any letter

I know, today one can communicate one's feelings  
With a mobile  
But letters are letters, isn't it?  
When the deeper thoughts of human soul  
Enter into his fingers in the form of ripples  
And then those ripples enter into his writing  
The writing then starts to create the dialogue with the soul  
In varied shapes, then,  
A letter does not remain merely a piece of paper  
It becomes an emblem of man's soul

Letters do not become numb by speaking only once  
They continue to speak intermittently  
They sleep to wake up again  
As the time passes, their existence becomes deeper  
And their fragrance speaks of the distant past

Eventually the letters are turned into a mirror  
In which the present delves into its past  
The time does not remain time then  
It becomes a stream of sympathy

(25.9.2009)

## **The Roadside 'Restaurant'-1 (Dhaba-1)**

Decorated at all corners, this colourful and mesmerising market  
Affluent with their fat bellies pass through it  
The market welcomes them with open arms, lures them  
And after some time, clinging to their pockets  
It comes along — to their homes  
In these homes, so many markets are already enjoying themselves  
The *new* market too occupies some space  
And the people in it are pushed a little bit more —  
Outside of their home  
Till a day comes when they feel  
That the market is in their home and they are in the market

Silently at the same market's footpath  
Has emerged a little Dhaba<sup>1</sup>  
That wakes up every morning with the music of tinkling utensils  
The fiery coal brightens its hearth  
The boiling of daal-chawal<sup>2</sup> along with the vegetable curry  
And the red-hot rotis coming from the hearth  
The weary labourers come and sit on the broken benches  
After filling their bellies with some money  
They leave again for work  
Meanwhile, having homes within their eyes

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1. A roadside food stall with humble facilities.

2. Daal is a split grain (lentils) used in Indian cookery. Chawal is rice.

The pahadi<sup>1</sup> workers of the Dhaba  
Begin to count the money  
Their eyes brim with the distant mountains  
Their homes on the mountains  
Old parents  
Young wife, innocent children  
Images begin to float on the money they hold  
Their hearts get soaked with affection  
It seems the mountains are calling them  
Disguised in the voice of their homes...

(12.3.2010)

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1. Those belonging to hills and mountains.

## **The Roadside 'Restaurant'-2 (Dhaba-2)**

Two tall houses  
Standing adamantly against each other —  
Roaring in silence  
Years ago, it seems  
Their egos clashed  
On a petty issue  
In between passed many a Holi<sup>1</sup>  
None could bridge the distance among them

Between them is a crossing  
Just near the Dhaba  
That too witnesses petty clashes on everyday basis —  
The taller with the dwarf  
The thinny with the fatso  
The rickshaw with the rehadi<sup>2</sup>  
One drunkard with another  
The crossing yells  
As if the storm has come  
Next day I see  
All of them sitting  
On the benches of Dhaba  
Talking  
About their homes

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1. A Hindu spring festival celebrated with colours.

2. Small cart, made usually by assembling four bicycle tyres.

Inflation ruining their lives  
Their pains now merge with each other  
Laughter converge with each other  
Who waits for Holi here?

(13.3.2010)



## **A Poem on Women's Plight (*Nari Yaatna Par Kavita*)**

Sitting within the closed doors  
He was writing a poem on women's plight  
The floor was littered with cigarette butts —  
Matching equally with his flaming thoughts  
Like a true companion  
The liquor beside was cherishing his mood

There was a knock on the door  
Opening the door his wife saw —  
A woman draped in rags  
Is she a woman or an embodiment of pain  
"Who are you?" asked the wife  
"I have come from the village  
I want to see my man  
Who came here after abandoning me"  
The poet recognised the voice  
He shouted at the top of his voice —  
"Who is there Prabha crowing incessantly  
Give something and throw her out  
The rhythm of my poem is breaking."

(1.4.2010)

## **Global Village (*Vishwagraam*)**

Global Village  
What a beautiful word it was  
It gave goosebumps to my heart  
Aha, after so many centuries  
Our idea of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' is taking shape  
Not only my country  
But the whole world is now transforming into a village

And then the mobile rang  
Damn it! The same number rings throughout the day  
And why blame only this number  
There are many that have created havoc in our lives  
I have always been a man of few needs  
They are fewer in my retirement days  
Like me, my needs remain shrunk within  
The four walls now  
But this mobile keeps me in a dreamy world  
Promising new consumptions every day  
It wants to lure me towards the new offers  
Makes me listen new romantic songs of cinema  
Keeps me entrapped through its spicy gossips and poems  
And slowly and gently  
Squeezes my old pocket towards its dead end

However annoyed I am, I cannot scold it  
For it never tells me the source from where all this originates?

Yes, Global Village  
Village is such a lovely word  
The village that I had lived  
Still floats as music in my consciousness  
However broken, it was still a home  
That housed the continuous blessings of my mother  
The guidance of my father  
The companionship of my siblings  
It imbibed the happy and sad stories of my village  
Admitted, the whole village suffered from lacks and deficits  
Forlorn, disheartened, an emblem of calamities  
But peoples' hands were enjoined with each other  
The eyes showed villagers' soulful connection  
Their hearts showed the balminess of the festivals  
The warmth of their relations was at its peak  
Every man had his individual colour  
And so many individual colours  
Would create a unified colour  
The closeness among the adjacent villages  
Was difficult to miss  
The seasons would come and go  
But the unison of the villages would stay  
Where the stranger of one village  
Could slip into another without a fuss

So how pleasing it was to know  
That the whole world is converting into a village  
That it will embody the kinship of a village  
One's happiness and pain will be pain and happiness of the other  
All will uplift the weak in the family  
If one home be in dark

The neighbour will pass on one of his lamps  
The venoms of religion, community, caste, nationality  
All will succumb to the expansion of the global village

I just plunged into this dream  
But the child came and switched on the T.V.  
The romantic and illusionary market lay bare in front of me  
And there was again a knocking on the door  
What I saw — a salesman  
He was in hurry to dump  
The new products of a company on my family  
That none of us required

Slowly and gradually the mystery began to make it clear  
That the tempting palace of the global village rested  
Not on the village empathy but on commercialisation

I admit  
Village and market always had a very close and soulful connection  
In village the market would erupt once in a week  
People would wait for it desperately —  
Especially for those things  
That made house a home  
Such as dal-chawal, salt-oil  
Spices-veggies, cloths-detergents  
Indigenous make-up items for women  
And many such things  
The village would move towards the nearest town for certain things  
Such as medicines, utensils and for the stationary items  
As the times changed  
Slowly the needs of the village too started to increase  
And its association with the city market got deeper and deeper  
These new needs were inevitable too  
The market did not impose them  
It was from the womb of the village that they originated



But now?  
 Now the developed countries of the world are spreading  
 Colourful mysteries of market into the *Third World*  
 A kind of neo colonisation  
 Things manufactured by them  
 Are becoming indispensable even when they are not needed  
 Under this heavy spell of buying  
 The market is entering into peoples' homes  
 And they are self-exiled into the market  
 True, the world is becoming one  
 But only in the sense of the market  
 The uniform market of the global village

In this village  
 You don't have the aroma of the bygone villages  
 It does not have its varied individual colours  
 Here, man has no connection with his roots  
 In this village, man is no man; he is either a seller or a buyer  
 Human emotions are converted into things  
 In our country too  
 The chariot of economic progress is moving smoothly —  
 Under a certain romantic delusion  
 With the following riders onboard —  
 Politics, Religion, Business Houses, Media  
 And the glittering faces of the administration  
 And people from below  
 Are watching this chariot without a wink  
 And asking each other —  
 Whose chariot is this, brother, and where is it going?

Amidst this chaos and turmoil  
 Rises a melancholic Pen  
 Singing the melody of its land.

(20.1.2011)

## The Sunshine (Dhoop)

After long, the Sun is smiling today  
 It was indeed the coldest time  
 The fog-wrapped earth was in a frightened state  
 The chilly winds would come uninterrupted  
 To settle in in our closed-door rooms,  
 The road was in a state of shock  
 The cold beaten lives were slithering on it  
 The trains were standing frightened or crawling  
 The winglets of the airplanes were not opening  
 Bodies were numb, consciousness blocked  
 In my closed door, I kept thinking —  
 About those  
 Who would be sleeping on the footpaths and pavements  
 Draped in coarse clothed quilts and ragged blankets  
 The next morning would not be waking many of them  
 Who can understand your mystery, O mysterious  
 You send some people on this earth  
 Only to be victimized by the cruelty of society and nature

I am a writer  
 Withholding the pain of inside and outside  
 My pen tries to move on  
 It makes me realise the sense of my being  
 But in this coldest time even she remained stifflingly crouched

Time kept on moving —  
Leaving behind a sense of meaninglessness in me

How pleasing it is looking today  
Defeating the monstrous shackles of cold  
Finally we have the Sunshine  
She is providing warmth to the body  
And injecting new vibrations in the human consciousness  
The roads are busy once again  
And so is the road in front  
Hosting different clusters of people  
Talking and arguing with each other

The school children are not shrinking in cold anymore  
They are like blooming sunflowers now  
Chattering and shouting in the Sun  
The desolation of the trees is swept away too  
With the songs of the birds  
The sunshine is caressing the bodies sleeping on the footpath  
As if asking — "Hope you are fine."

My pen woke up with her pandiculations  
And is asking —  
Let me roam around in all corners of this happiness —  
From the city to the village, let me go and see  
The flower laden crops and the dancing butterflies on them  
The overhead blue sky and the showering of his blessings  
Let me write the tale of sunshine  
See, o see, how happy I am  
A bit farther, I can hear the footsteps of spring coming nearer.

(22.1.2011)

## Cat, Sparrows and Flowers (Billi, Chidiya aur Phool)

There sits a Cat, under the tree of my cramped garden  
Ill-treated by the hot Sun  
She returns, even after repeated expulsions  
Her presence is a bad dream for the Sparrows  
They absent themselves from our tree now...  
My wife continues to wait for them though  
Carrying the feed in her hands  
But knows she well that the Cat is the TERROR  
So, with a stick in her hand  
She runs behind the-terror  
I am very happy  
That the sparrows don't show up now  
In fact, one day I too hurled a mudstone at them  
They ran away, in fear, I remember  
It was my revenge...  
For they gobbled the fresh green leaves  
Of all the marigold flowers that I planted  
My marigolds!  
Left stranded — with their disabled bodies — crying  
My marigolds...  
They are the conscience of my aesthetics  
They blossom in Falgun<sup>1</sup>  
And so am I — in their company

1. A month in the Hindu calendar that corresponds with February/  
March in the Gregorian calendar.



I put myself in the midst of marigolds  
 Their radiance transfers to my eyes  
 And so does their fragrance in my breath  
 Marigolds water my cold, frozen, creative sensibilities  
 And my heart starts to dance, suddenly.  
 And these sparrows!  
 Destroy the vehicles of my creativity  
 Even after surviving on the feed of my house  
 My pain and anger knows no bounds...  
 The cat enters in the garden, once again  
 My wife is after the terror of her sparrows, again  
 Seeing me laughing with sarcasm, she said —  
 “You could feel the pain of your flowers  
 Not the life of my sparrows?  
 They survive on my food  
 Are flowers more important than the food?  
 And when the sparrows splash together  
 In the water kept by me  
 The fluttering sounds of their wings  
 The melodies of their songs  
 Is no less than the composition of an epic  
 For me ...  
 And you don't feel an impulse of aesthetics in them?  
 Everyday in their company  
 Feels like a festival to me”

I don't know what happened to me  
 I too started to chase the Cat, suddenly, with a stick.

(24.1.2011)

## **The Tree and I** **(Ped aur Main)**

Once wandering lonely, I saw-  
 Sapling of a Mango tree, struggling in isolation  
 Seeing me it called —  
 “Thirsty I am. Fetch me some water”  
 From then onwards  
 I started to quench its thirst, everyday  
 Even guarded it with a tree-guard  
 Continued talking to it, every now and then  
 During my habitual wanderings...  
 Today, it is a full-grown TREE  
 In the glory of its youth  
 Many a people sit under it  
 To cool themselves off from the unkind sun  
 They exchange their tales and stories  
 Under its patronage  
 The life-stricken fragrance of its flowers and fruits  
 Mix with that of its refugees’  
 And on its young branches  
 The young girls hang their swings  
 Their youthful spirits travel far and wide  
 And somewhere on its branches  
 When the nightingale sings with ease  
 Every part of the tree comes alive

I have not gone on that site for a while  
In fact, I don't go there at all now  
Today I reached there, in my dream  
And there it was — the Tree, as if asking —  
“Why don't you come friend  
To take the fruits of my existence, now?  
After all, I exist because of you, isn't it?  
I said-  
“O kind friend, I only come — in so many different faces  
'Not everything is done for the self'  
And who knows it better than you?  
Do you ever live for yourself?”

(26.1.2011)

### **They are Silent Now (Ab Ve Chup Hain)**

The poets continued to sing  
In the praise of their poems  
Though the poems themselves were silent  
In the individual and collective chaos of such poets  
He was absent — as were his poems

They are silent now  
Their poems had always been silent  
He is also silent, like ever before  
But his poems are speaking now.

(18.3.2011)



## Along with Poems (*Kavita ke Saath*)

In common parlance, he is a BIG poet  
In his rule-bound verse  
Rests the nuances of art itself  
Deep beneath his rules are caged  
Many silver lines, fluttering to break free  
There is an unprecedented race  
To praise him more, and more  
Every CLEVER poet wants to pass  
Not through his poems but by him  
Dying to praise him  
He flutters his honey-dipped tongue

I am made helpless by my desi mind  
That reads poems and life alike  
I know  
If I say what I want to  
The CLEVER people will laugh at my ignorance  
I remain silent therefore  
And walk silently along the poems unbound by rules  
They carry the pain of my soil  
Weight of my air  
In them I see the transparency of my water  
Warmth of my fire  
And the laid out extension of my sky

They carry my dreams  
I feel to have been walking with poems  
That belong and relate to me  
And you see — how well they reciprocate.

(21.03.2011)

**The Whole Country has Become  
Your Village Now  
(Poora Desh Tumhara Gaon  
Ho Gaya Hai)**

How badly I remember my village today  
The physical constraints of not being there  
Are becoming deeper  
And so is my desire and remembrance of village

Though it is not unfamiliar to hear now  
That my villagers are shrinking too  
Towards the neighboring cities  
And the homes they leave behind  
Which earlier used to live amicably  
Are fighting their heads out  
...Ghurr...!!! Ghurr...!!!  
The dark times of political instability  
Flies over their heads like the dark demons  
The fragrance of the crops...  
Which used to be common in Chaitra<sup>1</sup>  
Nowhere to be found now  
Neither one sees those melodies of Chaitra  
Machines do everything now  
Seasons do come, with their signature music

1. The first month as per the Hindu calendar. It corresponds with March/April in the Gregorian calendar.

They stand, undecided — on the village borders  
As if asking...where are the trees?  
That displayed the signs of our arrival  
The festivals come, even now  
But they vanish without singing their tunes  
For the T.V. can sing now — on their behalf  
In fact, the T.V. can house everything  
Even all the houses of the village in it  
But what to do with the village  
That resides in me?  
Every now and then it cries for me  
Yes, the whole village suffered from lacks and deficits  
But it had no dearth of voices  
The farms...  
Gardens...  
Ponds...  
Village paths  
All would sing in tandem  
In anticipation of the seasons and festivals  
And every home would look like a bright candle  
All of us covered our distance  
Sometimes through the feet of our companions  
These barren feet of mine  
Still have the repositories of those times

Perhaps this is the reason  
That my village calls  
I too feel like going back to its lap  
Before death beholds me in its own  
I am curious to see — the ones who are still alive  
I am curious to see — what stories time has written on them  
Let me witness the changing times in my village  
Let me see how much it is illuminated by the new dawn  
The metamorphoses of the village trails into roads  
Lead...  
I wish to know — where?



The hut in the village continues to call me  
The one that shaped my childhood —  
It was the site of our happiness, miseries, and dreams  
It had the blessings of my mother  
Warmth of my father  
And the companionship of my siblings  
I remember still — the nights  
And the survey of the night sky  
With mother on my side  
What a sight it used to be  
To see the birds returning to their nests  
The uneven walls of our hut  
Might still have the marks of my breath  
The hut was dumpy and small  
But it could always accommodate us all

I have a wish  
That I should have my final breath  
In the lap of my village  
My body should dissolve in its soil  
But then someone speaks  
From inside — You stupid!  
Haven't you realized that you are carrying  
The soil of your village, all these years  
From one city to the other  
And in this process  
The whole country has become your village now.

(15.4.2011)

## The Heights (Unchae)

Stairs over stairs. Just stairs ...more stairs  
How excited he was  
After reaching such a proud height  
With his hysterical laugh  
He looked down at the earth  
And those who were present there before him  
Welcomed him in mystery wrapped tones —  
Welcome! Welcome! In this great wonderland

But why he has started to feel lonely  
All of a sudden  
Every moment he lives now  
In the fear of falling down  
In his dreams — someone steals him  
From his own self  
He wakes up many a times  
And can't sleep at all.

(4.4.2010)

### **Stone Gods (Devtaa)**

The stone-gods were sleeping  
In ever illuminating colourful stone-houses  
Their devotees continue to break their heads  
On the stone-gods  
For the sake of wishes they nurtured  
Witnessing all this, I returned home in emptiness  
But as I entered in my kitchen  
The grater-stone cried —  
“Where have you been?  
I am here. Waiting for you...”

(14.4.2010)

### **Our Earth (Dhartee)**

Our Earth: Plain, broad, muddy  
It has everything: hunger, thrust  
And a continuous quest for survival  
But still, all of us walk on it  
There isn't a fear of falling down  
Look -so much glitters in the sky  
But there are no companions with it.

(14.4.2010)



## Against the Darkness (*Andhere ke Virudh*)

Aligning with different groups  
They continued shouting against the darkness  
At the top of their voice  
But slowly and gradually, one by one  
They too fell in the same darkness  
Seated amongst them now – the DARKNESS  
Not only became deeper  
But was laughing too, at their expense.

But HE continued to walk through in silence  
Carrying a mashaal<sup>1</sup> as his companion  
He wasn't alone now  
However small, a light was with him  
And with every ray of this light  
The DARKNESS was trembling  
It was his turn now to have a gentle smile  
At the expense of DARKNESS.

(15.4.2010)

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1. Oil torch

## The Flower (*Phool*)

The existence of the living and the dead  
Was gobbled by the dark night  
Its blind darkness was drinking  
All the drops of life  
But somewhere, one FLOWER  
Was bathing in the glory of its fragrance  
It was hardly bothered  
If people noticed it  
Its presence was all around  
From here to there, from there to here.

(16.4.2010)

## **A Beginning (*Ek Shuruaat*)**

Everyday newspapers are filled  
With novel episodes of horror  
The T.V. screens are always  
Dipped in blood  
He gets jitters  
Wishes to set this world free  
From all the ugly shadows  
But what can he do — alone

Whose voice is this —  
“No worries friend, begin from yourself first  
At least the burden of one shadow will be lessened  
A small ray of hope shall come alive, and then  
It will lighten the lamp with a lamp.

(17.4.2010)

## **And then One Day (*Aur Ek Din*)**

Walking for centuries, Man finally came out of the jungle  
How happy he was to see the light of civilization  
In jungle, he was always in a perpetual fear  
Of being attacked by other animals  
He could never enjoy life there  
Where was the peace to do so?

Once out of this mess  
He established villages, cities  
And all the human relations  
The sorrows of others became his grief  
And their happiness his joy  
And to suppress the traces of jungle in him  
He created religions  
Constitutions  
Arts, beauty and aesthetics  
To nurture and water his fragile sensibilities

His developing legs are struck now, suddenly  
He heard someone crying in his own jungle  
Who is crying? Why? Still! We have everything now  
—A never-ending series of beautiful buildings  
—The meticulously laid out roads  
—And the variety of vehicles running on them



—Man-woman of this land carry a unique smile  
Well, they hardly look lesser than gods

But still — someone is crying and says  
—“I am TIME”

Tear open my breast to see  
The account of atrocities I behold for  
—the poor and the hungry  
—the ones who were murdered for their innocence  
—the girls and young women who were raped  
—the innocent children who were kidnapped  
(Either sold or killed for not getting the ransom)  
—and the poor people, plagued by terrorism of  
Of dirty politics and the magical might of money and religion  
How ironical

Man brought only the negatives of jungle  
He forgot to bring the liveliness of its flora  
—the music of its fauna  
—the fresh air that never discriminated  
—the singing of its birds  
Leaving behind all this, here he is  
Caged within the four walls of his concrete jungle  
Outsourcing his life to a variety of gadgets  
And becoming a gadget himself in the process

I don't know to which extreme Man will drag me  
He, the ignorant doesn't understand  
I am TIME  
And will not tolerate for a long time  
This vicious circle spun by him  
Because one day...

(29.9.2011)

## Bank Note (Not)

When the bank note is with me  
Or somewhere in the house —  
I afford a sound sleep  
The morning embraces me  
With happy dreams  
And taking a cue from such warmth  
I embark upon my every day journey  
And I am still happy to return in the evenings  
For I know that the house will be waiting

However it is nothing in itself —  
Not bread; cloth or shelter  
It is just: a piece of paper  
But still it seems  
That everything is dissolved in it  
Or exists — because of it  
In its texture are engraved  
Different shades of our bread  
Different designs of our shelter  
From that of a hut to a villa  
It defines everyone's life  
For both the needy and the affluent come  
Within the radius of its powers

They say that the papers of a bank note  
And that of books

Are mutually contradictory  
Even their souls often lash against each other  
But even in the existence of books, bank note is involved  
It is only with the key of a bank note  
That the doors of learning are opened  
For a healthy mind you need a healthy body  
And the doors of healthy body can't be opened by anyone  
Except a bank note

The availability of a bank note  
Is like a powerful shield  
And a massive consolation  
That we can fight all the challenges  
Which life may offer  
At least, there would never be a regret  
That comes when you have no weapons to fight  
How I feel when I see  
That to afford a few pieces of bank notes:  
-the elders are toiling on the streets  
-the poor and the half-naked battling in the harsh weather  
-and the little children:  
Roaming on streets, carrying garbage sacks  
Among the barking dogs

And then I think  
O God!  
Give me the rag of bank notes  
But only in the quantity  
That I may need  
For the excess would make me feel  
That the share of others has landed in my pockets  
It is only by making the needy helpless  
That the economic demons have grabbed  
Their share of bank notes  
It is only at the expense of  
The hungry stomach of the poor  
And their extinguished lives

That the rich always have their way  
The government machinery aids the rich  
Which laughs and collaborates with them  
In a mysterious way

My poems do ask, again and again, in anger,  
"After all, for how long things shall be like this?"  
How long!

(31.5.2011)



## **The Seed (Beez)**

He was laughing  
"What's the matter?" I asked  
He continued laughing  
And said, then —  
"I am laughing at his foolishness"  
"On whose foolishness?"  
Brother, look: Both of us are competing seeds  
And landed on this wet park soil, all at once  
I dragged myself, slowly... slowly  
And reached here on this dry bed  
But he — the fool, dragged himself to the mud  
And became one with the soil  
Alas! Poor soul..."  
I started to smile now  
"Why do you laugh?" he asked  
"Stay here thou shall get to know  
In days — three or four"

When I reached there after some days  
He was very sad  
And just a short while away from him  
Was fluttering a small plant  
Having its small and red leaves  
Flying freely in the air

"What's the matter mate, why so sad?"  
"What to say brother  
Feels as if I am getting dried from within  
I may lose my life-string at any moment"  
"Remember, that day you asked  
The reason for my smile  
Could you see now?  
Your competitor friend did not die  
By becoming one with the soil  
It got metamorphosed into a plant  
As it grows, it will turn into a big tree  
It will be overloaded with flowers and fruits  
Many a people and birds  
Will be benefitted by its presence  
Its fruit will be the repository  
Of many more like him, for the future  
This has been the tradition of trees, isn't it?"

You were trying only  
To save yourself  
You never realized  
That only those who give, get  
Earth lives its generosity  
It always multiplies what you give  
And makes you the music  
Of its own universe.

(01.8.2011)

## Diary

You wrote poems  
Stories  
Novels  
And what not...  
But you never plunged yourself directly  
In any of them  
Your own pains  
And that of others  
Emanated in the imaginative writings you produced  
You heard others and said your own stories  
Whatever impact it created on the minds of people  
You always escaped by thinking  
Oh! It is a mere imagination

But in me you entered as you were  
With your naked truth  
Whatever remained unsaid through imagination  
Those little moments  
Those emotions  
That you could never express through writing  
Are sorted through me, always  
Like a mirror that shows thy true self  
When people see my face, it confuses them  
"Who is this? Seems —  
We have seen him before  
But how come this man  
Who has always been stubborn and unbroken  
Is looking like a common man

In this mirror — with his rise and fall  
Breaking and then becoming  
Tears in laughter and laughter in tears  
He matches the man on the street

And I — the repository of your secrets  
Feel happy that at last  
People have recognized the human in you  
Who has travelled afar through the broken roads  
To be where he is today  
But you have given me more than the pains  
You have induced many images of man and nature  
That has enriched me  
Made me bath in the glory of the moonlight  
Drenched me in the rains of monsoon  
In your abundance  
I sought the sense of my being  
Till your concerns for the poor and oppressed  
Sent jitters down my spine  
But now the same concerns fill light in me  
To visualize a better tomorrow  
By becoming one with the lines written by you  
I croon these lines again and again  
How lucky I am to witness your journey  
And accommodate the fragrance of the soils  
Covered by you

You did a favour to me  
By not putting the burden of jargon ridden  
Values of Criticism on me  
Otherwise Criticism would have herself said —  
'Why are you a Diary if you wanted my job  
I wouldn't have kept quiet—  
'I never entered in your house O prideful  
It is you who have done so, uninvited".

(24.7.2011)



## Fame (Sohrat)

While in conversation  
With my little granddaughter  
I felt the whole pleasure of the universe  
Getting settled in the pitch of our dialogues

Suddenly there was a knocking on the door  
While opening, I asked "who are you?"  
"I am Fame"  
"Please come in, have a seat"  
"I haven't come to sit with you but to tell you —  
That to get me, you have to come out  
Run behind me — here, there, everywhere  
There is a rat race to have me, can't you see"...

I smiled gently and said —  
"So why don't you go after those who are after you  
Whatever I have of you is enough  
And yes, every time  
You have come after me"

"You are right, now I am so much entrenched  
Into the market psyche of the people  
That I don't get enough time to visit people  
At their homes  
Today I stole some time  
To come and advice you"

"Can you count your arrival by doing a good thing  
In my locality there are many hungry bellies  
Who have remained hungry for generations  
There is a silent pain in their existence  
You become their voice and make it reach to those  
Who are often called the messiah of such ill-fated"

She stood for a while, silent  
And said then — "I am not the voice of ill-fated  
I am the victory song of luckier ones"

I closed the doors and came inside  
"Who was she grandpa?" asked my little one  
"Girl she was someone who once get behind  
Makes it difficult for a person to eat, drink, laugh, and cry  
She turns him an alien in his own house"

My girl looked perturbed  
She must be thinking  
What sort of disease was that?

(02.8.2011)

## **The Body vs. Mind (*Man Toh*)**

I remain untouched  
Though the stream of time continues to flow  
There is so much happening around me  
But in me the silence finds a resting ground  
And then I get the remembrance of the past  
The long journeys that gave me pleasure  
My fragile body puts a restrain now  
Though the heart wishes to go back there, again.

(9.8.2011)

## **A Ray of Hope (*Ek Ujaas Bhara Kona*)**

Night comes like a mother to embrace  
The tired and hapless in her motherly affection  
She induces sleep in them, slowly  
Where their suppressed self of the days blooms  
During the night dreams  
In their dreams  
The lack of the day gets its desires fulfilled  
He gains himself in the dreams, a little

As the night passes  
There are glimpses of a new dawn  
Settling aside the forgettable experiences of the past  
The new morning promises a lot  
O here comes the newspaper  
Nothing changes!  
Theft, accidents, suicides  
The false promises of the politicians  
The attack of police on the hapless  
The mayhem of the terrorist on people  
The diktats of Khaps<sup>1</sup> on the lovers  
It looks lesser a newspaper

1. Caste councils — particularly active in parts of western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Enforcer of strong patriarchal norms, Khaps have been in the news for their extra-judicial interventions in marriage and caste norms.



More a drainage of blood  
Entrapping me in its universe

I seek refuge  
O! Here we are —  
Pleasant news is hidden in an invisible corner  
“A stranger took an injured person to the hospital  
In spite of the police fear  
The person got saved”  
Two-three similar news items were found  
At the margins of the newspaper  
All of a sudden, the newspaper was breathing  
In an ocean dominated by politicians, actors,  
Bureaucrats to name a few

It rescued my morning from darkness  
And gifted it a gentle smile  
It became one with my poetry  
But my poetry cannot help but think with pain —  
What will happen to this world tomorrow  
Mounting himself on the demon gadgets  
Man is crushing his environment  
Soil, fire, air, water, sky  
All crying with warnings  
But He is happy on his material throne  
Caring less of what he has broken  
The values that he has broken  
Are like broken glass pieces  
Making life difficult for everyone  
He has turned his ears deaf to the values  
That defined him in the past  
He just wants to fly now  
Higher. Far more higher  
The voice of my poetry fails to reach  
The height that he has occupied

But whenever it sees that pleasant news'  
In the neglected corners of the newspaper  
My poetry gets lit up again  
And becomes a ray of hope  
For those who survive in the neglected corners  
Through these neglected corners she survives  
And so does humanity, alongside it.

(11.8.2011)

## Laughing out Loud (Kahkahe)

Who is laughing out loud  
Without thinking that this is a market  
Everything is sold here  
But without a fault in the measurement  
Yes, even smiles!  
Here smiles are not usual natural outcomes  
But stickered on the lips — like commodities  
And if at all they appear naturally  
They do so to laugh on the haplessness  
Of a man whom they don't even know

Still, among such clear rules  
Who is the one laughing out loud  
Like a monsoon rainstorm  
Suddenly I saw — it was a hermit  
Standing at a crossroad  
He was laughing out loud  
Having his face towards the market  
Even the market was thinking —  
Why his voice is annoying me so much  
I went and asked —  
“At whom you are laughing out loud Baba?”  
“At my own self  
How came I in this market?”  
He started to laugh out loud, again  
And I felt a poem raining in my head  
Like his rainy laughter.

(15.9.2011)

## Here Comes the Kawaar (Fir Aa Gaya Kawaar)

Kawaar<sup>1</sup> has come again  
And Saraswati ji is admitted to nursing home again  
Her Jasmines waft all night  
And rain flowers in the morning  
They cry for Saraswati ji —  
“Where are you?  
Our flowers on earth  
Are waiting for you”  
The squirrels are jumping from branch to branch  
As if waiting for her  
And so does the sparrows  
As if saying —  
“Where are you? Where are you? We need food”

Winter — you know how much I love you  
You are part of me  
In many forms and tunes  
But still I wait for Kawaar  
It brings patience  
The fun times of Ramleela<sup>2</sup>  
And the songs of Dussehra<sup>3</sup>

1. A month according to the Hindu Panchaang. The corresponding months in English are September/October.

2. Folk re-enactment of the life of lord Ram on the lines of ancient epic named *Ramayan*.

3. Also called Vijayadashmi, it marks the triumph of lord Ram over the 10-headed demon king Ravan, as outlined in the epic *Ramayan*.



I like the Sun of Kawaar  
 For it carries a pleasant sunshine  
 Just enough to fill the corns in the fields  
 And stream away the moisture —  
 Of the wet sarees<sup>1</sup> hanging in open  
 Kawaar also brings the new rice to our food plates  
 And the newer jasmine flowers in our courtyard  
 What a pleasant time it is  
 Cool air fills its warmth during days and nights  
 And here comes Diwali...  
 Full of hope and new life  
 And it doesn't come alone  
 Bhaiyadoo<sup>2</sup> and Govardhan-pooja<sup>3</sup> follow it  
 We remain drenched in the festivities  
 Till winter bids adieu to our lovely season

In nursing home  
 I sit near my sick Saraswati ji  
 Thinking about such a pleasant weather  
 And the conspiracy of Kawaar  
 To throw us out of the house!  
 Why?

(12.9.2011)

1. Indian woman's garment.

2. Hindu festival that celebrates the love between brother and sister.

3. An auspicious festival of the Hindus celebrated a day after Diwali.

## The Days Gone by (Beete Prasang)

It is never too late to mend — they say  
 He who lost the way in the morning  
 Finds it back in the evening  
 I asked — “where have you been, all day?”  
 He said — “leave the day and talk about the night  
 For it is night now”

Even the wise ones have said —  
 “Leave the bygone and think on what is to come”  
 I too trust this wisdom  
 But what shall I do with my heart  
 That entangles to and fro  
 With the conflicts that are so perennial  
 At times I find myself in the midst of these  
 And the guilt ridden in me starts thinking  
 “Why I did all that to him? Why?”  
 If only I had participated in his grief  
 And fought his enemies with him  
 Had I given something more to my myself  
 For the sake of my family and the surroundings”

The arrival and departure of these thoughts  
 Make me feel  
 As if I have started to relate with my present now  
 In a much more sensible and valued way

And now when I dream of the future  
I see a lot more of my people  
This intensifies the fragrance of my village earth  
A bit more...  
Against the ever shining brick stones of Delhi.

(15.9.20110

## **I Search this Light** **(Us Jyoti ko Khojta Hun)**

Here comes Diwali, once again  
The markets smile in the hope of  
The upcoming abundance  
And people too wait for Diwali  
With a hope that Lakshmi's<sup>1</sup> arrival  
Will lighten their future  
But in my home...  
Lakshmi never came  
Rather she went back — to the market  
Or got attached with those who came for tips

Still, I wait for Diwali —  
For its lights  
Yes, light for me is THE festival  
They say Ram returned to Ayodhya on this day  
After crushing the darkness of demons  
With his divine light

All of us also inhabit a Ravana  
And a Ram too  
There is a continuous struggle between the two  
Till one day we get to know that  
Our Ram defeats our Ravan

---

1. Hindu goddess of wealth and purity.



And that joy  
Gets illuminated in us in the form of Diwali

But who feels this divine light in the cities?  
Here Lakshmi is welcomed by  
A string of illuminating electric lights  
They illumine not the light of the heart  
But the arrogance of money  
The high decibel crackers make life hell  
And many a suffer from their side-effects  
The morning of the next day  
Struggles for breath — on a pile of garbage.

I remember the Diwali of my village  
Where the earthen lamps would be fighting  
Against the darkness of the sky  
They burn to create a new light  
In this divine light  
One could see the faces of all my relatives  
The lamps will be everywhere —  
On the wells, fields, temples  
And in this way the light of one village  
Will be connected to the light of other village  
One connects with the other so as to produce  
A congregation of twinkling stars on earth  
The sight of the scene makes me feel as if  
The music of light is playing itself  
Piercing through this lull Amavasya<sup>1</sup>  
Egos are crumbling and the whole village  
Is erupting in joy and happiness  
I search this light on every Diwali  
And sadness takes over, if I don't see it.

(13.10.2011)

1. Lunar phase of new moon in Sanskrit.

## The Temple — Palace (Pooja Bhavan)

I prefer a room with its windows open  
Allowing it to be filled with fresh air —  
From the trees nearby  
In this way, let my silence  
And the hustle-bustle be allowed  
To live together  
Let this room never be burdened  
By too much of furniture and earthly materials  
Bereft of any money and jewelry  
It will remain away from the scanner of thieves  
Yes, sleep comes to me only in such a room  
It helps me write better  
For my mind can walk free  
Without bothering much about the room  
I get a better sense of the world  
— the dominating, dominated  
— the victim, victimiser  
Everyone comes under the radar of my pen

But O god  
How you live in such big temple-palaces?  
How you manage to survive  
Among so many pillars of silver and gold  
How do you breath  
Among the goodies bestowed on you

By the filthy and poisonous rich  
How do you digest the comforts  
Hurled on you by the rich  
That smells the blood of poor?

O yes! You don't need these goodies?  
They were collected on your behalf  
By the big stomachs  
Who always see sin  
In those who are hungry and poor

But don't you think God  
When those who sing  
The songs of your victory and might  
At the same time —  
The cries of hunger  
Strike your silver and gold plated pillars  
You are omnipresent — o god!  
Nothing is hidden from you

Suddenly, I heard a gentle laugh  
"Who are you and from where have you come?"  
"Try to look within yourself first"  
"O! My god! You are here?"  
"Yes, it is me  
And be clear. In temple-palaces  
Not me but the stones live  
That bear my name  
And those who worship those stones  
Are not priest but traders  
Who trade on my name  
There no one comes to offers prayers  
But to display their desires  
In their goodies are hidden  
The wishes to find salvation

You don't know but I always live  
In the house of those  
Who carry the rays of sacrifice  
And never discriminate among  
The rich and the poor.

(8.7.2011)



## The Traffic Signal (Chauraha)

Nothing bothers the life of this traffic signal  
Not even the bone-chilling winter  
It never surrenders to the uncontrolled rains of summer  
One of its footpaths is home:  
To Shankar and his sewing machine  
His machine gives rebirth  
To the injured clothes of the poor  
And of course, two square meals to its owner

The coal continues to burn  
In Maatbar's dhaba  
Supplying food to his customers  
And to his family

On an intersection close by  
Stands the rehadi of our sardarji<sup>1</sup>  
Supplying cups of boiling tea  
To the tired bodies  
And a life to sardarji's family

On the edge of the road  
You would see nameless rickshaw pullers  
Running between here to the metro station  
Their running ensures the smiles of their children

1. A way of addressing the people of Sikh community.

In the vicinity, there is a hair saloon  
Always busy in giving new looks to people  
Meanwhile the rehadis of fresh veggies and fruits  
Continue to hover around  
In hopes of securing two meals for their families

And from the same traffic signal pass  
Many a congregation of demi-god babas  
Including those having their bellies full  
For they are in search of more, a bit more  
The babas promise people the prescription  
To digest their accumulation  
The throng is lead by painted women  
Having decorated urns on their heads  
Dancing men follow them  
In varied postures  
The accompanying chariots carry cutouts  
Of the smiling babas  
And the disciples on the chariots call out  
Almost everyone at the traffic signal  
"Please come, you also come"  
But those at the traffic signal pay no heed  
As if saying —  
"Get lost,  
What business we have with these babas  
Our two hands are our only gods  
We need only their blessings to be happy."

(10.7.2011)

## **The House and the Peepal Tree** **(Peepal aur Ghar)**

In the root of my outside house wall  
Newly sprouted a Peepal tree  
What a powerful storehouse of energy it is  
Peepal can born wherever it wants —  
Even in the rocky lands  
It has the energy of its own  
After all, it is a dharamtaru<sup>1</sup>  
Many a tales of life and death  
Are witnessed by it  
Its life-giving air keeps alive many lives  
That is why they never cut a Peepal tree  
They just pass by it, paying their gratitude

That day, many women of neighborhood assembled  
Having the worship bowls in their hands  
They said —  
“No need to travel afar for worship now”

Suddenly, I could vision —  
My peepal has grown big  
Big enough to cover the whole of my house  
Its roots have made cavities in my walls  
My winter sunshine got entangled into its infinite leaves  
Below it I could see the congregation of priests

---

1. Sacred tree.

The crowd of worshipers  
Carrying many instruments of their worship...

In fury of this religious ritual  
The peace of my house is going haywire  
I too revere Peepal  
But not that blindfolded by the religious rituals  
For me, the most pious is my house  
My identity and existence survives through it  
I will not allow anyone to muddle with it

One day, I picked up the axe  
And said to peepal —  
“O lord, pardon me, but this place isn't yours”  
People were watching me with frightened eyes —  
“What this man is doing — an atheist idiot?”

(26.6.2011)



**You shall Come Back**  
**(*Lautkar Aaoge*)**

Put stairs over stairs, more stairs  
Climb up, up, up... just up  
Though you will not get anything there  
Except a big zero  
You will repent after climbing so high  
You would want to come back  
But by then, it will be too late.

(27.6.2011)

**They are Back**  
**(*Laut Aaye Hain*)**

They are back now — worn out and broken  
Swayed by the glittering world —  
They went to that 'divine' world  
There was too much light there  
Enough to make them blind  
Their bodies got awakened there  
Though their souls went to sleep  
After all they all belonged to the world of souls  
How long they could have stayed there  
They are happy now — they are back.

(27.6.2011)

### **The Right Path (Sahi Rasta)**

Today, 'C' is on the chair  
He said —  
"THIS is in the interest of the nation"  
'B' said — "not at all"  
Yesterday, 'B' was on the chair  
And he ratified THIS very way that he is opposing today  
But then 'C' had said — "not at all"  
In their arguments  
The prosperity of the nation is getting drained  
But how prosperous they are becoming!

(27.6.2011)

### **Let us Search a Well (Koi Kuan Khojte Hai)**

Hey stop!  
Where are you going?  
It seems a blue veil has covered your eyes  
Hey! That is no water  
But a mere mirage of it  
Let us dig a well — if you are thirsty  
In this barren land  
This is what man has done always  
Made a hut and dug a well — in need.

(28.6.2011)



**The Money Laughs**  
***(Paisa Hasta Hain)***

The roads were already shrunk  
The traders shrink it a bit more  
From all sides...  
People now collide with each other, fall  
They duel and abuse each other  
But have no option to complain  
Police has already turned away their backs  
Meanwhile, the money laughs... louder and louder  
On people's plight

(28.6.2011)

**You Graze in Our Fields**  
***(Khet Chartain Hai)***

"We represent people  
And we only know  
What is to be done for them and what not  
And who are you to jump in here  
Like a messiah — between us and our people"  
"We haven't jumped in here, we are the people  
And we know what you do for us  
You pretend to protect our fields during the day  
So as to graze happily in them during the nights"

(28.6.2011)

## **The Chair (Kursi)**

When my son came to the city for the first time  
He asked —  
“Father, why so many people are fighting?”  
“Not fighting, said I.  
They are playing musical chairs for THE CHAIR  
So as to reach nearer to the chair  
They are pushing each other aside  
Could you see the man — currently on that chair?  
And people pushing to remove him aside”  
“But father, the chair will break in this tussle”  
“No my son, people get attached and removed  
From the chair they seek...  
The chair remains intact, as it is  
Only those who seek it are broken.”

(30.6.2011)

## **The White Demon (Safed Asur)**

Once there was a demon  
Whose soul rested in a parrot  
He abducted a certain princess  
And imprisoned her in the palace  
Inevitably a prince would come to rescue her  
From the clutches of her tormentor  
In the ensuing battle between the demon and the prince  
The demon would loose all his limbs, one by one  
Only to receive them back and turn as he was  
But on the princess' signal  
The prince throttles the parrot's neck  
And the demon falls  
Never to rise again

Today, the country has  
Many a white demons  
Their souls reside in the money  
Deposited in the Swiss banks  
So many helpless lives are imprisoned  
In the palaces of these white demons  
The princes still come  
But realise that these white demons are their brethren  
How can they kill them?



How can they be killed here?  
When their souls are in the foreign countries  
The powers are hell bent there to protect them  
And the ones trapped in the prisons of these white demons  
Are no princesses  
They are vulnerable, helpless lives  
Who would fight for them?  
Some fakir!  
How does it matter?  
After all, he is just a fakir.

(02.7.2011)

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1. Religious ascetic who lives solely on alms.

## Hunger vs. Fast (Anshan)

For many days they are hungry  
Mother-father, brother-sister  
Looking at each other with helpless eyes  
They are silent, knowing their own helplessness  
Though a volcano resides in them

At some distance there is a parallel world  
A world: full of over-fuelled bellies  
Showcasing the rainbow of luxuries  
And the sound of their treachery filled laughter  
Yes! Here live the Human Gods  
The ones who snatch the food of the people  
They eat some; throw away the rest  
And to loot this thrown away food —  
The poor and the dogs compete with each other  
It is an attempt actually — to retrieve what is theirs  
However, these Human Gods also observe fasts  
When the indigestion of too much food troubles them  
They fight the battle with anti-constipation tablets  
To gobble the share of others again

That hunger or this fast  
How filthy both look  
One tormented by oppression  
The other making attempts to digest it

One getting away from life  
The other trying to squeeze it

But how the same fast acquires new meanings  
When it gets associated with a Gandhi —  
Then it becomes a weapon against the falsities  
And as it gets deeper and deeper  
So does it potency —  
That stands against the unruly powers and systems  
Known for making fun of even the best of weapons  
But the slow light emanating from the fasting  
Unleashes chaos even among the best of armies  
And there begins a bloodless war  
Between the truth and untruth  
Where truth is always victorious inevitably  
But for all this to happen  
We always require a Gandhi  
As naked as the truth itself.

(20.6.2011)

## I Know (*Mujhe Pata Hai*)

I know  
My poems will not come along  
Not even this long-earned fame  
Everything shall remain here —  
When I will embark on my final journey  
And of course people do ask —  
“Why am I writing these poems after all  
In the twilight of my worn out life?”

What else should I do?  
I love this life immensely  
And till it is there  
I wish to live every bit of it  
Does not matter if it is sweet or sour  
I will continue to hold on to it  
Poetry is the essence of life  
Without it —  
Life seems like an empty space  
That one has to occupy without reason

When the poem hums inside your mind  
Or appears in words  
You feel the essence of life, the sense of your being  
A unique fragrance spills everywhere  
As if the static time flutters with his wings



The birds start singing  
And my loneliness transforms into many a sound  
Creating ripples of laughter and tears  
In the corridors of my soul

I don't know how valuable my poems are for others  
For me —  
They are the essence of my meaningful existence.

(22.6.2011)

## Hanuman

*'O lord Hanuman! Victory to you!  
You are the ocean of pure knowledge  
O lord Kapeesh! Victory to you!  
The entire universe is illuminated by thy fame!'*  
These lines were emanating from the kitchen  
Yes, Saraswati Ji has established a small temple there  
It is her usual routine after the morning bath

In the seventies  
Physical pains tormented me  
It is the cruel hand of Sade-Sati<sup>1</sup> — they said  
I was advised to worship lord Hanuman  
Even the enlightened Tulsidas wrote *Hanuman Bahuk*  
To get relieved of his physical pains  
But what should I do with this cynical mind of mine  
That refuses to believe in the blind rituals  
Created to worship the sacred

So in her quest of relieving me off my pains  
Saraswati Ji started to worship lord Hanuman  
I too hear the rhythm of her hymns —  
Without making much of efforts  
Whenever I cross by the other Hanuman temples  
I see long queues of worship

---

1. A 7½ years long period/spell of *Shani*. This astrological phase is much frightening for those in India who believe in Indian astrology.

People waiting under the baggage of their own desires  
I laugh and pity them  
Though I love my Hanuman  
Whenever he appears in Ramayan —  
I feel a sense of thrill and excitement  
There he is alive — full of life and passion  
The unchained fighting light  
Against the empire of darkness  
Now to see the same lord caged in these temples  
Breaks my heart

I do not aspire earthly reaches from the lord  
I just seek a bit of his light  
So as to fight battles on my own  
Against the devils and ghosts.

(14.7.2011)

## God in the Dream (*Sapne main Ishwar*)

Last night, I met the God in my dream  
With a thought  
That he will embrace me with love  
And will take away all my pains and troubles  
But he did not even look at me  
I was surprised  
Ignoring me, He was talking to an atheist —  
With love and affection  
I shouted with anger —  
“O lord! I am your true devotee  
Day and night I recite your name  
I sing your glory from home to temple”  
The lord looked at me with a sarcastic smile and said  
“You are brimming with pride that you have known me  
But the fact is that like your leaders and bosses  
You consider me a believer of sycophancy too  
You hail anyone to get what you want — don’t I know that!  
I created a beautiful world for all of you  
Immersed something of me in everything that you see around  
With a hope that all of you will love it — develop it; protect it  
You will destroy those who want to destroy this world  
But you love my name and ignore me  
You hail me and ignore my aesthetics  
The earnings of life got washed away in a second  
I thought  
And then the sound of utensils in the kitchen  
Broke my sleep.

(19.4.2010)



**Poetry is the Tune of Humanity**  
**(Kavita Manushyata ka Raag Hai)**

"Poetry is the tune of humanity  
It connects us to us and with the rest of the world  
Pity the ones who are disconnected from poetry"  
The poet has uttered it many times in numerous congregations

But today, in his neighbourhood  
A boy has inhaled poison  
The women of the house were in perpetual trauma  
The only other man of the house was out  
The other 'normal' people of the neighbourhood  
Got together to see what has happened  
But the poet seemed busy with a great work  
By locking himself in his closed room space  
He was composing a great poem, probably.

(2.04.2010)

**Poetry Makes us Sensitive**  
**(Kavita Sanwedansheel Banati Hai)**

"Poetry makes us sensitive  
It keeps awakened our sleeping conscience"  
Thus was he addressing the congregation, in a high-pitched tone  
Revealing the human side of the art of poesy

While getting out after his great speech  
People started to shower him with heavy gratitude  
Without even looking at any of them  
He was accepting their warmth  
As if doing some favour to them  
In such a way  
He ensured his exit — keeping his arrogant head high  
Now people started to think —  
"Alas! The man fooled us with his rhetoric!"

(3.4.2010)

**Jasmine**  
**(Harsingaar)**

For many days its flowers were falling slowly  
Without revealing if the falling was its laughter or tears

From my courtyard, I would often witness this scene  
And inhale the fragrance spread from its fall  
Reminding many autumns that I have spent

The buds will continue to ask throughout night  
Why don't you let us live for a few more days  
Even our nights are full of fears  
Due to the impending deadly mornings

O my heart! Why this happens always  
Wherever it sees pain, it becomes silent  
Why doesn't it understand that  
Whatever will happen, will happen  
What is the point in so much of contemplation?

(25.11.2011)

**How Good it Feels**  
**(Kitna Accha Lagta Hai)**

How good it feels to read and write  
In the comforts of one's home  
How good it feels to weave dreams there

Everyone craves for the gathering  
So as to speak from the dais amidst thunderous claps  
They say — leave your homes to rise high

The pain comes as a guest from varied corners  
And its exit is ensured by my poetry  
I belong to the earth — I have no desire for the mountains

Every corner of my home chats with creativity  
It says — “worry not, don't cry in any pain”  
It taught me to battle with self before the world

I come home — again and again, after many a journey  
Surrender all relations that I bring — to this very home  
Abandoning this home now will be a self-abandoning

(11.12.2011)



## Jungle

While in village  
I always dreamt of a city  
I had heard —  
There are many seductive building there — kissing each other  
And the glittering roads  
Accompanying vehicles of different kinds  
And the theatres — having many dancing damsels  
All corners are filled with the echoes of joy  
Men and women lighten the city with colourful attires  
No less than the gods and goddesses  
And... and... and...

It's been ages that I live in a city now  
It has colonized me  
But my heart knows no bounds  
It flies like a bird  
And takes me back from where I had come  
It asks the body to leave the city  
The body replies  
There isn't a calorie left to support your adventure

In this entire helplessness  
Once in a while I sit in front of the T.V. Set  
To watch *Discovery* or the *Animal Planet*  
How good it feels  
To travel the jungles of the world from my home  
And see their existence through such density

Variety of tress — short and tall  
Many rivers decorated with the shadows of trees  
And the small naughty streams  
Navigating the uneven earth  
Different species of animals and birds — all at one place  
How good it feels  
To be travelling with this open world  
Without moving an inch

But it feels paradoxical too  
After being scared from the bloody life of city  
I turn towards the nature — on T.V.  
Only to find that  
There too the same bloody battles are going on

In the jungle I wished to see  
Spring, rain and the abundance of autumn  
Trees loaded with colourful flowers and fruits  
Green vegetation across valleys  
Dancing peacocks — all this and more  
So as to get away from this deadly city world  
And to be in the nature's sunshine

But I don't know what has happened  
Even to the eyes of camera that humans use  
It only sees the violence of the jungle  
Wild, deadly unruly animals  
Expelling the innocent animals  
Every now and then — one sees  
An innocent life into the jaws of death  
A toxic silence prevails all around  
And eventually the silence is broken  
By painful cries of death  
Animals arrive at riverfront — to quench their thirst  
Pay inevitably — with their lives

Doesn't matter if it is my neighbourhood or jungle  
How disturbing it is to see the innocent get attacked  
By those who are drunk on power  
And how good it feels — to see once in a while  
A group of wild buffaloes — in unity  
Driving away a herd of lions

In the natural world  
Violence is permissible though  
According to nature's norms  
But the heart broken by man's violence  
Seeks refuge in the natural world  
But alas! Even from jungle  
He shows his own mirror image  
Petrified — I switch off the T.V.

(12.11.2011)

## Vasant Panchami

Today the Sun has been kind  
But the cold winds coming from the west  
Are bathing its sunshine with their vapory touch  
I too sit outside my door to touch the sunshine  
My heart starts to croon —  
“Today is Vasant Panchami”  
I continue to think —  
Such a pleasing name  
Whatever be the season outside  
The season of my heart  
Has already turned colourful  
—With the touch of Vasant Panchami  
Someone sings inside me —  
Vasant has arrived  
The laughter of colourful flowers is heard everywhere  
The fields — as if covered by the blanket of yellow sky  
And the uncontrollable winds  
As if running away in enthusiasm  
Even in the coldest of eyes  
I can see the rays of hope, a future  
The weary ways have started to smile now  
And it feels  
If the nightingale is about to spell its cuckoo spell  
And my companion who has been sad too long

---

1. Also spelled Basant Panchami is a Hindu festival that marks the preparation for the arrival of spring.



And the *tulsi* plant that has long been unconscious  
Always made me feel about their impending death  
Are breathing a new lease of life today  
All due to the sight of Vasant Panchmi

Outside, the footsteps may yet not be heard  
But inside me:  
The Vasant has already set in.

(28.1.2012)

### After Such a Long Time (*Kitne Dino Baad*)

He was out of my memory for long  
The concern for his arrival had ceased too  
How happy the heart was, bereft of any hope  
With the passing of time, his absence became a routine too  
Days, weeks and years will come and go  
All pass with a steady pace

Two days back the news broke  
That he is coming after ten days  
All of a sudden the heart went crazy  
He is coming, he is coming...  
Strange melody started to reverberate in my heart  
Every passing moment now started to look like a day  
Why can't the days in-between wither away in a flash?  
Ah! After such a long time...

(4.2.2012)

## What is This? (*Yehain Kya Hai?*)

Today the morning was different  
I felt as if the light outside was calling me  
Its entry into my body made me light  
When I sat in the courtyard  
A cup of tea was in my hand  
In its hot radiance  
I could feel the warmth of my wife  
And the fragrance of her touch  
Getting communicated to me  
Through her cup

I turned towards the trees of my courtyard  
Their soulful green started to ask me —  
How are you?  
Sparrows started to chirp around to say  
Good morning... good morning  
Squirrels started to talk in their *chik-chik* tone  
And the red-yellow shades of Marigolds  
Started to colour my poetic sensibility

For a second, I thought — who are they to me  
But then why do I feel: Had they been absent  
My mornings would have been gloomy  
Every room of the home  
Started speaking to me, every corner

And when I went to the entrance  
The road said — 'Ram-Ram'  
And with this — all the echoes subsumed in me  
Suddenly the newspaper is thrown at my door  
The whole world arrived on my hand  
A world full of pleasures and pains  
A world full of strangers  
But why their pleasures enthralls me  
And their pains make me cry  
I was thinking all this  
Then came my granddaughter, suddenly  
Smiling silently, she came and sat in my lap  
With her weight I felt so light  
And turned into childhood, all of a sudden  
Oh! What is this that I have written?  
The editor asked for a love poem

---

1. Customary greetings among Hindus.



## Some Independent Verses (*Kuch Muktak*)

I came to the new town, breaking ties with the old  
Many a troubles that I faced slayed my enthusiasm  
Everything of that town, I brought in here  
But it feels that the old beholds me, still

How difficult it was to come, don't walk away now  
Imbibe some light in the darkness of your eyes  
How long he has been waiting for you  
His home deserves a bit of your stay

\*\*\*

Time's tests were always thought to be an injustice  
None could understand the gifts hidden in its troubles  
How much pride we carried in having understood the world  
But friends, now we understand — how naïve we have been

The day seems to be singing, is it an illusion  
Some of our own seem to be laughing here, is it a shadow  
A strange fragrance is floating in the air  
There is a knocking at my heart — has he arrived

\*\*\*

It was a long journey my friends, a troublesome path  
On the thorns of life I almost gave up  
But then life came to speak in my ears  
I should never give up — said she

While walking together, we continued to share secrets  
We kept on encouraging the weary  
With a desire to reach the destination one day  
We kept on encouraging each other's dreams

\*\*\*

What is victory or triumph once you are out of the game  
But one can continue to surrender from within  
When grief is all over, there is hardly a place to run  
The only way to live life then — is to have a treaty with grief

On the path of life whenever I struggled, someone rescued  
Every time darkness engulfed me, someone put up a candle  
And whenever grief overtook me, someone put out a hand to hold

\*\*\*



On the one hand I play hide and seek with poverty  
On the other — there is money that never plays to my tunes  
Which path I should seek on this intersection  
One goes to the village and the other — to the city

The shivering cold felt like a dark well  
Everyone was saying what difficult times to live in  
I thought otherwise: time has been kindest now  
Come on! Come together — we have such sunshine

\*\*\*

**The Laughing Flames and Other Poems:** Published originally in Hindi as *Aag Ki Hansi*, *The Laughing Flames and Other Poems* accounts Ramdarash Mishra's medley of poems composed between 2009-2012. The collection displays a unique poetic freshness, landscaped on the fertile soil of human experience. Most of the poems here chant the songs of life and nature in varied ambiances. Without a doubt, the poet celebrates the village life but his empathy with the 'ruins' of the city life is on display too. On the one hand, he finds it difficult to conceal his nostalgia for the idyllic rural life and on the other; extremely troubled by the negative vibes of contemporary urban life. Taking a dig at the modern man and his cultural values, *The Laughing Flames* exposes the faultlines of the market economy and the resultant alienation of humanity from her roots. Deeply reflective and contemplative, *The Laughing Flames* calls for a painstaking re-examination of our (new) beliefs, choices, systems and values.

**Ramdarash Mishra** (b. 1924) is an important signature in modern Hindi literature for more than five decades now. Always in limelight for his *ghazals* and poetry, he has made a prolific contribution across genres in Hindi language, which is now collected in 14 volumes. In spite of undertaking such a long creative journey, Ramdarash Mishra never surrendered his artistic gifts in service of a particular –*vaad* (-ism) or ideological school. On the contrary, he reserves his creative prowess to understand the *human condition* and *attitudes*, especially in relation to the vagaries of changing times. He is a spokesperson of humanity, for humanity. A life-long defender of the ordinary, Ramdarash Mishra's literary universe advocates a fairer, wiser, and kinder future for humanity. He has received almost all the prominent awards reserved for excellence in Hindi literary writing including the Sahitya Akademi Award for his poetry collection titled *Aag Ki Hansi* (*The Laughing Flames and Other Poems*) in 2015.

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