

ADIL MANSURI

## Poems<sup>1</sup>

### ON THE PASSING OF MY FATHER

He had not slept for forty nights.  
Dreams loaded on camels  
he kept moving along into the waste-  
lands of the night  
he kept burning on the pyres of moon-  
light.  
On the table  
dentures resting in a glass kept smiling.  
From a realm behind the dark glasses,  
the cataract bud<sup>2</sup> strove to raise its  
head.  
Darkness began smirking in his eye.  
The hand of the soul pierced by the tip  
of a needle.  
The lamps of desires were stilled in his  
body.  
Fluid shadows of green water, moment  
by moment,  
began descending into his body.

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<sup>1</sup>Poems selected from his *Ḥashr ki Ṣubḥ Darakhshān Hō* (Allahabad: Shab-khūn Kitāb Gḥar, 1996).

<sup>2</sup>“Cataract bud” may sound a bit odd, but the original “mōtiyē kī kalī” employs a subtle play on words: “mōtiyā” is a variety of jasmine and derives its name from “mōti” (“pearl”) for its pearly-white color; “kalī” is “bud.”

Under the shade of ten stars embedded  
in the ceiling of the house,  
images relinquished contours;  
images withered.

(“Vālid kē Intiqāl Par,” 36–7)

I AWAIT YOU

In veins devoid of blood  
under the blanket of flesh  
On ladders fashioned from bones  
On pathways of breath  
I await you.

(“Main Tum<sup>h</sup>ārā Muntazir Hūn,” 180)

WHO IS IT?

Concealed behind the square breasts of  
the room  
Who is laughing?  
The conception of whose shadow is lost  
in the depths of the soul?  
On whose slippery back rides the naked  
sky?  
Why is the tongue of dark desire tied?  
Through whose scorching caress has the  
frozen blood found life?  
A longing for whose body churns in the  
heart?  
Who has deposited burning embers on  
my lips?  
Who shatters the mirrors of pleasures?  
Who is it?

(“Kaun Hai,” 184)

## BOSNIA 1

The way to the hospital pants  
 spread-eagled in sixty thousand virgin  
 bellies.  
 Smear'd in blood—smear'd,  
 lies each moment,  
 each epoch,  
 each body,  
 each dream—  
 In the severed hand of a child  
 the bucket of water overflows with  
 blood.  
 In the palpable darkness,  
 nothing sane occurs—  
 Not the road of return;  
 not even the minaret of the ruined  
 mosque;  
 not even the hue of blood smothered  
 on the horizon;  
 the vista of being born;  
 not even the nation wrecked and pros-  
 trate in sixty thousand virgin bellies.  
 (47–8)

## BOSNIA 3

All the walls, riddled with holes.  
 Each house, a ruin  
 Placing the head lying on the earth  
 back on the neck, I ponder:  
 “All contemplation is now futile.”  
 Pushing my hand through the yawning  
 gap in the rib cage,  
 I fumble around.  
 Who throbb'd in here?  
 The hand finds its way across my back.  
 With the hand fallen in the dust below,  
 I balance the head

which is in the process of rolling down  
my neck—  
All the walls, riddled with holes.  
Each house, a ruin.

(50)

Now

The journey of black sun is over.  
Now, dreams shall descend to the earth  
from the eye of the heavens.  
Now, windows of space shall be  
opened;  
the earth shall be cleansed with moon-  
rays.

(“Ab,” 156)

IN HOTEL NATRAJ

Two fingers of wax,  
dissolved in cups of black coffee.  
Solitary rays of the evening sun,  
absorbed in Coca Cola.  
An ocean shrieked in the carafe of  
water.  
Thorns pierced the heart of a sandwich.  
Tomatoes on a plate started giggling.  
The dark melancholy of evening  
wafted away as steam from a kettle.  
Winking its eye,  
it turned towards another table.

(“Hōṭal Natrāj Mēñ,” 149)

GOD LIES AWAKE

Unclean melancholy of the dove’s eyes,

dilapidated in the sorrow of your  
absence,  
will presently sound out from the  
corners of the house.  
You shall not be able to hear.  
I shall not be able to speak.  
On the infamous streets of black cities,  
shadows will stalk you—  
Place the earth of darkness on their  
palm saying thus:  
“This is your share in this world, and in  
the afterlife.  
No damsel shall know the taste of your  
lips.”  
Wait,  
Where are you headed?  
Look at me intently and say:  
“God lies awake.”

(“Khudā Jāgta Hai,” 81)

A DESIRE TO OPEN THE DOOR OF  
ANCIENT HISTORY

I remember my existence in the womb.  
Even today, the pain of the exact  
moment of birth  
is conscious beneath my skin.  
The lament of deaf darkneses within  
the four walls of the void,  
My destiny scribbled over with the  
curse of the sun.  
If only someone would cast me  
into the eyeless cavern of touch.

(“Purānī Tārīkh kā Darvāza Khōlnē kī  
Tamannā,” 166)

AFTER WATCHING BECKETT'S PLAY<sup>3</sup>

Who do you await in the desolation of  
 ruins?  
 The tree has long since withered.  
 Who drags away, casting a noose  
 around the neck?  
 To whom do you display the wounds of  
 words?  
 Roads are closed;  
 the measure of directions not traceable.  
 There is no arrival, no parting—  
 Shadow  
 is the neighbor;  
 is a lunatic.  
 (“Bāikeṭ kā Ḍrāmā Dēk<sup>h</sup> Kar,” 130)

## GINSBERG

... In the streets of Banaras,  
 wrapped in khadi,  
 the connoisseur of marijuana  
 wandered in search of his self.  
 On the ghats,  
 all mendicants savoring unripe sunlight  
 —his companions.  
 In the swirling exhalations of mari-  
 juana,  
 spread hesitantly his fragmented magic.  
 Through the overgrowth of hair and  
 beard,  
 pierced the biting intensity of charcoal  
 eyes.  
 Shrouded by small glasses,  
 eyes spewed hatred;

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<sup>3</sup>Samuel Beckett's: *Waiting for Godot*.

A dirty expletive rolled between the  
 palate and teeth—  
 Running down Gautama's thighs,  
 drops of pale, cold blood  
 crawled along the stretched out  
 branches of the peepal.  
 Stop, Stop.  
 Get your thumbs severed before  
 returning to America.  
 What is mortal? What is eternal?  
 Water colored red?  
 Here he comes, the one who reads  
 verses on footpaths.  
 Here he comes, the one who progresses  
 treading upon the corpses of his  
 shadows—  
 The connoisseur of marijuana behind  
 the wall of shadows;  
 Holding a few crumbs of dry bread,  
 he stares at everyone from the aperture  
 of the sun.  
 Run, Run!  
 Flee, Flee!

(“Ginsberg,” 163–4)

#### A POEM

In the half-opened door of *City-Light  
 Books*,  
 the night spread on the yellow paper of  
 “Howl” and other poems  
 gravitating from the churning skies  
 reflected in the squinted eyes  
 of the python wrapped around Allen  
 Ginsberg's neck,  
 (standing with his fists clenched)  
 slowly spreading over the elongated face  
 of the Empire State Building.

Black ants taking in the world's sticki-  
ness,  
licked from U Thant's thick, black lips  
try to seek refuge in the chillums of the  
tonsured mendicants of Banaras.  
Objects of Marlon Brando's objection-  
able movements  
have begun to rain!

(“*Ēk Nazm*,” 161)

—*Translated by Riyaz Latif*