

**RAJENDER MANCHANDA BAANI**

## Ghazals

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Rajender Manchanda Baani is remembered chiefly for his novel expressions in Urdu poetry. His unconventional treatment of the most popular Urdu genre, the ghazal, broadened its spectrum and presented many more possibilities to explore. Born in 1932 in Multan (now in Pakistan) he came to Delhi in the wake of Partition. He taught in an obscure school and actively participated in the literary and cultural activities of Delhi before his death in 1981. His was a life full of stoic perseverance. He left three collections of poetry: *Ḥarf-e Mu'tabar* (1972), *Ḥisāb-e Rañg* (1976), and *Shafaq Shajar* (1983)].

### I

Strange was the experience of jostling through the crowds;  
She got the chance to have a word with me.

Then came a wave and dragged her deep to the bottom;  
Thus ended the spectacle of sinking and sailing.

I know this path may turn into my tomb,  
Though worn out, I dare not stop here.

Handing me a withering rose  
She watches the expression of fear on my face.

Who sprinkled this blackness in the sky?  
I have been pining to paint it my own way.

Alike are the queues of friends and foes.  
He knows it is not safe to pass by them.

Keep an eye over companions near the destination.  
It is the juncture to fear one another.

I heaved and hopped but collapsed at last;  
How hard I tried to emerge on the surface!

No punishment is there for soaring in the sky!  
A globetrotting with hardly any adventure!

No news to come from anywhere under the sun;  
No aeroplane coming in to land anymore.

No echo at all to be etched on the ears;  
No image whatsoever to stay in my eyes.

No wind to whistle in my heart anymore;  
No more a poison to enter my soul.

No further a matter to make me sad;  
No longer any behavior hard to put up with.

Only a shriek had fallen from the mountaintop;  
It caused a rare spectacle of dispersal of the fog.

## II

Time and space were stretched before me.  
I collapsed fearing the vast distance ahead.

Showing me the obscure image of the free time,  
Who is it escaping and eluding inside me?

A single wound was deepening in my heart  
Though a thousand scars were consigned to oblivion.

It was the ultimate beauty of the breakup  
Both turned speechless in the middle of the talk.

Strange was the view of the village across  
Crossing the river they got separated from one another.

I stood still on the way like an accident  
And strange times were passing by me.

At last, the decorum and propriety kept us apart.  
Intimacy minus touch was making the bodies explode.

III

If relation of any sort persists between us  
A spasm of sorrow will haunt your heart.

Let us also sever the bond of love  
And let there be a gossip for a while.

Your grief will never stop tormenting me;  
This hermit will linger in the woods of my heart

Your wretched lovers will never be cured  
Of the craze of having forsaken their love.

It makes no difference if someone comes or goes.  
Silence will always rule in the woods of heart.

A gentle gust of the wind of despair  
Will always precede your arrival.

We will become unaware someday of ourselves  
And the pains of love will remain unattended.

The heart will keep marching towards its doom  
And simultaneously it will keep crying for you

In your half-open eyes till eternity  
There will remain a charm, an illusion.

IV

The one to kick up green and golden dust is me.  
And the one to paint the twilight tree is me

The one to collect all the colors of the space is the evening;  
The one to adorn the night's lashes with dreams is me.

The one to make the first flower bloom is the morning;  
The one to sing to the accompaniment of wind is me.

The one to grow the crops within and without is you;  
The one to always lavish your riches is me.

Downpour on the roofs, the distant hills, the dim sunlight:  
The one to be wet and to dry his wings is me.

When the four directions blend into one  
The one to turn isolation into prayer is me.

The one to blow the clarion is you;  
The one to leave his house to meet you is me.

v

The one never to tread the beaten track is me  
The one to take new, outlandish turns is me

Never will you understand these odd, offbeat things?  
Wherever be the fire, the one to get burned is me

Enough is the little dew to make me wet;  
Enough is the little flame; the one to melt is me.

Enough is the little blow to make me stagger;  
Enough is the little wave; the one to splash up is me

Enough is the little journey to lead me astray;  
Enough is the little help; the one to recover is me

Enough is the little morning to mortify me;  
Enough is the little moon; the one to pine is me.

Enough is the little space for me to pass through;  
Enough is the little hope; the one easy to please is me.

VI

Your little grief and the one to sob is me;  
The one who cannot bear with your gloom is me

What is it like spark in your body?  
The one to glitter at the tiny reflection is me.

What is it like wakefulness in your blood?  
A mere touch and the one to be perfumed is me.

What is it like grandeur in your grace?  
The one to hesitate at a trifle is me.

Your lovely face is a garden of colors  
What sights I capture though a winker is me.

I am not a stone, immune to the season's mood.  
The one to be stirred by a gentle breeze is me.

If alone, it's difficult to move a step;  
With you around, the one never to be tired is me.

VII

Afraid of the thick dark night is me.  
The one to spread like desolation is me.

Who is it that calls me from across the river?  
The one to dive into the swollen river is me.

If infamy is my fate, let it be so.  
The one never to take timorous steps is me.

What do I crave more than your company?  
The one to live and to die with you is me.

Having told everything, have you severed the ties?  
What should I say, for devoid of the gift of gab is me.

The one to design varieties of pages is you;  
The one to paint your choicest shades is me.

The eternal, infinite Time that passes is you;  
The one to halt at every sight and shade is me.

### VIII

What a turn it was! I was going to lose you.  
The one who never cried did weep at last.

What gust was it that made my body and soul sparkle?  
I didn't know I was going to turn to ashes again.

What wave it was that dragged me into the vortex?  
I was at the shore to play with water.

Where was the color in the petals?  
It is I who painted them with the rays of the sun.

Gone are the days but everything flashes past my eyes.  
I am awake, the one who used to enjoy sleeping.

It's autumn and the trees are standing clad in yolk.  
The one to have a piercing glance at each sight is me.

Whatever is this side you'll find across the river.  
Now I have decided to scupper my boat.

### IX

Her dress was like a mere symbol  
And her body was like a highlighted text

The atmosphere was clear and clean like ears  
Her silence was like a promise she was keeping

Her style was like waves of curiosity  
Her breathing was like the pervasive fragrance

The chessboard of life was in her grip  
Her arrival was like auspicious tidings

The elusive eyes were like an invitation  
Her formality was like a favor

The yearning was arousing like wine  
Blood in the veins was like an affliction

Henna was spread over the imagination  
And the setting was like an embrace

Desire was like an emergent need  
And she herself was like eternal love

The language of heart was simple as ever,  
Immutable like an abiding tradition

**x**

Though hands were drenched in ink, no text was there to  
write.

Some lines were there but no outline; some shades were  
there but no symbol.

A symbol of loosening ties, the pale leaves knew their fate.  
No storm was awaited to make them fall from the trees.

The friendship was getting bitter; the path itself awaited a  
turning.

Then the two got separated in silence without shock.

How long I was lost amid the razzle-dazzle of the  
decorated house!

What embellishments were there for my sake! I wasn't free  
to catch her glimpse.

Seize the moment and capture the ecstasy of the virgin  
touch.

Else you cannot say the heavens were not friendly or the

earth was not beautiful enough.

How much water has flown in the river! How many scenes  
have gone with the wind!  
Still the treasure is far from empty. A loss nobody could  
complain about.

I had to squeeze hundreds meanings from the barren  
bosom of words.

I wasn't fortunate to be left a legacy. No will was drawn up  
to my name. □

—*Translated by Mirza A.B. Baig*