

JAYANT PARMAR

Poems

THE GOBLET OF VERSE SHATTERED¹

The goblet of verse shattered
on the glistening floor
But the sound of the goblet,
why does it not pierce my heart like an arrow?
I emerged along with my roots.
The goblet smeared in blood
The explosion resounds throughout the room.

Age-old *radīfs*,²
manuscripts in their hands,
loiter gracefully in the town.
Melodies drive nails
in my ears day and night.
On the paper,
the butterfly of prosody
flutters about.
Here and there,
feeble threads of metres;
somewhere, doves of couplets
soar to the seven heavens—
Ruins of symbols deserted
The window of metaphors opens nowhere.
Pigeons of words, of feelings, of dreams, of desires,
of rhythm, of harmonies, of aesthetics, of *isms*—

¹“*Ṣurāḥī Naẓm kī Ṭūṭī*,” in *Aur* (Ahmedabad: Sanket Mahapatra, 1999), 2–3.

²*Radīf*: the repetitive refrain employed especially in the ghazal.

But their wings are wounded.

Knife, dagger, hammer, nail, paper and reed-pen:
despite all of these
why is the poem not made?
Stars strum the strings of my heart all night
But why is the poem not made?
The goblet of verse shattered ...

A STAR HAD FALLEN³

On the frontiers of dreams
a blue, turquoise ocean
akin to your eyes.
Floating away on the spearheads of waves,
resplendent like moon,
the ark of our love—
Farther from the seven seas,
flirting with storms,
conversing with mermaids
when it returned
on the shimmering sands of the shores,
a star had fallen!

MANU⁴

One of these days,
Manu,
in front of the house,
on the branch of a neem tree,
stripping you naked,

³“Ēk Sitāra Ṭūṭ Girā Thā,” in *ibid.*, 6.

⁴“Mānū,” in *ibid.*, 8–9. Manu, the primordial father, is reputed to be the author of *Manusmṛiti* which outlined the laws of conduct in Vedic society and decreed society’s division on the basis of caste.

I will hang you.
Tearing out your veins
I will see
how much of my ancestors' blood
you have consumed—
One of these days
I will flay your skin.
You decreed we
should serve
Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.⁵
You inscribed the fate of
Chamar, Bhangi and Chandal⁶
Stay outside the precincts of the village!
Eat from broken vessels!
Here, even the buffalo is a wise pandit;
even a donkey partakes of holy Ganges water!!

But are you aware?
I have now learned to soar like a falcon;
to spring like a tiger;
to use words as weapons ...

One of these days
I will flay your skin
and hand it back to you!
In the same way
you stripped my father naked and struck him down.

⁵Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas: three of the four castes into which Hindu society is divided according to the scriptures. The fourth and lowest caste is the Sudra, condemned to untouchability and assigned to carry out extremely low functions of the society; this caste has inevitably suffered at the hands of the three upper castes.

⁶*Āmār*, *Bhaṅgī* and *Āndāl*: pejorative terms used for the Sudras, based on the functions they are condemned to perform in society.

SCRIPT⁷

On the walls of my house
 darkness lies awake.
 Opening the window, quietly,
 a moon-ray steps into my house,
 searches for me.
 And I am immersed
 in deciphering
 the script of your body.

LINE OF THE NEW POEM⁸

On the writing table
 Lorca and Octavio Paz
 Majeed Amjad and Faruqi
 sit together.
 As if Ghulam Ali
 on the cover of *Dharmayug*⁹
 will presently break into
 “I Remain in My Own Inebriation....”¹⁰

The girl in the TV commercial
 has emerged fresh from her bath;
 as if the fragrance of her soap
 has spread into the room ...

I look into the mirror
 and am reassured
 that I inhabit the same old form.
 The fingers of my hands
 once again freshen

⁷“Līpī,” in *ibid.*, 19.

⁸“Na’ī Naẓm kā Miṣra‘,” in *ibid.*, 22–23.

⁹*Dharmayug*: a popular Hindi journal.

¹⁰*Apnī Dhūn mēñ Rabtā Hūñ*: a popular ghazal sung by the Pakistani entertainer Ghulam Ali.

their identity ...

I am lost in the city of perplexity;
I look for the line of the new poem.
Grabbing its finger

I may be able
to traverse the ocean of the day

VAN GOGH-1¹¹

One evening
for a moon-faced-one
you cut your left ear with a blade
and offered it ...
Returning to your room,
you lay on the bed unconscious.
When sunrays descended into the windows,
a small rivulet of blood
had flowed outside the door.
And in it
a heart-shaped leaf
was aflame!

VAN GOGH-2¹²

When have colors ever confined you?
Painting the shadow blue
you shatter the sky to bits ...
Green grass
you inscribe in a yellow script.
You conflagrate trees.
In cups and bottles

¹¹"Vān Gogh-1," in *ibid.*, 27. Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), Dutch painter.

¹²"Vān Gogh-2," in *ibid.*, 28.

merely winds
akin to your face—
You empty your ennui in the strokes of your brush ...
I have watched you
empty color tubes on the canvas.
In the colors stuck to the palette
you descend.
Sitting on the shores of passion
what all dreams you adorn
but
before dawn
you sink
to the depths of a dewdrop!!

POET¹³

Adorned with paper
with patchwork of phrases,
stands on the corner of poems,
with a rosary of stars in his hands,
a venerable poet
still in the belief that
from the darkness of the soul
only words can redeem ...

FALL¹⁴

a lone tree
for the sake of
embracing yellow autumn to its bosom
one after another
in passion
throws onto the earth
all the garments of its body

¹³“Shā‘ir,” in *ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴“Patjhar,” in *ibid.*, 75.

FOR KAFKA¹⁵

Dear friend
Here is my final wish:
whatever I leave behind,
notebooks, copies, drafts, letters, notes—everything.
Without reading them
assign them to flames.
You asked this of me
but my dear
Are you aware?
Even God Almighty hesitates profoundly
in reducing this enchanting world to dust!

AHMEDABAD¹⁶

On the shaking minarets¹⁷
Sunlight with a flavor of raw onions ...
The city charred by
toxic smoke from the chimneys
has been coughing since long
like my old grandmother.
Odors from Bhatiyar Gali¹⁸
permeate my room—
Stench all round,
of flesh,
of blood,
of filthy drains ...

The ramparts of Ahmedabad's fort

¹⁵"Kāfkā kē Liyē," in *ibid.*, 82. Franz Kafka (1883–1924), Czech writer.

¹⁶"Ahmadābād," in *ibid.*, 91–92.

¹⁷The stylistically distinct minarets of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Islamic monuments of Ahmedabad. These minarets are reputed to sway at the application of the slightest force.

¹⁸A well-known eatery street in Ahmedabad comprised of small kiosks that dish up quick and cheap non-vegetarian meals.

have been razed since long.
 Sunrays peeping
 from Sidi Sayyid's *jālī*¹⁹
 lie scattered on the earth floor
 like fallen leaves.
 In the shadow of the Jami mosque²⁰
 the sun calls the faithful to prayer.
 Pigeons perform ablutions
 in the waters of the ritual tank.

Sky—rattled by intrusion of new buildings
 On the walls of Rupam²¹
 a girl lies naked.
 Savoring the poster,
 the old city is titillated—
 On the steps of Gandhi Ashram²²
 corruption, in khadi²³ garments
 poses for a photograph.
 Streets speak the dialect of daggers.
 Relationships, akin to dried grass;
 no distinction can be made
 between blood and water—

On the shaking minarets
 Sunrays will glisten again tomorrow
 Someone will knock at my door
 and demand of me:
 the chest of sensitivity which I had entrusted to you;
 where have you left it?
 Before savoring the first sip of tea then
 I shall flee Ahmedabad!!

¹⁹The reference here is to the exquisite, highly ornamental, perforated screen window of the sixteenth-century Sidi Saiyid's mosque.

²⁰The fifteenth-century congregational mosque of Ahmedabad.

²¹Rupam: an old movie theater in Ahmedabad.

²²Gandhi Ashram: the commune that Mahatma Gandhi established at Ahmedabad on his return to India from South Africa.

²³Khadi: homespun cloth advocated by Gandhi; one of the tools of nationalist resistance against the British Empire.

MARINA BEACH²⁴

With the advent of the evening
unloading the burning rock of sun
from the shoulders
exhausted from the day's travails
launching many colored balloons into the skies
whistling away
on Marina Beach
the blue ocean
barefooted
has come for a promenade

BLACK SPARROW²⁵

On the grey skies
A fluttering black sparrow
silently descended
and through some back door
came to my bed
and settled on my breast—
But hearing the pounding of my heartbeat,
returned to the skies!

—*Translated by Riyaz Latif*

²⁴"Marina Beach," in *ibid.*, 102.

²⁵"Kālī Čiryā," in *ibid.*, 103.