

RIYAZ LATIF

## Transience<sup>1</sup>

and when  
on the spires of our breath  
we had shaped some space,  
that conversations with lofty clouds would follow,  
that collisions with azure fogs would occur,  
bearing tides of worlds  
would descend the birds of Time,  
alight, flutter,  
in the flapping of their wings  
carry the dance of misty islands'  
burning crimson twilight—  
brooks of Being would murmur  
on the spires of breath—

it was then revealed  
all is vain  
nothing anywhere rests—  
in each breath we too float away  
far from ourselves,  
veiled from the eyes of our shores, our horizons—  
we, akin to an emotion astray  
that eventually dissolves  
in the caress of roving moments—

we, in houses, in offices, in the crowds on streets,  
we, in groaning crawling bus-lanes,

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<sup>1</sup>Originally published as “Nāpāyēdārī” in *Zehn-e Jadid* 4(16) (June-Aug) (1994), pp. 58–61 (for the original see the Urdu section of this volume). This poem dates from 1993 and, as such, has very topical references to the Berlin Wall, Glasnost, Bosnia-Croatia, and so on, which might seem rather dated today.

in the encirclements of  
cinemas, banks, ration-cards, crumbly bedsteads—  
ensnared in existence's desert-tracts—  
on weary computer-screens  
inscriptions of lost worlds  
votaries of Star TV  
we, shattered bricks of the collapsing Berlin Wall  
with fresh demons of our past lodged in our chest

O friend, we are Glasnost  
homeless fruits of Russia's disintegration—  
we, lamenters of Bosnia-Croatia's congealing blood—  
a morsel of heart's empathy in Africa's famished mouth—  
Ram, we are done for!  
sowing the primal seed of creation in sleeping waters,  
inventing a god of existing epoch,  
bearing the shroud-less corpse of Kashmir—  
in the sizzling assemblies of SAARC nations,  
we, often, on UNO's pulpits  
drowning questions in questions,  
in the realms of our impoverishment  
smiling and weeping at the world—  
we, in roaring hollow slogans:  
"Bring Peace"  
"Grow More Trees"  
"Multi-Party Formula"  
"Eradicate AIDS"  
"Save the Whale, the Dolphin"

have we been able to  
save ourselves from the tempests of this body?  
we, in the body, in the soul,  
in the vibrant cupola of expression—where?  
on nullified frontiers of revelations, of illumined dust—where?  
on the earth-expanses of faces  
akin to pause of beauty, we, for a passing instant, meditative—  
crystals of lips bereft of mirth  
oceans as if had wafted away, vaporized  
when does water rest in rivers?  
when does meaning halt in words?  
on the splendor-abodes of the parchment

the nudity of torn words—  
 from reflection, from speech, from tongues, from expositions  
 slips away the wilderness of meaning—  
 we are adrift—  
 where are we?  
 we, splashing half-filled goblets, savoring Mughlai delicacies  
 we, on grand roads of cities  
 we, in resplendent hotels  
 we, in ampules of blood,  
 in the burdened, shattered sighs of ailments—where?

from the nameless crevices of mind's mists,  
 the ones we have abandoned  
 in the occult chasms of our age,  
 emerges perpetually a voice:  
 you are in the clamor of earth's evolution  
 traversing spectral darkness of innumerable yonis—  
 sprouted from the roots of the primeval,  
 you are enigmas carved on the tombstones of your own souls!

rending you asunder, they shall blaze through you:  
 the creation of light, freshly forged stars, expanses,  
 inebriated streaks of lightning, heady planets, winds—  
 rending you asunder, they shall blaze through you:  
 veiled epochs, mountains, streams, grassy meadows,  
 woods' green leaves, mouths of caverns,  
 pouncing panting flying crawling myriad species of  
 birds, animals, insects, bugs, butterflies—  
 you, earth's rising—  
 you, in the wastes of hushed births—  
 you, centered on the weighty circles of untold centuries—  
 rending you asunder, they shall blaze through you then:  
 men of bygone eras,  
 in wrecked columns, in arches,  
 unknown civilizations intoning  
 as green moss on stones of ruins—  
 cities shimmering in vision,  
 spread habitats, childhood's alleys,  
 cows, dogs, goats,  
 portico, cedar-chest, books, radio, soap!  
 rending you asunder, they shall blaze through you:

robots, microchips, strands of DNA,  
and the absolute sorcery of the atom's core—  
all shall blaze through you  
across to probability's transformed glances,  
across to vistas soaked in rainclouds of absence—

you, in changing glances  
you, in changing vistas  
you, in mutable bodies, your faces metamorphosed—  
you, in the weighty circles of untold centuries,  
in the breaths of infinite births,  
in innumerable yonis,  
have sculpted your death with a void-chisel  
you, in death, in perpetuation too—  
you, beyond death  
or maybe not!

the voice emerges but ...  
when do uprooted voices sojourn?  
playing Malhar and Darbari on the lyre of winds,  
caressing cultures carved on ancient stones,  
robbing my forebears' faces,  
it slips away secretively  
beyond the last abode of the skies—

what rests here?  
from the nameless caverns of mind,  
from the foggy fissures of our age,  
have skidded and toppled  
trade unions, red cross, literary forums—  
shamans of knowledge's withered body  
Chomsky, Foucault, Derrida,  
Marx, Lacan, Heidegger;  
all birds of radiance beyond our insights—  
far away from the coop of mind—  
why, Mr. Parrot?  
at the mere thought of passion, the desert was set ablaze?  
the sun of thought set in the veins of waywardness?  
the sun snuffed in the veins  
adrift on cadence of blood  
the sun has flowed away, holding on to blood—

does blood ever rest in veins?  
 it gushes away leaping and springing audaciously like Amazon  
 gathering the verdant leafy passion of  
 the dark forests of its shores along,  
 beyond the colors of its waves, its horizons—

and do colors stay anywhere?  
 colors, extinct from faces,  
 colors, fugitive from flowers,  
 colors, vanished from the range of walls—  
 Picasso's dismembered elements  
 Dali's vexed breasts embedded in dreams  
 are now desirous  
 for someone to come and ossify them  
 in the heart of absolute light, of absolute colors,  
 in the heart of the rhythms of nimble heavenly spheres—

but the nimble heavenly spheres  
 afloat in their own ruminations!  
 what rests here?  
 tanks, armies, bombs,  
 Hiroshima lurking in bone-shafts,  
 all flowing—  
 all transient—  
 we, in bodies, in souls,  
 in boundless skies of our depths—inside,  
 miasma-like, disappeared somewhere—  
 nonexistence, whirlpools of strange births,  
 abstract precincts of Time  
 cannot contain us—  
 all is transient—  
 who resides now across moments?  
 where now the haze of uprooted voids?  
 where now uprooted voids where now?  
 who rests here ever?  
 what sojourns ever on the spires of our breath?  
 no birds of Time now  
 no thunder of clouds—  
 azure fogs and dance, vanished,  
 no call of brooks anymore—  
 all is transient—

and we, on this lonely spire of our breath  
have shaped some space,

have betrothed your barren world—

—*Translated by the poet*