



fiction

Symbiosis

by Purabi Basu

THE FULL MOON AT EASE, MELTED and protruded from a serene sky ; it cuddled every object of nature as if the silent night entwined with true enlightenment. And Sumi, with her alert and curious eyes, gazed at the kindred garden searching every prose and cons of airy display. Batabi grew in its full bloom and Kamini stood still in a romantic posture spreading its bounteous branches, perhaps trying to allure the white night. As her eyes began scrutinizing the flutter of lilacs, stayed ecstatic in their brilliant complexion, she dropped her sight near a corner - amused, thrilled or surprised. Sumi grew skeptic; coming out into the veranda, she lowered her brows by some measurement for eyes approval.

All asleep, sharing the tranquility of undisturbed earth. The whole city turned so calm in an eldritch illustration as to ignore a drowsy eye. Little haze about to spread in coldness, between sombre air and happy earth, playing hide and seek with street light that separated the two houses by miles. Such placidity is hardly seen. Sumi tried her eyes once again, then quickly got to her feet and moved towards the bed room.

Akash was sleeping, resting his body on a wide divan beside the bookshelf, as if the earth was never coalesced with harsh reality. Turning aside, Sumi looked at her barren bed with a pity ; a sunken, deep curvature of her head on the pillow showed her desperation for getting a sleep. The other pillow was unruled, of course, it didn't reflect her wishes. It's Akash who once said, I am anxious more about me as my nerves are not so strong as yours. Besides, you may also think I didn't mean what I said; all my promises were hollow.

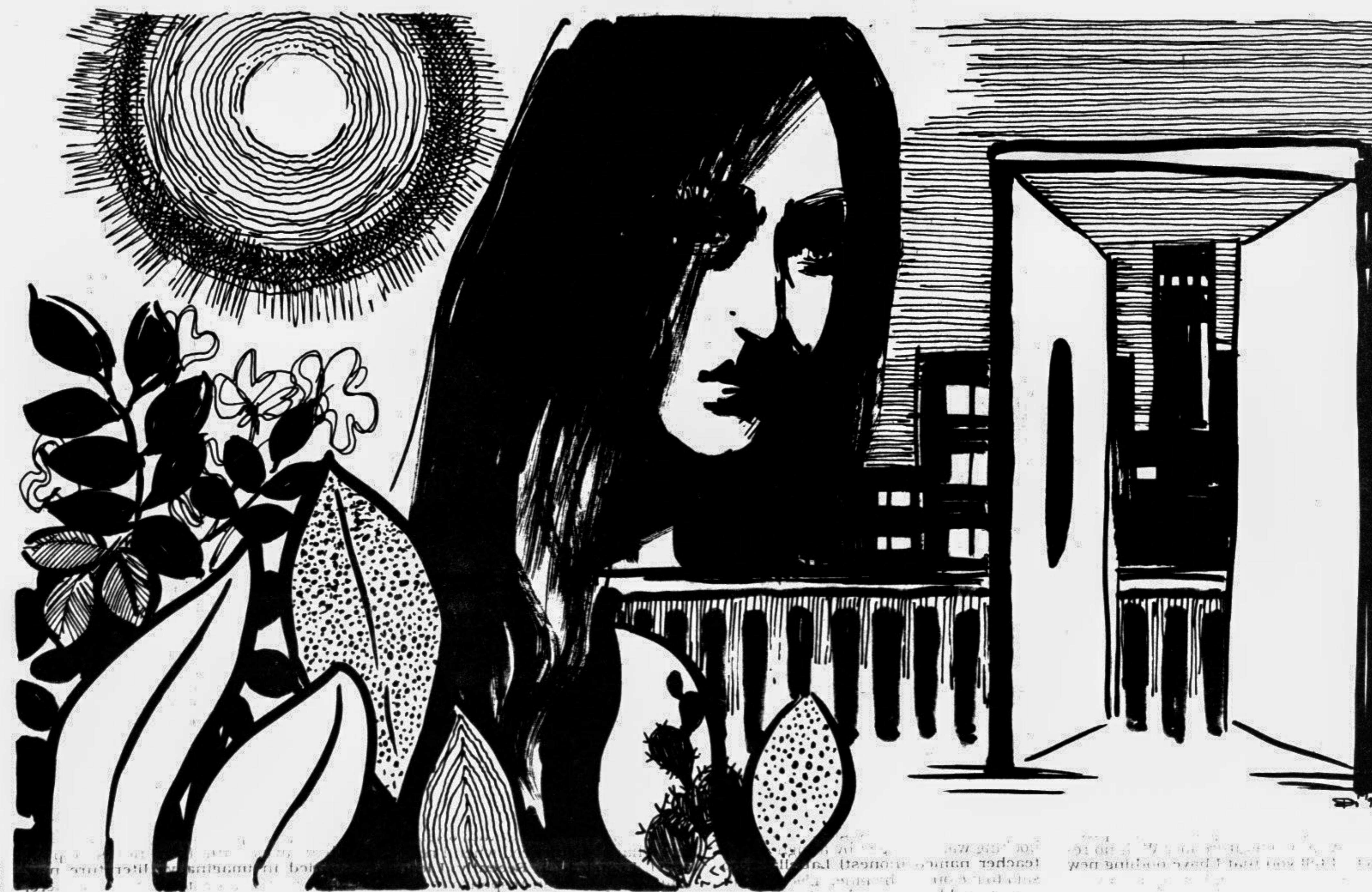
You know Akash, life ends in death and nothing happens thereafter. Death can pulverize all our pride and complacency just in a moment's decision. Even then, life hankers for acquisition and we live for that allurement. Why should I misunderstand you ?

I do understand everything but twill never force you nor'll need or ask for anything. What I believe is - I'll remain yours forever and nothing will tear us apart.

Nothing remains after death, I believe that too. But I can hear Rabi saying how could you forget me, so soon? An instant feeling of guiltiness seized my mind.

Leave it to the time. Only that would heal. I was not in a hurry at all and I would wait even longer though your parents insisted. You see, how a single woman struggles in this culpable society of ours. And if she is a young widow or a lady of some beauty she falls easy victim to our knavish sympathy. How could I leave you in a situation like that. For this I agreed to marry now.

Sumi came out to veranda again. Covering herself with a long black chadar, she started to pore over the intricate moon, as if, her attention could reveal a few secrets. In her garden, the little rubber plant, which was so far frowning at her, stood lavishly with a spookly thirst in its look. It was, in fact, bought to add some verdant beauty to her drawing room. Some how it had



been displaced and it might be the reason why it could receive more attention now.

After being married to Akash when Sumi first came to office, she, with an air of displeasure in voice told her colleagues that her two-room flat was visibly unfurnished with mere display of books, magazines and audio cassettes the real possessions of a bachelor.

Then, buy some plants and flowers, Raka, one of her good buddies, told her in a concerned voice. They nourish our mechanical mind. Soon you will get rid of your monotony, she added.

To her immense surprise, just on the following morning, a boy assumingly thirteen or fourteen years of age, came to her office with a healthy rubber plant in his hand saying it's you looking for plants? Surely it's an act of enthusiasm! Raka, Sumi murmured, recovering slowly from her state of astonishment.

Such fraudulence is not unusual these days, said Raka in a loud and confirm notion. He has certainly played a trick on you. But Sumi, with the last debris of hope, fixed her eyes at the way he departed. The boy, however, didn't reappear. He cheated.

In a curious hand Raka examined the

its inner strength and robustness. Even you don't need to take care. Just leave it in a pot and it will grow habitually, reassured the boy. Sumi nearly forgot about pot and earth - two elementary needs to spring up a living object like plant indoor. The boy himself came forward to buying those and took extra money from her assuring that he would be back within just half an hour. The clock, ticking slowly over her worried mind, struck at five but still there was no trace of the boy. Her sense quivered a little and wasting no more time she called Raka on phone. No, Raka didn't tell any body about Sumi's necessity. Then, how he came to know all about these? Her brows shranked in disbelief measuring the depth of her instant annoyance.

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plant by gently pulling its healthy crux. While doing this, she, all of a sudden shouted in a shrill voice, as if she's wounded or acquired some insect bite. Look what's in there, pointing her finger to a metallic wire, which, with an intention to defraud, clasped a whole bunch of fresh roots not inherited by the plant. What an infuriating surprise. The boy has given you a taste of his swindling creativity only, Raka cried out in sorrow and anger. You could, at least, call me while buying this! continued she, drawing clear dissatisfaction over what Sumi did ignoring her.

With her beguiled heart Sumi stayed at her office till evening. She didn't know what to do in such. The deceitful boy had taken away all her faith enticing her trauma with unceasing wind. To get rid of the problem, she, all at once, decided to throw the plant away. But as she called up the whole sequence of happenings showing respect to her longing, she changed her mind and carried it to her house wrapping with an old newspaper. Coming back home, she lit the lamp. Her heart sank a little in

an weird and unknown dispersion of air. She knew Akash would be late as he'd be busy working for his weekly publication of literary magazine coming out next morning. By the time, her servant came, though very late, with the grocery, and she, picking a sharp Dao in a manner of impatience, took him to the garden. With the aid of her servant, Sumi placed the plant ; her careening hands poured water around its men in an effort to enliven a quiescent spirit. From thereon, the plant was watered twice daily for 10 straight days in accordance with her instruction. Akash knew all about these but hardly showed any curiosity until her enthusiasm turned into madness, what a nonsense act! Goini crazy about a mere branch of tree! Isn't it absurd? Akash pointed towards her over-enthusiasm.

Don't you really see Akash that the plant is regaining its vigor day by day? Sumi tried to receive an approval of her act. You are really going insane. Rubber plant, by nature, is hard and succulent. It will simply take a little more time to end up in a dead branch. It is been

shown to be alive just for the moment being as you serve water to it twice daily, reiterates Akash to make her understand the very simple fact.

But Sumi stayed unmoved. Her curiosity began to expand with every day passing and she, soon, developed a habit of spending more and more time behind nurturing it. She was simply carried away. Even, while she was in a week-long vacation to Barisal, the thought of plant grasped her all the time.

Returning home just today, she first remembered her plant ; her patience collapsed moving in eddies of intense emotion. She came down and unlocked the main gate in a careful feet without disturbing the silence ; then ran straight to the backyard following the flight of irresistible wind. She was overjoyed with lunar invitation. The soft breeze pulled her to a certain emotion where she felt her body empty and beyond gravity, as if in a moon. Heart throbbed so loudly that she no more could cope up with its rhythm and losing her last drop of energy, sat near the plant. A pair of just-borne leaves, protruding from their shell in a twigs configuration, announced an ardent prayer to the psychedelic moon. She bent forward, laid her nail to the posterior of the leaves immersed in a light green diffusion. A blush of crimson there bearing a resemblance to the new born baby soaked with fresh human blood.

Sumi ran back to her room, Akash, wake up please, she drew a pause to his sleep pulling his arms in a hectic jerk. Being interrupted in the middle of his serene sleep, Akash took a little time to accommodate the situation. His drowsy eyes were still not organized for a reconnaissance.

Come with me. I will show you something wonderful out there, insisted Sumi and wasting no more time dragged her husband to the lively garden. Akash now felt nervous. His inquisitive sense, going over her animated face, tried to read her mind.

Both knelt down near the plant for an wondrous happening on earth. And Sumi, with her careful hands, tossed the leaves away to reveal the secret. Akash buoyed a little, his eyes delved into her frenzied face and then stuck at the new born duo. A mysterious silence grasped the whole earth and they were converged in a wordless conversation. All their words, thoughts and contemplation immersed in a lurid melodrama of moon. Akash drew her to his broad shoulder. At a distance, fog climbed into the light post and started melting down to earth reminding some fragments of transient life.

Sumi now, let her consciousness grow unresponsive to every earthbound action.

Will you forgive me, Rabi? For the last eight years I've shared with you whatever good and exciting happened. But today, on such wonderful moment, surprisingly, I forgot you for a while. Please, Rabi, don't get me wrong.

Akash was calling her. Sumi stepped forward to her own home, to her very own life.

Translated by Shawkat Haider

poem

Requiem for Shadhpur, Savar

by Tapan Jyoti Barua

It's here, oh here
The bestial bullets charged in a volley
And to utter woe cleft the air.



It's here, right here
The grimdest day cracked an abyss.
And the bullets vampiric pecked the unbent heads.

Nobody heard of this defenceless land
It is now too full of deaths
To go dead in memory's strand.

Was it because they loved their soft
The earthiest folks were racked and razed
And left thus, less than vestigial?

Was the sky convulsed, enraged
At the carnage, a script from Dark Age?
Or was there even a worse doom to presage?

Let me kneel unto the dead, the sentinels
In spirit never to fail.
Let me feel the mounds, penitential.

Here, oh here
Who will glance and heal the scar
Or history will just deem - it's all over, all over.

criticism

Emily Dickinson : In the Attic of her Mind

by Nuzhat Amin Mannan

THE title of this piece on Emily Dickinson (1830-86) started growing partly after having come across "the cellars of the soul", a quaint description supplied by Dickinson herself that caught on. All of Dickinson's critics are not in the same league as R P Blackmur who makes an incredibly contemptuous comment about Dickinson being a poet who "wrote indefinitely as some women cook." Nevertheless turning "cellar" into a label for Dickinson and pursuing to make references about Dickinson's "painful neurotic tensions", her "romantic genius" and "self conscious" posture make one wonder whether critics were not striving to make E D out as, what in 'feminist-speak' is called, "a sign of exception". Seeing a female artist or not, as a sign of exception in most general terms means that the female is perceived as unphallic, antithetical, irrational, unrepresentable, powerless, deviant, inscribed outside culture and seen as a threat. Without converting E D into a dogmatist, or a practitioner of feminism it is possible to infer that this

woman who admitted being interested in creating "circumferences", an activity of the mind not just the soul, most likely would have had other economies in her mind apart from the intractable dark depth in her soul. One would rather like to muse on E D writing from the attic of her mind and unfolding multifold possibilities.

It is not difficult to see where the conventional responses mostly revolving around E D's inwardness and her self-conscious obscurantism come from. Much has been made of the Calvinist vein in E D which was to make her susceptible to "looking inwardly". There has also been interest in showing E D's sympathies with the English romantic poets. The Calvinist vein in E D's soul, I think fits unconditionally with her scepticism and the distance she discovered taking a quiet but intensely felt an unlaboured and untragic retreat into the attic of her mind. One of the inadequacies in readings of E D's works is that there is a general tendency to sell E D in terms of her marginality as

a reclusive, fitful female poet. This has been so because it serves the reductive (mostly male) critics as well as the defensive (mostly feminist) critics in their respective purposes. The focus on her personality and her spirit can seem fatiguing since there has been so much of this already. A departure from such statis is one which brings back into the reading the rooms, chambers, doors, windows, passages, stairs, that seem to be strikingly left more or less invisible whereas E D can be best understood in terms of such "circumferences", that are extensions both of the 'home' and 'her mind'. Postmodern feminist critics have been eagerly engaged in showing 'home', as an inscription of stability and culture, needs to be deconstructed. Feminist discourses have been addressing female exclusion, alienation, the feminine-repressed and female madness. The complexity of this zone was laid bare by S Gilbert and S Gubar in their ground breaking work *Mad Women in the Attic* (1979). These considered create a fresh perspective from which E D might be read all

over again.

Harold Bloom a major male canonist has shown in *The Western Canon* (1995), how E D creates an interplay between 'space', the 'dark' and 'the blank'. To this list I think we should also add 'home'. In poem 465 (her poems were untitled) a fly buzzing against a window pane deflects if not desecrate the grandioseness of mystery. Or consider 280 : 'I felt a Funeral in my brain/And Mourners to and fro/Kept treading-treading till it seemed/That Sense was breaking through -' And then, a Plank in Reason/broke, And I dropped down, and down - / And hit a World, at every plunge/And Finished knowing — then —/'. And what about 461 in which a child-bride nestled in her virgin room fumbles in her childhood prayers as she hears the household stir ("Angels bustle in the Hall") and trembles as ("softly 0 Future climbs the stair"). The throes between marriage and death are indistinct. The ordinary room and the ambivalent wait put gloss on the spiritual content and not the other way round.

The use of 'space' as a

theme in E D's works has evidently registered, precipitating discoveries of E D on "the verge of sanity" or the "edges of aloneness" (my italics). This comments on the way the female mind like the female artist often is seen through symptomatic explorations of female exception and otherness. The attic situation or E D's retreat has only nominally to do with the imposing father/father figure (her own father and Col. Higginson who read her works and suggested improvements) or the mother who did not "care much for thought", or her romantic relationships that did not work. Neither should her retreat be seen as a posture betraying a half hidden anxiety to localize her territory. The chambers and rooms into which she took a retreat, made possible the perspective she was searching for. Even Bloom acknowledges that Dickinson had taken Emerson and Nietzsche's perspective to a new height. Neither the perspective or the retreat is peculiar or erratic or induced by womanly nerves — rather these work well in showing E D as an artist who "thinks" space with enviable success.