

essay

Nature, Poet and Poetry

by Fazal Shahabuddin

POETRY is a kind of magic. It is a language of the heart that a poet addresses to his reader and it the world. He does discover his own remote language — rather makes it from all those words scattered around him. As Donne once said, the poet takes words to batter them to break blow, burn and make them new. And in this process the poet gives new and deeper perspective and greater meaning to the word and achieves a new height in expressing his exclusive world of imagination. The poet has the power both to remind the old coinage of traditional use and issue new currency as well. The poet attributes a very special connotation to a word and in doing so he helps the language to emerge with a new functional miracle. A real poet always builds the most beautiful part of his language and through his writings communicates the deepest part of his literature. A poet creates new vision, wider imaginative spectrum and discovers a prayer of intense spiritual reality. As Eliot said, poetry arises and takes its own specific from out of the formless flux of life. He injects distant dreams and lonely passions in earthy factual life — drama-tises an imaginary world peopled with

characters of his own invention. A poet is always engrossed in an obsession of his own occult.

But how far a poet is obsessed with nature? Is nature plays a deep role in moulding a poet's imagination? Is mother-earth, the source of all human imaginative and emotional endeavours including poetry. Are the poets get the mysterious impulse of writing poetry from the intimate lure of nature — and can address the west wind as did Shelly or can get lost, like Rabindranath Tagore, 'in the deep shadows of the rainy July heedless of their insistent calls of the loud east wind. How far the poet is obsessed with nature and inspired by the splendour of its endless music?

To my mind a genuine poet has no escape, he cannot but be a part of nature. Without even knowing it and much before he starts writing poetry he discovers that he is gripped by an unknown frenzy and finds himself lost into the tune of nature and its bountiful patterns. As he grows into maturity his entire poetical design becomes a part of that glow which he feels encounters and accepts spiritually as his own entity and existence. He begins to identify himself with that unending chorus of nature which folds and unfolds the magic and thrill of creativity. He starts

whispering unbelievable sounds and writes impossible words with added meanings — a poet has no escape, he becomes a part of nature.

I still remember those beautiful days of my childhood when I used to visit my ancestral home in the picturesque countryside of Bangladesh. I used to enjoy the rains, the blind downpour on the tin roofs at the middle of the night — its deep and intense orchestra. I used to watch rivers swell, waters flowing in abundance from the distant mountains in the Himalayas. I had no idea but I liked it — the NAVANNA UTSHAB or the harvest festival during the closing days of autumn — when everything looked gay and great and hopeful and happy. I was so young but I thought I was a part of it, the nature around me. The rivers the green hills the shadows inside the remote villages and the clouds floating aimlessly in the sky and me — all part of a vast canvas as pure and ancient as the mother-earth. I just cannot forget those beautiful days of my boyhood. I felt the thrill of nature in my blood and in later days it continued in my system like an inescapable tyranny of emotions. I know not how but it happened and I was no poet at that time. But I felt it — I could not escape from it. When Tagore wrote, the sky is overcast with clouds and the rain is ceaseless. I

know not what this is that stirs in me — I know not its meaning, I am sure, he meant this inescapable agony.

The early part of Bangla literature is entirely dominated by Poetry-Bangla Prose is a history of later period. During this early period many great poets lived and contributed memorable verses to our language. They always equated nature with almost every aspect of emotions they experienced and encountered in life and which they immortalised in their poetry. Love romance anger affection good evil passion hatred desire sex eroticism and even religion found extraordinary expressions in their poems when equated with the sublime imperishable bounty of nature. Beginning from that early period till today Bangla Poetry has always tried to discover and identify nature as a great and divine source of spiritual harmony — as in Tagore, where in a songpoem he wrote, the light dances at the centre of my life, the light strikes the chord of my love, the sky opens, the wind runs wild and the butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light.

Not in Bangla literature only it is an universal truth that a poet in any language in any part of the world is a constant dreamer and worshiper of the splendour of nature. We can never find a poet who wrote anything in any lan-

guage which harms physically or spiritually the harmony of nature and the mother-earth. On the contrary a poet through his poetry describes experiences which are beyond ordinary human imagination and which helps mankind to establish a very deep intense and neverending relation with nature.

And in this process to discover a vision where one can encounter that moment when he can, like Eliot, feel the third who walks always beside him. The poets are and have always been the spiritual prophets of that bridge which kept the infinite obsession of nature alive in human spirit. I am sure, now is the time when the world should and must accept the reality that it is the poets all over the world who are actually responsible to get the external world of nature nearer to our heart and to our existence. It is possibly only for the Poets and their admiration for the endless images of nature that civilisation on this planet called earth is still alive. When the scientist dissected the nature with a wonton desire to make it useful for consumption. While the kings, Emperors, and Politicians fought each other with unbelievable might to get control over territories with bigger natural resources and while the traders and businessmen were busy in selling and buying anything and everything they

could command from nature to make better money for themselves — it is only the poets who were engrossed in an obsession to love to admire and to keep the nature alive not only for themselves but for everyone who is a part of it.

Before I conclude I want to repeat and say, poetry is a kind of magic — and with this magic touch of pure romance of life let us try to discover a magical remote control by which we can save the earth from the environmental crisis which we have created — by which we can save the nature before it is totally polluted. Let us overcome this nightmare. Let us hope that the earth will be worth living in every corner of its and like James Joyce one will be able to recite.

All day I hear the noise of waters
Making moan
Sad as the seabird is, when going
Forth alone.
He hears the wind cry to the waters
Monotone.

The grey winds, the cold winds are
blowing
where I go
I here the noise of many waters
Far below
All day all night I hear them flowing
To and fro.

fiction

The Fountain of Life

by Hure Tarzia Hossain

II

S this the fountain of life?" she inquired.

Her query fell on deaf ears. Frantic souls scattered and scrambled to fill buckets, pitchers, vessels of all sizes, of all shapes.

She looked into the murky waters at the bottom of the well. This was the water that gave eternal life? Believers could have their share. No force on heaven or earth could compel her to drink the water from that well. She felt the frequent tugs at the hem of her dress. Pushes and shoves from impatient collectors. Disappointed, weary, she stepped aside to make more room for the ardent believers.

All her traveling had been in vain.

Her feet bled from traveling on the rough terrain. A journey she had made alone, along the silk roads. She sat down under the shade of an ancient tree to escape the wrath of the midday sun.

Her mother had probably perished by now. In a last ray of hope, she had made this pilgrimage to save her mother. Poor tormented soul. Life had not been kind to her. She had been blessed with five sons. But each of them had been taken from her before reaching the age of twenty.

She thought of her mother, lying helpless on her death bed; crumpled and withered, and whiter than the desert sand. A tear formed in the corner of her eye. Quickly she wiped it away with the back of her hand, leaving a soiled mark across her cheek.

In her anguish, she hadn't noticed a little boy standing in front of her. He was holding up an earthen pitcher. His gaze was severe, but full of innocence. His eyes deeper than the water holes in her home town. They bored down into the depths of her soul. Her heart grew fond of him. She reached out and stroked his matted hair. The boy's face lit up. He couldn't be more than five. His cheeks were rosy with health, but his ragged clothes gave away his poverty. No words escaped his mouth. He simply held up the pitcher to her.

With a smile, she accepted his kind offering. She lifted the pitcher to her lips and drank a little of its contents.

She felt helpless and guilt ridden. On seeing the fountain of life, she had lost her faith and neglected to collect any water from its basin. It was too late now. It would be another fortnight before the next caravan would venture into the desert in search of the well. She had to go back. If she started now, she could reach the well by midnight. The light was fading rapidly and the sky was growing darker. The light from the stars would have to guide her.

Hurriedly, she threaded her way towards the end of the long winding line. She caught a glimpse of the boy who had offered her water that afternoon. He was clinging to his mother's sleeve. Burying his face in the safety of her gown.

Towards the end of the line, an old man blocked her way and motioned her to stop. His robes were patched. His brown face lined with the wisdom of ages.

"Stop my child" he said. "Don't venture into the desert by yourself. You will fall in the evil eyes of the slave traders."

"But I must go" she exclaimed. "Without the water from the fountain of life, my mother will surely die." And before he could engage her in any more conversation, she rushed off alone, along the trail they had just left.

A slight breeze lifted her wheat colored hair and blew sand into her eyes. The caravan was now only a dot on the horizon. Soon, that too would disappear. In the distance, a desert fox was calling out to its mate. She shivered. Her faded cotton dress did not protect her from the chilly night wind.

She had been using the stars to guide her way across the desert. As a little girl, she had spent many happy hours with her father, gazing up at the night sky. Her father would tell her tales about the constellations. Soon she knew all of them by name. It was up to the heavens now to guide her in her quest.

A red moon had risen, and dimmed the light of the stars. She had been walking for so long. It was close to midnight and still she hadn't reached her destination. Her heart sank at the prospect of being lost.

She thought she heard voices and the sound of shrill laughter. Slave traders! The thought struck her like lightning. Gripped with sudden terror, she stood frozen and breathless. Her heart beating wildly in its cage. But the desert wind can play strange tricks on one's mind. Or so she calmed herself. After some time, she heard the voices again. She was traveling against the wind and this time the sounds were closer. Drawn by some invisible hand, she climbed up the next mound and glanced over the top.

There, under a clump of palm trees was a curious assortment of men and women. They were huddled around a smoldering fire. Their hands bound, shackles around their ankles and necks. The light from the flames danced strangely on their sad faces. Surrounding them was a group of strong white clad men. They were laughing and drinking, and making vulgar jokes. Towering over them, was a tall Arab drinking coffee from a tin mug. He was dressed in flowing robes and wore jeweled rings on every finger. His belly protruded and his body shook with bouts of laughter. The same shrill laughter that had chilled her blood a

short while ago. Even in the dark, his teeth gleamed viciously. Without a doubt, he was the leader of the gang.

Her own breathing sounded like thunder in her ears. Her heart felt as if it would explode. If they caught her, they would show her no mercy. Her fair skin would fetch a handsome price. She would be sold as a slave in some northern port. She shuddered at the thought. Whatever happened, she mustn't let them catch her. Slave traders were known to ride the fastest horses in the desert — faster even, than the trade winds. She could never outrun them. Her only hope was to pass unnoticed.

Murmuring a soft prayer under her breath, she slowly crept away as silently as she had approached. She retraced her steps and ran as fast as her weary legs could take her. But her legs kept sinking into the deep sand. When she was satisfied that there was enough distance between her and the slave traders, she collapsed to the ground, drained of all energy. It had been a narrow escape. The events of the day were finally catching up with her. She would have to continue her journey at the first light of dawn. Her eyes grew heavy and she drifted into a deep slumber.

In her sleep, she dreamt of sunlit brooks and moss covered banks, where she used to go fishing and swimming with her brothers. They were frolicking in the sun and playing a game of hide and seek in the deep green woods. The forest floor was thickly carpeted and they hadn't heard the rider approaching. All of a sudden, he was almost on top of them. A tall bearded man, riding a black stallion. He got off from his horse and took out a flashing sword from his scarab. Her brothers ran but she was paralyzed with fear, unable to move. He caught hold of her arm, she let out a sharp cry and tried to free herself. She was still crying and struggling to break free, when her nightmare ended. The ground was frozen cold. The sun was not yet up and the early morning air was still very pleasant.

Slowly she collected herself and started walking. Her throat felt dry and her lips parched. She wet her lips with the last remnants of water from her canteen. She would have to find the well soon. The sand was getting hotter and

the sun was scorching her skin. It was difficult to tell the direction in the rolling sea of white sand. They had traveled north, when they left, the inn, for the fountain of life, the previous morning. So she headed in a northern direction.

She lost count of the miles. The memory of her narrow escape from the slave traders the night before, urged her to move on. She was afraid to stop. Before long, the sun was sinking in the western skies, and so were her hopes of ever finding the fountain. She knew that she would have to retire for the night. Her aching body could carry her no further. Thus, she spent another night in the desert, alone and exposed, under the blanket of the stars. She woke up in the middle of the night, cold and hungry. Her frail frame trembled violently. She hadn't had the courage to light a fire, for fear of being spotted. She clasped her arms and legs and rocked herself back to sleep.

In the early hours of dawn, she set out on her quest again. This time, she traveled in the opposite direction. She was almost certain that she had tread too far north. The day seemed hotter, and the sun more grueling. But as another sun set in the western sky, tears of defeat overcame her and flowed unrestrained. Gone were her hopes of ever finding the fountain of life, or ever returning home. She was about to settle down on a pile of rocks when a scorpion crawled out from beneath a rock and stung her hand. The moments seemed like ages and a whole minute had passed, before she realized that she wasn't going to die. The water from the fountain had somehow protected her from the clutches of death. Her faith was restored completely. A desert scorpion held enough poison in its curled tail, to kill six horses. And yet, here she was still standing, alive and unharmed after being stung by a one.

She realized that she could go on wandering in the desert for twenty years, without seeing another human soul, and not die of hunger or thirst. The thought did not appeal to her. It wasn't a fate she would wish upon her bitterest enemy. Suddenly she longed for the sight of another human face. Now more

than ever, she knew that she must find the fountain of life if she ever hoped of returning home. Another caravan would be there in less than a fortnight and she could make her way back with them.

The thought settled her mind. Her sleep that night was profound and undisturbed. At day-break, she re-embarked on her journey, traveling in a north-eastern direction. Last night, she had dreamt of her mother. Her mother looked pretty in her cool white apron. She was in the garden, tending to her favorite roses. She seemed peaceful, and content, and looked much younger than she ever remembered her mother to look. Recalling her dream in broad day light, swept her with unexplained emotions. She was strangely disturbed.

Just before noon, she sighted the ancient tree in the distant horizon. Heat waves were rising and blurring her vision. But as she drew closer, and the tree was still there, she was certain that it wasn't a mirage. Her quest had ended. The fountain of life was now within her reach. Her spirits lifted and her feet took flight. As she neared the tree, exhaustion set in. Three days of traveling in the desert, were finally taking their toll. Her pace became slower and weaker and her breathing shallow. She was now less than a hundred yards from the well, but was afraid of collapsing before reaching it. It took every last ounce of strength in her body, to carry her to the edge of the well.

This time, she didn't look in. She lowered the bucket until the rope would go no further. There was still no splashing sound. Slowly she turned the handle and lifted the bucket. Her eyes widened with disbelief. There wasn't a single drop of water in it. Instead, tightly coiled up at its bottom, was an adder. Before she could release her hold, the snake lifted its hood, and struck just below the collar bone. The venom traveled swiftly through her veins, paralyzing her in moments. She fell on to the hard ground. There she lay on the ground beside the fountain of life, her body cold and limp.

Every fifteen days, from time immemorial, the fountain bestowed the precious gift of life, rather than taking it.

poem

Well!

by Abu Taher Mojumder

Well, what can I do?
The evening lingers over the horizon
With tousled hair
Expecting a comb of rousing fingers —
Awaiting ...

I think of you

The gossamer veil of darkness
Two round mounds of earth —
Two nipples:
A thin flowery brassiere bursting

The sky lowering to kiss
The daring air mildly fondling
Engendering jealousy and rage
I thought of you

A sudden conflagration
Flames leaping to lick the blue
Cries shouts groans lamentations
The shanties — a hell — smell of burnt flesh —
rice — clothes — poultry —
The Fire Brigade pouring kerosene —
And alms ready-made — bundles of old clothes —
some money — shrewd tears — assurances
VIP and VVIP visits — concerned foreheads —
busy cameramen — sycophant flashlights —

faint smiles of sympathy
A sudden tulip fleeing with scratches and burns
Waifs and strays wagging tails —
Headlines in Dailies —

A press note
A Housing Complex peeping
An allotted office-site — explanations —
A Belle — View
I thought of you

The sky-kissing apartment towers
Cast dark shadows
Spread tentacles
The ramshackle structures turn pale
Budding dreams trampled

Nightmares flourish
I think of you

The street-hawkers must go
Mere aping a livelihood — meaningless —
Belles and Beaus befuddled
The City — Father's deodorant overpowered
His mansion and feasts mocked
His tendentious smile contaminated
World Bank aid — prescriptions —
Poverty alleviation —
A march of skeletal creatures —
Ungrateful ...
A blank mind — your flickering memory —
And some scraps of rejuvenation.