



poems

Song- Lyrics of Hemonto

by Rabindranath Tagore

Heemer rater

On this cool autumnal night,
Hemonto hides heaven's lamps with its cloak.
To every house it gives this call:
"Light festive lamps, make bright the night,
Shine your own lights, illuminate the world."
Gardens are flowerless now, birds sing no more,
Kashi flowers keep falling by riverbanks.
Let darkness, despair and depression go, light festive lamps —
Shine your own lights, proclaim the triumph of light.
The gods keep looking on —
Sons and daughters of earth, arise, illuminate the night.
Darkness descends and day ends; light festive lamps,
Shine your own light, triumph over this dark night.

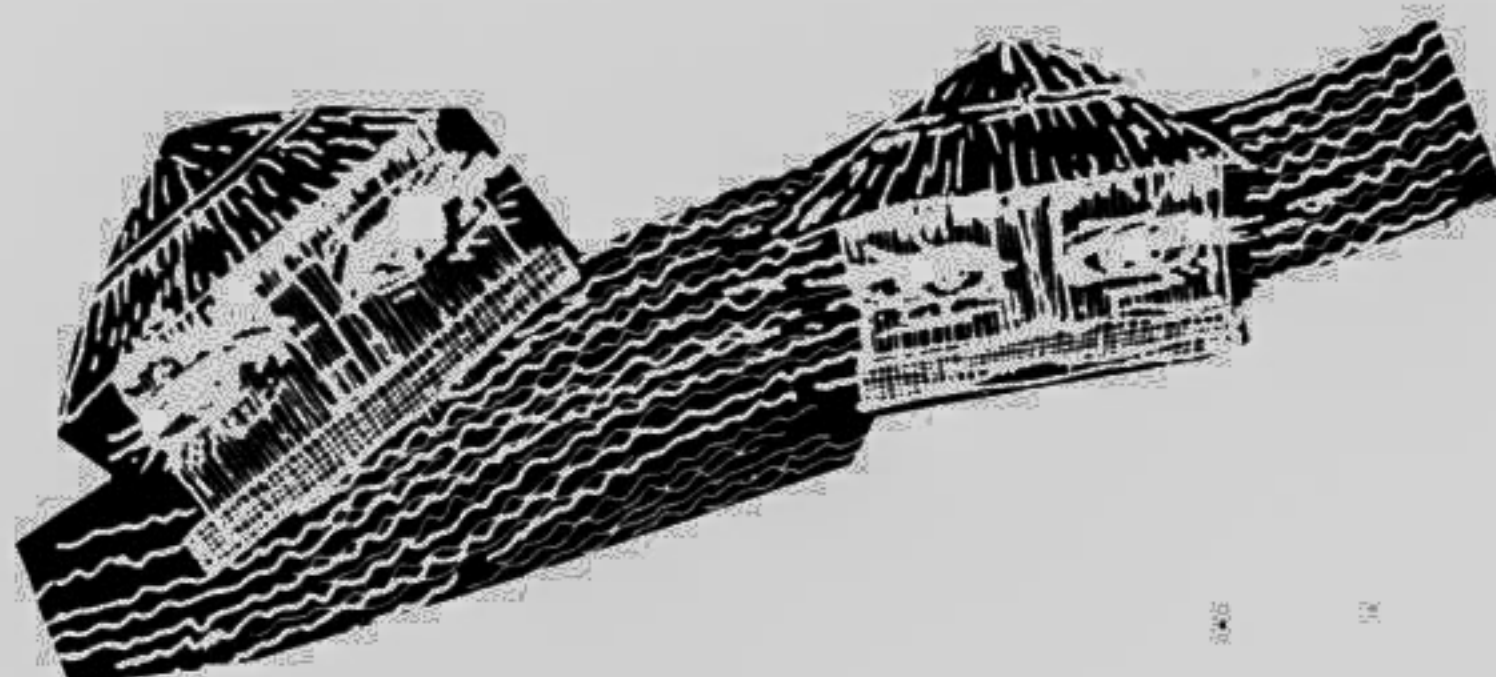
Shei din amai

You had your say that day,
But I had no time, and so you turned away.
It was time for play then; fields were full of jasmine flowers,
And leaves kept fluttering in the wayward wind forever.
Now Hemonto days are here,
Fields are mist-filled and bare,
The day ends; is it time to go away?
Sitting by the door, I keep looking at the way.

Hemonte Kon Basanter Bani

What glad tidings of spring does Hemonto's full moon bring?
Moonlight makes bokul branch edges dream of blossoming.
What secret whispered message does the full moon bring?
Early flowering white oleanders surprise woods into stirring.
A nameless sleepless bird calls out every now and then,
Whose sweet memory does the full moon arouse again?

Translated by Fakrul Alam



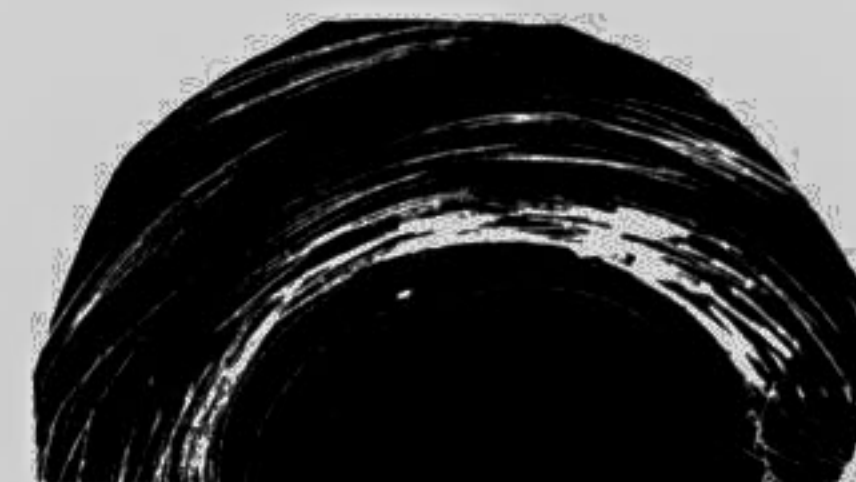
Good Morning Sorrow

Sorrow, I'm surprised
Why do you knock at my door?
This house is your own ...
You need permission to enter it?
Come in, won't you have a cup of tea?
I made these cakes especially for you.
I hope you like them.
Why look you so sad?
You'll never be lonely again.
You've found a true friend.
Will you ever leave me?
I know you will not.
We'll walk together.
These painted hands shall clasp yours
And these lips evermore shall smile.
In the dark of the night we shall whisper
And you'll put your arms around me.
There shall be no secrets between us
We know each other very well.
You came to my house one night
Was it so very long ago?
It seems but yesterday —
And you claimed me for your own.
And we've found happiness in each other.

Oblivion

By Batool Sarwar

Set me free from the bondage of individuality
Set me free to become part
Of the mystic river which endlessly flows on
Indifferent to human pain and suffering.
Set me free to become part of the mountain wind
Unsubdued by human taint,
Which blows away the dust and
Is the very breath of life.
Set me free to feel with every fibre of my being
The throbbing vibrant never of life.
Set me free to feel the scorching heat
To mingle with the very dust of eternity
Set me free; let me live to exult
In the very joy of existence.
Set me free!



Stillness

This cannot be turned into commonplace platitudes
Of meaningless words —
This is stark reality:
The tall tower with its beacon of light
Against the background of the distant hills
And frozen immobile sky.
There is a deep stillness, a silence of hushed expectancy
Of a truth too deep to be told.
It evokes some hidden meaning
Once known but now long forgotten
Shrouded in the mists of an eternal past.
It seems there are echoes in these vast windswept plains
Across the flowing streams of time —
Of that elusive music
Which creates an ecstasy so intense
That it is pain.

fiction

Utsav (The Party)

by Akhtaruzzaman Elias

ANWAR Ali was supposed to be in a very good mood now. He had just been to an enormous house in Dhanmondi. He was invited to a newly built well-decorated aristocratic house of inner Dhanmondi on the occasion of the marriage of a rich friend. He saw there many attractive women and talked even with some of them. Lofty voices of the entire party house were to keep him in good heart for at least one week.

But the will of Providence was different. As soon as he came to the entrance to his narrow lane, he got angry and sad. His anger had several reasons. In the drain of the lane, yellow thick water was staring indifferently with its dull eyes in the pale light of the lamp-post. Human and canine excrement was sleeping together making rings by the side of the drain. And those people, people of the area also caused his anger. The night-show at the cinema would break half an hour later; young boys started already their preparations to tease girls after the show. Left to the lane a gathering of gamblers was in full swing on the street. Twenty-year-old song 'leaving papa's home' was playing incessantly in Ahmedia Restaurant. It was a quarter past eleven; so the rough clamour would continue for two more hours.

He was sad as his area stood side by side with the festive house of the evening and its area in his disturbed mind. The streets of Dhanmondi were all wide, smooth and clean. Relaxing in milky illuminations they basked in the light and looked above at the eternally mysterious sky. Cars full of local and foreign ladies came out of one palatial residence and ran for another paradise. Those pearl-studded prestigious palaces stood peacefully with a respectable distance between themselves. He could imagine that in those prohibited planets there were half a dozen nymphs or so who talked in a different language. Now they tried malkosh on sitar and now yawning, they turned slowly the pages of a book. When came Muntazir or Ish-tiak or Ahrar, they talked socialism with them in a soft voice playing an LP of Kanika Banerjee. And at intervals, they took their time to taste a sweet sadness of loneliness. Then they could not help listening to Duke Ellington for two long hours, running the fan in full speed along with the air-conditioner.

And his area! In the dead of night eight or nine dogs were running about in the alley. Were there no dogs in that area? Yes, he saw one of them standing even in the party house. What a figure and what a grave visage! With a solemn self-confidence it was wagging mildly its tail as if the Jamindar of a Bengali film, sitting on a deck-chair in the balcony on the first floor, were enjoying the sunset with his feet swinging in air.

A dog of that kind could arouse a feeling of respect in one's mind.

And the dogs of his area were all tykes, sans a single hair on the body covered in sores and they groaned all the time. Some of them grew ugly fat as they ate, like some mean creatures, whatever they found. They stared with nonchalant eyes and pissed loudly whenever they saw a lamp-post.

When he entered his own room, it seemed to him that it was nothing but an extension of the alley. Always the same sultry odour full of damp. In the dim light of a 40-watt-bulb, one yellowish and another white tooth of Saleha Begum peeped shamelessly through her thick lips as she woke up. Saleha Begum was his wife. There were signs of saliva in the corners of her lips and rusticity on her entire face, only a stammering rusticity.

"Poly's mother, where is my lungi?" It was the fifth day of October. First few days of the month he called his wife 'Saleha' at home and 'Shelley' when they got into a rickshaw. But sorrow and anger made him go against his custom.

To avoid the drowsy smile of Saleha, he stood turning his back to her to put the lungi on. Anger gripped him. That woman had gone to college for at least one year; they had even been courting a little before marriage. Then why did she remain so inert all the time? Under her sari she had no breasts, no buttocks. Night and day she lay like a deformed bolster.

"It's night enough, isn't it? What time is it, eh?" saying so Saleha Begum walked to the yard. Beside the tap she would fit her two rough feet on two bricks and piss almost a gallon. He did not like that women always pissed, shitted and spitted that way. But what to do? These women were incorrigible. He would let her piss as long as she wanted; in the meantime he would have enough time to ruminate over the party. With one hand on the trousers of the hanger and the other on his yellow damp underwear he concentrated on the party in the small space of the small room.

But neither the party nor any lady of the party came entirely to his memory. All the marriage party in the flashing light blinked at one time as a single hazy image and at another time as the red lines of a tearful eye. Once he thought that he should not have attended that party. Was Qayyum such an intimate friend? He would have had no news of the marriage if he had not met him suddenly the other day in the stadium. They had studied in the same college for almost two years and as activists of the same students' party they had become a little close while organising a strike. Everyone in the college had tried to get intimate with Qayyum because he was the son of a very rich man,

active in leftist politics and a meritorious student. Would anyone have missed him if he had not been to the marriage? He could, however, meet there some old comrades.

He had got a sort of rivalry with Hafiz over who could have become more intimate with Qayyum. Seeing him ten years later that jealousy started to smoulder once more inside him. When Hafiz had first come to college, he had been a sort of country cousin; one could still hear his rustic accent. In student life he had published a magazine on 21st February with the collection of contributions. He continued to perform his moral duty to the 21st February as he was teaching Bangla in a college. The man could say anything; he talked too much. Beautiful ladies of the party were

many women together. He got there the best place to sit. On the deep-green lawn there were a lot of chairs. Some people were sitting; some were chatting walking around. Outside there was special police arrangement. The guests parked their cars and came to the lawn. They exchanged pleasantries with Qayyum, Qayyum's father and everyone else. With little pleasantries or anything they laughed loudly. Some ladies went to the room across the lawn. From his chair he could clearly see that place too.

In one corner of the lawn under an illuminated Krishnachura a few men and women devoted to Bengali culture and socialism made a good gathering. He had a distressed desire to join them. Elegant ladies of that corner could have exquisite make-up with few things only.

fond of music, too. You have perhaps heard one of my songs; it's now very popular and it was recorded practically at his initiatives. Khandoker Rafiq Ahmed has sung this hit song.

'Oh my Love

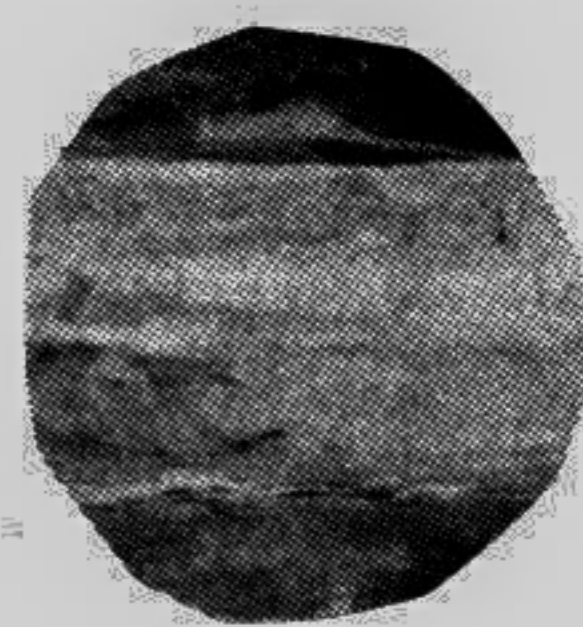
You had given me only the thorns of Keya.

Who did you adorn with the wreath of Keya?"

"You know, this song..." As Qayyum joined them with a young man and a young woman, the reading of Hafiz's autobiography underwent a sudden halt. The young fellow was a well-dressed man of handsome and striking features. Anwar felt a mild disturbance in the heart as Qayyum appreciated the literary works of Hafiz while introducing him. That young man's name was Iqbal Hossain Chowdhury. He was a First Secretary in the Pakistani Embassy in a West European capital. When he had been a student of Dacca University, thirteen or fourteen years earlier, he had often delivered addresses under the mango-tree of arts faculty, inspired by leftist politics. He had been used to singing folks and Tagore's songs and according to the custom of the day he had written revolutionary poetry. That time, reading one of his poems 'We shall bring the Sun back' Anwar Ali had been in high spirits for at least three days. Former poet Iqbal Hossain Chowdhury inspired once more lyricist Professor Hafizur Rahman. His tongue, main organ of narrating his life story, turned into a tail. That hairless short tail did a sort of arts and crafts in the larynx and these sentences came out from the mouth: 'I know your name for quite a long time. If you don't mind, you did a great injustice by stopping writing. Rather should I be allowed to say that you committed a crime? We have been gifted with an A class diplomat, no doubt about it, but at the cost of an A class poet.'

Seeing the European smile made by Iqbal, Anwar had a little pain in the lips. By that time people continued to come. Qayyum walked towards the gate to receive a well-known shervat-clad politician escorted by three or four sycophants and then they went away to the veranda. A strong turmoil started in the body of Anwar Ali when the moderate laughter of the cultured group was suddenly heard rather loudly. Qayyum joined them again, even then Hafiz was going on with his story. 'Whatever people say, I'm saying, I have always said, I say to my students also that our art and culture is still existing for a few enlightened people of Foreign Service and Civil Service. The attitude of high officials, at least so far as art and culture is concerned, that's right, I mean...'

'Not very agreeable.' Iqbal completed himself the sentence as Qayyum intro-



coming and going but Hafiz continued to narrate his stories. 'You know, I always avoid functions of this kind. I am a poor professor; I spend my time in studies. I don't like noises. I gave up politics when I went out of university. I have almost stopped writing. But as those people of radio and television are always sticking, I have to write still at their request. Nowadays I write songs only.'

One hand of Anwar Ali was still on the trousers and the other held his soft underwear. In Ahmedia Restaurant Lata Mangeshkar ran loudly, in the recorder of his memory Professor and lyricist Hafizur Rahman narrated his autobiography. He looked back on every corner of his memory to see those beautiful women; he had to see them all very closely. He would never find again so

They got a wonderful way of expression in an enchanting voice. Countless women of fourteen to forty imitated their voice and articulation. But hearing imitated sound outside was one thing and the very original voice was something else. Were they comparable? He had a longing to go there, but how could he do so as no one there knew him?

'You know, my wife inspires me very much in these things. My mother-in-law comes from a very aristocratic family of West Bengal. Related to Syed Badruddoza theirs is a very cultured family. You might know my second brother-in-law Shahriar, I mean Syed Shahriar Hossain. This year he sat for the CSS exams. He got Civil Service, now he is in training in Lahore. He is

duced Anwar Ali to the Punjabi wife of Iqbal. 'We are friends since our early youth.'

Mrs Ishrat Hossain Chowdhury happened to produce a red and white smile in the eyeballs of Anwar and in the bones of his chest, 'I see, you went to the same school?' she asked with an affected accent. That Bangla hears sweet but does not turn one on.

Qayyum said, 'No, we studied together in the college. We subscribed to the same political views. We were seriously active in politics in the college.'

'Is it?' the voice, the eyes and the lips of the fair lady trembled like a cinema-screen, 'My God! I am afraid of politicians. Politics terrifies me like anything.'

Their son Koli was lying with one leg on the legs of his sister Poly. The mother of the children arranged their lying on one side of the bed. The children were sleeping like logs. Outside a duet of a few lines of one song of the film 'Arman' was heard and it stopped suddenly. He heard what Saleha said in her indistinct voice and in his ears also rang the chattering of Mrs Ishrat Hossain Chowdhury that he listened to a few hours earlier. Hafiz was overwhelmed with the contentment of saying anti-government things in front of a high government official. As Anwar was thinking of what to say to the response of the speech of Mrs Chowdhury, the attention of the fair lady was drawn somewhere else. He heard Hafiz whispering, 'Do I care anyone? Didn't you notice how tactfully I criticised the government?' He forgot totally the face of Mrs Chowdhury. He could recall all her monologue, but where was the face? He saw the lady very attentively; from every possible angle. Hardly had a few hours passed when he forgot everything. What happened to his waning memory day by day? He was growing old, was it fair to grow old so fast? The party melted in thin air with the loud sigh that he heaved.

Saleha Begum put the pillows side by side. 'What a heat! Oh what a rotten heat!' saying so she sprinkled powder onto her throat, neck and armpits. He felt very embarrassed to see that. Little by little the drowsy shadows in her eyes died down and were replaced by lust, dead lust. Her inaudible voice started to become distinct, her words very clear. 'Why have you come back so late? You stuffed yourself badly, didn't you? Your friend is very rich, isn't he? Is that their own house in Dhanmondi? What does the bride look like? What was the dowry? You are of no good. If I had gone there I would have known everything. Were there lots of people? What did you eat, eh?'

Translated by: Swapan Barman

(to be continued)