

poems

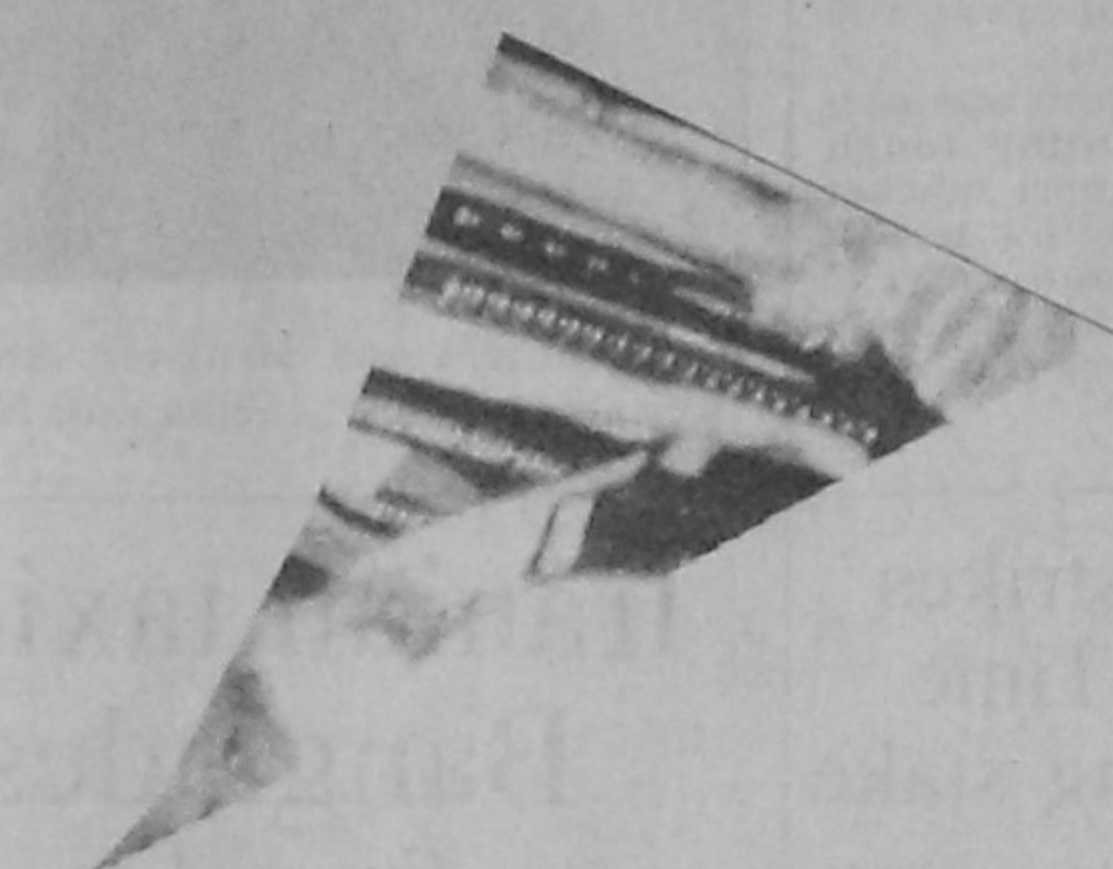
Three poems

The following three poems are by the guest poets — Nida Fazli who holds the central position in contemporary Urdu poetry and has won the prestigious Shahitya Akademi Award for poetry, Shiva Prakash, editor of *Indian Literature* published by the Shahitya Akademi, is one of the most celebrated poets in contemporary Kannada poetry and K. Satchidananda who is considered as the high priest in contemporary Malayalam poetry— at the 9th Spring Poetry Festival. Organized by the poetry magazine *Kabikantha*, the festival will be held tomorrow at Hotel Purbani.

Rikhyu

by H S Shivaprakash

Every moment here is an eternity
The breeze from the cherry orchard
is brining again
the fragrance of departing springs
the songs of birds
Inside the tearoom
the blossomed sunflower
the size of a palm
held in a vase
(Where, where are its
hundreds of brothers?)
Where they come from
Where they go:
No one knows
Not the tea-room
nor the teapot
Water boiled and sizzled in the teapot
Goodbye springs.
Goodbye springs.
The bird singing in the mist
That reminded them all again:
Rikhyu must die today
Must die by his own hands
at the emperor's behest.



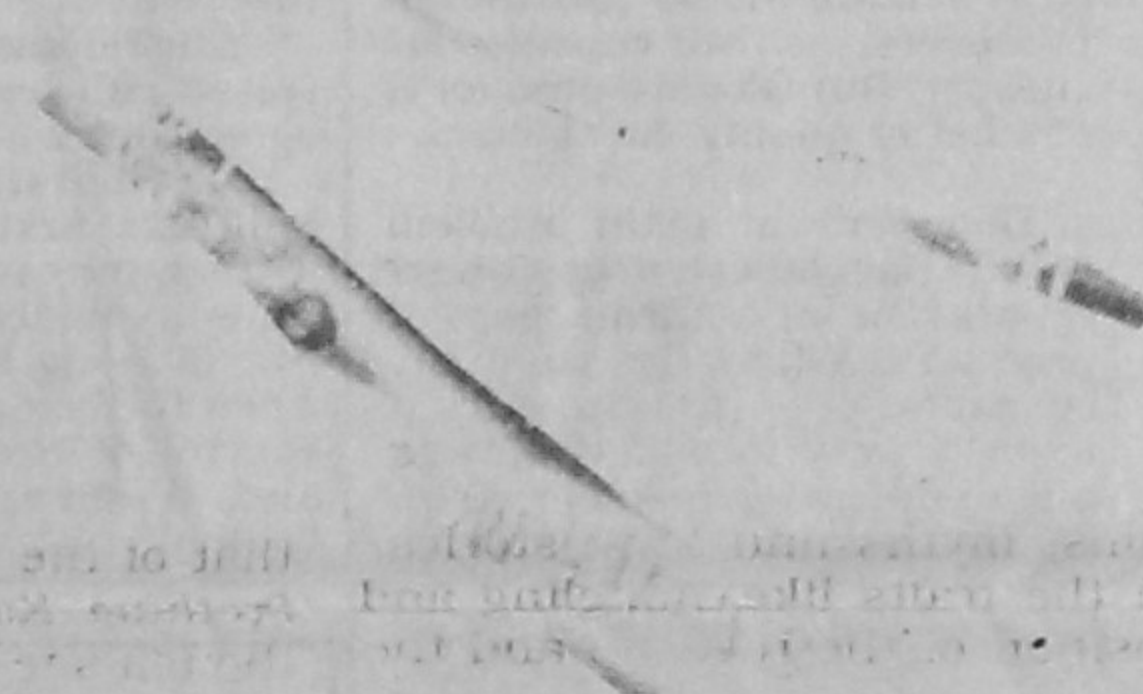
They poured tea into trembling cups
as if they poured out their lives
a Kalpa in every draught of tea
And after that
an empty cup in each hand
except in Rikhyu's
He smashed his cup
On the ground:
'Let no one drink
from this cursed cup.'
And then, like a stroke of lightning
the sword, the sword reflected in eyes
eyes reflected in eyes
the blood gushing forth
a million Buddhas
a million Kalpas.
Still they glitter
the sword like lightning
the blood like cherries.

(Translated by the poet himself)

My Body a City

by K. Satchidanandan

My body, a city.
My eyes, its contonments.
In them the eternal vigilance of
observing sentries.
A railway station between my ears—
There the unceasing tumult of crowds
That wait for a mate or a prey
and fall asleep, tired:
folks who always miss their trains.
Orphaned thoughts gone astray,
memories lost between the chiming of
bells
and the whistles of the wagons.
fire-filled dreams that pant and wait
for their green signals.
My veins are rivers, noisy with
anklets
my nerves, wires that carry music and
light.



My entrails are streets busy with
traffic.

The four chambers of my heart:
one, a prison, black with the solitude
of the dead
one a church, white with the sterility
of prayers,
one a hospital red with the groans of
the sick
and the odours of medicines,
one a courtroom blue with its
prolonged trials
and dispassionate judgements.

How shall I describe
the port of my nose
where smells unfold their sails,
the untriring mills of my teeth
that grind the hardest of pains
the market of my tongue
full of noises and flavours
the observatory of my skin that
records
the change of seasons in its language
of signs.

the garden of my hairs where the sun
never rises
the towers of my legs brimming with
still dances,
the office of my hands peopled with
files and clerks,
the sleepless factories of my glands
and the busy junctions of my joints?

In this city are the cries of birth
and the groans of death,
the temptings of the pimp
and the gospels of the saint,
the bargaining of the merchant
and the detachment of the monk
caged forests and chained springs,
clouds that rain at a touch

Just Keep on Living

by Nida Fazli

Just keep on living like this
say nothing
when you get up in the morning
take a head count of the family
Slouch in the chair and read the paper
there was a famine there
and a war raged somewhere else
be thankful that you are safe
switch on the radio and listen to the
new pop songs
when you leave the house
Paste a smile on your face
pack handshakes in your hands
keep a few meaningless phrases on
your lips
be passed through different hands like
a coin
say nothing
a white-collar
social respect
a few drinks every day
what else you need
just keep on like this
say nothing
(Translated from Urdu by B Bakht and
Leslie)

reflection

War in the East

by Sarah E. Coghlan

THE disappointment and humiliation of the INA was evident in the report made to me by Shah Nawaz, an early comrade to the cause. "When this regiment was raised, I, as well as every single soldier in this regiment, were of the conviction that we would form the spearhead of the advance into India or we would [at least] be among the very first troops to enter into Indian territory. When we actually arrived at the frontlines, the type of duty that was given to us was: road building, repairing bridges, extinguishing jungle fires or driving bullock carts carrying rations for the Japanese troops...duties of a labour battalion". There actually was a crossing onto Indian soil but by that time the larger battle (Imphal) was already lost, and those who had hoped to liberate their country from the English master were forced to retreat with their Japanese allies in conditions of great hardship. As early as 1942 the Japanese had rejected their hope of moving into India and for the time being at least were contenting themselves with the conquering of Burma. Concentration turned to preventing further disaster in the South Pacific. Still, General Matagichi, commander of the 15th Army, sought one large breakthrough, Imphal, almost on the Indian border, was chosen.

Success eluded the Japanese. They met stronger opposition than they had expected, partly from the troops that had been freed at the Arakan. The attack came later than it should. Japanese air support was unable to stop the RAF from bringing in supplies and reinforcements. Bose would never admit the defeat at Imphal. His attitude was that of continued robust confidence. He declared Imphal to be a tactical retreat and compensated by distributing more decorations and declaring more "special days" for more "special heroes." By this time many of his colleagues considered their leader to be losing touch with reality. While he praised many commitment to Indian sovereignty. Such was never the Japanese intention.

Bose Asked to Assume Command
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The events of 1940-41 revived for the almost forgotten Bose an importance which had dimmed over the years. The INA was in desperate need for effective leadership. Subhas Chandra Bose, still in Europe seeking allies for the cause, was asked to return to take the command. Bose embarked in a German submarine at the northern port of Kiel, Surfacing at Sumatra to assume the leadership of the Indian National Army, accepted the title "Nataji," or "leader." Eventually he reached Tokyo where he had his first fast taste of success with Premiere Tojo. There existed historic precedence for such a move. Indian nationalists had sought the sympathies of Japan following the Russian-Sino War of 1905.

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In December of 1943 the British began the opening moves of what was to be a two-year struggle to regain the lost Burmaland. Fighting raged throughout the whole Burma theater until the final defeat of the Japanese in August 1945(8) Early in 1943 the Japanese had attacked [the regular] Indian Army positions in the Arakan, the strip of land running along the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal, threatening the old port city of Chittagong. The

strategy was to draw British reserves away from Imphal to the north where the Japanese main thrust would be directed. Probably the most difficult place to fight in all of Burma, the Arakan consisted of Tangled jungle covered hills and was — and still is — highly malarial. The Japanese managed to outflank the 7th Indian Division in the Arakan jungle. Instead of withdrawing, as had been their practice when outflanked, the British, with a previously agreed upon strategy stood firm, awaiting air supplies and reinforcements. It was a successful stratagem and the Allies were eventually able to encircle the Japanese, thus obtaining their first victory in Burma. If judged by the size of the forces engaged, the battle was not of great magnitude, but it was a historic success for the British and a turning point in the Burma campaign of Bose's qualities, Fujiwara, the ranking Japanese intelligence officer, wrote after the war. "The standard of his operational tactics was, it must be said, low. He was inclined to be unrealistic...without being familiar with the actual fighting power of the INA, he was always demanding to be employed on the Imphal front and urged, even as the Japanese were retreating...that the INA should continue to confront the Allies until their aim was attained." The Japanese, however, recognised the realities and in August began the withdrawal which eventually extended to all of Burma.

Trial at the red fort
The IRA in actuality had contributed little on the battlefield. This was not all their fault however. The Japanese seem never to have quite trusted their ally. The INA was never given front line duty. Desertion rates soared. Many had a change of mind. Some 23,000 INA were rounded up and sent back to India for trial. Desertion could technically call for execution,

but execution on such a scale was unthinkable. The captured troops were divided into three groups, the white, the gray and the black, graphically displaying their supposed amount of guilt. Only the latter — ringleaders or those who had committed atrocities — were actually punished. The trial was held in Delhi's Red Fort, the very place where Bose had hoped to celebrate the INA victory. Here he had planned to introduce the victorious new India in the same location where the aborted 1857 mutiny against the English had concluded. There was strong sympathy among the general population and many defenders in both the Congress and among the Muslims for those whom they termed the "freedom fighters." Three INA officers — a Muslim, a Hindu and a Sikh — were brought before the military court accused of murder and waging war against the British King-Emperor of India. All three defendants were found guilty and cashiered but not shot out of cannons as had been some of their ancestors — the 1857 mutineers — following their trial in this same Red Fort. The leniency which predominated is apparent in India's commander-in-chief, General Claude Auchinleck's statement: "It is quite wrong to adopt the attitude that because these men had [for generations] taken service in a British-controlled army that, therefore, their loyalties must be the same as British soldiers." At a later date the joint secretary of the War Department of the government of India declared that the INA's patriotic motive would be taken at its face value and its members treated as prisoners of war.

Imphal had been a failure for the Japanese and most particularly for the INA. Yet the impact of an actual army fighting for the country's liberation — against the English, and led by a Bengali — did have an enduring ef-

fect. In his wildest dreams Bose could not have imagined the fervor that the INA trials, following the end of the war, excited.

Some months later, after the conclusion of the Delhi trials, a young Muslim IRA officer was sentenced for seven years imprisonment for "acts of brutality." Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi erupted in demonstrations unusual in the unity displayed by Muslims and Hindus. In January of 1946 the Royal Indian Air Force went on strike in protest over their conditions and as expression of solidarity with the INA. Most serious was the 18th of February mutiny of the Navy, starting on one training ship but spreading by nightfall to practically the whole Navy, berthed in eight to ten ports in the Indian Ocean. Other units of the armed forces joined in six hundred thousand textile workers in Bombay went out on strike. The British, with tanks and machine guns, eventually prevailed. The seeds of revolution had been quelled, but it was temporary. The dissolution of the British Empire had commenced.

Subhas Chandra Bose was not among those brought to trail before the Red Court. As the closing days of Japan's involvement became apparent, Bose determined that it was Russia that was going to be a world power. He forecast that the collapse of Germany would signal discord between the already shaky Anglo-American-Soviet alliance. With a Japan unable to forward free India's cause, and with the conviction that the world political future lay with some brand of socialism — of which the Soviet was the extreme example — Bose turned towards the Soviet Union and the one man who represented it — Marshall Stalin. He considered moving north and attempting contact from China or Manchuria. On the 16th of August, 1945, following the surrender of the Japanese, Bose

left the Singapore headquarters and departed in a small overloaded plane, supposedly headed for Russia. They came down once in Vietnam and then proceeded on to Taiwan. When leaving the capital city of Taipei, with the plane still over the runway, there was a terrific noise and the plane dove sharply into the ground, breaking into two pieces. Bose with severe burns, was taken to a hospital where he died within hours.

Always the Question "if?"

Peter Heebes, resident in India and author of books on revolutionary terrorism in India and radicalism specifically in Bengal, says: "Imphal was one of the greatest Allied victories of the war, a turning point as significant in Asia as El Alamein and Stalingrad had been in Africa and Europe." Yet I myself have found it little known, particularly the role of the INA in the Japanese drive against India. I inquired of the editor of Dhaka's leading newspaper and queried several professional US military, now retired but active in World War II, and finally the Bangladeshi ambassador to the United Nations. All knew little or nothing about Imphal. Nor can anybody tell me much about where the Japanese were stopped in their southern advance — only "somewhere south of Chittagong."

Should there not be at least a marker at that coastal spot in the Arakan, probably the furthestmost penetration into the western world by an Axis power? Happily, at Kohima, on the approach to Imphal, there has been erected a 161st Indian Infantry Brigade monument which reads: "Here the [final] Japanese invasion of India was halted."

Also, where is the elusive memorial to INA soldiers that biographer Dennis Judd describes as being visited, surreptitiously, by INA sympathiser Jawaharlal Nehru, not wanting to antagonize his colleague and friend, Lord Louis? (13).

The men of the INA are aging, their ranks decimated by death. There are, however, those who still remember, who still believe their leader will return again to lead that forgotten army towards a freer and more glorious India. Does, perhaps, the spirit of Subhas Chandra Bose still walk the land which he never lived to see liberated? Yes, say some, they have seen the Nataji.