

REFLECTIONS

Conversations with the sun

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

I talk to the sun every day. I do so for many reasons and in many different ways. I set out every morning for work only after I see the sun rising in the east. The red orb, peeking above the trees and houses, is my cue to get going. On days when I get up before the sun, I toss and turn in my bed, with many tunes in my head. But the one I sing often is Tagore's *keno jagey naa, jagey naa obosh ei poran* (O my tired soul! Why dost thou not raise thyself?) The first rays of the sun clear any lingering "oboshota" in me. As soon as I pull out of my driveway and have travelled only a half mile, the sun also becomes my companion. I see the many faces of the rising sun. First, as I am driving on the country road winding through my town, the sun has just topped the low-lying houses and is of a bright red color, it sometimes comes up right in front of me, often almost blinding my eyes. I need to be careful since if I am not, I might be hitting another driver ahead of me, also trying to shield his/her eyes, and might even have slowed down or stopped. Soon, as I take a northward turn, the sun moves to my right and keeps me company as I drive past Stonehill College, and then some open fields to the right. The red floating ball of fire is now picking up momentum and may be a few inches above the horizon, still in its bright red garb, but more golden than red. While I try to keep my eyes on the road, I turn my head for a split second or two to see if the sun is still there, but more to see its color and its majestic face.

I talk to the sun frequently as I travel along. First of all, I know that the sun has a long day ahead just as I do. I wish the sun "good luck" in its daily chores, in the hope that it is able to do its job without interruption as it moves

from the east to the west. I like to do the same, cover as much and in the orderly fashion the sun does its own. No interruptions or distractions. While clouds sometimes get in the way, it cannot stop the sun. The sun has to cover the distance no matter what gets in its way, rain, storm, earthquake, tsunami, you name it.

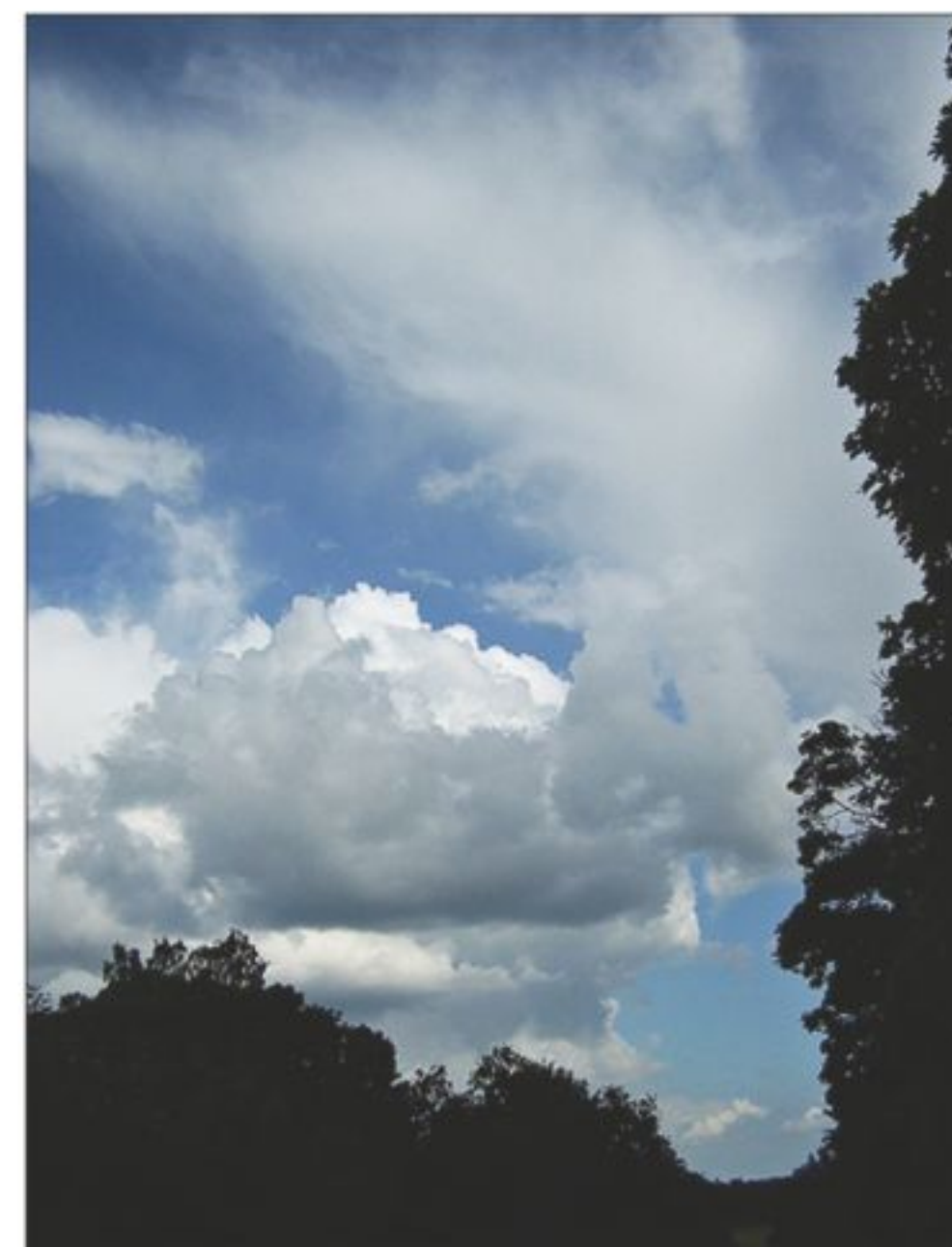
I might add that I enjoy watching the love-hate relationship between the clouds and the sun. The beauty of the sun is enhanced by the clouds, whether it is the rising sun or the setting sun. The clouds often try to cover the sun and I don't know why--but the sun has its own maneuvers. Truth be told, the sun looks more adorable as it breaks out of the cloud; the rays behind the clouds give it a very ethereal ambience. As Tagore chanted many years ago, "Megher koley rode heshechey" or "aji dhaner shishey rodro chhayar looko churi khela".

This triangular love affair between the sun, clouds and the sky is a story of eternal love and passion. The sky loves to have the sun all to itself but the cloud feels left out and covers up the sun. As if it is saying, "O sun, you may be big, and powerful, and have the energy to give life, but I can take you on, one on one, and can even take you away from the earth!".

I also say a prayer every morning to the sun. I learned these touching verses when I was very young, and have felt its power day in and day out. It was written by Sukanto, and who said, "Hey suryo, tumi amar". I know its work is still not done, since I read from my folks that people still live in the "shetshetey ghor", and many of the roadside street kids still shiver in the cold on a winter morning.

Coming back to my diurnal journey with the sun, the houses and the treetops take on a sheen of gold as it rises--the sun itself changes color from red to orange to gold, as

it travels with me. It also seems to be running along with me. As I squint to the right, I can see the sun trying to keep up with me, sprinting from one hiding place to another, hiding for a second, then revealing itself when it can't do so any more. It almost seems to be smiling in defeat, having lost its



hiding place.

My journey is often interrupted by traffic lights or slowed down by vehicular traffic in front of me. As soon as I hit the brakes, I turn to check if the sun is still with me, and to give it a nod of acknowledgment. As if telling the sun, just because I have my eyes on the road or turning away from you, does not mean I am not paying you attention. I know you are there, travelling with me, keeping me

company, shining the path for me and brightening up my morning, making it more colorful.

If perchance I turn left, I can see that the western sky is also enjoying the slow rise of the sun on the east. The western sky knows that after the sun has crossed the meridian it will be longing to move to the west --- because it rests in the west. But even in the morning, the sun lends its color to the west. The sky starts with a deep blue wraparound and then changes to a light blue or off-whitish garb.

Sometimes, I am busy during the day and don't get a chance to talk to the sun again until the late afternoon or even evening. But I also look forward to that moment when I can sit down, either in my kitchen, or stand at a window in my office, or just steal a moment from work or whatever is my task to take a look at the setting sun. I feel a strong inclination to say goodbye. But, more to just to meditate and enjoy the color. I now understand why all the religions set that as the moment of prayer. To be thankful for what you have.

The evening is another time I look out for the sun wherever I am. Sometimes when I am at work and the sun is going down (usually in winter when sunsets occur at 4:30 PM) I would often sneak out of my office in downtown Boston and try to catch a glimpse of the setting sun. The kaleidoscope that a setting sun creates even in an urban setting is majestic, provided you find a location on the top floor or go to a hill to catch the last minutes of this magnificent source of light, color, and life.

For me, each sunset has its own personality. One of the most memorable sunsets for me happened on the river Possum in Khulna during a trip to the Sundarbans on a big steam boat. One evening we came back

from a walk on the shore, and the sunset from the top deck of the boat was a beauty to behold. It was a clear crisp sky in early January, and the round ball of fire was slowly going down, casting its magical display of color on the water, the sky, and on our small world on the boat. Because we had time on our hands, there was no better use of it than to watch the change of colors and be under the spell of the lights and shadows of the setting sun, the eternal "godhuli logon". I have seen many setting suns, but it had never felt like this before. It may have partly been due to my pride in this land that is my place of birth, and partly the tranquility in these surroundings, and possibly the detachment from all the trappings of modern life. The gently flowing water, the shoreline with the tall trees framing the border between the sky and the water, the gold and then red and magenta paint spilled by the sun as it descended behind the other side of the forest, all made the passing moments so magical, so ethereal. I stood there holding the railing, sometimes leaning forward, sometimes just staring at the sky straining to see if I could see a sliver of the disappearing sun, all the while watching the western canvas as it yielded to the unseen painter's play with colors.

The feeling was one of peace, tinged with a little bit of melancholia and reflection the setting sun always brings about in me, the Bengali that I am. But I was also happy that I was in the midst of this unique setting: the short drama that is the "setting sun", one that is always a privilege to witness, and a gift from the sun, when I have the time to savor it and when it happens. A rare moment in life indeed!

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POETRY

Soliloquy of a politician

Z A KHAN

I could not see the splendor of mother earth so far As I have blindfolded myself, overwhelmed by selfish desire

Which instigated me to craft ways to remain concentrated

In the self love that almost has left me deserted. My pernicious politics torments and unsettles me Because I have hardly chased the sterling acme Of love for all, which is sublime

And carries the blessing of the divine. Many a time I got 'SOS' calls from a long way off And every time I responded with attempts to bluff Those millions who needed succour

By affirming my commitment to their welfare. Despite my promise to work for the downtrodden

I labored ceaselessly to raise and strengthen A vicious circle to thrive on devil's racket To thwart the growth of virtuous circuit. I have never tried to know where glory lay Rather conspired to block the sunny ray So that people cannot see their adversity To enable me to reap gain till eternity.

Being purged of people's love I could not see The sparkle in the eyes of human lovers in spree Chased by my own misdeeds I could not nourish The values to help the good in me to flourish.

As I am getting tired, lonely and old I pray to the Almighty to take me to His fold So that I may not commit any more crime To let them pinprick me the rest of my life.



If they were not to sparkle? Why did the winds stroke her hair If it was not to be garlanded? Just when it dawned on him That stillness is an unknowing ribald sin Lightning scintillated and silence broke Into the ringing of a thousand wedding bells? The silhouette merged with the body, The moon and the stars shone bright The winds now blew her scented hair Revealing a ravishing beauty The sea had now calmed Akin to the Mediterranean The flames of love were now seen from afar.

Half and half

NAHID KHAN

I made up stories, made up excuses There was the need for all those

I wanted to run to you There was the rain to stop me

Maybe the road mayhem Or the ranting street

Can't remember what it was Only I know I had to cross a hill

Of half truth to come to you I made it, finally

Laid my full eyes on you But you only gave me

Half of your look That sari I chose especially for you

And you only turned to me half the time To my extended arms you responded

By half a hug But it was magic when one of your

Two hands held one of mine It didn't feel half any more

Suddenly it was the whole Of your love

It was beautifully worth the halves.

My eyes

AINON N.

If I were blind It would dissolve

The dancing landscape Letters of language

Colour of people Face of smiles and tears

A childhood Traditions of past

Offerings in temples Rather I would etch

Eyes of trust Kindness in clasp of hands

Love in that embrace

Colour of shadow Confession of music World in fragrance Dancing with life I would ask Why live? Why die? The ensemble proclaims Song of conscience In its colossal beauty I would keep writing Without knowing Ink etches words no more

Illustrated love

RUBAB ABDULLAH SHUKLA

I covet the day When I fell in love with you

Yet the mood withers in stages Passing countless days and nights

Restless and sleepless Since my days are at the top

Of vibrations, vices and hurdles And I have errands to chase

No time to swallow No right to be mellow

Both of us saw eye to eye Perhaps for some engaging time

We became as one Illustration of love happened

That day Undying ever in heart

We sigh

My lover . . . a mortal

REHNUMA SIDDIQUE

At every break of dawn, The white cloaked boatmen wait pensively

Tracking our tiptoes We perform our pantomime with great elegance

Perennial visions of the snakes still sovereign his mind. Beheaded snakes, he chants there lying in the monotonous

white reality. But we still dance with our strings attached.

Most daintily, most impeccably. Like ballerinas we sway

Days pass, years, centuries, And the rain pours over our mechanized stage.

Each droplet like a magical piece of crystalline Plays the known melody in my heart.

An old Bengali cinema song, I ask. He smiles lightly

I sense my dreams again: I am a tune, he is my melody,

I am a poet, he is my emotion, I am a singer, he is my lyrics

And there the famed string-holder Watches with his chromatic eyes



The beauty of his creation With great sparkle, he watches away

At the halt of the muggy clime, An aroma overwhelms the powerful enchantment.

The sun beams with such a munificent smile, That even the blind dream beauty.

Flowers writhe in enigmatic emotions As the breeze sweeps past our cold, placid feet.

Our lips curve like the Sturdy muscles of a Greek god

It's time. We whisper to each other with obfuscating subtlety.

It's about time, I say to myself again. He saw the beheaded white snake.

The snake with the pompous hissing, poised slither. A tear enthralled my pallid skin.

An opalescent tear



Dithering desire

MADAN SHAHU

You looked up and I beheld your eyelids pulled down; Got message, you will not ever frown

If I show intimacy or say words of affection, You'd only rear up connection

Your heart would release a virtual peace dove, If even I dare express love

For eyes tell the tale of heart to the eyes they meet; To connect minds, not split

But when fleeting time leaves a wide swath across, It's a distance hard to cross

We are on start and end of a vain world thus, That none knows better than us

Your days are butterflies nights are stars, Mine are rains and scars

Your time extends beyond your widened sight, Mine gets shorter by the night

Yet we tend to feel so close and dear to each other; Time and distance do not bother

Your day has just begun Warm, clear and bright; I am already unto the night

Well, for once we squeeze out barriers and embrace, And feel as if a divine grace

Then let all your days be fragrant flowers Nights blissful showers



Taciturnity

MOHSENA REZA SHOPNA

A wee bit of cloud A skimpy shower

A long night and a short story. He was the physique, she the shadow

He was the immense sky, she its décor The winds that stroked her hair was he

The sun that made her bloom was his love The day he went silent

The swarthy sky turned the cheerful earth ebony All the lights dimmed . . .

The gentle wind metamorphosed into a tempest Waves that had brushed past their soft feet

Rose sky high in rage Fire that had lit their lonely life was ablaze now

Devastation had encircled the entire cosmos The wick that promised to burn lifelong had been

snuffed Had he loved only to go silent? Were the candles lit only to be stopped from flickering?

Why was the sky decorated with twinkling gems