

# ARGUS UNDER ANAESTHESIA

RAZIA KHAN

The march of the hunted across a land  
No longer their own began  
At a haunted dawn  
Yet only last summer, the last ever  
Flowering March, golds and emeralds  
Quivered in lush orchards—  
Now burnt; scattered ashes enveloped  
The moving column  
In a thin safety of silence;  
The least noise was suicidal;  
A mother frenzied by the roar of mortars  
Throttled her whining infant:  
Its life for the life of millions.  
Bruised feet, bleeding hands;  
Dilated eyes enacting the frenzy of Oedipus.  
Corroding thirst dulled  
The sense of loss of violated wives, mothers,  
Sisters, butchered babies.  
Worst the burden of survival in a den  
Beyond the reach of bipeds  
Set loose by madmen with moron-eyes  
Spurting martial orders  
Between bouts of drunkenness.  
The lull left by sudden  
Departures lay heavy over the fields.  
The mourning corn

Bent with grief; impossible phantasmagoria  
Haunting the eyes  
Of deserted dogs and cattle; incredible  
Whiteness of human flesh, pigment  
Peeled off by blind bayonets;  
Crouching figures of raped  
Infants making the earth red.  
What shapes of space will  
Shelter them? Unused pipes, fragile  
Palm-leaf huts?  
Those who died on the way, will  
Never come to their heritage  
Of a bowl of rice— and cholera.  
Roofless even in death  
Their buried dreams float in the air.  
Stifled sighs echo through eloquent  
Trees; unlike Duncan's their humble blood  
Dried ungolden on hungry bones;  
Their names unwritten in the annals  
Of freedom—again and again  
A trampled bud—its elusive fragrance  
Wafted to eager nostrils by words  
And promises  
Minutes and manifestoes.

2  
While the guinea-pigs trudge  
Towards some meagre shelter  
Sleek men sweat in winter clothes  
Seated at polished tables.  
The conference proceeds; pencil strokes confer  
Life and death on millions.  
When bony arms stretch for proffered  
Morsels global motives  
Are espied; new slogans coined to deter  
Feeding hands.

3  
In a golden island far beyond  
The reach of these  
Marching millions, Eve in the shape  
Of a voluptuous politico  
Titters in girlish glee—just returned  
From the holy land:  
"Genocide? No!— Only banquets,  
Lovely roses, bushy eye-brows,  
Exotic charm— a little brutal perhaps",  
(But how an English rose

Would love to be crushed in hairy arms!)  
As for happy triggers—  
To keep the colonies—why that's  
No novelty to us!  
Be a sport—do let us dance!  
If he made Black Princes  
Glow all over the highways  
Of a maudlin land  
Where such roses are unheard of, that's  
All the more glory!  
"Contrary to common talk— said  
My charming host—  
The stumpy race is far from anaemic;  
Rich haemoglobin,  
Beneath pigmented skin"—so he launched  
This second crusade  
Between the opulent and the half-fed  
In Allah's name.



Biren Shome, *Peace*.

4  
The demonic delta now wears a strange look!  
As the battle cry is sounded  
By a spray of machine-guns  
A true post-ablution  
Beauty bathes the ones sprawled  
In streets and promenades.....  
*The vultures shall come*  
Cheap scavengers—to supplement  
The economy of bayonets—in a protracted  
And sacred war  
A bullet is worth more than the feeble  
Heart-beat of a heathen.  
And behold! Now begins the miracle:  
The crowning glory of Jihad  
The holy feat of tearing rich pigmented  
skin open—to create  
Stupendous roses in a moist plain!  
Horticultural experiment;  
" Conquest of climate; call it what you will;  
And here Jill  
Is a rose for you and a rose for me  
As we dance to a waltz  
In this soft green malachite hall,  
Counting our victories!

A few thousand dead! Heil Adolf!  
Eye-brows matching moustache!  
Swinging in katabolistic glee  
As I watch the friendly  
Banner coo assurances—my heart thaws!  
The Dialectics—no monopoly  
Of the Russians— do not exclude elimination  
Before new creation!"

5  
Far, far away from the velvet-sweep  
The shot silk softness  
Of the tender waltz there are quivering raintrees  
Planted by romantic colonists.  
Beneath their cool breeze sleeps Selim,  
Physics undergrad; 3rd Year Honours  
Equal master of a seven-stringed Sitar  
His eyes—before they got erased  
By a bull-dozer—reflected for  
The fraction of a moment the sapphire  
March-sky of a land  
About to die out of the atlas.  
And there was Jyoti—the suave conversationalist  
Who kept the smile on his lips  
Till they became amorphous flesh in the mass-grave,  
Which also houses Modhu  
The varsity canteen-keeper for four decades:  
He grossly mispronounced  
The Kalimah hoping to survive by the incantation.  
Oh Gabriel, do not  
Call out to the Enshrouded One;  
He is only human—  
They are all gone, the men and the women  
Leaving this faith  
Not meant for mortals, to supermen;  
Dreamers of great concepts,  
Dynamic heroes the fabric of whose dreams  
Is often woven  
With the torn-down veins of unknowing men,  
Every now and then  
These high-priests of deception gather roses  
From common gardens  
To adorn the putrid shrine of their super-egos.  
The roses, hence,  
We consecrate to them.  
What if these livid plants which  
Bore the roses should awake in a terrible  
Resurrection  
Armed like Argus with a myriad eyes;  
And with their  
Omniscient, cruel light burn the hypnotic  
Tongue of demagogues,  
Scald inept ringers glued to the reins  
And demand back  
Their broken lives, theirs  
To live or sacrifice?

*Mittelweg, Hamburg*  
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*Notes—The first two sections describe the exodus from Bangladesh to India of refugees in 1971. The third states the reactions of a woman Parliamentarian back from Pakistan to her native England to Yahya Khan's action in Bangladesh. The fourth is a kind of reverie undergone by Yahya. The fifth section shifts back from England and Pakistan to Bangladesh.*