

POETRY

The Hridaya Sutra

BIPASHA HAQUE

A Quest

(You can) Take a break on the way to Kailash, can try resting beneath the chimneys! Now it is necessary to stop than to walk. You may also stop if it smells of salty air, when the sea is trailing behind the lake.

Around there the Brahmaputra bubbles just once, and prancing a few backward steps in a sudden gait, he splashes abundant power from shore to shore. When these happen, you need to stop.

Haven't you walked a lot? Your outstretched feet show how close they are to the soil; but your halting isn't needed for that: the quest which they spin around signals to cross the threshold—to be dusted.

Stopping by such a path, would you not cater for these blunt opposites? Then hark! Hold on— In smoky Himalayan heights nestled in the slopes of Tarai, they know the *Hridaya sutra* "gate gate paragata parasamgate bodhi svaha".

The Epiphany

Form is no different from emptiness, emptiness is similar to form—that which is form is emptiness, that which is emptiness is form. It is the same for feelings, perceptions, impulses, or consciousness.



All dharmas are marked with emptiness; Dharmas do not appear or disappear, are not tainted or pure; they do not increase or decrease.

Emptiness has no form, no feeling, perception, impulse or consciousness—it is not a realm of mindful consciousness either. Emptiness is not ignorance, nor does it extinguish, until there's no old age and death. And these again are perpetual.

Thus in life there's no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path, no cognition, and, no attainment;

as what's there to attain anyway? The mind is no hindrance; and without any hindrance no fears exist.

Far apart from all illusion absorbed into Nirvana in life and beyond: "Gone gone totally gone totally gone over the top, wakened mind, so, ah!"

Bipasha Haque is a diaspora writer with particular interest in life—the way it is. By profession she is a university teacher.

This Body of Mine

YASIF FAYSAL

This body of mine!
I look at the marvel, touch it—
Smooth-limbed, graded with precise
division of labor,
Vital organs carefully tucked under skin.
A picture-perfect thing.

Almost

My heart is working fine,
Tapping out a pulsating rhythm,
Making atria and ventricles work in
tandem.
There is no question of missing a beat
Nor of surrendering to any adrenaline
heat.

My kidneys have known no aberration.
Working assiduously round the clock
Like my two faithfuls,
They purge blood, stave off infectants
Keep the system squeaky clean.

My brain so far has betrayed no weakness.
A hive of neurons and synapses,
Fortified by the cognitive power,
Buttressed by an impregnable skull,
Brain is a sweet concatenation
Of fine-tuned commands,
It has never failed to respond
To any rational demand.

But this circadian clock won't go on
ticking,
Once wound up, the count-down begins.
Nothing but a prosodic scheme.
One insertion of a false syllable is
enough—
It fatally dislodges the rhyme,
Deals mortal blow to the intended theme.

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FICTION

Silence

NADIA RAHMAN

The phone kept ringing and Rehana fished inside her bag and muttered angry words under her breath for not being able to locate it. Finally, she got hold of it. It was Sultana, her eldest sister. "Rehana, need your quick feedback on the sarees I am planning to buy for Nazifa's wedding trousseau. I am at the shop. Hurry up, look at the photos sent in whatsapp!"

"Apa, I am going to office..." The line went dead before Rehana could finish. Again, Rehana was gripped with sadness. Amma keeps coming back in everything and a silent tear escaped her eyes.

Everybody says Rehana looks a lot like her mother: slender, tall, an oval-shaped face with long hair which Rehana wears much shorter now. However, that is where the resemblance ends. Rehana hardly knows anything about her mother, except that she does not like people and that includes her own children as well.

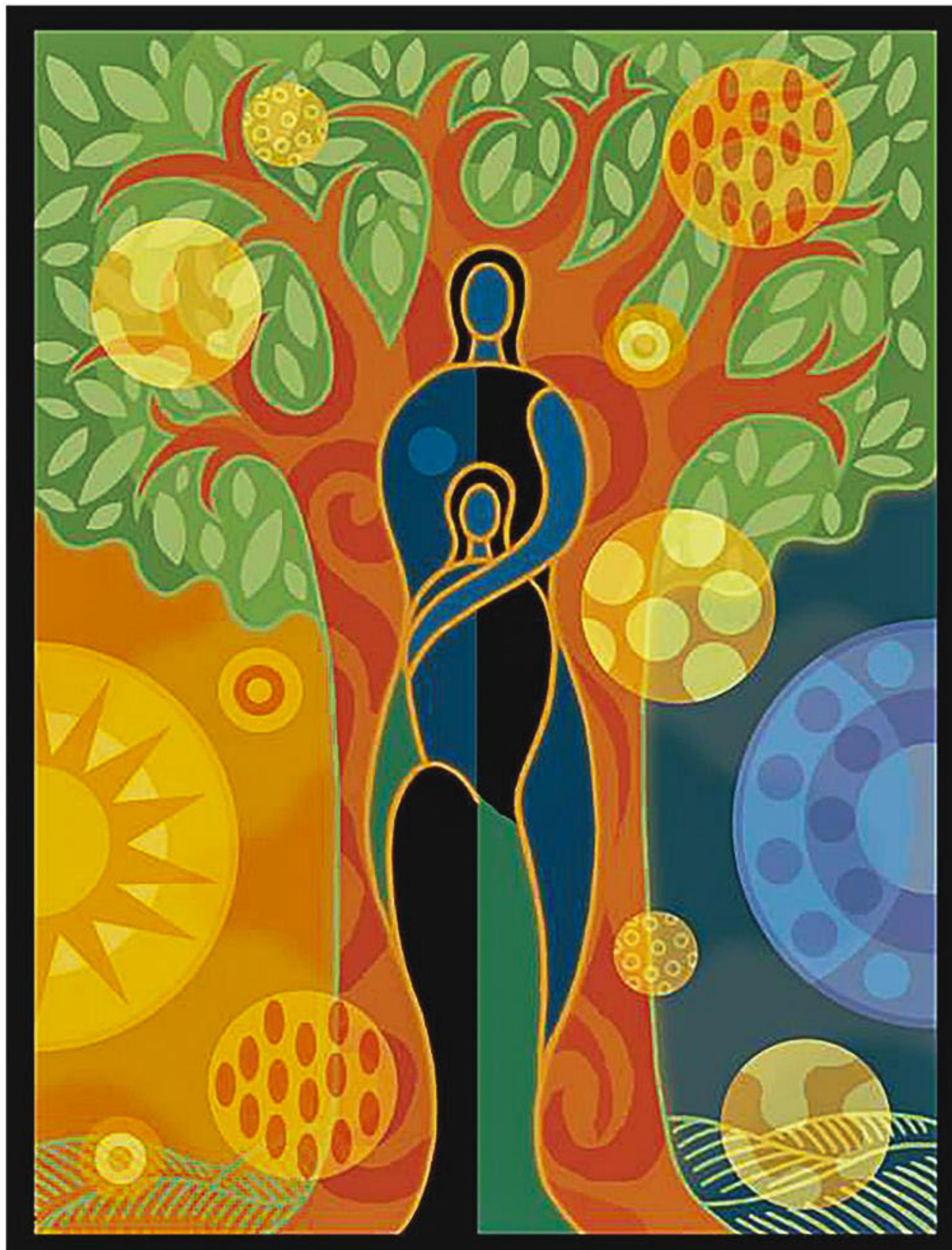
Amma has always been a stranger to Rehana, the youngest among her four siblings. She cannot remember the last time Amma had drawn her close and told her how much she loved her. Amma had been a distant figure in their childhood and still is. Only the eldest two of her siblings, Sultana and Raihan experienced a short period of affection from her, but it had dried up by the time Rehana arrived in this world. Being the youngest, the pain of not knowing Amma becomes especially unbearable for Rehana at such times. Rehana wiped off the tears, opened her whatsapp quickly and checked out the sarees. Nazifa looks happy holding the sarees in front of her. How she envies Nazifa, her own niece of being indulged by her mother.

But this is how it has always been. Why are they bothering Rehana anew? Shouldn't she be used to the indifference by now? The phone started ringing again, but Rehana was still lost in the turmoil of her thoughts. It has been two days since she returned from Chittagong. The visit was not pleasant as her mother was in one of her silent moods.

Amma has always been a silent figure in the house, sitting in a chair in the corner of her bedroom, sometimes sitting on the bed looking far away in the distance, lost in her own world, sometimes talking to herself. For her, nobody seemed to hold any meaning during those times. Amma was always by herself sitting in the other room, away from all. During her recent visit, Rehana tried talking to her, but found her all the time locked in her room.

Suddenly, Rehana feels an urge to call her *Choto Khala* to tell her of the disturbing encounter with Amma this time. But then she remembers that it is her mid-morning napping time. Her rheumatism is giving her hard times nowadays.

Rehana's *Choto Khala* is the other mother



for them and the only source of information with regard to Amma's past. There were all sorts of stories surrounding the quietness of Amma. The most interesting story was how a *jinh* had captured her mother when she was very young. Amma was very beautiful. Some villagers from Rehana's *Namibari* would come forward with vivid stories of Amma, how she went to the backyard in the middle of the night to relieve herself and a *jinh* got hold of her. Ever since that night, according to them, Amma talked with it and apparently it did not want her to come near her children and husband. So, all the blame goes to the *jinh* as an explanation of Amma's gradual withdrawal from this world. *Choto Khala* was especially close to Amma who would always tell Rehana

how beautiful, and lively she was until a *Jinh* completely changed her. Rehana has often wondered if it really is the *jinh*, or the sudden death of Nana, or the big extended in law who were responsible for the gradual withdrawal.

The earplugs lying on the car seat caught Rehana's eyes. They need to be replaced. Hridita, her daughter, repeatedly implored her to buy new ones. She must stop by at a store before picking her up from school. As a child, how she longed for such motherly attention! Rehana cannot ever remember having any mother-daughter chitchat with Amma. She never knew what it was like talking to a mother. Rehana realizes with a jolt that Amma does not even know what she liked, what her favourite dish was or what made her sad. After returning

from work, sitting with Hridita and listening to her stories or tantrums, Rehana would remember the quietness of Abba's house.

Again the phone rang. She could see Raihan's Bhai's name through the haze of her tears. She picked up the phone and in a croaking voice answered, "Yes, Bhaiya. How are you?"

"Rehana, Abba is not well. We are taking him to the hospital." Raihan's voice was grim.

Rehana could not believe her ears. She just saw him last week. Everything else became blank.

"Hello, hello. Rehana, did you hear what I said?"

"I am coming as soon as I can" croaked Rehana and hung up. "Shumon Bhai, go to Road no. 4. Hurry up." Rehana instructed the driver.

She did not know how she managed the tickets, managed Hridita, got on the plane and rushed from the airport to the hospital.

But it was all over before they could do anything.

Amma was called at the hospital to see Abba for the last time in ICU. She was not aware that a very critical disease had taken hold of Abba while she has been lost in her silent world. She was not aware that her husband was fighting for his life in the ICU. Rehana took her inside the ICU. She went inside, stood by his side and said "Shuncho, ei, what is wrong with you? Your Shimu is here. Open your eyes!" She turned to Rehana and asked "Does he have fever? Rehana cried silently the whole time.

One by one all the relatives filed in the ICU, recited some surah and left. Amma sat with a smiling face unknown to the grief and sadness choking her children and grandchildren.

It was time to say goodbye to Abba. He was about to leave the house. "La ilaha illallah, La ilaha illallah" chanted hundreds of people when Amma came rushing down the stairs howling. Rehana and Sultana came forward to restrain her.

She cried until Abba could be seen going out of the gate, through the alley. After that she went back to her room and became silent again. The women relatives surrounded her, uttering consoling words. Rehana could not hold Amma and cry and tell her that she missed Abba and that it was unbearable to lose him. Again, sharing that pain remained constrained with the siblings.

Finishing all the rituals, Rehana came back to Dhaka. She has been having sleepless nights again. Every night the television goes into sleep mode without being noticed by Rehana. It is almost 3 am. Rehana feels restless and feels that the night is smothering her. She tries finding solace by touching Hridita in her sleep. Her thoughts return to Amma again, "why did she not talk to me? Why did she not hug me

and cry at all?" The rejection from Amma was unbearable for Rehana this time. Amma had not uttered a single word during the five days she stayed after Abba's death. The only thing that Rehana could understand was that her bitterness has increased. Dementia has taken a firm grasp of her. She cannot even tolerate her own brothers and sisters. She did not talk to them during the four days that they stayed after Abba's death. Gradually, they all left, leaving Amma all alone.

All of a sudden, Rehana felt an urge to have a sniff of her Amma, but she didn't have anything that belonged to her. This time, Rehana so much wanted to bring a saree from her along with one of Abba's shirts. "Do not touch anything of my Almirah. All of you are here to steal my things" Amma screamed when Rehana opened the Almirah to look at Abba's clothing. Amma loves sarees. She clearly remembers who gave her on what occasion though she would forget the age or details of her children or grandchildren. All those sarees sit in her *Almirah*, locked away, gathering moth. She dutifully takes them out, washes and dries them, and again puts them away. Her *sarees* are like her, locked away, beyond her children's grasp. Abba was the only one who had some access to her things. Rehana silently closed the *Almirah*, handed the keys to Amma and went out to the long verandah. She sat on the easy-chair and stared ahead.

Abba would often take Amma out to eat *chotpoti* or *fuchka* when she was in one of her good moods. Everybody would tease how even in their old age they went out like young couples to eat *chotpoti*. But again, that would be very rare.

When the ritual of four days were over, Rehana had asked her Amma if she wanted to go. Amma replied "I need to buy some things." They went to one of the superstores in town, her favorite place to browse. She prefers to go to the shopping centers or super shops rather than visiting her siblings. She likes to browse through the aisles of the shop and pick up small necessary things like soap, shampoo, hair oil, clips... these are all that matters in her life, the objects that do not have a voice, very similar to her.

Rehana finally gets up from bed as the *Azaan* could be heard from the distance. Amma is dying silently by not fighting the liver cirrhosis and Rehana can do nothing about it. The helplessness overpowers all the past memory and makes her cry. Can she help her in any way? The silence suffocates her. The distant noises of the morning pull Rehana back to her daily chores.

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