

Poems

2013

from the
SAARC Region

SAARC CULTURAL CENTRE - SRI LANKA



South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

Poems

from the
SAARC Region
2013

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Poems from the SAARC Region-2013 is an anthology of poems from the SAARC region. The anthology showcases poems from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It provides regional platform for poets from South Asia and seeks further strengthening of cooperation among people of the SAARC Region.

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SAARC Region
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**SAARC Cultural Centre
Sri Lanka**

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Preface

Poetry is perhaps one of the oldest forms of art known to mankind. As an aesthetic mode of expression, it involves a variety of techniques including but not limited to similes, metaphors, imagery, meter, rhythmic tools and sound devices, all of which are employed to skillfully express human emotions. While these emotions may have arisen in response to contextual conditions, their messages are universally applicable. It is no different in South Asian poetry.

South Asian poems depict the vibrant, pulsating culture of South Asia. Reflecting the shifting contingencies of the region, South Asian poem has transformed through time in its tone, rhythm, emotion and nuances. Nonetheless, its universal appeal deriving from the sheer power of the messages they carry has not declined.

This collection entitled *Poems from the SAARC Region-2013* includes 70 poems from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka that powerfully portray dynamics of the South Asian society from a poetic perspective. The themes highlighted in the poems are of universal relevance and the collection is part of a larger initiative of the SAARC Cultural Centre aimed at promoting regional literature.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the editors of this collection, Dr. Kaiser Haq (Bangladesh), Jigme Choden (Bhutan), Prof. Bal Ram

Adhikari (Nepal), Dr. Rasheed Hamid (Pakistan) and Suharshini Dharmarathne (Sri Lanka) for their continued support rendered towards making this publication a reality. I would also like to thank the poets, translators, and my colleagues at the SAARC Cultural Centre, without whom this would have remained an abstract proposal.

It is my earnest hope that this volume would constitute a reference kit for poets, academics, literary critics and students who take a serious interest in poetry of the region. I also hope this collection of poems would be received with great interest by the readers.

G.L.W. Samarasinghe
Director, SAARC Cultural Centre, Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh

Lines on a Cat

Shamsur Rahman

For a few years we had a cat about our house,
Lapping up our love, especially my youngest
daughter's.

She looked after its daily needs, kept it clean
And well fed, giving up her own share of fish at meals,
And waited up for it to come back from its prowls.

One day it didn't; we searched in vain,
It had disappeared without a trace.

My daughter in her sorrow lay in bed
Two days without eating, keeping with me
A reproachful silence: as if I had worked
Her pet's disappearance!

How could I make her realize it often happens,
Someone takes leave saying, "Till we meet again,"
And disappears just like this, leaving behind
A vast emptiness as a gift: we never meet again.

Translated by Kaiser Haq

Poem # 240*Syed Shamsul Huq*

Do no work; not go out; just sit
 Tilting teapot over empty cup?
 Just keep standing
 Between the void and plenitude?
 And watch as birds in this dream city
 Inscribe golden letters on a blue mosque?
 And spruce up – choosing smart shoes,
 Bright socks, a spotless white shirt?
 Aren't the stories written with a clumsy pen
 All too perishable?

Is it all gone through in the hope
 Of hearing the climax to a musical score?
 Or am I a sicko, waiting with a depraved desire to see
 The sportive ribbons on the city's colourful head
 Come off in a cyclonic storm? When
 Will imminent death flare up in my eyes?

Who calls from the street? Who would go
 Gathering dear friends in housing estate and city
 neighbourhood?
 As hope collapses, who will be the muezzin to give the
 call to prayer?
 It was in another age that a brown bag burst open
 Scattering innumerable silver coins at a crossroads.
 Where have the horses in the stable disappeared
 Taking with their hooves a tremendous storm of words?
 Whose loud voices do I hear?

I must go out; ages seem to have passed me by,
 I must unfold a colourful handkerchief, set my hair free,
 Bring home the fugitive horses – a sweet scent in their
 manes,
 Horses that once carried me on their backs.

The Ram Cure

(Ram Dawai)

Belal Chaudhuri

Such furor over Ram temple and Babri Mosque
 Such brouhaha everywhere and nonstop squabble
 Surely if the king of wit, Shibaram Chakravarti, was
 here
 He would have pronounced judgment then and there –
 Is Ram’s temple really that different from Babri
 mosque?
 Instead of Babri concentrate on delicacies like Rabri!
 Didn’t mystics and gurus all prophesize
 “Temples and mosques shroud all paths!”

Having heard the discourse, Shakti and Rushdie,
 Embraced each other in sheer hilarity.
 Instead of Babri, the two swayed in Amir Khan’s
 classical melodic strain,
 And lapped up rum served neat to their hearts’ content,
 Drinking till their souls overflowed with liquor superbly
 potent!

And then the two burst out in peals of loud laughter
 That spread through the airwaves;
 Such irrepressible waves of incomparable glee;
 I doubt if even during the climax of Ram and Raban’s
 contest

 One would every such a spectacle see!

“What art thou called?” was the reply that one would
 hear then

 Reverberating in the Kalyana raga strain

“Get thee gone, you drunk dwarf worthless creature”
In such raillery and drunken discourse where no sense
could feature
And in the accompanying riotous laughter would join
one Shamsheer Anwar!

But wasn't it later in an age when things fell apart and
barbarians thrived
Men thought the time was right to burn down
Alexandria's ancient library?

But still later, through our candle's pure and bright light
Flickered indomitably and eternally
The manifesto of our poetry's firm and time-conquering
might.

Translated by Fakrul Alam

The Wait

Shaheed Quaderi

It was early morning when you went out
 And still no sign of coming back
 I've been calling over and over
 So that the dialled numbers
 Might ring like raindrops
 Making you wonder if someone
 Is singing a lyric by Tagore
 I've sent three text messages
 Still there's no answer
 Reply, for God's sake

When you go out I quake
 (to use a mild poeticism) with fear
 When you get back I feel like an astronaut
 Who once did a moonwalk
 You see
 I'm filled with fear because I'm wearied sick
 Of walking History's dark wilderness
 And sit confined in an exile's balcony

Separation however brief
 Fills me with fear I admit
 To me all sorts of separation
 Have the flavour of death
 Deodars standing like idols
 No longer chant mantras
 On quiet afternoons
 Nor evening azans address a golden sunset
 The night descends
 Like the murderous image of Kali

You went out at seven
It's now five o'clock
Won't we ever meet again
Iraq is burning
Submachineguns in killer hands
Roar amidst the mountains of Afghanistan
Death-wishing brainwashed boys
Grenades strapped to thighs
Walk the streets of our city
Police cars zoom
Sirens blaring

The day of the attack on Twin Towers
You were in New York
During the Great Calcutta Killing
I was in that city
Almost all my life
I've been haunted by thoughts of rupture
It was early morning when you left
And still no sign of coming back
Before death closes the eyes
Everyone deserves a last kiss
Won't I get one
It was early morning when you went out
And still no sign of coming back
I've been calling over and over
So that the dialled numbers
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And still no sign of coming back
Before death closes the eyes
Everyone deserves a last kiss
Won't I get one

Translated by Kaiser Haq

A Surreal House

Rafiq Azad

Whose is the house that stands
 Just opposite my dream – or isn't it
 A house after all, just the claw
 Of a motionless golden crab
 In a dream?

Are they very happy,
 Those who live in that house?
 They are strangers, no doubt,
 Of unknown pedigree,
 But are they very happy
 In that house in a dream?
 That lissome young woman
 With a tomato-cheeked baby
 In her arms –
 Is she very happy at this hour?

The murmur of voices that can be heard
 Coming from deep within the house,
 Isn't that crooning? – I know that the speech of happy
 people
 Is infused with the spirit of music; their words
 Promptly turn lyrical!

 All day
 Processions of mourners troop past the house;
 Hate processions go by every day.
 But I don't remember if it's a road that runs
 Or a river that flows by the house every day.

I don't recall at all if that house seen in a dream
Stands on a riverbank or beside a broad thoroughfare.
I remember just this: when I was in deep sleep
A house was wide awake, radiant in a dream.

Translated by Kaiser Haq

My Magic Box

Mahadev Saha

I've run out of tricks, my magic box
 Has been cast into the Mediterranean Sea.
 The Titanic may be salvaged
 But not this box,
 I am at your mercy now,
 If you wish you can exile
 This interloper from your fortified city,
 I have nothing to say in my defence,
 I'm mute as a rock

The magic touch is gone
 From my fingertips
 Like the romance of fairy tales,
 No more can I set fire to a handkerchief
 And hand out magic roses to you
 Or turn shreds of paper into fistfuls
 Of gold coins,
 My hands are cold as the Ice Age,
 I've thrown away my magic box,
 I've thrown my magic wand into the fire
 And it turned into ash,
 I've wiped all traces of colour
 From my fingertips,
 Slipped the magician's cape
 Off my shoulders
 And quietly snuffed out the magic candle.
 I've got no bag of tricks left,
 Nothing to startle you with,
 I can no longer charm anyone
 Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Translated by Shahnoor Haq

This Day I Haven't Come to Shed Blood

Nirmalendu Goon

Like all of you present here I love roses a lot
 While crossing the Race Course field yesterday
 One of the roses blooming there
 Said to me; "make your verse sing of Sheikh Mujib"
 I'm here to sing of him.

A bloodstained brick that had
 Fallen from the Shahid Minar told me yesterday
 "Make your verse sing of Sheikh Mujib"
 I'm here to sing of him.

Like everyone present here I love to see Palash trees
 blooming
 While crossing *Sangbad's* office yesterday
 A newly bloomed *palash* whispered in my ear
 "Make your verse sing of Sheikh Mujib"
 I'm here to sing of him.

The water sprinkling from Shahbagh Avenue's fountain
 Cried out to me
 "Make your verse sing of Sheikh Mujib"
 I'm here to sing of him.

Like all of you here I am partial to dreaming and to love
 A daring dream that came to me last night told me
 "Make your verse sing of Sheikh Mujib"
 I'm here to sing of him.

Let all of you heartbroken people assembled in this
 spring day
 Let all the still, parched, unsuspecting,

Not-yet-blossomed Krishnachura sprigs listen intently
Let the dark cuckoo that will perch on the tree
In the darkening light know I have kissed holy soil
Under my feet this day.
I'll be faithful to the pledge
I have made to the *palash* this day
I'll be faithful to the pledge
I've made to my vision
I haven't come here to shed blood this day
I've come here only to sing of my love for him.

Translated by Fakrul Alam

Such Delight

(For Sufiya Choudhury)

Abul Hasan

Such delight lay within the flesh of fish
 Such delight lay within meat
 The childhood moon kissed the forehead of night
 Such delight lay within the moon
 Such delight lay within women

When is a female called a woman
 Is it when her eyes lips breasts have reached full growth
 Such delight lay within women
 When lying in each other's arms
 We came down from the breasts faces thighs
 Of girls with sweet names abruptly upon cunts like
 oysters
 That is to say when we explored women
 Tearing their nails their darkness with the teeth of lusty
 stags
 Such delight lay within women

When in winter we wound a woolen shawl round the
 neck
 Or snatched a star-fruit from a girl and bit into it
 Such delight lay in the shawl in the starry-eyed girl
 When we'd eat colourful fish fresh meat tasty prawn
 gravy
 Sitting on finely-woven cane mats
 Such delight lay in those mats

I don't remember whose lips I first kissed
 I don't remember the day I had my first bath

Or when eating raw mangoes with salt and chillies
soured the teeth
Or when I had sex for the first time in youth...
Whatever I don't remember is delightful
Oh such delight...

Translated by Kaiser Haq

Moon Alphabet

Mohammad Nurul Huda

and a new alphabet soon came down from the moon
 not Bengali, English, Hebrew, Arabic or Greek , hence
 unknown
 as Horace or Bharat Muni surveyed our ways back
 home
 midnight walks across the seas, cities, ages and domes
 you, too, joined the procession neither to a village nor a
 town

who are you, son of Jocasta or someone ever unknown,
 sleeping in dreams, warring to capture father's crown,
 not a king nor a tenant nor white, black or brown
 all the time coaxing the cosmos, ups and downs

we said 'no', moon replied 'no' as headstrong she
 followed us
 and Bhusuku was sleeping at midnight on the leaves of
 grass
 so Whitman undressed hugging Kahnupa on the bank
 of the Dhansiri
 ah, fisherwomen brought the lamp of fireflies for the
 poet-lovers

we looked around, whales flocked on the sandy shore of
 Darianagar
 skulls of voracious eaters floated on the waves far and
 near
 kings and warriors roared, the lions fled with friendly
 tigers
 and the universe continued flying nowhere in delightful
 tremor

so the moon returned whispering the tales of Helen and
Menelaus
and poked Jibanananda to ink a fresh saga of embarking
a Hades bus
inspiring a poet not born yet in the dews pregnant with
moonbeams

fetters of land, language and letters known so long, who
would trim

World Geography: A Map

Daud Hyder

Beyond the village
On the red earth track
Dusk descended

We five
Crossed five continents
And headed for Vaitarani
The Underworld stream

Then everything changed, the
River, its source, the gull's
Cry, the geography
Of the world, the map of our land –

The lapping waters of the Vaitarani
Were deafening as we made
Our offering of drinking water
To ancestral spirits, each
In their mother tongue,
Sprinkling the vast
Depths of history

Translated by Shahnoor Haq

Fear*Abid Azad*

I'm scared...

Auntie, your smell has driven sleep away,
Now turn the other way; there's such a breeze inside
you,
Such moonlight, such a salty jungle odour.
Large leaves fall with the whoosh of a ghost
Going by; why do lantern flames leap in your eyes?
Are you a festive fairground? An attic? A scattering
Of shelled nuts? Why do you load my hands
With the mellow flames of balls of ice?
The heat of the hair in your nostrils will burn me.
If I burn and turn into ash, will you
Scatter me in the wind with your breath?
Auntie, I'm scared, put me down.

If mother - your sister - sees
She'll rebuke us for sure.

Translated by Shahnoor Haq

The Smell of Corpses in the Air

Rudro Mohammad Shahidullah

Even today I can smell corpses in the air,
 Even today I discern death's naked dance on the soil,
 In a trance I still hear the whimper of a raped woman –
 Has this country forgotten that nightmare night, that
 gory time?

The smell of corpses floats in the air,
 The soil is stained with blood.
 Those who girded themselves touching this blood-
 stained dust,
 Searching for a forbidden darkness amidst a tattered life
 Now lie awake in cages in night's dark caves.

As if ashamed of a wasted life, young mothers are
 benumbed;
 Independence – is it a wasted birth?
 Is it the shameful fatherless child of a woman?

That old vulture has our flag in its tight grip!

The smell of corpses is in the air –
 Yet dancers sway their bodies in neon light.
 The soil is stained with blood –
 And the bones of the starving pile up in rice godowns.

These eyes cannot sleep. I do not sleep the whole night –
 In a trance I hear the cry of a ravished woman.
 Rotting corpses floating like water hyacinth in rivers,
 The body of a headless girl eaten by dogs
 Floats before my eyes – I cannot sleep, I
 Cannot sleep...

Wrapped up in a bloody shroud, eaten by dogs and
vultures,
He is my brother, she is my mother, he is my beloved
father.
Independence – my near and dear one found after a
long search,
Independence – my harvest bought with the blood of
my loves.

The ravished sister's sari – that is the flag of my blood-
soaked nation.

Translated by Mohammad Shafiqul Islam

Fire Engine

Masud Khan

Having fled the madhouse, the lunatic darted up the tree.

Nothing would make him come down, he said,
Except for the pleas of that midget-size nurse!

The nurse came running, quick as a fire engine,
Waving wildly at him. Her gestures were coded
messages

Inducing the lunatic to climb down from the tree top.
Just as the operculum of koi fish will descend on the
dining plate

Entranced by the smell of steaming curry,
He descended easily and freely,
As consecutive numbers do when one counts down.

The lunatic's thoughts flickered across the nurse's
consciousness.

This day that mad man will return once more to his
asylum.

Placing his head on the confessional,
He will soundlessly suffer thirteen electric shocks
Designed to induce thirteen confessions from him
At the directive of the calm and composed head priest!

Translated by Fakrul Alam

The Fall

Taslima Nasreen

A woman remains a woman in the end.
 At first of course she rages, breaks
 Or scratches with ten nails
 The collar of imposed conventions,
 Turns things topsy-turvy...
 Avoids society's zebra crossing,
 Goes neither left nor right
 Nor turns around
 But walks straight on
 With arrogant gait.

Men on the street whistle
 In unison, crowd the pavements,
 Lean over the railings of roofs
 And gawp. Some miserable females
 Part their veils to stare wide-eyed
 And a few dogs with drooling tongues
 Dog her footsteps.

She reacts angrily, driven to distraction,
 Scratches at social ills with venomous nails
 But in the end that girl too
 Remains a woman,
 She too wants to arrange clothes
 On the clothes-horse,
 Add a few cloves and cardamoms to the rice pudding.

One day, dousing her fire
 In the ice of interdictions
 She too grows tame,
 Secretly orders from the jeweller's
 A pair of eternal bangles.

Translated by Shahnoor Haq

Mother

Shamim Reza

In his boyhood someone called Jean Genet
 The son of a whore, and ever since
 At the door of every brothel, beside
 The statue of a maternal figure
 His invisible hand wanders about –

Some may have seen him
 Completely metamorphosed into a star-fruit tree,
 Others think any tree, maybe
 A star-apple tree, seen in the yard
 Of a brothel is Jean Genet.

A tireless warrior against ugliness,
 Who imagined himself a dancer at *Les Fouxboules*
 And slept many nights with a pimp
 With amputated forearms
 And whose heroes were death-row murder convicts:
 These too sought beauty between the seen and the
 unseen.

Cocteau and Sartre once brought up the subject of his
 mother.

Sartre later said his sorrowful eyes seemed to show
 The tossing waves of the Atlantic and the Arabian Sea
 And the next instant send forth a desert storm.
 Every drop of breast-milk from the mother
 Who suckled Genet, even if only once,
 Every drop seemed to be Genet's bloodstream.

Translated by Shahnoor Haq

Bhutan

Tattoo Power

Ngawang Phuntsho

She is leaving him
like all others who have left
he will never be ready to lose her
like dozen others who have gone

He has charmed women
like the snake charmers of south
making them dance to his rhythm
his skill like a magician's knew no bounds

Just those three words
and the prey was his already
his magical potion
this girl is unique he thought

Now for the first time
an emotion called love was born
love needs no explanation
no artificial engraving, he reasoned

Pulling his sleeve up
covering his three magic stings
he gives her a huge hug
he means it all - for the first time.

Time weathers
and today his arm bears
three fading magical stings
"I love you"!

To the Cuckoo*Sonam Dorji*

Oh! Cuckoo, you are the pilgrim of the day!
You bring an ethereal smile to every lip.
In the golden dawn of springiest day,
You wake hopeless morn into happy weep.

On the bough of pine in the clime of spring
Your chanted melodies are loud and sweet.
You have the miracle to hold the beauty of spring.
When you sing in the lyre of your wit,

You sing like a wandering minstrel,
That soothes every beast with gentle voice.
Even mighty fellows of earth follow your trill,
In search of your sweet soaring voice

You have the melodies that never should die,
Let your sweet jargons embark the heart of hearts.
Yet, what you express I know not, but before you die
I will take your melodies till my everlasting rest

Bygones*Sonam Dorji*

The rain tapping outside my hut,
Taking down my only rose in the mud

Memory, a device, mirroring the past,
Good or bad, it comes in haste.

In the peaceful vale of natural beauty,
I find my brimmed eyes elusively misty

Constant works made me crazy,
Life there is not so dull and lazy.

A wife mourning the loss of her husband,
How long can footprints remain in the sand?

On the royal queen of hill,
I still became ill.

Let bygones be bygones, it does not matter,
Now I am fine, it feels better.

Paradise in the Himalayas

Sonam Dorji

In the heart of the soaring Himalayas,
Flourished by the dharma of Buddha,
With never fading sunshine and rain,
Lies Dragon kingdom in its pristine beauty.

The lovely Queen and destined King,
Give us love, which fills our life with affection.
Government here always thinks and ponders,
Making its people and making others wonder,
With every single thought, every single deed.

People here always are united in heart
Together singing the heavenly hymn....
Here is a home, which needs no roof,
Providing shelter to its tender nation,
A home in our heart it does engrave.

No End*Tshering Choden*

Come sit by me
I will show you something

Look at the sunset
The darkness is following.
It is not the end,
There is tomorrow
The sun will shine again.
Look at that rose, do you see?
It is all dried and withered.

See the other one,
It is blooming, isn't it beautiful?
The garden is rich.
The road is wide open
I'll go right, and yours is left.
The moon is on her throne
Why do you worry?
We will meet every full moon night.

Come, let us take a walk
I'll show you another thing....

House of Ghosts

Tshering Choden

The hollow shell is crackling down
 I need to save it but how?
 The beautiful thought has been consumed
 By the powerful jaws of anger
 The fire has smoldered the brain in my skull.

Trying to make others see:
 What I got is more than theirs
 What I did was better than theirs
 How I lived was more luxurious than theirs
 What I ate was more nutritious than theirs...
 Pride got me losing my reason, I lost my world.

Not wanting to let go of anything,
 Loneliness jumped into my list.
 More and more was gone,
 From the list of what I loved.
 Until my soul abandoned me
 Attachment is bad, but realization came late.

One green eyed monster
 Corners around the house,
 She never let anybody aside, oh!
 She speaks less and is pessimistic.
 Regretting her fate, despising others, spelling curses

Knowledge never comes in now,
 The door is closed and
 Ignorance is holding it tight.
 Its branches like hands,

Has closed all the windows as well
The House will never prosper,
The five ghosts are dwelling inside.
The house is me, the house is you.

Eventuality*Ngawang Phuntsho*

Love once we thought was undying
have now slowly died away.

Smiles that were once bright
have now slowly faded away.

Hearts that once transmitted joy
are now lifeless, cold and frozen.

Hands that folded two souls,
now folds but itself singly.

Feet that once ran to each other,
now retreat an inch by inch.

World that was once before us,
is now moving away from us.

Life once we promised writing
is now wasted away in crying.

Nepal

Midday and Cold Sleep

Bhoopi Sherchan

I am seeking faces of my days to come
 in the "Wanted Column" of papers
 I'm seeking some space to stand
 in every demonstration, assembly, public gathering
 and in every pile of files of the fiscal year.

I'm seeking assurance from
 the lips of the new budget
 I awaiting some words of solace
 from the radio-announcement
 I am calculating the life span of my family
 with the pay-scale recently announced.

Every notice of vacancy invigorates me
 But, life stinks like perspiration in my armpits
 upon hearing the result of each interview
 Some stirs anguish in my mother's love
 and chilled sigh creeps into my father's reassurance.

It seems
 as if *sindoor*¹ is reluctant to dwell
 in my virgin sister's forehead
 And as if my wife is serving me a satire in the plates.

It's been ages
 I have been wandering hither and thither

¹ Vermilion power put on by a married woman on her parting hair in the middle as a mark of being married and having her husband alive.

carrying my face like a petition paper
frequenting this and that door.

A cold sleep is hovering around me
Every now and then
I know for certain
if I fall asleep this time
I'll never wake up again.
So
O you folks creeping like caterpillars!
O words of slogans!
Shout louder and louder
Alas! I wish not to fall asleep at midday
Wake me up!
Wake me up!

Translated by Bal Rām Adhikāri

Residual Questions¹

Bairāgi Kāinlā

For their denial to offering themselves as levies
 For parents' defying to denoting their sons,
 students and teachers or youths
 are charged of being informants
 and kidnapped or disappeared
 in the mock scuffles or crossfire are killed mock
 guerrillas
 or some survive the undergoing 'people's action' or
 secret investigation
 Sure enough, with the bullets pierced in their heads and
 brains
 Krishna Rāj Yogi² and other innumerable Yogis are still
 surviving....

Bullets can hit from the camouflage or combats or
 civilian dress
 Bullets can hit from the guns in any hands
 Smoke from gunpowder or cloud of dust raised
 by the trotting feet of guerrillas
 has clouded the baffled mind
 and the unknown situation of dreams,

¹ During the protest against the regression, artists and writers stopped their creation and staged a protest against the dictatorial rule; at the same time making creation a powerful means. On that occasion, Manoj Nyaupāne had requested me for a poem so as to produce a collection of Protest Poems. I present this revised version to the young poet.

² Krishna Rāj Yogi from Bardiyā Dhodaree, Nepal was shot in his head for his failure to give a forced donation. He is still living with the bullet stuck in his head.

their revelation in the public and crying out for life
has turned but a cry in wilderness....

This life, ever in a trap,
has nothing to fear, nor any support to hope for
upon witnessing an endless file of clean shaved boys'
heads³
and the women in the white dress⁴
all the way from Rukum to Rabi,
from Rolpā to Jhāpā⁵
swept away by the raging flood of blood
and the elderly, all bewildered,
standing by the roads like the old dead trees

No tears drop from grandparents' eyes,
compelled to witness the shooting of their
tender children's future
from the widowed women's eyes
compelled to witness their husbands being hacked to
death
nor is there any trace of resistance in the eyes of a
husband
whose wife was raped before his very eyes

From high mountains in the north to plains below
in all the waters from the Mechi to Mahākālī⁶
from jungles to highways
there is fire everywhere- the nation is on fire,
rendering the people insecure and their lives uncertain

³ Indicates they are mourning their parent's death.

⁴ Widows are in the white dress.

⁵ Various conflict-stricken districts of Nepal.

⁶ Rivers that flow along the borders of the east and west of Nepal.

Who is on this side? Who on that?
 No side in the eyes of those transcending all sides
 If anything left, they're a blank mind and an arid heart.

The unknown future is lurking somewhere
 Petals thrashed by hailstones are strewn everywhere
 No pigeons fly in the sky
 Each house has turned into a front
 Only the guerrilla citizens are roaming around
 Houses have turned into burning crematoriums
 Schools graveyards
 Which one is your friend and which one is your foe?
 Even such questions are meaningless
 What life to live and what for? All the efforts are
 fruitless

Yet there is *something*-
 when fire is set to houses and they keep burning
 when fire is set to bodies and they keep burning
 when fire is set to hearts and they keep burning,
 regressive forces and their accomplices
 raise their hoods from the laps of the snowy lands
 from the shoulders of the hills
 and from the vast expanses of the low lands,
 and from the corners of Tudikhel, the parade ground,
 the hoofs of unleashed horses trample around
 as it happens on some occasions, for instance,
 say in the Bhānu Jayanti⁷ last year
 the writers were just caught by their hands
 and were forcibly put on the chariots for a ride

⁷ On the occasion of observing the birth anniversary of Bhānu
 Bhakta Āchārya (1814), the first Nepali Poet.

They moved them around the heart of the city
and the feudal lords like Bista⁸ and their accomplices
did walk behind,
ringing the death bell.

I am observing all this
We are silent spectators—
we citizens, labourers and poor farmers
teachers, students, and all youths
What is left now?
If something, there are just a few questions still alive—

Do people stop going across the River Tamor only
because its bridge is broken apart?
Can they destroy people and bring an end to their
dialogue
merely by dismantling towers of communication?
Will people be annihilated merely by destroying them
in one scuffle and some crossfire?
Be it the battle in the eighteen cantos or of eighteen days
or be it the 18th or the 19th of the month,
have the humans been wiped out completely even after
the battle of Kurukshetra⁹?
Writers, poets and artists stand for people's
emancipation,
for their sovereignty, for their right to live together

⁸ Alluded to the Royalists and anti-revolutionaries led by Kirtinidhi Bista, once Prime Minister, who used to threaten the freedom fighters with a warning: "Siren of Death", *Mrityuko Ghanti*.

⁹ The battle narrated in the story of the *Mahābhārata*; alluded to the 2006 April uprising in Nepal.

for the protection of democratic values and principles
 and against the abduction of imagination and creativity
 Fearless creators are still writing
 holding the placards of revolution high
 tied to the points of their pens
 defying the prohibition orders
 at Saraswāti-Sadan, Bhotāhity, Indrachowk¹⁰
 and on the ground of Gurukul¹¹
 Can curfew be imposed throughout life?
 Can they put a Poornavirām¹², that is, full stop, to the
 pen forever?

Translated by Govinda Rāj Bhattarāi

¹⁰ Densely populated ancient market places in Kathmandu.

¹¹ Gurukul, an important theatre house at the heart of Kathmandu, its activities supported the 2006 revolution, the protest against the regression. On a historic day many protesters, including the poets were beaten, arrested and taken to custody. As a staunch supporter of democratic values, the freedom fighter (the poet) portrays the horror and shows his conviction – we will win.

¹² Alluded to the brutal action meted out by the government army to the revolutionary poet Poornaviram, who suffered six months of severe torture and hardly escaped death from their hands. He was released after the Human Rights Activists protested against the brutal action widely.

Three Forms of a Male: My Perspectives

Kundan Sharmā

You, the beloved

I had to desert you amidst our love
 I had to forget you keeping you in my memory
 You dwell somewhere in my heart
 Every time I miss you
 I sit all by myself and peep within
 To find you more and more charming
 To find myself growing more and more fond of you.

I wonder-
 Had you been my husband,
 Would my memory of you
 Be as pleasant as it is?
 The thing we have appears so cheap
 And the thing we desire seems so supreme
 Right!

You, my imagination,
 In my heart I keep you nurturing
 I adorn you with all that I wish for
 Perhaps, because of this you look more and more
 charming!

You, the husband

Though in love,
 Sometimes I find no charm in you
 I feel so fed up with you
 I feel sudden anger at you,

Yet I cannot desert you as per my wish
 Many a time I left you
 Many a time I rushed back to you
 Now I can only threaten to leave you
 And in this threatening
 I sense you'll find some way to stop me
 I'll find some excuse to come back to you again.

You and I have opened a joint-account of life
 It cannot run in your absence
 Nor can it be in use in my absence
 Alas!
 Are you an addiction that I can never beat?
 Now I am addicted to you
 You are my reality; you have become my life
 Where should I run off leaving you behind?

You, the father

As I gave birth to a baby
 You grew contented with a piece of my flesh
 Now you look rather assured
 Maybe, you think I can desert you no more
 Leaving my part with you
 I can live no more.

With the arrival of the child
 My love is divided.

The baby is so closer to me
 He seems as if only mine
 You feel lonely as if orphaned
 You often take issue with me

You often look fumed
And before my very eyes
You grow smaller and smaller than my own child
And appear like my another child
Is it that you are seeking your mother in me?

Translated by Bal Rām Adhikāri

Prison

Krishna Sen Ichhuk

I am within the walls
 You are outside
 I am guarded by sentries
 You are free of their surveillance
 I am in the torture chamber
 You are in the open camp
 Whether it is the snare,
 the trap of a hunter, or his noose,
 it makes no difference, my friend,
 this life wherever it may be,
 when it is within someone else's fist—
 an enslaved life is likened to prison.

Where this life is imprisoned
 within bondage
 Where your beautiful dreams are
 tagged illegal
 Where your free desires are encaged
 Where your cordial feelings get hurt
 Where breathing freely, even if the stale air
 in a stinking place, is restricted,
 whether it is under the guard of guns
 or in the snare of the law,
 what difference does it make, my friend?
 A terrified life in a frightening situation
 is prison, wherever we may be living.

Where they keep patrolling all the time
 Where the siren blows with or

without any reason
 like the hooves of a horse
 on the road without reigns
 Where there are march pasts with
 a shrill noise
 Where the clouds thunder untimely
 and blood begins to rain
 what difference does it make, my friend?
 Whether it is within or outside the walls
 when my chest ever becomes their target
 wherever it may be, it is likened to prison.

Usual days and nights, dusks and dawns accompany
 me—
 the same disillusionment and a wretched life
 Usual motionless time is with me
 like a closed lake without any outlet
 Where there is a dirty society and a dark room to live
 whether it is an alien land
 or my dear homeland
 what difference does it make, my friend?
 This demoted life in an oppressed society
 is likened to prison
 wherever we may be living.

Translated by Govinda Rāj Bhattarāi

Song of Porokmibā Yāmphamibā, the First Man of the Creation¹

Dharmendra Bikram Nembāng

In the olden days there was nothing in the universe
 There was no Earth no Sky and no Ocean
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void
 There was no soil no air no fire no creatures at all
 There was neither light nor any night
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void
 There were no seasons no winter no summer no rains
 No rivers and rivulets nor any woods and forests
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void
 There were no craggy hills no majestic mountains
 No Terai no hinterland
 No nations no castes no crops
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void....

There was no clock no plane no ship nor any vehicles
 No passport no citizenship no ownership
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void
 There were no cities no sites for buildings no flower
 gardens
 No villages no yards nor any sweepings
 Neither industries nor any machines
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void....

The was no Nepal no UK no USA no India no Russia
 nor Japan

¹ First Man according to *Mundhum*, the scripture of genesis in the Limbu clan, an indigenous group, especially from the eastern part of Nepal.

There were no philosophies no Buddhism Marxism
 No postmodernism no multicolorism
 No temples no mosques no churches stood anywhere
 else
 Let alone any gods and goddess residing therein
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void
 There were no cell phones no computers let alone
 facebook
 No poetry no fiction no criticism let alone any anti-
 criticism
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void....

There prevailed no trace of wrath no grudge
 Let alone any conflict and war
 No objectivism no subjectivism no colorism
 No books no newspapers
 Let alone any means of communication
 There was no assembly no program
 Let alone any chairperson or chief guest
 There was but *sunyatā* the Void
 And in that Void existed but I...

There was no history no mathematics
 Neither grammar nor any culture
 There was *nothing* means there was *everything*
 There was *everything* means there was but the Void
 Where I existed
 The Void was alive like an ameba
 And colors were stirring subtly in the Void...
 At this moment you've arrived at Pauwasārtap²

² The native place of the poet inhabited by the Limbu people.

There were no gorges between Silauti and Sehonamlang
 hills
 And nor any gorges between Mahabhara and Tinjure
 hills
 No slopes no precipices plains all around
 The Nibu River nearby was waiting to burst out...

One by one the crusts of Void began to rupture
 Every now and then petals of colors would fall off into
 the Void
 Every now and then red white black colors would take
 off their tracks
 From that very day
 Quality nature and feature of colors set the Creation in
 motion
 From that very day colors began pouring down into the
 Void
 From that very day colors flooded the Void
 From that very day colors throttled the Void
 From that day the Void was in captivity of colors....

Translated by Bal Rām Adhikāri

[Note: In the this poem, the translator has intentionally avoided the use of any comma, full stop and hyphen as per the experiment that the poet has done in the original version and his wish to retain its spirit in the English translation as well. Since the poet talks about the time when there was no language, let alone any grammar, he wishes to keep his poem free from the mechanics of grammar to the extent possible.]

Death Bag

Thākur Belbāse

Perhaps, everyone is thirsty for life
But not everyone thirsts for love.

One needs a heart to love
And eyes that can see far and wide
And a pond of tears within the heart
More than this, a mind that
is ready to die moment by moment.

Along the love-path
One must also embark on the journey of death
constricting oneself, writhing around, crying and
laughing
in self-immolation and isolation.

At this moment I love you,
At the same time I walk ahead
embracing a death bag.

I do remember
your eyes
your smiles
And I keep wallowing in them.

At this moment
You are this earth, this sky, this sun,
this moon and these stars,
You are this dreary, pitch black night
this tedious time, too,

Yet, why can't I touch you?

You are the River Seti rushing down
for committing suicide
When mind agrees and heart loves it
one takes every bondage for freedom.

You are the goddess, all unknown,
Who, after upturning the firmament of peace
Into my heart,
forces me to sing the song of chaotic life.

You are Mt. Everest in my life:
I am the first summitter,
I will hoist the flag of my love
or the white paper of death there.

Every moment
I long for your caress
And I love you
And keep dying every second for you.

Tell me, my dear,
Are you my death, appearing?
in front of me in the garb of love?

Translated by Govinda Rāj Bhattarāi

The Last Poem

Sajan Kumar

May you listen to me in silence, not in words
 May you seek me in my soul, not in body
 May you meet me in utter darkness, not in the
 moonlight
 May you feel me with your heart, not with your mind.

You can find me merely in silence
 You can meet me in solitude, in meditation
 We will melt only in thoughts of *sunyatā*, the void
 Where else will you find me other than this?
 I am not anywhere; nowhere; yet everywhere.

Didn't you hear the lamentation of my kinsmen?
 Didn't you see the neighbors attending my funeral?
 Didn't you feel my soul flying away from my flesh?
 My body was burning in that *vātikā*, the garden
 Obliterating my physical being
 I was bidding you farewell for good.

My deeds had already been the matter of their talk
 They were talking about the sobbing of my soul
 They were pondering over my quest for the Supreme
 Soul.
 Alas! If only all this had happened a bit earlier.

To the raging flames I was offering my soul too
 In the hope of liberating myself
 From the cycle of suffering
 Wishing to leave for good,

And not to return here again and again
Neither in reality nor in dream.

Yet I wanted
You to listen to me
I wanted you to seek me
To touch me
To feel me
To embrace my soul, not my body
It turned out to be but my daydreaming, though.

My wish would remain unfulfilled
My soul would keep crying
I had committed myself to laugh
And to make you laugh
My soul is crying louder than ever
Who can make it laugh...?
Can you?
Can she?
It is the hope that is enduring my soul
Though crying inward, it has ever laughed outward
It has ever laughed outward.

Translated by Bal Rām Adhikāri

Looking for a Dream in Peaceful Effulgence

Sandhyā Pahādi

I need a shaft of light
 whether it showers down from the heavens
 or sprouts out of earth
 or blooms in future,
 For
 one cannot see the path
 on dark nights,
 tired hands
 cannot impede darkness.
 We must keep walking
 and eyes call for the warm embrace of sight
 I need a shaft of light.

I want peace
 whether it radiates from the Buddha
 or yields from the world that the Buddha shaped
 whether it comes from the austerity in the wilderness
 or it germinates from the very clamor.

My eyes cannot stand the sight of blood
 These hills and dales cannot bear tears and edginess
 Let the Buddha appear in everyone's face.

Let everyone's heart turn clean and pure
 I pray for a bloodless revolution
 I need peace.

I need a dream
 Whether it surfaces in my eyes

or it is composed by my pen
or it comes with the floating clouds
or in the music of a song.

The eyes that fail to dream
can never see
Dreamless eyes cannot cry
nor can they smile.
One needs tears and laughter for life
One has all rights to claim for one's own life
So I die for the dreams.

Translated by Govinda Rāj Bhattarāi

Pakistan

Page from an Explorer's Diary

Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi

The forest is so devilishly dense
but its monstrous trees
never leaf or flower.
Although they rise, bare skeletons,
to dizzy heights,
even the desert wattles
will find them laughable.

Not even a bud
in this maze of branches
which may tinge it with beauty
if not with liveliness.
Not a bird flits about
to undo the sleepy stillness
of years on end.

A forest which no longer knows
what it is supposed to be.
Nothing has changed here
since time began.
Bare, tangled frames
of trees in endless rows;
and down below
the worms which cling to the roots
and feed on blood.

Translated by M. Salim-ur-rahnuuu

As for Birds in the Jungle*Wazir Agha*

And as for birds in the jungle?
The birds blazing like
specks of words
floating higher and higher
toward Heaven have finally
perched
on the rim of the sun
and the moon. Slashed and split
into tiny crumbs of letters,
they are now dropping
one by one
assembling. then appearing like
inscriptions
on foreheads.
And we – the wretched ones.
no longer human,
are installed like tomb-stones
on our own graves. We are now
flakes of smog.
impressions of pottery,
created on the potter's wheel of sound.
We are now
our own phantoms.
Walking barefoot
in the smouldering jungle fire,
we are now mere shadows of ourselves –
a tiny touch of breeze, as it were. We are
ashes to ashes
and with our ashes
we have besmeared our dark faces.

Translated by the poet

A Fishermen's Village

Aziz Hamid Madani

Here is a settlement
marked by fearlessness.
No tensions haunt it.
Living it up with storms
it stands facing the sea.
Houses in a row, sketchy,
like a disorderly growth.
The interior of the dwellings look
like runic markings.
The mouldering walls,
and the discoloured bricks.
The sea spray blows in
like an incantation.
The door frames have a crazy look,
the handles twisted out of shape.
The tiles on the roof
resemble magic beads.
The doors look like holes
punched out by squalls.
The door chains rattle
and set up a berserk tune.
The lanterns shine
through the billowing smoke
like the eyes of a cat
staring up from the bottom
of dried up well.
After a good sleep
the fishermen get up and sit
like ascetics

in front of smoky fires.
A sprawl of nets dredge up
the depths of the sea.
Up comes the catch,
a literal fish galore.
The rising wind, in its insolence,
whips up the surge;
and out they go.
the riders of the sea.
Bred by sea storms,
these men traverse the main,
draped in the twirling waves.
Lashed by the storms
their boats which look
like fish scales
sail across the sea.
Iron rings secure the nets
and trapped within
these fish struggle.
Their lives are governed
by a single tenet:
hardihood is all.
Their brawn a fiat of exertion.
On board the boats the earthen lamps
burn unsteadily. Their faces seem
as if dipped in
a melt of sapphire blue.
Free as the eagles
the sails swell out
and match the wind's bluster
in a language the wind
can understand.
Billows of the sea, here is a clan

with which you have
an open kinship
Look at these weary arms
and the potent sea.
To each the honour
that its rank entails.
From dawn to dusk,
through stormy day,
You belong to them,
they belong to you.
You have listened to their songs,
the airs which seem to be
the warp and woof of storms.

They are indeed
your most ancient secret-sharer.
They are the oldest
voice on earth.

Translated by M. Salim-ur-rahman

Still - life*Munir Niazi*

A pair of eyes
riveted to a venetian blind.
A handkerchief of blue silk
on a floor of mini-bricks.
A man and a woman
whispering in a dark room.

A long way below the arch
of a door left ajar.
A faded and crinkled garland
on the wooden threshold
and beyond it some flower-beds
like a riot of colours
as I make my way down a lane
with my eyes shut tight.

Translated by M- Salini-ur-rahman

The Old Teacher

Gilani Kamran

(1)

My age
about fifteen or sixteen.
His, sixty and four:
between us stood a wall:
the present and past.

'On this spring, arose my image,
shimmered and drowned;
like a pebble in the square,
trampled by my feet,
time has forgotten all!

'which spring,
what image do you mean?' I asked.
'Aspirations, effort,
have but this worth,'

'In thirty years,
the moon, the sun
see through the arch or the world
another age,
witness happenings,
baffling, odd.

'The spring is murky,
its water, with my rare blood,
I had made pure;
with restive nights and days.
mirror of the times that were,
myself I had cleansed;
now it's just me,
friendless, alone
and the barren land.

(2)

On his old lips writhed
 a word or grief,
 a sinful phrase,
 his eyes shed tears,
 the fruition of his life.

'Your tears on barren earth,
 old Father, would break hell loose;
 in the skies, the gracious God
 on doomsday
 would be sorry, grieved.

'These pupils, these specks of dust.
 will tomorrow be
 the moon, the stars
 in dark nights,
 for travellers Journeying new paths,
 your words will be a solace.'

(3)

But he!
 Into a spring he turned,
 in his own sand he coiled,
 donned in the garb of loss,
 across the land, in all seasons,
 his tears in torrents rained.

Translated by Yasmeen Hameed

Ghazal

Saleem Ahmed

Hearts I infuse with pain, in the eye I culture pearls
 Make ornaments that mothers adorn

Time stalks me, wary I grow
 Paper warriors I raise in defence

My sailors are fated to row wrecked boats
 Their sails I patch, their anchors restore

This land, my mother, my honour dear
 This mantle I make to shield its name

A gypsy's life I now contemplate
 For homes have only adversities brought

This pen's my staff let wizards know
 A python I hold to turn on my foes

I bleed to nurture pearls, that
 From water the seashells fabricate

My dreams when darkened by night's gloom
 With light-shafts I shape in the moon

Translated by Mushir Anwar

A Moment's Journey on Sand

Ahmed Shamim

I was handsome and comely;
 like the fragrance
 packed in books,
 the breath was still;
 pictures I sketched
 with many unsaid words;
 on wings of birds wrote poems
 for those who lived on distant lakes;
 far away they lived
 but stayed so close!

With the morning rays,
 would alight a new journey,
 and I would say:
 Mother,
 butterflies have such lovely wings;
 give me a kiss on the brow,
 for I must leave
 for the land of glow-worms and butterflies;
 they beckon me;
 from the window,
 their glowing colours,
 borne by the wind,
 allure me
 towards the new path
 on a new day;
 give me a kiss on the brow.

Translated by Yasmeen Hameed

Two Worlds

Hasan Abidi

I remember those days of my childhood,
the mud-house;
in its courtyard
in the chequered shade of the mulberry tree,
on the cool earth
I would lie down,
my hands on my face,
peeping through the chinks between my
fingers
at the sky,
looking and musing,
why was it so serene,
why so bright and deep blue?
Closing my eyes
I would lose myself in the blue vastness.
If the wind stepped down stealthily
from the mulberry branches
and pulled away from my face,
the blanket of the transient shade,
I would then return from the blue expanse.
But now I have reached
a stage in my life
where the relaxing chair
symbolizes anxiety;
my eyes screened by the morning newspaper,
this chair never relieves me of myself.
I watch the sky
from the haven of my brick-house
and think,
which place do I belong to now,

where trees are bare and lynched,
demons possess their virtue, their shade;.
Why does the earth seethe,
why so insolent, the wind,
why all ashy the blue sky sky above me,
why my eyes blinded by black sunlight?

Translated by Yasmeen Hameed

Courier Pigeons

Ahmad Faraz

This blood
Which has reddened
The streets of my cities,
Its people's clothes
Will usher in tomorrow's
Seasons and suns.

Fine, you censored
The bold black headlines.
Shackled the word,
Fettered the pen.

But try to stop these winds too
Which sweep through
Streets
Bazaars
Highways,
Carrying from city to city
The red of your slaughterhouses,
Aroma of fresh blood.

Fools!
If pigeons are caged
Winds carry the message.

Translated by M. H. K. Qureshi

My House on a Star

Akhtar Husain Ja'afri

I have built my house on a star,
a house in which your name
is like a brilliance.

The night, indeed, is my enemy.
Even so my roof
is not fortified
I don't take cover in trenches.
I live outside the self.
This place will bristle
with soldiers tomorrow.
Ask them why the night
is my enemy.
Show them the sky,
in which I trust;
show them the star
of insurgence
which shines
on the skyline of friendliness.

And on that star I have built my house,
a house in which your name
is like a brilliance.

Translated by M. Salim-ur-rahman

Fresh Flowers of Love

Iftikhar Jalib

This book about Wittgenstein;
a gift by a girl to her lover,
hoping
it would find some space
in his bookshelf.

The cold desire
did acquire a place
but on the footpath,
among old, used books
that non noticed.

Who would know,
what the eager heart
had longed for,
I mumbled.
placed it in the bookshelf
and forgot:

Fresh blossoming flowers of love
remain in books for ages;
suddenly, petals and leaves
of longing, madness and words
wither, disintegrate;
fateful for the mad ones!
It guides a moment conceiving a new world,
This book about Wittgenstein.

Translated by Yasmeen Hameed

So Many Colours

Sarwat Husain

On the far side of the iron bars
some trees, a road, a man holding a dog's chain
and a line on which colourful clothes are drying.
These clothes without bodies, this field without children
this road without love
how small the world looks

When the colourful clothes have dried
a woman will come
then one by one these shirts, pants, dresses
will each receive its own body
then the field will fill with children
and the children with joy

This small creation will fill with colours
so many colours
oh woman, so many colours!

Translated by Frances W. Pritchett and Asif Farrukhi

The Story of a Heritage

Ghulam Hussain Sajid

When I was very young
I loved roaming about barefoot...

Walking on grass, drenched in an imperceptible
but ice-cold layer of silvery dew,
I still derive a kind of pleasure
that may be beyond any poetic metaphor
but the pleasure of stepping on it barefoot
was even more intense
than the icy enchantment of the dew-drenched grass.

Early in the morning, when the earth
like a large painted dish
slowly rotating on its axis, filled up
with discordant sounds,
emanating from trees, streets and houses,
with delicate laces, my feet were tied up
in heavy leather shoes
and my shoulders were burdened with words,
yet unfamiliar to me
but to whose association I were to be obligated for life.

Joining groups of other naughty children
of my like, kicking dust
and sometimes, on a whim, trying to keep away from it,
I yearned to place my feet, bound in leather
on the fine earth,
with such care that the lines on the soles of my feet
would leave their impression upon the soil,

just as in winters,
touching the warm, misty bathroom mirror
a bather's fingers get imprinted on it for a while.

But I wasn't graced with the good fortune
Of trampling the shiny dew drops
Or to leave the impressions of untruly wanderings of
my
Quivering feet on the soft earth
because my mother took great care not to let my feet
touch the land of my inheritance.

Perhaps she didn't want me to get the feel of it,
because once she had prayed for and permitted
two of my brothers to play on this land.
But climbing out of her lap,
right in front of her eyes, filled with tears,
they had disappeared in the unusually thickening
cloud of dust
and now she didn't have the strength
to witness any part of the story
repeated a third time.

Beside my mother's warmth, what I longed for
was the feel or the soil
but my mother wanted me, to trample the earth
with my heavy shoes.

And not only this,
she wanted me to perform this deed
callously and mercilessly,
lest my eyes, even for a moment
focus upon the earth I tread upon...

Her vengefulness could have led her to this
(for the creator and the creation possess the same
avenging attitudes).

Or maybe she knew
that those who desire to trample the earth
do not have the courage to face it.
If they do attempt to glance
at their footprints
they are taken by the earth's enchantment
and very soon they end up defeated by themselves.
Like my mother, I was aware of this truth
but never wished to trample the earth
or tread haughtily on it.
Rather, I wanted to step on it
like a bird softly floating through the air
would unexpectedly perch on a branch with such mien
that innocent blooming buds
or even the tiniest of leaves on a tree
would not quiver or take fright.

This happened a long time ago.
Today, returning after years of separation
when I tried walking barefoot on the silvery dew,
I could not feel the soft coolness of the soil.
I have stooped to touch the soles of my feet.
to be sure that I've actually taken off my shoes
and it dawns upon me
that my feet are stuck to my mother's eyes
and the earth, tied up in delicate silk laces
deviating from its axis
has moved beyond my exalted thoughts.

It's true that if my benevolent mother
had not been so persistent,
my father's unique heritage
would have gone to dust.
and perhaps, I too.

Translated by Yasmeen Hameed

Soliloquy

Perveen Shakir

It seems
 As if people around me
 Have started speaking a different language!
 The wave length
 On which we could communicate,
 Has shifted to some other cosmos.
 Either my dictionary has become obsolete
 Or their idiom has completely changed!
 Wherever I want to go
 I need a different password,
 To enter into the realm of their semantics!
 I am silent
 For the sanctity of words!
 Now a dialogue is possible
 Either with a wall
 Or with loneliness alone.
 At the most with my shadow!
 I'm afraid of the moment
 When shrinking to myself
 I forget even that frequency
 Which enables me
 To talk to myself.
 I'm scared of the day
 When I'm left screaming:
 May Day, May Day!

Translated by Leslie Lavigne and Baidar Bakht

A Nightingale on the Branch of Night

Shahida Hasan

How sad is the song or the nightingale
on the branch of night.

Here and there, roams in the silence
of a bedroom,

the smoky vapour of a lamp.

As there may be,

in a bygone memory,

an unidentifiable hope.

But, in corporeal time, HOPE, THOUGHT,
KNOWLEDGE:

All are soaked in a nameless thirst.

So, wind of sorrow!

In this mortal world

Who awaits anyone?

So, why this craving

of lips for half opened roses?

Why this faith in gathering clouds?

For anyhow,

This Earth's journey to Ascent is,

Without----'Purpose'.

Translated by Farida Faizullah

Sri Lanka

A poem written in a diary

Gunadasa Amarasekara

(A picture of a weeping mother, hugging a bundle containing a ring, a watch and a pen—the last relics of her son—appeared in a London newspaper in 1971, regards the 1971 insurrection in Sri Lanka. This is the genesis of the poem)

“Your ring, your watch, your pen,
Why have you sent them to me, my son !
For memory’s sake, to have them by,
Or, with them the day’s rations to buy?”

There in my diary is this verse,
Begun then, but never ended;
If not today, not tomorrow, but soon,
Write it, I must, find faith an’ heart to compose.

That morning comes back even now, in freezing snow,
Plodding along a dull London blind alley,
Mine eyes wet, with tears unshed, as these thoughts
Took root in verse, in my heart, to stay.

There in my diary is this verse,
Begun, yet, with no heart to attend,
If not today, not tomorrow, bur soon,
Finish it I must, find the heart to compose.

Are they in the right? Are we in the wrong?
If we be right, then are they wrong?
Is the way ahead, with flowers strewn ever?
Or splattered with blood o’er an’ o’er?
Apprehensive as always, my mind
Struggles, to see, to understand, to agree; the effort

Shatters my faith, withers my heart.

Poet am I, my heart weighed down,
By a grieving world, its sorrows untold,
Such be my role, to relate, to suffer,
Nothing else I see, no duty undone.

“Your ring, your watch, your pen,
Why have you sent them to me, my son!
For memory’s sake to have them by,
Or, with them the day’s rations to buy?”

Translated by Chandra Amarasekera

Portrait of the Priest with the Begging Bowl

Buddhadasa Galappatty

Over the range of mountains
Sun rises smilingly,
Showing the valley below awakening for
Another day.

Women tea pluckers amidst bushes shiver,
In cold breeze, showing their faces
I see them from the hill top.
Winding off the early morning session in
Meditation.
I descend in search around for the morning meal,
With my begging bowl, from house to house,
Pacing slowly.
I see little ones coming out,
Peeping and going on,
Oh! What a lot is cast on their faces,
Never expressed verbally.
I retreat to the adobe once more,
Partake of the roti offered to me,
As the morning meal.
Once again the next day,
I do the begging round,
Stand still before a hut
From whence I here, the sound of weeping
Children.
An infant comes crying
And tries to go in
When I call him to offer a biscuit hidden in
The begging bowl.
Back to my abode
Without any offered food,

(But) tireless I feel, no bodily aches
Only a sense of peaceful bliss
Born in my mind.
(But) what use is such a blissful mood
When the sound of a cry
Mixed with the pangs of hunger,
Is heard from a hut down below the hill.

Translated by Prof. Sunanda Mahendra

The Rifle Lesson*Ariyawansa Ranaweera*

Now, come you all today,
for the rifle lesson,
Look , this is T 56
To shoot,
to kill,
to stab,
this is the handiest tool,
chutty chutty in a fifty,
Seven Hundred and fifty shots,
What a thing,
at a thundering velocity,
aim it high sky,
level it degree forty five,
Keep the left foot forward
half knelt posture,
fill it well with bullets,
hold it well by tender arms.
that hold the future infants
press it well to the breasts,
that feed the future kids
let go off.
the Seven hundred fifty (750).

Translated by Prof. Sunanda Mahendra

Teacher cum Poet Interviewed*Sunanda Mahendra*

The teacher sat quietly
With his bundle of poems on the lap.
And the interviewer a young girl
Asked many a question
“You are a teacher sir, aren’t you?
And a poet, aren’t you?
You write poems in your leisure, don’t you?
Why should you write poems when you are paid a
 good salary for teaching?
For a moment the teacher the poet stood solemn
“What is she trying to drive in?” he thought
Then a smile appeared on his face
“Dear little child!
Ask not why I write poems
I don’t write poems for money
Nor do I write them for any honour
I just get them written down
Like flowers blooming
In a tree destined to be used as timber one day”

Translated by the Poet

My Lonely Single Bed

Samantha Herath

Oh! my lonely single bed
that consoles my forever sobbing heart
that brings forth the poet in me
in a cool comfortable art
Oh! my friendly single bed
that leaves me not

wherever I go,
the single bed is there for me
it shares the warmth of a tear or sigh,
readily with me
When I lie there, with sadness,
it lovingly accepts me
till death do us part,
my single bed is there for me

Yes, there was a time
I realized the wonders of love
and as those secretive memories
are always immortal
You never ever reveal to any body
anything of those memories
Therefore who else but only you are
my bosom pal
When I was
in a far away land of snow fall
When loneliness was a bothering affliction
Whole world seemed an abyss in darkness
without you, how would I have coped my lonely bed

In bad times
when the world brought only weariness
and I felt
only the heart aches and their harshness
When in a dark age,
everything seemed like death traps
like a woman's comforting lap,
my pal, you offered gentleness

If there comes a day
on which life's troubles
can ever be resolved
I'm sure only you'll be there
by my side
'cause no one knows me
better than you do, my lad
Oh! my lonely single bed

Translated by the Poet

"Boy"*Liyanaige Amarakeerthi*

Once
I had a friend,
And
he was just called
" Boy"
Yet
I called him
Only by his real name
"Santha".

Our class teacher,
Who lives in our neighborhood,
Also
called him
"Boy"
When she marked the attendance
every morning
Even when his real name,
"Shantha,"
Was right there
in the list.

By that
I understood
Some people don't even have
names.

Even in that tender days,
I thought
it was
wrong.

So, except when impossible,
I called our teacher
“woman”
I also called her,
When fitting,
“Madam Bigmouth.”

Can a son be robbed of his name
That his father gets drunk
And gets in to fights,
And that his mother gets
incessantly pregnant?

Even Sopaka, the outcaste,
had a name.

I always called my friend
“Santha”

Shantha’s handwriting was awful.
Shantha could not recite a single
mathematical table.
Shantha did not know
even a letter of English.

Yet I always called him,
“Shantha”.

One day
Santha told me,
“I want to fly planes when I grow up”
It made me laugh
really hard.
I almost said,

"Boy"

He could be justified
having such ambitions
If his father could afford
a bicycle at least.

"Pacchaya" or "The man with tattoos,"
Was how we called
Santha's father.

A figure of an airplane
had been tattooed on
his chest.

"You are crazy, Santha!"
I said with my mouth
screwed up like
Madam Bigmouth's.

Yet I always called him,
"Santha."

"If the nameless son of the Man with Tattoos
Can think of flying airplanes
Why cannot I
think of unimaginable things?"
Thought I,
Right on that day.
From that point on
I didn't turn back.
So, I didn't see
Santha.

After that,
I did not turn back

And he got left behind
After the Grade Five
Scholarship Exam.

Yet in my thoughts
he was always,
"Shantha."

Having become famous
way beyond
The bounds of our village,
learned in abroad
On my return flight,
the golden name tag
on a flight attendant's outfit,
"Natalie Greenwood",
the blond girl,
brought to my mind
the nameless boy,
black as darkness,
who wanted yet
to fly the planes
tattooed on
his father's chest.
"Boy is now driving a Three Wheeler
At the 'cuk cuk' park"
My mother told me.

Shantha is a like a king
At the Three Wheeler park
Through a ring-like
cloud of Gold Leaf smoke,
He asks me,
"Mister! When did you come back?"

This *Boy* steals the name
I won with great hardship.
I am worried that he might ask,
“Are you crazy?”

He is ‘piloting’ a Three Wheeler
I am just an airplane passenger.

But still I do not want to call him’
“Boy”
My nameless friend.

Even today,
I call him,
“Shantha” .

Translated by the Poet

Evolution*Rathna Sri Wijesinghe*

I'm coming along the doorsteps
 Of the Indian Ocean
 With its waves
 Barking out to bite into my feet...

The sunlight is pouring on
 The blood-red walls
 Of the lined up meet stalls
 On the ocean lane...

With reddish eyes
 Knife in the right hand
 A young man shouts out
 With the eyes blinking
 In blood-red colour
 Muscles of the well grown biceps
 Shuddering...

Hanging from the iron hooks
 And scattered on the wooden planks
 Are clumps of flesh... and ribs
 Turning the place into a graveyard...

Pieces of the red crests
 Worn like crowns on the heads
 Scattered here and there on the road
 Are decomposing and stinking...

Soft and white wings
 That drifted in the dreams...
 Now drenched in red are carried away into the sea...
 Seasoned hooves are severed
 And thrown on to the big by-lane...

Blood smeared horns
That challenged the rivals
Are thrown away
Hit by the walking sticks in elderly hands...
Hit by the bare and feeble feet...

Translated by Ajith Nishantha

The Flower Boy

Yamuna Malinie Perera

Wandering in the chilly mountains
 Plucking various flowers of various colours
 Emerging from the bends
 Selling those flowers to us by force
 Little son your face alone
 Brings a tear to the memory...

Where is this child from
 Just picked up from the Rose jungle
 Tender steps that should be taken towards the school
 Where have they gone...?

Shutting down the play hut – Rushing away with
 flowers
 Bringing handful of rice
 And providing a meal...
 Taking the place of the father
 You're by the side of your mother...

My son of your age
 Is growing up like a flower...
 The children's world he is blessed with
 Is taken away from you by whom?

Childhood that would never return
 Runs away through the bends
 For us who give you coins
 Is it the merits...
 Or the sins...
 That would ever count?

Translated by Ajith Nishantha

Something Square Shaped

Nandana Weerasinghe

The waterfall splashes down
 Amidst the darkening shadows
 Evoking the itinerant
 Monotonous noise

I search the bottom
 Of the river bed
 In to which it cascades

Pebbles big & small
 Nurtured moulded
 Pounded into a single round shape
 I collect in my palms

What use are these slavish minions
 Who yielded
 To the wiles of water without the murmur
 I throw them back
 To the stream where they belong
 And search and search for
 May be something square shaped
 To take back home as a treasure

Translated by Ariyawansa Ranaweera

At a Refugee Camp in Trincomalee

Thimbiriyagama Bandara

At a day break when the moon was departing,
I saw your face dawned on me,
But with fading eyes and drying lips,
You were a daughter, a damsel, and a mother

In the Jamaliya Camp, when the displaced begged
For their dear lives, I saw you there
fifteen years ago, sucking the breasts of
Your weak mother.

After ten years, I saw your begging for
the food subsidy with poor eyes.
Beside you was an old man, Alas, a tender
leaf caught in a thorny branch.

Still later in three years, I happened to
See an infant daughter sleeping
on your lap. But sad to see that
the mat your mother used to lie, Was vacant.

Again I visited the camp hopefully to
enjoy a smile from you .
But the camp was desolate and a
security man was seated dozing

Oh dear daughter or mother,
even your foot prints were not there,
I visited from camp to camp looking for
a mark of your being.
when wicked winds disturb
the palmirah leaves, sadly sadly
the moon departs and the stars
fade away.

When my own daughter sings
asking for milk from the moon,
I see you in her eyes,
Oh dear daughter, damsel and mother.

Translated by Ariyawansa Ranaweera

The Call of the Wild

Sunanda Karunaratna

On a day when my ménage was away leaving me
alone
I had taken out the old souvenirs that were hidden
somewhere
And taken a look at a soft and round cobblestone
When a flash of lightening happened inside my mind

A stream of thoughts flowed away
Towards a history of two decades
And stopped by a stream of water
That was flowing through the woods

In that youthful age
Whole life was just a feather
I always went into the woods
Obliging to the call of the wild

In a deep and dark forest
Emerging through the giant trees
Taking the chill of the sub canopy
Moving over the maiden ranges of rocks
Immersed in the maiden flow
that carries the crystal-blue water
I got refreshed to my heart's content
Evading the tiredness of my naked body and mind

Crushed shorea leaves were afloat on the muddy
waters
Fish were uncertain with these strange water games
Seeing buried in the sands while wading out
I picked up a souvenir and it was this cobblestone
Promising the waters in woods of 'coming back'
I came away and many years have passed
It was just another place among many more

That I never returned to as promised

This soft and delicate souvenir on my cheeks

Recalls me the call of the wild

I have already passed a long way with my beloveds

How could I turn back just to keep old promises

Translated by Ajith Nishantha

From Within a Refugee Camp...

Kalpana Ambrose

Beloved Sundaram,
 Curled foetus-like within my tent
 in this darkest of nights bankrupted of stars and moon
 The ominous thud thudding of boots
 convulses my universe, jolts me into recalling that
 somewhere beneath this soundlessly sobbing earth you
 sleep

That night, in the pitch darkness
 the panchayudaya fell into the lagoon and the little ones
 lost a father

From near and afar they flock
 With ceaseless, glib questions
 'Isn't this (bitter) rice tasty?
 Have you ever savoured such delicious fare?'

Birds take wing but throttle their song
 Flowers blossom only to be trodden underfoot
 The veena's broken strings stills the melody

If we flee again we shall tangle in the barbed wire
 If we lift our heads we shall be beaten down
 If we shed a tear our entire lineage will be reduced to
 ashes
 Therefore, I shall remain numb
 Breathe imperceptibly

Until you continue to sleep. Yours,
 Radha

Translated by Dr. Malathi De Alwis

At the Fancy Dress Competition

Sajeewanie Kasthuriarachchi

You
Are dressed as a good child
In
A white 'lama sari' (National dress of a girl)
With the hair
Weaved in one plait
Step up
Quietly
Face turned down
Carrying a cluster of 'Araliya' flowers

Controlling of the voice
And the words of your choice
Are very well suited
For a good child

Flying in circles
To their own rhythms
The hawks
From a far end of the sky
Fly down to the ground

With the hawk eyes
Well sharpened
They too
Are contesting

With sarcastic smiles
On the corners of their lips
Spectators are waiting

With the eyes wide open
It's not easy
Not easy at all
To win this game
Dressed as a good child

Translated by Ajith Nishantha

Edwin Aldrin's Response on the News of Neil Armstrong's Demise

Wasantha Priyankara Niwunhella

Dear Comrade!
From today onwards,
The milky moon
That gets into the
American sky
Will bruise my heart
With tears of eternity.

Yes, the milky moon
Brightens the entire America
With its milky soft rays
As did yester years.
BUT FOR ME,
The entire America
Is in total darkness
When cherished memory of you
Comes into my mind.

You who took the greatest step
BEFORE ME
Has now left for an unknown world
BEFORE ME
So from today onwards,
The entire America will miss you
With the dawn of each new moon.

Dear Comrade!
In memory of the greatest step you took
On behalf of the entire human race,

The still waters of five great lakes –
Ontario, Erie, Superior, Huron and Michiga
Will tenderly hold the image of the moon
Quietly in reverence for you.

Translated by H. M. T. C. B. Herath

Moon eclipse*Suminda Kithsiri Gunarathna*

One of the first to have
Made the history
From among earth men
To be on regolith

Shaky reentry though
The red carpet etcetra
Welcome the welcome
And among the elite

Time of my grandeur
Everyone wanted a glimpse
Let along hugs and kisses
I was the astronaut

Flowing champagne
Handshakes all around
Flash lit stage
Being the cynosure

Agenda culminates
With banquet at palace
Received by his majesty
Among dignitaries

The park for folks
Beyond the security
Even the fence
Plus teeming crowds
Came across, embracing

On a bench, further on
Oh my sweet-heart
At the launching

Hell broke on me
She, with another
Dim clouds obscured
The moon, I conquered

Translated by Dr. Nandana Priyankara Gunawickrama

Lusty Desires

Gongithota Sarath

I know my dear husband
at the house that you frequent
there is a mango tree
that bears sweet and delicious fruits

Having gotten very scared
Of your security guards
Other brats never come to that tree
I know that

Struggling to chatter the first words
A cute little kid of yours
Is growing up, I know,
Under the shade of that mango tree

The power of your post
And the power of your wealth
Along with the power of your thuggery
Quieted my 'caste'

Emitting the glitter of your white dress
Presiding the gatherings
You are debating as an intellectual
On moral values!
When I say goodbye willingly
Please listen to me my dear
Is pleasure such a treasure
Didn't ever feel the death
Which is like a crab
that plays in a pot
Burning underneath...!

Translated by Ajith Nishantha

Pollen*Isuru Prasanga*

Listen dear poets!
These are polemic lines
Tracing the pollen
That takes a tiny space
In the hearts of hearts
Yours and mine!

This land is so vast
It's not an easy lazy float
Surging and surfing to reach
A suitable fertile space

Amides hilly dales
Above the ocean waves
Inviting expectations
For a graceful fall is rare
Not even a musty hope
On millions of eyes

The sky overheated
And shimmering blue
Over the cracked dry earth
Only a mirage dance
On the certainty of death
A breath and birth is so difficult

Yet, my dear poetic friends
How can we overlook
The life that is hidden and waits
Within the atoms of atoms

To sprout up and smile
Into a tender leaf
Dusty soil particles
Are more stronger
Than a mountain boulder

Fly pollen
Fly!
Go pollen
Go!

Creating miniature designs
On insect legs
Shivering within flowers
Those flee afloat in streams
Or accompanying the wind
Reach down to tickle
Hidden flowers' secrets
That escaped the drought
And create the seeds
Containing life!

Spreading green canopies
Grow up in thick clusters
Providing shade
To this burning earth!

Translated by Sunethra Rajakarunanayake

The Burnt Fragrance

Bogana Bokanda

With the memory of the flowery fragrance in the Bo tree
terrace

I stroll towards the solitary temple near the tank
The thick darkness that has never seen the moon looks
down in secrecy
And embraces the sand courtyard before lying down
there

Dreams of the memories about the clusters of stars
Buried in the sleeping mountain ranges afar come as
drops of tears
They, I feel, are like chilly drizzling showers
That comforts the tired body in a dark and long night
hours

Flame of the clay oil lamp that drank up the last bit of
oil
Has died leaving the stirred up burnt fragrance
Which has been swallowed by the thick darkness
around
When the frozen chilly breeze was nestling in the trees

Hey, cuckoo birds, the songs you sang in the day
Where are they hidden in a long distance away
Or getting frightened by a wail of a devil bird
Are you sleeping on a tree top hiding it in the breast

Heard from afar faintly and with pauses in-between
The scary and melancholic cry of an owl

Brings about the signs of a bereavement of a bonded
heart
Lamenting on an eternal law of the world

Tender Bo leaves are murmuring in a faint voice
Making my mind query me about a great philosophy
Leaving behind the caressed clusters of sand on the
terrace
Where have the feet hidden after the tiring journey

Translated by Ajith Nishantha

The Daily Wager

Anuradha Nilmini

On the edge of her bed
Almost falling
Waking up the little breath
Filled with pains and aches

With the firewoods and red flames of fire
Struggling in the kitchenette

Lighting the hearth
Boiling the milk
Mixing her love in it

“Elder son”
Now it’s your turn
“Darling daughter”
Keeping the big jug near him

“What’s the time
Hurry up
Have you forgotten
To check your books”

“Red rice is for you
White rice for my son
For my darling little one
There’s gram for the breakfast”

The machine is in the auto mode
Without failing to do the full load
The rhythm of her walk

Shows that she's not just a machine
Tata, bye in the house
Makes it a deaf and dumb school
In her round face
There's a drop of tear

Her heart urges again and again
To bring the feet that walk miles and miles
in and around the house together
And to stretch on a bed or a mattress

A heap of dirt
Has reached far above the waist line
Whole of the house
Is a stinking sewage bag

Can't look at the cooking area
There you can see
A lot of wailing earthenware

Giving a glance of compassion
To the aching feet
A calmed down gust of wind
Moved around the house

When the dusk was limping along
With the looks of sorrow on the face
The moon was also in the courtyard
Witnessing the wilting of a flower

The damsel who
Scratches pots,
Washes plates and clothes

Went to the bed
That makes her sad
And hurts her heart

Absorbing all the suffering
In an instant
Her sleep took
The wings to fly

She who never loved
Anyone in her life
Huddled or attached
In a shower of parties
Filled with colourful wines
Smiled savoring the drink of love

“What’re you doing
Up till the midnight?”
It’s a secret
Blasted on the ears
Planks of the bed got splattered
After performing the duties for the day

Translated by Ajith Nishantha

Tributing the man who gave me water

Jayantha G. Jothiyarathne

In that unknown area
 I met that very strange man
 Accidentally.....
 Yes.....
 I met
 That very strange man.....

Who gave me something
 That not even a sibling
 Would ever give...
 Not even a relative
 Who would hang around when we succeed
 And desert us when we're in need
 Would ever give...

Amongst the non-humans
 Who try to live
 By robbing and selling
 Others'
 Flesh and blood...
 Kidneys...
 Or lungs...
 This noble man...
 (Never ever had
 any relationship with before)
 Yes,
 I met him.....
 In that area
 Where I didn't have
 My mother or father,

Any relative or friend.....
Donating
A bit of his land
For me to build a well.....
That very strange man
Smiles...
And I see my father's face
Through that smile.....!!

Translated by Ajith Nishantha

The Silk Road

Ruwan Bandujeewa

Neither East nor the West
On the both sides
Why? There is no sign
Of a silkworm
Came along the Silk Road
garbed in a silk robe

At the bottom of reeling pots, water boils
Young silkworm carcasses decay
The deadly anguish screamed when burned
Becomes silk and flows in air

A little one of a silkworm who died
Without a dream of silk
Tucked inside a shade of mulberry
Shivers in chill and shrinks

Translated by Hashitha Abeywardana & Sachie Panawala

The Indefinite Judgment

Suharshini Dharmarathne

Inspiration: The unsung song of the dancing teacher from a remote school who brought her pupils to a dancing competition to the capital.

Dear kind sir, do pay your attention;
we came passing a long way of tiresome.
Keeping the steps on the dusty ground
practised to the drummer's hollow sound.

Dyed cheap clothes gaudy
wrapped around the young waists in handy.
Covering poverty under make ups
brought into the stage with do ups.

They are summoned by the board of judges
to compare with the elegant young maidens
whose glamorous clothes sparkle.
The feet not used to the stage stumble.

Blossomed in the infertile dusty land
dried to the scorching sun and the sand
Look at the beauty of the wild flowers' dance
Tossing their lanky legs and hands.

Dwell amidst the comforts of Colombo suburbs
honorable sirs, unaware of the wild flowers
Beg your pardon to leave before the judgment
as we came from afar to the city, affluent.

Translated by Malika Dharmarathne

Mushroom

Ajith Nishantha

Mushroom, oh mushroom!
 There is no room
 For you to bloom
 Never mind, you bloom.

You may lack in your womb
 Chlorophyll, the pigment
 For flowers to bloom
 Soon after pollination
 A stem to branch
 Or to bear fruits.
 Still you bloom;
 My dear mushroom!

Absorb the lot
 Of a rotten log
 As a white blot
 Emerge from the straw-cot.
 Never bother
 About petals or fragrance
 Still, you bloom
 To gain your doom
 And die very soon
 Do bloom! Oh bloom!
 My dear mushroom.

Translated by the Poet

BIO NOTES

Editors

Bangladesh

Kaiser Haq

Kaiser Haq is a poet, essayist, translator and professor of English at Dhaka University and the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). Educated at the universities of Dhaka (BA Honours and MA) and Warwick (PhD as a Commonwealth Scholar), he was a Senior Fulbright Scholar and Vilas Fellow at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee; a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at SOAS; Café Poet at the Poetry Café of the Poetry Society, London; and a resident at the Recollets in Paris. An independence war veteran, he is a life member of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh and the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics (USA). He was awarded the Bangla Academy Award for Translation for 2013. His books include eight volumes of poetry (most recently *Published in the Streets of Dhaka: Collected Poems*, and *Pariah and Other Poems*), five translated volumes (among them *Selected Poems of Shamsur Rahman*, Mirza I'tesamuddin's *The Wonders of Vilayet*, and Nasreen Jahan's *The Woman Who Flew*), two edited poetry anthologies, and an edited volume of translated stories.

Bhutan

Jigme Choden

Jigme Choden works as a researcher with the National Library and Archives under the Department of Culture, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. She studied English Literature from Sherubtse College and received her Post-graduate Diploma in Public Administration from the Royal Institute of Management in 2010. She is also a recipient of SAARC Cultural Centre Research Grants 2011-12 for her paper 'Diminishing Buckwheat Noodles and Pancake Tradition in Bumthang'. Besides being a researcher, she takes keen interest in writing short stories and poetry herself.

Nepal

Bal Rām Adhikāri (b. 1977)

Bal Rām Adhikāri teaches Translation Studies at Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal, Tribhuvan University. Mr Adhikari is a Translation Studies researcher, translator and editor. He is involved in designing English Language Teaching courses, and editing academic reading materials for universities in Nepal. He has carried out a research on Tradition of Nepalese Translation under a Special Project of Nepal Academy. He is the translator of a novel *Socrates' Footsteps* (2010), anthologies of poem *Threads of Smoke* (2013), *War, Love and Coexistence* (2013), and a poetic play *Yashodharā*, and the editor of Trilingual Dictionary of the Magar Language (2011). He is pursuing PhD in literary translation from Tribhuvan University.

Currently, he is Vice-President of Translators' Society, Nepal, and Secretary of Multilingual Literary Society, Nepal.

Pakistan

Dr. Rashid HAMEED (b. 1968)

Dr. Rashid Hameed obtained his Ph.D. in Iqbal Studies from Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. A prolific writer in literature and history, he has authored a number of books which include; *Mukalama Numa* (56 Interviews of renowned Scholars, Poets, Fiction Writers, Critics etc.) (1999), *Zinda Rood: Tahqeeqi Aur Tanqeedi Mutalaa* (2007), *Javedan Iqbal* (2007), *Iqbal ka Tasawwur-e Tareekh* [Iqbal's Concept of History] (2008), *Faiz Banam Iftikhar Arif* [38 Published Letters of Faiz Ahmad Faiz] (2010), and *Guftagu Numa* (55 Interviews of renowned Scholars, Poets, Fiction Writers, Critics etc.) (2011). He had been the Director/ Chief Editor and the Director General (acting) at the Pakistan Academy of Letters, Ministry of Education, Islamabad and Lecturer in History, Punjab Government College. Some of his other publications are: *Justice Dr. Javed Iqbal: Shakhsiyyat Aur Fun*, *Harf-e Tanha* (Literary Columns published in *Daily Nawa-i Waqt*), *Hurmat-e Lafz* (Published articles relating to History, Culture and Literature), and Urdu Translation of *Thoughts on Pakistan* by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. He was awarded the prestigious National Presidential Iqbal Award by the Government of Pakistan in 2008. Dr. Hameed is currently the Deputy Secretary of National Language Authority, Ministry of

National Heritage and Integration, Government of Pakistan.

Sri Lanka

Suharshini Dharmarathne (b. 1969)

Suharshini Dharmarathne presently works as a bio-science teacher at Galewela Central College. She completed her studies at Girls' High School, Kandy and graduated from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka obtaining a Master's Degree in Agricultural Biology. Writing poems since childhood, she continued to publish them in newspapers during her teens and published her first collection of poetry as *Bol Bijuwata* (The Seeds that are Unable to Germinate). So far she has published three poetry collections and two books on children's literature. She wrote lyrics for famous singers Nanda Malani, Weerasiri Malwatta and Saman Panapitiya. She won the State Literary Award and Godage Literary Award as the best poetess in Sri Lanka in 2012 for her poetry book *Girihisa Tharanaya* (The Mountain Hiking). Her poem *The Indefinite Judgment* included in this anthology has been translated from Sinhala by Malika Dharmaratne.

Contributors

Bhutan

Tshering Choden

Tshering Choden works as a Human Resource Officer with the Bank of Bhutan and has written several poems as a member of the Writers Association of Bhutan.

Sonam Dorji

Sonam Dorji is a teacher by profession and also a poet. Some of the books authored by him include *Songs of my Heart* (2012), *Eight Pillars of Success* (2012), *Darjeeling Saga* (2013) and *Reliving* (2013).

Ngawang Phuntsho

Ngawang Phuntsho works as a Development Officer for READ Bhutan, an NGO. He contributes his writings to Bhutanese newspapers regularly and blogs on social issues, and is the author of two books.

Nepal

Bhoopi Sherchan (1936-1990)

Bhoopi Sherchan is one of the trendsetters in contemporary Nepali poetry in form and theme both. A master of satire, Sherchan is best remembered for his lucidity in language and thought-provoking ideas in poetry. To his credit are the anthologies of poems *Nayā Jhyāure* (New Folk jhyāure), *Nirjhar* (Fountain), and *Ghumne Mechmāthi Andho Mānchhe* (A Blind Man in a

Swivel Chair). The member of the then Royal Nepal Academy, Bhoopi was awarded with Sajhā Prize in 1970. His poem titled *Midday and Cold Sleep* included in this anthology has been translated by Bal Ram Adhikari.

Bairāgi Kāinlā (b. 1940)

Bairāgi Kāinlā is one of the greatest modern Nepali poets. Kāinlā together with I. B. Rai and Iswar Ballabh formed a trio who came like a thunder with a new literary trend and a powerful movement called *Tesro Āyam* (The Third Dimension). The Third Dimension has had a profound influence on Nepali literature. Kāinlā's poetry is the song of freedom; he is a great freedom fighter and participated actively in different movements. One can hear the deep undertone of love and revolt in his works. The anthology *Poems of Bairāgi Kāinlā* contains some masterpieces in Nepali. His poem included in this anthology has been translated by Govinda Rāj Bhattarāi

Kundan Sharmā (b. 1943)

Kundan Sharmā is one of the leading contemporary female poets in Nepali literature. *Merā Kavītāharu* (My Poems, 1989) and *Mero Man* (My Mind, 1995) are two of the anthologies of poems published to her credit. Female sensitivity, satire on social corruption and absurdity characterise her writing. Kundan's ten of the most powerful poems have been collected in the *Representative Nepali Modern Poems* published by Nepal Academy 2010. Her poem titled *Three Forms of a Male: My Perspectives* has been translated by Bal Ram Adhikari.

Krishna Sen Ichhuk (1957-2003)

Krishna Sen Ichhuk was a journalist and creative writer, who was killed in police custody during the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Sen was the editor of *Janadishā*, a pro-Maoist vernacular weekly newspaper. Ichhuk is best remembered for his voice against the state oppression and his staunch belief in progressivism. *Shokānjali* (Mourning-offerings, 1992), *Itihāsko Yas Ghadimā* (At this Hour of History, 2000) and *Bandi ra Chandrāgiri* (Detainee and Chandragiri Hill, 2002) are the anthologies of poems published to his credit. His poems titled *Prison* included in this anthology is translated by Govinda Raj Bhattarai.

Dharmendra Bikram Nembāng (b. 1974)

Dharmendra Bikram Nembāng is a young poet, fiction writer and critic. He is a leading trendsetter of the new group of poets known as Rangabādi, the colorists. This movement has invited multiple interpretations. At the heart of this literary movement lies the revolt against the existing system, including political ideology, literary principles and conventional practice. They have contributed a lot to the reinterpretations of Nepali literature, especially poetry in the context of pluralistic principles. This has created a space for ethnic aesthetics in national writings. Nembāng's writing is characteristically obscure, abstract and anti-foundational. His poem included in this anthology has been translated by Bal Ram Adhikari.

Thākur Belbāse (b. 1976)

Thākur Belbāse belongs to the generation of young poets in Nepali whose poetry has been widely appreciated for depiction of the untold suffering and chaos that the nation underwent for a decade. His first anthology of poems *Sāgarko Wāripāri Manharuko Samāroha* (Both Sides of the Sea and the Assembly of Hearts) came just a decade ago. He appeared again with another collection *Achānak Yo Sānjh* (Suddenly this Evening) three years ago from which the present poem is extracted. His recent work is *Iswar Trāsma Chha* (God is in Terror). Thākur is read for freshness, audacity and intensity that characterize contemporary Nepali poetry. His poem *Death Bag* included in this anthology has been translated by Govinda Raj Bhattarai.

Sajan Kumar (b. 1977)

Sajan Kumar is a lecturer of English Education by profession at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. His profound love for and deep interest in literature has made him a poet, critic and literary translator. He writes poetry and stories in English, Nepali and Maithili. To his credit, he has published a poetry anthology *Ra Po Atman Rudaichha* (Thus, Atman is Crying) in Nepali. His English poems are published in The Kathmandu Post, Of Nepalese Clay, etc. His poem titled *The Last Poem* included in the anthology has been translated by Bal Ram Adhikari.

Sandhyā Pahādi (b. 1969)

Sandhyā Pahādi was born in Kapilvastu, Lumbini. Sandhyā has established herself as a well-known poet in Nepali literature. She has won literary prizes and received felicitations. She has contributed profusely to conducting and producing many audio visual programs too. To her credit there are two collections of poems—*Mriga Trishnā Ra Aru Kavita* (Illusion and Other Poems), *Ghamkā Akshyar* (Letters of the Sun). She has also published lyrical poems and short stories. Her poem included in this anthology has been translated by Govinda Raj Bhattarai.

Pakistan

Hasan Abidi (b. 1929-2005)

Hasan Abidi was a freelance journalist who started writing poetry much earlier but began to explore his poetic talent more seriously in the 1970s. His collections of poetry are, *Navisht-i-Nai* (1995), *Jareeda* (1998), and *Farar hona Huroof ka* (2004). He has also translated Eqbal Ahmed's essays into Urdu and written stories and poems for children.

Hasan Abidi has written both *ghazals* and *nazms*. He is more in control of his craft in the traditional confines of the *ghazal*, but chooses another style and content for his *nazms*. Most of these are narrative of the socio-political aspects of the society. He persistently elegizes the changing value system that he finds alien and disconcerting.

The poem *Two Worlds* included in this anthology is from the collection, *Farar hona Huroof ka* published in 2004 by Scheherzade, Karachi and has been translated by Yasmeen Hameed from Urdu.

Wazir Agha (b. 1922-2010)

Wazir Agha is a prominent critic, essayist and poet. He has written extensively throughout his literary career and has published sixteen books on literary criticism, seventeen collections of poetry and five volumes of essays besides other works on varied themes of literature. His collected poems have been published as *Chehek uthi Lafzon ki Chaagal*. He is also the founder and editor of the reputable literary magazine *Auraq*. He has been awarded the Sitara-i-Imtiaz for his contribution to literature.

Wazir Agha is among those writers who can objectively analyze their own creativity and provide a logical premise for their own thoughts. He is at his best in some of his long poems where his diction, craft and creative self all combine to produce a compelling effect. In his later works, the element of deliberation is more pronounced where he tends to prod and push his creative being towards a premeditated end.

As for Birds in the Jungle is from the collection, *Ghaas mein Titliaan* published in 1985 by Maktaba-i Fikr-o-Khayal, Lahore.

Saleem Ahmed (b. 1927-1984)

Saleem Ahmed was an unconventional poet who strived to infuse Urdu poetry, especially the *ghazal* with a new

and invigorating thought content. He believed that poetry is the outcome of conscious understanding and premeditated thought. He lived up to his conviction all the way and inspired later generations with his notions, opinions and creative output. He was also a reputable critic of Urdu literature with a rich contribution of enduring and popular essays. His collections of poetry, *Bayaz*, *Ikai*, *Charagh-i-neem shan and Mashriq*, have been published collectively as *Kullivaat-i-Saleem Ahmed*.

The poem *Khwaab* is from the collection *Kulliyat-i-Saleem Ahmed* published in 2003 by Alhamra Publishing, Islamabad. His poem *Ghazal* included in this anthology has been translated by Mushir Anwar from Urdu.

Ahmed FARAZ (b. 1931-2008)

Ahmed Faraz is one of the most popular poets of the post-Faiz era. A seasoned craftsman, his diction and content are deeply rooted in the classical tradition. His *ghazals* are almost always, light love lyrics, full of classical appeal, whereas in his *nazm* he emerges as a rebellious soul, reacting against persecution and oppression. Even his politically charged verse has a strongly classical aura, fashioned by the use of conventional symbols and the Persian poetic tradition. Numerous of Faraz's *ghazals* have been put to music and popularly sung.

Faraz has produced a large volume of work. Thirteen of his collections are now published as his complete works, titled *Shehr-i-Sukhan Aaraasta hai*. Among the many awards that Faraz received are the Hilal-i-Irntiaz (which

he declined), Kamal-i-Funn Award, Firaq International Award and Allama Muhammad Iqbal Award.

Shahida Hasan (b. 1953)

An authentic voice in Urdu poetry, Shahida Hasan says that she has been a poet for as far as she can recall. Her poetry is rooted in tradition but with a distinctly unique character in style and content. She uses the language discreetly but effectively, especially in her *ghazal*. Her emotional being is refined and subtle and this quality makes her expression aesthetically appealing.

Poets cannot be isolated from the cultural, political and social forces of their times, she believes and therefore chooses varied themes for her poems. Nature inspires her too and likewise her roots and the places she visits. Poetry to her is an open window that brings in fresh air and through which she can also fly off to her own secret, boundless skies.

Her collections of poetry are, *Eik Tara hai Sirhaanay mairay* (1995) and *Yahaan kuch Phool rakhey hain* (2002). She also writes literary articles, and occasionally translates selected pieces of prose and poetry. She was given the Faani Badayuni Award by Urdu Conference, Delhi.

A Nightingale on the Branch of Night is from the collection, *Yahaan kuch Phool rakhey hain*, published in 2002 by Schecherzade, Karachi and has been translated by Farida Faizullah from Urdu

Sarwat Husain (b. 1949-1996)

Sarwat Husain emerged as a poet in the 1970s with a refreshing and luxuriant newness to his poetry. Highly creative and original, Sarwat Husain's *ghazal* is spontaneous and exceptionally lucid and engaging. The content and style of his *nazm*, which he wrote both as free verse and prose poetry is also untainted by any deliberation or artifice. It is not burdened with intricate or lofty ideas. His creativity teems with purity, passion and innocence.

Two collections of his work have been published, *Aadhe Sayyaray par* and *Khakdaan*, which was published posthumously after his violent and tragic death.

His poem *So Many Colours* included in this anthology has been translated by Frances W. Pritchett and Asif Farrukhi from Urdu

Akhtar Husain Jaafri (b. 1932-1992)

Akhtar Hussain Jaafri less known to common readers but is regarded highly as a poet in the world of literature. Working silently throughout his literary career, he always remained concerned about the quality of his creative output.

His collections of poetry are *Aina Khana* (1981) and *Jahaan Darya Utarta hai* (1993). He also published an anthology of Urdu literature called *Farda*.

Jaafri manages to express the intensity of his concerns in a highly controlled language. He cautiously uses his skill to keep his outpouring within the parameters he defines for himself. His themes are real and tangible.

They may belong to the world outside his being but remain firmly bonded to his innermost self. Absolute truth, he writes in the preface of one of his books, is inherent to the nature of man and therefore, readily discerned and accepted.

The poem *My House on a Star* is from the collection, *Aina khana* published in 1981 by Matbooaat, Lahore and has been translated by M. Salim-ur-rahman from Urdu

Iftikhar Jalib (b. 1936-2003)

Iftikhar Jalib was one of the founder members of the Movement of New Linguistic Constructions that influenced literary writing in the early 1960s. He actively propagated the use of a more relevant poetic language. Along with this, he chose for himself a style marked by ambiguity and a fragmented, non-continuous stream of thought. His first collection of poetry, *Maakhiz*, published in 1964 was directed towards this shift. Over the years his conviction lost vigour and as a result, a marked change in his viewpoint is noticeable in his second collection, *Yehee hai mera Lahan*, which was published posthumously.

Jalib has also made a significant contribution to literary criticism. His poem *Fresh Flowers of Love* is from *Yahee hai mera Lahan* published in 2004 by Multimedia Affairs, Lahore and has been translated by Yasmeen Hameed from Urdu.

Gilani Kamran (b. 1926-2003)

Gilani Kamran was a critic of high repute and a poet who belonged to the group which, in the late 1950s and

early 1960s propagated the Movement of New Linguistic Constructions in literature. In the preface of his first collection, *Stanzay* (1959), he claimed that he had, for his poems used a language that was discernable to a larger number of people. It was a language ordinarily spoken by all and not just confined to poetry. In doing so, he had done away with the Persianised compounds and had simplified his expression.

His seven collections of poetry were collectively published as *Gilani Kamran ki Nazmein*. He had received, among other award, the pride of performance for his contribution to literature.

His poem *The Old Teacher*, first published in *Bari Choti Nazmein*, is taken from *Gilani Kamran ki Nazmein*, published in 2002 by Multimedia Affairs, Lahore. The poem has been translated by Yasmeen Hameed from Urdu

Aziz Hamid Madani (b. 1922-1991)

Aziz Hamid Madani was a poet, critic and translator. He was also associated with the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation. His collections of poetry are *Chashm-i-Nigaraan* (1962), *Dasht-i-Imkaan* (1964) and *Nakhl-i-Gumaan* (1983).

Madani is a poet of significance and his thoughts and writings on modern Urdu poetry were received with special interest. He uses the language as a tool with great facility and applies the classical art of writing poetry to put together his thoughts. He tries to illustrate them through Images that exist in contemporary times. For these new images he deliberately inducts ordinary,

unconventional words into his poems and cleverly blends them with his own, highly Persianised diction. Some of his works are remarkable in content and essence. His is the age of Scientific Humanism, and its ideology, he writes in the preface of one of his books, is not opposed to the teachings of philosophy or religion. His poems, he states himself, are a blend of symbolism, a certain state of mind and a quest for the unknown.

His poem *A Fishermen's Village* is from the collection, *Dasht-i-Imkaan*, published in 1964 by The Urdu Academy of Sindh in Karachi. The poem has been translated from Urdu by M. Salim-ur-rahman from Urdu

Munir Niazi (b. 1923-2006)

Munir Niazi Was a renowned and prominent poet. He wrote for almost over half a century and the popularity and appeal of his poetry continued to persist. His poetry has a mystifying quality that transports the readers' imagination into familiar yet unknowable surroundings, into a world half-discovered, a life half-explored. He infuses ordinary experiences with wonderment to create his verse, usually short, simple poems, not particularly well crafted at times but carrying in their purity a raw appeal for the common and the scholarly reader alike.

Munir Niazi's, works have been collectively published as *Kulliyat-i-Munir*. His last book was *Eik Musalsal* in which he included some of his prose poems as well. He has been awarded the pride of performance and the Sitara-i-Imtiaz for his outstanding contribution to literature.

The Poem *Sisyphean Essay* included in this anthology is from the collection, *Eik Musalsal*, published in 2003 by Multimedia Affairs, Lahore and has been translated by M- Salini-ur-rahman from Urdu.

Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi (b. 1916-2006)

Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi was a renowned and respected writer. Prolific and versatile, he has contributed several collections of poetry and short stories to literature in Urdu. Throughout his career, he lived up to his commitment and involvement with the ideology of the Progressive Writers' Movement. His fiction as well as his poetry is inspired by realism. He consciously chooses themes that signify social and political issues. Thought and deliberation, more than passion, guide his verse.

Qasmi's verse, spanning more than half a century has been collected in three volumes. Qasmi was also the founder and editor of the literary magazine *Funoon*. He has contributed to criticism, column writing and children's literature as well. He has received several awards including the Nishan-i-Imtiaz and Kamal-i-Funn for his contribution to literature. His poems *Page from an Explorer's Diary* is from *Nadeem ki Nazmein*, volume 2, published in 1991 by Sang-i-Meel, Lahore and has been translated by M. Salim-ur-rahman from Urdu

Ghulam Hussain Sajid (b. 1951)

Ghulam Hussain Sajid writes in Urdu and Punjabi. Embellished with a consciously acquired diction, his *ghazal* is almost always a deliberate construction. His

prose poems are different, especially his series of fifteen long poems, through which he peeps into his past and reconstructs its mystery. The link created with his childhood in these poems is real and spontaneous and intrigues the readers' imagination. Appearing like a thoughtful documentary on the mind's screen, some of these poems are very effective, employing a vivid imagery to establish an emotional and mystical bond with one's roots.

Sajid also writes critical essays. He has published seven collections of poetry including *Kitab-i-Subh* (1998), *Aainda* (2004) and *Muaamla* (2006).

His poem *The Story of a Heritage* is taken from the literary journal, *Savera*, Volume 67, 2002 and has been translated by Yasmeen Hameed from Urdu

Perveen Shakir (b. 1952-1994)

Perveen Shakir is a very popular poet, widely read and appreciated. Shakir's forte is the *ghazal* which she writes with all innocent and appealing spontaneity in her first collection and crafts it with greater thought and deliberation in her later books. Clarity, dexterity and facility are the hallmarks of her *ghazal*. The predominant theme is love and its many facets, expressed with a rare sensitivity and a feminine perception that was absent in the realm of Urdu literature before her. She composes her *nazm* differently, showing more concern for the subject rather than the craft. Here she also tries to make conscious thematic shifts, drawing in social and political issues into her verse.

All her books of verse (*Khushboo*, *Sad barg*, *Khudkalami* and *Inkaar*) published in her lifetime were collected as *Mah-i-Tamam*, a little before her sudden and tragic death in an automobile accident. A fifth collection, *Kaf-i-aina* was published posthumously. She had received a number of awards, including the Pride of Performance for her contribution to literature.

The poem *Khudkalami*, published in 1985 by Maktaba-i-Funoon, Lahore and has been translated by Leslie Lavigne and Baidar Bakht from Urdu.

Ahmed Shamim (b. 1929-1982)

Ahmed Shamim's sensibility is a unique combination of the new and the traditional, both in language and thought. His personal and emotional presence in the socio-political backdrop of his poems makes them effective, along with a rare lyrical quality that he maintains with ease and a natural flair. He is charged with an awareness of life outside his own being and is, determined to record it with complete involvement and commitment. His collections are, *Ajnabi Mansammein Ababeel* (1983) and *Rait par Safar ka Lamha* (1988). The poem *A Moment's Journey on Sand* has been translated by Yasmeen Hameed from Urdu and is from *Rait par Ssafar ka Lamha* published in 1988 by Aksi Publishers, Islamabad.

Sri Lanka

Dr. Liyanage Amarakeerthi (b. 1968)

Dr. Liyanage Amarakeerthi is a senior lecturer of the Peradeniya University. Having studied at rural schools including Deegalla Rewatha Central College, Kuliypitiya, Dematagolla Government College, Kurunegala and Wellawa Central College, he obtained his BA Degree from the University of Colombo in 1994, MA and PhD from Wisconsin University, USA. Being an award winning writer of short stories, novels and poetry, he has authored a number of books and translated several books into Sinhala. He is also known as a literary critic.

Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekara (b. 1929)

Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekara is a novelist, a short story writer, a poet, a literary critic, and a public intellectual who has played a major role in the cultural and intellectual life of our times. His contribution to Sinhala poetry has been unique

In 1955 when Amarasekara came out with his first collection of poems *Bhava Geeta* he solved the impasse faced by the poets of the day- the impoverishment of the rich poetic tradition which had nourished our poets over the centuries. While many sought to fill this vacuum by imitating Western models as 'free verse' Amarasekara sought inspiration from folk poetry which had retained the basic features of the rich poetic tradition of the past. The result was a new poetic form- *the pasmath viritha* which is the most popular poetic form

of today. Since then Amarasekara has brought out six volumes of poetry.

Amarasekera is a dental surgeon by profession, a Consultant in Maxillo-facial surgery and Director of the Dental Institute, Colombo. His poem *A poem written in a diary* included in this anthology has been translated by Chandra Amarasekera.

Malathie Kalpana Ambrose (b. 1977)

Malathie Kalpana Ambrose is a poet, translator and a feature writer, whose works have been published on both national and international web-based and printed media, including different anthologies. Compiling her twenty years' work, she published her first poetry collection *Me Nihanda Weralata Enna* (Come to the Silent Shore) in the year 2011. As a social and development worker, she has been closely working with different communities affected by war and currently she lives in Colombo. *From Within a Refugee Camp* has been translated from Sinhala by Dr. Malathi De Alwis

Ruwan Bandujeewa (b. 1983)

Bandujeewa is a promising young poet who pens in Sinhala. He relieves his verse away from the sympathetic laymen's realm which is an essential requirement in internet-age poetry in Sri Lanka. He is a Management Degree holder of the University of Sri Jayawardhanapura. His poem titled *The Silk Road* has been translated from Sinhala by Hashitha Abeywardana and Sachie Panawala.

Thimbiriyagama Bandara (b. 1962)

Thimbiriyagama Bandara is a journalist with 30 years of experience in the field, an awarded columnist, a poet and a writer. He is working as the Deputy Editor of *Aththa* (the truth) Newspaper and as a visiting lecturer of the University of Colombo. His first poetry collection *Helidarawuwak* (A Revelation) was published in 1984, next *Ranmasu* (Gold Coins) in 1989 and the latest *Gini Sisila* (Cool of Fire) in 2013. He has written several features and lyrics based on people's problems related to the civil war of 30 years in the country.

Bogana Bokanda (b. 1947)

Bogana Bokanda is a versatile poet who has been contributing poems to newspapers and magazines for over twenty years. He has authored a couple of poetry collections. Gaining experience and knowledge by studying poetry for a very long period of time he has sharpened his talent as a poet. His poem titled *The Burnt Fragrance* has been translated from Sinhala by Ajith Nishantha.

Buddhadasa Galappatty (b. 1947)

Buddhadasa Galappatty, a graduate of Vidyodaya University of Sri Lanka, is a poet, short story writer, lyricist, freelance journalist, columnist and a critic. Since 1971, he has published eight volumes of poetry, three collections of short stories, and five collections of columns written for newspapers. Further he has published a volume of poetry and a collection of short stories jointly with other creative writers. Some of his

poetry has been translated into English and published in several local and international publications. A volume of his selected poetry, translated into English has been published.

He won the Best Poet of the Year Award in 1999 for his collection of poems, *Thuruliya Akuru Viya*. One of his collections of Columns, *Sahurda Satahan* was awarded with the Best Columnist of the Year at the Vidyodaya Literary Awards Festival in 2013.

He has held the office of the Chairman, State Literary Panel and served in many government and non-government agencies for Cinema, Theatre and Literature as a Board of Director, member and also as an adjudicator. He is an executive member of the Arts Council of Sri Lanka.

Besides his literary activities, he is involved in the Theatre as a make-up artist and in the electronic media as a moderator, presenter and a resource person. He has won the Best Make-Up Artist Award at five occasions at the State Drama Festival. He is a visiting lecturer in Literature at the University of Sri Jayawardenepura. His poem, *Portrait of the Priest with the Begging Bowl* has been translated by Prof. Sunanda Mahendra.

Suminda Kithsiri Gunarathna (b. 1972)

Suminda Kithsiri Gunarathna can easily be labeled as a visionary poet as his work is distinguished with critical and sarcastic eye on the contemporary and burning issues in which imagination is of paramount importance. The body of poetry rendered by Suminda

including *Chakkaran Kotuwa*-1996, *Ehili*-2000, *Na-raja We-
raja*-2010, *Lanka pokuna*-2013 stands as tantamount to the
modern Sinhala poetry that scans the anatomy of
society. He has won a number of awards including the
Provincial State Award as the Best Poet in 1991, Best
Poet's Award from the University of Sri
Jayawardhanapura in 2000, Wimalarathne Kumaragama
(A renowned Sri Lankan poet) Prize, Best Poet Award at
the Arts Festival of the University of Peradeniya in 1996
and Sarasavi Prgnankura Award for his maiden
collection of poetry. His poem included in this
anthology has been translated from Sinhala by Dr.
Nandana Priyankara Gunawickrama.

Prof. Samantha Herath (b. 1966)

Prof. Samantha Herath is a poet, lyricist, critic, and
researcher in literature and communication studies. He
graduated from the University of Colombo specializing
in Sinhala language and literature and received
postgraduate education from Bangalore University,
India and Lancaster University, United Kingdom. He
started his professional career as a journalist at the
Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd, and joined the
academic staff of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura
in 1995 and then the University of Colombo in 2001. He
has 34 creative and academic publications to his credit
including two collections of poetry, five collections of
lyrics and six research based books on literature and
communication. He has edited 21 academic publications
including the annual special volume of Literature
concurrent with the State Literary Awards in Sri Lanka.
Recently he edited two books titled *Lester: Unsurpassed*

Genius of Sinhala Cinema and Amaradeva: The Golden Voice of the Nation. Also, he edited the Arts Magazine, the academic quarterly of the Arts Council of Sri Lanka. Prof. Herath has contributed widely for academic journals and has presented papers in research symposia both national and international. As a lyricist, he has composed lyrics for many reputed singers in Sri Lanka and for films and tele-dramas. Prof. Herath is the Chairman of the State Literary Panel, the highest state body for literary arts in the country. He is also a member of Tele-drama Preview Board, National Television.

Jayantha G. Jothiyarathne (b. 1966)

Born in Trincomalee, Jayantha Jothiyarathne had his primary and secondary education at Sri Tissa College and Sri Sinhala Central College, Trincomalee. He works in the Security Division of the Ports Authority of Sri Lanka and writes poems and songs in his spare time. He has authored a poetry collection, two collections of song lyrics and a couple of children's books. His poem included in this anthology has been translated by Ajith Nishantha.

Sunanda Karunaratna (b. 1971)

Sunanda Karunaratna shared the State Literary Award for best anthology of poems in year 2012 with Suharshini Dharmarathne for his second anthology of poems *Kanya Diyawarata Elamba*. He published his first collection of poems in year 2010 under the title of *Doovili*

Minisa and so far he has authored four books. He graduated from the University of Kelaniya and he studied Microbiology and Chemistry to obtain his B.Sc Degree in Natural Sciences. He is attached to Wijeya Newspapers Ltd., a prominent print media company in Sri Lanka as a Manager in the Advertising Department. Currently he pursues for his MBA at the Post Graduate Institute of Management (PIM). *The Call of the Wild* included in this anthology has been translated by Ajith Nishantha.

Sajeewanie Kasthuriarachchi (b. 1971)

Sajeewanie is an acclaimed Sri Lankan poet who pens her analytical views on the society based on her experience gained while working as a social activist on various projects related to people's issues. Her poetry revolves around women who struggle to thrive in the patriarchal society. Having authored three poetry collections, a translation of a novel and a book on sociology, she has won a number of awards including The Best Young Poet Award at the Godage Publishers' Awards Festival 2005, Vidyodaya Award for the Best Poetry Collection and nominations for the Best Poetry Collection at the Godage Festival in 2005 and 2008. Her poem *At the Fancy Dress Competition*, included in this anthology has been translated by Ajith Nishantha.

Prof. Sunanda Mahendra (b. 1938)

Prof. Sunanda Mahendra's *Ogha tharanaya* (Crossing the torrential stream) won the State Literary award for the best poetry collection, 2006. Many poems from the collection are now translated into English. He has won

the State Literary Award for the best original play script (1993), the best research work (2002) and the best two Sinhala novels (1964 and 2002 respectively).

Mahendra was formerly a professional broadcaster at home as well as the BBC's world Service based in London, where he also read for his doctorate. He was a visiting fellow in Mass Communication attached to the Leicester University, UK, and presently holds the emeritus professorship at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. The outstanding contribution to his expertise field of Mass Communication made him the recipient of the coveted UNESCO Copernicus award for Social Sciences in 1983. Sunanda Mahendra, at Present, is a regular contributor to the Sinhala and English Press in Sri Lanka.

Anuradha Nilmini (b. 1971)

She is a journalist who, after having worked on full time basis for fifteen years, is currently working as a freelance journalist. She contributes poems and articles to newspapers and has authored a poetry collection which was published in 2011. She has authored a novel and a number of children's books too. Her poem included in this anthology has been translated from Sinhala by Ajith Nishantha.

Ajith Nishantha (b. 1968)

Having started writing poetry from his childhood, Ajith Nishantha contributed a large number of poems to numerous publications. In the year 2000 he won the Best Young Poet of the Year Award at the Youth Awards

Festival. He published his first poetry collection in 2001 and, in 2011 along with his second poetry collection he published a collection of translated poetry. He has authored many children's books too.

Wasantha Priyankara Niwunhella (b. 1971)

Wasantha Priyankara Niwunhella had his school education at Palugaswewa Maha Vidyalaya and Kekirawa Central College. He did his GCE (A/L) studies in Science stream and was qualified to enter the University of Ruhuna. But he preferred to study Arts subjects to Science subjects. So he was graduated from University of Peradeniya in Arts subjects as an external student. He has been working as a Science teacher for twenty four years and is currently working at a government school in Ibbagamuwa Education Zone. His first collection of poems *Samanala Kanda* was published in 2001. Since then three more collections of his poems - *Sithaka Upan Kavi*, *Sulanga* and *Oba Mata Siduhath* have been published. He has been adjudged the best poet of the province for few years in the contests conducted by the North Central Provincial Council. *Edwin Aldrin's Response on the News of Neil Armstrong's Demise* included in this anthology has been translated by H. M. T. C. B. Herath

Yamuna Malinie Perera (b. 1954)

Yamuna Malinie Perera completed her studies at Sangamitta Balika Maha Vidyalaya, Galle. She started her writing career as a poetess by writing to radio programmes. She has shown her skills in short story

writing, novel writing as well as in lyrics writing. She won the State Literary Award as the best Sri Lankan poetess in 1993. Later she was awarded by SAARC Women's Association as the best woman short story writer in 1999. She has won a number of awards for her poetry collections and songs. His poem included in this anthology has been translated from Sinhala by Ajith Nishantha.

Isuru Prasanga (b. 1981)

Isuru writes poetry with a thorough understanding of the contemporary socio political issues in the country. He was actively involved in the leftist politics for some time and with the experience he gained during that period he has penned a large number of poems criticizing socio political issues. He has published his first poetry collection in 2006. After that he authored two poetry collections and a collection of political reviews. He works as a journalist. His poem *Pollen* included in this anthology has been translated from Sinhala by Sunethra Rajakarunanayake

Ariyawansa Ranaweera (b. 1942)

After having published his first poetry collection in 1984, he has published fourteen poetry collections so far. Having won a number of awards for his poetry, he has developed his own identity as a poet who introduced an independent style of poetry to Sri Lanka after studying Japanese Haiku and the western poetry. He has published a number of translated poetry collections and reviews. He has translated a couple of Greek plays into Sinhala and won awards for his work. The poem *Rifle*

Lesson has been translated from Sinhala by Prof. Sunanda Mahendra.

Gongithota Sarath (b. 1946)

Gongithota Sarath is the pen-name used by R. P. A. Sarath who studied at Prince College, Kotahena, Colombo 14. He started writing poems and short stories when he was a student. After getting his first ever poem published in a children's magazine when he was at the age of just thirteen years, he continued writing poems and short stories. His poem titled *Lusty Desires* included in this anthology has been translated from Sinhala by Ajith Nishantha.

Nandana Weerasinghe (b. 1954)

A veteran Sri Lankan poet, Nandana is an award winning poet who has authored a number of poetry collections. He has won many literary awards including the State Literary Award. He has also been awarded the Bunka Award in recognition of his contribution to the Sri Lankan literary field. He published a collection of translated American Haiku poems in 2013. His poem *Something Square Shaped* has been translated from Sinhala by Ariyawansa Ranaweera.

Rathna Sri Wijesinghe (b. 1953)

Rathna Sri is one of the most renowned contemporary Sri Lankan poets. Born at Thellambura, Galle, he gained his secondary education from the rural schools in the area and obtained a BA (Hons) Degree, an MA and a

Post-graduate Education Diploma. Starting career life as a teacher in a government school, he later on worked as a lecturer at a Teacher Training College. He has worked as a Senior Assistant Secretary in five ministries of the Sri Lankan government. Having authored thirty two books including seven poetry collections, seven collections of song lyrics and ten children's literature books, he has won a number of awards including the State Literary Award, Vidyodaya Award, Godage Award, National Youth Award, State Television Award, Sumathi Tele Award, Sarasavi Award and Bunka Award. His poem *Evolution* included in this anthology has been translated from Sinhala by Ajith Nishantha.

Poems

from the SAARC Region - 2013

Poetry is perhaps one of the most powerful media for self-expression, given the intensity of feelings expressed through the use of diverse poetic devices such as rhythm, beat, metaphors and symbolism. The aesthetic appeal of a poem transports one from his circumstances to a completely different experience. South Asian poem too carries with it, the power to enthrall audiences by its unique South Asianess. It therefore, acts as a medium that portrays the intricacies and peculiarities of South Asia as a region.

'Poems from the SAARC Region- 2013' is an anthology of 70 poems from five SAARC countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This endeavour by the SAARC Cultural Centre aims at showcasing the unique fabric of South Asia and seeks to act as a platform providing a common forum for both established and aspiring poets from the region.

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