

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

SELECTED POEMS III

TRANSLATED & PRESENTED BY

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51. SURRENDER

O bend my head up to the dust of Your feet,

Wash out all my vanity with mine own tears.

Seeking ever to glorify my self

I keep on merely humiliating myself,

Ceaselessly winding around myself

I roam about from moment to moment

Wash out all my vanity with mine own tears.

Let me no more vaunt myself in mine occupation,

Accomplish Your own will throughout my life.

I long for the absolute peace from You,

Inside my being Your effulgence,

Protect me by standing on the lotus of my heart,

Wash out all my vanity with mine own tears.

[*Gitanjali*, "Song Offering" No.1, 1906]¹

52. KNOWING YOU

Countless are the persons You made me know,

Sheltered me in countless homes,

You turned the distant into an intimate, O Friend,

And the foreigner into a brother.

Each time I have to leave an old dwelling

My mind gets worried not to know what is up

Forgetting that You remain the familiar

¹ The serial numbers in the Bengali collection *Gitanjali* are distinct from those utilised by Tagore in the homonymous anthology of his poems in English

In the midst of the new,
You turned the distant into an intimate, O Friend,
And the foreigner into a brother.

In life or in death, in the totality of this globe,
Wherever you choose to carry me,
O my life-long acquaintance,
Whatever You will reveal to me.

Others cease to be strangers once You are known,
Taboos vanish and vanishes all fear;
You remain wakeful by uniting everybody
May I always realise it,

You turned the distant into an intimate, O Friend,
And the foreigner into a brother.

[*Gitanjali*, "Song Offering" No.3, 1906]

53. REFT FROM LOVE

If You cared not to fill the heart with love
Why did You permeate the morning sky
With abundant songs ?
Why weave wreaths with the stars ?
Why the flowery beds ?
Why does the west-wind murmur
A secret message in our ears ?

If You cared not to fill the heart with love,
Why keeps the sky staring at us

Intently ?
Why does my heart frequently
Become enraged
Embarking the raft on an ocean
Where the shore remains unknown ?

[*Gitimalya*, "Garland of Songs" No.42, 1913]

54. Conviction

Gratifying all my thorns,
The flower shall bloom,
And all my suffering
Shall redden into a rose.
In my life-long craving for the sky
Zephyr shall rush to blow,
Maddening my heart it will
Plunder all fragrant treasures.

I shall feel no more amiss
Once I have treasures to share,
Once my intimate worship blossoms
In beauteous forms.
When by the end of night
My Beloved shall caress them,
All the petals unto the last
Will bedeck His feet.

[*Gitimalya*, "Garland of Songs" No.49, 1913]

55. EXPECTATION

You remain ever present

Beyond my songs,

My melodies reach Your feet

Though I cannot attain You.

The wind bids imploring :

"Do not keep mooring the raft !"

Steering across, come up

To the centre of my heart.

The game of my songs with You

Is a game with the remoteness,

The aching notes of the flute

Throughout all day.

Seizing my flute, when shall You

Come over and blow into it,

In the dense obscurity

Of a joyous and mute night ?

[*Gitimalya*, "Garland of Songs" No.70, 1913]

56. THIS FLAME OF MELODY

This flame of melody that You have set inside my heart,

That flame has pervaded all through-and-through.

Dances that flame while keeping the beats

From branch to branch upon worn out trees :

Whom does it invoke in the sky

With the elated hands ?
The stars stare dumb-founded in the dark,
Maddened a wind rises from nowhere
Immaculate, at the dead of the night,
Blossoms this golden lotus :
None can fathom the spell of that flame.

[*Gitimalya*, "Garland of Songs" No.89, 1913]

57. REGRETS

Why did I not strew the dry dust with my tears ?
Who could guess that You would appear like an uninvited ?
You have waded through the desert sand
Without any shadowy tree,
I imposed on You this dire wayfaring,
Curse on me!

Whereas I had been whiling away my idle days
In the shade of my home,
I ignored all that you suffered
At every step.
That suffering, however, inside my being
Had resounded with a secret smart,
Stigmatising my heart with a profound wound.

[*Gitimalya*, "Garland of Songs" No.91, 1913]

58. GRATIFICATION

The moment when tears flooded mine eyes in a monsoon of sorrow,
Before the threshold of my heart stopped the chariot of my friend.

By handing over to Him the chalice of union that was brimming
With separation and pain, I have no more regrets, regrets none.

Gathering secretly in my mind, a hope, neglected for years...
That thirst for a touch was quenched in a twinkling of eye.

I knew at last for whom I shed all my tears :
Blessed be this awakening, blessed these tears, blessed all.

[*Gitali*, "Songs", No.1, 1914]

59. THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

O touch my heart with the flame of a philosopher's stone,
Sanctify this life by consuming with Your fire.

O lift up this body of mine to transform it
Into a lamp of Your tabernacle,

Set all songs flaming night and day.

O touch my heart with the flame of a philosopher's stone.

Let Your caress in the dark from limb to limb

Set blossoming stars throughout the night.

All shadow shall vanish from the glimpses and mine eyes

Will contemplate but light wherever they turn.

Upwards, all my suffering will blaze.

O touch my heart with the flame of a philosopher's stone.

[*Gitali*, "Songs", No.18, 1914]

60. THE HERO

Holding the sword on one hand

And the necklace on the other,

He has forced your door :

He has not come to beg alms,

He has come to fight

And win over your heart.

Out of the path of Death

He emerges into Life,

Attired like a hero :

He will not return with a partial booty,

He will take possession at a time

Of whatever he finds.

He has forced your door.

[*Gitali*, "Songs", No.20, 1914]

61. LONGING

You remained asleep, O my mind,

When the man of my mind was at the door.

You woke up on hearing

The sound of His leaving,

You woke up in the dark.

My garment outspread on the floor

I spend my solitary night,

In the dark I listen to His flute,

Without any glimpse of Him.

Can ever the eyes see Him -
The One whom you left in the lurch -
Can you catch Him up,
The One whom you have driven away ?

[*Gitali*, "Songs", No.27, 1914]

62. FORGIVE, O LORD

Forgive, O Lord, my weariness
And if I lag behind on the path.
This quiver in the heart,
This shivering, all this pain,
Forgive, forgive O Lord.

Forgive, O Lord, my miserableness
And if I keep on looking backward.
Garlands wither on the trough
In heat of a scorching sun,
Forgive that pallor, O Lord.

[*Gitali*, "Songs", No.59, 1914]

63. VICTORY

The doors have been flung open, You have appeared, O Resplendent,
Victory to You.
Scatter all darkness with Your generous emergence,
Victory to You.
O Hero, O Conqueror, in the dawn of a new life
You hold the spear of a novel hope,

Mercilessly cut asunder all worn out obsession...

Let the bonds fall off.

Victory to You.

Welcome, O Intolerable, come O Merciless,

Victory to You.

Welcome, O Immaculate, come O Dauntless,

Victory to You.

O morning Sun, you have risen like a warrior,

Your horn resounds on the painful path,

Kindle the flame of dawn in our mind,

Abolish Death.

Victory to You.

[*Gitali*, "Songs", No.101, 1914]

64. SHAH-JEHAN

You knew pretty well, Ruler of India, O Shah-Jehan,

That surges of Time takes away all life and youth and riches and honours.

The unique wish of the Emperor was

To perpetuate only your innermost sorrow.

Adamant, even the monarch's power

Wilt while dozing like the reddening of a twilight,

Solely a prolonged sigh

Might sadden the sky by heaving constantly,

That is all you hoped.

Let vanish, vanish if it must,

The splendour of diamonds and pearls and jewels -

Even as a wizard's rainbow glow on the horizon's void -

Let there be

Merely a drop of tears,

On the cheek of Time, dazzling and white,

This Tajmahal.

Alas, O human heart !

There is no time

No time at all

To keep on looking backward

At anyone whosoever.

You drift on

Amidst the strong currents of life

From bank to bank of this world...

Embarking on one market

You disembark on another one.

The moment the sacred rustling of the west wind

Inside your bower

Fills with mellifluous blossoms²

The agitated scarf of the trellis,

The dusk of farewell approaches,

Strewing the dust with bruised petals.

There is no time !

Therefore by dewy nights

You bedeck the espalier with *kunda*³ freshly blooming

As ornaments on autumn's joyous tearful wreath.

² *madhavi*, a particularly sweet-scented variety of jasmine, recalling Madhava, one of Krishna's names.

³ all-white fragrant flowers

Alas, O heart,
Whatever you gain
Has to be abandoned on the wayside
At the day's end, at the night's end.
There is no time, no time at all.
Therefore, Emperor, your anxious heart
Sought to entice the heart of Time
With Beauty's seduction.
Adorning His neck with a garland
Greeting formless Death
Clad in a wondrous deathless attire.
Throughout the twelve months
There is no scope
Of lamenting,
Thus under a shroud of eternal silence
You firmly buried
Your whimper without solace.
By moonlit nights within the secret chapel
The name with which you softly called
Your beloved,
You left that cooing on this spot,
For the ear of Infinity.
The sad tenderness of love
Knew how to blossom
In abundant flowers of Beauty in this serene stone.
Emperor, O Poet,
This is the picture of your heart,

A new *Meghaduta*⁴ of yours,
Unprecedented, marvelous
In its rhythm and melody
It soars ever towards the Unseen
Where your beloved, solitude-stricken,
Waits mingled
In the glow of the rising sun,
In the sighing melancholy at the horizon of a weary eve
The bodiless and voluptuous grace of *chameli*⁵ by a full-moon night,
On a shore beyond the pale of words
Where the begging eyes roam on from door to door.
The emissaries of your Beauty from age to age
Shunning the sentinels of Time
Pass by with this speechless message :
"I have not forgotten, I have not forgotten, I have not forgotten, O my Love !"

You are gone today,
O great King,
Your empire has fainted like a dream,
Your throne has been shattered;
Carried by the wind
The memory of your regiments -
Trembled the earth under whose strides -
Is now blowing along the dust of Delhi's streets.
The prisoners sing no more;
No music from your pavilion seeks to be tuned

⁴ Famous "Cloud Messenger" by Kalidasa.

⁵ another variety of jasmine

With the murmur of the Yamuna;
Dying with the crickets' chirping
In a remote corner of the broken palace
The ankle-bells of your courtesans
Set the night-sky to weep.
Yet, immaculate, your messenger -
Tireless, relentless,
Indifferent to the rise and fall of kingdoms,
Indifferent to the ups and downs of life and death,
From age to age -
Proclaim in one voice
The message of the solitary longing :
"I have not forgotten, I have not forgotten, I have not forgotten, O my Love !"

A sheer lie : can anyone assure
That you have not forgotten, you have not opened ajar
The trap door of memory's cage ?
That the obscurity of the past setting sun
Has still been binding your heart ?
Has it not yet flown away
By the loop-hole of oblivion ?
A mausoleum
Remains immobile forever,
Clinging to the mortal dust
Carefully it conceals Death
Beneath the shroud of memory.
Who can hold back life ?

Every star in the sky is crying up to it,
Its invitation comes from sphere to sphere
From ever new eastern horizons with an ever new light.
Breaking open memory's knot,
It shoots forth unhampered
Along the cosmic path.
O great King, no great kingdom could
Hold you back,
O Vast, even the ocean-breasted earth
Could not fill you up.
Therefore, once the feast of life is over,
With joint-feet you kick off the earth
Like a clay-pot.
You are nobler than your deeds,
Hence the chariot of your life,
Again and again,
Leaves your deeds behind.
Hence
Your traces are manifest, you are not here.
Love that knows not
To drive or to rush forward,
Love that installed its throne in the middle of the road,
Its discourse on pleasure
Clings to your feet like the dust on the path,
Which you have returned to dust.
Upon that dust of your feet behind you
All on a sudden

With a gust of wind from your mind
Had sown here a seed fallen astray from the garland of life.
You are gone far away :
That seed with its immortal sprout
Seeks to reach heaven,
It sings in a profound voice :
"As far as I can gaze,
He is not there, not there, that wayfarer.
His beloved could not hold him back,
 the kingdom yielded,
Oceans and mountains failed to stop him.
His chariot today
Moves on, urged by the night,
Accompanied by songs of constellations
Towards the triumphal archway of Dawn.
Hence
I lie here under the weight of memory;
Emancipated, he is no more here."

[*Balaka*, "Flight of Swans", No.7, 1914]

65. PIONEERS

Could you not be patient a little more ?

Winter is not yet over.

What flair very close to the trail

Drives you to sing in choir?

Oh distraught Champakas and intoxicated Bakuls,

Whom do you rush to welcome, all maddened in glee ?

Trackers of death, you are the first flock,

You didn't heed for the Moment to come,

From branch to branch your rumours ring

Enlivening and perfuming the undergrowths.

Jostling and laughing aloud before all others,

You blossomed in bounty, you fell in heaps.

The spring that was expected in April,

That would come afloat on the zephyr's high tide,

You no more waited for its hour,

You set piping your flute before term.

How could you reach the goal before the night-fall ?

You scattered all your treasures with your laughter and tears.

Forgetful of calculations, O my crazy souls,

On listening to His footfalls from far,

To cover the dust and bedeck His path

You laid down your own death.

Before you could see or hear Him, your chalices set you free,

You could no more wait for contemplating His face.

[*Balaka*, "Flight of Swans, No.21, 1916]

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