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**TRILOK CHAND GHAI**

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**PARTING**

That day  
during our casual talk  
over a cup of tea  
one thing my dear  
was clear:  
Henceforth we won't be  
atoms united in covalent bonds.  
Perhaps we would be  
two particles of dust  
in random motion  
floating in a shaft of sunlight  
Or two elements in two non-intersecting  
universes of discourse  
never meeting  
never coming in each other's way  
hurtling through space  
like galaxies from the shattered centre...

**DISSOLUTION**

The singer  
a plump mass of flesh  
surrounded by her accompanists  
sat there on the stage  
on her haunches, legs folded into each other  
her ethereal voice radiating through the air

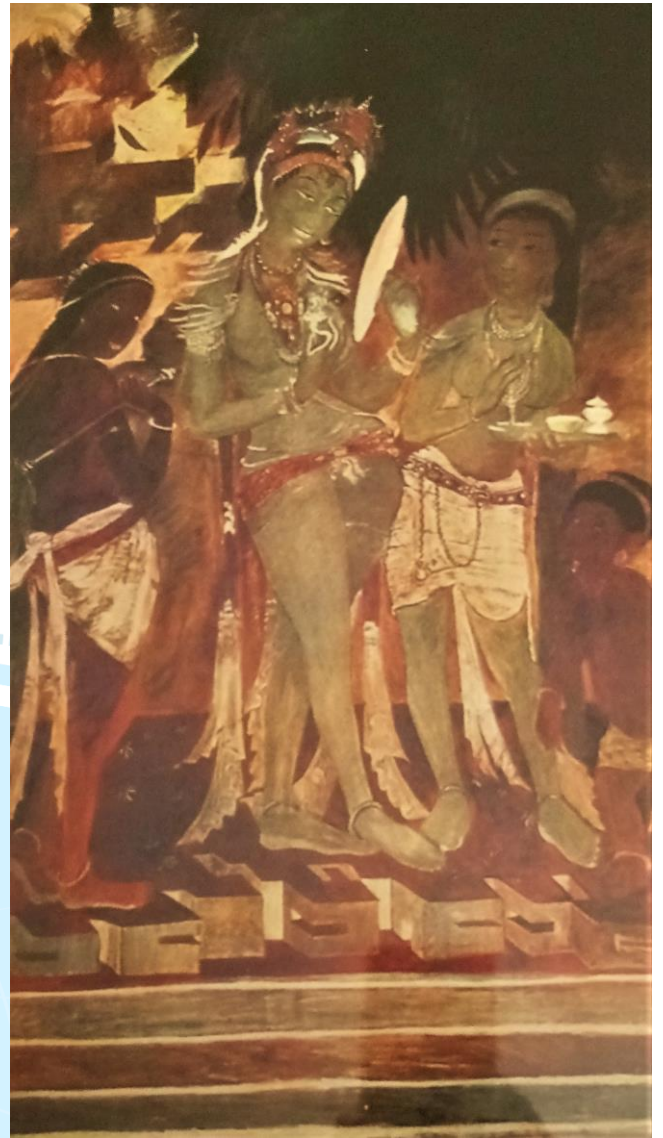
She sang with such passion  
it seemed her body was melting  
losing its fleshliness  
gradually dissolving into a melody  
that seeped through the bounds of the auditorium  
into the air beyond  
across the city  
into the sky, and the infinite space  
across the solar system and the neighbouring stars  
submerging one galaxy after another  
until it permeated the whole universe  
And then there was  
neither the lady nor the accompanists  
neither the auditorium nor the audience  
neither the earth nor the sky  
neither the stars nor the galaxies  
neither the universe nor the melody

### THOUGHTS ON A VISIT TO AJANTA CAVE NO. 17

What's this princess doing here  
in this solitary gorge  
among these monks  
meditating on life's sorrows?

Even after fifteen centuries  
one can inhale the fragrance  
from her freshly bathed body  
The jewels that adorn her  
are still avant-garde  
The chipped-off paint still brings out  
the dark lustrous smoothness  
of her youthful form, as she stands  
between her maids, a mirror in hand  
enamoured of her own beauty  
glowing like a forest fire at night.

What's she doing here  
among these monks  
who have vowed to conquer desire?  
Is she here to remind them  
of the cycle of countless births they must  
traverse  
to cool the fire that sears their loins?  
Or, perchance, she's here to melt  
the sculptured serenity of the Buddha  
himself  
and lead him back to the world  
to a celebration of desire?



### AN ARGUMENT AGAINST GOING TO WAR

Honestly, do we need a war  
to court a man-made death?

There're so many ways to die  
without going to war!

No, I'm not talking  
of the classy developed-world inventions:  
heart failures, cancers, air crashes  
though we have these too.  
Not of the less fancied but equally deadly ones:  
Malaria, Tuberculosis, AIDS ...  
though we have these too.  
Not even of Nature's periodic visitations:  
floods, earthquakes, cyclones

though we have these too.

No. I'm talking  
of our own Swadeshi innovations.

There's the death by fire:  
in which your body will melt like plastic  
in a kitchen  
in a jhuggi cluster  
in a fireworks factory  
in a cinema hall  
in a marriage pandal.

Then, there's the death on the road:  
Your bus can descend into a gorge  
like a surface-to-surface missile, and explode.  
It can hurtle on the highway and ram into another  
head on for maximum impact.  
It can mow you down like a three-ton lawn mower  
while you're asleep or waiting or walking on the pavement.

You can die on the rail:  
Your train may derail and nosedive from a bridge  
to become a spectacular heap of twisted metal and men.  
It may telescope into another  
to leave as many wounded and dead  
as in the month-long Kargil bloodshed.

You can die by water:  
Your rescue boat may capsize midstream.

You can die in high spirits  
by drinking hooch.

You can die feasting  
on infected food.

You can die in a hospital  
of a fake drug or of sheer neglect.

You can die in a police station  
of mere interrogation.

And you can die for so many causes:  
You can be stabbed or hacked  
in the name of your caste.  
You can be shot through  
in the name of your class.  
You can be blown into shreds  
in the name of your state.  
You can be roasted alive

in the name of your faith.  
In short, you can achieve martyrdom  
in the name of any hallucination.

Oh dear,  
when there're so many ways to die  
here every day  
in peaceful times  
do we really need a war?  
Do we really need a holocaust?

### THE NURSE

He was young, about twenty-seven,  
good-looking, would have been handsome  
had he dressed up.  
He was not educated –  
might have gone to school  
and dropped out.  
He had found work in a hospital  
to clean the wards, to dress, undress  
the patients, to see, touch and clean their bodies,  
their private parts, their soiled bottoms, and  
to absorb the stink, and much more:  
All on a petty wage, and the tips  
depending on the patient's goodwill –  
the hospital forbade this...

When father became immobile  
we engaged him to do all that for us,  
from morning till evening, for days on.  
He did everything we hated doing ourselves,  
without showing how he felt – we never tried to know –  
working for a moneyed man, with all rights of entry  
into our apartment reserved.

He came in whenever he was asked,  
keeping his shoes out,  
and went out when he was not wanted  
to wait at the door.  
When he performed his duties, I thought,  
he was something like a gadget –  
a dish-washer, a mop, a scrubber.  
And when father recovered, I paid all his dues,  
whatever we had agreed upon.  
As he was about to go, he said:  
'Forgive me for any mistakes.'  
I said, 'You haven't made any.'  
And shut the door on him.

**BIO-NOTE**

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Trilok Chand Ghai was born in 1937. He taught English language and literature at a college under University of Delhi, retiring as Associate Professor in 2002. Publications include ‘*Pattern and Significance in the Novels of R K Narayan*’ (1975), two works of fiction, *The Stricken Moth* (1984) and *Alone in the Wilderness* (2000), poems in *the Journal of the Poetry Society (India)*. Have translated into English three Punjabi poets, two of them being revolutionary poet Pash (*Pash: A Poet of Impossible Dreams*, 2010) and revolutionary-dalit poet Lal Singh Dil (*Exclusion, Deprivation and Nothingness: Selected Poems*, 2017). Translations of over 25 short stories of Munshi Premchand from Hindi into English are in press. Translations of a few poems of Lal Singh Dil were published in the *Transitions* issue of *MPT (Modern Poetry in Translation)* in 2012 and *MPT golden Jubilee anthology Centres of Cataclysm* (2016).

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