

Lapis Lazuli

An International Literary Journal

ISSN 2249-4529

www.pintersociety.com

GENERAL ISSUE VOL: 8, No.: 1, SPRING 2018

UGC APPROVED (Sr. No.41623)

BLIND PEER REVIEWED

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BRATI BISWAS

Translations of Dalit poet Kalyani Thakur's poems

Marching towards you Baba Saheb

I had been observing for a long time
Some flags lying around
Sun, Rain, Water had not
Changed their colour

The people walking by
Had/showed no concern toward them
Fear of termites eating, then
I hoisted the flag
Onto my shoulder and
Began walking
People's questions began then

You people were not picking up the flag
Therefore, I picked up
I noticed afterward
One by one, everyone began picking
Up the flags from the mound
And began marching
In the beginning
Without understanding which way to go
They loitered, aimless
Unorganized, groupless
Hesitant, some went round and round

In the end it was found
Their destination to be one.

Oh! Girl in the Dark

The girl who counts darkness
Whispers her story
Into the ears of the moonlight

The girl in the corner of the room
The glow-worm knows
Her story

The girl who breaks words
The deer are her
Friends

The girl soaked in rain
The cloud is aware
Of her complaint

The girl who swims
In troubled
Waters

Her sails don't rend
In the Ashwin Storm

The girl who grinds
The grindstone and pestle
Are her companions

The spices know her language
Ginger, chillies, cumin, *posto* (poppy seeds)

She appears a miracle
The tough girl

Wiping the sweat
Picking up the old plough
Along with the dark jewel

To the Inhabitants of Bhubon Gram

Come let's wander a little
 In that locality
 Where wares of desire are on display
 When the shopkeepers
 Open, is it not right
 To see with own eyes, checkout
 The good and the slightly bad
 We have to spend this life
 With good and the bad
 A few curses, abuses
 We will receive
 Will slip and fall a few times
 Those who have walked the road
 In their *jhola* some
 Experience they have gathered
 Is it not so?
 O Sir! Tell me!
 Thump your chest and tell me
 How 'great' a father's son are you?
 Stand before the mirror,
 You will yourself find a few black marks
 Even so,
 In this world,
 In the short span of
 A few days' acquaintance
 Can we let go of anyone?
 Not even one's father
 The people of Bhubon-gram
 Sing *Jai Mata Di!*
 We do not know our fathers' name
 The fathers have gone to another planet
 To bring more goods
 Have all fathers left?

Chandalini Kobita Poem no 31

Sleeping beside the ironsmith's blow pipe
Having listened to the cries
Of the hammer and
The burning iron

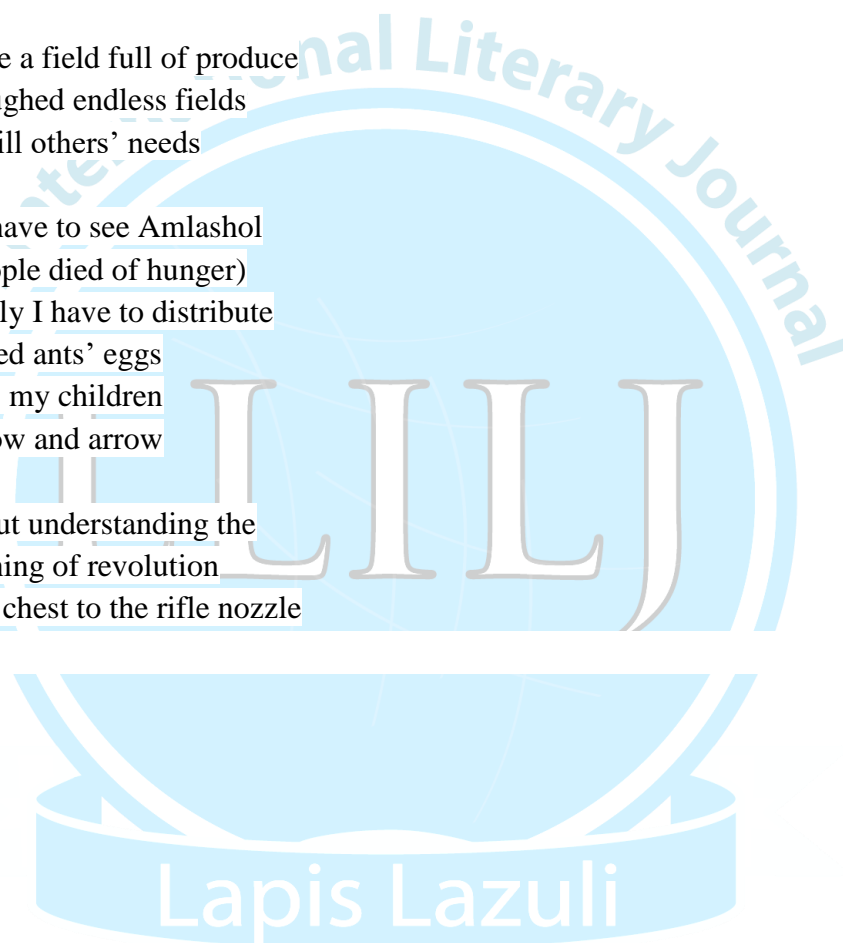
In the loom house
Like a shuttle I have
Ran from one end to the other

Becoming the share of the plough
Astride the shoulder I have
Gone to far horizons

I will create a field full of produce
I have ploughed endless fields
Just to fulfill others' needs

Even so I have to see Amlashol
(where people died of hunger)
In the family I have to distribute
Rice-like red ants' eggs
Fed on this my children
Take up bow and arrow

And without understanding the
Deep meaning of revolution
Offer their chest to the rifle nozzle

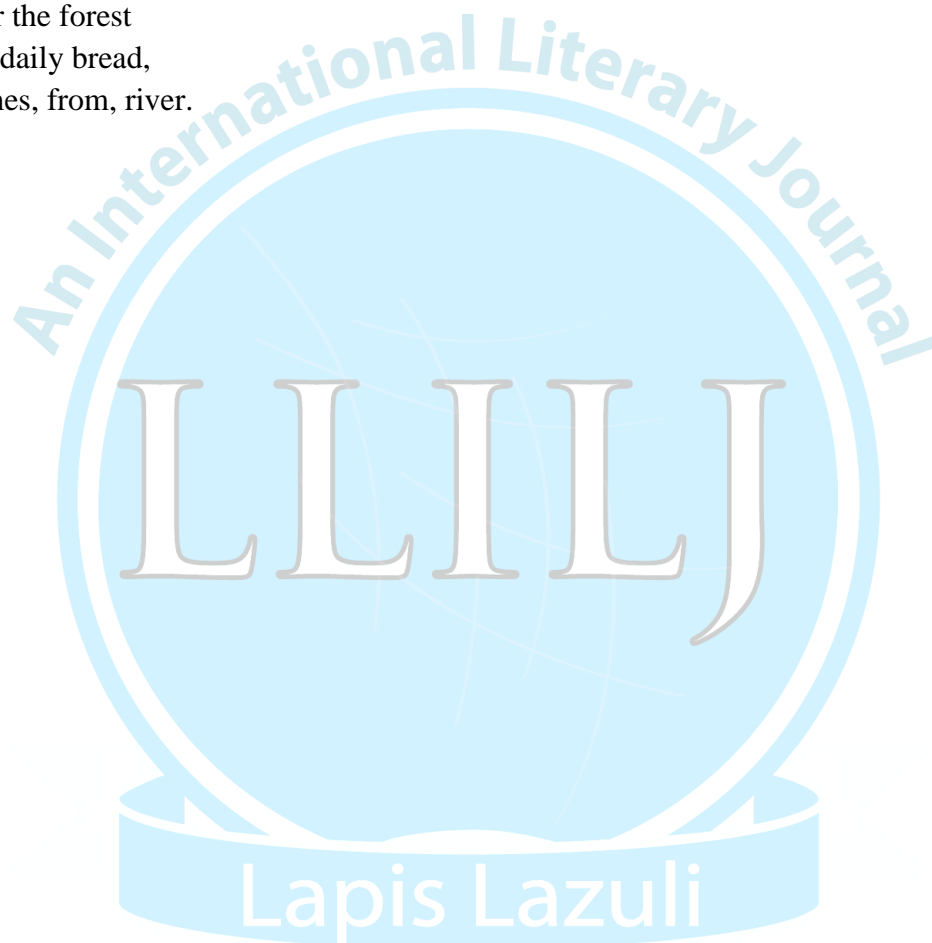


Poem No 39

The tiger feeds on us
The crocodile tears and eats us
We are the fish catching women
Can we afford to be scared

We have Bon Bibi
Dokhin Rai, we
Are the wives of the honey gatherers
We don't know when our husbands will return home

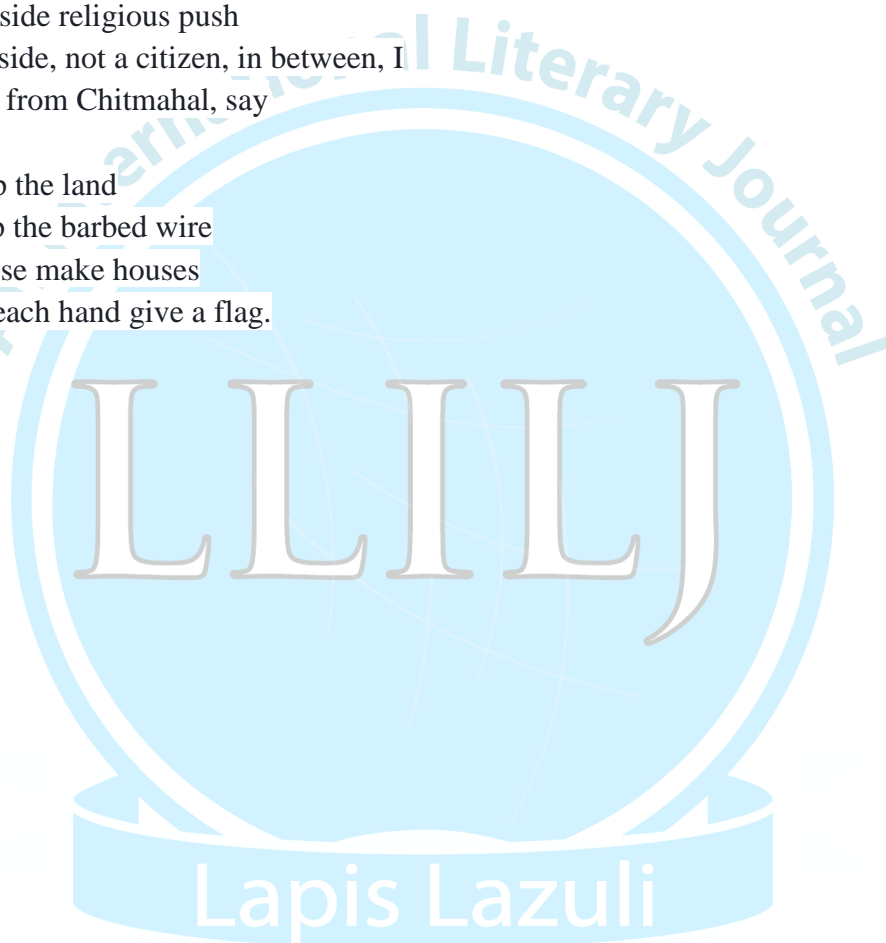
Our home is on the riverbank
Near the forest
Our daily bread,
Comes, from, river.



Poem no 40

I don't have a country
Nor do I have a flag
On 26th January
No flag flew here
I am a girl from Chitmahal Baskanta
On the broken Bengal border, I stand
Not on east not on west
I say----

I don't have a vote
I do not have a king
My mother weeps, broken mother
On that side religious push
On this side, not a citizen, in between, I
The girl from Chitmahal, say
Say
Seam up the land
Open up the barbed wire
Otherwise make houses
And in each hand give a flag.



BIO-NOTE

Brati Biswas is an Associate Professor of English at Dyal Singh Evening College, University of Delhi. Her PhD is from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and dealt with Dalit Literature of Bengal. She has published and presented articles on a wide range of topics -- from feminism to Dalit literature. She translates from Bengali to English and Hindi. Biswas is also a practicing poet.

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