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RASHMI BHARDWAJ

Translated Poems (Self)**In a Paper World**

Some people do not have a country
No four walls and a ceiling in this entire world,
that they could call home
Not a single map on which they can mark their state with blue ink.

They are often shipped off into the ocean
Where any boat can drown them
Fiery flames follow them around
A stray dagger or knife can develop a taste for their blood
Their birth-right is a bullet with their name on it
Their annihilation - an important step for the good of mankind.

Their kids – no longer innocent or young
Know where their mother is forcefully carried off to
The place from where she returns, unable to walk straight
Last time and several other times
They too had paid the price for mother's absence
They've never seen father cry
The new lines developing on his face each day, are dried tears
Their Gods are the helicopters that drop food packets from above
Carrying their home that has been reduced to a few bundles
They can get across any barbed wires overnight
Spikes only pierce the body
The blood seeping from their hearts never stops.

A home
A family
A country
An identity
To survive in this paper world
All they need is
A piece of paper.



The 80s and witnessing an unspoken relationship

While many of us don't even know for sure
Whether we are children of love or hate
Or were we conceived one night
As part of a non-consensual daily routine.

Except old and faded photographs
We never caught them gazing into each other's eyes
Or strolling on the beach while holding hands
We often felt that we were the only reason this house is a home
And if we were no longer a part of the equation
There would be no excuse left for these two people to stay together
We never heard them proclaim
That their existence is meaningless without the other
Instead fed up with daily rights,
we told them several times that they should leave each other
But they stayed together

And yet, if ever they had to stay away from each other
they would recount their entire day on the phone every evening
Reminding each other of things kept in the fridge or almirah
Enquiries about return tickets would be made
But never did they say - the house feels empty without you.
I cannot remember a time when they hugged and kissed us,
Told us that we were the apples of their eyes
And exchanged silent grateful looks
Love for us was always unspoken
But we know this in the heart of our hearts
That which is unspoken is beautiful

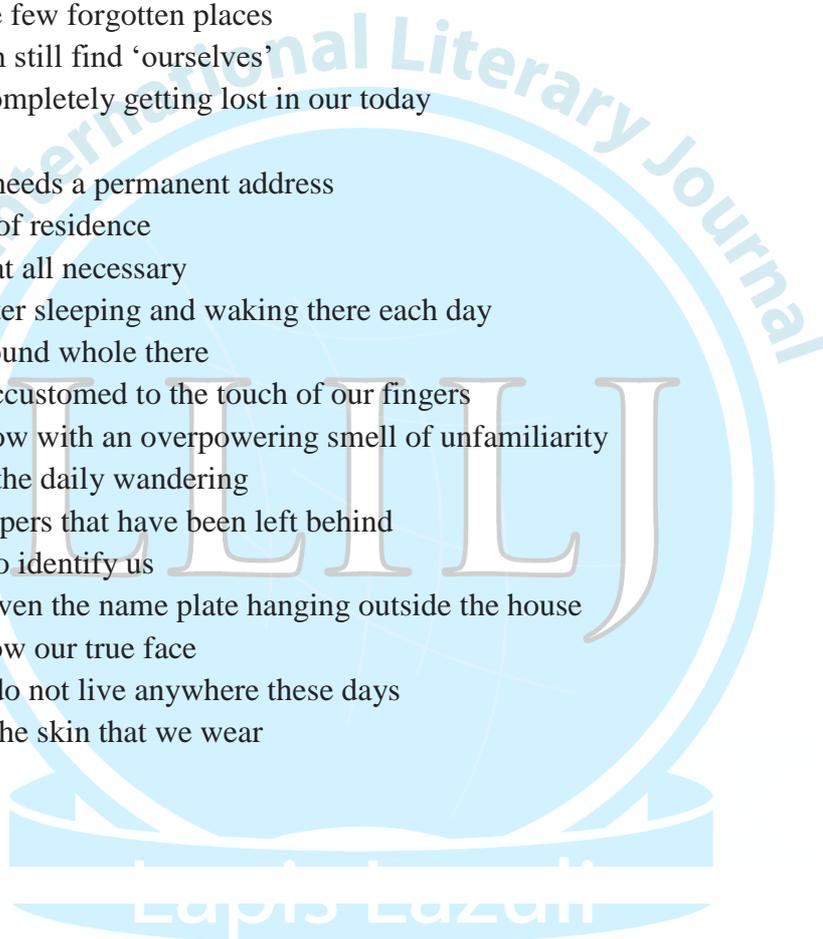
Even now that we do not live with them
They still do not use words
Which are fragrant with love
But they are still together
Forcing us to believe
That this is what love must look like.

We do not live anywhere these days

We return to our memories
Because there is nothing else to go back to
All those place we could have gone
Have moved a bit beyond our reach
Or have been left so far behind
That our feet cannot travel the distance

Reliving our memories is like being lost in the woods
Direction, time and hour are meaningless
Free and unbound feet of the heart
Get bloody while running and often cry out
These are the few forgotten places
When we can still find 'ourselves'
Even after completely getting lost in our today

Our present needs a permanent address
And a proof of residence
But it is not at all necessary
That even after sleeping and waking there each day
We can be found whole there
The things accustomed to the touch of our fingers
Often overflow with an overpowering smell of unfamiliarity
Fed up with the daily wandering
Even the slippers that have been left behind
May refuse to identify us
Sometimes even the name plate hanging outside the house
Does not know our true face
In truth, we do not live anywhere these days
Not even in the skin that we wear



BIO-NOTE

Rashmi Bhardwaj is a young poet and writer based out of Delhi. She holds an M.Phil. Degree in English literature and a Diploma in Journalism. She is enrolled in a doctoral program in English Literature. She is currently working as Editor-in-chief at the prestigious Vani Prakshan. She has worked with several prestigious newspapers and has taught at Galgotias University as an Assistant Professor. Rashmi won the Jnanpith Navlekhan award in 2017 for her debut poetry collection – “Ek Atirikt A”. Her writings regularly appear in several newspapers, magazines and literary blogs. She anchors and conducts several literary programs apart from being an invited speaker for several others. She also runs a bilingual web-zine called “Meraki”. When she isn't reading or writing, Rashmi can be found spending time with her daughter and dog.

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