

Classic Poetry Series

Aruni Kashyap
- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Aruni Kashyap(9 June 1984 -)

Aruni Kashyap (Assamese: অৰুণি কাশ্যপ) is an Indian English writer and translator.

He grew up in Guwahati and studied at St. Stephen's College, Delhi.

He works as the Assistant Editor of Yaatra : The Journal of Assamese Literature and Culture. An excerpt from his forthcoming novel set against the secret-killings of Assam was published in Tehelka Magazines annual fiction issue 2010. Along with fiction, he writes extensively on socio-political issues and his opinion based articles have appeared in The Guardian, UK, Open Democracy and Tehelka.

He is the winner of the Charles Wallace India Trust Scholarship for Creative Writing in 2009.

He is regarded as a strongly emerging young literary voice from the north-eastern part of India. His work published and in print has been able to draw interest and critical acclaim.

Arrival

There was no sun. So goats didn't bleat
and rush under trees, sheds; the stray dogs
that roamed around quarrelling over pieces
of meat in garbage dumps hotfooted to
verandahs. Opened doors shut on their own.
Closed unlatched doors opened shut perplexed
at the wind's guerrilla attack; shut opened perplexed.

The wind didn't come alone. Rains.
It was three o'clock at night. It didn't let me write.
It didn't let me sleep. Didn't let me stand and
watch it fall disperse invade all that was dry
in a minute and smile at its ferocity longing frustration.

It was scared of me. The rain and the wind and
the leaves it brought to me
without any appointment taken
made me busy in arranging the pages
of the novel I was weaving. Otherwise,
I'd have just breathed all of it into myself; trapped it.

Aruni Kashyap

Encroachment

I have known this river like tea leaves.
I have bathed, ran on its wet sands.
Grappled in its shallow banks for fishes and caught tadpoles.
Sometimes, avoiding restrictions I have even plunged naked
into its arms.

Hence I know, it has young blood in it.
And many cultures, ammunitions that have sunk into it.
They lie like treasures, loot
of seventeen victories against Mughals
over six-hundred years by Ahoms.
I have touched its chest, its shallow.
When it swells under weeks of rains
river-dolphins show their tails like mermaids,
just one glimpse
showing displeasure over constrained spaces.
We are the generous ones,
always embracing
not hollow men.
Only time has made our hearts narrow,
our spaces constrained just like this river's bed.
In eighteen ninety-seven
it swelled like rain clouds.
Paddy fields moved like sea waves
villages sank creating lakes
And one of those first sun hills,
cracked open.
And Digaru flowed down like Ganga
from Siva's whorls.
In this way we have made spaces.
Even for new rivers and lakes.
Sometimes villages too.

Aruni Kashyap

Fake Boots

Actually, stamping our feet
should have only awakened her,
but surprisingly, her motionless, senseless body made us run around
look for water, seniors and women
as if the fifty year old lady was in labour.

So more feet stamped while they sprinted anxiously
for women, water and a pair of open eyes.

We found her lying under the bed, a machete
clutched in her hands, drawn with love
towards her breast, as if to fight the whole world
of alien Hindi words, stamping feet and a camp
of green-men near the river where women no more
bathed, after many women were stripped,
even before they shed their second skins,

who didn't blush only before the morning sun.

She must have thought,

she would be one of them now
who were peeled to be enjoyed by many;
For hours since, she dared to speak silently to walls,
cicadas, four puppies huddled around a milk-heavy bitch,

maybe she thought, she would be one of those
who came back with crushed testicles to wail for nights
like hernia patients, while their wives burned
forever on beds fearing opinions and wobbling tongues,
though there was nothing as such to crush in her.

But perhaps only squeeze, though they were dry
And hung like weaver-birds' nests
from coconut branches in loamy soils.

She had been sleeping, the crumpled bed said, the hot-water bag
her earning city-son brought from the concrete-jungle slept
instead of her on the bed; and when I sat on it exasperated,

after breaking the only entrance to the house,
it was still warm with fear, comfort and urine.

We were only playing military-military.

Carpet grasses had just started growing from below.

We couldn't smoke if we wanted to, or watch films in cheap halls,
join the ULFA if we wanted, the way we can do now.

But still, those were better than days when we sneaked behind tamarind trees
and sang Bihu couplets to same-age girls, who had just learnt
to wrap a piece of cloth around their chests and giggled
poking each other in parts
we were embarrassed to utter the names of
before our elders.

We had new shoes then, the neglected Durga-idols waited
to be immersed in rivers and we thought,
one night—eating peanuts, jalibis and besan-pakodas,
to knock at aunt's door, while she slept with
the puppies, the walls and the heavy yet trying-to-be-warm air
inside, where she was left alone, to wait for us
Who pretended to wear boots, speak Hindi

and ask about the ULFA

Aruni Kashyap

Ghost Sounds

We huddle around Ma as
our gabled tin-roofs vibrate
during round-moon nights,
when bee-hives drip like wasted howling desires
of an elephant tethered to the banyan tree trunk.

Trailing his finger through the map,
my brother who thought maps
are exact replicas of the world,
assures us: father lives just half-a-finger away

·
Sometimes we sprinkle charmed mustard seeds
and wish they won't sprout foliage.
During evenings of fish-fry aroma,
our wooden doors moan creak sigh.

During full-moon nights, honey coloured,
doors don't take permissions before
flinging themselves open
like secrets.

Aruni Kashyap

Journeys

Trees moved along, clouds too
with the moon, the about-to-drown orange-sun
in sooty hours, slow;
they boiled down to a single feeling:

and I saw markets, old and new
where they sold, the same things—
Flesh of goats, cows, pigs,
hens or roosters,
ducks
and women

(they wore red, like lipstick
they wore clothes that failed functions
like hides, hung
over bones and clotheslines).

Nothing has changed
like red silk-cotton flowers
on green grass,
they remained
motionless, dead
yet striking
with repugnance,
not beauty.

Sometimes, I saw guns too
and brooms, that cleaned blood
like milk spilled by a cow's hind-legs-kick
from the milk-maid's knee-hold.

The same street, and people
and blood, guns, flesh traded
for money
It all remained the same
like a blood red morning sun
with the newspaper, red
roasted flesh
they still drink tea, brownish red

ginger-flavoured.

Once I saw a river too:
legends flowed on its simmering leaves
carried, with soil and life.
I sat on its bank
and listened.

When they ended, I found myself
on its bank: not in a time beyond
when people were afraid to cross it wearing
gold bracelets, silver toe-rings—
In case, a stormy wave swallowed them
a wild wailing wind from the untamed forests
hit them hard, pushed them into the river.

I felt I was going back.
Just felt.
And I found myself, amidst the river winds,
and legends that its white sands reeked
like rotting fish, jasmines, cow dung,
and rain.

Maybe this road, this journey
tree-crowded, cloud-shaded,
would also end in the same despair
And I would wait, stranded amidst smells
of fish, jasmine, cow-dung.
Though I was moving forward,
continually, I felt
as if I was going back.

Don't know where—
but I knew I would end up
where I started
so I went on.

Flesh, fragrance, jasmine
fish, cow-dung, women
and then the red colour
sometimes sun, sometimes silk-cotton flowers
or the blood which I mistook

for flowers.

Aruni Kashyap

The House With A Thousand Novels

This is a house, L-shaped,
seven-hands high; soil-veranda—
with twenty-one novels in it.

Every evening, five daughters beyond the banks,
who rested like bees in other houses,
with higher lower or equal soil-verandas
and more or lesser novels,
lift a night-black iron cauldron
so that it squats on the hearth.

This is a house, with twenty-one novels,
forever spanning
in episodic form, like long yarns.

In the room facing the east, where the eldest son lived
an almirah stood, with termites battling against it—
every night, along with the odious I'll-take-you-away-song
of the bespectacled inauspicious barn-owl;
proud, filled to the neck, with a thousand books.

Many of them were novels.

Popular, unpopular, pulp
erotic (hidden between old "important" newspaper cuttings) .

This is a house with eight doors,
seventeen windows, no ventilators.

In summers heavy with sweat and skin
snakes creep in for coconut-water-cold soil,
coated cool with greenish cow-dung
the epidermis of the seven-hand high veranda.

Everyday someone comes in—
leaving rippling traces forever
like generational earthquakes:

A wailing woman leaves a story of oppression, licensedrape, barrenness,
adultery;

A married daughter, beyond the banks, comes back to
disrupt diaries;

A worker runs away, digging up hidden gold jewellery
from one of these story-ridden rooms.

This is a house, with
a thousand serialised novels
floating in the heavy air.

Someone shrieks everyday.
Someone reads the caws of the crow and expects guests.
Picks up a mosquito from the milk and prays that no one dies.
Lights a mustard oil lamp in the household's prayer-room singing
pleading songs.
And children carry love letters for peanuts from here, from there,
leaving traces of story
to be ruminated forever:
with meals.
At night, around winter-fires,
the chewing and grinding of betel-nuts,
while lifting the iron cauldron.
This is a house with a thousand novels
(or more) .
Every window or a room that mourns for a vent
treasures a story in it, which
no worker can run away with;
more precious than gold
buried deep enough, deeper than
a spring, a well
so that it lives forever and grows
like tears, hair and serialised novels in journals;
inadequate to live anymore
in a wooden almirah eroded by termites.

Aruni Kashyap

Where The Sun Rises

If you come back,
There will be no sun,
like the day when we met for the last time in your room.
And there were no rains, but only thunder and stars.

ARSD hostel, wasn't it? There was no sun,
but we spoke about tomorrow's sun
that will gaze at its face in the mirror called the
Red River.

If Brahma wouldn't have married, and Parashuram
wouldn't have killed his mother,
this river, the mirror of the rising sun,
would have remained tumultuous, caged,
like this heart today, in the Parashuram Kunda, forever.

If you have a mother, and a father
who still earns and orders, you can't bathe there.
If you bathe there, all sins are washed away
Like peace, after the sun rose in Assam in a green flag.

Parashuram bathed there, and like blood, his axe descended
But still, he is the mother-killer.
Parashuram, there is blood on your hands -
your mother's.

If you come back,
what will you bring?
the Red River is redder now.

During independence Rupkonwar sang a song,
jingoistic, nationalistic: we aren't scared of sacrificing our lives
we will make the Brahmaputra red with our blood,
On the altar we will lay down our necks,
even if the priest runs away terrified.

What will you bring?
Those days are no more,
Those days: when young Assamese men sang so that the whites would go away
Sang, so that more young men would come and join the processions.

Green was there, even in that flag,
And if there was blood in nineteen-forty seven, there is still,
the Luit has become redder, only that's the difference.

I don't know what happened in Burma's forests,
Did you bathe in the Lake of No Return?
What will you bring for me, if you come at all?
mosquitoes, malaria, wounds and jaundice?
Or hunger for flesh and food to the point
where flesh will be food and food will be flesh
 Flesh will be food and food will be flesh
 Flesh and food.

Nobody will cook for you,
Nor me. Flesh and food are the same now,

A redder river weeps, not for you,
But for peace and a natural sun rise,
Yearns for redness from the sun floating between clouds,
Not in a green flag.

Aruni Kashyap