

Poetry Series

Mandira Mitra
- poems -

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Mandira Mitra()

A Dissertation On Dissertations

A soulful of you, lost in crowded stacks
In medias University's mildewed racks
Instructing moths and silverfish
In partial fulfillment of grandma's last wish_
And mama's; spurring your déjà vu
But they sent for a Doctor, not you.

Mandira Mitra

Activating Search Mode 123...

Oh why are the winds so wild today,
And the skies so sizzling blue,
Birds unusually vocal
As if on Richter Two?
Why are flowers beset with bees
Frolicking in ones and twos and threes
Oh why are the sage and sanguine trees
Craning to touch me as release
From roots that ache, or to please
Me into songs anew?
Tell them, I am no more
Not one, but half, till I restore
What Zeus cut up in two-
Trekking at Pyrenees or Istanbul
O my missing half,
Where are you?

Mandira Mitra

Deceased Intestate

I leave you nothing, Papa,
Except a red brick mound.
You may call it home
And in case I am no more
Do not seek me door to door
Instead let the whirring of the cooler
Cast upon you, dreams galore
Sensex 10,000 and still rising
To peace but not rest.
To Ma, if you can digest
Cruelty. This is called fate.
I choose to die intestate.
To, Shantibai
My fair maid of Cheapside:
Kakdwip, swinging on the Maids' special local
6: 30 to 8: 30 called Sonarpur express,
Reliever, I have received much
You may keep a lifetime coupon for lunch.
To, my children I bequeath:
A rotund hazy moon,
Gathering sweat without faith
Lies, deceit, NASA's treads
Antique. Another fifty,
Or at the most, a hundred and fifty years
Of celebration, globalization and spoof!
If not, then
To, my grand children
And their young ones,
Sorry,
For you I uprooted trees and planted polyphenylpropelene
Warmed up the Poles a bit,
Played a little ball game
Katrina Rita Wilma
All damned females playing part.
Nobel for Dolly of the cloned heart.
For you, who were never there
But in our imagination,
I bequeath an impaled sky,
Spread eagled with bird flu

Trusting you,
To avenge yourselves on your sorry ancestors
Watching with cold and listless eyes
From Mars Colony 211/B,
The lights go out
One by one,
Paris, Sydney, Rome, Perth
On old old Earth.
□

Mandira Mitra

Divorce 1

I would erase all memory of you, I would
Strike out word upon word with delight
Dissect your well meaning promises
And say, 'Here he was false, here light.'
I would, my sanity requires so,
Scout back, and discover a new fangled you.
Observe with calm precision of thought
Where it all went awry, where I ought
To have loved less, or none at all, or I
Should not so shattered be at a small goodbye.
I would delet all pictures of the mind
All letters burn, and rather believe
You laugh, and take another in your arms
When abrupt squalls bathe me down in grief.
I would, beloved, do it with a surgeon's heart
Save in parting from you thus, I from myself part.

Mandira Mitra

Divorce 2

This seals our pact; from this day
You turn a different route, I go my way.
No turning back, no tearful sighs
As we look up ahead at our apportioned skies.
We met, loved and are better parted
Than we fought, bitched and were broken hearted.
I'll ignore, I promise I completely shall
You breakfast on poaches or roaches
Or club sandwiches, or not at all.
No nagging tongue your siestas disfavor
Borrow your towel, toothbrush or blunt your razor.
Iron a bread, bake an alumni shirt & how
You're welcome to do all these to yourself now.
And lest I commit culpable homicide
Your inhaler is in the third left drawer, beside
Eighty two prescriptions that foretold
You're getting old, you're getting old, you're getting old.
Those stupid letters you wrote me Darcy style
Inhabit your elderly dense brown boring file.
I long to watch your graceless face
When that chick of a secretary absconds without a trace
Despite a rupees fifty raise
Nor Gods nor mortals know belles' ways!
So may you discover why they say
Cold tea and old wife never betray.
And so might you discover why
Cold scrooges and old husbands never satisfy!

Mandira Mitra

Dreams Come True

No use to cheat Nature
No use to pretend
I confess thirty winters
That I spent
Without knowing you,
Without knowing how completely
A woman is possessed,
In happiness and pain
Were rather spent in vain.

No use to keep waiting
Nothing is worth the wait
Neither e-mails, smses, telephone calls
Remotely compensate
What I must have now
Else it is too late.

Not the winter's misty sun
Nor December sweet
Nor the milky tears the moon
Weeps on the roses' feet
Neither meditation calms,
Nor are songs a balm,
Nor a lovely bedside smell
Of mother's boroline palm.
That includes all favorite things, that were before there were you-
If you are a dream,
Please come true.

Mandira Mitra

Equinox Girl

Fall-winter girl,
Sparkling, wise
Words trail off
Fashions capsize
Kinesthetic, her eyes
Evoke snowflake moments
Of past mall-winter skies.

Mandira Mitra

Gather Ye Atoms While Ye May

When I have paid my elemental debts
And returned to stars their dusty gifts
Fires to suns, to oceans tears
To mother earth with a vote of thanks for her years
Of coolie work, a spirit heavy with grief
And hear with an equally heavy heart
Her sigh of relief,
Then my love, shall I turn to you
And seek your love without benefit of arts
Unencumbered, in little parts.
No more in words, but in miniature things
Shall I come, hummingbirds' wings
Maidens' moles, roulette dices
Pomegranate seeds, champagne ices
Quiver incarnate on a polar stork's quill
Or safety pins on a virgin's espadrille.
So shall you never, as now things be
Complaine of having too little of me.
In such tiny ways might I love you night and day
Gather ye, love, atoms while ye may.

Mandira Mitra

Geometry At Thirty Nine

At age nine, an exasperated teacher
Slapped me for being circle-obtuse.
None of his analogies worked and
The circle remained a mystery, a
Rag picker child seeking name
In the dead wastes of my imagination.
Other fumbblings along corridors of linearity continued
Other fists upon blocked doors
Until an April evening well into its closure
As I relished my plants'
Parched thirsty eager necks craning to drink,
Leaves, shoots, buds, chlorophyll et al,
To lees my outpourings—
They were suddenly so much every much
Love-you-very-much You, who similarly sought,
And had, my hatred that parting summer noon
When I shook off my last leaf
Dead with the weight of a dying love
Feeding both our appetites—
It all came in a dizzying flash
So that's a circle, like a parenthesis
Poised between no longer beating together hearts
Bridge from nowhere to nowhere
Seeking soaking seeking
That's a circle.

Mandira Mitra

God Is An Autocrat

If God answers your prayer, he is increasing your faith.

If He delays He is increasing your patience.

If He doesn't respond, He knows you can handle.

If I can handle, my prayers do not include my pains.

I patiently wait to know the threshold of my endurance

But He keeps stretching it without ever asking for feedback.

If I cry out loud it's beyond my means; if He is God enough to understand.

Mandira Mitra

Halloween

Sorrow, sorrow, go away
Come again another day
Little Moon wants to play
Yet a little longer.
Come again another day
When she will be stronger.

Mandira Mitra

Honeymoon Homophones

Morning, mourning dawn
Faint, feint grief
Thrones thrown my way
Offer no relief.

Hurts lurk in dark hearts
Aloof a laugh echoes in guts
Feet perform feat
I's open, eyes shut.

Torn, turn asunder
Wrest, unrest for peace
Hills beckon heels
Kanchenjunga, Achilles'.

Mists, mysterious crows
Pick, peek on bones
Tired, tiered snows
Reign, rain faulty homophones.

I run, iron dreams
In-crease, de-crease passion
Fold neatly. Forget. Absolve.
He sleeps. My worlds revolve.
He switches dreams, treacherously
Turns back on me: it burns.
Law of diminishing returns.

☐*****

Mandira Mitra

How Do I Hate Thee? Let Me Count The Ways

How do I hate thee? Let me count the ways:

I hate you like the early winter six o'clock alarm

I hate you like Black coffee that forgot to stay warm.

I hate you like a surprise test on Compound Interest

An interruption to my Saturday night or an unwelcome guest.

I hate you like I hate Mama, when she asks me who called and why

I hate you like the waiter who says, "Coming!" and takes all eternity.

I hate you like the Summer Sun shining on me with a vengeance

I hate you like an offensive mail that offends me and says "No Offence!"

I hate you like I hate a scrub, especially on Holi day

I hate you like a spending spree when bucks are not coming my way.

I hate you like a lonely walk down National Library

I hate you because lovebirds are cooing hand in hand ignoring me.

Do I love you still? No, I don't. Yes, I do... oh damn!

I hate you not for what you are but for what I am, what I am.

Mandira Mitra

How I Avoid Insomnia

Worlds hum slowly in my sleep
I drown in dreams; their shadows deep
Like gypsy women's ancient art
Lull an ischemic heart.
Birds are restless tonight,
In degrees and not in kind
And Fukushima and Dai chi
Are just structures of my mind.
Myriad greens have waylaid me
To Plato's land of forms
Conspiring wickedly
To throttle sympathy.
I too had my share of storms.

Mandira Mitra

I Know I Know I Have

A lonely New Year's Eve
Beckons me tonight
With promises of retreat
Into warm August nights.
It will pass. But nothing
Thaws the heart's listless longing
For a little warmth tonight.
Nothing will quell this sobbing child
No lullabies will put to sleep
The chattering, monkeying brain-
Lest you lie alone tonight,
Lest you be alone again.
But I have lit bonfires, I say
Counted stars and built on sand
Played backgammon till they spotted me
On my lonely island.
And I have laughed alone and cried with me
And have sung with me a song
Till they found me waiting with me
And God! the wait was long.
Memories are fresh and raw
Savoured with care they'll give
Enough strength and warmth to survive
This Winter's New Year eve.

Mandira Mitra

Inflammability

She died a proper young maid's death;
Appropriate to her class. I couldn't
And appropriately I live. They said her sari caught fire.
I couldn't catch fire. I tried once
But it scorched me and I was afraid.
You cannot catch fire. It is hot. And perhaps round
A circle in three dimensions. Crimson. And afterwards
Your epidermis shrivels up like a coconut,
Wanting to run away and plunge into ice.
The ordeal of such random wound heals heartaches
Opening new cracks, wide fissures gaping like a shameless whore
Leaving you screaming, no more, no more.
I wonder what she saw, but of course
Her pupils melted into a thousand suns
Turning her into the sixth element on the periodic table,
Carbon thou art and to carbon return.
A diamond would be much preferred
Father, who punctually appeared
At month end, would have appreciated the gesture.
For an ugly bride, she made a rather good looking corpse.
You see she wrote fire properly. I, who couldn't,
Instead write her obituary.

Mandira Mitra

Keep The Change

He had the sun on his back
And out of an unzipped rucksack
'The Collected Poems of Heinrich Heine'.
Frothing coffee long gone cold
I thought him a little too bold
When to our generous, 'Keep the change'
His amused rejoinder, 'Keep the space'
Landed flat on our face.
How could we keep that space?
The only thing that lovers efface?
We were in Love.
Four years down the line
He was doing Medical school
And I was doing the dishes.
In between realising Kahlil Gibran
(Let there be spaces in your togetherness) ,
And cooking for guests, I sometimes wondered
If I could manage to make that change.
And so here I was, sitting all by me
Sipping my long-gone-cold coffee.
Nothing had altered, not the beaten sun
Nor the cafeteria in the long run,
Nor the poems nor the faith
Nor the gentle old man a little out of breath:
When I told him, 'I kept the space'
Said, flat on my face, as if in exchange,
'Keep the change'.

Mandira Mitra

Kitchen Garden

Now touches the first ray of the Sun
My tomatoes' ruby face
Peeping from the green junction
Of their dark gloomy foliage.
Auburn concentric beans
Stalk amethyst aubergines
Subtle whispers pass
From grass to grass.
Turnips cringe and shy
From birds flying by
As a single spotted sparrow
Alights on a long white marrow.
Creepers trembling on
Blinding lanes forlorn
Climb for old times' sake;
Slumbering parsleys wake.
Leaves within or without
Veins and muscles sprout,
Night's memory fades
Under deep papaya shades.
Fumbling vaguely for grace
I lose my youngest sorrow's trace
And ponder means and ways
To spill my endless vacuity of days.

Mandira Mitra

Lady With The Broom

No poetic enquiry of her unaccustomed smile
Will crack the mystery of her sudden style
As her plebian bucket and broom she wields
Perspires under the sun, sweeps and shields.

Neither prose nor no verse
Cross her island of Circe;
Escape vapors that arise
Confining your moments to her kohled eyes.
She may be sweeping streets but keeps
Your caged soul in dark pomegranate lips.

Until her amber waist, with a ferocity of motion
Brings you back to earth; shatters your illusion
You weakling, you fool, here was no average emotion_
On an average scorching afternoon.
She is getting married soon.

Mandira Mitra

Mahalaya

She of the allied forces
He of the foe
She of the lion
He of the buffalo
Come together, fight
Symbolize victories
Of dawn over night.
Yet if the silver sphere
Of moon were granted speech-
She would tell you how
Joints of Mother's fractious spear
Are full of rust and screech.
'Twixt good and evil though
The bedside lamp in Gandhi's land
Casts a crimson glow.

Mandira Mitra

Mirik,2004

Now I save the clippings in my soul;
How run they? Let's see:
The clouds dipped in the ketchup sky
Feel the rush of wind and eternity
And lest they part without a goodbye
Towering firs stretch their roots and gravity.
The looming fogs circle round and round
Touch the heights with pines and touch the ground
And mourn and laugh with a subterranean sound
And break upon the lake, lost and found.
Upon the hill are twenty thousand hills
Or twenty thousand islands of the flesh
Like wounded trees that yell, " Rimjhim+Hitesh"
They weep and sleep and sleep and weep afresh.
Casual tourists, we mesmerized take
Stories of children drowned in the lake
And consuming king size lobster fries at lunch
Drown in nightmares and think we had `em too much.
Tipped between reason and insanity
I laugh at Mirik and Mirik laughs at me.

Mandira Mitra

Monsoon At Prantik Asylum

Rain clouds gather in the sky
Like stalkers in silent consensus.
Grinning, communicating eye to eye
Crouching for you
To sail into a collective view.
Hold your sighs, droplets
Touch whether you will or no
Tentatively and then with assurance
Without reason or sense
Permitting neither retreat nor bent
In seeking words or consent.
Enjoy the shower since it is inevitable.
Once they are done,
Watch the sulk of twilight
Fade from your cell and await the night.
Tune your insane ears to the ringing
Of Water
Obeying summons of subterranean beings.

They teach you the art of living.

Mandira Mitra

Nel Passare`

O, to have loved and lost
Been hurt and cleft in twain
Takes years to heal; remembrance
Is raw and intense pain.

But for the benefit of verse
That combed and braided grief:
Wed sorrow to loveliness
And slashed memory brief.

Mandira Mitra

No Change Of Address

If canned mackerel in sauce
Had some semblance to memory
Would they recall
A once buoyant limpid world
Bedded with limestone and flagella
Wooed by green iridescent sea weed
Skirting past flame coloured coral
Magellanic Cloud of the Ocean
Like I recall my world
Perched atop this jerry can,
Home to fifteen megatons of nuclear warhead,
Called earth
And doing my own belly dance
Upon discovering another
Twenty light years away jerry can—
Let it be heard and noted
Sealed and signed, I,
Prefer to die, pleasantly
With my mother's face in my dead fish eye
Than, to sit alone on a fifty degree afternoon
Humid enough to make one swoon,
Opening my radiation proof can
Of mackerel in oil of bran.

Mandira Mitra

Oedipus, Oedipus

Why are you so young Mama?
And why was Papa so old?
"But we were in love, Beta,
Imprudent and bold."

Then why did Papa go away Mama?
It was not his age to die.
Why cant I, like them at school
Have a family?

"Oh yes, you can, my love
If we look near and far
For someone who's lost out there like us
A knight in shining armor! "

Would he smell like Papa, would he
Allow me now and then
To drive, and do all those things
Young boys must do to become men?

And I hope he will not beat me up
He's not my real Papa you see!
"Of course, love', say I,
'I wouldn't tolerate such cruelty! "

I wish you weren't young, Mama,
He sagely says as I,
Recline lightly on his young breast
Listening to him sigh.

We could be forever happy
The two of us, just so.
And years would pass by Mama,
And I would grow and grow.

You kept your day to day loveliness
And I wish you never die,
Oh why are you yet young Mama?
"And why are you so old? " think I.

Mandira Mitra

Old Wives' Tales

Do not be afraid to build.
That's what Granny said.
After three-score and ten
Years of traversing nations,
Partition and the riots
And the historic evening in 1954
Subsequently named by us:
"Transistor radio march"
When Farukh Mian brought information
Of an impending attack. Hand in hand
She and Grandpa crossed the border
With only a Transistor-radio
Their sole possession. Hand in hand
They walked towards a teeming island
Of refugees. Even then said
Granny with her inscrutable faith
Not put to test with the rest:
By all means build, like
The ant, like the wren, like the sparrow
Let there be four walls of trust,
Cat-in-waiting for the crust,
Of last morsel of fish and rice. Throw in
A nice bed embroidered with delicate threads
Where little heads
Keep popping out of blankets
For the frog-prince's ultimate fate.
Let there be a man in the house
With his delicious sloppy ways,
Leaving his masculinity around
In vast cigarette trays.
Build, said Granny: on sand
On sea on ice on rocks on fire
On snow. Absorb the sights
And sounds, of life around.
Befriend fish monger from Bongaon, blind beggar
From Maimansingha. Beg nostalgia or bargain
As if your life is at stake,
For that fish looking like snake.
Never be afraid to build. Never wake up

Alone from a nightmare. It pays
To have a soft comforting snore
Drift towards your lonely island of sleep
And keep (however queer her ways)
Your company. She understands
As even mother cannot understand
The fondness with which you retain that torn slipper
From that rain soaked walk with you-know-who
From your Varsity days. And she knows the ways
Your heart still skips a beat
(Adventure in the fashion of Granny's radio-retreat)
When a certain smile wafts across the dinner table
At Annual Alumni meet.

Mandira Mitra

Once Upon A Time And Love

Playing hide and seek in the deep and dark
Crypt of the Universe where shadows lurk,
Where stars SOS to distant stars
Over winding sheets of light years
I, Time, miss my errand
To set the cosmic minute hand.
Noisy gods and slumberous eyes
Work like Satan in disguise.
Forget master's dire command,
"Sift your proprietary sand,
and keep you watch from land to land."
Charged with dereliction of duty I stand
And Master acts as Officer in Command.
All the same the world doth turn,
Until in a childish feminine script
A post "To whomsoever it may concern"
Arriving at His daily brief
Asks, to my hope and relief,
"Why, since I lost him
Has Time stopped moving? "
Reinstated, I,
To thank the lady, stop by.
"Oh no no no my dear, " says my bonny lass
"Love is neither meat nor drink
Just a healthy Time-pass! "

Mandira Mitra

Over And Out

Nothing to say anymore
No emotions, complaints,
Unreasons that shout,
Without a word further
Without procrastination or doubt
I'm moving over and out.

Mandira Mitra

Passive Aggressive

You wanted to travel the world, so I wrote you a song.
Now you want to be a singer. Maybe I shall hunt a forest boar
And adorn your ego wall with its hooves.
Day before yesterday you were talking to
The mermaids of Cape Comorin in sleep. I am still not done
Drawing strings on your hunting sling.
Lead me not to temptations
Diana herself keeps you out of harm's way,
Hot pursuits adorn a king not a queen
But a loose stitch
May be a fatal thing.

Mandira Mitra

Philomel's Song

Sunday morning. I dust my alphabets to a shine
To build you a dainty you wake up
Red-eyed from your nightmare
Like the Loch-ness monster.
You'll be sorry later, but that
Orange -flared breath in your eyes
Scorched my wafer thin poems
To paper thin sighs.

Mandira Mitra

Plus Ca Change

Make no mistake
I am not looking for you in them.
Not seeking empowerment
In the words, translations, linguistics
Of their foreign tongue. Not tracing you
In the coordinates of strange lips, hair, flexes,
Or configuring a feminist revolution
In sweat-cigarette odours of rows of bodies
Affirming by denying you.
Not loving them, their fathers, grandfathers serenading through time
At midnight tryst with long awaiting wives,
To love you. This quest is not for you
Nor what you never yielded. Not the circularity
Of what I sought but never sought so in vain.
In crossing centuries of guilt and shame
Quests acquire a face or name
But things change and remain the same.

Mandira Mitra

Regressus Ad Uterum

To trust or not to trust, that is the question.

Though Time is all Time
And Space all Space; absence of grace
Thwarts blessings, denies foresight
As though at the centre of the Still Being
A vast rotating black hole
Soaks up all light, shades, darkness
Laughter, longing, paranoia
Even death, leaving a void. Loves
Paid heavily for and dear
Carried over from the last calendar year
Blur my vision
Mother
For the nth time I trust, risk betrayal
Juggle false and true.
If I fail, gather me unto you.

Mandira Mitra

Rome. Painting The Sistine Chapel.

The flowers of May are in full bloom
But they do not attend my fresco.
And only yesterday, touching up Noah,
I felt the wind change directions
And start blowing northwest; this blasted city
Not even seven hills blocking the salt sea air,
Making me nostalgic for the pure air of the Arezzo hills.
David sealed my fate, says Urbino:
It's been my twenty-eighth day up at the scaffolding
With men, women and children jeering at this madman
In clothes matted with plaster and colour running down beard.
I cannot bear too much light, nor saw the walking stick
Land on my shoulders, "Son of Ludovico! When will you finish? "
As Julius II, livid with anger hissed, "Inauguration on All Saints' Day! "
At 69 ft for four years my vertigo is cured now.
Painting is a lonely journey.
"When I shall finish, " I had answered the vacillating Pope,
Neither Genesis, unraveled for Man; nor promises
Of eternal glory make me work furiously.
But that cruel Vittoria, at mass on a certain day
With the Count D_ by her side at the pew
Shall look up at my nine panels of perspiration
And sin in her thoughts with me, in full Apocalyptic view.

Mandira Mitra

Strangers At My Door

So, that's how he mutates.
Toothless octogenarian, drooling spit
Finished in all fine details
Down to a once-black long umbrella,
Punjab lorry slippers and
Son-died-in-accident vacant eyes
Inviting you to a detour
Of deserts you imagined left behind.
Sometimes a factory hand turned salesman
(Upcoming bridge put them out of work)
Shoving a plastic sack between your door hinges
Disrupting meals; importuning you to take a look
To please take a look at least—
Desperate eyes smelling your guilty
Lunching munching fingers.
Doors become two-way mirrors.
Shaking off years of hibernation
Shedding layers of lullaby and meandering sleep
Grey cells whirr into action and speak:
Save tears for newspaper sorrows
There are smiles to go before a weep
And smiles to go before a weep.

Mandira Mitra

Unburdening At Cafe Thirteen Thousand

A trek to thirteen thousand feet in June
With roads on clouds roll-call,
And whispering willow retreats
Works wonders for the soul.
Mountains grow and shrink,
And wink at every passer-by
Lakes brimming over with mist
And the brimming-over-with-stars sky:
Acacias, rhododendrons, and magnolias worth dying for
Vie with each other for space
With upturned, eager face.
At a loss for words we,
With a little endeavour
Here laid to rest our memories
For ever and for ever.

Mandira Mitra

Whodunnit?

Love, remember when
As wanton love's refrain
We vowed to me and you
To round off with, "I Do".
Thus safely enclosed
In desires we dozed
Future unwary we two _
Until (was it me or was it you?)
We forgot to renew
Our terms and make them new.
That was the END.
HE called off our play enforced
And declared the game as closed.
Tell me who had the first fright
Tell me who first moved out of sight
Converted "I do" s to "may" or "might"
Tell me who switched off the moon tonight?

Mandira Mitra

Yet Another Shower

To warm urgent winds

Stroking insane minds

Thunder and rumbling in sky

And ocean, come rain.

To grimy Krishnachura, Sal, Sundari

Banyan, all but choked in vain

Come rain.

To broken-wing linnet

Limping mongrel cowering in pain

To ants queued up back to front with grain

Come rain.

To throbbing city streets

In startling sheets

Entreating oblivion

Come rain.

To Ivy, Honeysuckle, Red dead nettle

Azalea, Great mullein, come rain.

To fields, cornstalk, hay, scythe, sugarcane

Cattle bound by wild hawthorn terrain

Come rain.

To mouths pressed in solitude

Against dripping window pane

Come rain.

To bodies showered shaken rising

Raising toasts, sinking back again

Come rain.

Mandira Mitra