

Poetry Series

Sharmila Ray
- poems -

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Sharmila Ray()

Sharmila Ray went to Presidency College and Calcutta University where she majored in History did her Ph.D. on Durga and governance and subsequently joined City College, Kolkata under Calcutta University where she is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of History. She writes in English and has authored six books of poetry; *Earth Me And You* (Granthalaya, Kolkata 1996) , *A Day With Rini*(Poetry And Art 1998) , *Down Salt Water* (Poets Foundation, Kolkata1999) , *Living Other Lives*(Minerva Press, New Delhi, Mumbai, London 2004) , *It's Fantasy, It's Reality* (Punaschya, Kolkata 2010) , *With Salt And Brine* (Yeti Publishers, Calicut 2013) . She has experimented her poems with sarod (Indian string instrument) and the result is a CD— *Journey Through Poetry And Music*. Her poems are available in a CD- *Hello*. Her poems, short stories and non fictional essays have appeared in various national and international magazines and journals. For a time she looked after the column *Moving Hand Writes* (Cal Times, Times Of India) . She also edited *Poetry And Art*, a journal of art and poetry (1992-1998) , *The Journal* (2012-13) , journal of the Poetry Society of India. She was also on the board of juries for All India Poetry Competition organized by Poetry Society of India and Ministry of Human Resources, Government Of India. She conducted poetry workshops and resource person for translation workshops organised by the British Council Kolkata, SahityaAkademi (Indian Academy of Letters, India) and Poetry Society India and participated in various seminars organized by Universities and private institutions. She also curated an exhibition combining paintings and poems sponsored by Alliance Francaise, Calcutta and Indian Alluminium. Currently she is the editor of *Poetry And Art*. She had been invited to International Struga Poetry Evenings, in Macedonia where she represented India and International poets meet in Kerala to share stage with Ben Okri.. She has been widely anthologized and featured both in India and abroad. She has been reading her poems in various parts of the country. Her poems have been translated into Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Slovene, Hebrew and Spanish. Currently she is working on a poetry manuscript and non-fictional essays.

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A Strong Word

Missing you is a strong word.

It has a smell to it, mushy and oppressive.

Sometimes, in the dead of the night the word condenses
before it scatters into hundreds of colour photographs.

I put my hand over my eyes so as not to be dazzled.

Yet, the word blinks at me, blue –
a deep, deep blue.

I wake up as dawn breaks

and the word melts

carries a different smell,

cool and damp of ferns

of earth and old leaves

and, perhaps,

knives.

Sharmila Ray

Alphabets

Alphabets march to enter my heart
but an ancient wind stops them,
They get lost.
They die
without forming a word.
However, in the evening they return
with kites
with birds.
Colored alphabets
sitting arrogantly on my desk
deriding me.
Alphabets, mist of my armpits.
Alphabets, the cotton stretched
over my breasts.
Alphabets, the invisible horizon.

I'm swept.

In the sense-space of my thought
alphabets grow again on their own
as do the ferns,
much like the nails on your fingers.
Alphabets, word-forest.
Each tree a word
and if we do loose ourselves
in the forest
it is exactly then that we
find our voice.

Sharmila Ray

Hello

Hello,

writing to you is like writing on a blank page which magically will soak in all the words and become blank again. So there is only ng to you is addressing a blank within me. Tracing a line from your forehead down to your lips and then to

your heart which is warm and cruel like the enigma of oxymoron and I want to nestle there like sweet poison, corked and carefully preserved.

But can one learn to live? Can living be learnt from experiment and sameness, passion and indifference, art and craft?

Last years words belong to last years language, frozen and dried and the lilies that I had planted had withered too.

Should I invent a new language?

I want to count the moles on your face, breathe deeply the honey mint of your breath and then go off to sleep peacefully.

In a moment we are in words and language, in a moment we are outside words.

We are

fusing each other.

Be my nest...

Using the quick-option reply let me say your words reach out and touch me. Your word

have -tongue. Your word have teeth. Word-teeth. The tongue caresses the teeth bite. Your mail makes the evening smile softly at me and there is silence like the intense white heat. I seem to contract, to shrink and dwindle to a small colourless dot,

scarcely larger than hundreds of dots on your computer screen. I feel in my bones a sharp ache of the coming frost.

We live in each moment and in each we learn to live. What are we expecting?

Perhaps,

something, perhaps, nothing at all. We return to the same dialogue only to find it decayed.

But then we do return, isn't it?

What you desire or I, is perhaps, already a memory by the time you open your inbox.

For you, let me be a thin line between dreaming and waking.

Yours...

Past Tense

PAST TENSE

I just can't concentrate so I decided to write to you. It's queer I can't get you on the line and I am afraid to sms you.. I don't even know when you will read this. I feel in my being a razor sharp pain but I can't define it. Only I know it's a kind of silence, creeping in upon me, a vast ocean which has lost its blue. I am looking at the books you have given me. I am looking how you have addressed me, my name written in that bold scrawl, in fact, I am looking at you. I desire you but the moment I finish typing my desire is already a past tense.

I do not know
where you are
nor the circuits
that create rhythm
in you.
But I want to know
did you think of me?
Now the sky is slate
the rain almost about to fall
and the earth eager for love.
I am remembering you
your sun-browned hand writing
the computer screen full with
heavy words.

Are you thinking of me
are you?

Sharmila Ray

Refugee

REFUGEE 1

They boundaried you with double-razor wire
they called you refugee-number on a card
they scorched your identity with hate and fire
yet they're your saviour malevolent and hard.

REFUGEE 2

They grilled and hounded you
till you're a faceless face
they made you stand in a meandering queue
your eyes sightless surveying the space.

REFUGEE 3

You can be distressed or whatever
learning a new language to cope
staying in Abu Gharib in hot weather
your soul black even with a soap.

REFUGEE 4

Your open arms can only be a gesture
homesickness, no no emotion for you
it can only be a suggestion, a texture
in a world lopsided and new.

REFUGEE 5

You feel cold shrinking and dying
in every nerves, veins and bones
while they say you're lying
over a meeting with tea and scones.

REFUGEE 6

Half wondering under the tea coloured sky
host to million scavenging red-brown mites
holding a dead baby and questioning why
when you've forfeited your natural rights.

REFUGEE 7

Over vast and drying flat land
home was somewhere you had to walk alone
even then you failed, no outstretched hand
frost and arthritis marinating every bone.

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Ruins

Naked and immense
the ruins stare at me.
Here the evenings are
still born children and
the rain, if falls at all
is light as a grasshopper.
I have my notions about
other ruins,
but this one makes me
search myself.
Each cry I utter is lost
in the limitless space,
then it gathers speed and
hits the frozen walls
breaking into an echo.

Perhaps, the story I'm looking for
is buried beneath the mosaic
and in the whispering of the lizards.
Perhaps, it is there when the
first star shines and the
gods of night draw their curtains
over moon-drenched pillars.

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September

Can you hear your voice
my voice and
everything that's going on?

Can you see the dark islands
in an ocean and the sudden shafts
of light in a deep forest?

Can you feel the whipped fire that runs
in your veins, my veins and each little wants
that haunts the folds of our flesh?

Can you live again those poems,
those metaphors and those soft lust
of September days?

Can you say yes to the coming winter
and embrace without shivering
those mist-stained mountains?

Can you?

Sharmila Ray

Smell

SMELL

There are too many people here hurrying towards the metro. Their body odour spill over themselves mingle in the dusty air in soft slow hold my hand and we move away. My cologne-doused smell an explosion on your senses.

Our bodies quiver like shooting stars and emit smell. I feel we are stuffed tomatoes sauted over slow heat. I come closer. You smell like green chillies and asafoetida. I come closer. I feel you don't smell at all of chilly-asafoetida. To the four winds I curse which plays hide and seek with your smell, little realizing that they are cupid's tantalizing me. I look into your eyes. Here and there are outcrops of oddities, lichen and yes, smell. Not one but many- one upon the other, one beside the other, one mingling with the other. Smell, spicy, cloying, distant, oppressive.

Your eyes, our sea, green with decayed seaweeds smelling pungent and of deep substances. And then there is a clash of senses, smack of kisses. Textured, grainy-soft like luscious strawberries. Somewhere the blood runs deep astringent, formidable like soldiers defending the land which smells of freshly cut grass.

There is silence.

No word.

No sound.

Only smell. Violent, delicate drenching ourselves.

You come closer to me. Your breath like hot chocolate spreads over me.

You ask me 'do you feel anything?'

I answer 'smell me.'

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Voyage

Crossed legged on the floor
I open the first chapter on trade winds.
The warm fragrance of distant cities
and abandoned shells
waft over the loam of my being.
Before I know my eyes cut through
the twisting mist to the distant horizon.
Liquid notes of unheard melodies float by-
galleons, plazas and a fascinating time,
all freeze to take shape in a molten landscape.

On the other side you cannot
see the waves breaking against the cliff
nor hear the scraping of a broken scull
against the keel. You cannot even smell
the aloe, the cinnamon and clove
all floating in the cobalt water.

But I want you to do all these things.
I want to make you sit
on a rough sailcloth and
murmur words of love.
They would be hissing in the wind
like casurina leaves.
We would build a fire and
cook supper among the
green bracken and moss.

This is nakedness.
Perhaps...

As I reach you through
my word, my alphabet,
the alleys, the byways diminish.
And each sound of the keyboard

like a milestone recedes
taking me towards you.

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