



Poems from *Srestha Kabita* (2005, Best of Subodh Sarkar)

Subodh Sarkar

Translated from Bangla by Jaydeep Sarangi

1

Bribe

A suicide note under the ninth volume of *Rabindra Rachanabali*
Written to his son. Then with a blade in his hand
The Master had entered the bathroom.
In the afternoon, the maid saw the line of blood
From under the door and she screamed out.

This is the first and last letter written to his son:

‘Arani

I have a conviction that a son is as holy as water.

my relation with you is not smooth

Still, let me write this to you

Since the last two years, whatever little I had saved

Is spent up now, for your mother’s treatment.

I was not able to bear the burden of the treatment anymore.

I never ever touched your money in my life; I won’t even in my death.

I taught students all my life, never did anything wrong knowingly.

Last month, a parent came to my school, he was desperate to admit his son.

I refused the first day

I refused the second,

But I couldn’t on the third. In a big envelope

He left with me thirty thousand rupees.

With that money, your mother’s treatment is going on this month.

No hope whether she will ever return home.

If she does, tell her, that I have lost the right to live in this world.

Yours ever, Father.’

When the whole country is cashing on bribes

Then just one suicide note under the *Rabindra Rachanabali*!

In the hospital under the tree, I was having a chill down my spine.

I went forward to my Master, covered with all white cloth

Towards two lone feet, sticking out from under cover

Those two uncovered feet as it were, was *the* last feet of India.

Note: Rabindra Rachanabali – Rabindranath Tagore’s collected works



2

Murder

The boy used to say
'You will be killed the moment you love someone else.'
The girl used to say
'I will kill you if you flirt with any other.'

The girl is in Canada now, and
The boy is in Nepal, Rangoon
Can you tell me why they haven't
Killed each other yet?

3

Sita

Today I returned to you from Lanka
At first I looked at your face
It's not a face, but as if golden glow!
The two eyes are two books
One of valour, one of pain.
I looked at your hair,
how long have I not caressed those locks
I remembered the sign of the last night I spent with you
it was the moon in the sky
And you on earth
You loved me that night.
Though I know
No gallant can love a woman.
I think, that night you had
Loved me for the last time.

For me you
Have borne insult
I know that.
For me you have burnt down
One whole nation.

Today I returned from Lanka
To you



You are my husband, you are my protector
You are my love.
For so long the comb
Has not touched my curly tresses
For so long the turmeric
Hasn't touched my heated gold skin
My lips have dried, there for many days
There has been no love
With the breeze of *Ashoka* forest
The two lips are as if two months of the same season
One *Jaistha*, one *Baishakh*.
I returned to you
Swami, accept me.

But what did you say?
Sita you are of divine appearance
Seeing your beauty
That man having you so near at hand
Must not have been patient for long
You have fallen victim to the other man's scheme
If I accept you
What shall I explain to my subjects?

O Ram
I am Sita
I'm not only your wife
I am fire – hear me now
Fire cannot burn fire
I am not one, I am many
I am standing
Across the nation now.
The people of Ayodhya, know me as a daughter
Know me as the carrier
Know me as the mother
Today I am the mother of millions and millions of Indians.
Today I am the daughter of millions and millions
Of hurt fathers.

Now you tell me
That out of suspicion
You had abandoned me
Because *Ravana* had touched me
That you



That you all
Bringing *Hanuman* from Ayodhya
Spread all o'er Gujarat
You gave them mobile in one hand
voters' list on the other.
Throwing anguished Sita on the street
You raped her?

The mother in front of the son
The sister in front of the brother
The daughter in front of the father.
What happens to so many girls?
Where shall you return them now?
What was written in your constitution?
And how did you act?

From across Gujarat
The girls return from the relief camps?
Will not the father accept the daughter?
Will not the brother accept the sister?
Will not the son accept the mother?
Tell me, what is this that you have done?

In human history that day I was the first woman
One who had asked for repatriation?
Today I am in hundreds
Today I am across neighbourhoods
Today I am in squatters and slums
Today I am in numerous homes
Some used to attend the rice grains
Some have worked in the office
Some washed utensils
But today all our names is Sita

O Ram, today two thousand Sitas
Are standing before you
You for each of them
Will arrange for the fire test?
In your hands are petrol, kerosene, diesel,
But do you have that fire ready at hand
With which you can examine two thousand Sitas?



4

Ugly Slave in Assam

My mother is not in Assam
Nor in Meghalaya
From Kohima to Itanagar
Even then my mother.
Couldn't become ISI
Nor even Alpha
Not a terrorist
Nor a spy
Wrote a couple of books
Before and after the revolt.

Never become a jewel
Only became a bonded slave in Bihar, Assam and Orissa
Not one, not hundred
Ill starved slave
There sleeps at the core of my heart, a million diamond slaves.

About the Poet

Subodh Sarkar's first book of poem was published in the late 1970s, and now he has 26 books to his credit – 20 of poems, two of translations and one travelogue on America. His poems have been translated into English, French and several Indian languages and published in several journals and anthologies. Sarkar is the editor of *Bhashanagar*, a Bengali culture magazine with occasional English issues. He is the guest editor of *Indian Literature*, New Delhi. He is a recipient of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award.

About the Translator

Jaydeep Sarangi is a bilingual writer, academic and translator. About his poems Keki Daruwalla says, "Jaydeep Sarangi gives a fresh paint to everyday living. 'Small rivers' near tribal villages are his haunts. His language can be unorthodox, where a rock can turn into a 'reckless flow', but his poems are a rewarding read, with the scent of herbs coming through the pages." With Rob Harle(Australia), he has authored five anthologies of poems from India and Australia. With Angana Dutta, he has transliterated and edited *Surviving in My World: Growing up Dalit in Bengal* which has been reviewed favourably in many leading journals in the world like *EPW*, *Biblio*, *Commonwealth Essays* (Sorbonne University), *South Asia Research* (London), *Indian Literature*, *Voice of the Dalit* (Sage Publication), *The Book Review*, etc.