



Poems
Sudeep Sen

Secrets of the Divine
for Zila & Vilayat Khan

you interpret my face as a symphony — RS

When you sing your deep, languorous, elongated *alaap* —
your voice, timbre, breath, chest, quaveringly expand —

slow-dancing in unison. It's like your beloved father's
electric fingers — plucking, sliding on sitar-strings,

unearthing the hidden magic of a maestro's baritone,
it's range, it's fine textures. It's about subtle layering —

each fret is a *parda*, a curtained veil's highly calibrated
sub-sonics — divine and ordinary, erotic and sacred.

When you sing, your hands mimic your *abba*'s deft
finger-dance, nail-pirouettes counting minute syllables

inherent in every *bol* and *taal*. Balance is about extremes
coming together, about centring the heart's vicissitudes.

It is when strings are lips, finger-tips our vocal cord —
our extended tentative limbs, half-touch each other

like da Vinci's in the Sistine Chapel. Under this *gharana*'s
dome, echo unheralded notes of our inner core,

spilling guarded secrets in the safe loving of our raw,
unexpected, solitary presences. Unplanned, predestined,

under the benevolence of family lineage, *you interpret*
my face as a symphony — it is our art's gift, to each other.

The Laughter
for Sonora

In *the laughter* you wear
there is a studied poise,

there are tears of joy too —
their acrid glint, clues to

your past hinting at more.
Even your laced linen

handkerchief cannot wipe
or hide the deep memories

of childhood songs — lyrics
linking your heart-strings,

its bilingual turns of phrase
defying your mind's logic.

It is okay to cry — I say —
tears, touch or even a hug

are not loaded or gendered.
They are tiny simple acts

of humanness, affection,
connection. We're trained

to be subtle — so too much
remains hidden, needlessly.

The straight and sure lines
within these pale margins

of my mind leave no other
trail but those of my design —

you say. Are such designs
apt for unwritten lyrics?

These are songs of elation
etched on flaky red walls.

Its essence lies in the slow
unearthing of syllables —

hand-held gently — with-
out muting or losing them.

To Her Coy Mistress
to Andrew Marvell

Finder of frog spawn and mosquito eggs
in newly flooded marshes — the sun's boiling

tears the membranous Anopheles skin,
exposing human blood. There was no time

for larvae or pupa, or courtship or foreplay —
shy giggles exploding into a tantric dance.

I receive her libation in Mother's verdant
Auroville — Swagatham's sparse white room

welcoming me in her lap. Here the air is cool,
the earth red, and the slow-silence elongated.

The coy mistress is absent in her presence —
her words pirouette, swirling in dizzy passion.

Troy
for Tansy

Troy is burning, but the smoke in this case mollifies
my skin, soothes my charred heart to breathe again.

Eumenides forgot to say that the words filled with love
heal us faster than any surgical intervention. Trojan

horse is ready to gallop into the mofussil marshlands
to sweep Helen off her feet — and slow-sanctify her

in sandalwood, vermillion and turmeric paste in oil.
Then, like a living mummy, she will arise in ardour.

Tungabhadra Banks, Hampi

Late evening's deep matt-aquamarine light
slow-merges with the oncoming night.
Mammoth black boulders lie quiet
like sleeping humpback-whales on the shallows.

I can see only one predominant colour-palette now —
an aggregated thesaurus
of lapis lazuli, indigo, turquoise, teal, azure, sapphire,
cobalt, cyan, cerulean —
the colour of the deep blue-black sea,
its wavelength's elongated mystery enveloping all.

From the corner of my eye,
I spot Virupaksha Temple elephant's silhouette
carrying wisdom down Tungabhadra's ghats.
For now, it is relieved to leave behind the elaborate rituals
in the richly carved religious precincts —
its snout partaking pleasures of the river's cool waters.

A local fisherman, secure within the orbit
of his wicker-woven coracle,

paddles across the river, back and forth,
 attempting to find the last catch.
It does not matter whether he fishes anything —
 just the act of oar-repetition, is yoga enough.

People have long left this place for the day —
 the *mandapa* rest-house pavilions empty,
 barring few stray dogs.
On the shore, a large family of monkeys
make even the towering old peepul tree
 groan under their mischievous weight.

At this late hour, I see just remnants —
 crumpled flower petals, burnt oil-wicks,
 frayed sari-wrapped bundle-offerings,
white-ochre-vermillion marked rocks worshipped as gods.
 River gods come in various *avatars* —
a snarling yellow-striped tiger, an obsidian Nandi bull,
 small statuettes of marble Ganesh,
 an array of carved Shiva *lingams* on wet granite
 embedded in a mosaic of *yonis*,
 and slews of oval stones.

Imminent night's low light deceptively hides
 what you do not wish to see —
pilgrim's litter, their desecration, their misplaced prayers.
 Despite graffiti's defacement,
I can read Vijayanagara's grand stone-etched histories,
 hear their whispered medieval chants
 decipher the inscriptions' coded clarity —
solitude, serenity,
 and the simplicity of somnolent seance.

Waiting Dreams

I wait for that waking moment
when moth light — lights up
my dreams. As you sleep with
your child, exhausted-happy,
I wait for that curl-embrace
you etched in minimal words —
cascading down the shoulders
of another dream. Words
are inadequate now. What will
become of poets in the absence
of words? Will they be helpless
in silence, in sleep, in flesh?
*In star laden air with forests
all around, you sit with me.*
We hold the hands of letters,
threading each sepal-filament
gently into a garland of words —
longing for waiting dreams
to unfold after midnight —
under my private starlight.

Wapa di Ume, Ubud, Bali *haiku for Sally*

sun sets over half-
submerged rice fields — a bamboo
pavilion floats.

The End

after Nguyen Lam's 'Cuoi Cung / The End' (1965)



At purgatory's door, two sandals sleep
side-by-side, refusing to part — lest death

detaches them. A bowl for nectar awaits
on the other side — a gift, if you weather

the rigours of life's passage, transcend them.
The canvas is earthy — vicissitude-filled.

In the mud-scape trenches, remnants
of life — skeletal bones, skin, garment —

signs of a beating heart, frozen fossil-still,
preserved unintentionally, mummified.

I hear the sirens lament, a Miltonic dirge —
anthem celebrating (in)human genocide.

Illusion-delusion — yin-yang's dual face —
bipolarity balancing our precarious psyche.

In days of climate change, contagion, societal
toxicity — is there any light at “the end”?