

Classic Poetry Series

Hayat Saif
- poems -

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Hayat Saif(16 December 1942 -)

Hayat Saif (Bengali: হায়ত সাইফ) is a twentieth century modern Bengali poet and literary critic from Bangladesh. A career bureaucrat, he retired in 2000 and since then is engaged in the corporate private sector and divides his time in World Scouting and literary and artistic pursuits. He has been translated in English and Spanish and, in Bangladesh, is generally acclaimed as an intellectual interpreter of contemporary life and culture. Born in 1942 as Saiful Islam Khan he assumed this pen name in 1961 when contributing to literary journals.

 Early life and Career

He was born to Moslem Uddin Khan and Begum Sufia Khan in 1942. After high school, he studied English literature and obtained his M. A degree in 1965. After graduation, he taught in colleges for about three years and then joined the Pakistan Superior Service in the Finance cadre in 1968. He was involved in the revenue administration and tax policy making for more than three decades. He acted as Chairman of the National Board of Revenue and retired in 1999. In early 1960s, still a student, he worked as a casual announcer and newscaster in the Dhaka centre of the then Radio Pakistan and later in Pakistan Television at Lahore Center. He still continues his interests in broadcasting and telecasting and anchors literary programmers and talk shows.

 Works

He is one of the major poets of Bangladesh belonging to the generation of 1960s who set a clear trend of modern poetry in Bangladesh along with such poets as Rafiq Azad, Asad Chowdhury, Mohammad Rafiq, Abdul Mannan Syed, Rabiul Hossain, Imrul Chowdhury and others. His publications in Bengali include eight collections of poems apart from two collections of essays and a huge number of poems and articles published in various periodicals. One of his important books is titled Pradhanata Ma?i o Manusha. His collection of literary essays Ukti o Upalabdhi was published by Shilpataru in 1992. In 2004, he jointly with Mahbub Talukdar compiled and published A Selection of Contemporary Verse from Bangladesh. His latest collection of poems Prodhanoto Smriti ebong Manusher Pathchola (Mainly memories and man's path-walking) published in 2009 contains fifty seven poems "woven in a fine thread of thought".

 Works in translation

There are two collections of some of his prominent poems in English rendition.

One of these is Voice of Hayat Saif edited by Faizul Latif Chowdhury, published by Dibya Prakash in 1998. It contains forty-five poems translated by different hands. The volume titled Hayat Saif: Selected Poems was published by Pathak Samabesh, Dhaka, in 2001. The poems included in this volume have been translated by different hands.

 Fiscal Frontiers

In 1993, he launched a periodic journal under the title Fiscal Frontiers. He edited it until 2000. Fiscal Frontiers was focused on revenue policy and administration, fiscal policy and international trade.

 ICE

He is working as the Managing Editor of a magazine titled Information Communication and Entertainment, ICE in short, since 2005. This monthly is published from Dhaka.

 Quotes

In spite of all the innovations, verse is still verse as differentiated from prose pieces.

Music is the basic attribute of the language of poetry that differentiates it from other forms.

The idea of perfection itself suggests that the condition is not achievable, at best not in the physical sense.

I don't know really, why I write poetry. I suppose I write poems because I have to; because I have nothing better to write.

 Poetic style

His poetic fervour emerged when he was a student of grade-VIII. In 1962, his first poems published appeared in the literary periodical Shomokal edited by Sikander Abu Zafar. In writing poetry, his preferred metrical style in 'Okkherbritta' or 'Poyer', which is the most popular among modern Bengali poems. He is prone to use Bengali language words of Sanskrit origin.

 Scouting

He has been involved in national and international Scouts movement since early 1990s. He has been the National Commissioner of Bangladesh Scouts for a long time and has been awarded Bronze Wolf, the most prestigious decoration of World Scouting for outstanding contribution to the international movement.

** Publications**

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A Unique Afternoon

How will you hold all the joys of this afternoon?
And how will you express this
in a language that is naive?
For none of us know how
this silent afternoon became such a moment of truth
As if rising from emptiness and
Descending from the center of time.
This afternoon landed on
an unceasing joy.

In your glance
Is the shadow of a dream.
Beyond perception there is yet another vision,
Shadow, rhyme, color - distant and near

It's because you are near me
That I am so light
As though our two bodies are
floating, weightless.
My glances search your eyes
and the taste of another existence,
Our voices are like silent words
and the brightness of the moon.
Our touch is like boundless exuberance
of an April storm.

And the rain that follows
is a symphony of joy,
As though love flows
from a part of the body
and then the strength of touch ends.
But what remains is its endless aroma.
What remains is your gaze on mine,
Your lips on my lips.

And the final light of this scintillating afternoon
Becomes a bridge of light,
The luminous colors
of the two ends of a rainbow.

Hayat Saif

A Window

In this ancestral house
The few doors that we had
Have all been shut one by one
The windows around are also closed.
But just one window is still open
And through it alone the southern breeze
Sometimes enters and plays inside
Hums a tune and oblivious
Stays awfully rapt.
This lone open window
Even in this hard time gives us
Extraordinary gifts like birds' chirping
Rain soaked cool air
Gold dust hue in the late
 Ashwin afternoon sky.
Yet those gifts alas folks
In some inhuman process get
Readily paste on our wall
Turn into rotten handbills or
Some disconcerting column in a Dhaka newspaper.
Oft this humdrum consequence of life
Drags itself to its terrible destiny
Dropping down at the feet of death
Like earthenware unbecoming and ordinary.
Insensate masses do not know how to counter these
But deep inside the
Human heart
Terrible protests take solid shapes.
And suddenly how strange Out of protests come:
Gracefully existent love, offerings of flowers
Dreams of green crops extending to the horizon
Fruitful trees, fertile women and faces of the newborn.
The newborn also gives out its utterance of protest
And its tremendous cry
 Suddenly opens all the windows.
And no one dares to close them down again.

Hayat Saif

Another Circle

Grazing life's horizon I voyage
Towards another circle
Endlessly impulsive place
Love around tortured wrists
Store well-loved fragrances
In chests and boxes
And in my pocket a stamp
For an unaddressed envelope
Where is the destination
Of life's breathless journey?

Right ahead the bus stop beckons,
milling crowds around hawkers and touts
The bright merchandise of popular bliss
Is this then the destination,
This lit-up General Store?

A cripple on the sidewalk invokes the grace of God
Is He asleep in a waveless silence
On Heaven's minaret?
So, let us go elsewhere
Do a demented dance get roaring drunk,
Dive in a tailspin like a giant kite?
Go placidly grazing life's horizon
Sometimes as needed, playing the trumpet.

Hayat Saif

Ceaseless Meditation

For a long time with unbound bent eyes
With folded supplicating hands
Am ceaselessly meditating only you
Your nature in an amorphous assurance
Still gives me the language of rhymes

From darkness I move towards light
Your sharpened gait with its proud neck
Your majestic movement reflects a
Leading rhythmic measure

This language turns into painted poignant forms
At times songs suffuse into it
As if tunes surge like a deluge at the horizon
And at times gushes forth an old mnemonic river
The adolescent redolent shadows of nature
The image of the maiden turns into expression
In whose tinged lips
Heavenly words hummed.

At journey's end in this turning of the cattle trail
The unending language of your form
Flows like a soul song into passivity and love
In the mundane trappings of life
In the terrible tornadoes of summer
Even nature is ravaged without reason
And then your love blows like a cool wind
and brightens the sky
Suddenly the clouds pour
like love on the land
Even on the oppressed sandbanks of the Padma
Do I make an exit now in engrossed silence
Do I make a shadow in your heart
Where an intricate image is made vivid
Art radiates in the flickering form
Mingled rays of light turn into images and songs
And the immense darkness of the universe flares into light

Maybe that's worthwhile in the invisible streak

Where the magical dance of beauty remains beyond matter
Beyond the idea of absolute organic reality-
Is matter an expression of idealized strength
Or is it a form, which hosts perpetual energy
A place where universal hymns song
and tonal undulations
come swirling together

As streams go into the sea
As the sky and seascape go into the horizon
Which is visible in essence
But the void and beauty danced beyond sight

Such a unique sight I have never seen
In moving consciousness in the flowing eddies of memory
Exchange live O man O woman.
Don't corrupt this salutary soul for anything
Because you have never seen a consciousness
with such an intrinsic form.

Hayat Saif

Desire

Often when I hear your rhymed words,
I can touch your inner nature
Just through your words?

Quickly you gather the leaves of your words,
and together with them
the musical flower of your laughter,
and your bouncing words.
hold my hand
and take me to where I don't know.

Often I cannot hear your words,
But its pure sound reverberates in my ear
and eagerly I look at your exquisite face.
Your lovely lips from where come out
words as colorful as flowers.

Suddenly you look at the horizon and beyond,
And there on a fixed spot, your gaze settles.
I don't know where and what your eyes search
but I see you are looking at the horizon –
An intent image of joy.

And when you want something
I don't know what you really want
I don't grieve for that
For what you desire today
You'll surely forget tomorrow,
wanting something newer.

I will wait for you
Crossing the endings and all the borders -
A waiting that will never perhaps reach its end.

Hayat Saif

Entwined

Life entwines like a vine
On the fence, around the tree
On the hard brick of a derelict building.
This life slowly moves
Entwining anything in its wake, skywards.

Out of a great void
Out of the cavity of darkness
Out of the knot of an atom
Out of an embryo, sorrowful and soft
Out of the Alluvium -
Life jerks up,
Fast in skyward expansion,
Out of a seed embedded in moist clay,
Blazing upward
Power stuffed, and warm like a flame.

Sometimes like a vine
Life moves towards heaven, unperturbed
Sometimes twists
Around the fences in the gaps of building's bricks #
Something entwined
moving upward
And at last life once again in some great pulls
Droops on the clay
On water and on the plain earth.

Hayat Saif

Felling A Tree

(The flowering tree one spring was felled undesirably)
From behind the still vibrant foliage one can see
The crunching edges of the saw
A humming shaft of sound.

The sharp tips of the teeth plunged deep into the
Undefended flesh, ribs and marrow
And now into the chambers of the heart
With blue green lightning of searing pain.
Alone in the nervous pool of spouting blood
I grope and falter
For my eyes have burnt in the long despairing
Dream of dreadful droughts
The winds blow away the pent-up sawdust, lift the
Up like a veil and play games,
Games that people play.
'Excuse us for our undue presence' they say as if
to excuse themselves from life, from the
living and the dead.
In my bosom for decades I have nursed
An enduring rage,
Even that sacred rage seems to wilt and die
In this barren time of hatred and strife.

And so a mourning takes its place,
An intense mourning for something lost
Forever in silence.
But whenever the wild rains burst forth
From the ominous clouds
There is a drowning drench
The vast sheets of rushing water cascades
Down the slopes.
And then the cascading green of grass and weeds –
Even our blood does not seem to enrich
The barren earth anymore.
Many have passed away fighting for the alphabet in vain.
But neither the alphabet nor the scripture could stop
The droughts and floods and pains.
And now only the burning teeth of the saw

Plunge deep into the flesh
of the still living trunk.
The tree now lies fallen on the perched earth
And there is no rain and the dusts flowing from the saw
Covers the ignominious earth
Yet in the beginning of every spring they all congregate
At the central Shahid Minar.
When at last you are free of the frenzy
And a destructive mood
And the pageantry is no more, the square
Becomes empty again
And spring wind sighs past the still living trees.
And then without warning everything changes
For, in that dream of death quietly a life begins to sprout,
And all on a sudden blood sings in my veins-
Into this spring I shall go
Shedding everything that is
Neither immediate nor necessary.
Into this spring of rejuvenation I shall go
And learn anew this rhythm and the incantation of
Love of life
I shall bring forth rains that will give life
To the seeds and this burnt earth shall suffer
No more the bad dreams
That we had suffered once.

Hayat Saif

For You

Since you possess me,
My utterances
Become those of others.

Since you embrace me,
I am suddenly on fire
One that burns in every heart.

Since you have kept me
In your heart,
I'll give my boundless love to everyone

If some day we separate,
My words will never
Become poems again.

Hayat Saif

Forgivable

There were human beings then,
And spreading green, and rebellion,
The journey of time,
And the bent rainbows of fate,
There was a contentment.
The deep slumber of heart.
And at the center of the dismembered
Colorful dreams.
There was war then,
And the cessation of war
Inside passion's eloquent center

You drove your rhymes all around
With the speed of a deer,
And the controlled power of a tiger,
And raised your sublime forehead
To the vast sky,
Higher than the century itself.

From your expansive chest,
The land, the people, and nature
Rose up like music
Like waves of the Padma,
Solemn and beautiful.
That itself is dying now
Except when it grows passionate suddenly
Attempting to cover its age
With the cosmetics of day gone by
Its effort to hold on to its youth
Are sad, since where there should be water
There are nothing
But heaps of waste sand
Your proud inheritance - fitted-
A large, proud perspective,
You dwarfed even that perspective,
Raising your head high
With its ample, spring hair
But in our dear Bengal today, the world
Keeps continuously shrinking.

Can you forgive our pettiness?

Hayat Saif

In My Bony Hands

How much can these swollen veined
Bony quivering hands contain
When I am bedeviled by the scorched gray
of an impersonal ominous landscape all around?
And yet I can scale far above this accursed scene
As I glide through memory towards the remotest past
Towards my endeared nostalgic village
Towards its far fields, its intoxicant
smell of mango blossoms
Its springs, its boundless riches of the sun
Its sunbathed view as in Van Gogh
Embedded in the sprouting seed of life,
Buried in the soft silt ages ago, as it were
Like a talisman by a dervish.
Why now do the graceless massive thighs of city streets
Rake up the agony of fading youth,
The sobbing of decaying love, the pangs of old age,
The wounds of my head fill up
With the poison of stinky worms and maggots
With putrid gonorrhoeal ooze
Alas! Still the blood throbs with the cadence
Of the time-old Charjapada verses!
In the cantos—twelve poets
Long lost unseen, forgotten in an immeasurable play of
Light and shade?
All boyhood passed in bushes and bowers
In reckless abandon of naughty fun,
Even today I can hear the call
Of hedge crickets, the conversation of rejoicing frogs
Why did I leave the smell of soil behind
In quest of knowledge, the much desired
Tree of Wisdom, everything now sounds
Like disjointed snatches of dialogues
With no glow whatever of meaning.
Only till today the moon gets eclipsed
By the heart-rending cry
of Raham Ali from a nearby village.
The homestead of Maharam Mridha
Vanished in the upsurge of the Meghna

Near Mendipur, the family that was
High and mighty for five generations!
The dream of the past happiness
Cast a spell on me.
How I was enamoured in youth
By the serpentine rhythm of
Mariam Bibi clad in a striped sari.
Of a femme fatale like a black darash snake!
Every trace of all the remembrances
Float and fade away
in the dim twilight of memory
How much can I hold
In my swollen-veined bony shaking hands?

Hayat Saif

Indefinite

Not love, hate or ambition
but something else deep
Fluctuates like the mercury of a barometer
In my middle-aged soul.
Sometimes I crave to see the limits of time
From one illusion to another
They move in the eyes of an intent fatigued caravan.

Round and round all around
It braces to acquire the tiniest bit of water
And hope dances in the cells of the body,
The last evening of the winter,
painted in the sky, shivers.

The sound of someone's faith
Moves near a known grave
In the deepest core of the soul
not love, hate or lust
something else deep
In the valley of the wind swift and electric
Inside the clouds, in tigers' head
moves with the speed of a deer
Not love, hate, lust or ambition
Something else indefinite and deep.

Hayat Saif

Inside All Creation

Inside my very birth
my death exists.
Within my distance sleeps
My innocent nearness.
In my desire to be reborn
I continuously embrace death
My revenge-seeking regenerated-cells
Get vitiated as a new day approaches.
At times I wonder about the one
and His ways to reverse the continuity
after my exhausted liberated end.
Yet it is completely true that
amongst us, none is responsible
for our present indifferent
restless birth.
Inside this exciting and fearful nothingness
Lies our bounded existence.
The essence of which we cannot know
Yet we plan, we dream, and we live our lives.
Everyday brings about uncountable deaths.
Death from the closeness of my child
Death as I was disjointed from my mother's womb.
Death when I was separated from a loving embrace.

My timid world surrounds me with dreams and death
as they keep holding hands with creation and birth, unceasingly

Hayat Saif

Light And Shade

When darkness falls
And night deepens, you are far away
I can no longer see you
But then distances disappear
All the objects lose their identity
And become one
My thought then embraces everything
Far and near

It seems that wherever you may be
I can still touch your body, its fragrance
Feel its pulsating life,
Then in the silent unity of darkness
My ecstasy flower as a flickering flame
Of desire in a dream
It seems as if nothing has disappeared in darkness
They have mingled themselves in it
It seems as if with the first break of dawn
Your lips, your eyes, your voice
Will find their objects-
Another voice, another sensibility-
The throb of another heart.
And yet the first light of day
Takes you away from me
And I can no longer touch you.

I can no longer remain in your line of sight
Because the light defines all the objects-
Only some fresh loneliness, some pains and
Some distractions remain

Hayat Saif

Living In Violence

[Vivek has left]

[Here was once a dancing ocean]

Rising up dropp by dropp from the ocean
Water comes down in torrents form the mountains
Though the plateau on the plains
Gushing forth and tearing down the ramparts of stones,
Mountains break, continents are torn apart
In the rotation of the earth
Permafrost weighs down on the earth
Glaciers move and crush the earth
In huge powerful incandescent thrusts.
Blue flames rise up in deafening electrical clap of thunder
And then Noah's flood takes hold of the earth
An undying life begins to quiver
Civilization starts
Along the distant shores
White crested waves break
In long winding garlands of white sandalwood paste forms.
In diligent labor and devouring dreams blunders
Trials and errors and endless curiosity
Even truth and beauty begin to sprout
Inventions and technology convey to people
The meaning of good living
Even the outer space opens its doors to man;
But it seems after the passage of quite a long time that
In the genes something of the Dinosaur still remains dormant.
In visions and oracles, loves and sacrifices
History is made,
And yet at times all get destroyed bye violence and war
The Third World is devoid of'the third eye'
Only an arrogance and destructive mood crushes all hopes
While innumerable mouths wait to be fed
Any upward move quickly gives way to despair
Virtue and sin and the lure of the world hereafter
Seem irrelevant when an all-consuming hunger abounds
And in the spring dull roots are stirred and the earth
Suddenly bursts forth in a thousand blossoms and laughter
In the early hours of dawn the call for prayers

Echoes in the misty air
And chant of hymns from temple wafts in gentle wind

In epidemics and draughts, in flood and bereavements
The wheel of time haltingly moves round
And violence throws its arrows
Towards the streets and meadows
And lonesome houses,
In cyclones and tidal waves
The shoreline is lined with corps,
And yet even in that turbulence some fortunate
Few skillfully remain in treetops
Untouched unblemished.
A smooth leisurely life beckons them on
The rising middle class joins the race
And unabatedly build high-rises
And in geometric progression
Environment gets exterminated.

In hypocrisy and reckless destruction
Nothing remains sacred,
Will there be a final extermination before absolution?
Conscience, there fore exits from the scene;
Once we had a state of deep meditation
We had translucent empathy and simple joy
We had a beautiful vision raising its head towards the sun
We had a state of peace and beatitude;
But all those have sunk into a dark abyss of remorse
Remorse and no repentance
For our hands are smeared with patricidal blood
And our hearts are heavy with fratricide
Our faces are flushed with suicidal incest
Are we, thus condemned to suffer
A suffocating solid darkness?
Will He come to absolve the deep-rooted
Ancient sin on us?
Will He recreate man again in His own image?
Man appears to be even inferior to beasts these days.
Nothing human remains sacrosanct anymore
When freed of this known surroundings a few amongst us,
Repeatedly vent their impotent rage
On the insurmountable wall

That separates this existence from the other,
They, for the time being, do not find any watershed there.
They cannot look forward to
A peaceful deep lagoon of calm sleep.
There is no love left for them, and yet
The love of some men lives on, forever;

Therefore now finally shedding every bondage
If not all at least a few of us shall march along
The illuminated path of ultimate freedom
And slowly disappear in the distance.

Hayat Saif

Love's Generosity

She, who I love
Never presents herself through surrender
Indeed she never gives herself,
Never drops with exhaustion
As a leaf might drop,
Or as rain drops, drawn by the earth,
Seeking to merge with earth's substance.

She, who I love
Gives herself as a conqueror might
Through immensities of freedom –
She overflows, she gushes forth
Through vast domains of liberty
In full desire.

She is not chained by her yearning for love.
No, she is in flight
Like a flock of white cranes
Through open winter skies.
And through that flight
She effortlessly overtakes
Her sorrow, her agony, this squalid city,
Soaring to the ends of space –
Through love's boundless generosity.

Hayat Saif

Make Me Cry

And god shall wipe away all
Tears from their eyes; and there
Shall be no more death, neither
Sorrow, nor crying neither shall
There be anymore pain; for the
Former things are passed away.

Hayat Saif

Man And Earth

All around one can witness
Many high-ranking and garrulous asses –
Occasionally worthy, but always affecting wisdom –
Here, these clamorous men live.
Yet in the blood-stained center of this small planet,
What a multiplicity of frightening
Relationship exist,
Stained and stung by mud sand-stone parasite,
Roots, branches, insects, and men,
Get hit by atomic explosion, reduced
To muddy heaps of flesh.
In all directions lie, scattered social contrarities.
The center falls and there is a marked
Lack of cohesion,
For men are powerless in the grip
of mutual malice.
In marshes, briars, and untended fields
As though creeping out of a large dust-bin
Congregate all the world's noisome waste-
Those who propitiate the lords
With dissembling bows
Themselves use their fellow human-beings to
attain to affluence
A fake man of God, graves covered with
blazing red cloth
The waving green flag amid an epidemic or
scorched by a heat-wave.
And yet man is always in need of faith
Not so birds or animals.
Therefore one can hope one day faith reality
The visible and the invisible insects worms
mud and sand-stone
Will all co-mingle in an ultimate understanding
between man and earth
And from the blood-stained red earth
under the cosmic sky
Will emerge the bud of a huge
dazzling white water lily.

No Respite

You didn't give him any respite. The warrior's shield
Has been robbed. You didn't give him
With your fearless hand, a rifle, a Sten-gun
Or some ethereal grief,
Or seeds of golden crops for his granary, or green fields.
He was therefore never rich in harvests, and now
He is a questor, lonely and lost.
Suddenly the bright watchful day reveals itself,
All around
Streaming fountains of yellow and green –
Dart towards the horizon
Like a bull with uplifted tail and steaming nose
As if the secret amulet, darkly kept, is shaken wild
You've taught this for a long while that
When night comes
The spent day's sins are washed away
The nerves reverberate with an animated song
His familiar lifeline edges near and stops,
Although his address is lost in cataclysmic darkness—
Far from the chaotic clash of values:
He doesn't have rich luxury stashed in his safe
Or a famous magic lamp;
Even his woman insults him
Because he doesn't know which trees
Produce the silver fruits.
He is always in danger, and always around him dance
Colorful words, rippling waves
And the wings of birds.
In his brain the unforgiving insects are raised
He threatens the city as he walks
The neighborhood thugs are charmed when he talks
He is an unmixed clown whose eyes reflect the stars;
His windpipe has burst open and
In his earnest bone marrow
Diseases roam freely; darkness spreads its plumage
In the ancient squares and corridors
Such an untouchable being too, is nurtured on your soil
Blooming in animated, meaningless words,
Suddenly flashing;

Even such a youth grows too, in branches and foliage
A vibrant poster unfolds
In the dreamy moonlight flooded sky,
In the gray waters of the lake shines the evening star
Fountains of words empty into the flood.
The soft-hearted arum plant grow,
The wet heart of snails thrive,
The soft shoots of Gewa and
The flowery mass of Kewra prosper.
Unknown dancing girls dance on
Like trembling Shapla
Or lotus stem, while love, affection and
The blue-smelling river
Float downstream,
Now I hear the booming sounds of machines
The echoes rising from the ribcage and the veins,
Yet, even in this darkness, you'll give him no respite
Rather, you would turn on with the electric-megawatt heat
An unknowable light of immense power.

Hayat Saif

Rain

[Tragic death of Mahima: Eight-year old girl falls into an open manhole in A street covered with water from the torrential rain and is swept away. Her Body was recovered the following day from the Buriganga River. A news item in Dainik Ittefaq, 8th June, 1984.]

From the suddenly swollen seasonal clouds
Ceaseless rain falls
In unending streams it comes pouring down
Onto our present barren soil.
Washing the water-color from the brush of
Qayum Choudhury
Rain falls from the thick clouds of Ashaar
Black clouds from the ink of Samiran's clay ink pot
Gather, touching
and washing the black, water-color rain
falls in the mind
Within human memory endless rain falls
lyric rain falls
Gita Govinda rain falls
Meghadut rain falls in the mind.

Down the slopes of dreams onto
The deserted plateau of solitude.
Rushing to the sonorous valley of
deep personal mourning
golden rain falls
like the sound of raga Megh Malhar
like first love
On the first day of Ashaar
Crickets whisper at night in trees
over the grass onto field.
on verandas on window-panes flooding rain falls
the enchanted pictures of past days
All the pleased faces.
are drenched and melted and drop down
the drowsing window's glass
today on this first day of Ashaar.
and suddenly, unnoticed in the city of
air-conditioned offices, too, rain

falls in big drops
Then ceaseless water on the highways in the drains
in the damp dirty lanes
on the moss of the walls, in black, in green
in blue, flood water comes down
the Mayurakshi River;
On the slums spread out to touch
The skyscrapers of Gulshan and Banani
thrown-away torn up letters, paper, account books,
discarded boxes, broken bangles go speeding
on the murmuring water currents
at random on the flowing stream's face;
on road and manhole alike water rises inch by inch.
in the sudden gush
Of a massive stream.
On village, on granary, on field, on barren soil suddenly
tumultuously rain
pours down
No tax - collector today has reached their destination;
In such rain as this there is no traffic anywhere;
even the police are truants.
Shilabhadra once loved this earth
Mahima too, a thousand years later
With pendant nose-ring
In the city of luxurious wealth and of
rubbish-dump slums
Like this mother earth too once loved us perhaps
When the flooding rain fell and covered the whole road
and the open manhole alike
Mahima too went floating far away
in the terrible current's force
to the open hungry belly
of the Buriganga.
Here under the tropic of Capricorn
For a thousand years humanity and nature have
bargained with each other,
and on the first day of Ashaar rain falls
In the day's middle hours;
from black clouds
covering all the sky like swollen blackberries
with split lightning.
covering the concrete skyline on the hazy horizon,

in the last quarter of the century
Matchless rain falls in the mind.
falls down the slopes of the Chittagong hills
on the crests of the salt sea's waves
rain falls and falls.
surrounding the crowd of memory
dark rain falls on Ashaar's first day

Hayat Saif

Remorse

It was a piteous day of tears
And of mute fascination hour after hour.
Leaves falling in a frame of pensive mood.
Wordless message carved on tremulous lips
The wings of desire encircle the ravishing form
The brave heart holds on without a tilt of balance
The oyster-eyes fling enticing beckoning
Yet in the bosom, the distillation of tears
Untold words mad like the arms upraised
Light and shade play moment by moment
Rhythmic messages sway in wordless tinkle
And enshrine the serene night in rich fragrance
Unsaid words amass densely in vapour, gossamer
And ring in rueful tune the withheld feelings
And thus a day slowly brims with tears
Which distil into the bosom in quiet despair.

Hayat Saif

Rivers And Allegory

Spontaneous - intimate obscurity
Suddenly an enlightened certitude trifles
Deep inside, the mind spreads out the landscape
Wide meadows, a quick gush of green
The endless sky shedding blue
And in the soil of time are being sowed chronicles.

Is this the legendary loam, the seeds of the century
That may turn into a tree of elegance?

Incessant downpour in human memory?
 Continual motion
River within me
 And the allegory of it, without.

Hayat Saif

Someone Exists

Someone exists on the other end of this silence.
There exists someone beyond this immediate existence.
May be He is not exactly within sight.

Or maybe not even far away,
Remaining pretty close,
Throbbing near the throat's vein.

This is how one keeps on living, the heart,
Remaining in the depth of soul, unknown to others
Remains true to one's nature.

Light and shade continually play
All around the panoramic view
One can hear from our clean courtyard
The birds swaying in the tree-tops.
Deep in that ambience someone is alive
Maybe far away, and yet very close,
Frequenting our breath innumerable times
Someone is there on the brink
of our everyday existence,
Seems to dwell there, unknown to others
And seems to feel at home.
Our dual selves behind our quotidian life
Utterly unlike this life, someone remains,
Up at the antipodal zone

One who lives far away out of sight
still lives well within our sight.

Hayat Saif

The Renunciation

Habitation frighten me,
I would rather renounce the habit
 And the house in which
I once felt quite at home,

I would rather be a hunter
In the far off woods
Or be a short-lived target
 Of an archer there

Only humans put me off these days
Not quite evolved the way
 They should have been,
Every moment they are at one another's throats,
Men and women live without purpose
Copulating without love –
An incongruous collage,
A medley of broken hearts,
Flames of agony devour the crevices of the brains

In every home, spikes of hatred bloom
 Into mushrooms of death
Mindless automation moves a horde, zombies revel,
Robots shake hands in a pointless ritual of propriety
The only emotion is that of a misguided crusade
 With nothing to win
Rarely is there a face of a human being -
 They are all but masks;
I would rather renounce all these
And let them recede into the dark craters of the past
And find a quiet spot of my own, if there is any,
 Still left unspoilt.

Hayat Saif

The Revelation Of St. John The Divine

If you can, ventriloquist,
 Make this blabbing city
 Cry.

Mingle
 Your tears
 In the silence
 Of the terrible.

Burn this wilderness
 Of bricks and stone With the fire
 Of the unknown Bones.

Let the heart-rending
 Cry
 Of truth and beauty
 Ring aloud

Make this
 Sham city
 Tremble
 Cry.

Hayat Saif

The Sleeping Lady

My mother is now asleep under
the cold soil of Hetom Khan's graveyard.

I hear now, in this town live a million people,
But I never see my mother anymore.
She lives as a unique image that I have created.

Just like this enclave
Created from Borendra –
an idea given birth from the long memory
of our history –
Now it is embodied.

And here and there come a few aborigines
Nonplussed and dispirited they stand in the corners.
Hafiz, the poet of Persia, had written of the Perisan sweets
brought to the Beautiful Bengal.
A traveler said this:
Many roads led to this land,
But all roads leading out were closed.
Such is the magnetism that lies buried in this soil.

But we have seen those who go away –
Kings, his courtiers, and queens,
Travelers, monks, workers, people.
Only the soils and those who toil in them remain –
The giant expanse of the Padma, the Borendra, and the nature –
those stay.
People leave, they inevitably have to go away.
The body departs.
Behind me follows my confused shadow -
Travels in the locale resonant in memory,
Touched by feelings.
People leave as did my mother.
Hamlets stay, soil remain,
and memory remains deep-rooted in the soil.
In empty temples
remain mere bodies of the goddesses.

Inside me, there is the flutter of the 1950s –

stream of people, clutched fists of youth.
Now all these will rain down as dew-drops of memory,
Will become the silent mist of an autumn morning?

My mother wanted her children to be happy
with rice and milk.

Now she sleeps.

And around me sleeps

A Borendra in quiet despair.

Hayat Saif

Throughout My Life

Throughout my life, in this manner
I search for her in many an empty uttering
This meaningless search-all through life
Yet my pride keeps swelling like a wasted cargo.

Suddenly this morning I heard that the ploughing ox
Of Muharam Mridha has been lost
Shrinking homestead of forefathers is also gone.
The city has beckoned his daughter away.
In the sterile city the lowly clerks' sad culture
Turns gray in rain, yet the solid edifices
Of the northern city areas

Keep enlarging. And in the incessant night,
In the watery south, a few faces-
Some sad feelings
Some empty coffers-

In the intimate villages of Bengal this life of deprivation
And the fate that awaits as the century comes to a close
Offer no end to the disappearance of dear places
Even the length of land
Needed for a grave

"Is this a losing game? O Rabindranath Tagore'
The poor loses his scarce savings, leprosy eats his bones
still the one who has nothing but lamentation all his life
Sees his face changing shape suddenly in the dreary mist
And gleams in the moonlight
He tears his hair, spits, and eats the grass of poetry.
The question of virginity is raised
Without the lifelong companion
Because at the end of the road there is no end to hunger,
And nothing to wear
And so dreams are sold at a price—
At the price of blood
And then these dreams drown in watery beaches.
Still, at the deepest hour of night, in the listless,
Stuffy, pregnant night

The one whom I meet live the life of an exile
In the interior of the house
Lives the whole life imagery,
Resonance and alliteration
Live on in her own home as an exile

Hayat Saif

You Alone

Essence sieved out of innumerable names bestowed on you.

a unique pronoun

Your love harbors grace of music, pictures.

glory and brilliance of truth

Without you, no noun, no pronoun

not even adjective exists,

Only all pervasive omnivorous undecaying void

frustration on the inside,

war and violence.

One day, while in war in great fortitude

I intensely prayed for you

Even from extreme suffering and horror of death

You flowered

And in that hour of prayer and manifestation

My total existence transformed itself

into each of the fleeting bullets

Whistling swiftly

The fiery arrow hitting its mark

And with the heart-strewn blood I composed

Enkindled pictures

Your manifold semblances.

Today no longer can I see you together

But this disjointed self, I don't know how

I have dispensed into you

In the curvature of the brows,

arrogance of the neck

In the flow of arms, moderate swing of the shank

In the lion-cloth end

lying by your feet

In nails gracing magnolia fingers colored

in blooming crimson glow

In engrossed lips

in coyly brought down eyes

Are you my exclusive, my enchanted,

and my auspiciously turbulent Bengali woman,

The tremendous madness of my aggrieved heart,

my unlimited being, my intellect, and my fancy?

