

Classic Poetry Series

Gopalakrishna Adiga

- 5 poems -

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Gopalakrishna Adiga (18 February 1918 - 14 November 1992)

Mogeri Gopalakrishna Adiga (Kannada: ಗೋಗರಿ ಗೋಪಾಕೃಷ್ಣ ಅಡಿಗ) was one of the major figures in modern Kannada poetry. He is known as the "pioneer of New style" poetry.

Early Life

Born in an orthodox, scholarly, Brahmin family in the coastal village of Mogeri, Udupi district, in Karnataka State. After primary education in Mogeri and Baindooru, he went to high school in Kundapur, 14 miles away from his village. His education would have ended after high school, but for the foresight of his aunt, who, against the will of other family members, gave moral and monetary support for his college studies. Thus, Adiga went to Mysore and earned his BA (Hons) in English from Maharaja College, University of Mysore.

After several minor jobs in Karnataka, Adiga worked at Sharada Vilas College in Mysore as lecturer in English from 1948 to 1952, during which time he completed a master's degree from Nagpur University. He also served at St. Philomena College in Mysore for ten years. In the mid 1960s, he became Principal at the newly created Lal Bahadur Shastri College in Sagara, and later at Poorna Prajna College in Udupi.

As editor of Saakshi magazine he helped bring Kannada literature to the masses.

Kupamanduka

Where are you now? Once hand in hand with me
You blew the sail, plump and round,
Got clearance at the checkpoints, led me to distant lands, far off islands,
And then suddenly slipped out, and escaped.

You flew into the vast blue sky
Deserting me before I could open my eyes;
Halfway through the belching orchard I tripped and fell
On the shore of the lake drunk to the brim.

Burdened by my body, I lie here , an orphan;
Flower and creeper, plant and thicket, tree and bush
Mockingly gaze, turn away their face, and laugh:
Cruel jokes and constant watch.

The jack fruit tree, with yellow leaves, drunk in sun`s rays,
Stands lame, stuck in the ground;
The banana tree with overripened fruits rots
Sucking life from its own offsprings.

Grain is ripe after the dread of thunder and rain,
Streams from well and lake are choked with moss,
The circling bull with wounded neck pressed to the yoke
Cries this is the end of the race.

Endless labour pain was the reward
For my endless faith in you.
Should I remain a dry well? Touch me,
Wake me up, open the choked springs boiling far beneath.

I go back, I want a magic blanket
to be wrapped around me;
Winding it tight I slide below the valleys,
I leap and run to the call of the sea.

2

I was at the sea shore every morning
Anxiously waiting at the sand`s edge;
The gold ray shovelling the ocean foam
Marched forward the chariot`s pinnacle.

You playfully rowed the toy boat
With the small sail, and then
The boat suddenly hit the shore, you bent,
Stretched your arms, lifted me up up and hugged me.

Riding over the waves of seven seas
We spent the day gasping, lolling and lazing;
Cargo of rainbow, coloured beads and domes
Weighed heavily on the boat, we touched the shore.

In the dark ocean, in a lonely house on an island,
We played naked , diving deep;
We were one, laid the golden eggs,
Egg after egg had your stamp alone.

Every moment was festive; at the ropes of the chariot
Mine were the arms, yours the chant;
The strength of a thousand voices and arms
Originated from our mating.

Yet you are a rogue, I know:
In the village school, when the teacher was away,
You were the Bhagavata, beating castanets,
I, mighty Bhima, entering the battlefield,

Whirled the ruler like a mace;
Twentyfive toe-leaps and the mudpot was smashed,
The class roared in laughter, welt marks on back
Remind me of the story even today.

We, both the cheats, sat on the sea-saw;
You were slightly lighter, still,
Now and then the keel evened, I did not feel
The heaviness of my body pulling down my end.

3

The time has come when the ripened fruits fall and rot,
The roots of the green is eaten by the termites,
The chariot is slowly devoured by the insects,
The rope is old, it dries and breaks.

Heaviness grows everyday; my end
of the sea-saw rests in mud, your end
Is in the depths of the sky,
I, forty, bespectacled, cannot trace your ways and norms.

Still I hear your voice like a hundred water-falls,
A hundred roots go deep wherever I sit;
The buds wither the moment they sprout
Dissociated from your prime essence.

4

I am an ancient frog; I have drunk the water
Of seven ponds; to hop and keep hopping is my nature;
From ground to the pond below, from pond to the ground above,
I vacillated between the two.

I flopped on the ground, panting and swelling, swelling and panting.
At least now I should get down into the well;

I will hide myself in the womb of the clay,
Until I know myself when the swelling is done.

Then the body, light as air, yellow as gold
Will jig up and down in the water of the lake.
I will lean back on the green grass of the bank and croak;
Then the boat will approach, touch me and console me.

If I eat a fly, does that put the estate in order?
Does life come back to the banana tree?
Is the palmtree sad if I sink, or the jack tree depressed?
I spent much effort realizing this.

The jasmine which flowers your smile,
The mango grove whose shade displays your love,
The mud at the bottom of the pool which shows your affection,
I will play among these-this is my new resolution.

Gopalakrishna Adiga

My Lotus Red

A bright red lotus has bloomed today
To passers-by, what a fragrant Entree!
The wind, the bees, or the gentle spray:
Who needs an invitation to a party, eh?

The water trembled gleefully,
Tickled by the golden rays.
In how many ways do I love thee?

The bee's busy counting the ways ...
The lotus blushed;
And turned scarlet in face:
Look! His chariot of seven horses
Race through the eastern skyways ...

In every one of his million hands
He carries a tangled web of love.
The lotus was charmed. The buzzing of the bees
Waned; it seemed pale somehow.

She ignores the bees around
And waits for the sun, my lotus red.
Will morrow's dream take the form of sun?

[Translated by C.P. Ravikumar]

Gopalakrishna Adiga

Prayer

Lord,
plying the well-known pumps of heraldic praise
your hirelings bend double; others, gouty wagtails,
lick the land for crumbs; one snuffs his candle out
and seeks like a eunuch leech
the warm marshes in the cracks of light;
another sissy gives his back to the time-fed rumps
and sheathes his dagger deep.
Lord,
I am not of these.

—In Prarthane (Prayer, 1957)

Gopalakrishna Adiga

The Critic

Like a shadow you climbed the heights I climbed,
Crept into the lower depths I jumped,
Rubbing your wings to my wings you too flew towards the horizons I flew,
Explored, like me, new horizons; still,
You stood apart, untouched, spreading yourself
Above, below, around, piercing the sky,
Drilling the ground.

I opened myself from top to toe,
Filled the inside with salt,
Stitched the wounds,
Went underground, became a vampire,
Came up, jumped towards the sun, burnt the wings,
Fell on the ground,
On that very place built a cave around,
Became the very darkness of that cave,
Strived for fourteen years, became bitter,
Then ripened, exploded like fire,
Got back the wings-one seen, the other unseen.
Harmoniously I kept changing
From the concrete to the abstract, from the abstract
To the real-all these
Were seen by you too.
Still, like a shadow,
You remained whole, undisturbed.

You rise in the mind`s eye: you are not there outside,
But here in me:
Testing, measuring, weighing, checking-all these
Are your tasks. You pricked me with a needle
While I slept; let out
The unnecessary air while I swelled.
Are you an inside shadow? Or,
A spy from Chitraguptha?
You didn`t allow me to wander around
Like any emotion-bound animal would like to do.
You made me regret, burnt me with regret,
Caught me in the wheel of right and wrong,
Insulted me, dragged me to the streets, killed me,
By killing you rejuvenated me,
You, a Sani, a leech, yet a friend, my guru.

Gopalakrishna Adiga

This Land of Ours Now

Put this tree, dead in roots, erect,
Let the branches be as they are;
Collect the fallen leaves with choked feelings,
Boil them, prepare soup, and drink.

Water the tree; while you are sad
Water it with tears; show sympathy
With all your might; inside
Curry the favours of Sani.

Bring bulbs of rainbow colours; and
Hang them on every branch of the tree;
Fix the paper flowers, scent them with perfumes;
And play the cassettes of birds' songs.

You can't complain that the tree is dead, there's no shade;
Do you want a better shade than the shade of the roof of gold?
This is an ancient tree; what other solid branch you want
Than this to hang yourself and die?

When the wind blows from the west
The stage becomes active with the western dance and music;
This immortal tree doesn't like the muddy water of the surrounding earth:
It sucks the nectar of heaven and grows.

Won't even a single bird come here? -
Parrot, koyal, sparrow, crow, or owl?
Beat the koyal to death, stuff it with grass,
And then neatly arrange it on the branch.

Cover the moth-eaten tree with gold; and,
Carve its story on the trunk:
'There was shade here once, green leaves and buds, flowers and fruits,
koyal's song, parrot's nest;

Here was Kodanda, and the Panchajanya,
And the wheel-it was turning;
There were hermits, and the Vedas,
And this and that and much more.'

Hoist high the flag of 'Was'.
Bother not about the 'Is'.
There is tree, there is gold,
Water it and grow.

Gopalakrishna Adiga