Poetry Series

Jasbir Chatterjee

- poems -

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Jasbir Chatterjee (4 March 1966)

Writing poetry is not only my greatest passion in life, it is also my lifeline.

A Cloud Of Rain

A dark cloud of rain
drifted into my life
And for some time,
I felt good, happy...
I no longer felt lonely.

I thought life would go on happily
In one long, long stretch of time...
But when the cold, harsh
winds of change started blowing,
The cloud of rain
had to drift away...

Life is still going on
In one long, long stretch of time...
I am not lonely.
I can't say I am sad or unhappy.
But you have left a void
That would take me
a long, long time to fill.

Jasbir Chatterjee

Autumn Of The Year 1988

When the harsh summer
Surrenders
To the charms of the gentle autumn,
Everything seems to be so beautiful…
The weather becomes so wonderful,
The soft breeze feels so good
The leaves
Rustle with a very soft tune,
The flowers
Flutter in a waltz,
The sparrows
Join me in humming my favorite song….
I forget all my daily tribulations,
My heart
Bursts and overflows with joy
And everything I say
Turns into a symphony of words
While I recall that wonderful day in autumn
Of 1988…

Jasbir Chatterjee

Being Powerless

I often get a terrible feeling
These days
Of being powerless
Helpless,
Of grappling
Against forces
Beyond my control…

I shout,
I protest,
I scream,
I grumble
I cry,
But all in vain…
Because it’s all part of nature…

Everything that takes birth must die…
Everyone who is born must grow, fall in love, move away…
Everything that lives must change…
For better or worse,
And one can only watch helplessly
While the juggernaut of time
Tramples on everything that it steps on…

I shout,
I protest,
I scream,
I grumble
I cry,
But all in vain…
Because it’s all part of nature…

Jasbir Chatterjee

Changing Weather

Weather is changing again…
Summer is slowly giving way to winter,
Yellow leaves are falling,
New ones are coming in their place,
Early mornings now have a soft, soothing touch,
The ravaging afternoon sun has cooled down,
Evenings have a crisp, chilly feel
And nights are pleasant with clear, starry skies…

Yes, in a way
This winter will be like the last winter…
But in lots of ways
It will not be like the last one…

New experiences,
New friends,
New sensations,
Fresh insights,
Now light up my way;
And I plod ahead,
With a clearer vision
With a better understanding
of self, of people;
Humming a song
that I had never heard before
A song that has set my pulse racing...
A song that has touched my heart...

Jasbir Chatterjee

Diwali

Diwali
The festival of lights…
Diwali
The festival of joy…
Diwali
The festival of love, sharing…
Diwali
The festival of togetherness…
Yeah, Diwali
For me, is all these and a lot more…

Today, on the chilly morning of Diwali
As I lie down on my bed,
The sun shines benevolently through the hazy sky…
The soft breeze moves the curtains with a playful rustle…
The sun rays enter my room with a coy, slanting smile…

As I savor the succulent fruits of solitude in my mouth,
The delicious juices trickle down my throat
Cooling my insides,
The aches and pain ebb away from my tired, weary body…
My restless soul suddenly churns into a terrible turmoil
And points an accusing finger
At the ceiling fans
That remain dusty,
The corners
That remain unswept
The almirahs
That remain untidy
The tasks that remain unaccomplished,
The struggle
That lies ahead…

Jasbir Chatterjee

Jikon - April 2008

The script was well-crafted,
The main actors had rehearsed well
and smaller actors like me were expected
to just be around, to smile
and be politically correct.....
The top guns finally arrived
and the curtains went up....
The atmosphere became very tense
and we all shook hands and smiled nervously.
The much-awaited annual meeting began at last.
The main speaker started his presentation,
A few questions were raised,
Answers were given to some,
and excuses for others.
The farce finally ended
with plans and new projections.
The annual meeting ended at last
and the curtains came down....
The main actors walked out
and got into their luxury cars and departed
while smaller actors like me
trudged on the dusty road
towards the bus stop.

Jasbir Chatterjee

Kamala

Often
When I feel exhaused
When my hands and feet refuse to move
Having to look after you like a newborn child
Seems to be a punishment from God
And I wish you would die
Soon.

Often
When I feel discouraged
When nothing seems to work
And my heart fills with anger with myself
Having to pull you up on your feet
Makes you wince with pain
And Nanni screams,
'Mummy, how can you be so cruel? '

Often
When I am my normal self
When I look at you
And you stare silently with vacuous eyes, emaciated, helpless
I think of those old times
When you were stronger
and pulled me up on my feet
Gently, softly through tough times
and filled my heart with hope.....

Often
When I think ahead
I wonder if I too would live long enough
For Nanni to wish I would die
Soon...
For Nanni to have to lift me up on my feet
and make me wince with pain,
Long enough to be emaciated, helpless
and stare with vacous eyes....

Jasbir Chatterjee

Life and Death

She lay dead
On the cold, hard floor,
All through the chilly, wintry night.
Quiet, still, rigid, oblivious;
Eyes shut,
Cotton wool thrust into her nostrils,
Sindoor shining brightly in triumph
On her leukodermic forehead,
Freed at last
From the burden of living,
From her painful, asthmatic existence…

The sun rose up,
Shining softly
With an orange hue,
Gently reminding us to let go…

She lay dead
On the cold, hard stretcher
Upon a chilly, wintry morning,
Quiet, still, rigid, oblivious…
Held secure with strings,
Draped with a white bedsheet,
Bedecked with yellow marigold flowers,
Sindoor shining brightly in triumph
On her leukodermic forehead,
Freed at last
From the burden of living,
From her painful, asthmatic existence…

Riding triumphantly,
On the shoulders Of her loved ones
Chanting, “Hari Bol, Hari Bol”
Drifting out of our lives for ever…

Jasbir Chatterjee

My Sweet, Lonely, Little, World

Come, step
into my sweet, lonely little world!
Hand in hand,
We shall run across the cliffs
against which my emotions crash,
Fly through the capricious clouds
Through which my wild fancies fly,
Swim in the deep waters of the sea
in which lie buried the secrets of my heart,
Sing and dance
to the music of the swaying plants and the whistling winds,
and when weary and hungry,
eat the Forbidden Fruit.....
But perhaps you would wish to run away,
Perhaps you have your own sweet, lonely little world.....
But first,
Come, step
into my sweet, lonely little world!

Jasbir Chatterjee

Ship In A Storm

Every morning
After I complete my household chores
I rush to the bus stop…
Sprinting, running,
Jostling through the crowds…
The bus seems to have started earlier than usual;
But I manage to catch it somehow.
Panting, sweating,
Elbowing my way,
Through the madding crowds,
Through the terrible traffic…

Every evening
After I complete my office work
I reach the same bus stop…
Tired, exhausted,
Jostling through the crowds.
The bus seems to have reached later than usual;
But it does not matter really;
My nerves tingle with excitement
And I look forward to another day, another tomorrow…

But all that was till yesterday…

Today black clouds are again gathering in my skies,
Thunder and lightening sear the skies with a deafening roar,
The torrential downpour of rain drenches me all over,
And waves of self-doubt and anxiety lash angrily against the cliffs of my soul;
And I ask myself
All this sprinting, running,
Jostling through the crowds,
Panting, sweating,
Elbowing my way through the madding crowds
Through the terrible traffic…
What for?
For what purpose,
For what goal?
Will it never end?

Jasbir Chatterjee

Silence

Speech is silver
And silence, they say, is gold.
But when bitter words remain
Unuttered
Till they are forgotten,
Duels and wars remain
Unfought
Till the reason is forgotten,
And peace remains
Untouched
Till the humans evolve,
Silence seems
To be more precious than even diamond.

Jasbir Chatterjee

Something Strange

Something strange has happened to me…
I am always restless, never stable, never contented;
Vacillating like a pendulum
From one emotional state to another…

Sometimes I am happy, jovial, ecstatic;
Trivial incidents make me laugh
And personal tragedies I just brush off…
I want to sing, dance, play music, write stories…
Do all those things I always shied away from;
And people around me wonder and say
Something strange indeed has happened to me…

And sometimes the gravity of the earth pulls me back;
I search for inner calm
Peace, tranquility…
I want to remain quiet, passive, inactive;
Nothing matters really and nothing seems to be worth it.
Singing, dancing, music, writing…
Of what use, I ask myself…
One can learn only as much as one’s limits allow,
And people around me wonder and say
Something strange indeed has happened to me…

Jasbir Chatterjee

Stars In My Eyes

Yesterday
For some time
I walked
Sat and talked
As in a dream....
With stars in my eyes,
With my heart beating fast
In excitement and ecstasy...

Yesterday
For some time
I thought
I would finally get
All I had ever dreamed about
With stars in my eyes,
With my heart beating fast
In excitement and ecstasy...

Today
I am back
in the same place
A place where every step poses an obstacle
A place where every step seems to be a mile
Where an hour of rain
swamps us
into deep water...

But dreaming
I have not stopped...
Because dreaming
makes me hope
And I walk
sit and talk
With stars in my eyes,
With my heart beating fast
In excitement and ecstasy...

Jasbir Chatterjee

Staying Afloat

Here I am
At the bus stop,
Unemployed once again,
Waiting for the bus that would take me home...

Dark clouds are gathering
in the sky and it has started drizzling...
There's a lump in my throat
and tears of dejection are gathering
behind the eyes, just about to overflow...

Suddenly Courage springs up inside me,
The lump disappears,
The tears dry up,
The bus arrives.
I gather my cloak of self-esteem around myself
and calmly, I get inside...

I stay afloat
and Life pushes me along...

Here I am
At home
Unemployed once again
Waiting for the phone call
That would change it all...
The sky is clear
and the sun is burning hot
There seems to be a big cross on my shoulders
and despair threatens
To pull me down...

Suddenly Courage springs up inside me,
The cross disappears,
Despair gives way to hope,
I send applications, I sew, I wash, I clean, do all my household chores
And calmly, I sit down to pray...

I stay afloat
and Life pushes me along...

Jasbir Chatterjee

The Delhi Metro

The doors slid open
And I stepped in…
What a great relief it was
To be so far away
From the madding crowds,
The smoke and the chaotic traffic,
The rashly driven blueline buses,
The stray cattle on the roads…

The doors closed
And the train started gliding…
What a great relief it was
To be so far away
From the scorching heat,
The terribly long power cuts,
The little, gnawing worries,
The daily drudgery of existence…

I spotted a vacant seat
And I sat down…
What a great relief it was
To see
Everything so spotlessly clean;
Not a single scratch,
Not a single speck of dust,
Not a single perverted message
Scratched on the walls…

I relaxed
And I began to daydream…
What a great relief it was
To let
My thoughts wander
Like naughty, restless children
Swing up into the sky,
Ride on the clouds
Run on the green grass…

The train stopped
And I woke up with a start…
What a great shock it was
To find
I had reached my "stop."
On the opposite seat
Sat a newly-married couple
Still too engrossed with each other
Oblivious to everything else…

The doors slid open
And I stepped out…
What a rude contrast it was
To be back

Into the madding crowds,
The smoke and the chaotic traffic
The rashly-driven blueline buses
The stray cattle on the roads…

Jasbir Chatterjee

The End Or A Beginning?

Things ended between us,
Many years ago,
In a queer, tacit, unspoken manner…

I tried to destroy everything in my life
That reminded me of you…
But your poem
I could not discard…
And the memories hovering in my mind
Remained stubbornly intact…

Recently, many years later,
I began looking for you once again
Alas, I found you!

You hadn’t forgotten me either…
We still haven’t met;
Will we ever, I doubt…
Your replies to my emails, smses and phone calls fill me
With a rush of joy and excitement;
The wave passes and I feel sad again…

Because I know if things end once again between us
They will end for good, for ever
In the same queer, tacit, unspoken manner…

Jasbir Chatterjee

The Idols

Idols of Gods and Goddesses
Somehow never held any meaning
For me,
And spending hours in prayer
In front of them much less;

But when I stand
With my head bowed and eyes shut
Just like everybody else
Some kind of faith resurges into my soul
And I find myself praying
For inner peace and calm
In a world of
Chaos and turmoil…

Idols of Gods and Goddesses
Somehow never held any meaning
For me,
And spending hours in prayer
In front of them much less;

But when I saw
The idols of Durga and her family members getting split up
And then prayed in front of them
Just like everybody else,
My heart sank in despair at the thought
That we also must be idols in the hands of our creator
To pray to, to worship, to play with,
And finally break up and dump into the Yamuna.

Jasbir Chatterjee

The Snail

Your easy laughter
Your jokes and smiles
And your jovial manner
Makes me feel so good, so comfortable…
And like a snail
I crawl
Out towards you…

But the ways of the world
And the complexities
Of the human mind
Make me feel so apprehensive, so terrified…
And like a snail
I keep
My shell handy, very close to myself….

To retreat into just in case
your soothing smile
changes into a devilish sneer
and your friendly hand
stretches itself out
to kill,
to snuff the very life out of me.

Jasbir Chatterjee

The Train

The train is running
Through the fields, the forests, and the deserts…
So close to the earth and yet,
An intrinsic part of the society—
Full of people with all sorts of shades
Of character, uttering words that could
Mean nothing, and yet everything…

The train is running
Through the fields, the forests, and the deserts…
So close to the earth,
Giving me such a frightening sense
Of having a home and yet,
Being so homeless;
Of having a destination and yet,
Being so displaced;
Of being among so many people
Laughing, singing, joking, and dancing and
Yet, not knowing whom to trust
And whom not to,
Whom to believe
And whom not to.

Jasbir Chatterjee

The Withered Petals

I hold the withered petals
of my illusions
in my hand.
Then I throw them on the ground
and lift my foot
to trample upon them....
But I can't,
Because I can't be cruel,
Because it hurts,
Because it is painful....
So I pick up again the withered petals
of my illusions
To keep for the cruel, cynical woman
I would be in a few years
For the woman in a desolate place
Who, with a cruel and sinister laugh,
would fling away the withered petals
Among the debris
in disgust
with me, with herself, and the ways of love.

Jasbir Chatterjee

Thoughts Of A Mother

My daughter would turn 10 next month…
I find it hard to believe!
It seems only yesterday
That she was born….
As my thoughts wander
Down the memory lane,
I am transported
To those restless days
In the balcony where I sat
On a low stool
With swollen feet and a heavy body
With waves of nausea and anxiety
Drowning me in the abyss of depression
Wondering if I was in for a second nightmare
Much more frightening than the last….

My daughter would complete one decade of her life next month…
I find it hard to believe!
It seems only yesterday
That she was born….
As my thoughts wander
Down the memory lane,
I am transported
To those long, peaceful days
In the balcony where I sat
On a low stool
With needles and threads of different colors
With a pink cloth and an embroidery frame
With my lips moving in a silent prayer to God
Wondering if He was going to make my daughter
As beautiful as the flowers I was embroidering…..

Jasbir Chatterjee

Ways Of Life

Strange are the ways of life
With all its ups and downs....
The wheels of fortune turns
And all of a sudden
Haves become have-nots,
Have-nots become haves...
But what must happen
does happen
and we have to face it all
with courage and a steely resolve...

Strange are the ways of life
With all its ups and downs...
The morning alarm rings
and all of a sudden,
Fear and anxiety threaten
to suffocate me to death.
Then I remind myself
But what must happen
does happen
and I must face it all
with courage and a steely resolve...

Jasbir Chatterjee

When Intimacy Changes into Indifference

Time just flows past
And you never notice
Till subtle changes come bubbling to the surface;
When intimacy turns into indifference.

Time just flows past
And you never notice
Till your close friends just drift away;
When intimacy turns into indifference.

Time just flows past
And you never notice
Till people who supported you in tough times just disappear;
When intimacy turns into indifference.

Time just flows past
And you never notice
Till one’s cross feels too heavy;
When intimacy turns into indifference.

Jasbir Chatterjee

You and I

Many years ago
When we were young
And deeply in love,
We once sat in a park…
The sun was setting,
Making way for the moon…
The birds were coming back to roost…
You were reading my poems…
Suddenly you drew me closer…
With your arms round me
And with your voice earnest,
You said, "Marry me, Jasbir,
And you will never have to write
Poems like these…

Many years later
When we were no longer so young
But still deeply in love,
We once stood among the mountains
On a valley…
The sun was setting,
Making way for the moon…
The birds were coming back to roost…
We were smiling into a camera…
Suddenly other things became more important
And the moment was gone…
We were now part of a large crowd
And I began knitting my thoughts and memories
Into another poem.

Jasbir Chatterjee