

Classic Poetry Series

Joy Goswami
- poems -

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Joy Goswami(10 November 1954 -)

Joy Goswami is an Indian poet. Goswami writes in Bengali and is widely considered as one of the most important Bengali poets of his generation.

Biography

Joy was born in Kolkata. His family moved to Ranaghat, West Bengal shortly after and he has lived there ever since. Goswami was introduced to and encouraged with respect to poetry by his father, a well-known political worker in the area. He lost his father at the age of six, after which the family was sustained by his mother, a teacher. She died in 1984. Goswami's formal education stopped early, in grade eleven. By this time he was already writing poetry. After a long period of writing in little magazines and periodicals, his writing was finally published in the influential Desh Patrika. This brought his immediate critical acclaim and so long after his first poetry collection was published, named Christmas o Sheeter Sonnetguchchho (Sonets of Christmas and Winter). He has received the Anita-Sunil Basu Award from the Bangla Academy, Govt of W.B. the prestigious Ananda Purashkar in 1989 for Ghumiyechho, Jhaupata? (Have you slept, Pine leaf?) and the Sahitya Akademi Award, 2000 for his anthology Pagali tomara sange(With you, O crazy girl).

A Bathroom Fairytale

Lay yourself down, when you wish to be born lay yourself down
in a grassy field meadow pasture lay yourself down and say Ma Baba Ma Baba
Soon your body will become this tiny in the morning
Office-goers will see on the grass drops of dew
Your one drop will vanish with the warmth of the sun, go,
Go if you wish to be born say to the clouds Ma Baba Ma Baba
The clouds will hurl you from their womb such rain such rain such rain
Down below a beautiful maiden enters her bath in a roofless rented bathroom
Today there isn't enough tap water when the rain comes
Her joy as she embraces you to her bosom such love such love such love....

[Translated from 'Kalgharer Roopkatha' (Bengali) by Oindrila Mukherjee]

Joy Goswami

An Evening Of Rain

An eye had wandered, to another's beloved, her leg.
When, carelessly, her sari lifted just a little -
Outside, the rain comes down. A lantern's been lowered underneath the table, in
the dark
Now and then the fair lustre of a hidden foot drifts up...

The fault is not in the eye. There was no choice but to look.
Wasn't there? Why? -- Rainspray rushes in noisily
Wasn't there? Why? -- Flowering bushes leap on barbed wire
Wasn't there? Why? -- From the one who has no right
Everything is concealed by a fringe of embroidered lace...

Now the rain has stopped. Now she too has left the room.
Only, the breeze returns. Only, like the eye of a powerless man
From time to time the lantern beneath the table trembles.

[Translated from 'Ekti Brishtir Sandhya' (Bengali) by Oindrila Mukherjee]

Joy Goswami

Anniversary

A name I've written on a blade of grass
On the date my mother breathed her last.

[Translated from 'Batshorik' (Bengali) by Oindrila Mukherjee]

Joy Goswami

Don't Wait For Your Lover Any Longer

Dusk has fallen. Go home.

Don't wait any more.

Trees, flats, trees, signboard, trees

In between the slate sky - in the distance, shops by evening

Every scooter, Maruti

Flashes light and turns by the culvert

The same storm that came and went seven days ago

Is coming back again.

On the street dust swirls with the paper bag

The wind's voice gradually rises to a roar.

What a strange restlessness

Has begun to tremble in the suburban pond's water...

Go home, wait no more. Go and see

The child you left behind with the nanny

Was playing when he fell asleep on the floor

In the jungle of small and big toys.

[Translated from 'Premiker Janye Aar Apekkha Koro Na' (Bengali) by Oindrila Mukherjee]

Joy Goswami

Hieroglyph

Dead peacock in the dream
The moonlight fell upon his body

Cactus in the veranda
Room besides the roof

Dried-up old birds
Pierced by a skewer

In their voice
The hissing wind

The dead peacock is standing
In his body the firefly glittering

Moon is hanging on chain
Black pendulum

The slanting tree besides
Melting wooden house

Dead peacock in the dream
His clear eyes open

[Translated by the author and Skye Lavin]

Joy Goswami

If You Must Ask Me

If you ask me, 'what have you done with your life'
then I must tell you...

One day I vomited, one day I swallowed
One day I touched the water and it changed into milk
One day by looking at me a heavenly girl lost herself
One day without telling me both my hands flew away in the wind

One day I hid in a drunkard's stomach as a strong drink
the next day I came out, in another way entirely, as the tears of a beautiful
woman
and at once the muslin handkerchief sucked me in with sympathy

One day I beat her, one day I kicked her
One day I stuck out my tongue
One day I lathered myself with soap
One day I lathered her
If you don't believe me, go and ask your wife

One day I managed only caa, caa
One day I took on the scarecrow
One day I adopted a pig, Oh Yes one day a goat
One day I played a flute, Oh Yes one day for Radha I played
One day I pressed my face into a woman's lap,
while the rest of me fell to someone else
If you don't believe me, go and ask she-who-is-my-fate

One day my body was a bag full of green leaves
and my fingers were long white lillies
and my hair was a cumulus cloud---
when the wind comes, it will float anywhere
One day I was the grass in field after field,
but only because you will come and pour your body out onto it
yes, my eyes exceed all commands
they roam from river to river to river

On the river Ganges I lay my body down, like a small bridge
so people can go from this side to that, no passports
from that side to this came your own mother once,

a teenager in her first sari
While writing the Constitution of the nation, I got a bit sleepy
in that moment someone came and scribbled on it: oh, oh I want to make her

One day running out in the main street naked
I submitted this year's budget

One day I opened my mouth and one day
I shut it

In the yawn of my Yes-saying mouth there is no food
and in my No-saying mouth there is no food.

One day blood dripped down my cheeks
I looked for my torn-out eyes in the water and the mud of a field

One day a knife stabbed me in the back
I collapsed into the yard before the hut, coughing blood
the village crowd came to see me with lanterns held up

One day body ablaze, I leapt from a burning hut
and fell into a pond

The next morning I was surprised to see it in the newspapers
I got so excited tears fell, I called people, sweat dripped from our foreheads
I kept the assembled sweat in my file cabinet

If anybody comes to do research in the future
they can set fire to the documents and burn many people

Kill! Kill! Kill!

Adopt two different techniques for men and women

Kill! Kill! Kill!

Since the heart has come from the mouth
since the baby has come out of the womb

Kill! Kill! Kill!

In this place we must use screams

that break the skull

In this place we must use such intercourse
half the body will be dumped in the earth after
and turned into coal

In this place we must spit
so that when it comes from the mouth, it explodes like stars

In this place we must use a duet,
a song in which the hero and heroine will fly in the sky
and the hands, legs, head, and genitals will rip away--- all from a song

every limb will cry out for every other limb
each limb left will caress what is left

at last they will fail to know what to do next
and they will return to their previous form

Here you must use a kiss that kills---
one that seizes and then lets live, so the lips smash each other trying to unite

the lips of abandoned lovers will open to the sky for an eternal kiss

If you ask me today, 'why have you written lies in hundreds of lines?'
If you ask, 'why didn't you learn the duty of a poet
... still why didn't you learn?'

I will lecture about a particle
I will explain that I was born from a grain of sand
I was born by salt
and the anonymous drop of rain that watched me from a leaf on a high branch of
a tree
and then jumped onto me
I know nothing more than this

If you ask me today, in what phalanx,
in what black hole, in what hidden drains of the nation
I wander, in what armoury do I drink a cup of tea,
against what billboard do I smash my head,
over what big bridge or dam,
what deer came and nuzzled my foot,

what swan prayed to me to come and twist her neck

Over the cloud, under the cloud
like thousands and thousands of drops of rain
I jumped & danced in the fields and the cities

If you ask me today, how many buds
do you have on your plant?

Are you shundillo or bhardwaj?
durlov or koiborto?
Are you mango tree or banana?
Do you wear shoes or sandals?
Are you Muslim or Pyre-attendant?
Are you a worshipped stone or are you alive?

Then I will tell you the story of that night,
that night on the calm grass field when a long minaret spun
and burst from the ground
mud and stones
shot out and vanished into the black heaven

From the long fire tail in the sky
I jumped arms spread into the revolving foam womb of time

Now I am in the last ocean after all the distances
and the iron wheel revolves under the water
Now I am at the very beginning of the ocean
and the iron wheel revolves under the water
What is bodied and what is bodiless? All are awakening
to the robust life through me

I am moving through time now
I stroke in two directions, past and future
I am a monstrous fish lashing my tail
the water-pillar in the ocean rises and falls
the fountain of water springs from my nose
it creates a burning cluster of cloud

A rope is fastened to the sword on my nose
the other end of the rope goes on and on
to where no earth, no solar system exists

to where the dark ether wave swells with stars and cosmic dusts
there from one galaxy-island to another
a life-craft of flame floats on

that's all, that's all
I have nothing more to say to you

[Translated from 'Aaj Jai Aamaake jigyes karo' (Bangla) by Skye Lavin and Joy Goswami]

Joy Goswami

In The Evening Sadness Comes...

In the evening sadness comes and stands by the door, his face
Is hidden, from the dying sun he took some colors and painted his body
The sadness comes in the evening,
I stretched my hand and he caught my wrist, in an iron-hard clasp
He caught me out from my room, his face
Is black, he is ahead of me and I follow him
I crossed from the evening to the night, from the night to the dawn, then the
morning, the noon, the day, the month
Crossing water, tree, boat, city, hill
Crossing blows, stumbling, poison, suspicions, jealousy, graves, genocide, the
bones and ribs of civilization, swamp and grass
Then crossing my own death, death after death, going on and on
The bony fingers holding nothing but a pen
Nothing...

[Translated from 'Sandhyebela daraja dhare dNadaalo bishaad' (Bengali) by Skye
Lavin and Joy Goswami]

Joy Goswami

Narrator

Ash moves in the room, printed in darkness
Paper, book, cover, painting, the call of dead birds---
Ashes moving in the room, what is suppressed in the room
One trunk of stories wants to rise up from the floor

You have nothing to do:
you are the narrator
because once you took part in that story.
By pressing your own throat you strangled many times the shout of delight
You restrained the shout of delight when death was near.....

Are you dead? Or not?
Death appears, comes near, nearer, then disappears
This heart-breaking stress of pleasure, peculiar and unknown to you
Such a whip you have never felt before

What happened at last? After a torturous wait for her and your death-sucking lip
Overflowed the limit and the sky broke open.
Out rolled the storm of the destroyed
The storm of distress rolling onto the floor

But you are still restless, where, there is no peace, none---
Fire does not descend, fire does not bow his head!
Where do you throw the flames, where should you,
With that thought the cloud bangs his head, sky! sky!

Where is the tree? Who can take the flames?
You have burnt tree after tree after tree,
With that test, in the burned out darkness
Ash moves in the room, paper, book, painting....

Cover upon book--- inside the call of dead birds
Lightning flies, says, 'will you be my dream tree?'
Oh? Again? The floor of the room cracks---
Void---

One trunk of fiction emerging from the void, poet!

[Translated from 'Kahinikar' (Bengali) by Poet himself]

Joy Goswami

One Man

Suspicion comes and sits on his shoulder one morning,
Slowly with long, thin beak, it cleans his ear,
When his eye closed with pleasure--- suspicion--- with a tweet entered
into the hollow of his ear,
and he did not notice.

Since then always the sound of the bird beating its wings in his skull,
When he tried to hear someone instead he heard that sound,
When he looked in someone's eye he always saw the eye of the bird,
Waking up every morning he cut off one friendship,
In the night when he lay beside his sleeping wife, checking his own body
He wants to examine it to be sure that his wife is not sleeping with anybody else.

[Translated from 'Ekjon' (Bengali) by Poet himself]

Joy Goswami

Poem From Another Land

By deeper water, upon greener rock, I had pitched my tent
And washed away with care the colour of my scream
Your bone and stone ornaments dried on wet rock
And Night would spread its blue-black skin upon the water
Then, it wasn't in this land I lived!
The animal hides you gave me to wrap around my waist
I laid beneath my head to sleep on the island sand
In the distance a whale released water through its nose, in the early morning sun
One by one all the corals emerged from the sea -
One day a wandering Marco Polo anchored his ship
One day Columbus too -
Who was first, who second, can you remember? - And once
On his way back from his long desolate exile
Crusoe, Robinson; he spent a couple of hours with us
Dined with us on long fish roasted in fire
Not a single bone in them - "excellent" he remarked
in dense creeper-covered forest, I noticed
the way the early morning sun flashed - while speaking
with you from beneath his nutbrown beard there flashed
such a smile -
Then, it wasn't in this land I lived!

Tonight why do I recall that tent upon a rock
Why do those bone and feather ornaments sparkle in the dark?
Here where the butterflies are lightless and the minerals damp as a cold
From sleeping bodies warm vapour rises constantly
If I try to wash the wound of my scream, then
From the water there will rise a crimson smoke!

But running will not help!
I will fetch the rocks and warm them
Warm them and whet them
Soon their inert tips
Will sharpen and glisten

And then
Do you remember one time in the dark how
A drunken bear pounced on you
And I with just such a sharp rock

Flattened him right there, in the sand?

[Translated from Bengali by Oindrila Mukherjee]

Joy Goswami

Rain-Drenched Winds In My Sleep

['In my youth, one day, love came to me'
Rabindranath, Arogya No. 13]

(1)

When did light string me to sleep's dark branches,
O Tamal,
When did peacocks enter
night's township
go from door to door peddling songs!
You carefree soul,
Let the wayfarer give alms today let her give
all your best wishes to lovers
Gladly let her give to paupers like you---
Only a fistful of grass only a handful
of desolate sand may she offer to the river, enough,
You the destitute
Do not linger any longer thinking
Aid is on the way aid will be here wait no more
Waste no more time
Someone has sent out a call to every village, every hamlet
Beyond my thoughts all forests, groves, trees
have gone crazy in the wind in the wind
like a crazy girl walking down the street
unheeding uncaring shoeless.

And seeing that
from all directions waves swell distant vistas
come flying in

And wondrously, now in Chaitra, what a furore
"Sraban has come, Sraban has come",
The sky grows eager with dense deep clouds
A fierce gale tears since morning
Its madness knows no bounds
Drunken trees sway their heads now
now they begin to fly
And over the flying forest clang cymbals,
Drums beat again again kohl-black rain clouds
rain clouds mine.

(2)

For me, only the walking

All night

within the cloud-hued black dreams beneath sleep

All night a bewitching snakebite in my head

Never to be forgotten

O seven seas, however did I, a wayward fishing boat

Blithely ride your various heaving billowing waves

Who was it, a coral island, that stopped me midway

made me set up house

My meagre shelter for a few days-----

That too I left behind when in dream one dawn I heard

The command

Left behind family friends and a lap to put my head in

without a word I came away

My fishing boat hurtles from one hill to another

Suddenly my boat sinks

Rises again, and then

Heedless of my protests my reluctance

She takes me on the sandbanks

on the fishing boat

She took me unknown woman.....

(3)

Days die. O dusk trailing the dusty soil

If you have known me

Then come, take me back home

Hold me by the hand and take me

home.

In the steps of a ballad I have come

this far

Now I know not where I am

My eyes were fixed

on its watery footprints

I no more know what comes

Watching the road so long

my eyes are blinded

Today I hesitate,

My own words sound strange

Speak, death's simple words,
Of the land begun in fire
Of the sowing in that land

This song will outlive death
What river this beneath your feet
Where its bends and meanders

There the women tend the garden
Sprinkle on their hearts in the morning
moist words

He who has never known love
Let him go and lie beside the red river

Burn simple words mine
On that tree where
Every leaf cups fire

A beggar-woman's lost child
Falls asleep by the roadside
Touch him gently, o flowersprig,
Leave all else aside,
come gently touch.

[Translated from 'Sbapne Paaoyaa Baadal Haaoyaa' (Bangla) by Nandini Gupta]

Joy Goswami

The Burning Bird Drops

Sizzling sound in the water
My sleep broken
A billion years of sleep

Over whose head
The hole of the sky, the iron cloud, and
Under that, circling, the silence of sinking earth

[Translated from 'Jwolte jwolte paakhi poDchhe' (Bengali) by Poet himself]

Joy Goswami

Things Recalled At Night

All that rainfall

Laid out in the rainfall, all those dead bodies

Beating at the dead bodies, all that wind

Trembling with the wind but not billowing out, all those

encompassing shrouds

Thrusting their muzzles in, tugging at the cloth, all those night-time dogs

Shouting, driving the dogs away, all those attendants

Half-naked, squatting attendants

Laid down beside the attendants, all those wooden staves

Those clay pipes not burning, in the rain

Those not-burning pyres

Spaced apart, all those not-burning pyres

Behind the pyres, the ragged river-bank

And on all those ragged edges, risen from the water,

All their mothers sit

Their heads covered with uncolored cloth

Risen up from the water after long years, climbed down from the rain,

All their mothers sit like small white bundles

So that at burning time

They can be close to their sons--

At burning time when the dead will remember

a wife left behind

An only daughter who ran away with her lover

Unresolved property and a friend's treachery

The dead man will remember the first day at school and

Unseen for so long,

unresisted, the cause of his own death

When he tries, flustered, to sit up on the pyre

one last time

And the attendant's staff strikes hard,

breaking him, laying him out--

Then she can touch that fire-burnt skull

With her age-old kitchen-weary pot-scrubbing shriveled hand

And, spreading the end of her sari over those molten eyes,

the widow can say

Don't fret, baba, my son, here I am, here, I'm your mother,

here, right at your side!

Not: The original poem [raatre kI kI mane ilo] appeared in the collection of poems 'paataar poshhaak'

[Translated by Prasenjit Gupta]

Joy Goswami

This One Noon

This noon I do not sleep, I do not wake, I do not die, I do not live
Time enters the room through the window, until this noon I did not know my
hand, my own thin hand is a lyre
You grab the hand like a musician grabs his instrument from elbow to index
finger and you look at it as if
'what a wonderful thing it is'
Your lips fall from the peak of the finger on flashed the major and minor notes,
on and on
In my palm you discover a red vein, what a surprise, it trembles, which until this
noon I did not know

I knew nothing about water, land, and sky before this noon
I do not sleep, I do not wake, I do not die, I do not live only a bird
comes and lands on my face
A village falls like a stone into the river and the river changes its direction
Since that time, there is a stream of hill water in place of my home, I do not
drown, I do not float, I do not fly

I am not more than this stream, if you cup me in your hands, you can refresh
yourself
I can do no work except splash your face
The time for your swim has come...

You sink your head under the water and search out my eyes by holding your
breath
You press your lips against my closed eyes and I remember my wolf's life, my
scorpion's life, my python's life
my killer's life and the life of hiding in the forest
Once I promised to have you in my lips and after so many ages I have come to
keep that promise
Now nobody will come here, only your head will come down to my lap

Again we'll search out one another, the pressure of your lips caught the life of
this noon
This noon is a stream that is still, under this stream we will lie together we will
not sleep we will not wake
we will not die and we were never born

because in this stream the time has stopped--- because

now we are making love

[Translated from 'Ei Ekta Dupur' (Bengali) by Skye Lavin and Joy Goswami]

Joy Goswami