

Poetry Series

# **Mohan Rana**

## **- poems -**

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# Mohan Rana(1964)

Mohan Rana (Hindi: मोहन राना) is a Hindi language poet from India. He has written six poetry books.

## <b>Biography</b>

Mohan Rana was born in Delhi, India. He completed his graduate degree from Delhi University. His poetry work has been appreciated by poets. He uses techniques of free association and improvisation in his writing. The poet and critic, Nandkishore Acharya, has written that, 'Amongst the new generation of Hindi poets, the poetry of Mohan Rana stands alone; it defies any categorisation. However, its refusal to fit any ideology doesn't mean that Mohan Rana's poetry shies away from thinking - but that it knows the difference between thinking in verse and thinking about poetry. For Mohan Rana the poetic process in itself is also thought process.' Examples of his style of writing poetry are in these fifteen poems, translated from Hindi by Lucy Rosenstein and Bernard O'Donoghue.

A standard shirt  
After midnight  
Another word for it  
As the past approaches  
Did you hear it too?  
In your own words  
Not what the words...  
The blue-eyed blackbird  
The colour of water  
The evening news and the roof of the world  
The morning post  
The photograph  
The poet's fate  
The washerman  
To the lost children

(Translations from Hindi)

# A Patch

The forest first dried inside me  
The river turned into stone  
The sky became barren  
The earth fallow  
Desert spread  
soaking up every dropp like blotting paper  
Every shape tumbled onto its roots,  
I had crossed a sand bridge there  
before putting it into words  
A green shoot dried under my feet  
A memory – just touched – became sand  
My footprints disappeared  
Crazed hot air whirled about  
unravelling breath from my lungs

Past days are saved in spider webs  
in the outer mirrors of the inner world,  
Hopes lie around with broken spades  
Sew a patch  
on the torn fringes of the day  
so that a door may open  
This century has lost its way  
in the dark lane of time

With eyes open I see  
this world, all around  
words turn into dust  
First inside me  
the sand storm has struck

[Translation from the poem in Hindi: "Ek paiband kahin jodana" by Lucy  
Rosenstein]

Mohan Rana

# A Standard Shirt

Between midday and nightfall  
there comes a time  
when the day's noise and actions  
are already done with,

just as now,  
all desires quenched,  
I am ready to sit down  
on any chair.

A boy in a yellow shirt  
has just passed by  
and made me think  
of a shirt of mine  
in those old ordinary days.

So it was possible.  
Yes, this life was possible.  
And here I am, still wearing  
a shirt just like that.

[The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein;  
The final translated version of the poem is by Bernard O'Donoghue]

Mohan Rana

# After Midnight

I saw the stars far off -  
as far as I from them:  
in this moment I saw them -  
in moments of the twinkling past.  
In the boundless depths of darkness,  
these hours  
hunt the morning through the night.

And I can't make up my mind:  
am I living this life for the first time?  
Or repeating it, forgetting as I live  
the first moment of breath every time?

Does the fish too drink water?  
Does the sun feel the heat?  
Does the light see the dark?  
Does the rain too get wet?  
Do dreams ask questions about sleep as I do?

I walked a long, long way  
and when I saw, I saw the stars close by.  
Today it rained all day long and the words were washed away  
from your face.

Mohan Rana

# Another Word For It

Different blues  
in sky and waves.  
The cloud hums a dream  
of eyes open.  
So what will this day be like,  
this garment of moments?  
The ball of thread  
that knits time  
taps the sleepy stones.

There may be a better way  
to say this  
some other day.

Mohan Rana

# As The Past Approaches

As the past approached,  
the future, even when you've lived it,  
remains to be seen.

Behind that door  
there is life. But guess!  
Out or in?  
This side or the other?  
Closed or open?  
Who's waiting for me there?  
Who am I waiting for?  
I have still to discover.

One foot forward,  
one backward.  
The truth is  
neither key nor lock.

Mohan Rana

# Ata Hua Atit

Mohan Rana



# Atmakaloho

Mohan Rana

# Bharam Anek

Mohan Rana

# Dhumketu

Mohan Rana

# Did You Hear It Too?

All night long your restlessness  
walked the wet streets of Lisbon,  
pitter-patter.

A silent moan  
woke me at daybreak.

A bird  
was singing in the dawn:  
something had woken it up too.

All night long your restlessness,  
unable to sleep, walked and peered  
with eyes closed  
inside me.

A sound broke in the ocean's sigh  
amidst the rising waves.

Turning over in the sheets' folds,  
did you hear the bird too?

Mohan Rana

# Ek Kavita Phir Se

Mohan Rana

# Giragi?A

Mohan Rana

# Hindi

Mohan Rana

# In Your Own Words

They said: Don't go to the end of the Earth  
because your lengthening shadow will frighten you.  
There it is the world of winged pythons;  
the earth there is ablaze with the fire they spit.  
If you arrive where it is neither day nor night  
you'll be turned into stone while you are waiting.

As if I had heard these words of mine  
from somebody else.  
If I'd had a full life rehearsal  
I'd have made some changes to the text;  
but I can't get away from my own words:  
returning;  
going away;  
loving you.

But I wasn't good enough,  
I couldn't write for days.  
Living in evil times, I turned evil;  
not seeing time passing,  
I became imperceptible  
as if trapped in clockwork  
driven crazy by my own words.

[27.9.1997  
From Is Chor Par, On This Shore]

The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein  
The final translated version of the poem is by Bernard O'Donoghue

Mohan Rana



# Kapron Se Bahar

Mohan Rana

# Maya

Mohan Rana

# Namaste

Mohan Rana

# Not What The Words...

I dry out words in the rain  
until one day all that is left  
is whiteness. The verandah dazzles  
with emptiness, so I take them back in.

These are the fallen, scattered shards of life.  
I pick them up and fit them all together  
to make a pattern whose meaning can't be made out,  
though in autumn  
the leaves still fall in their season.

A rainy cloud hits  
the edges of the garden,  
and a bridge that has held apart  
two riverbanks  
comes in as if to speak.

As a rule few people travel this road.  
It features on no map,  
this road that leads nowhere.  
But when, out for a walk, I pick something up,  
the track appears: just as, when a leaf falls,  
a seed somewhere is born out of that falling.

[7.11.2005

From Dhoop ke Andhere men, In the Darkness of the Sun]

The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein  
The final translated version of the poem is by Bernard O'Donoghue

Mohan Rana

# Pankaua

Mohan Rana

# Philips Radio

My home grew wizened on its Vivid Bharati  
Its highs and lows, the fluctuating waves  
Its knob has forsaken us in our last whitewash  
Cells heated in the sun turn silent by nightfall  
In between the headlines

Cowering from the rough wind in the open streets, at the heart of Eindhoven  
I stand near a large building of Philips Corporation  
I walk the zebra-crossing ponderingly  
Is it our Philips Radio?

[Translation from Hindi: Arup K Chatterjee]

Mohan Rana

# Probashi

Mohan Rana

# Shaval

Mohan Rana



# The Blue-Eyed Blackbird

Is it right to speak of myself?

This will do:

I am a blue-eyed blackbird

My wings know all directions

My flight has touched the colour of the sky

When soaring aloft I've glimpsed the darkness beyond

I've tracked drying rivers and swelling deserts

I've been singed in burning forests

I've kissed anguish as it melts in the rain

I've seen a woman give birth in a tree beseiged by flood

I've changed my body so many times

and yet I am always a blue-eyed blackbird

People in flight from war, in hiding,

climbing steep slopes, stop when they see me

Stunned they are so high, so far,

even though I live in their hearts

In the deep lines of their faces

countries are shattered and rebuilt

They buy new locks, new keys to new heavens

What did Boabdil think when he handed the keys

of the Alhambra to Isabella,

whispering, 'Here are the keys to paradise'?

This endless flight with no day and no night

when the sun sets and rises at once

Longitude is locked in my eyes

Reading the diary of a poet's dreams

lost in fog, I fall

merging with the earth's dust

a blue-eyed blackbird is born again

Arrows, now guns, are aimed at me

I have no fear

My blood will mingle with the crimson of autumn

I'll take flight from another country

Another direction

Casting life from your words

I am not of this world

Is it right to speak more of myself?

This will do

[The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein  
The final translated version of the poem is by The Poetry Translation Workshop]

Mohan Rana

# The Colour Of Water

Rain falling, day after day,  
as if trying to clean off  
our permanent stains,  
but all it does is discolour  
this well-worn shirt,  
and wash the memory  
of all the passing seasons  
from the walls.

This is not summer  
nor autumn nor winter:  
sometimes I recognize myself,  
then forget.

Maybe after so much rain  
all colour will be washed out  
and my shirt then be the colour of water.

Mohan Rana

# The Cormorant

Soon a new season will start  
if there is spring in this latitude  
I'll change my clothes  
and stroll around guided by maps  
Trees will come into leaf  
Birds fly back from near and far  
I hope there will be no news  
of a new war  
I'll clear my throat to say the half-spoken but fall silent  
May this spring be so long that the memory of  
Autumn does not return to the solitude of words

Spring is getting shorter each year  
So short that sometimes  
only two seasons seem to be left now -  
Good and bad  
Joy and sorrow  
Love and fear  
You and I  
May spring and autumn be divided between us  
and the withering rain remain all year long

I thought, let's catch the fragrance of a taste coming from the kitchen  
on my sleeve and write it down  
Wishing to understand something in the quiet back yard  
Searching for a wee corner in a tiny space  
Time may come soon  
to divide the world  
All has to be forgotten in order to remember  
Alone with the inventory of necessary baggage,  
Life requires not just breath  
but flames of love in mind's shadows -  
the hand which breaks the fall

Small change in the abacus adding the loan of drudgery  
Nervous in the decrepit present, feeling my dry cheeks,  
I haven't yet seen the past  
from inside the mirror  
When I leap in its luminous unknown

I lose one thing to gain another.

Mohan Rana

# The Evening News And The Roof Of The World

While light for us is fading  
elsewhere it is brightening.  
We can think of the dusk  
as we walk among the park trees  
that stand still with arms folded.

Somewhere else there was rain  
while here it grew colder.  
The airs mingled to bring together  
tired voices.  
We must get home before dark.

We stopped to watch the light  
being dusted from the sky,  
and I want us to be a tall tower  
to see round the horizon  
whose hand it was that dimmed the light.

While we watch the official evening news  
the world will wash its bleary face.  
The century will end with no grand epic  
though we will spend its final days of peace  
to fanfares. There was a time  
when the day's spring and the evening's fall  
were something to think about:

as if the Stone Age was a short while ago.  
Then in a dream I saw that, though we were  
on the highest roof in the world,  
the stars were still far away  
and the darkness had no end.

[13.7.1992

From Jaise Janam Koi Darwaazaa, As if Life Were a Door]

The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein  
The final translated version of the poem is by Bernard O'Donoghue



# The Morning Post

Sand has flown from the Sahara in the night,  
crossing lands and seas to fall on this city.  
Or has some wind blown it from nearby fields?  
For the first time I take notice of dust:  
all my life I have lived without seeing  
all that is ordinary, all that is  
where it should be:  
birds in the sky, men on land,  
fish in the sea's dark depths.

Wearing a mask  
made specially for this poem,  
I stand with eyes open on an empty stage,  
declaiming inside a glass box  
my name, nickname, surname, pen-name,  
address, age, birthplace, education, job.  
Every day since I opened my eyes  
I have done this, trembling like a broken puppet  
dangling from the strings  
that grow twisted as I wither too,  
gasping for breath,  
my next role unwritten.  
The post lies on the mat,  
curling at the edges, unread  
every morning.  
From there I move on  
another passing day: hardly a glance  
at the morning post my figure shadows.

The geography of near and far inside you  
decides what life brings: happiness or sorrow;  
time of grief, a brief moment for love.  
Over and over I practise the minor rules  
of punctuation: life still spent  
on small distinctions. Yesterday's  
unfinished business still unfinished  
tomorrow. I grow old, trying to become new  
by wearing another coat today.



[1992 Leicester

From Subah kii Daak, Morning Post]

The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein

The final translated version of the poem is by Bernard O'Donoghue

Mohan Rana

# The Passageway

The passageway is empty  
Have all decisions been made?  
All waiting finished  
Sunlight falls onto flowerpots  
Like truth filtering through  
The passageway is empty

unchanged despite the passing of so many feet  
An empty space, a few steps  
between entering the house and leaving it  
Nobody sleeps here  
on sheets of a carefree night

The passageway is empty  
between dream and sleep  
Like that place on the left side of the chest  
which seems empty  
Where the hand feels  
an empty hollow  
Where there is no air  
no beat.

Mohan Rana

# The Photograph

Woods on either side: light along the path down the middle.  
Woods on either side and loud laughter: path silent down the middle.  
Woods on either side, and screams: path unmoved down the middle.  
Woods on either side, bathed in dreams: the path released from sleep.

This vision trembles on the eyes like the mirroring surface of water.  
A face bent over it is startled  
at the world shimmering  
in those shut, moist eyes:  
like a compass, the love inside you  
takes you on an unfamiliar path  
and the truth releases you.

Open out your clenched palms.  
The wind can't hide inside them,  
nor light either.  
They have made their own prison.  
I want, suddenly, to see your face:  
then to be surprised.

[4.4.2003

From Dhoop ke Andhere men, In the Darkness of the Sun]

The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein  
The final translated version of the poem is by Bernard O'Donoghue

Mohan Rana

# The Poet's Fate

by Mohan Rana

Were this light even whiter  
you and I would be invisible  
we each would live our invisible pain  
never knowing  
the absence of joy  
Stunned by that void  
into which shadows vanish  
forms dissolve  
falling, we would imagine flying  
without a sky  
Only sounds  
reach the surviving memory  
no need for introductions  
The poet's fate  
poetry's fate  
together  
just a breath

[The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein

The final translated version of the poem is by The Poetry Translation Workshop]

Mohan Rana

# The Washerman

Silently watching the morning's brilliant  
light tear the dense clouds  
I forgot the sky and  
the aching hand  
Watching the brimming reflection  
wrinkle the water  
I forgot my own age  
Watching the bloodied  
shadows in the swaying greenery  
I forgot the nowness of the dead  
and turned to something else  
Stirring the basket of clouds  
into the blue sky  
I wash myself

[The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein  
The final translated version of the poem is by The Poetry Translation Workshop]

Mohan Rana

# To The Lost Children

I want to write to the lost children,  
those whose clothes hung from the branches  
of the mulberry tree, getting smaller  
as the branches grew.

The tree gets thicker and thicker  
until years later I see the old tree  
bent over its own shadow.

The clothes turn to shreds;  
their memories mix in the wind,  
dissolve in water, sink under the seasons,  
fade like a forgotten poem.

I set out to write about myself  
but I start talking of someone else.  
My contemporaries are growing older.  
One day they too will go missing  
like the lost children: one day.  
One day will go missing out of many.

I want to write a letter  
to the lost children  
posted from their lost childhood.

[18.8.1995  
From Subah kii Daak, Morning Post]

The literal translation of this poem was made by Lucy Rosenstein  
The final translated version of the poem is by Bernard O'Donoghue

Mohan Rana

# Tumhara Kavi Koi Nam Na Tha

Mohan Rana

# Two Feet Of Land

Where have you disappeared or maybe I am lost  
in what corner of the city, where  
on two feet of land  
even that is not mine

No distances, nor a mind in wrath  
no reason to remember you  
the pretext of forgetting you is the bad weather which  
like a headache  
eats time up, keeps eating  
but is still hungry like today

Or I am asking myself  
eating time raw  
why am I hungry like a headache  
Thinking, I am cracking a hard nut

Now I've even forgotten  
what did I ask you  
Replying to my own question  
on two feet of land  
which is not even mine.

[Translation from the poem in Hindi: "Do pairon barabar zamee par"  
by Lucy Rosenstein]

Mohan Rana



# Vilap

Mohan Rana