

Poetry Series

Murali Sivaramakrishnan
- poems -

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Murali Sivaramakrishnan()

Murali Sivaramakrishnan started writing at a very young age, drawing suitable inspiration from his ardent enthusiasm for natural history, especially ornithology, and his exceptional talent for sketching and painting. His early poems are replete with imagery of nature: animals and birds, mountains and forests, the sea and the sky, all find their place in his work alongside the human. He loves to travel and sketch people and places. His earliest significant poem – Night Heron- appeared in Chandrabhaga, and the poet Jayanta Mahapatra noted it mainly for its singular appeal and original voice. Another longer poem Ganga also found a place in Chandrabhaga in the early eighties. From then onwards Murali's poems have appeared in many reputed journals and periodicals. Whatever his other preoccupations he has been writing poetry fairly regularly. Poetry Volumes include:

Night Heron: Poems and Sketches (1998)

Conversations with Children (2005)

Earth Signs (2006)

The East-Facing Shop and other Poems (2010)

Camouflage

I draw my dreams up tightly
around me every night
and make a soft cocoon of kingly wisdom.
In plain black and white I loll.
No daylight enters through its thick
comfort; no bird drones its sorrow
nor delight- I am alright alone
in my empire of surfeit, successful, content.
On a perpetual knight errand on camel back,
I wear my politics round my waist;
it distends to my pleasure
tightening in a distress of plenitude.
Newspapers hardly interest me.
I find them excellent as flyswatters.
Only my wife broods over worldly hazards
while my children make a hammock of weekend cartoons.
The T.V. dishes out the latest analgesics.
And the glass cases brim with newer olympiads.
Life like a game of snakes and ladders
sucks one often up or down, while like the geckos
on the wall, we wait for the light to draw
one unsuspecting prey after another-
good sprinters to success.
Only the fool plays on while the wise one sleeps
warm inside the cocoon of his kingly wisdom.

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Confessions Of A Poet

I write poetry for the main
as a private submission
of a brain
misguided by the song and march of words
like a cloud of birds
swooping and curving
about a painted sky
reaching nowhere

poetry flicks its tail like a gecko
on the prowl, wary, unsure yet
of its position and spring
on the insect on the wing
poetry shocks
like a faceless woman
in the streets
aberrant like the summer noon
unsure like the monsoon cloud
lazy and hazy
drifting about
poetry is
endurance
survival
fodder
passion
defiant, naughty, errant
the howl of a distant dog

I barely know more of it-
more enough yet to make
it a public event out of shape...
blown- up like coloured balloons
bandied about like political cartoons
and yet
when I see
the many monsters
francing about in the holy streets
feel a tightening around my temples

the pressure is the same
when I see a bad picture
hanging awry on a wall
I reach out to pull it
either up or down
or sideways as the case may be...

I wish I were not a poet at all
and not having to tame reckless words
feel the silence settling in still
and watching the shadow play
between waking and sleeping.

Murali Sivaramakrishnan

Ganga

</GANGA

1

Ganga,
frivolous, as yet the girl
you flirt with countless millions everyday;
silver trinklets tinkling over the smooth round stones,
whispering ecstatic love songs;

but waken anew into the awareness of aeons
as softly the evening sky buries his flushed face
in your cloudy tresses;

with a singular valediction you move on.

Far in the tamarind boughs
crows assemble. Their cawings add another leaf
to the chronicle of your loneliness.

2

The wheat fields turn yellow, then brown.
Sometimes a lone night bird cries on the wing.
The moon throws silver behind the mountains.
Fragrance flows downwind.

Ganga,
Flow to me.
Fondle me with your thousand little fingertips,
nibble me with your thousand little silver lips,
curl around me, sweep me into your lap.

Ganga,
Ganga, my love,
how you tremble, marble-cold.
Hold me closer to you.
Snake-like I slip and slither
on the soft swell of your breasts
on the languid slip of your thighs,
only to deliver myself on to the misty grounds

of your remoteness.
Each intake of my breath
tears us farther and farther apart
drifting into the vast regions of the formless
till you are all but lost to me.
Ganga, I can hardly feel you.

Like death you remain unseen, yet too near.
But sever not these chains of sensation
that still bind us together;

my heart needs them all.

3
I dearly love the wind in the trees.
It reminds me of your floating hair
which streams like a burning banner of love in the moon.
Tonight the wind storms into my room,
wild, hectic, unappeased.
I look on helpless and disarmed.
It bloats out my letters as they are formed
and breathes into my lines and swells them.
High in the mountains they are caught
in the lofty trees, your tresses and my love.
Ganga,
my deliverance,
what it had take for me to build in devotion
I have ravaged in violent emotion.

4
Night feels its way into me. Gently
unfolding me layer after layer.
Like the desolate cry of the lone lapwing
my mind soars in empty space.
A mute yellow landscape spreads its nonchalance
below me. The stench of burning sand invades me.
And souls devoid of gravity and reality fly up to me.
What each has gained in faith
the other has lost in despair.
Staring vacant eyes bespeak of a bland fortitude
conceived in helplessness.

Somewhere in the reaches of my corroding memory
I hear you lapping; or are you chanting
the vedic hymns garbed in the saffron folds of a sannyasin?

The dead have found salvation in you.
The living with garlands adorn you.
Prayers dissolve in you, to vanish in dark circles.
Then I find you—
a silver trickle in the bosom of Himavant.
Perhaps this is the place where you descended
with the might of a million Akshouhinis
to be caught in the tousled locks of a Savage God.

5

The mountains know the hand of God.
They are so mute, so huge, invincible.
I have lost my bearings confronted with such vastness.
One moment I am the Brahmin pundit
performing the funeral rites,
absolving the sins of the past;
another moment I am the corpse, soul-flown, half-cremated ,
tossing amidst your immortal caresses,
in a crystal present; a pariah kite dips
and takes off, and I with him fishing
for still-smoking remnants
on your sun-stretched shore-lines;
the I am the derelict seeking the hermitage
lined with sensual feathers; a breath, a pale whisper,
a flutter of wings, and as a dove I descend
into your silvery depths.

6

As when the mist lifts its veil for a moment,
and blue mountain glimmers into view
for a moment only, to eclipse into eternal quiet,
regions of the soul hitherto unvisited
heights I never knew existed
manifest through my naked self.
People, places, things and sensations
harmonize in a new rhapsody of timelessness.

7

Dark nomadic patterns of grim silence
mingled with the subdued crying of a child;
flash of a low-flying bird in the night sky
across the flares of a few dying stars;
the eternal wakefulness of tiny relentless waves,
and the footfalls of everyday death.

Often, now, I would weave on the same relief
gospels of assurances, surmises, and faith
in a prolegomena to sleep.

8

Ganga,
Ganga, O Ganga,
let me, love, with an ear to my heart,
withdraw in selfless meditation
into the deeps of my mindscape,
and find you, flowing gently
over the smooth stones of my unknowing,
unpossessed, eternal, unceasing.

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I Like To Let The Word Fly About

I like to let the word fly about
Not tied down to its meanings
Like a dog on a leash
And be walked on the beach.

But let it prance around, flip and turn
And perch on the tiniest branch
Of suspense and dream
In the balmy glow of a rainbow
Like a crazy cormorant
Caring not a fig for gravity.

I like to let the word
Make mouths of mockery
At those who take it to mean
Like sea and sea weed moth-green

I like to clutch them and scooping
Eling handfuls into the sky
And watch them rain
Poetry.

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Night Heron- Poem

<Red trees

in evening's

darkening

glow.

Breeze,

cat-footed,

stealthy,

alert.

Like

an ashen bird's

first

awakening,

your

eyes

fade in

the night.

Eight

night herons

voyage on.

Eight

silent

pilgrims,

or

prospectors.

In the distance,

mountains

loom,

like destiny.

With

the bitter

reluctance

of a waking child

a star

begins

to blink; the

landscape

blurs.

No more

the song

□ of the cicadas—

here let us

□ part.

And

□ peel off

the pearly

□ flowers

□ of rainy

□ afternoons,

one by one,

□ only to move on

□ like

□ight herons.

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Passim

As the first cotton seeds broke
and the fluff floated about in the fine breeze,
we ran in circles, you and I, catching the handfuls
only to blow them around;
there was so much to laugh about, drenched in thin shreds....

Safe in your hefty hands I spotted my first bird—
An oriole among the neems; you named it for me.

When you stood with that distant look in your eyes,
Coffee-cup in hand, and recited the long narratives
of the nineteenth century poets,
I heard the brooks and hills of some far away land
resound with your clear voice of unreason.

Down by the sea, you and I stood amazed
and watched the sun like an upturned pot
shrink and spread out...between the palms—
and tingling our eyes and legs.

You had nothing to call your own
not even your beliefs, but only a store of tales about your self
which I listened to wide-eyed.

You'll leave me one day, I know,
like everyone else—an old man, bald, wrinkled, acerbic,
among the aging, dying, parting...

You are no seer, nor even unwise enough
to counsel me. Your wisdom lies like a nimbus
around your portrait that I disfigure.

My mirror does not lie to me about your face
that infringes on my brow.

The plovers leave and return,
the coconut fills with juice again and again,
the jasmine blooms out of all seasons and the cottonseeds
break all day... O father shall I break this mirror

What reflects everything in the obverse?

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Poem

I love streamers and trailers.
Linked to something it might be easy to trail
Streaming in the wind.

But there is always something to follow.
I love sparklers lit on both sides
They are quick to sign off!

They leave a secret trail
Of streaming sense
Written in the blackness of coal.

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Poem Unlimited

My gods have a thousand eyes
a thousand pair of hands and feet
They travel up and down,
edgeways, sideways,
and diagonal on fleet mounts
They see, hear,
sense and feel,
and taste the succulent
deeps of time and space
They love; they know
nothing of hate and death,
nor the extinction of life
Their erudition
is far worse
than our tiny tots.
But they are eager to learn.
We teach them
the art of deception and despair.
Now they are very much like us.
We have sprouted wings.

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The Ghost In The Room

I sensed the struggle in mid-sleep.
Neither in dream nor awakened unease
The flutter and the tremor of misjudged flight
Out of long forgotten lore: perhaps, the last
Moonbeam had relapsed into cold reality-
A solid, earth-like, dreamless ball of truth
And now there was no here nor there
For the shadowless presence. I heard
The walls folding in on the long-distance
Retreat, the floor and the roof in imperfect
Amazement at the sheer geometry of the
Apparition, crumble. Now I see the
Face aghast at the human sight, like
Broken glass-bits in the mid-day sun
Up-bearing the abrupt light. Why don't
Some owls hoot and dogs howl to suffer
Me to falter and fumble in fake distress
And let my guest out through the open window?
No trees stirred. No blade moved.
The presence faded folding back into itself
Neither here nor there, but all at once everywhere.

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The Poet's Room

All things remain unsaid till he leaves the room.
Now the parrot takes off from the low hanging branch just
Outside the window; there were three—only a whir of wings
To confirm the exit. The saying begins at first a faint murmur
A few unwritten pages fly about; one book lies open on
Page ninety nine; the opposite wall registers a few
Blank spaces while the computer screen flashes
One lake scene dark then bright then dark again
To save the screen from becoming extinct. What has
Happened to the words unsaved on the scrolling screen? Only the mouse is alive.
Rain. Black and treaklish. Fungi-like the fish stick to the pool's
Silent bottom. A child peers from round the bend in the night street
And starts to walk backwards slithering its wet arms across
The dumb walls. All things remain unsaid till he leaves the road.
Then the loud bark of street dogs and the patter of the rain

This poem appears in my *Earth Signs* (2006)

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