

Classic Poetry Series

Subhash Misra
- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Subhash Misra(-)

Subash Misra is a poet, development worker and UNICEF staff.

Subhash Misra's book *Gangasmriti & Other Poems* was published by Writers Workshop, Kolkata, India. Columnist Khushwant Singh wrote, "We have a new talented poet joining the band of Ganga worshippers. Subhash Misra was born on its banks at Mirzapur, educated on its banks at Varanasi and made his livelihood in Calcutta by the Hoogly. In his collection of poems, *Gangasmriti & Other Poems*, he goes ecstatic in praise of Srishti: The Creation

"I was born on the banks of another river/ Another name for self and all of us/ I was not born in these plains — watching your slide/ Nor did I arise where the barriers to meditation/ Are left behind. If you are looking for the root/ You will find it in 'I' and Us. That is where/ My ancient land was before it became country,/ Nation, state, date and repeatedly rewritten history. Later, from the maturing rhyme/ From the earliest of all times/ You awoke us/ Making your own sand and smiles/ Creating your own gods, grains and grass/ Gliding gently, dashing wildly, turning seductively/ Reclining piously on flowers and brass/ From sweating snows to sleepy morning dew/ From hot and humid days to a regional blue."

Subhash Misra has worked for UNICEF and has headed the Tsunami Recovery Program in Andaman & Nicobar and then contributed to the Afghanistan National Development Strategy as an adviser with UNDP, Kabul. He started the development organisation OASES in 1982. Subhash Misra has also contributed personal experiences to various Indian newspapers. He is currently working for UNICEF, Iraq.

A Promise To Sleep In Anbaar

Umi, you tell me to sleep
this used to be my bed time
but this was when I had a bed
we were at home

your face serene
only as a mother's face can be

I try to sleep
but I have claws in my stomach
these days I am always hungry
and, sleep is not easy on emptiness

umi, where is Akhii?
we ate and slept together
he is left behind the fence
and Abii still fighting
our neighbours with different
prologues for prayers

one day we will be no fighting
on paper and on roads
there will be no detonations
no shelling
of houses abandoned
with children
with women
waiting for conversations to return

children
love colours
not to be wrapped in black
forever

umi, I promise to sleep
to sleep indefinitely
you will have one less to worry
one more
consigned to the memory

I wonder if children are remembered
differently

Subhash Misra

And, How Can I Not Love You

Sometimes I feel that in darkness
You do not grope for light but for words
My words that twinkle with your touch
So much that they become smiles in my nights

Sometimes I see you silent
As if you seek the sound of my words
My words that resonate meanings
As they touch your ears

Sometimes I find you holding your breath
As if you wait for special scents
My words smell of life
As you slowly inhale their rawness

My words have your name arranged
Differently as flowers and butterflies
As a river gliding gently, breeze from the heavens
My words are nothing but my wishes fulfilled in you

Subhash Misra

Beatrice Again

I always say it: the eclipse is only about who occults whom
How does it become my opinion, a tonal bane, an as if
I could have stopped the collusion of the planets
Or I could colour the shadows green or crimson, if you wish,
But I do not control the cosmic moods; I don't even know when to say hello
I'm not clumsy, I have avoided death, and I have lived in the lap
Of uncontrolled waves, sometimes they die before I step forward
Sometimes after I try to spell her name in a language that I have learned
This was when my tongue curled as a poppy pod seeking drops of dew
When the moments for another journey arrived on the unwilling rickety bus
Early in the morning before the swaying bells lost their regularity
Before life could decide to sleep or fold the hands in a prayer
But that was only my imagination; the suggestions were
In the buzzing bees, or in the eyes that never let the moon out of sight
Shapes change in water, and also in the sky, depending on where
You look first. The dust on the solitary road to my village
Was deciding how we live our lives. It was a dictate, the only, opinion
That mattered. No matter how much importance I gave to my words.
Sometimes, I thought the strewn pearls were from a stanza of a poem
I hoped to write but got preoccupied by your eyes, living your dreams
I can't even tell you how beautiful they were because you may ask again
And I will be clobbered by my memories of what I may have said.
On an unintended day, you asked me the names of all the flowers I liked
I could tell you none because there were too many shades on your lips
I always got lost on straight roads, on the same bus that stopped only once
I forgot if this is where I wanted to be, where I wished to go remains buried
Too deep in the mind, lost its moorings because the way you had once looked at
me
I remember you had once held my hand and said, there is nothing wrong in living
Blind, because we are all lost in our own ways, but having said that
You got distracted. I did not know that a cloud hold more than tears
You let the evening lead you away, soothing it was. The wine was slow but sure
I watched the sunset without glimmers from any ghost, I had nothing to offer
My words sank into the sea, and swam like fishes over the reef
Before they too were orphans looking at the windmills on tranquilized waters
I walked the shore clutching my thoughts like condiments from the east
Who possesses or profits by a long voyage through the inclement seasons?
Spring could be one of them; as you smile away your absence
I clutch a bundle of hay, looking for some twigs, for the last winter day

The rain douses all fire fuelled by breathing meant only for life as I had
Sorrow is not about being sad, it is the infinity between us, a sedgy way

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Borrowed Verses

Wherever you go whenever you travel
There is always something to unravel
Freedom is an unconscious quest
To stay away from the daily unrest
It's about continuity of time on water
Separated from senseless slaughter
Of the shared spirit in our common skies
Obscured by silence, half-truth and lies
Crafting vicious geographies
Death does not knock or says please
Forsaking the cultural cloak
In ashes emanating stringy smoke
We take shelter in imaginary skin
Counting every loss as a rightful win

In places heard but not seen before
On the hills valleys and the sea shore
I walked quiet and I walked alone
Seeking meanings in the unknown
Shunning realities as I understood
Thinking thoughts carved in wood
Throwing my dream worlds in the air
It wasn't easy but I did dare
To leave my home to reach a verse
In the unreflective galloping universe

Sorrow stubbornly shadows us
But we cannot know or guess
Its presence while it may be there
Forever ready to find a prayer
From all madness and maladies
From nations or natural calamities
We have to be forever ready to die
Not knowing how where or why

I found these verses that I do not own
The words evolved and have grown
Into warmth of cuddled expressions
From myriad travel trodden impressions

Of death as either an uninvited guest
Or something to be worn, a victory crest

Moving between destinations
With or without clear intentions
Carrying homecoming and exile
Through every conscious mile
Collecting tears from the stars
Prayer-calls floating from towers
Grief wrapped in resilience
Verses that seethe with incense
Lost worlds away from ours
Hopeful seas and desert showers
The sudden silence of papal bells
On days strung between earthly hells

Through unintended journeys
To the cities mountains seas
Hundreds of forlorn islands
Desolate people contested lands
I have accumulated these
Words that remember and seize
The on-going irony and melancholy
In our cumulative memory

I have visited homes shared food
Listened to narrations lucid shrewd
Dreams waking up with stark smiles
Extracting images from my exiles

I return to where I began
But will I really be back again
Followed by smells and echoes
Pleading an escape from gritty blows

These verses born from earth and water
Swept away tears and lost laughter
Dying roots and falling leaves
Patches pasted on my dusty sleeves
This much travelled aging coat
As I felt remembered and wrote
These songs that visited

Mocked implored and teased
Decided to stay on with me
Sorrows swelling in poetry
Having said that dear reader
Let me fade away disappear
Leave these words garnered for you
From sorrows sufferings some rue
Glowing eyes of the children
Historical hands rubbed in vain

The darkened water trickling down
Of hate fear disdainful frown
The spring recedes, the sap clots
The stifling summer routinely rots
Among bodies ideas and desires
Waves of water rising or raging fires
Souls desperately clinging
Scorching sinking still floating
When the final path is paved
Still something has to be saved

On the morning of the Boxing Day
The earth shook the sea swept away
On a deathly journey of no return
Sick or simply sleeping children
Lovers daughters brothers sisters
Professionals paupers and visitors
Before the bells after the muezzin's call
Receding sea and its violent recall
Among the unwavering believers
The day changed for all the years
It was the hour of a fuming nature
To leave its indelible signature
On the death warrant
That would once for all recant
Guarantee of lotus-life
Water frozen in a sinister knife

In another time and place
Death had fragmented face
Redrawing circles every day
Going round and round on its way

Men had drugged it guided it
To mould it occasionally hide it
They'd kill and they'd die to kill
Mindlessly abandoning any other will

I am at a loss trying to tame the breeze
Unable to be with grains of salt on seas
Or discarded leaves on the fresh snow
A little farther the riotous poppies grow
I am unable to understand the reason
Of the greater glory of god and man
Why the waves came a killing
Why men want others kneeling
Why it came without an invite
Why swords sought an endless plight
Same result different locations
Equipped or sudden insidious invocations

I have returned to the start
With a smouldering heart
Hoping to unwind
But here I only find
That the nights are lonely
In the bustling bursting city
With the ghosts on my rhyme
From places that are lost in time
I have to give away these images
From the flooded and burning villages
I have to spread them wide
Away from those who have cried
To those who are in peaceful luxury
Away from nature's or men's fury
To feel them and own them
As if you've always known them
From the safety of your land
Caressing the destiny in your hand

The deaths in the distance
Are also about us in the sense
They may creep up gradually
Memories amassing slowly
To live with us in every plight

Like a distant simmering light
That would neither let us sleep
Nor unabashedly weep.

Subhash Misra

Charlie Location

In the room
Flowers bolted to the ceiling
Like detained stars
Outside
The alleys meander
Like liberated streams
Searching streets
Roads that'd go somewhere
Subdued fear flowing
Between galvanised steel
And sentinel sand
The world arrived here
To unfetter and settled
To build swords from words
Strategies in wine glasses
To pull pages from
The historical spaces
Inking answers
For the unasked questions
Time stand stills
In these containers
That could have been sailing
If they did not home
Experts with hearts
And educated fingers
There was a time
This too was a city
At the door of narration
Now it has been
Liberated
From any such anxiety

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City Had One Thousand And One Nights

Tonight I sleep as the sun rises somewhere
The sun that will warm a few hearts
Shine a few faces
Tonight the sun will make a day
But that would not be mine
I sleep without dreams
Walled in parched lands
Travelled by seekers in caravans
Trampled by invading boots or rationale
Now the sand stormed by the wind
Blinds the sky that had once seen
Days and nights alike
Gradually more nights fewer days
Tonight I wished the night will end
Same as I believed the last night
And all the nights before
Since I have been here
In the city of elapsed algebra
Abandoned House of Wisdom
Tonight without memories of the sun
That could have been here
They are all getting to leave
And those who are left behind
Get ready to weep to sleep
As if tears are prayers
Death walks commonly in the shadows
Of dwarfs fancying giants
As they looked in mirrors not time
The city was contained in a circle
Before other circles were drawn
Divided by unrestricted water
Mixing with perpetual flow of blood
Grief, remorse, pride and memory
All in one night of the thousand glooms

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Desert Spring

The hills filled with fight and fear
Days are lost in rudimentary cheer
One could've a million sensitivities
But only if there were green on trees
Instead only wireless telecom towers
Stabbing the sky facing futile hours
Unable to decide or divide the parts
Of the day, feelings from the hearts
Minds and simply growing on lips
Like lumber from myriad wasted trips
Neither spoken nor sanctified desire
In the space without food or fire
Lost in the unrestrained historical plot
Barren land without fertile thought
Direction or any perspective clue
But the spring comes to the desert too

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Every Time You Meet

Every time you meet another person
Every time you reach another destination
You have to learn a new language
You begin with everyday greetings
Acknowledgements and appreciations
The words for a colour or a season
Then you have to return
Some phrases sticking like dust
Others like stars, there are some pollen too
But soon all nuances confined to memories
Like graves visited occasionally
With carnations with different sound
Trying to relocate the feelings and perfumes
Nowhere to be found

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Happy Birthday Father!

I am like you
But not really
You could hold skies
Over my thoughts
From the prickly rain
You sewed dreams
To ward off redundant realities

I am your image
Not really
You are without shadows
Light becomes a part of you
You are the beacon
You are the derivation
The first word
The first step
The first idea
And before everything
The life itself

They said
I am your souvenir
But I know
That you have been
My gift since the day one
You wished for me
But I am blessed for that

I wouldn't have been without you
But it's not only about the beginning
It's 'bout every step
Every word
Every thought
Every moment of being
Founded on the day
You were born

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I Had To Leave

When the humour dries
The words rebound
From their meanings
Not easily ignored
When the conversations
Do not linger like smog
Over the municipal blocks
But cut like a blade of fire
It is time to travel on wire
Without apology or explanation
There is nothing that can revert
One's position to the original high
The starting point
Of an onward journey
The varying levels of grounds
Sometimes home and sometimes away
At home in exile and exiled at home

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The Last Summer

This year there will be no summer
Inestimable afternoons
When not much really exists
Only a silence burning on
The oven of the passing day
The dehydrated clay of thoughts
Tress motionless along the warm waters
Of the pond allowing the miasmic
Reflection of life: floating as if
There is still time for a come back
But that is really not true
Because this year there will
Be no summer to tell you
That we are not here any more

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