

VERSE QUINTET

BASUDHARA ROY

Karim City College

basudhara.roy@gmail.com

Received: 30-04-2021

Accepted: 30-06-2021



Candle / Bonfire

I would fain
thaw like snow
in the heat of glances
that scan my being,
claimed, possessed -
in the full confidence
of knowledge,
hard-sought, well-earned.

Glances that scan
its ups, downs; mountains,
meads, plateaus; and its
scented valleys in between.
Lush vegetations, fertile basins
de-skinned rocks, rugged peaks
and this giddy, gushing brook
as at the topography of home.

Glances that having been
farewelled as conqueror,
return as exile, as pilgrim,
seeking wisdom, refuge,
so that to them, this treasure
once owned, becomes again,
precious gift; fortuitous,
powerful in its bestowing.

In the intense candle-heat

of such glances, I would fain
thaw like snow but
passion-struck, you hasten
to light bonfires instead.

Between

Of the two I would willingly
have given myself over to,
one cannot take me, one won't.

Between them, the soul craves to
untether its ache of belonging,
suspend for a while all claim on

the self and be led as a dry leaf by
the wind. But of the two winds I
would gladly have sweep me off,

one cannot blow me away, one won't.
Buried within itself, each body is at
some moment a dark cage to run away

from till someone arrived to light its
lamps and set in its *deepawali*, each
neglected corner aglow. But of the

two in whose oils I would readily turn
flaming wick, one cannot ignite me,
one won't. And even as I hear your

persisting summons at the door and
know you come to dust and inhabit
a faltering, forgotten prayer and even

as I pretend that you are the perfect
acrostic come in-between my lines,
animated with the will of the first,

sans the other's limitations, I would
still keep you waiting at the threshold –
unsummoned, unmitigated, whole.

Names

In your voice,
my name becomes a song,
a wish granted,
a cup of tea I relish on my doorstep,
a pillow I nestle firmly against
in the welcoming warmth of my bed.

In my breath,
your name is a fervent prayer,
a talisman I clutch,
an amulet I wear to ward off my misgivings,
a fabric I clothe my fancies in.
To utter aloud your name would be to scatter grace.

I know better than to bring it to my lips
for to name you would be to count my treasures,
to summon my world under one strict roof
and I would rather leave things
unreckoned in their plenitude,
scattered as they are.

Healing

There is a suffering in your heart.
I want to tell you, I know it well.
It has been a friend before, met
again, will acknowledge the past.

I want to tell you that what etches
across your mind as grief's midrib
with its branching veins will heal
one day. That the pain, autophagic,

will atrophy, lose its sting, will
unwrap and fall off like a soiled
bandage leaving behind wisdom
once the skin forgives its faults.

Masters

A lamp is lighted every day at the altar,
hymns chanted, conch sounded, incense burned.

Prayers remain unanswered, piled indifferently
like dusty files on a bureaucrat's desk.

The gods remain dauntless, unperturbed,
knowing their place too well to bend to supplication.

Life, they rigorously insist, can never be all democracy.
You stand in queue, stoop to enter through small doors.

Flowers must be regularly brought, offerings made,
the sanctum dusted and the deity housed well.

Some slavery is inevitable.
Not all masters, remember, can be dispensed with.

BASUDHARA ROY is a poet, academic and faculty of English at Karim City College affiliated to Kolhan University, Chaibasa. Her latest work is featured in *Madras Courier*, *Lucy Writers Platform*, *Berfrois*, *Gitanjali and Beyond*, *The Aleph Review* and *Yearbook of Indian English Poetry 2020-21*, among others. Her recent (second) collection of poems is *Stitching a Home* (New Delhi: Red River, 2021).