

# In The City Alone ... and other poems / Rachna Joshi



In the City-Alone

The lone Tesu tree at the edge of the road,  
hardy survivor of many city beautification drives  
throws the morning shadow over the mazdoor  
woman  
breaking stones.

Half-erased signboards written in Hindi  
flank her.

*Yahan Malba Phekna Mana Hai*

'Do not throw rubble on the road.'

Undeterred, she keeps pounding rocks  
breaking them into pebble-size,  
the sidewalk is cluttered.

There is a bulldozer parked on one side  
and also a scrawny boy with a limp hobbling by.

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### Girl on the Bulldozer

Oh! Thin girl on the bulldozer,  
your faded sari, shriveled plait,  
your bold attempt to stand erect  
have stilled me here.

Is the beefy driver-lover  
exploiter, employer?

Have your desires, loves and life  
Been pounded into  
a sick and suffering body.

Ensconced in my sunlit terrace  
like the maker of a documentary film  
I see you still.

Elvish , wispy, forlorn  
spirit: I gather you,

in my thoughts.

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That Boy with a limp

He had shorn off

his hair after 1984

yet the limping boy

still feels cornered

by innocent stares.

Pulled apart by two sets of conditionings

split by the riots

in Byronic despair

he thrusts his fascinating profile forward

his trembling limb held firmly in check.

He is iconoclastic and outrageous

his voice fierce, eyes black

he seeks clarity and meaning

identity and success

in an increasingly incomprehensible world.

Images of carnage haunt him

scared, wary, suspicious,

he will rather starve than beg.

(From *Travel Tapestry*, Rachna Joshi, 2013, Yatra Books, New Delhi)

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Rue de Rivoli, Paris

A cobbled street merges  
into the paved road.

I see the old Paris  
old buildings, worn and used entrances,  
people dressed in quaint clothes.

I am drawn back to India.

India as a dark, vibrating womb  
which maintains at its core  
a primal rhythm.

A fragrance arising  
out of old manuscripts, statues  
rock carvings, leaves, bricks, dust.

Buried in nooks and crannies,  
in forgotten places.

(From *Monsoon and Other Poems*, Rachna Joshi, 2020, Tethys, New Delhi)

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Sivoham

In the bus, people move among goats and sacks of grain.

Women in flaring skirts  
seamen on leave

sick children.

Across the ridge, the sun rises  
Nanda Devi, Trishul, Pancha Chuli,  
they appear in different colours.

I walk through the old market  
fascinated by cowbells. Himalayan cedars  
and pines cover the slopes around.

Dew soaks through the foliage  
and the cold vapours settle everywhere,  
branches and leaves hang in a myopic mist  
green, white and light blend.

In the wooden house, the harmonium is playing.  
someone is singing 'Sivoham, Sivoham.'

His brow is covered with sweat  
and there is a sandal-silver dot in the middle of it.

(From *Configurations*, Rachna Joshi, 1993, Rupa & Co., New  
Delhi)

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Worli Sea Face

Rain flies across the pavements,  
and smoke rises from the road,  
wet, sticky odours linger...

one streetlight flickers,  
one mangy pie dog barks,  
but...the onslaught continues.

The churning sea comes inwards,  
With deafening crashes, tumultuous breakers,  
foam, froth and water boring every shattered rock.

Haji Ali, bathed in some celestial light  
stands alone...distant...a tower of silence.

Smoke rises from the Bhel Puri vendor's stall,  
it hurts the eye.

Something drifts in the air,  
something...reflected in the restlessness of the sea,  
something felt as the rain drums the tarred road,  
something felt as Sunita and Sujata discuss the language of  
the waves.

'The sea dances,' they say.

'It joins hands to dance among the stratified remains of some  
land,

it breathes, it heaves, it wants to say something.'

I stare up at those tall, towering giants,  
those muted high rises, the forlorn penthouses,  
they look back, with conscious irony.

Then the sea decides to speak,  
the rain beats faster, the sea leaps up,  
the fast, co-ordinated dance breaks,  
the waves lose step, the water screams,  
screams out, too clear...

and we walk back,

unable to understand the fathomless, changing, unpredictable  
dance.

The sea has warned us,

the sea has warned us.

(From *Crossing the Vaitarani*, Rachna Joshi, 2008, Writer's Workshop, Calcutta)