

# **“Kilmoras and Hisalus” & other poems from Mussoorie by Rachna Joshi**

Reading at IHC

From my new book

The poem ‘Kilmoras and Hisalus’,

About my childhood

In Fernlodge Barlowgunj,

And the denizens

Of that village.

By **Rachna Joshi**

**Kilmoras and Hisalus**



Sikandar Hall, Mussoorie  
**Eating kilmoras and hisalus**

On the way to Naala Pani  
Past the Old Brewery  
And Sikandar Hall.

Fern Lodge perched atop a hillside  
With peach and plum trees  
Trailing along a slope.

Below, the cowshed  
Where the gwala comes to milk the cows  
And to keep encroachers at bay  
Who are creeping up the hillside.

Barlowgunj Market  
With Chaman Lala's shop

And the schoolchildren  
From St. George's  
Coming for tuck.

Chachi and Buaji in the kitchen  
On stilts  
Churning out pots of soup.

The old piano in the drawing room  
Which children liked to play.  
Patties and pastries in the evening.  
Granpa's green fingers in the nursery  
Where there were fuschias and begonias  
As well as a beehive.  
Hydrangeas in the gardens

### **Rhododendron Squash**

Mountains are a special place  
Where the mind soars  
Above the mundane  
and how creativity flowers  
among the cedars and rhododendrons.

Granma making rhododendron squash.  
Her deft fingers cutting the flowers  
And cooking them  
In sugar syrup.

This is how I would  
Like to remember  
My childhood  
In Fern Lodge Barlowgunj.  
Mussoorie Modern School





## **Mussoorie Modern School**

I remember

The pipes used to freeze  
In winter in Chaman Estate.

In the hostel dorms  
The matron used to change our clothes.

I remember the Tibetan teacher  
Putting butter and salt  
In her tea  
In the mess.  
Thal jus mukh, kator jus aankh.

Mr. Viegas, the Principal,  
With his wife Shirley and daughter Candy  
In a cottage by the side.  
Framed by flowering beds.

## **Driving to Dehradun**

Driving to Dehradun  
Passing Duckchick  
And Chital at Khatauli.  
Seeing the travelers and itinerants.

Having pakoras and chai,  
With the canal nearby  
And the bridge.

Attending the Doon readings  
At Hotel Aketa in Rajpur.  
With Mountain Echoes, Penguin  
And Doon Library.

Shekhar Pathak, Ruskin Bond  
And Anjali Nauriyal,  
Poetry of the hills.

The stately Rajpur Road  
With Daalanwaala and  
Welham Girl's High School.  
Astley Hall and Ellora's.

The Tibetan monastery  
At the end of the road  
Near Sahastradhara.

Getting caught in traffic jams  
While returning on Easter  
From Dehradun.

### **Seemadwar**

Walking to Seemadwar  
After eating khichri  
And passing Jagdamba's shop  
At Indiranagar.

Mrs. Chaturvedi's house  
And HARC.



Shukla Marriage Bureau  
And Anurag Paudhshala.

Sun Chasers  
Where Sumitaji  
Is having a conversation  
With the owner.  
A budding romance.

## **Ganga Aarati**



Ganga Aarati  
At Haridwar  
With diyas floated

On the Ganges,  
And the waving of lamps.  
Chanting and singing.

RACHNA JOSHI

Rachna Joshi is a poet and reviewer who has lived in India and North America. She has written five collections of poems: Configurations (Rupa & Co., 1993); Crossing the Vaitarani (Writer's Workshop, 2008); Travel Tapestry (Yatra Books, 2013); Monsoon and Other Poems (Tethys, 2020); and Unraveling (Authors Press, 2024) She has a master's in Creative Writing from Syracuse University in upstate New York, and has been widely published in magazines and anthologies in India and abroad. She worked as Senior Assistant Editor at the India International Centre, Delhi, for 28 years and lives in Noida, U. P.

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**Forget me not | Ojaswini  
Trivedi**



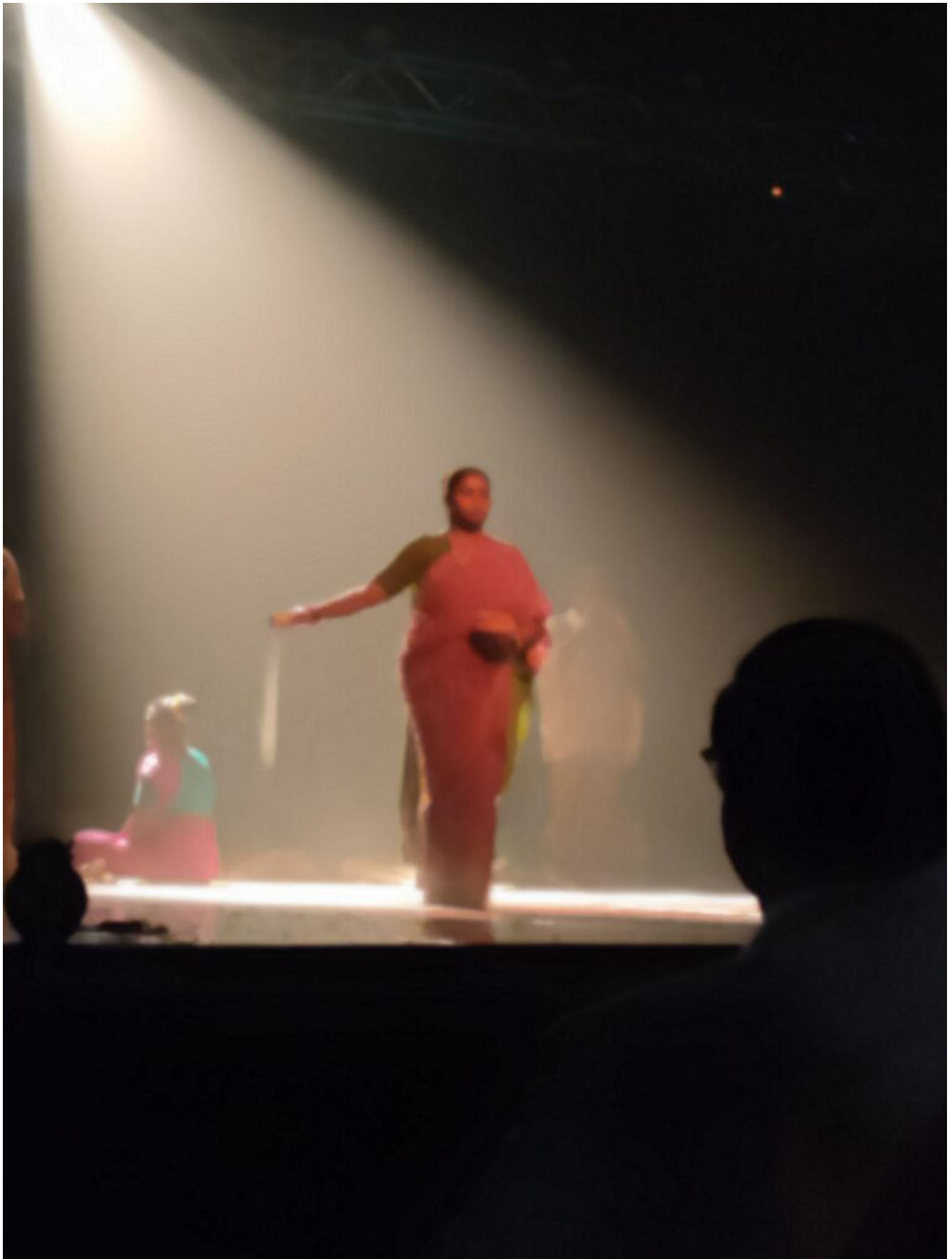
As the rays of your beam  
Transcend through our sheets  
The creases collapsing with time  
One after the other,  
He, after him  
after you  
The blinding intoxicating power  
A touch, innocent, eternal  
A smile, banished, surrendered  
Will you remember that we loved?  
That we loved, despite knowing  
Knowing it won't last.  
So as long as you walk through life  
Trying to find me the "Touch-me-nots"  
Remember our macadam of broken dreams.  
A life we never lived.

A life undone  
Unfinished

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**Dakṣakatha      Devikavya      –  
Provoking and Contemplative**





**A review by Manohar Khushalani for IIC DIARY**

Daklakatha Devikavya is an open ended play performed in an engagingly

informal folk style, evolved from the epic poetry and stories of K.B. Siddaiah's .

It was Directed by Lakshman K.P. It presents the inner workings and external experiences of the Daklas – a Dalit community.

*Presented by Jangama Collective, Bengaluru with Bindu Raxidi (Dakla Devi, Kadiramma); Santhosh Dindgur (Dakla, Cheluvaiah)l; Bharath Dingri (K.B. Siddiah & narrator); Narasimharaju B.K. (Narasappa); and Ramika Chaithra (Gangavva, Munivenkatamma)*

*Accompanists who also added tone and tenor to the performance were: Poorvi Kalyani & Skanda Ghate (vocal); Bharath Dingri (tamate); and Narasimharaju B.K. (arevadya)*



### The Flower Sellers

*The setting of the play had **flower sellers** squatting in the background and rising in turns as actors with robust voices. The traditional Folk device, a half curtain, known as, **Yavanika**, was used to introduce the important characters. The actor would peep over the curtain which was lowered after he started speaking or singing.*



### The Traditional Yavanika

The most important aspect of the performance was that it retained the spiritual richness of the Dakla community, through its music. Two of the characters appear on the stage playing tamate (hand drum) and arevadya (urmi), instruments not seen in contemporary theatre. Daklas are people who are protected by the untouchables and hence are still lower in the social hierarchy. But whatever notions people have about Adivasis or Daklas being a backward community, better revise them forthwith. First of, the female roles were done by women and not female impersonators. These women unhesitantly lighted beedis, and were not coy about



using cuss words,  
which is true to their life. It is also true of contemporary  
OTT films, which claim  
to be more modern and truer to our life.

The author had a strong faith in mysticism as exemplified by  
his poetry which  
was the soul of the performance:

*O mother as you rock the world  
And rock the child  
Bear me again in your womb  
Walk this infant from the cave of your vagina  
Into the cave of contemplation.*

Here in the above context the poet brings out that once the  
mother bears him  
in her womb the stigma of untouchability will not be so  
strong. One recurring  
metaphor that has remained constant is hunger. The poet throws  
a direct  
question to the creator:

*O God! Take birth like me  
Then  
Try to touch and be polluted!  
Try to take like me, like me take birth!*

Untouchability does not generate self-pity in the play, in  
fact it is an instrument  
of self-awareness and enlightenment. Sheer magic was created  
in the dark  
night by luminous display of improvised spinning fire wheels  
urns with radiant  
charcoal cinders. All elements in the play contributed to an  
experience of a  
magical night to remember.

Watch the entire play on You Tube:

## Provoking and Contemplative

**PLAY:** *Daklakatha Devikavya: An Experimental Play Drawing from the Epic Poetry and Stories of K. B. Siddaiah's Selected Writings*

**DEvised AND DIRECTED BY:** Lakshman K. P.

**PRESENTED BY:** Jangama Collective, Bengaluru with Bindu Raxidi (Dakla Devi, Kadiramma); Santhosh Dindgur (Dakla, Cheluvaiyah); Bharath Dingri (K. B. Siddaiah & narrator); Narasimharaju B. K. (Narasappa); and Ramika Chaithra (Gangavva, Munivenkatamma)

**ACCOMPANISTS:** Poorvi Kalyani & Skanda Ghate (vocal); Bharath Dingri (tamate); and Narasimharaju B. K. (areye)

**2 November 2023**

*Daklakatha Devikavya* is an open-ended play performed in an engagingly informal folk style, evolved from the epic poetry and stories of K. B. Siddaiah. It presents the inner workings and external experiences of the Daklas—a Dalit community.

The setting of the play was flower sellers squatting in the background and rising in turn as actors with robust voices. The traditional folk device, a half curtain, *yavanika*, was used to introduce the important characters. The actor would peep over the curtain which was lowered after he started speaking or singing. The most important aspect of the performance was that it retained the spiritual richness of the Dakla community through its music. Two of the characters appeared on stage playing *tamate* (hand drum) and *urumi* (hourglass drum), instruments not seen in contemporary theatre. Daklas are people who are protected by the untouchables and hence are still lower in the social hierarchy. But whatever notions people have



about Adivasis or Daklas being a backward community better revise them forthwith. First, the female roles were played by women and not female impersonators. These women unhesitatingly lighted beedis, and were not coy about using cuss words, which is true to their lives. It is also true of contemporary OTT films, which claim to be more modern and truer to our lives.

The author had a strong faith in mysticism, as exemplified by his poetry, which was the soul of the performance.

*O mother as you rock the world  
And rock the child  
Bear me again in your womb  
Walk this infant from the cave of your vagina  
Into the cave of contemplation.*

In the above context, the poet is saying that once the mother bears him in her womb the stigma of untouchability will not be so strong. One recurring metaphor that has remained constant is hunger. The poet throws a direct question to the creator:

*O God! Take birth like me  
Then  
Try to touch and be polluted!  
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Untouchability does not generate self-pity in the play; in fact, it is an instrument of self-awareness and enlightenment. Sheer magic was created in the dark night by the luminous display of improvised spinning fire wheels and urns with radiant charcoal cinders. All elements in the play contributed to a magical night to remember.

■ MANOHAR KHUSHALANI

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# **Aneeta Chitale: Sojourn to Maldives – Book Review / Interview**

The turbulent times between the years spanning from 2008 to 2014 is presented on the canvas. The relations between the two countries were totally raptured in this era. The entire plethora of Indian nationals and foreigners had gone berserk. I had to study it in detail and follow it consistently.

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## **Erebus and I / Ojaswini Trivedi**



## Night Sky

Who saves us? What protects us? Or are we just living our lives with the illusion of being protected. Of being saved.

Hurt is the chalice of nothingness, writhing through the voiceless screams. The mind crawled up in a desperate embrace, bleeding, shivering, hangs itself from the ceiling.

With nothing to hold on, with everything to let go. What is the truth? What is right? Who decides what our conscience speaks? Who lives through, who survives the maelstrom of starlit sighs.



I remember that night, alone, terrifyingly-complete. The lights turned down and the darkness eager to consume me. For a first, it didn't charge at my insecurities with vengeance but tip toed with a docile ambiguity that allowed me to accept it with arms wide open. Night was kind to me. Maybe the moon was watching.

The background rhythm played in sync with my closing ventricles, expanding lungs and perhaps possessed arms. The sanctity of its beauty transcended into every cell, each tissue. Unbiased with the form or function.

Only one song played that night.

"Bottom of the Deep Blue sea" by MISSIO. *The* song. Ironical? I know.

My feet ached, and I swayed endlessly. Almost as if the night was my guide, the security man outside my window. Convincing me that Pain and Anguish would have to cross the seven seas, climb the tallest peaks, jump across the chasms, speak the strangest of languages to reach me.

I was safe.

As if maybe for the first time, being numb was equivalent to being happy. Maybe sometimes feeling everything is like feeling nothing at all. Like a snake swallowing its tongue. Or a snowball exploding against a Pine tree.

Au contraire, I never felt more alive. Like the first breath of air after plunging out of the water. Gasping, lungful of the escaped nuances- All gushing back into the realms of my truth.

The soothing audacity of hurt comes in unabashed like the lust for love. It's heavy. It's bored. It's engraving.

Dancing barefoot on the wooden floor, with nothing but a mirror around me. It broke my heart in a different way. It

crumpled my soul in an unfittingly. I felt distorted,  
perfectly.

All of a sudden in those frail moments everything I did and  
didn't do made sense to me. Almost as if a gospel truth  
unravelling beneath the sheaths of my eye lids, trotting  
through my veins, into the earth.

With every move, my heart imploded, it succumbed to the bliss,  
the night had to offer.

Is that what love looks like? Oh the sheer godliness of it.

Somewhere through my illicit affair with the night, as I laid  
on the floor, breathing the earth, staring into the sky across  
the translucent concrete above me.

My toes crinkled.

The desire and occurrence of complete degradation followed by  
the innocent upheaval of honesty, lastly toppled with the cool  
embrace of bliss.

I gasped.

Maybe, this felt like love, after all.

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# **The mask with the black hair / a poem by Sushmita Mukherjee**



Take the first step,  
Become your own bestie,  
Your online friend, begins and ends with You in the main role,  
not a cameo,  
in the online film forwards of others.  
I spied a homely grey haired hag,  
You guessed right..in the mirror,  
She smiled Mona Lisa ish,  
And gestured to the dressing table.  
Ah! I don't have one here in the village, just some stuff  
haphazardly pitched together in my hurried exit from Mumbai,  
fleeing the Virus, like a Partition victim of yore.  
The deodorant smiled at me, luring me to let her cozy under my  
armpits.  
Sorry girl, I said,  
you know, here in nature, I don't smell at all.  
The toothpaste squeezed soft and sparingly,  
Wants to be pushed and handled hard.  
But I decline... You have more to stay in today's day..  
So with wipes and tissues,  
No 'khachak khachak' like our film helpers do, liberally  
plucking out 5, when 1 would suffice.  
Trees, wood, plants heave a tentative collective sigh...  
My shampoo stares seductively at me...  
I hadn't noticed the sexy gaze all these years...  
No no, not today..I tease her back,  
I can wait  
I will use you bit by bit,

till you foam at the mouth.  
And then the hair colour dibba,  
Painfully reserved for the last day of the lockdown,  
The colour which will provide the mask to meet the masks that  
I will meet,  
When lockdown opens,  
I will meet another woman,  
The mask with the black hair!

Susmita Mukherjee

3-4-2020

Lockdowned in paradise.

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## **I KEEP YOU AS A POEM / Sangeeta Gupta**

I keep you as a poem  
in the core of my existence  
I sing all day  
You my song  
You often shine as the evening star  
in my lonesome dreams  
You hold my hand  
When I am lost in the wilderness  
You, the lifeline of a poet  
I keep you as a poem  
in the core of my existence

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# Siesta at Charles De Gaulle Airport by Shanita Vichare

Siesta at Charles De Gaulle Airport !

Down The Memory Lane....

( my flight was delayed )

No hurried spaces, to foot fall

I sat;

Raising my hopes, for the next flight

On Time..."Qui ".....

Feeling for my dimes; I finally had a fancy.....

At Cafetie're

Had some quickbites Chagrill & Cappuccinos....

Croissants & puffs...not forgotten my penchant

For

Caramel ! ...Irresistible....!!!!

Such 'Delicacies' on my palate....!!! ( I think, every thing had gone well then on the contrary)

Meal...was a Deal !

...What next ?...

I skirted on the 'Vogue' stands....

Now; nothing more would I have ever wanted,

Out of The Blue ! I had Missed The Flight...( next was after 7 hours)

Now It was Calling.....

Perfect ! Timing.....

I made rounds at .... 'Christen Doir ' N 'Gucci 'Perfumes

Bought A Freaking 'Poison'...a Duffel Bag !

Those Were The Days! My Friend.... ( when you have no worries )

Sheer ! Delight ...

To smoothen my ruffled feathers , I bet !!

....The Lounge ! Was the best place....now... I perched On the seats,

By Jove ! I saw a beauty...

Jolie Belle femme ! ...from Cypress ...  
A Royal Persona....  
Picture Perfect ! Well,  
We soon got ...talking ...and of lands far, across the seven seas  
!  
It was a day...Out of The Blue !  
“Qui “  
Princess; Treated me .....  
....Wafted scents and aroma....Spread over  
The Tableau  
For a Lavish Dinner;  
Holding The Long Trimmed Goblets....  
Of Chardonnay N Champagne !  
Vintage And  
Signature Dishes ! Well Famished .  
Well,  
Long after, the days have set I still ...  
Carry The Memories ...of the day !  
Some Days are Blessed !  
But The Journeys are Destined !

(Scribbled at Paris Airport when I was stranded for more than  
10 Hours – Shanita Vichare)

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**The Poetry Page – LS Bajpai /  
Antonio Blunda**

**The Poetry Page  
Laxmi Shanker Bajpai**



### **Those People**

Those were the people who  
with tiny boxes filled with fine sugar  
would go in search of anthills

They would scatter seeds on terraces  
for birds to feed on.

They would get troughs of water  
made outside their houses for  
thirsty animals passing by.

and before eating their own meal  
They would set aside a portion for cows and  
other creatures.

They wouldn't let anyone pluck a single leaf from the trees  
after sunset

lest the resting trees be disturbed.

They would start conversations on their own  
and ask strangers for introductions

They would heartily help those in need

and if someone asked them for directions  
they would gladly

escort the person to his destination.

and if at some odd hour a lost traveler  
happened to come to their

door they would provide him with  
food and a place to rest

maybe such a species does still exist  
in some remote village or hamlet  
I wish it were possible to create a museum for them  
So that generations to come would learn that  
This too was a way of living.

## Quelle persone

Italian Translation of L.S. Bajpai's poem by an Italian Poet: Antonio Blunda

Quelle erano le persone  
che con minuscoli cassetti  
colmi di zucchero a velo  
andrebbero in cerca di formicai  
spargerebbero i semi su terrazze  
per nutrire gli uccelli.

metterebbero trogoli di acqua  
costruiti fuori dalle loro case  
per gli animali assetati che transitano.

e prima di mangiare il loro pasto  
metterebbero da parte una porzione  
per le vacche  
ed altre creature.

Non lascerebbero che nessuno  
cogliesse una singola foglia dagli alberi  
dopo il tramonto  
affinchè il riposo degli alberi  
non fosse disturbato.

Inizierebbero le proprie conversazioni  
chiedendo a stranieri di presentarli

Aiuterebbero di cuore coloro che lo necessitano

e se qualcuno chiedesse loro di guidarli  
essi lo farebbero volentieri  
conducendo la persona a destinazione.

e se all'ora più casuale  
ad un viaggiatore disperso  
capitasse di giungere alla loro porta  
essi offrirebbero cibo  
ed un posto per riposare

Forse una tal specie ancora esiste  
in qualche remoto villaggio o borgo

Vorrei che fosse possibile creare un museo per loro  
così che le generazioni venissero ad imparare  
che anche questo  
era un modo di vivere.

(Traduzione in italiano: Antonio Blunda)