

***SAHITYA GOSHTHI***  
*Hindi Literature in the Diaspora*

2-3 April 2004  
Calhoun College & Whitney Humanities Center  
Yale University

# *Sahitya Goshthhi*

## *Hindi Literature in the Diaspora*

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**Quest for Identity:  
Grappling with the Literary Self in the Diaspora**  
An Excerpt  
SUSHAM BEDI, Columbia University

Writing in a language that is not spoken by a recognized minority in a country can make a writer irrelevant. On the other hand, writers hardly have a choice other than to write in the language they are born to. As the Indian novelist, Anita Desai puts it, a writer “writes the way a spider spins; it is all he knows how to do and he does it without thought, almost without consciousness. To him it is a compulsive and instinctive act.” (“Flight of Forms,” *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 10, number 4, 1983, p. 410).

So I wrote and wrote, without being aware of the relevance of what I wrote to the people or the community that surrounded me. The question of a writer's identity was encountered by me, for the first time, in November 1993, when the translation of my first novel, *The Fire Sacrifice*, was released by Heinemann publishers at the Commonwealth Institute in London. The editor of one of the South Asian journals wanted to do a write-up on me. But then she told me that at the time she was working on Indian women writers and after finishing that she planned to write about me. I was startled, “Am I not an Indian writer?” I asked. “No you are not. You are an American writer,” was the answer. I said, “Everyone takes me to be an Indian writer writing in Hindi and of course I will continue to write in Hindi.” She responded, “Hindi is a global language, just by writing in Hindi one does not become an Indian writer.”

The question was particularly surprising since it was raised in my personal context; otherwise it seems like a rather common question that has been raised in the context of many writers especially writing in imperial languages like English and French. There are many dimensions and aspects to this question ranging from the ideas of assimilation and ethnocentrism to racism and nationalism. The question is gaining importance for writers writing in languages like Hindi especially because a good segment of Hindi writing is taking place outside India. However the status

of Hindi is very different from English. First of all it is the language of the colonized, and not the colonizers. Although Hindi has been accused of perpetuating imperialism within India, it is still the language of the common Indian. One might consider it to be the language at the center, it mostly resides in the peripheries like all other national languages of India. The special status as the official national language does give it the political power and status and this power has been certainly enjoyed and exploited by various political leaders. And therefore Hindi does appear to be enjoying the status of being at the centre. In actuality, Hindi is only limited to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and it has been threatened by English in every other part of India. The language at the center still remains English and most people prefer it that way for what they call “very practical reasons,” e.g., it is their only connection to the world, it is the language of sciences, progress, etc. Moreover as Aijaz Ahmed has rightly said, “...there has clearly developed, in all cosmopolitan cities of the country, an English based intelligentsia for whom only the literary document produced in English is a national document, all else is regional, hence minor and forgettable, so that English emerges in this imagination not as one of the Indian languages, which it undoubtedly is, but as the language of national integration and bourgeois civility.” (In *Theory*, Verso, London, 1994, p. 75) Therefore the status of Hindi as a global language is probably a myth. If there is a center for Hindi, it is India, Whereas all English writing looks up to the West.

However, interestingly when I began to rejoice the idea of being an American writer, I had another jolt. Last year, a writer friend suggested that I submit one of my short-stories in English translation to *Weber Studies* for its special issue on South-Asian American Literature/Culture. I learned that they liked the story and as I was awaiting a written confirmation, I received a letter from its editor, stating—“I liked the story. Its narrative technique and language are excellent. But I am afraid we cannot include this one in our special issue because it is a story in translation.” I felt I was denied an identity of being an Asian-American writer on the ground that I wrote in Hindi.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Friday, 2 April 2004

4:30 pm CALHOUN COLLEGE MASTER'S TEA

**“Hindi Literature and Diasporic Writing”**

**Moderator:** DR. WILLIAM H. SLEDGE,  
Master, Calhoun College, and  
George D. and Esther S. Gross  
Professor of Psychiatry

**Readings by and Conversation with**

SUSHAM BEDI

DHANANJAY KUMAR

GULSHAN MADHUR

MADHU MAHESHWARI

VISHAKHA THAKER

JOHN HANSON

6:30 pm DINNER (in Henry R. Luce Hall, Common Room)

# SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Saturday, 3 April 2004

11:00 am SESSION I (in Room 208)

**Readings by and Conversation with**

SUSHAM BEDI

JOHN HANSON

SEEMA KHURANA

DHANANJAY KUMAR

GULSHAN MADHUR

MADHU MAHESHWARI

VISHAKHA THAKER

1:15 pm LUNCH (in Room 108)

2:15 pm SESSION II (in Room 208)

4:00 pm TEA (in Room 108)

## आसमान - भैनहैटन की गली में सुषम बेदी

आसमान एक तंग गली है  
ठीक मेरी गली के उपर ।

उस पर न तो स्पुतनिक उड़ते हैं  
न रंग विरंगी चिड़ियां  
गंधमयी बयार भी नहीं छूती उसे  
न बादलों के घेरती सुनहरी रेखाएं ।

हां मेरी हथेली पर कभी कभी उतर आते हैं  
धूप के कुछ कतरे  
जिन्हें सूरज मान में  
चूम लेती हूं  
प्रणाम कर माथे पर धर लेती हूं  
और छुवा देती हूं  
उस नन्हें बोनसाई को  
जो कुछ दिन पहले ही परिवार का सदस्य बनने चला आया था  
और अब धमकी देने लगा है  
कूच कर जाने की ।

मैं डर जाती हूं उसकी धमकी से !  
और आंखों से चूसने लगती हूं गली पर के आसमान की नीलाई को  
आसमान के टुकड़े को विस्कुट की तरह चबाने लगती हूं ।  
कहीं अपनी जगह से वे गायब न हो जाये  
मैं पूरा का पूरा निगल जाना चाहती हूं  
और विटामिन डी की गोली खा  
दफ्तर के केबिन में बंद हो जाती हूं

**Sky: In a Manhattan Alley**  
SUSHAM BEDI  
(Translated by SUSHAM BEDI)

The sky is a narrow alley  
Right above my narrow street

No sputnik's flying over it  
No brightly colored bird  
No fragrant breezes touch it  
No golden rays break through the clouds.

But from time to time chips of sunlight fall  
Over my palms  
And taking them for the sun  
I kiss them  
And hold them on my brow in greeting  
And make them touch  
That little bonsai tree  
Which recently came to be a member of the family  
And now has begun to threaten  
To go away and die.

I'm scared by that threat  
And I've begun to suck into my eyes  
The blueness of that sky above the alley  
And chew on those bits of sky as though it were a biscuit.  
Lest it vanish from its place  
I long to gulp it down completely  
And swallowing a tablet of vitamin D  
Shut myself up inside my office.

## फ़हवन√ से सुषम बेदी

न्यूयार्क के जॉन एफ. कैनेडी एयरपोर्ट से टैक्सी में सतिंदर और पिंकी के साथ उनके घर जाते हुए गुड्डो को ऐसा कोई उत्साह महसूस नहीं हो रहा था जिसकी कल्पना करके उसने कितनी ही बार एक अनाम सुख महसूस किया था। कंकरीले पथरों की ऊंची ऊंची इमारतों से सिले इस शहर ने एक अजीब उदासी और घुटन का अहसास दिया था। पिंकी ने बताया था-- “मैनहैटन” कहते हैं न्यूयार्क के इस हिस्से को।

**The Fire Sacrifice: An Excerpt**  
SUSHAM BEDI  
(Translated by SUSHAM BEDI)

...While she and Raju rode from the John F. Kennedy airport in a taxi with Pinki and Satinder, Guddo did not feel the kind of excitement, the indescribable joy she had experienced so many times before in her imagination. On the contrary, when she saw the city's towering buildings of hard stone she was aware of a strange sadness, a feeling of suffocation. "This part of town," Pinki told her, "is called Manhattan."

## सात रंग सीमा खुगना

मेरे अन्दर ढेर सारे रंग .....  
अच्छा - ढेर सारे नहीं, तो चलो सात रंग ।  
इन्द्रधनुष की तरह -  
कितना अदभुत दृश्य है यह!  
सातो रंग साथ साथ -  
नीला रंग हरे रंग के साथ,  
न तो हरे रंग में घुलता है  
और न ही  
हरे रंग को अपने मे घुलाता है ।  
उसी तरह बाकी रंग भी -  
जामुनी, नारंगी, पीला, संतरी, लाल,  
सब साथ साथ  
इन्द्रधनुष की तरह ।

कहते हैं ये सातो रंग तो  
किरण में हमेशा ही होते है ।  
पर - जब तक हवा में सही नमी नहीं होती,  
तब तक दिखाई नहीं देते हैं ।

मेरे अन्दर के ये सातो रंग  
जब हवा में सही नमी नहीं होती है  
तब,  
एक दुसरे में घुलमिल कर  
एक मटमैला कीचड़ बन जाते हैं ।  
जिस में डूब कर अक्सर मेरा दिल  
मिचलाने लगता है ।  
और या फिर ये रंग -  
इस तरह छिपे रहते हैं

मानो

किसी रईस की नाजायज़ सन्तान हो ।

लेकिन कई बार तो

आपस में

लड़ते झगड़ते हैं

मरने मारने पर तुले रहते हैं -

कभी पीला रंग लाल को मार देता है

और कभी संतरी रंग के हाथों मारा जाता है ।

लेकिन रावण की तरह

इन रंगों को भी कोई

अमरता का वरदान मिला है -

जो एक दुसरे के हाथों

मर मरा कर भी

फिर ज़िन्दा हो जाते हैं ।

लेकिन मैं, इन रंगों की रण भूमि बनी,

इन्हीं के लहू में

डूबी रहती हूँ ।

फिर भी -

मन की मिचलन सहते हुए भी -

नाजायज़ सन्तान जैसी शरमिंदगी झेलते हुए भी -

लहू से सींची हुई रणभूमि बनते हुए भी -

मैं टूट क्यों नहीं जाती?

इन रंगों को अपने से निकाल कर

फेंक क्यों नहीं देती?

शायद उस दिन की आशा में -

जिस दिन हवा मे सही नमी होगी -

ये सातो रंग एक बार फिर

इन्द्रधनुष की तरह सज जाएंगे ।

## Seven Colors

SEEMA KHURANA (Translated by SEEMA KHURANA)

inside me  
there are many colors  
all right, if not many, then seven colors  
just like rainbow  
what a miraculous sight it is!  
all seven colors are together  
the blue is right beside green  
neither gets dissolved in the green  
nor attempts to dissolve the green  
and similarly  
all seven colors  
violet, indigo, blue, green  
yellow, orange and red  
together  
just like a rainbow!

they say these colors  
always exist in the ray of sun!  
but until there is precise humidity in the air  
these can't be seen.

these seven colors inside me  
sometimes –  
in the absence of precise humidity  
get dissolved in one another  
and turn into a sickening muck!  
and sometimes –  
shamefully  
each color goes into hiding  
as if  
it is an illegitimate child of  
a rich landlord!

and sometimes  
these colors  
totally intolerable of the 'other'

are geared up to kill!  
sometimes the yellow slaughters the red  
and sometimes gets slaughtered by orange!  
But strangely  
as if  
each color is given a 'boon of immortality'-  
even after this carnage,  
is alive again!  
But I have  
turned into a battlefield -  
soaked in their blood.  
still  
why don't I  
after being in the sickening mud  
facing the shameful dishonor  
and  
becoming a blood drenched battlefield  
simply break down?  
why don't I throw away these colors?

perhaps  
because of the hope  
and the certainty  
that one day  
when  
there is precise humidity in the air  
these seven colors will become  
a rainbow!

## \मैःख और \तुमःख धननजय कुमार

सुबह के सुनहले स्वप्न  
शाम के रंगीन नज़ारे  
आसमान के फरिश्ते  
शायद मुझे ढूँढ रहे हैं  
लेकिन मुझे पा न सकेंगे  
क्योंकि मैं \वोःख नहीं ।

उस दिन ऐसा लगा,  
जैसे मैंने खुद को पा लिया पहचान लिया  
जिसे मैं सदियों से छुपाए बैठा था ।

एक धुंधला सा खयाल आता है  
वो स्पर्श, वो दृश्य, वो घ्वनि  
एकबारगी मेरे अन्दर कौंध जाते हैं ।  
जगत की सारी वस्तुओं को हाथ लगाता हूँ  
उंगलियों में कुद उलझा जाता है  
आंखों में जलन होती है  
कानों में तीर चुभते हैं  
पहलू बदल जाते हैं

अपने मानस के विस्तार में समय के चक्र में  
आगे बढ़ता हूँ, एक फिसलन है  
फिर कुछ प्रश्न हैं और कुछ खाइयां  
जैसे तालाब में कंकरी की लहर  
उसमे तैरती हुई एक शकल .....  
नही ..... प्रतिभा, नही .....कुछ लकीरे .....  
कुछ शब्द बनते हैं और कुछ तस्वीरें ।

मैं अपना अपनापन खोकर  
उसी में समा जाता हूँ।  
लगता है बस तुम ही तुम हो  
क्योंकि मैं तो एक ही था  
जो तुमसे खो गया  
मेरा आस्तित्व आस्तित्वहीन हो गया  
अब कोई \मैं:व्र न बनाना  
सब \तुम:व्र को भूल जाएँगे।

“You” and “Me”  
DHANANJAY KUMAR  
(Translated by DHANANJAY KUMAR)

Golden dreams of early morning  
Dreamy scapes of misty evening  
Nightly angels in the sky  
Are searching for the one  
Who is wrapped in skyfold  
Or gliding on new dimension  
But that's not me...  
Poor angels caught  
In endless pursuit of the unsought.

After ages that day  
I found and recognized myself  
Cracking away from you  
We feel but do not see each other  
In spiraling echo of sight and sound  
Piercing arrows of glued objects  
Are strung in fingers  
And carved in eyes

In time, in mind, images oscillate  
New ones form and float  
Are they searching for images  
Or spherical lines and brush and colors  
To draw pictures that move  
But not crumble or bifurcate?

I enter the balloon, sniffing suffocation  
The balloon burst, to dissipate and merge  
For the air inside was heavy and stale  
I pop out to become part of you  
One existence has ceased  
I ask thee, never to make “me”  
For all will forget the being of “you.”

## प्रश्नोत्तर गुलशन मधुर

मैं किस संस्कृति का वारिस हूँ?  
जिसकी छाती अशक्त को देखते ही गुब्बारा हो जाती है  
और सशक्त के आगे जिसकी विनम्रता  
फले आम की डाली बन जाती है  
उमगती है भक्ति तत्क्षण  
शब्दों के उत्स फूटते हैं  
एक गाढ़ी स्निग्धता स्तोत्र-सी उमड़ती है  
रच जाती है  
अनुशंसा का महाकाव्य  
मैं उस संस्कृति का वारिस हूँ?

मैं किस संस्कृति का वारिस हूँ?  
जो हर सौदा गलत तोलती हो  
सुविधा के बोल बोलती हो  
प्रेम, परंपरा, परिवार  
जिसके तकियाकलाम हों  
लेकिन जिसके चकूव्यूह  
हर पल  
किसी अभिमन्यु की तलाश में रहते हों  
जो आस्थाओं की हत्या करने पर उकसाती हो  
और अपराध की जघन्यता ढकने के लिए  
शब्दों की टकसाल खोल देती हो  
मैं उस संस्कृति का वारिस हूँ?

मैं किस संस्कृति का वारिस हूँ?  
सच के आईने से जो आंखें चुराती हो  
जो अपनी झेंप से घबराकार  
अंधेरे कोनों में

सहभितों की भीड़ जुटा लाती हो  
अपनी दबी लज्जित हंसी को  
ठहाकों का भ्रम देने के लिए ।  
जो फिर- फिर अपनों को रेवड़ी बांटती हो  
सामाजिकता का लिवास पहनकर,  
जो ओहदेदारों के तलवे चाटती हो?  
मैं उस संस्कृति का वारिस हूँ ?

नहीं, मैं उस आरोपित संस्कृति का वारिस नहीं हूँ  
ठकुरसुहाती  
मेरी परंपरा की धरोहर नहीं है  
न ही मेरी विनम्रता  
मेरी सुविधाभोगिता की मोहताज नहीं है  
कृपा-पात्रता मेरी विरासत की पूंजी नहीं है  
मेरी संस्कृति गिरोह की, झुंड की, बैसाखी की अपेक्षा नहीं है  
मेरी संस्कृति सहज सौहार्द की संस्कृति है  
जो समुदाय से नहीं बनती है  
जिससे समुदाय बनता है  
जिसे सच ढूँढने में पक्षधरों की गिनतियों की नहीं  
बस सच को खुली आंखों देखने की आदत है  
यह है मेरी संस्कृति  
जो मुझे विरसे में मिली है  
मैं इस संस्कृति का वारिस हूँ!

## Question and Answers

GULSHAN MADHUR

(Translated by MRIDULA MITRA VYAS)

Am I an offspring of a culture that prides on the powerless?  
And modesty, like the branches laden with fruits, bows down  
before the powerful.

Words of reverence sprout like seedlings, a deep gentleness erupts  
like a fountain.

And just then the epic poem of Anushangsa is composed.

Am I an offspring of such a culture?

Am I an heir to a culture where every trade, every transaction is  
deceiving?

Every word uttered is of convenience. But love, tradition, family  
are its signature.

And yet every moment, exploitation seeks out the innocent.

Just as the labyrinth of the battlefield challenged Abhumanyu!

A culture that instigates to strangle faith

And mints words to bury the hatchet of heinous crimes.

Am I an heir to such a culture?

To what culture do I belong?

Where one evades from looking into the mirror of truth!

And fears its own guilt, so it hides in a dark corner amidst the  
cowards.

In the guise of openhearted laughter, it hides its suppressed smirk  
of shame

And celebrates with sweets.

In the garb of social grace, it licks the boots of the powerful.

Do I belong to such a culture?

No, I am not a progeny of an alleged culture.

The feudal lords are not the custodians of my tradition.

My humbleness is not out of a need for convenience

My sense of gratitude is not the capital of my inheritance.

Neither large nor small throng do I depend on for support

Mine is a culture of simplicity and whole-heartedness.

Which is not built on mass, rather builds a mass of believers  
around it.

I don't need to count my supporters when looking for truth.  
Truth is what I look into with eyes open.  
That is the culture I have inherited.  
Yes, I am the progeny of such a culture.

आए थे हम  
मधु महेशवरी

आए थे हम  
इस विराट भूमी पर नए नए  
पहचान अपनी बनाने  
राह कोई नई पाने

पहचान बनी  
राहें मिली  
घर बसें  
घरों में ठाकुर सजे  
चीड़, ओक, मेपल ने  
हंस स्वागत किया  
पर याद बरगद — पीपल की बनी रही  
बरखा आई हर मौसम में  
पर कानों में  
काले मेघा पानी दे  
गाते मोरों की ध्वनि तनी रही

घास वैसी ही हरी थी  
माटी वैसी ही सुनहरी  
बस हर शाम -

आकाश में बहती रंगो की नदी  
थोड़ी कम गहरी थी  
जल था  
बलखाती नदियां थीं  
पर किनारों पर घाट न थे  
हर हर गंगे कहते  
मंत्रों से गूंजते  
स्नान न थे  
नदियों के नाम थे

पर पुराणों से जुड़े  
आख्यान नहीं थे  
दूर तलक सघन वन थे  
पर उनमें धूनी रमाते  
भभूत से सने  
तपस्वियों के भाल नहीं थे  
सुबह थी पूर्व दिशा में  
ललछौहीं सोने के कण विखराती  
पर उससे टकराते  
मस्जिदों से उठते सुरीले अज्ञान न थे  
आकाश वही था  
निर्लप्त योगी सा

पर मन पाख़्त्री  
दो छोरों में उड़ता रहा  
कुछ सपने आए झोली में  
पर मन का अहम हिस्सा  
ऐ वतन तुझसे जुड़ा रहा  
और जीवन पर जब छाया अवसाद  
तो मन अमृत के कण  
तुझसे पीता रहा  
तुझसे दूर होकर भी  
यूँ तेरे साथ जीता रहा

**Here We Were**  
MADHU MAHESHWARI  
(Translated by MADHU MAHESHWARI)

New to this vast land stretched far and wide  
Between two oceans  
Here we were  
With budding dreams  
Glistening faces  
Twinkling eyes  
Hard work woven in our hands  
Standing here in awe  
To welcome every new sight and sound  
To give our void new spaces  
Awe to land brought the award  
Homes were built and adorned  
With Shiva dancing  
Krishna prancing  
Stately oaks, fragrant ciders,  
Majestic Pines, laughing Poplars  
Befriended us  
Blooming dogwood grappled us with mirth  
But still the vivid memory of Banyan and Pipal trees  
Has lingered in the memory vivaciously

Unlike the Monsoons  
Rain has stretched herself in every season  
Showers drenched the mother earth  
Riding on winds, welcoming the new sights  
My hearing sense yearned  
For the Peacock's song, how before the first rain of the season

‘They echoed the sky invoking clouds  
From their sweet slumbers  
Rhyming one phrase over and over  
Oh dusky clouds give us water  
To vanquish the heat  
To Drench the soil

Every sunset, twilight has opened its magic box

The river of colors has flowed from it  
on the western sky  
Except the colors were not as bright  
As in my land

The mighty rivers were flowing  
Twisting, twirling, tossing  
Trilling, their path ways  
But my mind has kept wandering  
For the scenes of Ghats  
Bursting with pilgrims  
Going down the steps  
Taking holy dips  
Chanting mantras aloud  
Wishing for paradise

Yes rivers had names and history  
But epics and myths were not woven  
In they're every stream

The forests nurtured the land so lovingly  
Dense trees and lush greenery mesmerized  
The roads and the scenery  
The eagles rose and touched the sky  
But mystical hermits fully bearded  
Scantly clothed, holy ash smeared  
On their foreheads were missing from the scene  
The holy smoke of their fire  
Did not fly behind the trees

Rolling hills full of dancing trees  
Reaching to the sky  
Extending their friend ship to all beings  
But my ears longed for sound of bells and gongs  
From the temples.

The crimson dawn scattered  
Particle of reddish gold in the East  
But did not hear the melodies morning chants  
Rising from the mosques

Like an unattached yogi sky was the same sky  
But my mind like a bird has kept flying  
From shore to shore  
From new land to old land  
Immersed in the memories  
Whenever despair descended in my heart  
I stood in solitude  
Have stretched hollow of my hand  
To fill nectar of love from you old land  
Though I live faraway from you  
You still live in me, you still live in me.

## गीता

विशाखा ठाकर

तेरी करुणा का साक्षात्कार  
कितनी बार  
होता है मुझे .....  
कैसे कहूं तुझे?  
जाने किस तरह से  
कई बार तूने मुझे  
अपने प्रकाश के  
तेजस्वी दायरों में बांधकार  
अंधेरे मन के कुंठित  
विचारों से बचाया है ।

मुझे तो सच  
सही ढंग से  
तेरी पूजा करनी भी नहीं आती  
न ही संस्कृत में लिखी  
तेरी स्तुति को  
कंठस्थ करके  
तेरी छवि के सामने  
रटन करना आता है मुझे

हां कभी  
नेशनल जीओग्राफिक में लिखी  
दहकते लावा से भरी  
इस धरती को तेरी मानसपुत्री समझकर  
सोचती हूं .....

या तो  
ऐंटार्कटिका का भू खंड के

सीने के तले  
मीलों तक गहरे पानियों में  
मचलती जीव सृष्टि  
या तिरती चमकती  
मछलियों के बारे में सोचती हूँ

या तो  
शहर की भीड़ में  
बसी इस इमारत के कोने में  
जहां मेरी प्रयोगशाला है  
वहां सूक्ष्म जीवों को  
माइक्रोस्कोप के तले  
बड़े जीवों की तरह  
जीवन की तमाम हरकतें करते  
देखती हूँ  
तो सोचती हूँ

कि तू  
जो शायद ईश्वर है  
या तो कृष्ण की तरह  
कोई शरारती जादूगर है  
या तो ईसा के रूप में  
इस धरती पर  
आता जाता रहता

तो क्यों  
तेरे मिलन के लिए  
मैं अपने अनगिनत अवतारों की  
या  
मृत्यु की प्रतीक्षा करती रहूँ?  
क्या तू

किसी अच्छे दोस्त की तरह  
कभी घर आकर  
या किसी अच्छे रैस्तरां में  
या कभी भीड़ से अलग  
किसी घने पेड़ की छांव में  
पोपकार्ना खाते हुए  
नहीं मिल सकता?

तेरे मिलन की  
प्रतीति के अह्लाद से  
कैसे कहूं  
कि कई बार  
मन भर आता है!

मेरे कमरे में  
रात के अंधेरे में  
मेरे टेबल लैंप के पास पड़ी  
भगवद गीता को  
अक्सर थकान की वजह से  
मैं चैन से पढ़ भी नहीं पाती .....

पर लगता है

## Gita

VISHAKHA THAKER

(Translated by MRIDULA MITRA VYAS)

How do I tell you, how often you have bestowed upon me your  
mercy?  
How often you have enlightened me with the aura of your  
brilliance  
And saved me from my dark and shallow thoughts?

Neither do I know how to worship you.  
Nor do I know how to recite from the  
Sanskrit Scriptures before you.

Yes, sometimes, in the written pages of the National Geographic  
As I see the bosom of our planet blazing with blistering hot lava  
I think of her as your adopted daughter.

Or when I ponder over the living world under a frozen sea  
Or the shimmering fish swimming in the  
Fathomless Ocean of Antarctica

Or in my laboratory, nestled at the corner of a tall building  
Amidst a bustling city, when I find under the microscope  
Microbes living a life much like the large living beings  
Of this world, I wonder about you.

If you are God, or Lord Krishna, like a magician full of mischief,  
Or Jesus who appeared in the form of a savior on this earth  
Tell me, do I have to live through countless lives, or die?  
Before I can have a sweet rendezvous with you?

Tell me, like a good friend, can you not come to my house?  
Or meet me at a restaurant, or away from the crowd,  
Can we not meet while eating popcorn -  
Under the shade of a leafy tree?

How do I tell you how my heart fills with ecstasy -  
At the thought of realizing you!

Quite often, at the end of the day when I am tired and weary  
I can't focus on the Bhagvat Gita, lying  
Beside the table lamp in my room!

But I feel, as though, emerging from the Bhagvat Gita  
You ride in a chariot all night long on a mission to  
Destroy the enemies of our dark and devious  
Thoughts with your powerful discus!

And at the crack of dawn, bathed in your sweet radiance  
You bring me back at the threshold of a new day  
For a long journey ahead!

How do I tell you, how often you have bestowed upon me your  
mercy?

# गीता

विशाखा ठाकर

तेरी करुणा का साक्षात्कार  
कितनी बार  
होता है मुझे .....  
कैसे कहूँ तुझे?  
जाने किस तरह से  
कई बार तूने मुझे  
अपने प्रकाश के  
तेजस्वी दायरों में बांधकार  
अंधेरे मन के कुंठित  
विचारों से बचाया है ।

मुझे तो सच  
सही ढंग से  
तेरी पूजा करनी भी नहीं आती  
न ही संस्कृत में लिखी  
तेरी स्तुति को  
कंठस्थ करके  
तेरी छवि के सामने  
रटन करना आता है मुझे

हां कभी  
नेशनल जीओग्राफिक में लिखी  
दहकते लावा से भरी  
इस धरती को तेरी मानसपुत्री  
समझकर  
सोचती हूँ .....

या तो  
ऐंटार्कटिका का भू खंड के  
सीने के तले  
मीलों तक गहरे पानियों में  
मचलती जीव सृष्टि

या तिरती चमकती  
मछलियों के वारे में सोचती हूँ

या तो  
शहर की भीड़ में  
बसी इस इमारत के कोने में  
जहां मेरी प्रयोगशाला है  
वहां सूक्ष्म जीवों को  
माइक्रोस्कोप के तले  
बड़े जीवों की तरह  
जीवन की तमाम हरकतें करते  
देखती हूँ  
तो सोचती हूँ

कि तू  
जो शायद ईश्वर है  
या तो कृष्ण की तरह  
कोई शरारती जादूगर है  
या तो ईसा के रूप में  
इस धरती पर  
आता जाता रहता

तो क्यूँ  
तेरे मिलन के लिए  
मैं अपने अनगिनत अवतारों की  
या  
मृत्यु की प्रतीक्षा करती रहूँ?  
क्या तू  
किसी अच्छे दोस्त की तरह  
कभी घर आकर  
या किसी अच्छे रैस्तरां में  
या कभी भीड़ से अलग

किसी घने पेड़ की छांव में  
पोपकार्निन खाते हुए  
नहीं मिल सकता?

तेरे मिलन की  
प्रतीति के अहलाद से  
कैसे कहूं  
कि कई बार  
मन भर आता है!

मेरे कमरे में  
रात के अंधेरे में  
मेरे टेबल लैंप के पास पड़ी  
भगवद गीता को  
अक्सर थकान की वजह से  
मैं चैन से पढ़ भी नहीं पाती .....

पर लगता है

उसी भगवद-गीता में से  
तू रथ में बैठ कर निकलता है  
और मन में उभरते  
तमाम दुर्विचार के शत्रुओं का  
तू रात भर अपने सुदर्शन चक्र से  
हनन करता रहता है  
और .....

भोर में निकलते ही  
तू मुझे  
भीगे सुगंधी प्रकाश में नहला कर  
नए दिन के द्वार पर  
लंबे प्रवास के लिए  
अपने रथ से उतार देता है!  
तेरी करुणा का साक्षात्कार  
कैसे होता है --  
कैसे कहूं तुझे !!

## PARTICIPANTS

### ***SUSHAM BEDI***

Prolific novelist and short-story writer Susham Bedi has been writing and publishing since 1984. Born in Ferozepur, Punjab, she is an academic whose research work is in the area of Indian theater. As a teenager she became a leading actress in Hindi dramas on All India Radio and later on television. Susham Bedi's first novel, *Havan* (*Fire Sacrifice*—translated into English by David Rubin) was serialised in the magazine *Ganga* and published as a novel in 1989. Bedi has been the most widely-read of diasporic writers ever since. *Havan* was published in Urdu in 1992.

Bedi's exceptional work includes *Nava Bhum Ki Ras-katha* (*Epic of the New Land*), *Gatha Amerbel Ki* (*Song of the Amerbel*), *Katra Dar Katra* (*Drop of Drop*) and *Hindi Natya Prayog Ke Sandarbh Men* (*Innovation and Experimentation in Hindi Drama*). She has lived in the United States since 1979 and has been teaching in Hindi Language and Literature at Columbia University in New York since 1985. She is currently the coordinator for the Hindi/Urdu language program at Columbia. She may be contacted at [sb12@columbia.edu](mailto:sb12@columbia.edu).

### ***JOHN HANSON***

John Hanson is a communications and language specialist with over twenty-five years of experience in intercultural communications, translation and interpreting, education and training, and writing and editing a wide variety of publications, with extensive overseas experience in Europe, Asia and the Near East. He is fluent in spoken and written Arabic, Farsi, French, Spanish, Hindi and Urdu. Mr. Hanson is highly skilled in translation, revision and coordination of major translation projects. In the past he has served as an escort and seminar interpreter for United States Department of State and the federal court system. Currently he is the Senior Translator for the International Monetary Fund in Washington, D.C. He may be contacted at [jhanson@imf.org](mailto:jhanson@imf.org).

## **SEEMA KHURANA**

Seema Khurana has taught Hindi language and literature courses at Yale University since 2001. She has sustained her interest in Hindi literature through many different forms, beginning with her editing the Hindi section of the college magazine at the Government College for Women in Chandigarh, where she studied economics and political science. Her teaching of Hindi began in earnest in 1995 when she began teaching Hindi at New York University and Vassar College. Recognizing a lack of pedagogical materials for the teaching of Hindi language and literature, Khurana has worked to develop resource materials for teachers and students and has promoted the teaching and writing of Hindi literature through various outlets. Together with the World Hindi Foundation, she is in the process of developing a Hindi curriculum for use in high schools and colleges.

Since 1996, she has presented radio programs on *Geetmala*, an Indian music show, and has written, directed, cast, and acted in the Hindi language play, *Chhoti Si Rasoi (A Little Kitchen)*, about the life of an old Indian woman who loses her identity when her kitchen is taken away by her well-meaning children after her husband dies. It is currently being made into a short film. Khurana's poems and stories have been published in *Pashyanti* in India and in *Hindi Jagat*, *Vishwa*, and *Baal Jagat* in the United States.

In 2000, Khurana founded Sandeshi which for the first time in the United States made recordings of Hindi literature available on audio tape for Hindi learners at all levels. Sandeshi makes Hindi literature accessible to those who would not ordinarily choose to read a Hindi book, as well as to those who understand the language but cannot read the Devanagari script. For Sandeshi, Khurana has produced numerous stories-on-tape recordings, assisted in the development of a distribution strategy for recordings, and continues to develop multi-media materials. Most recently, the Khurana completed a recording of Amrita Pritam's *Pinjjer*. She may be contacted at [seema.khurana@yale.edu](mailto:seema.khurana@yale.edu).

## ***DHANANJAY KUMAR***

Dhananjay Kumar writes on a variety of subjects, but the urge to know the truth behind the basis of our very existence inspires him the most. Whatever is around us, illusion or real, he tries to find it, define it or express it in his poems. Besides having written a vast collection of poems in Hindi and English, Dhananjay Kumar has composed music for plays and television programs in the United States. He has also been involved in writing and directing television shows in America. Some of his renowned collection of poems include *Adhuri Baat* (published in 1995) and *Barf ki Deewar* (published in 2001). He has written and directed the famous play *On the Hill* that was highly praised by audiences.

Kumar has an impressive creative profile, but he wrote most of his literary work after and during the end of his career as a senior industrial economist at the World Bank. After receiving his Ph.D. in Economics in 1976 from George Washington University, Dhananjay had an illustrious career in the World Bank where he traveled to several countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East focusing on private sector development, financial policies, and public sector management. Dhananjay Kumar retired from the World Bank in 1998 to pursue other interests. He is also a certified and registered Yoga teacher and is the founder and director of India International School in the United States, teaching classes in music, Yoga, and meditation. He may be contacted at [dkyoga@hotmail.com](mailto:dkyoga@hotmail.com).

## **MADHU MAHESHWARI**

Those who know Madhu Maheshwari as a friend and acquaintance will tell you that the most characteristic thing about her is her sensitivity—and it is this sensitivity that is expressed as the quintessential trait of her poems.

Madhu Maheshwari's poetry tries to find the Peepal and Bargad trees in the midst of a garden of Oak and Maple. Her works attempt to establish a Ganga in a foreign land. She has a Master's degree in Indian History and a Bachelor's degree in Hindi Literature. She has eighteen years of experience in teaching Hindi. Besides, she has written and directed several plays. She has published essays, short stories and poetry in the many Indian and Hindi-language publications in the United States.

Madhu Maheshwari is the chairperson of the International Hindi Association since 1997. For quite some time now, she has managed to successfully organize colloquiums, Ghoshtis and seminars in Washington. She is presently teaching at the John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. She may be contacted at [madhu1022@cox.net](mailto:madhu1022@cox.net).

## **GULSHAN MADHUR**

Gulshan Madhur's poems seem to have just the right words and amazing similes to quietly compel the reader's conscience to think. His words cleverly bring to the surface the inner agony of the individual—agony caused by the indifference and inherent injustices of an unmindful society. His poems have been published in various magazines.

The powerfully melodious voice had landed him at *Akaashvaani Dilli* (All India Radio, Delhi), where he was a long-time presenter of *Aapki Chithhi Mili* (*Your Mail*) and *Aapki Pasand* (*Your Choice*) programs. Later he came to the United States and joined Voice of America. In addition to being involved in broadcast journalism, he has written pieces for *Hindustan Times* and the *Washington Post*. He was also responsible for helping shape *Namaste Asia*, the very first ethnic Indian television program in the Washington, D.C. area. He may be contacted at [gmadhur@voanews.com](mailto:gmadhur@voanews.com).

## **VISHAKHA THAKER**

Vishakha Thaker's passion for poetry was born in her childhood as she grew up in the literary environment of her family. That passion has continuously inspired Thaker to create powerful and thought-provoking poems in Hindi through her incredibly lucid style. She has also worked as a Radio Artist for Hindi and Gujarati literary programs at Moscow Radio and All India Radio.

Thaker is currently engaged in research work in molecular diagnostics at the National Institutes of Health. Yet, she remains a poet at heart and continues her devotion to poetry through her creations. Collections of her poems titled *Aparajita* and *Teesara Chhal* have already been published and another titled *Anchhue Aangan* is ready for publication. She may be contacted at [vthaker@niaid.nih.gov](mailto:vthaker@niaid.nih.gov).

## **MRIDULA MITRA VYAS**

Two of the poems were translated by Mridula Mitra Vyas, a poet, playwright and a novelist. Vyas' *A Wounded Tigress*, a collection of six Indian novellas was published in 1997 and has been translated into German. Since then she wrote a historical novel after several years of research, *The Jewels in the Family*, which has not yet been published. On request from a Bollywood film director, she wrote a movie script based on events of September 11 with Manisha Koirala in the lead. She has also edited a book on *Meditation and Positive Attitude*, published in 2002. She is currently working on a novel, *A Sacred Lust*, on devadasis, temple prostitutes in India. Vyas has also written children's books and loves to write poetry in Bengali, English, and Urdu. Vyas' plays have been staged in India and in the United States. She may be contacted at [mridulmitravayas@yahoo.com](mailto:mridulmitravayas@yahoo.com).

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