

Hirendra Nath Dutta's Poem

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Writ in Water

Dedicated to Amrit Basumatari

On that afternoon bent over the deck of the ferry
With a gaze at the sharp stem resembling a shining ploughshare
Cleaving the muddy waters
I was brooding
The running stream is not a knee-deep watery field
Here before and after the endless ploughing
No seed but raindrops have been sown
In the furrowed waters of the big river
The muddy stir of meaning and no meaning
The to-and-fro of the fumbling minds of humans of clay

At the moment of getting off the ferry on the other bank
One of our co-passengers called out
Look look at the vermilion sun
Going down the cleavage of the two peaks
Look look at the dashing beauty of the vigorous horseman

In an instance we rose above the fragmented time
And suddenly in the muddy water left behind
I saw thousands of modar trees laden with blossoms
As if the countless seeds of raindrops
Were the red darkness of modar flowers now beyond count
And in the red darkness the braid of mornings and evenings
I didn't ask
Why have you blossomed, O lovely modar flowers
For the modar flowers not wanted by both gurus and bhakats
Are the segments of hearts of the disdainers of gurus and bhakats

The desired epitaph of Keats the poet was
Here lies one whose name was writ in water
If you ponder it is in water
That our name fame and works are etched
In the river Saraswati the musical notes of the Vedic incantation ripple
In the river Daya in Kalinga the marrows of Ashoka's name
Over the Luit the immortal creepers of our Madhava are etched
Over the waves of the river Wye glimmer of the outlines of Wordsworth's poems
To the Avon are stuck the works of Shakespeare
Life and youth fame and wealth
Drift down in the torrents of Time
In mornings and evenings millions of modar trees blossom
Covering up names embroidered on the surface of Time
Maybe in those modar blossoms I find
The patch of violets brightening the graveyard of poet Keats

Centuries getting joined make
A new millennium
Maybe then dolls will become humans

And humans will become dolls
The batteries of dolls will make us animated
Maybe the dolls will make us dance with unseen strings

The origin of all narcissism is food sleep and mating
Selfishness is the main root of all wickedness
The last lap of all victories is the ultimate defeat
So I want to take the new century
As stars and trees as birds and hills
Our days months years centuries millennia
Of them all the sun is the only dispenser
That moves round in the golden chariot
Coming up and going down among the peaks
I rely on the countless modar tops reflected in water
Our works are embroidered in the waves
In the patches of modar trees in bloom throughout the year
Lie our wealth and woes or the shards of earthenware

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Modar tree: the Indian coral tree. Although brightly colourful and attractive, its flowers have no use. They stand for something or someone that is outwardly attractive but essentially valueless.

Translated by **Nirendra Nath Thakuria**

Hirendra Nath Dutta (1937–2016) was an Assamese poet, critic, and educationist. He published three collections of poems during his lifetime. In 2004, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection *Manuh Anukule*.

Nirendra Nath Thakuria, a retired Associate Professor of English, is a translator and author.