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In the Footsteps of Yogesvara and Abhinanda

The Round of the Seasons

Spring

1

I tire of superstitions:
the asoka blossoms only
at the touch of the beloved's feet;
the bakula must be splashed
with rinsed wine from her mouth;
the tilaka must be hugged
and the amaranth should get a glance from her
before leaf turns green
or the petals colour.

I quicken into flower
at the memory of your touch.

2

It is the season for illusions:
night-mists turn to dawn-haze
frost becomes dew, though sharp.
The night-jar still coughs.
The blackbird is heard sometimes
but she hasn't been seen.
The scent of the mango-blossom is there
but not the mango-blossom.
A bird alights on the leafing lotus bed
thinking it is an island.
Bathing on the ghats
shawled in mist, she finds
bees moving towards her breast-tips.
Summer

1

Kama, in this torrid summer
let some things remain cool:
her eyes, reflecting the waters
the smell of jasmine in her hair,
her body dripping with the cold river
as she steps out on the ghats.
Let only one thing burn, Kama,
and that is her ardour.
Let thoughts smoulder within the cool forehead.
Let the cheeks be cold
but the tongue within, all fire.

2

From the mountain's shoulder to its groin,
from nether regions
to the lip of the escarpment,
forest fires rage simultaneously.
Bark and bud crackle and rain down as ash.
The trapped antelope does not know where to run
as the four directions, wrapped in smoke,
converge on him.
Such is my fate, beloved,
in the forest of your limbs
under the black rain of your hair.
Rains

1
The rain gods betrayed us last night.
The thunder woke her parents
lightning showed her stealing from my door.
Such a commotion there was
that despite disturbance in the skies
I heard wooden bolts unfastened
on neighbour's doors,
and women peeping out.
The rain has stopped today
but the village drips with her escapade.

2
They are all there
the paddy-straw covered by a cotton rug
the white smoke-tendril
uncoiling from an incense-stick
the air outside sharp with drizzle
the night sharp with the moorhen's joyous cries.
Only my flank is empty
Only the beloved isn't there.
Autumn

1

*Shrawan* has gone with its singed smell of lightning,
and the jasmine flowers
are not starred upon the trees
but are a crescent upon her dried hair.
Is lightning necessary
for those smitten by lover's lightning?
Is rain essential
for those wet with each other?

2

The water lily bleached
under a septembral sun.
The paddy-straw crackling
under the fires of their love.
A bangle breaks, as her arms pummel his back.
Who says lovers must move only to the beat of rain?
Early Winter (Hemanta)

1

It is a season for departures:
the clouds have gone
like wild geese from the lake.
Lightning stirs now
only in Yogesvara's verses;
and the flood waters have left with the boatmen.
Yet is it a season for arrivals:
the lover comes to your door
like the night heron.

2

She, who caught her
stealing back at first light,
said "there is mustard-flower
on your back, be careful,
it is getting to be winter.
You may catch cold.
The peasants who spend their nights
with the scarecrows in the fields
are already warming their hands
on chaff fires."
"You don't know the fires of our love"
she answered.
"For us it is still shrawan."
Late Winter (Sisira)

1

There was some coming and going
on the machaan that night,
during his vigil over sugar cane.
The wooden platform,
spread over a fieldbreak,
creaked and creaked, disturbing
the night owl on his perch
and the lapwing in its shrill concentrics.
He never shouted once
but wild boar kept away
from the phalanxed cane
while the stars wheeled round them.
His envious friends said later
that wild boar never came because
his machaan creaked through the night
with their love-making.

2

There was no din in the guava grove
except at first light when parrots
raised a curve-billed cacaphony
over half-bitten fruit.
He still slept soundly. The rope
 tied to a can perched on a tree-fork
lay in his hand, gently-clutched,
as if it was a braid of her hair,
the one who had slipped from his string-bed
light as a dawn-breeze,
the colours of the east
streaking across her love-bitten face.

NOTE

1. These poems are written in imitation of Sanskrit love poetry. Yogesvara and Abhinanda
were both great exponents of sensuous love poetry.