Poetry by Subodh Sarkar

Translated from Bengali

by Jaydeep Sarangi
Mothers of Manipur

Stood up my naked mother of Manipur
We got eyes from the eyes of this mother
Got her tongue, got the tunes – sa re ga ma
Stood up my naked mother of Manipur.

Army and Police can do whatever they wish
Curfew on streets, Charminar burns
No one has any word to say, they are not supposed to
Stood up my naked mother of Manipur.

Army jeep moves below the sky
The girl tosses in the army jeep
Crying “sare jaha se”
She is unbuttoned in the army jeep.

Even if the girl returns home
Even if she dies under the sky
The police erased her name
Where does she live? In a village outside Imphal!

It happens, day in and day out
Somewhere a girl is lying abused
Somewhere her sister is not found
Only their scarves hang from the trees.

But this July has crossed all limits.

Mothers of Manipur stood up
Stood up the naked breast-milk- givers
Can’t you how many veins are there in your mother’s breast
How do you feel when you see your mother being naked?

The moment Assam Rifles shut the gate
Where I was in that mother’s womb
From there gushed out hot Ganga
Mothers of Manipur redefined my mother with a new name.
Where mothers walk naked in a procession
Commanders, what you were doing then?

Do you still think your mother as sacred?
She is burning, she is burning...
My strongest mother is burning
Within all mothers of Manipur.
Gandhi

Sitting or standing?
Will Gandhi be sitting or standing?

He was made to sit, seeing seated Gandhi in night-light
One expert said,
‘No, this will not do, it is looking like Gandhi is sitting to defecate,
Make him stand, give him a staff in his hand’
But only making him stand won’t solve the problem,
  where is he standing?
In which place is he standing? For what is he standing?
It is by seeing the standing posture one can understand
Weather one is begging alms or giving alms.
Pupul Jaykar said,
During the Noakhali riots, Gandhi is crossing
The bamboo bridge – capture that moment.

That was captured. In Kolkata we say, ‘No faith
  until the mouth has been rinsed’
In Delhi they say, ‘Arreyaar, it is not enough to catch,
  one must burry after catching’
Rope-tied Gandhi was unloaded from the truck.
At first near the India Gate ten people revolted threateningly,
  not here, Gandhi proceeded
To Ranaghat
Not even there, there was fierce debate
From Ranaghat, from Teenmurti the truck proceeded
Towards Yamuna.

Gandhiji was standing in the mild dusk light
    on the banks of the Yamuna
He has grown thinner
He was muttering, ‘You’re not being able to give me
    a patch of land to stand?’
For once he proceeded two steps towards the left
Three steps to the right, then knocked his staff on the ground
Then he started walking straight along dark India,
    away from the Yamuna...
About the poet

Subodh Sarkar is a Bengali poet, writer and editor, and a teacher of English literature at City College, Kolkata. He is a recipient of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award. Sarkar is the editor of Bhashanagar, a Bengali culture magazine with occasional English issues. Now he edits Indian Literature, New Delhi. His first book of poem was published in the late 1970s, and now he has 26 books to his credit – 20 of poems, two of translations and one travelogue on America.

About the translator

Widely anthologised and reviewed as a poet, critic and translator, Jaydeep Sarangi has worked on postcolonial literature, *dalit* studies and translation studies.

Jaydeep Sarangi is a bilingual writer, academic, editor, translator, and the author of a number of significant publications on postcolonial issues, Indian writing in English and Australian Literature in reputed journals and magazines in India and abroad. He has translated Bengali poems/stories into English as well as edited a number of anthologies of translations of Bengali writings.