

DISSENTING VOICES

1977

PEOPLES UNION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES AND
DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS (DELHI STATE)

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Foreward

These are the voices of poets from some of the languages in India.

This collection is not representative, but only a small sample of what is available.

We hope that this anthology, however feeble, shows that the poetic conscience of India is not silent at the time of crisis.

Translations By

**ANJAN GHOSH
KRISHNA KUMAR
M L TIKKU
MUDRARAKSHASA
P C PATNAIK
PRAVANJAN
RADHA KUMAR
V RAMULU
RATI BARTHOLOMEW
C S SUBBA RAO
VASANT MANE**

Telegu

Mother

Mother
Why do you weep ?
Why do you mourn ?
at the grave ?
Your son is not there.
Look—
He is already
One with his people

SIVA SAGAR

Bengali

The Charge—Treason

By the window books jostle
scraps of paper, random,
scattered.
These were the companions to your monotony.

From Bilaspur, your cousin wrote regularly
news of her gentle husband
and domineering mother-in-law
spread over the space of an inland form.

One day your neighbour's dog
chased your girlfriend Jaya
she didn't come to the house again.

Pain constricted you
as the clouds straightjacket the sun.

You were always gloomy
this city depressed you—you felt that
its entrails were twining around you
and like a tapeworm in its bowels
you wanted to jerk it into unease
see its whole body jackknife with pain
so that it would be forced to retch you
up, with your girlfriend Jaya
And the neighbour's grumpy mongrel
would be free to copulate with stray dogs
under the sun or the moon.

2) Your mother cooked,
squatting by the fire
one day she couldn't straighten her back.
Your father, a retired Government servant,
scanned the advertisement columns daily
in search of part-time jobs.
Anger smouldered silently in your sister—
there were dark circles under her eyes.

Some nights the police cordoned off your house
in search of your absconding brother.
They turned the little room upside down—
the hush surrounding their noise struck you strangely. . .
in the neighbouring houses no lights came on
no windows opened
even out of common curiosity.

3) In the examination hall you were told
that in a small village in Mograhat
they had tied Kajal to a tree and killed him.
Three days later they came to Kajal's house, and
told uncle to go to the morgue and identify him.

Neither uncle nor aunt cried out
but Kajal's younger brother gnashed his teeth.

A month later he left a note: "I am going away
to finish Kajal's work. Bless me".

Uncle died. For some time after
aunt was like clay—
now she has hardened into stone,
When you pass that house your head bows
and your feet hasten across the path.

4/It is said that Professor Bhattacharya
is not normal any more. Torture
and suffering have crippled him.
They broke the flats of his feet and shattered his wrists;
did something to his eyes. .
he cannot see very well and his tongue sticks
to the roof of his mouth
The charge—Treason.

At regular intervals he is brought to court
for the hearing
then the same prison van takes him back again—
this has been going on for five or six years now.

Professor Bhattacharya taught physics—
how the electron which circles the nucleus
is practically weightless. Yet this
weightless thing, the electron,
can control the nature of the atom.
It is a question of numbers only.
While the neutron has no positive charge,
a change in the number of neutrons
can transform the nature of the atom.

You took notes and he smiled, whether
in pain or in contempt you did not know.
Towards the end he stopped coming.

Then one day you heard that in a
slum in Gulu-Ostagar lane
the police had arrested him. .
The charge—Treason.

5/ Sharbani and Rekha
taught in a slum school. One day
the special Branch jeep just picked them up.
The charge—Treason.

Treason because they shouted slogans in a procession :
“We demand the release of political prisoners, removal of PD,
Misa, the Black Laws. .”
treason because they were suspected of mingling
with the masses
of wanting to share their lives.

6/ Curzon Park, July 20, 1974.
They trampled on Prabir's stomach with their
hobnailed boots.

This city learnt under the terror of the Black Maria,
the hail of merciless lathis,
that to speak the word ‘Vietnam’
was treason.

There is treason in your song, treason in your play,
for you and I, and you and you and you
to meet is treason.
treason
treason
treason
to live in this country. . .

Feb. 1975

DHRUBA SEN GUPTA

Telegu

The Jail Koel

The nation
is like a sky washed
in tears.

The nation
is a burial ground of hopes
the battlefield of ideals.

*Excerpt from a poem written by KVR
during the Emergency.*

Hindi

Don't walk
RUN
There is now no time to think.
The train loaded with wheat is
Standing at the signal like a snake
Heave it by the tail
Whirl and smash it.

Courage and speed
With them you have been killing snakes
Without weapons.

Don't walk
RUN

To think too much is to invite fear
To go slow is to lose the opportunity.

I know you've no flag in your hand
A starving helpless man
Does not require a flag.

Hold up
The torn, bloodsoaked shirt of your partner
On a pole
—he who was shot yesterday while looting a wagon
Alone.

Don't walk
RUN

Run united
Or else the train will reach the capital
And you'll find only the corpses of children and old ones
When you are back in your huts.

—SARWESHWAR DAYAL SAXENA

Punjabi

The Judge

His bald head
Shone like polished iron.
When he stared
his spectacles slid to one side
like the weighted pan of a balance.

From his mouth
leapt a scatter of words
like popping corns.

Suddenly—
One hit me
Straight in the eye :
“Three years’ hard labour !”

AMARJEET CHANDAN
(*Amritsar Jail*)

Bengali

Do not Tolerate

As long as
in this country’s jails
there is even one man
held without trial—
and justice is derided
in the name of trial

As long as
wolves and jackals
tear even one man to pieces—
Do not ever believe
that in this country
such things as democracy
individual freedom
education, culture, civilization
exist.

Never never tolerate
this great insult
to Man
and Humanity.

BIRENDRA CHATTOPADHAYA

Monologue

I'll not say a word about unlawful things.
Let me state emphatically, again.
If you don't know the law
You'll not be forgiven Ignorance of the law
is an offence and being forgiven is also an offence.
I will not do anything unlawful.
If I give you a book I shall take a receipt,
not taking it will be an offence and your
not returning the book will be an offence.
The Court will punish you and not punishing
will also be an offence.
Take the money without a word. Give a receipt
and issue me a driving licence.
Your saying that that is not necessary
is unlawful. Without taking a licence
driving will be unlawful.
You're hatching a plot to trap me in the law,
that is why you say this.
But I am a law abiding citizen
I shall not be fooled.

Be kind enough to remove the cup—
I cannot drink the tea,
I am suspicious of those who brought it.
Besides, you haven't taken my prior consent.
Without prior consent I do not do a thing.
I dropped a letter to you before coming here,
intimating the day, the month, the date and the time of
arrival.

I have not received your letter.
You must have sent it.
Probably these days my letters are being censored.

Many of them aren't forwarded to me.
Evidence is being collected against me
and is being recorded in a secret report on me.
I have not received the letter about my citizenship
of this town. That it has been issued,
I have come to know.
Arrangements have been made to delay it.
But I have carefully kept my application
and according to law I must get their letter
within the prescribed limit. Otherwise
it will be an offence on their part.
I have submitted representations on every thing,
stating my complaints and expectations.

The light in the lamps in my house
has been reduced. And the roads remain dark.
This is totally unlawful.
I cannot read, I cannot write.
I will not allow my freedom of thought to be suppressed in
this manner.

I have registered a complaint
in the electricity department of your office.
And as for the food department
I am soon going to drag it to court.
The quality of food stuff is deteriorating
We are compelled to take poor diet
It is announced that the stocks are finished
This is homicide. Slow
systematic killing, preplanned.
The offenders must be punished.
If I go on tolerating this tyranny, I shall also be guilty
of a major crime. Punishment will be meted out
and in the public square I will be shot.

If this does not happen, I shall declare
All laws unlawful,
Because none of the laws have been made
with my prior consent.

Therefore they are not binding on me.
That is why I do not participate in the elections
of the peoples' assembly, I do not vote.
All elections are unlawful.
Candidates and voters are unlawful.
I do not want to be involved in crime.
I have not been granted permission to stay
in this town. The investigating officers visited me.
My name wasn't found in their list.
It proved that I was nobody, they said.
I gave them my name and occupation
and also told them where I lived.
Normally I do not disclose my address.
But it was not in their list
I am asking why my name has been removed from the list.
For a number of years I have been staying here.
Why then is my name missing ?
I am certain that systematically you are
doing all this.
No name in the list, no reply to the application
for citizenship . . . which means everywhere
you are running a campaign of demolition.
You must give me the driving licence
I am not an outsider
I am not non-existent either.
I am.
I can prove my lawful existence
—and your unlawful one.
I have collected all the evidence
All the detailed notes are in my possession.
Your crimes are noted with full details.
I have procured all your secret reports.
I shall put you in the dock in my re-formed court.
There is no pardon for your heinous crimes.
Pardon will be unlawful
I do not wish to say a word about unlawful things.

VASANT AABJI DAHAKE

Santrasa

That's not the first emotional pouring of love, Dear Comrade
Not also the brook of the spring
The long-awaited moonlight.
Behold the sparkling red-hot iron
 Made into the sword of the youth
That is the awakened spring of summer
 Under the ethereal fire.

In the Orient, a missile
In the toiler's hands, pressed under
 The citadel of oppression
That has arrayed the stormtroopers of the Guerrillas
Started with the wheel of the time
 A forerunner in the name of Adbhut.

He has devoured the hills,
 The corns of the landlord's family
He has fanned the song of revolt
 The dove singing liberation.

Thrusting himself back, the mythical elephant turning sides
Burning flame in a land of exploiting signs
In mid-east, in the Bolivian jungle
The child of brutal change is awake
The west with a mark of Vermillion
 The east curdling with blood
The earth's greenery touching the horizon
The mind rages in terrifying vision,

AGRAGAMEE

The Exile

I am alone now
Like a peg
Nailed to my brain
Or in a field
abandoned after I wound up my settlement.
See
my body is slowly burning now.

Is this what you desired ?
Just for this much
You conspired so elaborately ?
A mere finger
Pointed towards you
like a terrifying horror
to be removed ?
See—I am off
like a reflection.

Very few people know
That some wood
Cut into pieces
does not disintegrate
but—starts growing into a tree.
And the same is true
about some people
Who appear to be just a dismembered hand.

See—I am silent now. . .
Tense like gnashing jaws.
Believe me
it is only for you
That I have stuffed my legs with sand.

And I sit here
by the side of the mountain of my faith.
This sand shall continue smouldering
even if I stop writing forever.

Compromise ?
You must know
if this word threatens to become my destiny at all
I shall brave the dirty marshes
upto my knee
with my hand raised like a flag.
See
this hand has slowly started burning now !

MUDRARAKSHASA

Telegu

A Dream Soaked in Blood

This is prison—
The voice muffled
movements confined—
But the hand still scribbles
Nor does the torment of the heart
cease.
Dreams in lonely darkness float toward
lighted shores.

Leisure. . . !
Sinister as high walls
and solid gates
of the Nizam era.
Leisure that breeds lethargy.

And Prison. . .
that stops my tongue.
The light of the moon is barred
but who can bar the brilliance of the Sun ?

The innocent here suffers silently
for crimes
committed under the exploiting system
Famished and miserable
Policemen prisoners of uniform
Compelled to guard jails
to protect the ruling classes.

Prison walls tremble
rusted bars fall
The ants on a long march
devour the slough of the snake.

Outside

the working man's hammer blow
echoes. . .
In face of this hard truth
the mercenary bends in shame
Bodies in uniform
Souls crave freedom

Let strong winds blow
and set ablaze
concealed sparks
Let the sleeping Sun of Red Revolution
rise.

If. . .men turn from crime for self
to that for society
If. . .for the cause of the working class
Men load guns
Before my eyes then
the road to armed revolution
will lead us to our destiny.

In the shadow of my eyes
a dream
Soaked in the blood of me heart

P. VARAVARA RAO
(*Composed in Jail*)

Punjabi

Occupation

Once

I used to be so busy
in big and small thiags

But

how uselessly I sit now

I

Contemplate my hand
Or watch flowers moulded on the earthen pitcher
Or stare at sparrows and crows
and pigeons.

What meaningless occupation is this ?

AMARJEET CHANDAN
(*Camposed in Amritsar Jail*)

A Meeting

Very very silently
evading the guards
Abdul Syed from the other side
Aged eighteen
with a wisp of hair on his lips—
was caught—on this side
and brought to jail.
I, who belong here
have heard my mother say
that once upon a time
we were there. . .
Now, a part of memory
quite naturally.
I asked :
'Land ? Job ? School ?
opening his shirt, he bared his ribs :
'Only these remain.'
He asked :
'And yours ?'
I showed him the three square feet of the cell
'This is all for the present
and food at government expense.'

After a moment's silence
We clasped hands
and said :
'Comrade'

DEBABRATA BHATTACHARYA.
Composed in Alipur Central Jail

Jungle oh Jungle

jungle oh jungle
I love you—
though nurtured
by the breeze of a garden
I love you
You the flower of tomorrow's sky,

the mother of tomorrow's nation
for
in your lap of thorns
my people found sanctuary
in the shadow of your eyes
they found solace

your trees
your leaves
your breeze
witnessed their death

Their arrows
their guns
their bullets
slipped into you

KEEP THEM
Jungle my jungle

To liberate this country
from poisonous flowers
and plastic vines
I will come to you
one day.

IVA.

Years of Silence

They came
From Russia with love
To the land of Fucik
As one comes home
After a long long wait.

They came
To sweep the shadows of death from the earth
People had nothing to present to them
Only tears, embraces and kisses.

They blossomed for them
Whose eyes' flowers were trampled
They shone for them
Whose eyes' stars were extinguished.

They came again
From 007 with love
To the land of Fucik
Their brains and hearts were buried
In the Wall of Kremlin with state honours.

Now time was not the wheel of a chariot
But the chain of a tank
Which trampled and chewed the path underneath,

Sounds of frightened birds
Burning human-torches
Falling trees asked:

What brought you here ?
Who invited you ?

A laugh echoed
As only the Czechoslovaks could laugh
Then in sorrow
Silence was observed for years to come.

AMARJEET CHANDAN
(Reprinted from '*Peoples Power*')

Red Cycle

All night
a red cycle
Stood against the barbed fence
forlorn and alone
Shrill whistle of the police blew
heavy boots thudded the ground.

In the morning
a child appeared
and played
with the cool dew-wet cycle bell.

Then
with screaming siren
a huge black van
roared to a stop—
The child
forgot his bell
Watching in fascination
the winking blue light on its roof. . .
The black van took away the child.

For the first time
I watched the shadow of window-bars
on the floor
And was
filled with terror.

SARVESHWAR DAYAL SAXENA

Telegu

Smile

I never thought
a smile
Could move the heart
Could release a stream of tears
Could blossom on the face of a fighter. . .

A smile
Sharper than knife
brighter than blood

A SMILE
glowing on the lips of a martyr.

*(From an anthology of
Poems banned by the
A. P. Government)*

Oriya

Procession

This untimely death of humanism in this world ?
And for that
I myself, a silent procession of suppressed wailings,
Am crossing the turnings of this universe.

I carry the coffin of humanism on my shoulders
Crossing the serpentine path of the sky,
Its countryside of stars and the vales of the moon.

I proceed on.
Challenging the "Khalifa" of the city of the sun.
In my eyes, in every root of my hair, and in every part of
my body,
Burns the funeral fire of dissatisfaction—
And towards the cemetery of the heart of God
I proceed on.

A disaffected procession of silent weepings,
I pass on path after path, planet after planet, stage after
stage,
My eyes are flooded with lavaic tears
My heart troubled with the high tide of swelling sobs.
My hands are clenched,
And my voice throbs with the poisonous anguish of silent
slogans,
Over my forehead furls the crimson flag of Irrepressible
revolt.
If humanism has to die,
Who is that brutish creator of this creation ?
(He should also die !)

RABINDRANATH SINGH

English

Kilvenmani

Some lives are not taken too seriously.
Helicopter borne ministers with many appointments
and pure ghee souls,
descend like khadi angels
doling out regrets, ten kilos rice

peddling ahimsa to wild eyed widows
then close the file.

This time they brought out the guns
brought back the bodies
meat and bone stacked high
on green revolution tractors—
those the 'Express' were the lucky ones
the others they burnt alive.

The bitter music of our centuries flows on
bayonet bullet lathi or flame
the flesh is crushed
the raga is unchanging
you bend to their reason
live in bitterness
live unprotesting
listen to the pimps of passivity
soaking eyes of want in pious whimperings of ahimsa
who like latter day Vishnus
unfold their apparatus of salvation
promises slogans prayers
all strewn with whorehouse random
who drum patriotic fantasies
on the distended bellies
of grey haired children
and ring temple bells to ask for votes
(they've promised *Kali* a cabinet post)
and so the maya-machine
of the two thousand year
great golden heritage oozes on.
But those of whom we speak
now begin to ask—

“Can this raga be sung no more
by which all things are made bitter?”
young minstrels, it is said,
have risen in this land
who with shattered tongues
whisper this prophecy—

that there is no end to such
despair
save the bloody undoing
of its roots.

This time they brought out the guns
but those they slay and slay again
will bloom many million times
from the flesh of our sisters.

Guns cannot move the moon
of those who know what
wood they are made of—
ask any Vietnamese.

NAVROZ MODY

Telegu

Khedda

Let them guard vultures
but why fly parrots in the open ?
Let them make nuclear arms
but why make peace agreements ?
Let them make children beg
but why call that education ?
Let them kill the poor
but why call that democracy ?

T. ASHOK

Hindi

Disturbing Moment

Pounding on the door
and the rattle of chains :
To the Black Maria
enclosed in stone and guns—

This was not a first journey.

But how disturbing
that moment
after midnight.

MRITYUBODH

(Written in Tihar Jail)

Bengali

This Night is Endless

This night is endless
The rice jars are empty
My eyes fill with tears
and my heart is anguished
How will I look after my mother ?

I cannot stay much longer.

I hear the mountains tremble
as the people march upon them
and the mansions of the rich crumble

Do not keep me, then, mother
as I too must go
to make the bright sun rise.

*Composed and Sung
By Political Prisoners
in Midnapur Jail*

Rebirth

To destroy
the heat of thought even in my shadows
the police follow me . . .

When I look
at the sky innocently
they measure my eyes.

To capture
the refrain of my revolutionary song
in my foot prints
they send the dust to the analyst.

They try
to put out the human lights
that feed you and me.

Instead of removing
the filth I hate to see
they try to pluck out my eyes.

When I kiss children
they try to scrape the moisture
on their cheeks with Knives.

My voice is a crime
my thoughts anarchy
because
I do not sing to their tunes
I do not carry them on my shoulders.

To call me
Conspirator
Constitution is their index—

with the folly
common to all religions
they cloak their class-interest
in the sanctity
of all Constitutions.

But
No 'raga'
to **their** religion and rule
will escape my throat

Every drop of my blood
I scatter like seed
to liberate my country.

Prisoner I may be
but not a slave
Though battered and broken
like a wave of the sea
I will be born
again and again.

CHERABANDARAJU
(Hyderabad Jail)

Waiting

Waiting
is an enemy
Do not trust him.

No one knows the bushes
and the hillocks from
behind which he
Spies on us
while we keep our ears glued
to the sound of the shifting leaves.

Waiting
is an enemy
Do not trust him

Like a guerilla, he
hides in the darkness
leaving us exposed, vulnerable
By light, watching
Waiting for the moment
While we keep flasing torchlight
against the depth of darkness.

Waiting
is an enemy
Do not trust him.

He turns us into a stream
and floats through like a fish, unseen
While we strike to clasp him
with the numerous hands of the ripples.

Waiting
is an enemy
Do not trust him

Save yourself from him.
Grasp, what you have to, now—
Do, what you have to, this moment.

SARVESHWAR DAYAL SAXENA