

## **Marxist thought in India- Reflected in contemporary poetry**

**By Ra Sh (Ravi Shanker N)**

Marxist thought, as a doctrine of post-Russian revolution, and the Communist Party as its vanguard, has been in existence in India since the 1920s. When India gained independence in 1947, the Communist Party initially took a stand that called for armed revolution against the State, which was suppressed. Thereafter it chose a pragmatic parliamentary road to power, succeeding in the federal state of Kerala in 1957, the first time any communist party in history had done so through a democratic election. Despite a significant presence in many federal states, the Party split into two in 1964, and then again in 1967. Two factions still follow the parliamentary line while the other adheres to Mao Tse Tung's thinking regarding armed revolution.

Today, the strength of the parliamentary Communist parties is much reduced, being in power only in Kerala. Maoists operate in the forest terrains of Andhra, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Bengal and Bihar.

Marxist/communist ideals also had a profound impact on Indian art and literature. Literature till then had an elite bent of mind and was controlled mostly by upper castes and classes of society. Communist or progressive literature began to make its presence felt from the 1930s. This new literature spoke about the miseries of the suppressed masses and how only a communist revolution could alter their situation. Giving a voice to the poor and needy, the Progressive Writers Association was established in 1936. Though it had only Urdu writers initially, many writers from other languages in India joined. Even Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Prize winner, whose poems are national anthems in India and Bangladesh, was a member. Many other prominent writers in all languages also played a part.

The movement lost its momentum after the splits in the Party. Many were disenchanted and left the movement. In Kerala, under the major ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist), it still persists as the Progressive Arts and Literature Association. Major contributions to literature have also come, in Kerala, Andhra and Bengal especially, through the Naxalite/ Maoist movement. When we look at the contemporary scene, with the rise of subaltern/Dalit literature and feminist literature in the 1980s, the premises and stand points of the Communist movement have been questioned. The Dalits (people placed lower in status than the four-caste system) have been voicing the concern that the Communist Parties are controlled by upper caste men, and therefore Dalit aspirations are not reflected in progressive literature. A similar case has been made regarding women writers (feminists or otherwise), who find that the movement is in the hands of patriarchal men. This situation has thrown up much disillusionment coupled with the general feeling that the Communist parties (and their leaders) have slowly degenerated into apostles of crony capitalism in the globalised world.

The 17 poems presented here should be viewed against the backdrop of this history. Most of the passionate adherents of Communism with creative brilliance are no more, like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Birendra Chattopadhyay, Pash, Saroj Dutta, Subramanyadas etc. Certainly some poets like Vara Rao, an octogenarian Telugu poet now in jail, still hold on to their pro-proletarian anti-State view points and find hope in Communism still. Telugu poets K. Kyub Varma and Naresh Kumar Sufi, belong to this section. Similarly, a young poet Like Moumila Alam, a Bengali writing in English, who was a worker of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) till recently, believes still in the liberation ideal of Marxism.

A septuagenarian poet like K.Satchidanandan, one of the most celebrated poets in India, in a Malayalam poem written in the 1970s, when the Naxalite moment held sway, holds up hopes about Cuba; while the Malayalam poet K.G. Shankara Pillai, of the same age, in a metaphorical poem written in the 70s, holds some hope about the persisting redness of rebellion. But, they would not write with such passion about the real praxis of Marxism/Communism now.

Vinod Vaisakhi, an office bearer of the Progressive Arts and Literature Union, Kerala, talks of revolution but from his point of view that the Naxalite movement of the 70s was a failure. On the other hand, a Tamil poet like Yavanika Sreeram tries to find in Marx a man wronged and betrayed by society eulogising him but not wholly following him. Umar Nizarudeen, an Indian English poet from Kerala, writes about Regis Debray, the French revolutionary philosopher who wrote the book *Revolution in the Revolution?* which acted as a handbook for guerrilla warfare. The poem by Arnab Saha, an Indian English poet, is an excerpt from a longish poem on love titled *Mademoiselle*, which uses certain references to Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin. Rishi Dastidar's poem indicates both despair and hope symbolized in a statue pointing towards a new direction, but whose hand is broken. The rest of the poets display a forthright condemnation of Marxism as represented by the Communist Parties. They display disillusionment with Communism as an ideal for various reasons including the raw treatment meted out to Dalits and Feminists by the Communist Parties and also their succumbing to capitalism. Indian English poets like Aditya Shankar, Basab Mondal (a Dalit), Chandramohan Sathyanathan (a Dalit), Leena Manimekalai ( a feminist), Soni Somarajan and Ra Sh all belong to this new crop of poets.

**Ra Sh (Ravi Shanker)**

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## Poems revolving around Marxist thought/Communism in India

### **1. Lockup**

**Vara Vara Rao**

**Translated by N. Venugopal in consultation with the author**

Was brought like a VIP  
In a flight  
Here in the police lockup  
A quadrangular cell like a cage  
A rag of a mattress  
And a rundown blanket  
A vessel to urinate  
Where do you get  
So much luxury,  
They wondered...  
Day and night I am locked in  
No, they won't give pen and paper  
Nor they supply books or magazines  
There is not even light inside

Restless and sleepless  
Amidst swarming mosquitoes  
And brimming thoughts  
I tread in circles like  
An animal in a cage  
Blanket sleeps on the mattress  
I seem to be walking around  
My own body.

(In Vishrambagh Police Station, August 30, 2018, 1.30 AM)

*Varavara Rao is an octogenarian Indian activist, poet, teacher, and writer from Telangana, India. From early days, he was deeply influenced by Marxist philosophy and his poetry and writings capture his pro-people sentiments and his opposition to neoliberalism. Vara Vara Rao was instrumental in the formation of the Revolutionary Writers' Association, popularly in 1970, which aimed to publish a more divergent and politically outspoken group of writers. Rao has been arrested many times by various Governments for his open stand against the State. He is still in prison.*

*Rao has, to his credit, over 15 collections of revolutionary poetry that have been translated into several Indian languages.*



## **2. Cuba**

### **K. Satchidanandan**

Cuba watches me  
with his commanding beard  
and triumphant eyes:  
the green epic of the red sacrifice.

Cuba sows new seeds  
in this summer of my longings :  
seeds that teach.

This parched earth,  
the roots beneath this earth,  
and as the moisture at the root tips,  
a Cuba of bells and echoes.

Above me the bird of the green,  
the parrot from the epic Ramayana,  
this today, the burning mission,  
the earth of retrieval,  
the daughter of the earth,  
the liberation of the fertile black:  
some Cuba of seeing.

These endless conjunctions of  
history that repeats yet does not repeat,  
this cold circumlocution,  
on the dispassionate staircase

The wet footprint of red dust:  
A Cuba  
of footprints.

*K. Satchidanandan is arguably the most well-known poet of India on the international platform, though he writes basically in Malayalam. His books and poems have been translated to a multitude of languages the world over. He has also translated much of world poetry into Malayalam. His bibliography runs into more than 70 books in Malayalam and English. He was one of the mainstays of the trinity of modern Malayalam poetry along with K.G. Sankara Pillai and Attoor Ravi Varma during the 70s-80s.*



### **3.The Dhoti\***

**KG Sankara Pillai**

**Translated by K. Satchidanandan with the author.**

Colour used to bleed  
along the border of my dhoti.

The dhobi\*\* said:  
Each time I wash it,  
the red bleeds.  
Wonder where all the  
red dye comes from!  
I've seen such ones before.  
Impudent. Disobedient.  
Soon,  
the dhobi got really worked up:  
Hell.  
Let me see if I can stop this bleeding.  
He left saying so.

Next time, he came very late.  
Grim-faced, like a judge about  
to pronounce the sentence.  
Silently, he opened the bundle.  
The dhoti was unusually white,  
handsome like an urban man.

When he unfolded the dhoti,  
it was in rags.  
Each nerve, in a high tide of red  
had turned pale white, taking  
whacks on the beating-stone.

But by then,  
the entire bunch had turned red.  
All the rivers and lakes had turned red.

\*Dhoti is a long white unstitched piece of cloth wound around the waist like a Sarong.

\*\* Washerman.

*K. G. Sankara Pillai is a well-known poet from Kerala, India, writing in Malayalam. Along with K. Satchidanandan and Atoor Ravi Varma, he was one of the prominent members of a trinity of*



*modern Malayalam poets. His poems have recently been collected, translated and published in English as 'Tiny Judges have arrived' by Dhauli Books, Bhuvaneshwar.*

#### **4. Remembrance of a man** **Yavanika Sriram**

**Co-translated by Kayal.S with the author**

Marx,  
Calling you 'The Father'  
is devastating and agonizing.  
You are the black plum of the spring.  
The nutritious protein of the summer.  
The days of misbelief  
and days in which you were blacked out  
regret now while trying to justify you  
or betray you.

They are still searching for the footsteps  
of the snow man in the polar slopes.

A well-developed city or  
an anguished hamlet's pond  
remember you while the  
autumn rains fall on them.  
It is comparable to  
not only a simpleton's love  
but also to the distress of a lunatic trying to roll  
a huge rock up a mountain slope.

Severing God's surplus value  
from all things around,  
Marx, please create an untimely season  
for the Bengal gram vines to show  
the brilliance of their green crop  
even in the turbulence caused by  
pain and suffering and to segregate  
the rotten fruits from the good.

Referring to you as 'The Father' is dreadful.  
You have the prodigious ability  
to confront God face to face.  
You shouted with such precious tears  
over all things gone wrong,  
like the croaks of a frog during rainy season,  
about the resurrection of the human race.

You, who predicted that  
all super structures will have to  
come down to the square in future,  
what a magnificent wayfarer you are!

*1962 born Yavanika Sriram is a very well-known poet, short story writer, critic and essayist in Tamil, one of the languages of India. He has at least five books to his credit including a collection of poems titled Poems of Yavanika Sriram, Thalaimaravukaalam, Kadavulin Niruvanam, Veedattravaarkalinulagam etc. He has also written scripts for Tamil films like Madathi.*



## 5. RégisDebray<sup>1</sup> UmarNizarudeen

RégisDebray! We who are about to die  
salute thee, in the face of  
torture, death, impalement, castration.  
The phallus exists not.

Soft spoken Theory of the Interim  
never have we had it this good.  
The nakedness of power and flesh.  
Four majesties guard the doors of Mammon  
Marx, Freud, Mao, Stalin  
*Dwarapalakas*<sup>2</sup>  
Derrida, Foucault, Godard, Trotsky  
*Ashtadikpalakas*<sup>3</sup>

Hissing at the feudal past, ascends  
the humming future on its wings.  
Discarded index of  
a lost totality.

Don't cancel yet,  
the Military Police mornings  
bayoneted musk  
from testicles.

Pores open in the wild  
to sounds of death.  
You stiffen in pages  
splashed with liquors.  
The song dies, yet never lies.

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The infinite coition of revolutions  
blink back into darkness  
in the dense underground.  
We chase your words  
keep them alive.

The flayed stink of maroon flesh  
ripe for feasting

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<sup>1</sup>RégisDebray is a French revolutionary Marxist and philosopher

<sup>2</sup>Dwarapalakas are statues of divine doorkeepers in temples of India

<sup>3</sup>Ashtadikpalakas are guardians of the eight directions in a Hindu temple

Eucharist  
dangle the skin in your face,  
it's vellum, you see.  
Sunburnt slate  
with nervous ticks of neurons  
that argue for Mao, but are  
wary about Stalin.

Urethral insertions, of palm frond stems,  
too painful a nightmare  
yet clasping Debray, we  
rock ourselves to sleep

Debray in the darkness.  
Debray in the noon.  
Debray at night.  
Debray arrives to inquire.  
He brings eggs, milk, packets of rice,  
Mobile phones, cigarettes, batteries.

Now massage chairs  
lull our frazzled nerves.  
Mermaids sing us to sleep.  
Gurus bring healing.  
Moms cook us rice.  
Mouths prised open  
Acid or water.

Darkness corrupts.  
We read Debray  
in this world and the next.  
Past lives flash past.  
Marching sounds come nearer.

Tortured on a rope,  
beaten black and blue.  
The photos in the newspaper,  
Dharma of capitalism.  
Yet we keep on reading  
Regis Debray in the night.

*Umar Nizarudeen is with the University of Calicut, India. He has a PhD in Bhakti Studies from the Centre for English Studies in JNU, New Delhi. His poems and articles have been published in Vayavya, Muse India, Culture Cafe Journal of the British Library, The Bombay Review, The*

*Madras Courier, FemAsia, Sabrang India, India Gazette London, Ibex Press Year's Best Selection, and also broadcast by the All India Radio.*

## 6. The comrade I wish

Arnab Saha

Co-translated by author with Baridbaran

Not as a lover, be the comrade I wish.  
Woven in every leaf of grass on the *maidan*\*  
is crimson poetry.  
The diffused magic of your eyes  
foghorns my voyage into tempest,  
into the inscribed statue of Lenin.

A touch of your fingers,  
takes me to the Spartacus League,  
into Rosa Luxemburg's November.  
Not Zapatista; we are Tupac Amaru.  
In the depth of a taxi  
you're darkness donned Clara Zetkin.  
Keep your hand on the emptied soul,  
let the debts rise.

No more dithering, Commandant!  
The boat will sail in the night's last hour.  
Another salvo resounds from a cruiser called Aurora!.

\*Playground, a ground used for meetings.

*Arnab Saha is a prominent Bengali poet of the '90s. He has largely been published in all major Bengali periodicals and newspapers. He has released seven collections of poems. Arnab availed Baden-Wuerttemberg Senior Research Fellowship from Heidelberg University, Germany in 2019.*



## **7. Winding The Great Helmsman's watch**

**Rishi Dastidar**

History stopped at 19:14  
and we've been planning  
for change ever since.

Our left arm has broken  
from pointing, priming  
our direction of travel.

Long have we marched  
to achieve our aim  
of restarting the future.

As Helmsman my time is on pause,  
but our revolution can never be.  
Repaired, we will raise our hands.

*Rishi Dastidar's poetry has been published by the Financial Times and BBC amongst many others. A poem from his debut collection Ticker-tape was included in The Forward Book of Poetry 2018. A pamphlet, the break of a wave, was published by Offord Road Books in 2019, and he is also editor of The Craft: A Guide to Making Poetry Happen in the 21st Century (Nine Arches Press). His second collection, Saffron Jack, is published in the UK by Nine Arches Press.*

## 8. Influence of Industrial Investment on Homesickness and Nostalgia

Aditya Shankar

Communists of the new world, unite  
Beneath the barbed wires  
That guard the capitalist borders!  
At the deportation centres of metropolises,  
In the withheld list of job applicants, unite!  
Unite beneath flashy logos, neon bulbs  
And imperial superhero accessories.  
Snug under a newfound flag and in  
A suburban basement, unite as migrants!  
Bond with the unfriendly syllables  
In a strange language:  
You have nothing to lose but your ID cards!  
Rootless yet growing,  
Unite in the footage of documentaries  
About the world population in flux,  
About ever-growing favelas\*,  
About Mushrooming drug mafia  
And asylum-seeking poets  
(Their poetic capital akin to  
Blood money parked in tax-free havens).  
Learn to waste water in the shower  
And to speak about the big moments  
(Telecom/Coal/Ecology/Bitcoin).  
Away from the punishing optimism of hope  
That plagues the third world,  
Communists of the new world, unite  
In the soothing darkness of home theatres  
To watch\*\* *The Young Karl Marx*,  
*Motorcycle Diaries*, *Lives of Others*...  
And channel an anger  
For the illusion of voice, long-lost.

\* - Slums

\*\* - Movies relating to Communism.

*Aditya Shankar is an Indian poet, flash fiction author, and translator. His poems, fiction, and translations have appeared in many national and international magazines and anthologies. Books: After Seeing (2006), Party Poopers (2014), and XXL (Dhauri Books, 2018)*

**9. The young comrade**  
**By Basab Mondal**

The slimy walls  
of the century old house  
has a bicycle leaning  
on its contours .  
The rusty iron gate,  
colorless  
has green creepers  
rising merrily upwards .

An unusual crowd  
at the gate  
looks curiously  
at a young boy lying  
on the threshold ,  
decorated with bullets.

A dead Communist  
who fought yet lost  
the battle  
for Equality.

*Basab Mondal, is a teacher by profession. He is from Kolkata. He is a bilingual poet and columnist who writes in English as well as Bengali. His poems, stories and translations have appeared in several anthologies and literary magazines. He writes to gratify his own inner self and the world around him serves as the cue.*

## **10. Special Branch Report on a revolutionary Marxist comrade**

**By ChandramohanSathyanathan**

He speaks English with one of his close friends who claims to be a poet but sets aside the imperial tongue in the presence of other comrades. He could be drawn to the bourgeoisie temptations of the imperial language- this can be his undoing.

During interrogations, we can provoke him with phrases in English because he fumbles for words. This maybe his Achilles heel.

He has collected works of Marx, Lenin and Mao which he uses like a dumbbell to build biceps though his cousin owns a gym. The icing on the cake is that if he chances upon a drop of water at the bottom of a well, he is euphoric as if he discovered an ocean. He wishes to name this ocean after him.

He often proclaims---“after Mao, it’s me”.

He secretly claims to be working towards a lexicon(s) that effectively translates Marxian pr-axis into verbs. He once caused a ruckus at a bookstore when he stumbled upon Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* in English without the name of the translator. He said it is not fair to put words into the mouth of an alleged fascist.

*Chandramohan Sathyanathan alias Chandramohan S. (b.1986) is an Indian English language Dalit poet based in Trivandrum, Kerala. He has been published in many magazines and anthologies and he has published two books of poetry in India: Warscape Verses published in the year 2014, and Letters to Namdeo Dhasal (Desirepaths Publishers, 2016). He won a fellowship at the International Writing Program (IWP-2018) at the University of Iowa. His poetry collection Love after Babel and Other Poems (Daraja Press), published in March 2020 in Canada, won the 2021 Nicolás Cristóbal Guillén Batista Outstanding Book Award.*

## 11. Me/Him

Leena Manimekalai

Translated by Ra Sh with the author

At the peak of coitus  
with the squirting goo  
he inscribed my insides  
with the word  
'Comrades!'

Then, with a shake of his body,  
he disentangled himself  
and blabbered  
that Marx gave the call  
'Workers of the World, Unite!'

I yanked his head  
betwixt my thighs.  
he parted my pubic bush  
calling it the surplus value,  
swore at my navel for its relations of production.

He offered my vulva with  
Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Ho chi Min,  
in that order.

Kneaded my breasts and exclaimed 'Che', 'Fidel.'  
like an infant with a baffled mind  
sucked at my nipples, murmuring  
'Perestroika', 'Glasnost.'

Some time, with fire in his loins, roared 'Revolution.'  
and with quickening breaths, gasped 'Socialism.'  
gave me his thing to blow.

The Berlin Wall crumbled.  
The Soviet collapsed.  
'Stand Erect', he commanded.  
Yelled 'America' and rolled on a condom.

Wrestled him down  
and asked him to lick the salt.  
he mumbled 'Coca Cola.'  
hugged him till he swooned.

Into his mouth,  
now drained of words,  
I offered my pubic hair  
strand by strand.  
and beamed,  
'This is Deconstruction.'

*Leena Manimekalai is a poet, activist and film maker from Tamil Nadu, India. Her collections of poetry include 'As a lonely leaf', 'The most beautiful woman in the world', 'Queen of sluts', 'Antharakanni' and 'Kingfisher'. She is also a prominent filmmaker having directed many documentaries like Mathamma, White Van Stories, Goddesses, My Mirror is my Door, Is it too much to ask etc. She has also directed two feature films titled 'Sengadal' (The Dead Sea) and 'Maadathi', an unfairy tale. Both films have won many awards in International film festivals the world over.*

## 12. The Day Communism Died

Soni Somarajan

*Manjadithara\**, 1979

Let words distance themselves  
like my widowed grandmother:  
wear the simplest of cotton, eat the thinnest air,  
and depend on money orders.  
The family, and anyone who counted,  
discussed the ayes and nays of a cremation,  
as grandfather's body lay, beside a flickering  
lamp — never lit while he was alive.  
Filled to its seams, the room  
holds its breath, unable to mourn the one  
who built it, the periods of hush broken often  
by a sudden wail, sometimes a staccato.  
In death, this free-for-all manifests

a betrayal of the departed, the comrade's faith,  
preserved carefully once, now undone,  
the public washes away the private,  
rendering everything pointless.

\*Place where the poet's maternal grandfather lived.

*47 year old Soni Somarajan is an Indian poet whose poems and stories have been published in various English publications. He was affected with progressive neuromuscular disorder at the age of 17 confining his life to the wheelchair. Despite physical obstacles, he took part in a poetry seminar of Iowa University in USA in 2013. In 2021, he published his reminiscences in a collection of 64 poems titled First Contact, instantly pushing him to the centre of the Indian English publication arena.*



### **13. The ex-Communists or exorcised communists, a farce.**

**Ra Sh**

As the great graveyard of martyrs was being auctioned there were very few takers, except a global guy. He was hailed as a messiah opening new vistas of jobs and opportunities adding to the labour class numbers.

This is class war, extolled the local leader, who had just been cured of a bout of whooping cough. More speakers arrived explaining why the graveyard was just a piece of property on which a Mall could be built. 35000 sq feet, hundreds of employees, the entire township could be absorbed as labour class.

In the night, a few martyrs came out of their graves and sat on the few tombstones around. "Where do we go when the mall is built? Where do we hang around in revolutionary spirit?" A hotblooded young spirit said, "comrades, this is our graveyard. a paradise on earth for the martyrs of the cause. We should resist in true revolutionary fashion as we resisted the landlords."

But, the earth movers came and dug up all the graves and deposited the bones and skulls in a corner. Some martyr spirits took to flight, some stayed put, waiting for the building work to start in right earnest and vigour.

In the sprawling mall, customers sometimes heard suppressed groans and exasperated cries from locked rooms. And faint sounds of marching boots and firearms spitting fire. A sudden staccato of machine gun fire sometimes screamed across the mall, sending customers and staff scampering.

An ex-communist exorcist was pressed into service. All his attempts to shoo away the martyr spirits failed. Finally, a greenhorn marketing executive got a flash of wisdom. "Let's rename the Mall as The Commune, comrades."

The ploy worked. The martyr spirits were appeased. The young guy won a 10% discount coupon on all goods sold. The martyrs slumbered in air conditioned comfort.

*Ra Sh (Ravi Shanker N, poet-translator,) has published English-language poems in many national and international online and print magazines. His poems have been translated into German, French and Italian. He has published four collections of poetry – (1) 'Architecture of Flesh' (two editions) by Poetrywala, Mumbai; (2) 'The Bullet Train and other loaded poems' by HawakalProkashan, Kolkota; (3) 'Kintsugi by Hadni' by RLFP A Editions, Kolkota and (4) 'In the mirror, our graves', a chapbook of 20 poems written with Ritamvara Bhattacharya. His play 'Blind men write' is to be published shortly.*

**14. Beyond the War –  
KKK (K(cube) Verma  
(Translated from Telugu by Rohith)**

The ant's sudden bite  
at the stalk of a mango-leaf  
resounds.

The tick-tick-sound of a mynah  
settling upon the leaf of a teak-plant  
reaches the ear.

Abruptly, the trudging noises of shoes  
blows in the wind,  
A hail-storm of bullets  
amidst the ups and downs of a landscape.

The war that began thus  
reaches climax  
with the bloody balls of flesh  
flung aside  
amidst cries and screams  
in the jungle.

They are the lives  
that stood in defence of  
the natural resources in  
mother-earth's womb.

Some other bodies  
were those of starving officers  
salaried for guarding  
the desires of corporate-fascist thieves.

Between hearts that burnt  
against one another,  
Each drop of blood shed  
Is a tear-stained motherhood.

Only if a bullet had eyes-  
It would know the direction it was fired  
Only If a bullet had mouth-

It would have given its testimony.

*KKK Varma (K(cube) Varma) has been a member of the Revolutionary Writers Forum of Andhra Pradesh since 1997. The Marxist books in his father's library had tremendous influence on him. He has published three books of poems till now. His fourth book 'Bhoomi Rangu' (The colour of earth) is forthcoming.*

## 15. The Evening

Naresh Kumar Sufi

(Translated from Telugu by Rohith)

After many days, that evening  
we spoke about a lot of things  
about the war, the prison,  
about the confused sentries guarding our jails,  
and the lawyers in their black coats running around.

We spoke about the accused who never committed a crime  
filling the cells of prison.  
The cow and the chai-waala beside us  
didn't care about our existence under the tree  
leaving us to ourselves to talk...

All the things I thought I would speak all those days  
didn't occur to me at that moment; So  
we continued speaking about the iron chains, about the  
the jail-officer who wrote notices to meet inmates,  
about the political prisoners who composed  
poems in that freezing cold;  
But yes, we spoke throughout that evening.

And we also spoke about 'state violence' —  
like many in this country who speak about it  
helplessly, everywhere except wherever necessary,  
clandestinely — with dismayed faces  
and lowered tones.

And when she had to leave,  
looking at the police who held her chains  
she screamed 'Inquilab Zindabad'  
that the entire court premise shuddered.

I kept watching her as she was escorted to jail-  
As the cow remained there chewing the cud  
staring at the court entrance.

*Naresh Kumar Sufi is a young Telugu poet and short-story writer from Mangalipalle of Peddapalli District, Telangana state. He has worked as a mechanic, film reviewer, and journalist in the past. He is a known name in Telugu literary circles for his political activism and poetry. His book of poems is called 'Nishabdha' (Quietude).*

## **16. Beedi\***

**(Translated by Ra Sh)**

(Sugatharaj, who was active in the Naxalite movement, was from my place. He was in shackles for a long time....till his death. This is for Sugathan who relished every puff from his beedi.)

Stuck between the fingers  
seeking fissured lips  
the rolled pipe of ponderings.

Fuel, for the ones  
dry as coarse tobacco.  
Oxygen, for the ones  
greyed by cogitation.

Flute, for the poet  
striking the flint of remembrance  
against the cinder of rain  
in the night.

Pipe of camaraderie  
for drawing close  
even strangers  
face to face.

Tube, setting dreams in motion  
binding the displaced rails  
battered under the slithering life  
that runs on the fuel efficiency  
of tobacco fillings.

We have known the bitterness  
of the whirling dark smoke  
that drills into the heart walls.

Yet we stick together  
to see the rhythm does not flounder  
along the broken line of the pulse.

Knowing that the insane lips  
are there forever  
to suck on till the last  
the butt that burns on and off  
like a signalling light,

we move afar  
leaving the dark tracks behind,  
still smouldering.

\*Beedi – A crude roll of tobacco

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*He has got many awards for his poetry collections.*

**17. The lampposts**  
**Moumita Alam**

By the roadside in rain they are  
watching silently  
the fall of the gods  
the perfectly sanitised hands  
trickling blood.

They are chroniclers of untold stories  
of the young men  
waiting for the final day  
when the tormentors  
will be hung with ropes from the lampposts.

The crows will dine on  
the skins of the rulers.

They are longing for the day of judgement  
yearning to close their eyes in peace  
when the eyes of justice will give birth to justice  
for the oppressed.

The lone watchers  
are standing tall.  
They are history books  
in the country of dead eyes.

*Moumita Alam is a bilingual (Bengali and English) poet, teacher and contributory writer for the mag People's Review. Her poems have been published in The Bibliophilia Café, Freedom Review, Countercurrents, Littérature mag etc. She writes non-conformist poems that are vocal about the plight of the oppressed classes. Her solo collection in English 'The Musings of the Dark' was published in 2020.*



