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**ANAMIKA**

Anamika teaches literature in English at the University of Delhi. Her doctoral thesis is on the reception of John Donne across the ages. Besides eight volumes of criticism, she has published seven novels in Hindi. Three of her novels, *Dus Dware ka Peenjara*, *Aienasaz*, and *Trin Dhari Oat*, have won national awards. In 2020, she received the Sahitya Akademi Award for her poetry collection *Tokri Mein Digant*. Poems from her other poetry collections, *Anushtup*, *Khurduri Hatheliyan*, *Doob-Dhan*, *Pani Ko Sab Yaad Tha*, and *Band Raston Ka Safar*, are on the syllabi at different universities. She is an avid translator herself and also the founding-editor of a bilingual literary journal called *Pashyantee*. Her essays on womanist discourse in Hindi have been translated into many languages, and she has translated the works of Rilke, Neruda, Doris Lessing, Octavio Paz, and contemporary women poets extensively.

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## एक बिजूके की प्रेम कहानी

मैं हूँ बिजूका एक ऐसे खेत का
जिसमें सालों से कुछ नहीं उगा ।
बेकार पड़ा-पड़ा
धसक गया है मेरा
हाड़ी-सा गोल-गोल माथा ।
उखड़ गई हैं मूँछे ।
लचक गए हैं कंधे ।
एक तरफ़ झूल गया है कुरता ।
कुरते की जेबी में
चुटुर-पुटुर करती हैं लेकिन
नीले-पीले पंखों वाली
छोटी-सी चिड़िया ।
एक वक्त था जब
मुझसे बहुत डरती थी,
धीरे-धीरे उसका डर निकल गया ।
कल मेरी जेबी में अंडे दिए उसने ।
मेरे भरोसे ही उन्हें छोड़कर
जाती है वह बहुत दूर दाना लाने ।
नया-नया मेरी खातिर
भरोसे का कोमल एहसास ।
काठ के कलेजे में मेरे
बजने लगा है इकतारा ।
दूर तलक है उजाड़ मगर
यह जो चटकने-चमकने लगी है
बूटी भरसे की,
उसकी ही मूक प्रार्थना फूली है शायद
जो बदलियाँ उमड़ गई हैं अचानक ।
खिल जाएगा धीरे-धीरे

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यह पूरा संसार,
बस जाएगा क्या
धीरे-धीरे
फिर से यह उजड़ा दयार?
लेकिन जब खेत हरे हो जाएँगे
ढह जाएगी क्या यह मेरी निरीहता ?
आयेंगे वे और कर देंगे मुझको फिटफाट-
सूट-बूट और कड़क मूँछें, चटक लाल आँखें?
ओ बाबा,
क्या मैं भयावह हो जाऊँगा फिर से-
डर जाएगी मेरी डालीकी चिड़िया मुझी से?
क्या बेबसी प्यार का घर है?
प्यार हमदर्दनगर है ।

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## अनब्याही औरतें

"माई री मैं कासे कहूँ पीर अपने जिया की, माई री !"
जब भी सुनती हूँ मैं गीत, आपका मीरा बाई,
सोच में पड़ जाती हूँ, वो क्या था
जो माँ से भी आपको कहते नहीं बनता था,

हालांकि संबोधन गीतों का
अक्सर वह होती थीं !
वर्किंग विमेन्स हॉस्टल में पिछवाड़े का ढाबा !
दस बरस का छोटू प्यालियाँ धोता-चमकाता
क्या सोचकर अपने उस खटारा टेप पर
बार-बार ये ही वाला गीत आपका बजाता है !

लक्षण तो हैं उसमें
क्या वह भी मनमोहन पुरुष बनेगा,
किसी नन्ही-सी मीरा का मनचीता,
अड़ियल नहीं, ज़रा मीठा !

वर्किंग विमेन्स हॉस्टल की हम सब औरतें
ढूँढती ही रह गईं कोई ऐसा
जिन्हें देख मन में जगे प्रेम का हौसला !
लोग मिले-पर कैसे-कैसे -
ज्ञानी नहीं, पंडिताऊ,
वफ़ादार नहीं, दुमहिलाऊ,
साहसी नहीं, केवल झगड़ालू,
दृढ़प्रतिज्ञ कहाँ, सिर्फ जिद्दी,
प्रभावी नहीं, सिर्फ हावी,
दोस्त नहीं, मालिक,
सामजिक नहीं, सिर्फ एकांतभीरु

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धार्मिक नहीं, केवल कट्टर

कटकटाकर हरदम पड़ते रहे वे
अपने प्रतिपक्षियों पर-
प्रतिपक्षी जो आखिर पक्षी ही थे,
उनसे ही थे,
उनके नुचे हुए पंख
और चोंच घायल !
ऐसों से क्या खाकर हम करते हैं प्यार !
सो अपनी वरमाला
अपनी ही चोटी में गूंथी
और कहा खुद से -
"एकोहऽम बहुस्याम"
वो देखो वो -

प्याले धोता नन्हा घनश्याम !
आत्मा की कोख भी एक होती है, है न !
तो धारण करते हैं
इस नयी सृष्टि की हम कल्पना

जहाँ ज्ञान संज्ञान भी हुआ करे,
साहस सद्भावना !

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## MANI RAO

Mani Rao is the author of sixteen books in poetry, translation, and non-fiction, including *So That You Know* (HarperCollins 2025) and *Kalidasa - Selected Poetry and Drama* (HarperCollins 2025). She held writing residencies at IWP Iowa, Omi Ledig House NY, and International Poetry Studies Institute Canberra (IPSI), served on juries including the Windham Campbell Prize for poetry, and participated in such festivals as Jaipur Literature Festival and New York PEN World Voices. Mani has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a PhD in Religious Studies from Duke University, USA. Her research on mantras in the book *Living Mantra: Mantra, Deity and Visionary Experience Today* is part of the Anthropology of Religion Series, Palgrave Macmillan (2019). She is the Managing Editor, Translated Poetry, for The Bombay Literary Magazine.

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**A SCARECROW'S LOVE STORY**

I'm the scarecrow of a field
where nothing has grown for years.
Laying idle, my rotund head is bone worn.
Moustache uprooted, shoulders stiff, my
tunic flaps about.

In my pocket, a little blue-yellow winged bird
that was once scared of me, chirrups.
Little by little, she lost her fear.
She laid eggs in my pocket the other day.
She leaves them in my care
and goes far to look for food.
There's a new, tender feeling of trust.
A string instrument now plays
in my wooden heart.

As far as the eye can see, it is barren,
but all of a sudden the clouds
have begun to rumble.
Perhaps due to the dumb prayer
of this little shoot, sprouting, gleaming.

Oh, the entire world will revive, blossom!
Will this abandoned land be inhabited again?
When the fields are green
will my hopelessness be erased?
Will they come and deck me up?
Suited, booted, given a stiff moustache,
eyes gleaming red, will I be
formidable again?

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Will the birds on my branches fear me?
Is hopelessness the proper home of love?
Where there's empathy, there's love.

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**SINGLE WOMEN**

*"O' mother, to whom shall I speak of my heart's distress."*

Whenever I listen to your songs, dear Meera,
I'm lost in thought.
What was that you would keep trying
to tell your mother?

But love songs are usually like that.
At a roadside eatery behind the working women's hostel,
a ten-year old boy washing dishes played this same song
again and again on a clanky cassette player.

He sure had the look.
Will he be the heart-throb of some little Meera?
Not sullen, but sweet?

Our quest went on.
O' to find someone
to stir our hearts and realize love.
Instead, we met all sorts.
Not wise, just erudite.
Not the faithful type, a swinger.
Not brave, quarrelsome.
Not determined, stubborn.
Not charismatic, just bossy.
Not friend, master.
Not sociable, lone mouse.
Not ethical, just pious.

Pouncing upon their prey.

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Well, after all, the opponents
were game. Their game.
Wings clipped, beaks bruised.
How ravenous, to need
lovers like this!

So we wore the garlands meant for them
in our own plaits and told ourselves—
“I am one, I am multitudes.”
“See, if we need to love someone,
we have him, little Krishna,
washing pots and pans.

See, even the mind is fertile
like a womb.
We created a brave, new world
with our imagination
where knowledge became wisdom
and bravado, goodwill.