

MIR

By Dr Debjani Chatterjee

He was born of a second wife, the second son,
but the sweetness of his verse was second to none.

'Hold love true,' his dervish father said, 'Love is all.'
Poor though he was, his riches were second to none.

Heart-broken, he saw love's cruel face in the moon.
In young romance, his madness smiled second to none.

His love was bountiful beauty, pure poetry,
one divinity; his love was second to none.

Hindus and Muslims honoured their poet of love.
Love was his nature, his greatness second to none.

Agra-born, Delhi-made, Lucknow cradles his bones.
All share and own the one who was second to none.

Foremost of poets, Mir was first among lovers.
Love was his language, his words sing second to none.

Note:

Mohammad Taqi Mir (1723-1810) was born in Agra, the city of that great monument to love - the TajMahal. His autobiography, *Zikr-e-Mir*, states that he was educated by his dervish father who advised him to make love his goal in life. His father died when Mir was eleven, so

he went to Delhi to make his living as a tutor, while at the same time completing his own education. He fell in love with a married woman in his own family, and because of this and his half-brother's hostility, his relatives turned against him. He became insane and hallucinated that he saw a face in the moon which haunted him. After a period of very sadistic treatment, Mir recovered and started writing. He quickly became very popular and was patronised by both Hindu and Muslim nobility. Mir was saddened to see that Delhi, the seat of the Mughal empire and a city that he greatly loved, was going through very troubled and violent times. After the treaty of 1765 with the East India Company, the Mughal emperor was only a puppet king. So Mir eventually left Delhi to settle in Lucknow where he died. One of the great Romantic poets in world literature, Mir was a profound influence on the Urdu poets who followed.

SHADES OF ...

The black and white kitten purred her pleasure
as I made the mistake of stroking her.

When I said 'Go away!' it was too late.

She understood only my 'Come here' voice
and made the mistake of following me home.

She looked up oddly at my firm shut door.

Forgive me, Lord, for teaching that fluff-ball
that sometimes our black and white world turns grey.



Hokusai's *The Great Wave*, c 1831

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KANAGAWA TANKA

(INSPIRED BY KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI'S 'THE GREAT WAVE OFF KANAGAWA')

Tsunami rises
off Kanagawa; hail stones
crash on beach and boat.
Snow-flecked waves claw fishing rafts.
Fujiyama meditates.

MY VILLAGE

Here, in my village, busy beneath a red sky,
life meanders on as always
with its everyday chores of to-ing and fro-ing,
pulsing to the warm village heart
under the broad-leafed banyan tree.

We maids balance heavy clay pots on heads and hips;
multi-hued muslin sarees swish.
Daily we come to draw the well's clean cool water
and gaily we stop and chatter.
Portuguese pirates fled this land, they say. Hurray!
But who now will haunt lullabies
that frighten children in the dark?

Choudhry Sahib's collector twirls his spruce moustache
and eyes the beauties swaying past.
A proud blade decorates the embracing silk sash
that squeezes his corpulent girth,
his spear makes the point of revenues we must pay:
dark stains spoil even the best dal
and clouds creep towards nirvana.

Fazlul the fisherman returns from town with tales
of uniformed sepoy's drilling
with muskets ready, marching beneath a red sky.
His next trip will bring back a bride
with coral henna patterned hands and kohl-rimmed eyes.
They don't worship our great goddess,
but we'll share our water with them.

The Sufi preacher passing through our village tells
strange adventures from sand-whipped lands,
of sultans and slaves, of robbers and saints and djinns.

We vie with each other to draw
water for him and feed him for our karma's sake.

His sonorous voice blesses us.

Life meanders on as always.

Old Grandma comes each morn with the motherless child.

(Was Grandma ever young like us?)

She bathes his chubby limbs with sun-warm mustard oil
and dips him wriggling in the pond.

He is the sun, moon and stars dancing in her eyes.

He feeds the courting swans puffed rice.

Drying him, she basks in prayer.

This is my life, my village, my people, my world.

Feringees pass through - life goes on.

They warn that cannons boom in distant Kolkata.

But temple bells call me away
from the well beneath a red sky.

Note

Feringees: Foreigners

['My Village' was commissioned by Sheffield Museums in 2012 to accompany the Precious Cargoes exhibition in Weston Park Museum, and is published in DebjaniChatterjee's latest collection, *Do You Hear the Storm Sing?* (Core Publications, London), 2014.]



DebjaniChatterjee's 'My Village' was inspired by this painting by an unknown artist in Sheffield's Weston Park Museum.

SALAAM, MY POET-FRIENDS!

(For Basir & Hassan Kazmi)

Salaam, my poet-friends!

I am the dust dancing in the evening haze
around Nasir Kazmi's grave.

I rise to greet you - but I am not his dust.

I am yours and yours and yours.

I am the dust of Lahore's first founder,
Lav, who ruled here in a gilded age,
the sweet dust of Shakar Gunj,
who made this place his own,
I am yours and yours and yours.

I am the noble dust of Dayanand,
who preached here like a tornado,
the gentle dust of Nanakdev,
Talwandi's towering saint,
I am yours and yours and yours.

I am the loving dust of Shah Hussain,
the whirling dust of Madho Lal,
the fragrant dust of Bibi Pak Daman,
the sacred dust of so many saints.
I am yours and yours and yours.

Salaam, my poet-friends!
Who better than I to welcome you?
for I am the eternal dust of your ancestors.
I am the dust that blesses your hair
and kisses your yearning eyes.

I observe you three, shuffling at this grave:
NasirKazmi's two poet-sons
and his poet-translator from lands near and far,
a neighbour, a friend and seeker.
All lying here are dead but I rise to enfold you.

I am the moving dust of Inayat and Bulleh Shah,
the proud dust in the one-eyed Maharaja's wake.
Though I am mere dust and silence is my name,
I am also the still witness of Time,
the Custodian of centuries of change.

Salaam, my poet-friends!
In patience I have awaited your coming.
This small plot of land contains your dear one
until he rises again at the end of time.
Till then, my poet-friends, I claim your voice.

For I am dust and I blow beyond
all boundaries and I live his dream.
Freely I flow between Lahore and Ambala
Freely I fly through Delhi, Sheffield and Kolkata;
I need no passport for Jerusalem and Ramalla.

I am the dust of every cremation ground

and cemetery from Ganges banks to Mamilla.

I cling to your clothes, I enter your nostrils,

I float in your dreams, I commune with your souls.

I am Memory. Will you speak my words?

Notes

NasirKazmi: A great Urdu poet and playwright (1925-1972) from both India and Pakistan.

Lav: One of Rama's twin sons and the founder of Lahore.

ShakarGunj: Literally 'Treasure of Sugar', a title of the 11th century Sufi saint Baba Farid, who is buried in Lahore.

Dayanand: DayanandSaraswati(1824-83), founder of the AryaSamaj movement, preached in Lahore and elsewhere.

Nanakdev: Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was born in Talwandi near Lahore.

Shah Hussain: A Sufi poet-saint (1538-1599). To celebrate his close friendship with his Hindu disciple MadhoLal, he adopted the composite name MadhoLalHussain.

Bibi Pak Daman: Literally 'the chaste lady', this is the collective name of six pious ladies, interred in a shrine in Lahore that also bears this name.

Shah Inayat and Bulleh Shah: Shah Inayat (d. 1728) was a Sufi saint of Lahore. The poet-saint Bulleh Shah (1680-1754) was his best-known disciple.

one-eyed Maharaja: Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), the founder of a Sikh empire (1799-1849), made Lahore his capital and was cremated there.

Mamilla: A historic cemetery in Jerusalem.

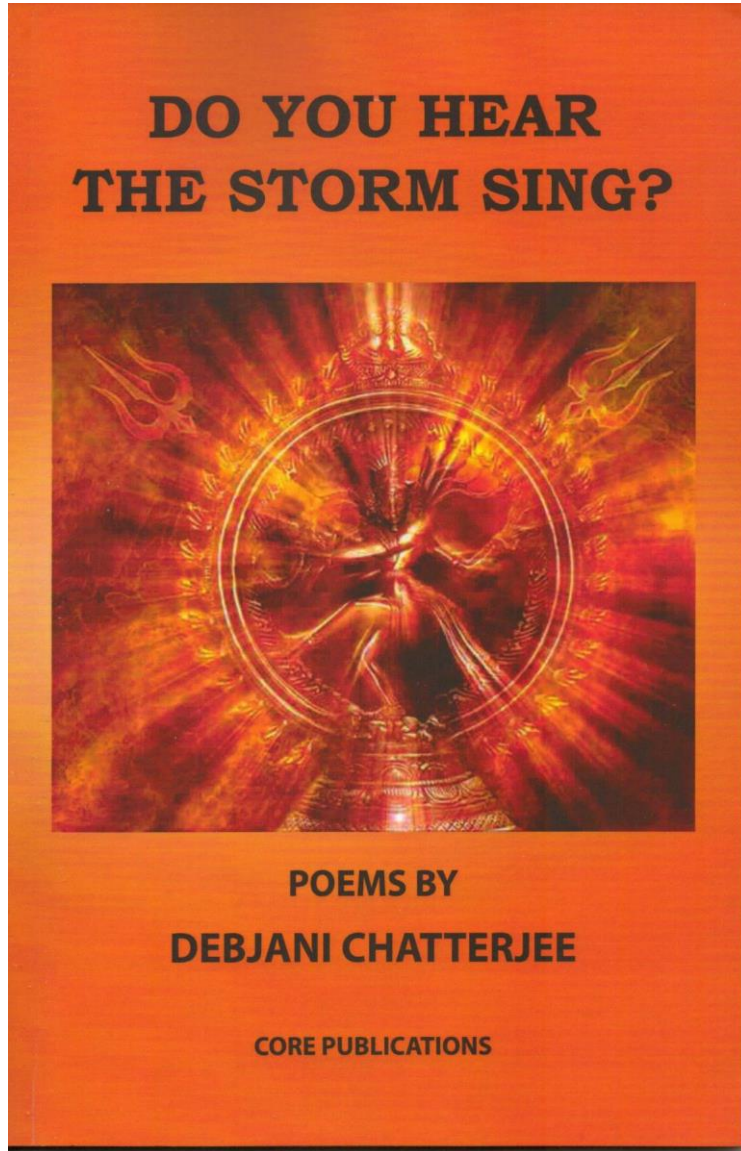
['Salaam, My Poet-Friends!'] was written after visiting NasirKazmi's grave in the company of his two poet sons Basir and Hassan Kazmi, and is published in DebjaniChatterjee's latest collection, *Do You Hear the Storm Sing?*(Core Publications, London), 2014.]

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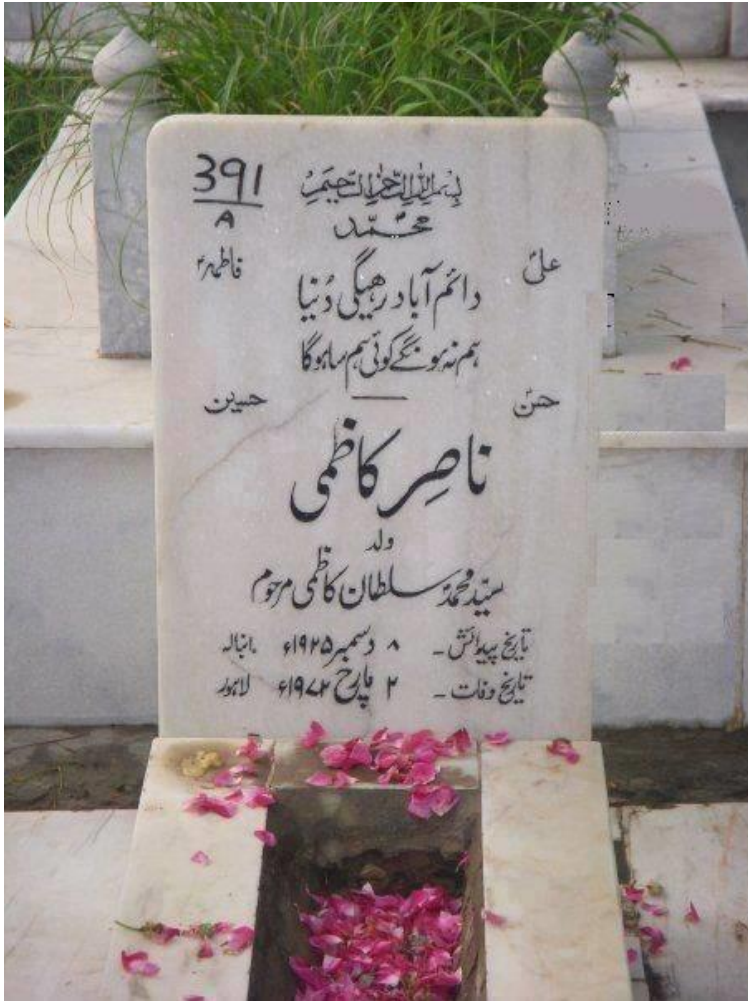
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NasirKazmi (1925-1972)

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NasirKazmi'sgrave at Mominpura, Lahore

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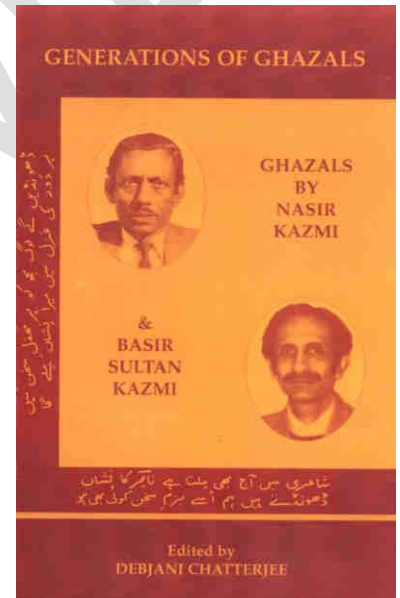
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THE FIRST RAIN

By Nasir Kazmi

Translated from Urdu by Debjani Chatterjee

The following two translations by Debjani Chatterjee of Nasir Kazmi's ghazals are from *Generations of Ghazals: Ghazals by Nasir Kazmi & Basir Sultan Kazmi* edited by Debjani Chatterjee (Redbeck Press, Bradford).



When I first learnt how to write,
first of all I wrote Your name.

I am the pure submission
that shouldered the weight of trust.

I am he of noble name
to whom jinns and angels bowed.

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Why did You not hold my hand
when I wandered from the path?

Whatever I gained is Yours,
all I lost was also yours.

I lived lifelong without You,
yet people say that You were mine.

O Sender of the first rain,
I thirsted for sight of You.

MONSOON MOMENTS

Once more the monsoon wind blows and I remember you,
once more the leafy anklets chime and I remember you.

All day I was lost in the maze of worldly affairs.
Now when the sun climbs down the walls, I remember you.

Once more the crow calls in the empty courtyard at home,
once more the drops of nectar fall – and I remember you.

Once more the herons cry in an ocean of green grass,
the season of yellow blooms has come – and I remember you.

At first I wept aloud, and then began to laugh.
Thunder rolls and lightning flashes – and I remember you.

Bio:

Debjani Chatterjee was born in Delhi, but has been called ‘Britain’s best-known Asian poet’ (Elisabetta Moreno) and ‘a national treasure’ (Barry Tebb). She has written and edited over 65 books for children and adults. Her collections include *Namaskar: New & Selected Poems*, *I Was That Woman* and most recently *Do You Hear the Storm Sing?* Her prize-winning anthologies include *The Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry*, *Barbed Lines* and *Rainbow World*. She is an Associate Royal Literary Fellow and Patron of Survivors’ Poetry. She has chaired the National Association of Writers in Education and the Arts Council of England’s Translations Panel. A cancer survivor, she runs ‘the Healing Word’ support group and advocates the healing power of writing, storytelling and art. Some writing residencies have been at Sheffield Children’s Hospital, Ilkley Literature Festival, York St John and Leeds Trinity universities. She has won major prizes, including a Muse India Poetry Translation First Prize. Sheffield Hallam University awarded an honorary doctorate ‘for outstanding contribution to Literature, the Arts and community service’. She received an MBE in 2008, Penguin Books

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selected her as a Lesley Pearse Women of Courage Finalist in 2010, and in 2012 she was an Olympic Torchbearer. More at: www.debjanichatterjee.moonfruit.com

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