

HOMAGE TO MAA

By C. L. Khatri

I was holding her in my arms

In the icy winter morning

Her breath slipped out of my hands

My numb fingers could not hold her

My palms were greasy, vision hazy.

They got smeared with sand and soil

Of the fibrous roots of the fallen tree

Stream of tears washed the roots clean

Only salt survived in the quaint eyes

I lost myself in the maze of memory.

Every cleaned root told me a tale

Of her petal like hand on my head

Of her tears and kisses

Of her frolicking fairy tales

Of her lullabies lulling me to sleep.

She was standing like Mother Mary

Feeding me her breast

Alas! I could not be her Christ

She bore the Cross all through her life

I slept in peace, bloomed in spring.

Her glowing figures flashed on my tears

Mopping floor bent on her knees

Cooking food on *chulha*¹ fed with cow dung cakes

Making noodles, *paapars*, pickles, *sattu*²...

Oh, the aroma of frying grains in sand!

Grinding grains in grindstone

Boiling and drying paddy for the rice mill

Making granary with soil and husk

A feast for her gods and guests

A frugal house keeper counting coins.

She looked goddess incarnate

Offering oblation to the setting sun

And the rising sun on *chhath*³

Giving us *thekua*⁴, *kasaar*⁵ and fruits in *prasad*⁶

Guerdon of three days observance.

How dearly I cherish my domestic deputation

In *teej*, *jeetia*, *bhai dooj*...⁷

Decking home with flaming earthen lamps

White washing the sanctum of ancestral deities

On Deewali, savouring *laddu*⁸ and *balushahi*⁹.

She taught me: everything has its day

*Kartik Purnima*¹⁰ was the day of *khaza*¹¹ and milk

Sweets of sesame seeds (*tilkut*), curd and beaten rice

On Makarsankranti¹², gram flour and raw mango slice

On *sattuani*¹³ were the breakfast.

Ganesh revolved round his parents

Won the race for circling the earth first.

She was in the centre of my diurnal course

I did wag, nag but rest on her lap.

She whispered, "Thank God, I am dying married."

Absence shows one's real worth.

Today I feel her more intensely

Than ever I did. A deity in the sanctum

She lives in me, breathes through me.

Who cares if I win or lose the race I am not in?

1. Earthen Stove

2. Gram flour

3. A folk festival of Bihar

4 & 5. Sweet snacks offered to Sun god on chhath

6..The remnants of food items offered to god and then given away to a person

7, 10, 12 &13. Folk festivals

8, 9 & 11. Sweets

Bio:

C.L.Khatri is a well known Indian English poet, reputed and perceptive critic and editor of *Cyber Literature* and of several anthologies of criticism. He is a bilingual poet writing in English and Hindi. His two poetry collections in English are *Kargil* (2000) and *Ripples in the Lake* (2006). He edited an anthology of poems on world peace *Millennium Mood* in 2001. He was awarded Michael Madhusudan Academy Award for his poetry collection *Kargil* in 2002. His poems are widely published, anthologized and translated in different languages in India and abroad.

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