

## **INTRODUCTION**

**BY KAMALA DAS**

I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power, and can repeat them like  
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru.

I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,

I speak three languages, write in

Two, dream in one.

Don't write in English, they said, English is

Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave

Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak,

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses

All mine, mine alone.

It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,

It is as human as I am human, don't

You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my

Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing

Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it

Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is

Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and  
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech  
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the  
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing  
Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they  
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs  
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.  
When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask  
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the  
Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me  
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.  
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.  
I shrank Pitifully.  
Then ... I wore a shirt and my  
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored  
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit  
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.  
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better  
Still, be Madhavi kutty. It is time to

Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.  
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a  
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when  
Jilted in love ... I met a man, loved him. Call  
Him not by any name, he is every man  
Who wants. a woman, just as I am every  
Woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste  
Of rivers, in me . . . the oceans' tireless  
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,  
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,  
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself I  
In this world, he is tightly packed like the  
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely  
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,  
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love  
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying  
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,  
I am saint. I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no  
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

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# **ENTERPRISE**

**BY NISSIM EZEKIEL**

It started as a pilgrimage

Exalting minds and making all

The burdens light, The second stage

Explored but did not test the call.

The sun beat down to match our rage.

We stood it very well, I thought,

Observed and put down copious notes

On things, the peasants sold and bought

The way of serpents and of goats.

Three cities where a sage had taught 10

But when the differences arose

On how to cross a desert patch,

We lost a friend whose stylish prose

Was quite the best of all our batch.

A shadow falls on us and grows.

Another phase was reached when we

Were twice attacked, and lost our way.

A section claimed its liberty

To leave the group. I tried to pray.

Our leader said he smelt the sea

We noticed nothing as we went,

A straggling crowd of little hope,

Ignoring what the thunder meant,

Deprived of common needs like soap.

Some were broken, some merely bent.

When, finally, we reached the place,

We hardly know why we were there.

The trip had darkened every face,

Our deeds were neither great nor rare.

Home is where we have to gather grace.

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## OUR CASUARINA TREE

BY TORU DUTT

LIKE a huge Python, winding round and round  
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars,  
Up to its very summit near the stars,  
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound  
No other tree could live. But gallantly  
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung  
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,  
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;  
And oft at nights the garden overflows  
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,  
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown  
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;  
Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest  
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone  
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs  
His puny offspring leap about and play;  
And far and near kokilas hail the day;

And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;  
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast  
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,  
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence

Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:

Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,

O sweet companions, loved with love intense,

For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear.

Blent with your images, it shall arise

In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!

What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear

Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?

It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,

That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!

Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away

In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,

When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith

And the waves gently kissed the classic shore



Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,  
When earth lay trancèd in a dreamless swoon:  
And every time the music rose,—before  
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,  
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime  
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay  
Unto thy honor, Tree, beloved of those  
Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,—  
Dearer than life to me, alas, were they!  
Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done  
With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,  
Under whose awful branches lingered pale  
“Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,  
And Time the shadow;” and though weak the verse  
That would thy beauty fain, oh, fain rehearse,  
May Love defend thee from Oblivion’s curse.

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## **THE BUS**

**BY ARUN KOLATKAR**

the tarpaulin flaps are buttoned down  
on the windows of the state transport bus.  
all the way up to jejuri.

a cold wind keeps whipping  
and slapping a corner of tarpaulin at your elbow.

you look down to the roaring road.

you search for the signs of daybreak in what little light spills out of bus.

your own divided face in the pair of glasses  
on an oldman`s nose  
is all the countryside you get to see.

you seem to move continually forward.  
toward a destination  
just beyond the castemark beyond his eyebrows.

outside, the sun has risen quitely

it aims through an eyelet in the tarpaulin.

and shoots at the oldman`s glasses.

a sawed off sunbeam comes to rest gently against the driver`s right temple.

the bus seems to change direction.

at the end of bumpy ride with your own face on the either side

when you get off the bus.

you dont step inside the old man`s head.

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## **DAWN AT PURI**

### **JAYANTA MAHAPATRA**

Endless crow noises

A skull in the holy sands

tilts its empty country towards hunger.

White-clad widowed Women

past the centers of their lives

are waiting to enter the Great Temple

Their austere eyes

stare like those caught in a net

hanging by the dawn's shining strands of faith.

The fail early light catches

ruined, leprous shells leaning against one another,

a mass of crouched faces without names,

and suddenly breaks out of my hide

into the smoky blaze of a sullen solitary pyre

that fills my aging mother:

her last wish to be cremated here

twisting uncertainly like light

on the shifting sands.

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