

National Translation Month Premiere

Seven Poems by Seven Nepali Poets

Translated from the Nepali by Yuyutsu Sharma



We're thrilled to continue today our string of National Translation Month premieres: for the first time we're featuring **a selection of contemporary poetry from Nepal, curated and translated by the acclaimed poet and translator Yuyutsu Sharma**. From the statement of a rape victim to the longing of the immigrant, to surviving the pandemic, these remarkable poems pierce the heart while bringing us a breath of fresh air straight from the slopes of the Himalayan glaciers. Many thanks to Yuyutsu Sharma for translating and sending us these beauties.

We'd love to hear from you! Follow us on Twitter [@TranslateMonth](https://twitter.com/TranslateMonth), share using [#TranslationMonth](https://twitter.com/TranslateMonth), join our mailing list, submit a translation month event, or like our [Facebook](#) page. We hope you'll join us and celebrate your favorite translations of poets from all over the world in September and beyond.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

Seven Poems by Seven Nepali Poets

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The Statement of the Raped One

By Parijaat

On the slope of the mountain
teeming with wildflowers,
I'd bent to pull a thorn
out of the sole of my foot, my Lord!
It wasn't like 'sporting'
or a wildlife safari to hunt tigers or leopards;
it was just ordinary humans
walking along the trail
whistling in a festive mood,
teasing me as I walked alone ahead;
then the Ranger and his men
played with my honor
and left my body soaked in blood.
My end hadn't come yet,
so I didn't die, my Lord!
My mother's house nowhere
to be found, my husband naïve,
on the behest of the elders,
the villagers brought me here, my Lord!
Please lock me up
in that house in the distance
there... my Lord,
in that prison house.

Here/There
By Shailendra Sakar

Exploring images
of the Himalayan glaciers
thinning out in the icy
depths of the Pacific,
on the moving steps
of the Supermalls
recalling Lisno ladders
dug in fragrant tree trunks
recollecting hillside courtyards
resting-plinths on the mule paths,
submerging hearts shattered here
in slow sledges there

Having saved my body
from a sky crackling in an eternal inferno,
like an indomitable warrior
making analogies in the mega city,
parallels of Dharara,
Ghantagarh clock tower,
postponing a desire
to spend a lifespan there,
for the time being I came back

Having stuffed
a free sky of the Continent
in a tiny briefcase,
having discovered on ocean,
compressing its entire expanse
in a little laptop
to a dingy corner of
a divided sky, I returned.

I came back to embark upon
the mission of exploring
olden acquaintances,
older faces, forgotten friends
and to keep gazing at
the glistening mirror of Himal

Like an old wind,
I returned, like the sighting
of the forgotten, familiar faces,
I returned.

The Apparition
By Yuyutsu Sharma

For my son, Yugank

So much hand washing, son,
scrubbing sanitizers with the fervor
of pouring sacred waters with such fanatic frenzy
that an elephant's wrinkled face
starts surfacing along the jagged crusts of my pores.

Holding back the breath
in terror to keep the invisible enemy away,
piled-up fill of surgical masks in the trashcans
of my trance, pyramids of gloom rising
in the blind vaults of this world
where I've turned into an apparition.

Here on the edge of the earth
standing next to the fractured glaciers
ready to explode any moment,
from the valleys of muted deities,
I can only speak through you,
I cannot touch you, feel your breath,
tousle your hair, or smell sweet odor
of your handsome head.

Being so far away from you,
and much to your annoyance,
over and over again eager
to return to my instructions —
fear everything around you,
keep a safe distance, don't be complacent,
fear doorknobs, street vendors
from Laxmi Nagar, Khureji,
milkmen from the capital's bordering villages,
tin foods you bring from Khurana Store,
groceries you unpack along the rumors,
carry a portable hand sanitizer,
let it dangle from your waist
like a weapon in a battlefield.

These quick words of caution,
ash-smearing antics from the swirl
of my years on this earth,
these mantras that Grandpa gave me
foreseeing the calamity decades ago,
the lesions I received in the 60s,
four decades after the First Pandemic.
“Come home,” he'd said, “wash your hands
and feet at the water pump in the courtyard,
clean your mouth with fresh water,
chew an herbal twig to freshen it;
your breath might get polluted

from others in the public spaces.”

I didn't quite understand his words—
how could anyone get polluted in public places,
didn't notice anything unhygienic in our quiet Punjabi town,
airs cool and crisp, skies azure blue
in the land of bluest rivers in the world.

I didn't approve of his rigorous rituals
when he made me wash my hands thrice
with ash from our hearth.
“It's pure gold,” he'd said, “ash,
nothing purer than ash.”
His white starched turban
stiff over his head, his gruff gurgle;
I saw his Adam's apple dilate,
a little bird of wisdom trapped in his throat.

In our messenger chats, son,
I notice your hair has grown long,
covering your forehead.
In your voice messages,
I see an anxiety pouring in
from the rouge metropolis.
Last night, I dreamt a tiny ball
of dirt roll out of your left ear,
and you cried out in pain,
my little prince trapped
in a fort of filth.

I hope you remember your Papa,
like I remember my Grandpa today,
someone who loved me,
with a heart purer than his gold ash.

I see you all alone in the apartment,
your video games that took you away from me,
now you dream to see the real world,
tangible people, busy parks,
ports squawking from seagulls,
snow ranges, mule paths littered
with spring flowers and million butterflies.

But locked down here,
I am only an apparition in Kathmandu,
not a valid figure of flesh and sturdy bones.
My blood cannot throb to warm your anxious sleep,
I cannot touch you or reach out to you,
being miles away from you.
I cannot take you to Connaught Place,

to your favorite cafes, or bring you to the bustle
of your favorite Squares at Nehru Place,
Karol Bag, Chandani Chowk, Janpath.
Or bring you back to the Himalayas,
to our luxuriant canyons to make you race around
the glaciers, to sweeten your breath in our dreams
from the forests of rhododendrons, making you
sing along the chorus of summer cicadas
to fill your youthful vessel
with the quiet sheen of our eternal snow.

On my return from the Camp
By Ramesh Chitiz

The fragment of a riverbed
continues to dance in my eyes,
it'd clung to come with me.
The sad huts waver in my mind,
they too have come, glued
to the thrumming strains of my memory.

No idea when having stopped
flowing along the emerald green banks,
the river Kankai scaled atop
and started sloshing in my eyelashes.

No idea when the mind's
pigeon would flutter its white wings again
and fly away to race across borders,
mildly stroking humble cowsheds
and basil vases of worship in the far-off courtyards.

From each hole of the Camp,
eyes gaze at the smiling pace of the postman day.
Like colorless parting of a widow's hair,
the vacant passage spreads endlessly into infinity,
and no footfalls can be heard.
Having grabbed the palm-leaf plates,
the tiny little children throw up notes of wild lament.

Lightning strikes – whacks the humble huts.
Rain falls – only on the thatched roofs.
The earth has turned into simmering disc of a large oven.
Trusting the stone as pillows under their heavy heads,
the people of the hungry huts have turned into stones

The Camp continues to dance
in my eyes these days, my mind has turned
into a dry forest, igniting a flurry of questions,
putting the withered forest trees aflame,
demanding answers.

O how constricted the world
that cannot accommodate the soft,
rose petal feet of tiny children in its heart!

Relief

By Shyam Rimal

The rice is infested,
stale and smelly

potatoes rotten,
piles of lentils creepy-crawly

and sacks of
salt out-of-date

without a glint
of iodine.

Relief comes
rolling on polished wheels

Relief comes
flying on airplanes

Black money
arrives disguised as social service

Relief comes
to take a snapshot with

just one sack of rice,
salt, lentils, and sugar.

At that juncture
the government goes to sleep

and seekers rush back
to the streets to start

banging the empty
begging bowls again.

To wait for disasters
endlessly to beg and along

the arrival
of pandemics and plagues

spread our homespun
blanket of helplessness—

all this seems amiss along
the curves of our nation's glorious map.

This is what defines
the true face of our nation,

where the essence
of NGOs, INGOs

and the Government agencies
mingles into one rotten core

wherein, one after
the other, the pandemic relief funds

are mounted atop
a mighty threshold

to fuel festivities
in the house of the higher gods

and elsewhere
enduring calamity

the cold hearths
continue to shiver

without a trace
of livid flames

warming fragile walls
of our hungry huts.

And? And then?

By Tanka Upreti

From my handkerchief
shall I pour shining stars
in the empty
sky of your tattered apron.

What would you do?

One by one I shall pick them up
and bedeck the liberation
warrior's bleeding chest.

On your palms
shall I place a sickle-
looking crescent moon.

What would you do?

I shall sharpen it
and chop off the miseries
of this wailing earth.

Messiah Puppy
By Amar Aakash

A mission impossible for me to carry out ,
this act of self-immolation.
In the dark tunnels of tumult,
I fought day and night.
Like a failed prophet,
I sermonized on the subject.
But in the end, *Dharampadda*, *Holy Bible*, or *Bhagwat Gita*
they all amounted to nothing,
and crumbled into a wasted mound of sawdust
to become a two-month-old spotted puppy.

To begin with, Mom started showering complaints,
to shame me. I couldn't choose a profession,
couldn't find a way to earn a living.
Then my girlfriend changed colors
and finally distanced herself.
I saw no income coming my way
in weeks and months.
Some admonished me to save me:
Life isn't just an effort to eke out a living,
nor is the ability to feed your self
thrice a day a triumph.
Acquiring a roof over your head,
not the ultimate accomplishment.
You think it's feasible for everyone
on this earth to reach the top and become wealthy?
None had proper answers.
Why were people with or without degrees jobless?
Isn't it old-fashioned to name a poor man a thief,
or label someone ugly a witch?
But to lose a second lover at 39
was more horrific than being
without a food grain in my stomach for days.
Life's boundaries always slither
across borders of meal and shelter.
There were these disheartened human being
who died out of million failures in life,
and there were others, neck-deep
in debt ready to give up the ghost.
I'd known some who hung themselves
for being jilted by the loved ones.
Yet there were others who opted
to swallow angry pills to seal the final exit.
Many a times, I've laughed at their
dead bodies arriving at the cremation ghats.
No matter what, the lightning strikes on all,
regardless of time or place.

But that a two-month-old spotted puppy
could save someone's life I'd never heard.
In one of the blind alleys of Kathmandu
before getting waterlogged
into the bottomless bog of despair
as I lifted my poisoned cup
I'd no idea that a soft soggy tongue
of a puppy licking the bridge
of my foot could have brought
me back to the flaming fields of life.

About the authors and translator

Born in Darjeeling, India, **Parijat** is the most celebrated Nepalese poet and novelist. She authored over a dozen books, including *Shiris Ko Phool*, (Blue Mimosa), ‘Mahattahim’, ‘bains ko Manchhe’, ‘Toribari Ra Sapanaharu.’ She also led Ralfa movement to protest against the traditional set-up of the Nepalese society and played active role to overthrow despotic one-party Panchayat system in Nepal. She passed away in 1990 and remains most celebrated author today among the Nepalese readers.

Born in remote Bhojpur district of Eastern Nepal, **Shailendra Sakar** was educated at Tribhuvan University and has published over a dozen books of poetry and short stories. He launched several literary movements like *Movement of Discarded Communities* and *Boot Polish Movement* to oppose the cruel formalities of Panchayat Regime. After the 1990 Democratic Revolution, he brought out his famous book, *Sarpaharu Geet Sundainen* (Serpents do not Listen to Songs). He also launched with Yuyutsu Sharma, [Kathya Kayakalpa](#) (Content Metamorphosis), a literary movement to transform concept of content in the contemporary Nepali poetry. He lived in Kathmandu.

Recipient of fellowships and grants from The Rockefeller Foundation, Ireland Literature Exchange, Trubar Foundation, Slovenia, The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature and The Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature, **Yuyutsu Ram Dass Sharma** is a world-renowned Himalayan poet and translator. He has published ten poetry collections including, *The Second Buddha Walk*, *A Blizzard in my Bones: New York Poems*, *Quaking Cantos: Nepal Earthquake Poems*, *Nepal Trilogy*, *Space Cake*, *Amsterdam* and *Annapurna Poems*. He has held workshops in creative writing and translation at Queen's University, Belfast, University of Ottawa and South Asian Institute, Heidelberg University, Germany, University of California, Davis, Sacramento State University, California, Beijing Open University, New York University, New York and Columbia University, New York. Half the year, he travels and reads all over the world and conducts Creative Writing workshops at various universities in North America and Europe but goes trekking in the Himalayas when back home. Currently he edits *Pratik, A Magazine of Contemporary Writing*.

Shyam Rimal is a known Nepali journalist and poet. He has published several books, most noted being, *Trishuliko Kinarabaat*. He contributes literary columns to several vernacular newspapers, including *Drishti Weekly* and works as editor at National News Agency, Kathmandu.

Hailing from Eastern Nepal, a known name among younger generation of Nepali language poets, **Tanka Uprety** has published three poetry collections, including *Gajur Paglera* and *Niguroko Kharani* (Long narrative poems). Currently he works for Nepal Television.

Nepalese poet and lyricist **Ramesh Kshitij** has published two books of poetry and a short story collection. He has won several awards and honors including Best Lyricist at Radio Nepal National Poetry Festival Award at Nepal's National Academy and Rapti Literary Award. A civil servant by profession, Kshitij is currently based in Kathmandu.

A significant Nepali poet and fiction writer of younger generation, **Amar Aakash** contributes columns to several Nepalese newspapers and journals, including leading literary monthly, *Madhuparka*. His debut collection of short stories is due in 2021. Adhikari lives in Kathmandu.