

For Birendra Krishna Bhadra

By Shikhandin

Time stitched tomes since you died.
Yet your voice still strides
into our prayer-less rooms. Dawn
breaks. We close our eyes to
saffron tipped carpets, heady
enough to make us rush out,
seek the beating of drums.
We've made new
rituals from the old. Newer religions. No
Gods here though. I don't
regret it. You are something
else. Making us weep. Raising
our heartbeats to levels beyond
barefoot running in the snow. Even
when we didn't care to know,
your words broke through
the ice sheets of our ennui. Powerful
vocals that splintered open the wounds we had
so thoughtfully closed. Or so we believed.
Crossing far frontiers. Willing
slaves to our dreams. The dust
of our old country packed
into gifts of delicious nostalgia. Little
else. Then why? Why
this hollowing up? This digging up
of roots? Your drug worked
year after year after year. Still
does. Autumn comes. Apples fall
embracing rot and worm. The ground turns
fat like the Goddess's feet piled high
with offerings. A posse of conch blowers
stand. They have measured
the depth of air the conch needs. They
have marked the hour. That designated time
for the earnestly pious, palms together, feet plumped
up by wool. And then there is us,
the joy-riders in your thrall. You erase time.
Every time. Cold air folds
when it meets your voice. I stumble
into it like a distracted shopper mistaking
a glass wall for a doorway. When I turn, I see

a girl running. The ribbon streaming
out from her happy braids. A mere
child with open mouthed faith. Waiting for the Goddess
to descend, and the light to expand
like an atom bomb. Eating horizon. I shudder,
failing to purge the avalanche
of emotions threatening to break
loose from my eyes. Listen, they say. Just
listen. It's only for a day. They always say that.
What would you say?
We let go. We threw it out. Yet we couldn't shut
our ears. Rising like zombies before dawn
or an imagined dawn for even timelines are blurred
in our porcelain homes. Why
did you stay back for this one
day? Or is this your annual pilgrimage
pre-empting the Goddess? Do you laugh
when we bleed every time
your voice vibrates on glass
and digs into wood? Do you glower
from the flames of candles encased in crystal
domes? We are renegades upholding your Bengal
like a snow globe. The old songs drift like
tiny snow flurries. And settle down
into a gentle carpet. Soothing
motion. Obedient in our hands. We feel
your voice beginning to melt
in the air even as it booms
within the recesses of our flesh. This is how
you come to us. This is how we keel
over. Toppled by the wand of your voice. We
kneel to sound. To Brahma. No less.