Poems by Bibhu Padhi

Another Need

You have spent your years
asking for nothing, and when
someone tells you, you will
never get anything without
asking for it, you have said,
that’s not my business,

the days and nights should know;
the single universal force
must respond to my needs

as it always does
to everything else, including
the earth’s quiet rotation
round the sun, or a sapling’s
slow rise through space and time.
But I say, they had asked for it
time and again; asking is giving,
no more, no less. I will not ask for
things, you say. You say, I am rich
already with things I never asked for.
You may not know, but silences
have their own modes of prayer
just as words have, but different,
less visible, perhaps less arrogant too.
I cannot ask for things even in
silence, for words left me one night
long ago, without my asking for it.
Perhaps, that night you dreamt of it?
Body

This is where everything is, lives and breathes or just ceases to be.
Everything else—all that promises to be true—is vague and nameless, like someone you have never spent time with.

This alone is branches and leaves, fingers, toes and lips, the fruit’s and the breast’s haughty, self-contained accuracy, the statue’s slow, incredible formation through time, each moment’s limitlessness.

How can I forget what has grown through a careful, evolving history, or can bring in tomorrow long before its chosen time.
Spirit of it all, it has its needs too—
the dark smell of the cave’s depth,
the very special intimacies.
A Question of Faith

Someone who cares for me, says,
“You have been so different during
these past few days. Your smiles
haven’t been like your smiles,
your words not like your words.”

The mind seems to have
turned the other way—
the way the wind comes from,
the way the trees look toward
to find where all other good things are, how

they are being treated by people
who so cleverly think they belong
to the world the most proper way,
how carefully they build themselves.

My reply is a question too: “A tired
smile? Do you think so? Something
for which I appear to be putting in
a lot of effort even while this frail body
wouldn’t permit me to do so?”

“Right,” she says, “but we really need the love which is so much like you. Uncontaminated, like the upper air, the ever-renewing wish of the short grass for heaven, not a cold, distant smile.”

I’ve nothing much to say, but it seems as if I am taking something away from myself, losing my knowledge of things in quick succession, my faith, even my faith in what I should indeed be for others’ sake.
What Am I Here for?

I have been followed by days and nights
as if they needed me badly—
this slight body, this ragged mind—
for a purpose far outside these thoughts.

And, why is it I don’t ask why
they are here? Perhaps they should
answer that for themselves. I think
each one must do that for oneself.

See, how different I am from
anything else, including
the blood in my capillaries,
the pulmonary air, the breath!

The older questions reappear
and then suddenly, there is a stop
to everything. The answers may take
some time coming, may not come at all.
Early

October. It is rather early
even by date and wishful
desires. And there is
a lonely winter’s
fugitive touch
on the skin, in the air.

It is too early to predict
any new arrival, but
the earlier than usual sunsets
have been too quiet,
too invisible for the mind
for over a week now.

The power is being
withdrawn every day
in the name of
autumn festivities,
which are still
some distance away.
The provincial town
sleeps into late afternoons.
And when it is dark,
the lights appear too tired
to offer a whole day’s
affection or desires.

He has also co-authored a book on D. H. Lawrence (Whitston) and (with his Minakshi Padhi) a reference book on Indian Philosophy (McFarland).