

My Autograph: A Dramatic Monologue

RAJ DAS

Master's in English
University of Calcutta
Kolkata

‘This is the last book I am going to sign,’

Said I to the bookstore manager.

‘No problem, sir’, he replied

Before adding pleasantries gentle and benign

Reserved only for the most esteemed of our kind.

Who knows how much longer I shall be living,

Reaching as I am the dying embers of my life.

‘The greatest poet of our age,’ wrote *The Times*

‘His verses at once seductive and biting,

They contain aphorisms of life at the guise of nursery rhymes.’

They come by the boatloads to buy my poems,

My readers who desire my autograph.

Now I sit, signing with my feeble old hands,

A collection of my carefully crafted rhymes,

Which should please the senses, and no doubt the mind.

But these fools do not know a secret,

Something that I have guarded all my life.

I go back to it from time to time

Often pondering over it for hours over a cigarette

Until I am roused of my stupor by the clock's chime.

An International Refereed/Peer-reviewed English e-Journal
Impact Factor: 4.727 (SJIF)

Critics have always praised these morbid poems of mine
And have noted the pain and trauma captured in them.
Little do those fools know what pain they are,
What horrors it took to produce that shine
The best poems are written when the poet feels true fear.

None of these poems are mine, I repeat
None of these poems are mine.
My father, you see, was a lover of rhyme
And insisted all his life I become a poet,
It didn't matter if I earned a dollar or a dime.

On his deathbed he extracted a promise
That I shall try my hand at writing verses fine.
But I was never an obedient son.
I was neither as intelligent nor as creative as His Highness
Choosing instead to join the bank and marry my sweet hon'.

My father wanted to fulfill his own desires
Through me, his son.
But I was happily married to my hon'
Until she felt the need to explore greener pastures
And left me cold and desolate, an object belonging to none.

I wanted to become a poet now,
Just as my father wished to see me.
I wanted to turn all my sorrows into verse.
But everything I wrote failed to impress me somehow
And I flung all those pages angrily away- 'Poems my arse!'

I then resolved firmly: 'If I cannot create verses
Of my own making, why someone else will!'
That night I captured my first prey, the boy
Took him up from the house of the dancing lights
While his father was away, and his mother busy with her toy.

I had to tie his mouth with the muslin towel
The one which my hon' wrapped 'round herself after each bath.

I tied his limbs to a chair
And with great caution confined him in a hovel,
Making sure he could never leave my secret lair.

Finally, I said to him: 'Fear not, son
Now you be a good lad and write a poem I like.'
I opened a box of knives which made his eyes go wide,
And instructed him how it should be done.
Yet neither could he think, nor could scarcely write.

With one stroke I slit his throat
For wasting my effort and my time.
'Why won't you write anything?' I asked him twice
But he made no reply, looking at me with eyes afloat.
I dispatched his corpse and soon thereafter made a bold reprise.

I knew I had to catch them young,
But ones capable of writing verse.
My next child should not die like my first boy
And soon enough found a girl who at the local choir sung
But will she write poems for me, or like the boy be hung?

An International Refereed/Peer-reviewed English e-Journal
Impact Factor: 4.727 (SJIF)

She was a fine young girl, and my hopes were high
‘Now write me a poem, sweetheart,’ said I
‘Or like the one before, you will have to die!’
The girl began to write and create verses fine
And I arranged for her to sleep and dine.

The girl was quick and bright
Producing poems that filled my days with delight
And the hope of publishing my poems one day.
Until, of course, she began to revolt
And I had to send her to the netherworld.

I spent months in such fashion, capturing and
Forcing the young ones to write.
Some days were highly productive and I saw
Much progress from my children.
Slowly I was killing my soul.

Soon my first poems came out and I saw
Success at the expense of my children’s blood.
I had to keep my conscience at bay,
And occasionally wiped my knife, at the ready to slay.
Their cries haunt me up to this day.

Now I am almost ready to meet my Maker,
Old, feeble, friendless and out of work.
My legacy was built, quite literally,
By the drop of blood, sweat and tears.
I feel no hope, joy or fear.