

## **MASKS**

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When I say a mask is necessary  
For survival they turn their faces  
The other way round and tell  
Me to keep my mouth shut.

Glowing skin is a shield of the mortal  
Black, white, red and green interior.  
Claudius dresses up as a father and  
Gertrude like a faithful, pure mother;  
Hamlet wears a mask of pretence.  
Masks veil Laertes into two worthies.  
Ophelia wears the mask to be a pawn.  
It makes Polonius a faithful minister.  
Horatio is lost in the wilderness of masks.  
A mouse-trap unmasks the conscience.  
Lear, Shylock, Othello, Romeo, Macbeth,  
Cordelia, Portia, Desdemona, Juliet and  
Lady Macbeth too wait for their turns.

Corona is not ditched for years.  
Ants remain undeterred by masks.  
Masks do not hide one for long.  
Masks do not claim to save one  
From turning into dust or ash.  
Isn't a grave a mask for a new life?

## **THAT WINTER MORNING**

In the severe winters  
One needs fire to keep oneself warm.

The fire comes from coal.  
The coal comes from the depot.  
The depot is empty today.  
Will there be no fire without coal?

The coal is loaded in the mines  
Located in the far off places  
A train is needed to transport it.  
The wagon is there on the tracks  
Waiting for the labourers to fill it.  
They are on a forced leave.

On a severely cold Sunday morning  
When I opened my eyes I saw  
My poorly clad father sweeping  
The floor and collecting the leaves  
And the twigs. He was preparing  
To light a fire to keep us warm.

In the neem tree a baby monkey  
Close to the chest of his mother  
Is trying to suck milk from the dry  
Saggy breasts. The mother monkey  
Stares at the cow that was licking its  
Calf sucking milk from the full udders.

Today, I miss my father; I miss  
My mother too. The train has  
Off-loaded a lot of coal. The hearth  
Is no more warm in absence  
Of the love carved in hearts. An  
Owl is hooting outside my window.

[Reading Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays" (1962)]

## DOES A BLACK LIFE MATTER?

In my country of the blacks  
I am considered to be a white.  
In the country of the whites  
I am considered to be a black.

What is my colour?  
Sometimes, I say, brown,  
Sometimes, green  
Sometimes, saffron.  
There is hardly a difference between  
Human beings and chameleons.  
Is Death a punishment  
Or a way to save the earth?  
Is dying a sin or an earning  
Or a crime or an investment?

How does it matter  
If I die of snake bite or of  
COVID-19/20 or of a  
Powder chosen by me?  
The crushing wheel of  
Time moves on and on.

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