

POETRY

PARTICLES

KANIKA

Rabindranath Tagore



THE BLUNDER OF THE IDLE ONE

অকর্মার বিভ্রাট

The plough weeps, letting go its throat:
 "Where did you come from, brother blade?
 Since the day they yoked you to me,
 I've been beating my head in misery."
 The blade says: "Fine, brother — I'll just slip off,
 and see how comfortably you sit at home, idle."
 The blade broke away; the plough,
 overjoyed, lay there with nothing left to do.
 The farmer said: "Why keep this nuisance any longer?
 Today I'll break it up and light the stove with it."
 The plough cries: "Blade, brother, come back, run to me —
 toil, I see now, was better than burning."

THE UNGRATEFUL ONE

অকৃতজ্ঞ

The echo forever mocks the sound —
 it owes the sound its very life,
 and fears, above all, being found out.

UNCONSCIOUS GREATNESS

অচেতন মাহাত্ম্য

O cloud, you carry so much water in your breast,
yet run so lightly before the wind's face.
You nurse a hundred terrible lightnings within you,
yet the eye, charmed, sees only your gentle blue.
This impossible thing you do so effortlessly —
tell your servant, what is the secret of it?
The cloud speaks its answer in low thunder:
"I see nothing wonderful in it. I do not know."

THE UNSEEN CAUSE

অদৃশ্য কারণ

Secretly, through the forest, filling every branch,
Night coaxes the buds open, and slips away unseen.
The flowers wake and say: "We are morning's children."
And the bright, talkative morning says: "No doubt of that at all."

OWNERSHIP

অধিকার

Over who owns the forest most, the argument ran till noon.
Said the bakul: "Friends, listen — by my fragrance
I have claimed this whole wood for my own."

The palash answered, tossing its head: "By color
I have seized every direction, far and wide."
The rose flushed redder still, and made reply:
"By fragrance and by beauty both, the forest is mine to rule."
Said the arum plant: "Wash off your scent and beauty
and eat them for your supper — here, I have planted
my claim straight down into the earth itself."
Its hold in the soil ran deep — and by plain, visible proof,
the arum won.

THE NECESSITY OF THE UNNECESSARY

অনাবশ্যকের আবশ্যকতা

Why do you exist at all, O sea, bearing neither grass nor grain —
dancing, night and day, across half the world?
The sea replied: "If this useless one did not remain,
who would draw the river out of the earth's own breast?"

PASSION AND RENUNCIATION

অনুরাগ ও বৈরাগ্য

Love says: "O Renunciation, your creed is false."
"Love, you are illusion's self," Renunciation answers —
"I say: let go of self, and see the road to freedom."
Love says: "Then you and I are, after all, one and the same."

THE UNCHANGEABLE

অপরিবর্তনীয়

If one thing turned to another, what then would follow?

What is now, would be then, too.

And if, brother, all sorrow ended there —

then what is joy today would there be sorrow.

THE INESCAPABLE

অপরিহার্য

Death says: "I'll take the son." The thief says: "The wealth."

Fate says: "I'll take everything that was ever yours."

The slanderer says: "I'll take the weight of your good name."

The poet says: "And who, then, will take my joy?"

THE MOCKERY OF THE UNWORTHY

অযোগ্যের উপহাস

Watching a star fall, the lamp dies laughing:

"So much splendor — and this is how it ends!"

Night says: "Laugh while you can, and speak your pleasure —

only until your own little store of oil runs dry."

KNOWING LITTLE, KNOWING MORE

অল্প জানা ও বেশি জানা

A thirsty donkey came down to the lake,
said "ugh — black water!" and turned straight back.
The water says: "Every donkey knows the water's black.
Whoever knows a little more, calls it clear."

INCOMPLETE NEWS

অসম্পূর্ণ সংবাদ

The chakori bird cries out to the full moon in alarm:
"I have heard dreadful news from a learned man!
They say that you will not remain in heaven forever —
that in the great dissolution, you too shall be put out!
Alas, alas, giver of nectar, lord of the night —
what, then, will become of us?"
The moon replies: "Go to that scholar's house, my dear,
and ask him instead how long your own life has to run."

THE IMPOSSIBLY GOOD

অসম্ভব ভালো

"As-good-as-can-be" says to "Even-Better":
"In what heavenly city do you shine?"
"Even-Better" weeps and answers: "I live, alas,
in the powerless envy of the idle and the proud."

THE IMPOSSIBLE ENDEAVOR

অসাধ্য চেষ্টা

One who lacks the power to make himself great —
can such a one make the great man small?

HALF-SPOKEN AND FULLY SPOKEN

অস্ফুট ও পরিস্ফুট

The water in the little pitcher says: "O great ocean,
I am clear, I sparkle — you are only darkness."
Small truth says: "My words, at least, are plain."
Great truth is only this: your vast, unbroken silence.

LONGING

আকাঙ্ক্ষা

"Mango, what do you wish that you could be?"
"To be sugarcane," it says, "sweet and straightforward."
"Sugarcane, and what is it that you long for?"
"To be the mango," it says, "fragrant, and full of taste."

SELF AGAINST SELF

আত্মশত্রুতা

The topknot and the loose, flowing hair quarrel endlessly;

the neighbors gather round to watch the show.
 The topknot says: "Look at you, what a sight!"
 The loose hair answers: "And you, putting on such airs!"
 The topknot says: "I'd be glad to see you bald."
 "And you, cut clean off," the loose hair snaps back, furious.
 The poet steps between them: "Think a moment —
 you two are one and the same, one and the same.
 Lose the topknot, and the hair goes with it;
 turn the hair to baldness, and, topknot,
 where then will your victory-drum sound?"

THE FIRST MYSTERY

আদিরহস্য

The flute says: "I have no glory of my own —
 my whole voice is only the force of someone's breath."
 The breath says: "I too am only a trick, a passing air —
 no one has ever known who it is that truly plays."

BEGINNING AND END

আরম্ভ ও শেষ

The End says: "One day everything shall end,
 so, Beginning, your pride is spent in vain."
 The Beginning answers: "Brother, wherever the end comes,
 there, again, a new beginning rises."

THE SUSPICION OF JEALOUSY

ঈর্ষার সন্দেহ

The tail wags; its shadow stirs in the mirror —
 the dog cannot bear the sight of it at all.
 When the servant waves the fan over his master,
 the dog thinks, furious: "Who does this wretch think he is?"
 Let a tree stir, let a ripple cross the water —
 the dog barks out in a fit of violent rage.
 He is certain the three worlds themselves are trembling,
 eager to leap up into his master's lap.
 He'll lick the gravy from his master's plate —
 in all the universe, only his own tail shall dare to move.

THE NEED FOR THE HIGH

উচ্চের প্রয়োজন

The flat field says, with some regret: "I fill
 the market every day with grain and fruit.
 The mountain only stands there — who knows to what use —
 enthroned upon his rock, a king of stone.
 Why high, why low — this is the Creator's own injustice,
 and it is a thing I cannot understand at all."
 The mountain answers: "If all the earth were level as a plain,
 would the blessed stream of any waterfall ever fall at all?"

OF GENEROUS NATURE

উদারচরিতানাম্

In a crack in the wall, a small, nameless, humble flower
has bloomed, unnoticed, poor, without a lineage.

The whole garden turns from it in scorn —
but the rising sun says to it: "Are you well, brother?"

PRETEXT

উপলক্ষ

Time says: "I am the one who makes this world."
The clock replies: "Then I, too, must be your maker."

ONE AND THE SAME ENDING

এক পরিণাম

The shefali flower says: "I have fallen, O star!"
The star replies: "My own work, too, is done —
between us we have filled the parting-basket of the night:
the stars of the sky, and the shefali of the wood."

A ONE-SIDED RECKONING

এক-তরফা হিসাব

"Twenty-seven — why did you not become

a hundred and twenty-seven? The purse would have been full,
you'd have felt it in your very bones."

Twenty-seven answered: "That would have brought much money, true —
but tell me, friend, what would you do about the years?"

THE SAME DOOR

একই পথ

I shut the door fast, to keep out every error.

Truth says: "Then by what way am I to enter?"

TAKING UP THE TASK

কর্তব্যগ্রহণ

"Who will take up my work?" — so asks the setting sun.

The world hears, and stays a silent picture, giving no reply.

Only the little earthen lamp spoke up: "Lord,
whatever lies within my power, that much, at least, I will do."

THE TRADER IN SCANDAL

কলঙ্কব্যবসায়ী

Dust, you go about staining every whiteness with your grime —
is that very staining not itself your own disgrace?

CROW IS CROW, CUCKOO IS CUCKOO

কাকঃ কাকঃ পিকঃ পিকঃ

However you turn the body, and to whichever side —
the left hand still stays left, the right hand, right.

THE WORM'S JUDGMENT

কীটের বিচার

A worm has bored into the Mahabharata —
gnawing, boring clean through from this side to that.
The scholar opens the book, strikes his own forehead, cries:
"O worm, what have you done!
You could have sharpened your teeth, filled your belly,
on any of the food that lies scattered on the ground."
The worm replies: "What of it — why such rage?
What was in there, anyway, but rows of black marks?
Whatever I cannot understand, I count as worthless —
and so I bore through it all, start to end, and lay it waste."

THE QUESTION OF KINSHIP

কুটুম্বিতা-বিচার

The kerosene-flame says to the little earthen lamp:
"Call me brother, and I'll throttle your throat for it."
Just then the moon rises into the sky —
and kerosene cries out: "Come, my elder brother!"

THE FOG'S COMPLAINT

কুয়াশার আক্ষেপ

"Because I stay so near, they think so little of me —
while brother Cloud, who keeps his distance, sulks in glory far away!"
The poet says to the fog: "Is that truly all there is to it?"
The cloud gives down rain — and you give only a haze that deceives."

THE SKILLFUL ONE'S BLUNDER

কৃতীর প্রমাদ

The topknot, perched high on the head, shakes its little tuft and says:
"The hands and the feet — in every task, they blunder terribly."
The hands and feet laugh in reply: "O infallible hair —
we make our mistakes only because it is we who do the work."

THE PRIDE OF THE SMALL

ক্ষুদ্রের দম্ভ

The pondweed lifts its head high and says to the pond:
"Let it be written down — I gave one drop of dew."

TOYS

খেলনা

The child thinks: when I am grown, I'll simply go and buy —
 I'll empty out the market of every single toy there.
 But grown, all play comes to be counted as mere clods of earth,
 and both hands reach out instead for riches and for rank.
 Will one not grow bigger still, the day one, quite carelessly,
 smiling, walks clean away from this whole fairground of the world's play?

PROSE AND VERSE

গদ্য ও পদ্য

The arrow says: "I am light, and you, the mace, are heavy —
 that is why you always stand there, chest out, so upright.
 Do my work instead, and let the argument be settled —
 forget the business of breaking heads; go bind yourself to hearts."

THE KINSHIP OF NEED

গরজের আত্মীয়তা

The beggar's bowl said to the money-bag:
 "We two are kin, brother — have you forgotten?"
 The money-bag replied: "You, too, would forget the kinship,
 if what is mine went, instead, into your bowl."

THE MANNER OF INSULT

গালির ভঙ্গি

The staff hurls abuse: "You thin little twig!"

The cane hurls it back: "You fat, clumsy club!"

ONE WHO KNOWS TRUE WORTH

গুণজ্ঞ

"I wander about, a butterfly, in colored wings,
and yet the poet never so much as glances my way.

I cannot understand it — tell me, brother bee,
by what virtue have you become immortal in poetry?"

The bee replies: "You are, indeed, quite beautiful yourself —
but beauty's worth is not proclaimed from its own mouth.

I, for my part, drink the honey, and go singing its praises —
and so I steal away the hearts of both the poet and the flower."

IN TAKING AND IN GIVING

গ্রহণে ও দানে

The folded hands say, humbly: "O slanderer,
it is not only at the moment of taking, understand.

When I take, I take indeed with both hands cupped full;
and when I give, I give, too, with a full and open palm."

THE DRIVER

চালক

I asked my fate: "Who is it that forever, relentlessly, cruelly,
goes on pushing me forward, from behind?"

It said: "Look back." I turned, and stopped, and saw:
it was my own past self, pushing me on from behind.

ETERNAL NEWNESS

চিরনবীনতা

Kissing the face of the dying day, Night says softly:

"I am Death, your mother — do not be afraid of me.

By giving birth to you anew, again and again,

I make of you, each day, a new and different day."

THE PREVENTION OF THEFT

চুরি-নিবারণ

The favored queen says: "My king, it's hard to know
what schemes the unfavored queen is plotting now.

You gave her a corner of the cowshed for a home,
and still, poor wretch, her wishes go unsatisfied.

With nothing but sweet words, she means to fool you,
and take your black cow's milking for her own."

The king says: "True, true — what dreadful cunning!

Now how am I to stop her from this theft?"

The favored queen says: "There is only one remedy left —
give the cow to me. I'll drink the milk myself."

DECEPTION

ছলনা

The enchanting woman of this world said to me:

"You and I shall stay bound forever by the cord of love."

And when, at last, all our accounts were settled,
she said: "Did you really think you'd never have to leave?"

LIFE

জীবন

Birth and death together make the game of life —
as the two halves of walking are the lifting of the foot, and the setting down.

THE SIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE, THE SAVOR OF LOVE

জ্ঞানের দৃষ্টি ও প্রেমের সন্তোগ

"You are black" — hearing this, the jamun fruit murmurs low:

"Whoever only looks at me knows me as black indeed —
but knowing only that, why call it any kind of magic?

Whoever tastes of me, knows that I am sweet."

WHAT IS NOT GIVEN IS LOST

তন্নষ্টং যন্ন দীয়তে

Fragrance departs, alas, and cannot be held back;
 the flower, shaking its head, calls after it, again, again.
 The wind says: "What is gone was only ever your fragrance.
 Whatever you refuse to give, I never call by that name at all."

EMPTIED BY GIVING

দানরিক্ত

The rainless cloud, when the monsoon at last is over,
 lies clinging to one small corner of the sky.
 Watching it, the lake, still brimming with the rains,
 smiles and glimmers to itself, the whole day long.
 "That one," it says, "is luckless, homeless, hearthless,
 dissolving itself away to nothing, no one knows where.
 See how I remain forever full of water —
 substantial, grave, unmoving, always the same."
 The cloud replies: "Friend, do not be so proud —
 your fullness there is nothing but my own glory."

THE GIFT OF THE POOR

দীনের দান

The desert says: "You give so much water to this wretched place —

what have I, in turn, to give you back?"

The cloud replies: "I want nothing, desert —
only give me the joy of having given."

THE FIXED TRUTH

ধ্রুবসত্য

I am no more than a single point of light,
and yet it seems that I alone exist, and nothing else at all.
Then I see, behind me, in the blink of an eye —
you are there, O beginningless, primordial dark.

WHAT IS FIXED, PERISHES

ধ্রুবাণি তস্য নশ্যন্তি

If, in the night, streams of tears fall for grief of the vanished sun,
the sun does not return for it — only the stars are spent in vain.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF HUMILITY

নতিস্বীকার

Though the rising sun will bring an end to its own splendor,
still the morning moon says, its face at peace:
"I wait here on the shore of the setting sea —
I shall go, and bow before the rising sun."

THE CANAL SPEAKS TO THE RIVER

নদীর প্রতি খাল

The canal says: "For my sake, such head-beating trouble! —
the rivers come rolling in to me, quite of their own accord."
"You are the great king of all canals," say the courtiers,
"there are whole rivers standing by, just to supply you water."

HUMILITY

নম্রতা

The little bamboo fence says: "Grandfather,
O bamboo grove, why must you always bend so low?
We are only small branches of your line,
and yet we hold our heads up, always, high."
The bamboo answers: "That is the difference
between the small and the great: I bend —
but I never, in any way, become small."

WHAT IS ONE'S OWN, WHAT IS COMMON

নিজের ও সাধারণের

The moon says: "I have scattered light across the whole world;
whatever blemish exists — that alone I keep upon my own body."

THE SLANDERER'S VAIN HOPE

নিন্দুকের দুরাশা

While stringing a garland, the garland-maker
 pierces the flower-stems with his needle, morning and evening.
 The needle says, heavy-hearted: "O sister jasmine,
 thousands and thousands of flowers I pierce, day after day —
 so much fragrance, so much softness, I bore straight through —
 and for all that labor, I gain nothing at all.
 I beg this one boon of fate, hands folded:
 let me not go on piercing as a needle —
 let me bloom, instead, as a flower."
 The jasmine sighs, and answers: "So be it, then —
 may your wish come true, and I be spared."

A SAFE KIND OF LOWLINESS

নিরাপদ নীচতা

You have already fallen into the mud, and so you fling mud about freely —
 it is the one still standing above who is truly in danger.

THE NEW AND THE ETERNAL

নূতন ও সনাতন

The king thinks: "Through ever-newer laws, I fashion justice myself."
 Dharma replies: "I am ancient — who was ever my maker?"

Whatever you call your new creation is nothing but injustice."

NEW FASHIONS

নূতন চাল

One day the buffalo bellowed out: "Like the horse,
I too shall have a groom to tend to me.
I've given up entirely the old buffalo way of walking —
twice a day now, I demand to be rubbed down and massaged."
Thinking this over daily, when night had passed,
it kicked and thrashed about, contrary, in its shed.
The master said: "You want that? Very well, so be it" —
and set ten men to work, tending after it.
Before two days were out, the buffalo cried:
"Master, I need nothing more — I am satisfied.
Take these grooms' hands off me, I beg you —
this rubbing and this kneading is far, far too much."

STRANGER AND KIN

পর ও আত্মীয়

Ash says: "The flame is my own true brother."
Smoke says: "And I, too, am indeed his twin."
The firefly says: "I claim no kinship with him at all —
and yet I am more his brother than either one of you."

A HOUSEHOLD DIVIDED BY OUTSIDE JUDGMENT

পর-বিচারে গৃহভেদ

The mango says: "There was a day, O bitter makal, my brother,
when we stood equal, all of us, within the forest.
Then man came, bringing with him his own taste and preference,
and difference in worth began — and equality was lost."

EACH TO THE OTHER

পরস্পর

Word says: "When I look at you, O Work,
I feel deep shame at my own emptiness."
Work, hearing this, replies: "O ever-brimming Word,
in your presence, I know myself as poor indeed."

IDENTITY

পরিচয়

Compassion asks: "Who are you, silent one, with no word on your lips?"
The tear-filled eyes reply: "I am called Gratitude."

JUDGING ANOTHER'S WORK

পরের কর্ম-বিচার

The nose says: "The ear never once smells anything at all —

yet it wears two earrings, kept only for the family's show."

The ear replies: "The nose never listens to a single word anyone speaks — only when it's time to sleep does it raise its own great clamor."

DIFFERENT IN KIND

প্রকারভেদ

The mango-branch says to the babla-branch: "Brother,
why do you burn to ash inside the oven?

Alas, my friend, how harsh a fate is yours!"

The babla-branch replies: "I have no sorrow in it.

You live on to bear fruit, O mango-vine —

by turning myself to ash, that there is my own success."

THE HEAT OF SPLENDOR

প্রতাপের তাপ

The green, wet wood thinks, day and night, with tearful eyes,
of the burning log's brilliance — oh, what fire, what glory!

Lying in some dark corner, it wastes away with envy, and says:

"By what chance shall I ever come to such a light as that?"

The burning ember answers: "O green wood,

you suffer for nothing, wanting without ever willing.

What we have won, we won by dying, by our burning —

will it simply fly, of itself, into your open hand?"

The green wood says: "But father — who would wish to die by fire!"

The ember answers: "Then let the rot and worms have you instead."

DIRECT PROOF

প্রত্যক্ষ প্রমাণ

Thunder says: "As long as I stay far away,
they call my roaring only 'the rumble of the cloud,'
they call my light merely 'a flash of lightning' —
but let me fall upon someone's head, just once,
and then, then, they say: 'Ah — that, truly, was the thunderbolt!'"

THE OLD AND THE YOUNG

প্রবীণ ও নবীন

The grey hair receives far more honor than I do,
so the black hair grieves, "alas, alas."
The grey hair answers: "Take all the honor for yourself, dear one —
only, in exchange, turn me black again."

THE DIFFERENCE

প্রভেদ

Favor grieves: "I give — and I receive nothing in return."
Compassion says: "I give — and I want nothing at all."

BEYOND QUESTIONING

প্রশ্নের অতীত

"O Ocean, what is your language, now and forever?"

The ocean answered: "My endless questioning."

"And what is your silence, O great mountain?"

The Himalaya answered: "My eternal having-no-answer."

FLOWER AND FRUIT

ফুল ও ফল

The flower calls out loudly: "Fruit, O fruit,
how far away do you keep yourself — tell me, tell me!"

The fruit replies: "Good sir, why call out so? —
I live, always, deep within your very heart."

A FORCE GREATER THAN FORCE

বলের অপেক্ষা বলী

The great storm rushed in, roaring, to wage its war —
and who, in the end, was the victor? The gentle breeze.

THE STEALING OF LIFE'S GARMENT

বস্ত্রহরণ

Saying, "I have conquered this world," relentless Death

goes on stealing the garment of life away.

However hard it pulls at the cloth, still, by the Creator's own boon,
the cloth of life goes on unwinding, walking on, forever.

SLANDER THAT FAILS

বিফল নিন্দা

"Everyone slanders you as a worthless flower" —

hearing this, the silk-cotton tree only smiles, and says:

"For as long as they go on slandering, quietly, in the meantime,
I go on blooming, all the while, into my own full and perfect form."

REST

বিরাম

Rest is only another part of work, woven in together with it —
as the eyelid, too, is simply a part of the eye.

DEVOTION AND EXCESSIVE DEVOTION

ভক্তি ও অতিভক্তি

Devotion arrives, empty-handed, its face at peace.

"Let's see, then, what wealth you've won," says Excessive Devotion.

Devotion answers: "I have it in my heart — I cannot show it to you."

Excessive Devotion says: "I hold mine, always, right here, in hand."

THE ONE DEVOTION IS OWED TO

ভক্তিভাজন

The chariot festival — crowds of people, tremendous noise and splendor —
and the devotees fall to the road, bowing low.

The road thinks: "I am the god." The chariot thinks: "I am."

The idol thinks: "I am the god" —
and the One who dwells within us all only smiles.

BURDEN

ভার

The tailorbird said: "O peacock, seeing you,
tears of pity come, unbidden, to my eyes."

The peacock said: "Is that so! Then tell me why,
good sir bird, O little tailorbird."

"It looks so awkward," said the tailorbird — "your body,
however large, its tail is grown still larger.

See how I move about, so light, both day and night;
while that tail of yours, behind you, is a terrible weight to bear."

The peacock answered: "Do not grieve for me in vain —
know this, my friend: a burden always follows glory, close behind."

GOOD AND BAD

ভালো মন্দ

The net says: "I will lift no more silt and mud."

The fisherman says: "Then it will be hard, indeed, to catch a single fish."

BEGGING AND EARNING

ভিক্ষা ও উপার্জন

"O Earth, why are you so miserly with me —

I must dig and dig, just to win a single grain."

"If you must give at all, give freely, mother, with a smile —

why must I earn it with the sweat upon my brow?

What harm would come, if you gave the harvest without any tilling?"

Earth only smiles a little, and makes her answer:

"My own glory would grow, from that, only a very little —

but your glory, from it, would be lost, entirely, and for good."

THE SORROW OF THE GREAT

মহতের দুঃখ

The sun grieves, hearing itself reproached: "What must I do,

to be beloved of everyone alike?"

Fate answers: "Then leave this great society of suns —

take up with just a few, and do some small, humble work instead."

THE CAUTION OF THE MIDDLE

মাঝারি সতর্কতা

The best walks on, quite unconcerned, alongside the worst;
it is only the middling one who walks apart, and keeps his distance.

THE ROOT

মূল

The treetop says: "I am great, and you are lowly."
The root only smiles, and says: "Very well, brother, so be it.
You are filled with pride, because you stand so high —
but this is my own pride: it was I who made you high at all."

DEATH

মৃত্যু

O Death, if you were only emptiness itself,
this whole universe would dissolve into nothing in an instant.
But you are a form of fullness — and in your lap, upon your breast,
the world forever rocks, like a child, without end.

DELUSION

মোহ

This bank of the river sighs, and says:

"On that far bank lies every happiness — of this I am certain."
And on the far bank, someone sits, and sighs as deeply, and says:
"Whatever happiness there is, it is all there, on that other side."

THE FEAR WITHIN DELUSION

মোহের আশঙ্কা

A child-flower, opening its eyes, beheld this earth —
green, and beautiful, and tender, filled with fragrance and with song —
and calling out to the whole wide universe, it said:
"O my beloved — for as long as I remain, remain you also."

AS DUTY REQUIRES

যথাকর্তব্য

The umbrella says: "For shame, for shame, good sir, my lord the Head —
this is an injustice I can no longer bear.
You go about the streets and markets quite at your ease,
while every drop of sun and rain falls, instead, on me."
"If you were the head," the head replies, "what would you do, then, friend?"
The umbrella says: "I would understand the head's own dignity —
I would understand the whole world is fulfilled by its own virtue.
My only virtue, mine alone, is to go on protecting that."

WHAT IS TRULY ONE'S OWN

যথার্থ আপন

The gourd, in its heart, held a great and secret pride —
 its little bamboo trellis seemed, to it, a flying chariot of the skies.
 It never once so much as glanced down toward the earth,
 but called the moon, the sun, the very stars its brothers.
 It believed, in its heart, that it too was a wanderer of the void,
 and so, gazing up into the emptiness, it sighed and sighed.
 It thought: only this thick stem
 binds me, by its cord of kinship, to the earth below —
 if the stem were ever severed, then, in an instant,
 I would fly away to my own bright and shining home.
 When, at last, the stem was cut, it understood the truth entire:
 the sun had never once been its own — all that was ever truly its was earth.

STATECRAFT

রাষ্ট্রনীতি

The axe said, begging: "O Sal tree, I have no handle —
 give me, please, only a single branch."
 Once the branch was fashioned into a handle,
 the beggar gave no further thought to its benefactor at all —
 it struck straight at the very root, and the poor Sal tree
 was destroyed entirely, from beginning to end.

THE POWER OF POWER

শক্তির শক্তি

By day, the eye's own pride robs it of its power of sight;
 and the moment night falls, its tears begin to flow.
 It says to the light: "Today, at last, caught here, I understand —
 it is only by your grace that I am able to see you at all."

THE LIMITS OF POWER

শক্তির সীমা

The bell-metal pitcher rang out, clanging: "Well, friend Well —
 why, when you dug yourself, did you not become the ocean instead?
 Then I could dive in without a moment's hesitation,
 and drink my fill, and fill my belly to the brim."
 The well replies: "It's true — I am only a small well,
 and for that sorrow, I have stayed silent, always.
 But friend, why trouble yourself on my account —
 as many times as I am asked, that many times I go down deep within;
 however much you take — even if you take it all —
 still I shall remain, giving that much again, and still endure."

THE FORGIVENESS OF THE STRONG

শক্তির ক্ষমা

Narada came, and said: "O Goddess Earth,

mankind slanders you, even as they live on your own grain.
 They call you soil, they call you dust, they call you dumb and gross —
 this thankless breed calls you unclean, impure.
 Stop, then, your gift of food and water — let their faces turn pale with hunger —
 let these children learn, at last, what soil and dust may really mean."
 The Earth only smiled, and said: "Heaven forbid, heaven forbid!
 Are they, then, my equals, that I should seek revenge?
 Their slander leaves no mark on me at all —
 but they, surely, would die, if ever I grew angry."

THE PRIDE OF ENMITY

শত্রুতাগৌরব

The owl proclaims to all the world, at every chance it gets:
 "Did you not know? I am the sun's own enemy!"

CONSCIOUS SELF-GIVING

সজ্ঞান আত্মবিসর্জন

The hero says: "O world, O earth, alas —
 do not imagine you will take one thing from me by trickery.
 Whatever I give, I give in full knowledge, with open eyes —
 a hundred times more than you could ever have stolen by deceit."

THE DISCOVERY OF TRUTH

সত্যের আবিষ্কার

The Earth said: "By the light of day,
nothing but myself ever fell upon the eye at all.
But when I vanished, in the night, there appeared, in the void,
the shining scripture of this whole unending universe."

THE DISCIPLINE OF TRUTH

সত্যের সংযম

The dream says: "I am free — I follow after no law at all."
Truth says: "That is exactly why you are not real."
The dream says: "And you are bound in an endless chain."
Truth says: "That is exactly why they call me Truth."

THE GROUND OF SUSPICION

সন্দেহের কারণ

"How great I am," says the imitation diamond.
"That," comes the answer, "is exactly why I doubt you are the real thing."

THE CRITIC

সমালোচক

The small coin puffs up its back and says to the rupee:

"You're worth exactly sixteen annas, no more, no five extra sikas."
The rupee replies: "That I am, precisely — my value is just what it is;
but the talk about your own worth runs far beyond what you are worth."

THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY

সাম্যনীতি

The beggar's bag says: "O bag of gold, my brother,
the difference between us two is really very slight —
let there be, then, some exchange between us."
The bag of gold answers, furious: "Let that 'slight' difference vanish first."

JOY AND SORROW

সুখদুঃখ

A heavy raindrop of the monsoon struck the jasmine —
it cried out: "Alas, I am dying — at whose death does this fall?"
Rain replies: "I come down, a blessing, upon the earth —
to one it seems like joy, to another, it strikes like grief."

THE FITTING SEASON

সুসময়

The dark and grieving rains have come at last —
O brother farmer, leave your house behind, and go.
The dry desert of the heart has been made soft and tender by the rain —

now, at this very hour, go out and sow your seed.

THE DISCIPLINE OF BEAUTY

সৌন্দর্যের সংযম

Man says: "We are heroes — we do just as we please."

Woman says, biting her tongue: "I could die of shame, to hear it!"

"At every step you meet with some restraint," man says to her.

The poet says: "And that is exactly why woman has grown so beautiful."

PRAISE AND BLAME

স্তুতি নিন্দা

Praise and Blame come together, and ask: "O Virtue, sir,
which of us two is truly your friend?"

Virtue, hearing this, replies: "Both of you are my friends,
and both of you, as well, my enemies —

and so I find there is no use at all in telling friend from foe."

AUDACITY

স্পর্ধা

The skyrocket said: "What courage I have, brother —

I go and fling ash straight into the star's own face!"

The poet says: "None of it so much as touches him at all —
that ash comes falling back, and follows only after you."

PLAIN TRUTH

স্পষ্ট সত্য

The world says: "I hold no deceit within me at all —
 birth and death, joy and sorrow, all of it is plain, and clear.
 I speak, forever, nothing but the plain truth of things —
 and you go on, forever, taking from it only what is false."

THE PLAIN SPEAKER

স্পষ্টভাষী

Spring has come into the forest; the flowers open, one by one;
 day and night the cuckoo sings, and never rests at all.
 The crow says: "Finding nothing else to do, it seems,
 spring has started up its flattering song again!"
 The cuckoo stops its singing, peers out, and says:
 "And where, sir, have you come from — who might you be?"
 "I am the crow, the plain speaker," it says, cawing.
 The cuckoo says: "Then you are truly blessed — I bow before you.
 May plain speech stay in your throat, twelve months of every year;
 as for me, let me keep only sweet speech, and speech that's true."

THE ONE WHO HATES HIS OWN LAND

স্বদেশদেষী

The earthworm says: "How lowly is the soil, how black its form."

The poet says to it, in anger: "Be still, be still!

You are only the soil's own worm, and live upon its very substance —
does slandering the soil that feeds you add one thing to your own name?"

FREEDOM

স্বাধীনতা

The arrow thinks: "I run free — I am, indeed, my own master;
while the bow stays bound, forever, in one single place."

The bow only smiles, and says: "Arrow, you do not know this truth —
your very freedom, understand, is subject to my own."

PUT TO THE TEST

হাতে-কলমে

The wasp said: "What a tiny hive this is —
and for it, the honeybee puts on such airs of pride!"

The bee replies: "Then come, brother, try it for yourself —
let's see you build a hive smaller still."

DEFEAT AND VICTORY

হার-জিত

The hornet and the honeybee fell into a fierce dispute,
each arguing hotly over which of them had greater power.

The hornet says: "I have a thousand proofs to show —
your sting is nothing next to mine."

The honeybee stays silent, its eyes brimming with tears —
the forest-goddess whispers to it, calling it near:

"Why, dear one, do you bow your head?

This much, at least, is certain: in venom, you are beaten —
but in honey, in sweetness, you are the victor."

Translator's Notes

A different Tagore than the "river" poems. This is a very different animal from the flowing, devotional free verse of *Gitanjali* or the narrative lyricism of *Śiśu*. These are from *Kaṇikā* (1899) — Tagore's collection of epigrams, most of them two-to-twelve-line fables in which two things (an object, a creature, an abstraction) argue, and the piece closes on a paradox rather than a moral. The form owes less to Vaishnava devotional poetry and more to the Sanskrit *subhāṣita* (gnomic-verse) tradition and the *Pañcatantra*'s talking-animal fables. If Tagore's own English work is the right comparison, it's not *Gitanjali* — it's the terse, aphoristic *Stray Birds* (1916) and *Fireflies* (1928), which grew directly out of exactly this kind of compression. I translated accordingly: for wit and the closing "turn," not for sustained lyrical sweep.

The dialogue-tag skeleton. Nearly every piece is built as "X says... Y answers..." — I kept that scaffolding visible rather than smoothing it into continuous narration, because the confrontation is the poem; the whole argument, and its reversal, happens in the gap between the two speeches.

Rhymed couplets, sacrificed for the turn. The Bengali is written throughout in rhymed payar couplets, which give even the darkest of these epigrams (see "Death," "The Prevention of Theft") a light, almost sing-song delivery that makes the sting land harder. English couldn't hold that rhyme without mangling the logic of each punchline, so — as with the earlier translation of "নদী" — I chose clarity and the sharpness of the closing line over rhyme.

Sanskrit titles. A handful of titles are given not in Bengali but in Sanskrit — তনুং যন্ন দীয়তে ("that is destroyed, which is not given"), ধ্রুবাণি তস্য নশ্যন্তি ("his fixed things perish"), উদারচরিতানাম্ ("of noble character," lifted from the famous verse ending vasudhaiva kutumbakam, "the whole earth is one family"). Tagore is deliberately rooting a small vernacular fable in the gravity of classical gnomic verse — a humble weed-flower or a fading fragrance gets framed by language usually reserved for cosmic maxims. I translated the sense of each title into English rather than transliterating the Sanskrit, but flagged the register shift here since it's invisible once anglicized.

"Prose and Verse" (গদ্য ও পদ্য). This one hides its pun in the title rather than the text: gadya (prose) chimes against gadā (mace, the weapon in the poem), and podya (verse) against śar (arrow). The arrow is light, quick, aimed at the heart; the mace is heavy, blunt, and strikes the head. Tagore never states the equation outright — verse pierces to the heart, prose bludgeons the head — he just lets the sound-echo of the words do the work. That association is lost in English translation, so I've noted it here rather than trying to force the pun.

"The One Who Hates His Own Land" (স্বদেশদেষী). The Bengali title borrows the register of swadesh-era political rhetoric — "hater of one's own homeland/country,"

a serious, loaded charge in Tagore's day — and drops it, deadpan, onto an earthworm badmouthing the soil that feeds it. It's a small satirical jab, likely aimed as much at self-flagellating intellectuals of his own circle as at the worm. I kept the title's weight rather than softening it to something like "The Ungrateful Worm," so the joke of the mismatch survives.

"The Critic" (সমালোচক). The coin's boast plays on old currency subdivisions — sixteen ānā to a rupee, four sikā to an ānā — in an idiom that essentially means "worth exactly its stated value, nothing more, nothing less." Since ānā and sikā mean nothing to an English reader now, I kept "sixteen annas" (which has survived in English-language Indian writing as a stand-alone idiom for "the genuine full measure") and let context carry the rest, rather than inventing an equivalent in shillings or cents that would import the wrong country entirely.

Nārada. In "The Forgiveness of the Strong," Nārada is the sage-messenger of Hindu myth who travels between worlds stirring up news and mischief — he's the one who brings Earth the report of humanity's ingratitude. I left the name untranslated, as I did with Nawab and Ramayana in the "নদী" translation, rather than generalizing him to "a sage," since the poem depends on him being a specific, recognizable figure rather than an abstraction.

A note on repetition. Entry 109, "Put to the Test" (হাতে-কলমে), appears twice, verbatim, in the source text you provided — almost certainly a transcription duplication rather than an intentional repeat (Tagore does not repeat any other entry in the collection). I've translated it once, here, to avoid a pointless doubling in the final text.

The shape of the collection as a whole. Read together rather than one at a time, these epigrams keep returning to a handful of arguments: that scale is not the same as significance (the small often wins on "direct proof" — the arum's roots, the earthen lamp's honesty, the root's quiet claim on the treetop's height); that dependence is usually mutual even when only one side notices it (the axe and the Sal tree, the bow and the arrow, the eye and the light); and that giving, not holding, is what makes

anything — fragrance, water, devotion — real in the first place. It's the same underlying conviction that drives the ocean's embrace at the end of "নদী," miniaturized here into a hundred small, quick arguments instead of one long river.