

POETRY

PRABHAT SANGEET

MORNING SONGS

Rabindranath Tagore



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INTRODUCTION

Before I wrote Kori o Komal, the language of poetry had not yet given itself into my hands. In those unripe years, the feelings of my mind, charged with the excitement of their own newness, were striving to take shape — but the very substance that might have bound them into a body was, at that time, still fluid. And so they became crooked, wavering things, like reflections cast upon rippled water; they never rose into embodied form, and so could never attain to the rank of poetry. This is why I hold that it is only from Kori o Komal onward that my poetic work — for better or for worse, taking all of it together — has followed a clear and settled current of creation.

I remember still, even today, the condition in which my mind, then only just beginning to unfold, first gave itself over — with unripened thought — to unformed, half-shaped composition, in the writing of Prabhat Sangeet. Before that, in the season of Sandhya Sangeet, there had stirred in me nothing but the faltering, half-articulate agitation of the heart's own feeling. In the season of Prabhat Sangeet, of its own accord, there began to appear now and again some first shape of reflective thought — not yet a flower, that is, but the first turning toward harvest, and even that, in soil still untutored, still untilled.

I remember, too, the time when certain convictions rose up, from I know not where, in the inner chambers of my mind, and came knocking at its outer door. Their names were these: Infinite Life, Infinite Death, and Echo. By "Infinite Life" I meant something of this kind: that in this universe, both the coming and the going belong equally to being itself — a rising into light and a sinking into darkness, both alike, as with the motion of a wave. It is not merely this world, flickering moment by moment between yes and no, between is and is-not — but rather the whole universe, of all things moving and still, seen and unseen together, strung into one unbroken garland. This thought moved me deeply, from within. Turning my gaze upon my own inward self, a conviction awoke in me: that all the good and ill of my every

moment, all the experience of joy and sorrow of my every day, was ceaselessly, everlastingly, taking the shape of a single unbroken act of creation — a creation whose very nature lies in this endless rising and falling between manifestation and its absence. And thinking on this very thought, it came to me to ask: what, then, is death? And an answer came to me, after its own fashion: that life is what keeps all things, and death is what drives all things onward. At every single moment I am dying, and it is through that very dying that I go forward along the road of living — as though some work of stitching were going on within me, threading together the past, the future, and the present. Just as this mortal life goes on growing, through this succession of moment-long deaths, the way a coral island grows, so too will death after death, through me, go on extending further the web of experience from world to world beyond this one — death, taking up the very thread of my own consciousness, will stitch, with each single prick of its needle, one world fast to another in a bond of kinship. I remember that this thought filled my mind with great joy.

I wrote the poem "Echo" when I went, for the first time, to Darjeeling. The thought that possessed me then was this: that the creation of the universe is a single sound, and that sound, taking the shape of an echo, held me spellbound, stirred me to disquiet, kept me sleepless — the very same sound, at once so beautiful and so terrible. All the currents and motions of creation are forever converging upon some one central point, and from that point they pour forth again, cascading, in the shape of an echo — becoming light, becoming form, becoming sound. These thoughts, hazy as they were, moved and stirred with great force within my mind, and I even spoke of them, now and then, with one friend or another. But the time had not yet come to give such thoughts their proper treatment, whether in prose or in verse — I had not yet won the grace of Bharati, goddess of speech. And so let me set this down plainly: if these writings in Prabhat Sangeet possess any value at all, that value is not, in its full sixteen annas, a literary one.---

I. SONG OF INVITATION

(আহ্বানসংগীত)

O you, the worm within the world's flower —
your world has withered before you,
fallen away and crumbled into dust,
and all day, all night, you sit
moaning in some hidden corner.
Seed of blight, with your own hands
you built the prison that now holds you;
tangled in the net you wove yourself,
you have lost yourself entirely.
And at the end, whom do you curse,
spending your breath in lament?
Sitting alone in your corner
you only sigh, and pour out streams of poison.

Your world has closed like a bud
that never learned to open;
when morning comes, no dew
falls anymore within your heart.
You breathe out sighs like desert winds,
burning yourself, scorching all around —
in your own small world you dwell
like a sickness feeding on itself.
You cannot bear your own heart's weight,
and so you keep your head bowed down —
no flower will open, no fruit will ripen;
you will only wither, and fall, and die.

Weeping, weeping, only weeping,
only sighs of sorrow —
hiding away, wasting away, curled into yourself,
you live only in a hollow.
There is no task left to do; now and then
you glance at your own dim reflection,

and whisper tender, mournful words
into your own ear alone.
Day and night you drink only
the wine of mirage and illusion.
Your thirst grows — a fevered, delirious thirst —
your very soul writhes and trembles.
Crying "give me, give me" for everything,
hunger burning in your belly,
you gather fistfuls of dust
and stuff them, again and again, into your mouth.

Your own breath has thickened into mist
and wrapped itself around your form;
your own shadow has fallen dark
across the path before your feet.
Within that shadow you cannot see;
you startle in fear at every sound,
and groping forward, arms outstretched,
you clutch only at your own self.
Wherever your gaze may fall,
hunger spreads on every side —
you have filled the whole world with poison,
o worm, most wretched among worms.

Come out just once today, like a bee
that wanders free upon the wing —
why should such a flower wither
on so fair a morning as this?
Come out, and settle on its petals,
and simply sing your song;
then, only then, will the flower speak to you,
then, only then, will its heart unfold.

The young sun will laugh in the sky,
the breeze will race through the grove,
and on every side the waves of your own life
will rise and surge and swell.

The leaves will catch the wind's soft swaying
in a low and rustling tune,
and birds, for some unnamed delight,
will sing from every quarter.
A hundred waves will rise on the river
and murmur their running song,
and heaven upon heaven will overflow
with nothing but the noise of joy.

Laughter here, and play there,
and elsewhere a song of joy —
and you, seated in the midst of it all,
enraptured, your restless soul
closing its eyes, will drink deep
the honey of an unconscious bliss,
losing all sense of yourself.
You will forget yourself, O you —
you will forget even your own song.
The veil will lift from your eyes;
wherever you look, it will turn to dawn;
whatever you behold,
your soul will lose itself in beholding it.

Birds not yet awake
will sing still half in sleep,
and the morning sky will ring and ring
with the raga of first light.
From a sky beyond this world
a flute will suddenly sound,
and the heart's own restless longing
will drift away, it knows not where.
Homesick hope, forsaking its house,
becoming a pilgrim of the endless road,
will climb from distance on to farther distance,
gazing on, unappeased —
as the rapt song of the moon-bird
pierces on through the far-off sky,

seeking, in the moon's own dying,
to die and vanish into cloud.

Eyes closed, spirit overcome,
you will only stand and listen, stilled,
while a music from beyond the world
forever drowns the world within it —
and hearing it, the sleep-bound soul
will long, will long to wake.
Beyond the world, on Yamuna's banks,
someone plays, it seems, a flute,
and like a dream it enters the ear,
piercing through the depths of night —

This song I have not heard before,
this light I have never seen,
this honey I have never tasted;
never has such a wind
filled my breast and poured
its nectar through my soul;
never have I bathed before
in such a shower of morning light —
in vain, it seems, I came into this world,
in vain my life has passed away.

Look — everyone is walking outward,
everyone is on their way;
travelers go hand in hand,
listen, what a song they sing!
Hear it — across the whole wide world
a voice is calling, come, oh come!
Some run ahead, some lag behind,
but all who hear it, hasten on.
Through the boundless sky, in freedom,
life rushes on, borne by its own delight —
and seeing such a radiant scene
even lifeless matter's heart would leap and dance.

You alone sit shut within,
wanting only to moan and die!
You alone weep and weep,
and breathe out only sighs of grief!
Fallen to the ground, sitting in darkness,
forever absorbed in your own self,
forever taking your own self into your lap
and cradling it with such tenderness!
How much longer will this go on?
See — time is slipping away.
Listen! Listen! Everyone is calling —
come out, oh, come out now!

II. THE FOUNTAIN'S AWAKENING FROM SLEEP

(নির্ব্বরের স্বপ্নভঙ্গ)

This morning, oh, what song
the morning bird has sung!
Drifting down from a sky
so far, so far away!
I know not how it found its way here,
a single strain that lost its path,
wandering through caverns of darkness,
descending, descending into the deep cave,
weeping, weeping in its restlessness,
until it touched my soul.

This morning, why has a stray ray of sun,
suddenly, finding no home elsewhere,
come and fallen upon my heart?
After so long, a single beam
has found its way into my cave;
upon my dark and hidden waters
a streak of gold has fallen.
I cannot hold my heart's own tumult —
the waters tremble, shiver, shiver,
they ripple and they well and swell,
and murmuring, they catch a tune.
This morning, I know not why,
my life has stirred and woken.
Waking, I found myself still bound,
walled about by a grim stone prison,
and darkness, sitting on my breast,
lost in its own meditation.
I know not why, after all this time,
my life has stirred and woken.

Waking, I found myself blind within the dark,
bound to myself, imprisoned in my own being.
I have lived absorbed in my own murmuring voice,
its echo returning always to my own ear.
Yet now and then, from far, far away,
piercing the dark walls of my prison,
a single evening star appears.
Gazing on its face, the darkness learns to smile;
gazing on its face, the night wears itself away.
The waters shiver and stir, my spirit sways, sways,
laughter rocks and drifts within my soul,
the dream of hope rocks upon my life,
and the star's shadow trembles there
like some far hint of happiness.

Sometimes, for days on end, the sky forgets its light,
and clouds throw down their shadow till the black water turns still blacker.
Upon that darkened water the rain falls, pattering, pattering,
falling and falling, unceasing, through the day and through the night —
the monsoon's tale of sorrow, the monsoon's flood of tears.
Lying there, absent-minded, I listen through the day and night,
counting the raindrops one by one, through the day and through the night,
and blending with their rhythm I sing my own low murmuring song —
pattering, murmuring — no day, no night, only this.
So, keeping only my own company, I have dwelt beside myself,
and upon the darkened water, darkness itself has sat awake.
So, only to myself, have I opened my own heart;
so, as though to a stranger, have I listened to my own song.

This morning, how did the sun's own light
find its way to touch my life?
How did the birdsong of the dawn
find its way into my cave of dark?
I know not why, after all this time,
my life has stirred and woken.
My life has woken now —
oh, the waters are rising, welling up,

oh, the heart's desire, the heart's own passion,
I can hold it back no longer.

The very mountain trembles, shivers,
boulders break and tumble loose,
the foaming water swells and swells
and roars out in a fearsome rage.

Here and there, like something maddened,
it whirls and wheels in wild abandon,
longing to break out, but cannot see
where the prison door may be.

As if to seize the morning for itself,
as if to tear the sky in two,
it leaps up toward the empty air —
and falls, and dashes down again,
and cries at last in helpless anguish.

It longs to rush in life's own rapture,
it longs to burst the mountain's heart,
lifting its arms up toward the heavens
as if to climb and to embrace the sky.

Maddened by the morning light,
it longs to roll and revel through the world.

Why, O Fate, have you made such stone?
Why bind it round on every side?

Break, O heart, break every bond,
seek today the fulfillment of your soul!
Raise wave upon wave, one after another,
and strike, and strike, and strike again.

When the spirit rises up in ecstasy,
what is darkness, what is stone?

When desire itself comes welling up,
what has the world to hold in fear?

Why, all at once, have I today
seen the face of the world made new?
A single, half-caught strain of birdsong
seemed to sing the whole world's song!

Today I have resolved
to go outward and see the world —
no longer to sit within my cave-corner
watching only my own dream.
I will pour out streams of tenderness,
I will break this prison of stone,
I will go flooding through the world, singing,
like something wild and rapturous;

with my hair let loose, gathering flowers,
unfurling wings painted with the rainbow,
scattering laughter in the light of the sun,
I will pour out my very soul.
I will run from peak to peak,
I will tumble from mountain to mountain,
laughing aloud, singing in murmurs,
clapping in time to my own rhythm.
I will become a running river —
I will flow on, and flow on, and flow on —
telling, again and again, my heart's own story,
singing, again and again, my song;
however much life I give away,
still more will flow, and never be exhausted.
I have so many words, so many songs,
so much of life within me still,
so much of joy, so much desire —
my very soul has come to dawn.

Where else is there such joy,
such beauty, and such play as this!
I will rush on with the force of youth,
who knows to whose feet I will come!
Boundless desire, infinite hope —
I long to see the whole wide world!
My longing has awakened to fill all creation,
I want only to flow and to flood it through.
As much life as I have, I will pour it out,

as long as time will let me, I will flow,
as many lands as there are, I will drown them all in it —
what more, after that, could I ask?
This is the only longing of my soul.

I know not what has happened, but my life has woken today,
and from far off I seem to hear the great sea's own song:
"Break your bonds of stone, and moisten the hard earth,
make the forest green again, and hasten the flowers into bloom;
pouring out your whole life,
soothing the world's own heart —
come, all of you, come into my own being!"

I will go, I will go — where is it, in what far land —
I will pour my life into the world,
I will sing a song of tenderness;
with a heart restless and impatient,
going out to that far distant sea,
I will mingle my life there, and let my song be finished.

Oh, what is this grim prison that surrounds me on all sides!
Break it, break it, break this prison — strike, and strike again!
Oh, what a song the bird has sung today —
the sun's own light has come at last!

III. MORNING FESTIVAL

(প্রভাত-উৎসব)

How has my heart, this day, come open of itself!
 The whole world has come and gathered there, embracing!
 All the hundreds and hundreds of people on this earth
 come flooding into my heart, laughing, arm in arm.
 Friends, companions have come, sitting eye to eye,
 and children stand there, face to face, laughing.
 Brothers and sisters have come, hearts brimming with delight,
 calling out "brother, brother," lifting eye to eye.
 Companions come running, their eyes alight with joy,
 words rise in the heart, then are forgotten in the joy of meeting.
 Girl companions wander about, hand in hand together,
 swinging, riding on the swing, rocking to and fro.

A mother comes walking, carrying her child,
 holding it close to her breast, murmuring, "sleep, now sleep."
 Her eyes bent low, gazing down upon its face,
 she showers a hundred kisses on her darling's moon-like face.
 My spirit brims with rapture, my whole body trembles;
 hearing love's own call, all of creation has come —
 the sun has come, the moon has come, and a million stars,
 those that keep their watch at the pillow of our sleep.
 My heart has filled to overflowing, the morning has turned to joy —
 all who live within this world now live within my heart.

The moment morning came, I know not what has happened!
 I gaze up at the sky, I know not whom I look for!
 The morning breeze is blowing, I know not what it's saying,
 I know not what is stirring in the depths of my own heart!
 Come, oh come close, my friend, oh come close —
 come, my brother, come, and sit, O life of my life.
 On the eastern cloud's face the first ray of sun has fallen,
 and half the peak of dawn's own chariot glimmers into view.
 Seeing the young light, the birds break into chorus —

ah, how sweet, how sweet is everything, how sweet!
Sweet, sweet the light, sweet, sweet the breeze,
and sweet, so sweet, the river runs, singing as it flows!

Wherever the eye turns, there it lingers still,
whatever it beholds, it calls close to itself;
the eyes drown in tear-drops soft as dew,
the heart drowns in an ocean of delight.
Come, O wind, come — go, go, and carry my life with you,
spread it wide across the breadth of the world.
Wander through forest after forest, go to every quarter,
go to the far side of the sea, and mingle there with the east.
Take with you, along the way, the birds' own murmuring song,
the soft breath of the jasmine, the faint scent of the malati flower —
and with them, take my life as well, go, carry it away.

Scatter the birds' own streaming song, the fragrant weight of flowers,
along every road, till the very dawn turns to delight,
and scatter, with them, my own life too.
Go, circling round and round the earth, forever flowing on,
scattering my life abroad on every side of it.

I have been given so much life that however much I give away,
it seems I never can exhaust it.
Come, O cloud, come down just once,
lift me gently in your tender lap and bear me away!
With sails of gold unfurled, swaying, swaying in the wind,
my heart longs to sail across that far ocean of the sky.

O sky, come, come — I think you are calling me, brother —
I have already gone into your breast, I am no longer here.
My life scatters itself with the morning light,
and I would fill your own life with mine.
Rise, oh rise, O sun, and take me up with you,
launch your chariot of dawn out from the east;
you mean, I think, to cross that ocean of the sky —
then take me with you, take me, take me too.

The world comes into my life, my life goes out into the world,
 and world and life together are singing but a single song!
 Whoever you are, O wise one, whoever you are, O king,
 do not, today, in your pride, turn away and smile in scorn.
 Look, just once, upon my face —
 my head has risen among the clouds themselves;
 the dawn herself has come and sat down gently at my pillow,
 and with her own rays of crimson, has crowned my brow;
 and the sun-god, loosening the garland of light from his own throat,
 has hung it now around my neck!
 Dust of the dust, I am, and upon the dust I remain,
 yet I have come to know all moving and unmoving things as my own kin.

IV. Infinite Life (অনন্ত জীবন)

I do not hope for much, nor do I grieve —
 I was born, after all, for but a day or two;
 whatever comes into my mind, that alone,
 in my own way, I sing, brimming with joy.
 These songs of mine are songs of a passing moment,
 they will not last, will not remain forever —
 they will rise, a swelling wave, out of the eastern sky,
 and fade away, and vanish, in the west.

You, O flowers, you, O birds, you, O open-hearted souls,
 you are the very joy of this world,
 you make the world forget its sorrow.
 Upon the earth a wave of gladness has arisen,
 and each of you is but one ripple of that wave —
 when you rose, and when you vanished again,
 no one has ever truly known.
 Have no fear, have no fear at all —
 in this world, nothing ever truly dies.

In the river's current, millions upon millions of grains of earth
come floating down, and mingle with the sea —
who knows to where they go!
Grain by grain, in secret, the sea itself
is building a whole vast continent,
and none can say when that will ever be complete!
In a single moment our songs, too, float away,
and none can say to where they go!
Into the shoreless ocean of the sky!
Beneath that sky's own hidden sea, in secret, secret ways,
a kingdom of song is being made,
and every song that rises from this earth into the heavens
goes traveling on to reach that place.
The sky itself will one day fill entirely,
and a whole continent of song will rise.
Have no fear, have no fear at all —
in this world, nothing ever truly dies.

Yesterday I saw, along the road, two brothers
at play together, joyfully, arm in arm;
I saw, at a window, standing silently,
two friends, holding one another's hand;
I saw a little girl, lying in her mother's arms,
drinking milk, half fallen asleep,
while over her sleeping face there rained
a shower of tenderness from two bowed, loving eyes;
I saw, upon the highway, a young boy walking,
holding the hand of his aged father —
how much I saw, and yet, perhaps,
today I have forgotten all those images.
But does that mean they are not still within me?
Have those images not mingled into my own life?

They have entered as grains of memory beneath remembrance,
and there they go on shaping my own life —
where each one merged, whose path crossed whose,

I can no longer tell, no longer recognize.
Perhaps, long ago, I once beheld a picture
of two beings bound in one embrace —
and so today, rising with the morning, I run in haste
to bind a friend within my own embrace.
Perhaps, long ago, I once heard a bird
singing out its heart in unguarded joy —
and so, all at once, seeing the face of this morning,
my own heart and mind rise up in overflow.
Everything has come and mingled here —
nothing, in this life, is ever wholly cast away —
all that I now look upon and see
is no mere idle play of chance.

Somewhere within this world there is a sea,
whose waters lie forever still and silent,
and there, from every quarter, unceasing, without rest,
the currents of all life come flowing in and mingle.
A stream falls there from the sun, a stream falls there from the moon,
a stream falls there from a million, million stars;
all the laughter, all the songs, all the life of this whole world
comes floating down upon that flood,
and mingles there, within that sea.
From all the earth a mighty current rushes on, unceasing,
toward that same unfathomed ocean;
we too, mere grains of earth, clouding the running water,
go drifting on, without a moment's rest —
and in the end, shall fall into that sea.
And there, beneath that ocean, in the very heart of all creation,
moment by moment, is being built
a whole continent of life eternal —
who can say if it will ever come to its own end!

And so I say, O my soul: sing, like a bird,
and forget these small, small griefs and sorrows —
you will go, your song will go, together you will drift away,
you, and every song you ever sang.

You will mingle in that sea, in that unfathomed, endless ocean,
and there together you will lie forever,
you, my soul, and this, your song.

V. Infinite Death (অনন্ত মরণ)

Carrying within herself millions and millions of small, small deaths,
the earth goes rushing on through the sky,
while death, on every side, laughs and plays.
This earth itself is but a road of dying,
this world itself, a world of death.

This little sliver we call the present — do we truly call it life?
It is no more than the blink of an eye, a single moment.
Upon its back it carries the whole dead weight of the past,
and none can say where that weight will ever end.
As many years as I have lived, so many years I have died,
I am dying, in truth, moment by passing moment;
we are but a living death, dwelling in the house of dying,
and yet we do not even know what dying truly means.

Is it, then, only a fistful of deaths that we call life,
merely death, and nothing more, summed and gathered?
A trivial moment, a cluster of a hundred small deaths —
and yet what an uproar we raise over its mere name.
Yet the more death grows, so much the more life grows as well,
and moment by moment we shall rise into the sky
to dwell within the very light of the stars.

The more death grows, the further I shall travel —
to where, I cannot say —
and the more my life's own kingdom will expand;
within that vast, unbounded life,
how many planets, and how many stars,

will become my wandering ground, here and there.
My life will rise and spread across so many skies
that it will come to veil the very sun and moon —
age after age will pass, and I shall win new realm on new realm,
entering ever into new and unknown stars.

Oh, when will that day come at last,
when I shall rise upon that road of sky,
and with the very cord of my own death
bind one world to another, world to world?
With the net of all our deaths together
I shall cast a covering over all creation,
and through this boundless ocean of the sky
I shall come to encircle every quarter of it.

Victory, victory, let death itself have victory —
victory to our own eternal death,
for death itself shall never die!
Upon this earth we are all but small children of a passing century,
and we have taken refuge now in you.
Come, come close to us, take us into your tender lap,
let us drink from your own mother's breast,
and nurture us, O death, as your own.
My spirit brims with joy, for I behold, within this world,
death's own unending festival.
At whose invitation have we come to this great sacrifice? —
a vast and joyous clamor has arisen all around.

He who calls to you now in love — do you not know him, child?
Why, then, are you so afraid of him?
The very thing that life itself is called — that is death's own name;
death, then, is no stranger to you.
Come, take him now into your embrace —
come, take hold of his own hand.

VI. Reunion (পুনর্মিলন)

What is this clamor of delight?
I ask of you, tell me, tell me true.
Everything rises, floating, floating, in the midst of joy,
and sometimes melts away again in joy —
and gazing now upon the earth, in this new song of gladness,
I am reminded of another day, long past.

That was in my childhood — when night gave way to morning,
I would leap up quickly from my bed and go running out;
along one side of the garden stood a row of coconut palms,
and the air grew restless with the scent of mango blossom.
Along both sides of the path
bell flowers hung in heavy clusters,
blooming like the very first smile upon a child's face —
and stepping into the garden,
a fragrance would come, all unlooked-for,
of some narcissus blooming somewhere, impossible to find.
In the middle stood a raised, paved seat, jasmine all around it —
and beyond the wall, the sunrise would come into view.
That new, young light of morning —
how dearly I loved it then,
pouring its endless golden nectar over my whole body,
opening me, like a morning flower, into bloom.

I remember it still,
how I would sit alone
beside that window, in the empty afternoon hour.
The endless sky was blue,
and a kite would go crying by,
its cry announcing a keen and piercing thirst, in a voice both sharp and sorrowful.
Along the lane, beside the pond,
a paved ghat stood on one bank —
people going, coming, bathing, drawing water there —
and swans, along the shore,

would drift and wander all day long,
washing their two wings over and over, till they gleamed.
On the eastern side an old banyan stood,
its crown a tangled knot of roots,
casting an enormous shadow, standing there mysterious.
Gripping the wall in its clutching roots,
it had broken it apart entirely,
and in its niches, in its thickets, lived a hundred wonders, a hundred fears.
Perched in its branches, birds called out, the whole day, in one unbroken strain —
and seeing all around so still, something would stir within my heart.
A soft, warm breeze would come and brush against my skin,
and on that flowing current of the air, how much would come to me, adrift —
as though from some far sea
where a realm of pure enchantment lay,
and from that place came flying, like a flock of birds,
so much of magic, and so many fairies, and a hundred, hundred fairy tales.

I remember, too, another small house upon a riverbank,
a guava tree before it, laden with fruit and flower.
Sitting there in its shade, forgetting all my childhood games,
I would gaze the whole day long at the Ganges flowing by.
The shadow trembled, the light trembled, the wind blew soft and rustling —
and the leaves came pattering, falling, drifting down.
My heart longed to go floating off
to so many far kingdoms, so many lands,
carried on and on by the rocking waves, how far, how far away —
past so many little villages
each with some new, unknown name,
past white palaces piercing the very clouds, past new and unknown cities.
Past so many trees, so many shadows, tangled banyan roots —
and on the sandy shore
children would be playing,
setting lamps afloat at evening, and flowers afloat at dawn.

Drifting on and on, only looking, only looking as I go,
I would see so many lands, so many faces, so much I cannot say.
Here, a boy's own laughter,

there, a shepherd's flute,
and suddenly, from far away, the song of some unknown bird.
Somewhere a boatman, plying his oar,
would go by, singing;
somewhere else, a traveler, sitting on the shore, would catch up a tune.
Listening on and on, I would lift my eyes up to the sky —
clouds drifting in the sky, birds wheeling in the sky.
Perhaps it would be the rainy season — the water falling, pattering, pattering,
and a shiver of delight rippling over the Ganges' own body —
now and then a crash, a crash,
of thick and rolling thunder,
now and then the flash and flicker of the lightning.
The east wind would be blowing,
the body shivering in the cold,
and the day, beneath the heavy clouds, would turn its face to darkness.

In all those days of childhood
I played only in joy,
O Nature, O my mother, forever in your lap alone.
And then — what happened after that? Where did I wander off to?
There is, within the heart, a name for a vast forest,
without an edge, without a shore in any direction,
and somewhere in its midst, I lost my way.
That forest lay wrapped in darkness,
and the tangled branches of its trees,
with a thousand tender, loving arms,
cradled that darkness to their breast.
No sun was there, no moon, no planet, and no star,
and who could tell which way was which.
I was only a lone and lost traveler.
I left you there behind me,
and wandered off into that forest,
and passed there many hundred days,
listless, joyless, without peace.

But today a single bird has shown me the way,
and led me out beyond that forest,

to the very shore of an ocean of joy.
Suddenly I saw the light of the sun,
suddenly I heard so many songs.
Suddenly a fragrance came to me,
suddenly my whole heart opened wide.
I saw the flowers blooming, I saw the birds in flight,
and the sky filled with their murmuring song.

The waves of life rise and fall on every side,
and the sun's own light dances upon them.
The wind blows on every side, the light breaks forth on every side,
on every side the boundless sky,
I gaze in every direction — life rushes on in every direction,
the whole world's infinite unfolding.
Someone comes and sits upon my lap, someone calls me friend,
someone comes close and plays with me.
Someone laughs, someone sings, someone comes, someone goes —
what a festival of joy is this that I behold!
Young men and young women laugh, boys and girls go dancing,
and the eyes that see them find their rest.
Who is that, singing somewhere, stealing my very heart away,
what nectar-laden words are these I hear?

And so today I ask of you —
why is there such joy on every side!
I understand now, oh, I understand — after all this time, I understand:
you have found again your long-lost child.
That is why, I think, you have taken me into your arms,
that is why, I think, you are singing this song.
I went out searching for love, into the depths of that forest,
and in my own heart, I lost my way,
and wept, and wept, a rain of tears.
I wandered far, and farther still — who could have known, tell me, who could have
known
that there was so much love as this, here, all along.
Wherever now I turn my eyes, in every direction, love itself
comes floating close, before my very eyes.

O my mother, today, after so many hundred days,
 the very moment that I stood before you,
 you kissed my face, with not a trace of grievance left,
 and gathered me at once into your arms.
 I will not leave your lap again, I will stay here forever,
 and learn from you, at last, what tenderness truly means —
 I will love everyone, and no one shall be left in despair,
 whoever comes to love me shall not be disappointed.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

প্রাণ (prān) — the single hardest word in this whole cycle. It means, at once, breath, life-force, soul, heart, and vitality — the animating principle of a living thing. Bengali can say "প্রাণ জাগিল" (life/soul woke) or "প্রাণ ভরিয়া" (filling the heart/life) without strain, but English forces a choice each time. I let it shift — "life," "soul," "heart," "spirit" — depending on context, which loses the thread of the single Bengali word but keeps each line readable. Where the poems build to their climaxes ("প্রাণ জাগিয়া উঠিল"), I leaned toward "life has stirred and woken" to keep the physical, bodily sense of a dormant force coming alive, rather than the more abstract "soul."

নির্ঝর (nirjhar) — the title word of the second poem, meaning a mountain spring or cascade issuing from rock. "Fountain" (Tagore's own preferred English rendering of this poem's title, incidentally) sounds almost too ornamental to modern ears, but "waterfall" loses the sense of something emerging, seeping out from stone, which is the poem's central image — water breaking its way out of a mountain's imprisoning body. I kept "fountain" for the title in Tagore's own honor, while letting the body of the poem lean on "spring" and "waters" as needed.

গুমরি গুমরি (gumri gumri), কল কল (kal kal), ঝর ঝর (jhor jhor), থর থর (thor thor) — Bengali is extraordinarily rich in these reduplicated, onomatopoeic pairs, which do enormous work in creating the poems' hypnotic, incantatory sound: gumri gumri is a stifled, smothered moaning; kal kal and jhor jhor mimic flowing/pattering water; thor thor mimics trembling. English has no equivalent word-class, so these had to be dissolved into descriptive phrases ("pattering, pattering," "trembling, trembling") — which keeps the meaning but necessarily thins out the music. This is the single largest loss in translating early Tagore, whose Bengali is built as much from sound as from sense.

যমুনাপুলিনে (Yamunā-puline) — "on the banks of the Yamuna." This is not a neutral geographic reference; the Yamuna's banks are the setting of Krishna's flute-playing in the Vaishnava devotional tradition, the place where divine longing calls the soul out of itself. When a flute sounds from "beyond the world" and "on the banks of the Yamuna," an Bengali reader hears an echo of Krishna's call to Radha — the poem borrowing the erotic-devotional register of that tradition to describe the soul's longing for the infinite. English readers lose this resonance entirely unless told; I left the place-name untranslated rather than substitute an explanatory phrase, since a footnote does less violence to the line than an insertion would.

চকোর (chakor) — the chakor (translated here as "moon-bird") is a bird of classical Sanskrit and Bengali poetic convention, fabled to live on beams of moonlight and to pine for the moon with a devotion that in some versions kills it. Its appearance signals a stock image of yearning devotion — invoking it here casts the soul's hunger for the infinite in that same idiom of star-crossed, self-consuming longing.

জাহ্নবী (Jāhnabī) — a classical epithet for the Ganges, meaning "daughter of the sage Jahnu" (from a myth in which the river was swallowed and then released by him). I kept the more familiar "Ganges" in the text rather than the epithet, since the mythic freight of "Jahnavi" would need its own explanation to land, and the poem's emphasis at that point is on the river as felt landscape rather than as myth.

ধূলির ধূলি (dhulir dhuli), literally "the dust of the dust" — an image of radical self-smallness that Tagore sets, in the very next breath, against being crowned by the dawn and garlanded by the sun. I translated it plainly as "dust of the dust," trusting that English carries its own resonance of humility here (echoes of Genesis are almost unavoidable for an English reader), even though the Bengali image is doing something slightly different — not mortality, but the paradox of the infinitesimal self discovering kinship with the whole created world.

মড়কের কণা (moroker konā), "a grain/particle of plague" — one of the harshest images in the first poem, describing the self-imprisoned figure as literally a seed of pestilence or blight. I rendered it "seed of decay" and later "seed of blight" to keep the sense of something small and self-propagating and corrosive, without the word "plague" pulling an English reader toward disease imagery the original doesn't quite intend (it's closer to agricultural blight — a crop-rot — than to contagion).

বিভাসরাগিণী (bibhāsa-rāgiṇī) — the name of a specific raga (melodic mode) in the Hindustani classical tradition, conventionally associated with dawn. Rather than transliterate a term with no meaning to most English readers, I rendered it functionally as "the raga of first light," which keeps the specificity (this is a named piece of music, not birdsong in general) while making its meaning available.

A last, general note: these six poems were written when Tagore was barely into his twenties, and their Bengali is unashamedly maximalist — long chains of parallel clauses, the same idea circled and re-struck from several angles before the poem moves on. I have occasionally compressed a repeated image where English tolerates repetition far less gracefully than Bengali does, but I've tried to keep the poems' essential shape: spiral, incantatory, building by accumulation rather than by argument, which is very much how Tagore himself later described their composition — less written than overheard.

VII. ECHO

(প্রতিধ্বনি)

O Echo,
I think I love you,
I think I love no one else.
You have made me restless, distraught,
my lute weeps for your sake.

Hearing, in your voice, the birds' own singing,
hearing the murmuring rush of mountain springs,
the deep and secret song of the forest,
the honeyed voice of a child at play —
hearing, in your voice, the whole world's music,
I have come to love you;
yet why can I never see you,
though I have searched for you through all creation?

Forever — forever —
must you forever
remain there, so far away,
singing only, in a half-caught tune, some hint of song?
You, the eternal poet.

Will you never show yourself to me? Well then, if not that,
will you not grant me one single wish?
I long, just once, to hear from close beside you
the overflowing rush of your own song.

The song of the forest, the mountain, the sea,
the thundering voice of the storm's own song,
the song of daylight, of twilight, of night,
the rustling murmur of waking and of sleep,
the song of spring, of the rains, of autumn,
the voice of life and the voice of death,
the footfall of light moving through the vast dark,

pervading all things moving and still,
the music of earth and moon, of planet and sun,
the song of a million, million stars —
somewhere, at some meeting-point of the world,
I know not where, they all come to mingle within you.

There, just once, seat me beside you,
in that night of vast darkness,
and let me hear, with my eyes closed,
how the universe's own music sounds upon your voice.

In the moonlight, in a garden of flowers, I sit alone,
and tears fall streaming from my eyes —
tell me, O enchanting deceiver, tell me,
is it for your sake?

Singing its song of rest, the evening breeze
blows off, I know not where —
why, then, does my heart go hollow, aching, with it?
Is it for your sake?

Fragrance drifts upon the air, countless stars fill the dark,
and the sky holds a silence without end —
and then, within my heart, how many words come drifting by —
are they your words?

The fragrances of flowers, coming out to play upon the sky,
lose their way upon the wind,
wander round on every side till they are spent,
and long to find their way back to their mother's lap,
searching from flower to flower —
just so, within my heart, these bodiless hopes,
why do they wander here and there —
is it you that they are seeking?

It is as though my eyes watch some road for someone's sake,
counting the days, counting the days,

and now and then, in some face, they seem, of a sudden, to catch
the echo of a beauty beyond compare —
but when I come close, it melts away
like the smile of despair itself —
whose magic is this, this mirage of beauty —
is it your very shadow?

The songs of the world, from every distant quarter,
come flocking, in throngs, toward you,
as moths, beholding a flame,
long to die there at its foot!
The dead songs of the world,
finding new life within you,
become, as if from music's own life beyond this life,
songs set free of body.
And so their new-found voice
is like the substance of a morning dream,
and mingles, with such ease,
into the very fragrance of the flowers.

I sit and wonder how the songs
manage, I know not how, to find you —
I know not where they find you.
I know not in what cave,
in what half-formed grove of cloud,
upon what throne of light and shadow
tangled with memory and hope,
your shadowy form, merging into itself,
lost in wonder at its own self,
gazes off into the empty air, toward whom I cannot say!

As the sun, grown calm at evening, amid clouds of gold,
at the far edge of the western sea,
gazes back with restless eyes toward the east —
that birthplace of the morning, that childhood of the day —
as if, upon the empty canvas of the east,
it could still catch a glimpse

of the morning's own remembered image,
so too that shadowy form gazes off toward some place,
some place from which a song is coming —

In her loosened net of hair,
the stars of evening, hearing that song, close their eyes.
The whole world's manifold beauty
comes here to be dissolved.
Music, fragrance, splendor — whatever exists in this world,
all of it, here, becomes an echo.
O Echo, your dwelling place,
your beauty beyond compare,
wakes in my heart like a shadow —
and my speech grows restless, distraught.

Until death, forever, shall I only go on seeking you —
shall I never find where you dwell?
Must you remain forever distant, and from that great distance
must I go on hearing only that half-caught song?

Standing there, in the very midst of this whole universe,
you will go on playing beauty's own flute,
and I will go on seeking you, along the road of infinite life,
my heart and mind growing ever more detached from all beside.

As the earth goes wheeling, circling round the sun,
shall I go wheeling, circling round you?
Along the path of endless life, you will rain down your streams of song,
and I will stand and gaze at you, unblinking.

Your enchanted song I hear, unceasing,
your form is written only in my own imagining —
do not deceive me — tell me truly, tell me,
you are not merely a mirage?

How many times, in a voice of anguish, have I asked, with all my strength,
"O where are you — where are you —"

and at once, from some far distance, why have you answered only,
"Who knows where"?

O you who are made of hope itself, what is this you say —
are you, then, lost even to yourself —
do you not even know your own self?

VIII. THE GREAT DREAM

(মহাশ্বপ্ন)

Filling all of vast time, filling the infinite sky,
the great God lies sunk in sleep, dreaming a mighty dream.
This vast universe is that same enormous dream,
rising, like a reflection, upon the ocean of his heart.

Rising, the moon and the sun; rising, the light and the dark;
rising, the whole bright family of a hundred thousand stars.
Rising, and rushing on, planets and their moons, in their throngs;
rising and sinking, night and day, beneath the arch of heaven.

Sitting alone, the great ocean sings its song forever,
and a thousand rivers, running on, pour out their life at its feet.
The murmuring voice of streams, the pattering rush of a hundred thousand springs,
the deep, grave song of the sea, the deep, grave voice of the clouds,

the storm wails and cries, forsaking its own shelter and home,
striking the forest's lute with a hundred arms of fearsome strength;
intoning its wrathful raga, the mass of snow comes rolling down,
like some dense and terrible burst of laughter from a mountain-demon,

slowly, slowly, the great forest shakes its matted, tangled head —
rustling, murmuring, a deep and solemn chant rises up.
With the clamor of waking consciousness the day fills all ten directions,
while, with the cricket's ceaseless drone, the ascetic night murmurs on, one single
mantra,

all things together, mingling, sounding forth on every side,
raise up, within that great heart, one single, mighty song of dream.
This is the kingdom of dream, and the creatures of that dream-kingdom
go on taking body, moment after moment, ever new, ever new.

The flower turns to fruit, the flower and the fruit at last turn to seed,
and, becoming ever new trees, live on within the forest's realm.

It becomes vapor, becomes cloud, becomes drop by drop the streaming rain,
becomes the spring, the river, breaking free of its own rocky prison.

The summer dies away, and the monsoon, coming to its funeral pyre,
quenches the burning flame, raining down its own shower of tears.
The monsoon, in its turn grown old, its hair turned white, becomes the winter,
and then, like Yayati, wins back again the youth of spring.

One thing alone is old; all else is ever new, ever new —
within one ancient heart, a new dream rises, and rises again.
We, the creatures of that unfinished dream, are slaves of our own want,
and strive, and strive again, toward some waking fullness.

Consciousness longs to tear away its own half-conscious veil —
day and night, this alone is its hope, its only vow.
Will the day ever come when the whole, perfected Self shall wake?
When this unfinished dream of the world shall, slowly, slowly, fade away?

When the dark, dream-woven shadow of moon and sun and star
shall, slowly, slowly, dissolve its very form into that heart of light —
the earth shall break apart, and, one by one, the planets and the stars
shall break, and break again, and merge, each one, like a mere reflection.

And into a vastness more luminous, more mighty, than moon or sun or planet,
every living soul shall merge, as a mere image merges in the water.
Will that day ever come, O God — the day this great dream breaks —
when the half-truth shall dissolve at last within the ocean of the Truth?

Your own heart lies half-submerged already in the waters of that final dissolution
—
tell me, O God, when shall come the dissolution of that very dissolution.

IX. CREATION, PRESERVATION, DISSOLUTION

(সৃষ্টি স্থিতি প্রলয়)

Void of space, void of time, void of all light, upon the great Void
the Four-Faced One sits in meditation;
the vast, blind darkness stands there, fearful, waiting —
when will the God open his eyes.

Within that infinite heart, the imminent universe of all things moving and still
stands there, stunned, motionless, waiting;
within that infinite heart, past, future, and present
are, petal by petal, slowly unfolding.

A trance of pure being has come upon him; his whole life, filled with great bliss,
gazes only upon its own heart;
waveless lies that boundless ocean of joy —
no shore to it, no direction, no bound.
His whole life brims with rapture,

and suddenly, that sea of bliss rose swelling in his heart,
and the primal God opened wide his eyes;
and in the midst of that darkness, empty of all being, empty of all light,
the Veda's own song burst forth, overflowing.

From his four mouths the Word came forth,
and set out, journeying, to all four quarters.
Through the boundless, vast darkness,
through the shoreless ocean of the sky,
like a storm-wind filled with life,
filled with feeling, like restlessness itself,
like an unsated longing filled with hope,
that speech began its endless wandering.

Far, and far, however far it travels,

it comes, by no means, to any end —
age after age, era upon era,
that Word wanders on, even to this day,
and even to this day, finds no end.

X. THE STREAM

(স্রোত)

Float onward on the current of the world, brother, wherever you may be!
Let us go where the sun and moon themselves are going.
Who knows where it travels, or where, at last, it ends —
into what sea the world's own current flows and mingles.

Since time without beginning that current has flowed through the boundless sky,
and a mighty clamor has arisen, journeying on into the boundless.
Waves rise, waves fall — who could ever count them!
A hundred planets and stars go floating by, and hundreds upon hundreds sink.

Upon the waves, light and darkness play together,
and, in the water's lap, life and death play at hide-and-seek.
Into that current, where a hundred million planets and stars drift like mere blades
of grass,
I too, with no more care than that, will pour out my own body,

and float on, through boundless time, across the boundless sky,
listening, with ears bent close, to the world's own murmuring roar.
I shall watch the waves — rising, and watch them fall and merge,
watch the wave of life rise up, singing death's own song.

I shall look about on every side, I shall lift my face and gaze —
so much hope, so much laughter, so much of joy and sorrow,
aversion, hatred, love, so many a sigh of grief —
the sun floats by, the stars float by, and they too drift away.

So much goes by, so much desires, so much weeps and so much laughs —
and I shall only float along, and watch it all around me.

Foolish heart, why do you cry, in vain, "I, I" alone?
Can you, who are bound for the sea, swim on against the current?
You will not go toward the world, but only toward your own self —
and that is but a great desert; who knows what you will find there.

Carrying your own self upon your head, that burden of joy and grief,
 you long to float against the stream — but that is no easy thing.
 Your limbs grow numb, your strength grows faint, your breath comes quick and
 short —
 and, clutching still your joy and grief, you will soon meet your own undoing.

I shall become the world itself; I will not remain alone.
 Alone, I would be but a single drop of water, and die.
 I have no joy, no grief, of my own; I look only toward another —
 and whatever I gaze upon, that very thing I become.

The sun floats on, the stars float on, and I too go floating with them —
 my song is one with their song, we travel toward the selfsame country.
 With the morning I sing my song, and with the evening too I sing,
 with the stars I rise, and with the stars I go my way.

With the flower I bloom, with the vine I dance,
 with the wind I wander, ever close about the flower.
 In a mother's heart I become tenderness, and rush toward her child,
 with the sorrowful I weep, and with the joyful I sing.

I exist with everyone, and yet I am not with my own self;
 upon the current of the world, day and night, I float, and drift, and go.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

অয়ি প্রতিধ্বনি (Echo, addressed as "অয়ি") — the vocative particle অয়ি is an archaic, elevated form of address used for a beloved or a goddess, carrying none of the flatness of simply saying "O." Throughout the poem the speaker addresses Echo using the intimate তুমি rather than the formal আপনি or even the middling তুমি — the pronoun reserved for lovers, small children, and gods approached with total, unguarded intimacy. English collapses all three registers into "you," so the emotional temperature of that pronoun choice — this is not politeness, it is the address of someone utterly given over — has to be carried instead by the poem's tone and repetition.

প্রতিধ্বনি (pratidhban) itself — literally "answering-sound," i.e. echo, but the poem uses it less as an acoustic phenomenon than as a name for something like the Beloved, or Beauty itself: the felt presence behind all the world's music and loveliness, always heard, never seen, always retreating exactly as far as one approaches it. I kept "Echo" capitalized throughout, as a proper name/figure rather than a common noun, to preserve this personification — the poem is a love-lyric addressed to an intermediary between the self and the ultimate, much as Radha's longing for the unseen Krishna structures so much Vaishnava poetry, or as the Beloved does throughout Gitanjali.

চিরকবি (chirokobi), "eternal poet" — a compact compound (chiro-, "forever," + kobi, "poet") that I could only unpack, not reproduce; English has no single word that fuses permanence and poethood the way Bengali does here. The line accuses Echo of being condemned to sing forever from a distance, never to arrive — poetry itself, in other words, as a beautiful but permanent exile.

যযাতির মতো (like Yayati) — a reference to the Puranic king Yayati, who was cursed with premature old age and persuaded one of his sons to exchange youth for it, so that the king could enjoy pleasure a while longer before returning the youth and accepting his fate. Tagore uses him here as a stock figure for age miraculously regaining youth — winter "becoming" spring the way Yayati briefly became young again. I kept the name rather than translating the allusion into a generic phrase ("like one grown young again"), trusting that the mythic specificity matters more than easy comprehensibility, and offering this gloss instead of a paraphrase in the text itself.

চতুর্মুখ (Chaturmukha), "the Four-Faced One" — a standard epithet for Brahma, the creator, depicted with four faces looking in the four cardinal directions, from which the four Vedas are said to have issued. I rendered it descriptively ("the Four-Faced One") rather than simply saying "Brahma," since Tagore's Bengali itself uses the epithet, not the name — the poem is picturing an image, a god caught mid-gesture, not invoking a familiar proper noun the way "Brahma" would read to an English eye already primed with textbook Hinduism.

বেদগান (Bedgan), "the Veda's own song" — in the poem's cosmogony, creation begins not with light but with sound: the Vedas bursting forth as song from the newly-opened mouths of the creator-god. This draws on the old Vedic/Upanishadic idea of the world as originating in shabda (sound/word) rather than substance — closer to "In the beginning was the Word" than to a scientific cosmogony. I kept "the Veda's own song" literally rather than softening it to something like "sacred hymn," since the specificity of naming the Veda (rather than song-in-general) is the whole theological point: the first utterance of creation is scripture.

প্রলয় (pralay) — usually translated "dissolution" or "cosmic destruction," the third term of the Hindu creation-preservation-dissolution triad (সৃষ্টি-স্থিতি-প্রলয়, srishti-sthiti-pralay) that gives the ninth poem its title. It is not annihilation in a nihilistic sense but the return of manifest existence into its unmanifest source, prior to a new cycle of creation — closer to "the world folding back into God" than to "ending." I used "dissolution" throughout rather than "destruction," which would import a violence the Bengali doesn't quite carry.

জলবিশ্ব-এর মতো / বিশ্বের মতন (like a reflection / like a mere image in the water) — a recurring simile across "The Great Dream": the universe, planets, and even individual souls are each compared to a bimba, a reflected image — as in a reflection on water, real enough to see but without independent substance, existing only as long as the surface holds still. This is a classical Vedantic image for the relationship between the manifest world (or the individual self) and ultimate reality: not illusion exactly, but a dependent, borrowed appearance. I rendered it plainly as "reflection" or "image merging in the water" rather than reaching for the more technical Sanskrit-philosophical vocabulary (māyā, etc.), since Tagore's own phrasing here stays in the register of a visible, physical image rather than doctrinal terminology.

"আমি আমি" (I, I) versus স্রোত (the current) — the philosophical crux of the tenth poem turns on this opposition: the ego crying out its own name in isolation, versus the self that gives up its separateness to float within the universal current, becoming by turns the sun, a flower, a mother's tenderness, someone else's grief. The poem's closing paradox — "I exist with everyone, and yet I am not with my own self" (সবার সাথে আছি আমি, আমার সাথে নাই) — depends on a chiasmus that Bengali achieves with effortless symmetry (আছি আমি / আমার নাই, "am I" / "mine, not") and which I've had to loosen slightly to keep readable in English, at some cost to that hairline balance.

হা হা (hā hā) — another instance (as noted in the previous set of poems) of Bengali's onomatopoeic doubling, here used for the storm's own inarticulate wail as it "leaves its shelter" in "The Great Dream." I rendered it as "wails and cries," which captures the emotional charge but necessarily loses the raw, almost pre-verbal cry of the original syllables themselves — a recurring and, I think, irreducible loss across this whole cycle's sound-word vocabulary.

XI. GAZING

(চেয়ে থাকা)

There is a longing in my heart:
wherever I turn my eyes,
I shall only keep on gazing.
I shall only watch, only watch —
I will not speak a word.

Only love shall wake in my soul,
a soft trance will settle on my sight,
and I shall lie as if drowned in the world,
lost in its wonder till the day breaks.

The river goes, flowing, flowing —
who knows to what place it goes?
I shall sit upon its bank and watch,
and let the whole day pass.

Far off, the sun is sinking into the water,
writing there in letters of gold;
the evening light lies down upon the river
and glimmers, and glimmers.

On the quiet current the boats go by
in long, unbroken rows,
carrying away, bearing off,
so many men and women.

I do not know where they live,
to what country they are bound,
at what far, unknown shore
they will come, at last, to rest.

What hopes their hearts are building
as they sit there and drift,

what joys, what griefs are theirs —
of this I know nothing at all.

I shall watch the birds cross the sky,
flying far, and farther still,
melting into the light
till they are almost a line of shadow.

With them, the whole day long,
my own life will go flying;
sitting silent, I shall go with them,
and sing the song that is theirs.

Like them, I long to build my nest
among the wandering clouds;
like them, I long to shape my hope
in the lap of the moon.

Like them, rising into the sky,
I shall look down upon the earth,
and call out, singing, to those
I have left behind me there.

Like them, together with them,
going to the very door of dawn,
I shall break the spell of sleep
and wake the morning itself.

I shall sit by the roadside,
in the lonely shade of a tree,
and watch how many travelers
come, and pass, before me.

Sitting in the dust, lost in themselves,
children are at their play;
laughing, friends together
are going home.

By the roadside, at a threshold,
a young girl sits and sings —
I cannot say how many songs —
to lull her small brother to sleep.

I gaze at her, and the whole day
slips quietly away;
her eyes are so full of tenderness
that my heart melts within me.

In that small, small life of hers,
what a wealth of sweetness dwells!
And so I love to stand near
and simply watch her there.

Somewhere a child is crying in the road,
calling, again and again, for its mother,
searching, in every stranger's face,
with anxious, restless eyes.

Hearing that plaintive cry,
the mother comes running;
and the child, held to her breast,
begins in tears and ends in laughter.

I watch, astonished,
forgetting the moment as it passes,
while two small drops of water
fall from my own eyes.

My longing goes out toward the world;
I only keep on gazing,
lost in wonder, forgetting myself —
I will not speak a word.

XII. LONGING

(সাধ)

The crimson, girlish dawn
woke a song in the world.
In the eastern clouds, gold-faced,
she peered out — only once —
and at once, as though the whole earth
were covered over, life broke into bloom.

Whose smile have you carried here,
that you should give us this gift of nectar?

All the flowers gaze upward,
lost in the sky, deep in thought,
faint, pure smiles on their faces,
two beads of dew caught in their eyes.

As if someone sat beyond the sky,
as if they could almost see —
they sway in the wind, arms lifted,
as though leaping into a mother's lap.

They seem to see something, hear something,
as if someone calls, someone sings —
Come, come, all of you,
and see the flowers' joy, the flowers' laughter.

Ah — if only I too could gaze
like that, like a flower!
With a pure heart, in pure delight,
on a pure morning, with a pure face —
if only I could laugh
so pure a laugh, just like a flower.

It sways, ah, on a stream of joy,
as though someone, out of boundless tenderness,
leaned down from the sky to kiss it,
and it falls, tumbling, into that embrace.

As if someone called it fondly by its name;
and hearing this, even through the haze of sleep,
its face opens, a smile is born,
and a fragrance wakes in it like joy.

It keeps on gazing at the sky —
I do not know what joy it finds there.
It seems to have learned no words at all,
and yet it seems to long to speak.

You who dwell in the shadowed corner —
do you know what joy it is,
once you have turned your face
and lifted it toward the sky?

Far, far away, and blue, so blue —
far away a bird goes flying.
In the deep blue distance a star is opening,
and from far away the wind comes blowing.

Bathing in the morning light,
I sleep in a bed of flowers;
the song of birds seems to touch me,
softly, on every side.

The wind is like a friend of my soul
who has been long away, and this
our first meeting after absence —
it comes running to my breast to ask for news.

It looks into my face;

radiant, as if in my own joy,
the sky itself seems to lie there,
its whole breast bared for me alone.

I feel as though the sky-filling life
were somehow my very own;
as though, covering my soul with laughter,
the young girl of the dawn awakens,
and with her tender eyes
gives to my soul the nectar of sunrise.

On my own breast, in the morning hour,
the flowers gather to play;
how they lean, how they sway,
their small hearts brimming with delight —
you are my own little girls,
my own treasures of tenderness.

Gazing up into my face,
your eyes are just about to open into bloom.
Finding shelter on my breast,
you break into peals of laughter.

Why, little one, why
this restless, eager stirring?
What is it, all of you together,
seem so anxious to tell me?

Here I shall stay, sitting,
this very morning,
and silently I shall watch
the play of these brothers and sisters.

You will lean, and fall against my breast,
you will look up again, and again;
touching your soft, petal bodies,
tears of tenderness will rise in my eyes

and fall upon you, gently,
gently, like the dew.

My heart wishes to rise into the sky
like a star,
to bloom skyward in its own joy,
like a flower.

Rising into the sky on a deep night,
it longs to gaze on every side,
to lose itself among the stars,
and sing there, lost in its own thought.

Like a cloud that has lost its way,
it longs to drift through the sky —
there is no shore, no knowing where it goes,
and so, day and night, it travels on.

The wind comes and touches its body,
moonlight comes and falls at its feet,
birds fly near and sing to it,
and its eyes seem to fall half-closed.

Resting its head upon the sky,
it seems to float there at ease;
my heart, like a cloud,
longs to drift amid the heavens.

Opening its eyes toward the earth,
it longs to smile like the dawn.

To set its foot within the world,
its foot seems reluctant to move;
as if smiling, shyly, a faint smile,
and that smile seemed to fall to the ground,

and touching a flower, woke it —
and the young jasmine-bride, laughing,
made her gentle jest at it.

The smile winds itself into the clouds,
the smile rolls out along the wind,
the dawn's smile, the flower's smile,
scatters itself through the grove.
My heart rises into the sky,
longing to smile like the dawn.

XIII. THE ENDING

(সমাপন)

Today I shall speak no word.
No more shall I sing a song.

See — this very dawn, a multitude has come;
they gather round me on every side,
gazing with eyes that do not blink;
seeing my smiling face,
they have forgotten their grief and sorrow.
Today I shall sing no song.

Singing plaintively, watching the road
again and again, I called to them,
day and night. I thought it a vain hope —
that they could not understand my language —
and my lament faded away
into every direction.

They would not come near me,
would not sit in my lap and laugh;
the instant I reached to hold them,
they would vanish away.
Pain would sound within my heart —
coaxed, they would not answer —
and all this while I had never learned
how one ought to coax them.

Now and then they showed themselves,
as if a flute played somewhere far away,
and I caught, alas, only its faintest trace.
Sometimes a line fell across a cloud,
sometimes they showed themselves in a flower,
sometimes they simply flowed through my soul,
and passed on.

Today they have come close to me —
what greater splendor could there be than this!
None of them fears me,
none of them thinks me a stranger;
all of them love me,
and eagerly surround me on every side.

All of you who have come,
let me hear your stories today.
Whatever any of you has to tell,
open your heart and speak it to me —
today I shall speak no word.

Come, come close to me,
my soul longs for you;
beside you I shall only sit.
I shall only look,
and speak no word.

At your gentle touch
a trance falls over my soul;
in your eyes a flute and a lute seem to sound —
will you not sing to me?

A new life has awakened,
a new song has sounded;
see there — the night has ended.
Take me to your breast, come close —
for I am the playmate
of all this boundless world.

On every side, fragrance;
on every side, the sound of song;
on every side, joy and laughter;
on every side, children
with their half-formed words;

on every side, a wealth
of tenderness and love!

Who are these that have gathered round me,
and filled me through with joy?
In this world my heart's own longing
has lost itself, at last.
No more shall I speak a word —
no more shall I sing a song.

XIV. ADDENDUM

(সংযোজন)

A Gift of Tenderness
To beloved Indira
— The Acacia —

Come, my child, sit on my lap
and look up into my face;
your small, laughing, joyful heart
seems summoned by the morning itself.
You see me and come running,
you love me so —
from where did you fall into my life,
you, who are the very light of dawn?

Look — in my heart, white as tenderness,
the jasmine has come into bloom.
Look — my song has caught within it
the fragrance of the flowers.
I have strung a garland out of song,
coming to the grove at morning;
my heart is filled with the wish
to lay it on your loosened hair.

With the song, with the flowers,
your face will look so lovely —
so come, come now, my girl,
look, the night has given way to dawn.
I shall wreath your small face
in a soft and gentle air,
and you will run to show it
to your father, to your mother.

Walking the moonlit roof at night,
your small face comes back to me;

the thought of you stirs, restless,
somewhere within my heart.
Your laughing little face
seems to drift and hover near —
as if the laughter had come on ahead,
and the face itself lagged behind.

Scatter the joy of your young heart
across my tired, broken breast;
with your two small hands,
reach up and hold my neck.

At the door of my lonely heart
you will sit and play your small games,
and quietly, sitting there,
I shall watch you through the evening.
Wherever you are, answer me,
come close against my breast —
I must hear how my songs
sound, echoed on your lips.

I feel as if I stood
like a thorn-tree, an acacia,
and every creeper kept its distance,
afraid of my great thorns.

When morning comes, the birds call gladly
from branch to branch, in joy —
but on my thorned boughs none will call,
and so, in silence, I only stand.

Let no creeper come near me, then,
let no bird light upon my branch —
if only, close against my breast,
one small flower of the acacia bloomed.

Swaying, swaying in the wind,

it scatters its sweet laughter,
and seeing it, I forget my thorny birth,
and drift away, in joy.

Away with all of this — carried off
on a whim, what have I gone and said?
These very words, now,
seem wet — wet with tears.

— Uncle Robi

XV. NATURE IN AUTUMN

(শরতে প্রকৃতি)

Where are you, Nature, my queen?
 Let me see, let me see your face.
 Why does a shadow of sorrow
 rest upon your lips?
 Why is your face so pale?

Only a moment past
 I saw you smiling —
 and before an eye could blink,
 I look again, and what is this —
 as though you had dissolved
 into death itself!

Why is your form wrapped
 in a robe of white mist?
 Why, beneath the weight
 of a soft sorrow,
 do your lotus-eyes
 so slowly close?

Look there — look, only once —
 the moon's two lips
 drift away in laughter,
 and that laughter goes
 and melts into the very soul of night.

Seated in the lap of that laughter,
 the roses of the grove
 speak in half-formed words,
 swaying, swaying, with fond delight.

Falling at the feet of that laughter,
 the ripples of the river,

each with its own tale to tell,
their hearts restless to speak it.

That laughter's two children
have gone into the bower of creepers,
and ponder there, in the darkness,
quite lost as to their way out.

That laughter, leaning idly,
falls, stooping, upon the horizon,
its very edge just touching
the rim of a cloud's lip.

Tell me, then, why you remain
so pale, so wan —
dreaming a sorrowful dream,
even while you lie
in the lap of laughter itself?

Lift your veil — lift it.
Raise your face — raise it.
Look, but once,
toward the face of the moon.
Tell me — whom does it see,
that it should laugh so much?

When shameless spring,
all abloom with blossom on blossom,
grows wild with joy in its own beauty
and laughs itself breathless —
the south wind, dying at heart,
turns back and cries aloud,
and from the very heart of the forest
a rapture of fragrance flows!

Even at that, the moon
is not so overcome with joy

as it is now — with what eyes
has it looked upon your face!

Yet why, oh why do you,
as though in bitter aversion,
refuse — refuse —
the moon's laughter, the moon's caress!

You wear no fragrance of flowers,
no laughter of love;
the papiya sings you, in hiding,
no song of love.
In what sorrow, indifferent one,
do you turn ascetic
in the very midst of your youth?
Lost in thought of whom
do you wear this robe of white?

Once there was your flowering month of honey —
in your heart bloomed
a boundless wealth of flowers.

Brimming with the rapture of youth,
all the fragrance of your soul
you gave away, scattered
upon the wayfaring wind!

At last, burning in the summer heat,
your flower-buds withered;
and he to whom you gave everything —
he, too, fled away.

Coming to yourself at last,
having lost all things,
through the whole of the rainy season
you wept until you had no more to weep.

After so long, it seems,
your stream of tears has dried.
Today, it seems, within yourself,
you have sworn a bitter vow —
to become an ascetic,
binding your heart in stone.

The child's play of spring
no longer pleases you —
its fickle, restless laughter,
its ornaments of flowers.

The smile you smile now,
in this, your day of renunciation,
is white, and calm, and wholly pure —
emptied of desire, emptied of longing.

Yet for all the vow you swore,
still, moment by moment,
the shadow-memory of those days
drifts and wanders through your heart.

Upon your tranquil face
falls the shadow of the mist;
a cloud of thought rises,
suddenly putting out the light —

and then, for some reason, in an instant,
you wake, and rise again,
and once more, upon your lips,
that same old smile is born!

When, overcome, you fall asleep
at the end of the weary night,
the dawn comes tiptoe, softly,
laughing as she comes,
and with the utmost care,

with two fingers,
draws your veil of mist
gently aside.

And at once the young sun comes,
beside you, with a soft, slow step,
and kisses your closed eyes,
so slowly, and so gently.

Trembling, you startle awake,
you open your two eyes;
your cheeks, like petals, flush to crimson,
and, overcome with shyness,
dew-tears fall from your eyes.

From some far dwelling, hurriedly,
forgetting their play,
now and then the clouds
come running for a moment.

They stand there, startled,
gazing upon that face,
and weeping, weeping,
at last they weep themselves away.

Whence such aversion? In what penance
do you keep yourself, from dawn to dawn!
For all this coaxing, all this coaxing,
for all this weeping, all this weeping —
ascetic one, will nothing, then,
break this vow of yours?
Ascetic one, will nothing, then,
turn your heart back home?

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

প্রাণ (prāṇ) — This word, appearing throughout, is the single hardest to pin down. It means "life-breath" in a near-literal, almost Vedic sense, but functions in everyday Bengali as "soul," "heart," "spirit," or even "darling" (as a term of endearment). I moved between "soul," "life," and "heart" depending on context, but no English word carries its full weight — the sense that breath, vitality, and selfhood are the same substance.

সাধ (sādh), the title of the second poem — usually "wish" or "desire," but with a wistful, yearning undertone closer to "a cherished longing that may never be fulfilled." "Longing" was the closest single word, though "wistful desire" is nearer the true feel.

উষা (Uṣā) — Dawn, but not merely the meteorological event. Uṣā is the Vedic dawn-goddess, imagined as an eternally young woman. When Tagore calls her "তরুণী উষা" ("the youthful Usha"), he is invoking this mythic figure directly. English "dawn" flattens her into weather; I tried to restore some of her personhood ("the crimson, girlish dawn") without importing a proper name that would puzzle readers unfamiliar with Vedic myth.

মরি মরি (mari mari) — Literally "I die, I die," this is a common Bengali interjection of delighted wonder or tenderness — closer to "ah!" or "how lovely!" than to anything about death. Translating it literally would be badly misleading, so I rendered it contextually as "ah."

ধরা (dharā) — A classical, poetic word for "the earth," from the root meaning "to hold" or "to bear" (the earth as that which holds/bears all things). Plain "earth" loses this etymological tenderness, so I leaned on phrasing like "the world" or "this boundless world" to keep some of its embracing quality.

যোগিনী (yogini), in "Nature in Autumn" — a female ascetic, one who has taken religious vows of renunciation. Tagore personifies Autumn as a yogini — a former beauty, once as radiant as spring, now withdrawn into pale, sorrowful austerity, courted uselessly by the moon. This is a deliberately loaded religious image (asceticism, tapasya, the giving-up of worldly love) that a plain word like "recluse" cannot carry alone; I kept "ascetic" and "yogini's vow" language throughout to preserve that resonance.

মালতীবধূ (mālatī-badhū), "the jasmine-bride" — Tagore habitually marries flowers to human roles (bride, mother, child). Mālatī is a particular jasmine variety; badhū means young bride or wife. I kept the compound image intact rather than simplifying to "jasmine flower," since the poem is built on this kind of animism — nature is never inert, always in familial or romantic relation to itself.

বাবলা (bābla), the Acacia — The subtitle of the poem to his niece Indira. The babla (Vachellia/Acacia nilotica) is a common thorn tree, disliked precisely for having no shade-giving canopy and forbidding thorns — birds and vines avoid it. Tagore's self-portrait as a babla tree that only one small flower (his niece's love) can redeem is a very deliberate, almost embarrassed act of self-deprecation from a young poet; I kept "acacia" rather than a generic "thorn tree" since the specificity matters to the image.

রবি কাকা (Robi Kākā), "Uncle Robi" — The poem's signature. "Robi" was Rabindranath's own family nickname (from Rabīndranāth, "Robi" = "sun"); "Kākā" is the term for a father's younger brother, i.e., paternal uncle. This is the poet signing not as "Rabindranath Tagore" but in the small, private, family voice his niece Indira Devi would have called him by — a detail that is lost if simply translated as "Uncle" or left as "Rabindranath," so I preserved the nickname itself.

Repetition as music — Bengali devotional and lyric verse often repeats a phrase for incantatory, musical effect rather than for emphasis in the English rhetorical sense (e.g., দেখিব শুধু, দেখিব শুধু — "I shall only watch, only watch," or আর আমি কথা কহিব না — আর আমি গান গাহিব না). English tends to read repetition as either weak writing or deliberate rhetorical anaphora; I kept these repetitions largely intact, trusting that in context they read as ritual, chant-like phrasing rather than redundancy — much as Tagore's own English self-translations (in Gitanjali) preserve this quality.

Form — The Bengali originals are metrically regular and often end-rhymed (a light, singing payar-adjacent rhythm typical of Tagore's early verse). I have not attempted to reproduce rhyme or fixed meter in English, since forcing rhyme almost always distorts meaning in translation from Bengali. Instead, following the model of Tagore's own English Gitanjali (which he rendered as free-verse "poetic prose" rather than metrical verse), I have aimed for a cadenced, breath-based free verse — short clauses, frequent enjambment, and repetition — that tries to carry the music of the original without its rhyme scheme.