MUNIB-UR-REHMAN (1924 -)

Born: Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India
Mother tongue: Urdu
University: Aligarh University, M.A., University of London, Ph.D.

A scholar, Munib-ur-Rehman has been the director of the Islamic Studies Centre at Aligarh University, and presently teaches in the Department of Modern Languages of Oakland University, Michigan, U.S.A. A specialist in modern Persian poetry, he has published in his field a critical study in Urdu, and numerous articles in Urdu and in English. He has also edited two anthologies, and is a well known translator of Persian poetry into English.

Of his own poems, two collections have been published, one in 1965 and the other in 1983.
APPREHENSION

Life is a trick of the mind, an illusion.
No one ever arrives, or ever departs.
Across the chasm we gesture.
Come, come to see me once more
Before the glow of cheeks dims.
Time is flying by.
Today, tomorrows’ darkness
Is already shrouding my face.
THE RUIN

The walls are razed to the ground,
The arches and domes stand deserted:
Yet every step leaves a fresh mark
That this is some monument of the past
Which the builders of civilization
Have left as rubble.

The dust covered floor
Attracts our world's pilgrims;
Makes them think and makes them dream.
Looking at the ruin's desolation
Some traveller will think
That this is some monument of the past
Which the builders of civilization
Have left as rubble.
RENDEZ-VOUS

When the bloom of moonlight
Blended with the fragrance of spring air
We often used to meet.

We still meet often.
Nights are still romantic, enchanting;
Your eyes are still
Full of nameless mysteries.
You are still the same.
But often I wonder, I don't know why,
Whether that's true of me.
THE SEA

God knows why, I kept looking out to sea
The vast blue ocean lay before me
Like an open book;
The waves made pretty patterns on it,
I kept asking: For God's sake tell me what story you have written.
I asked and asked but indifferent, they had no time to talk.

This boundless ocean, these restless waves,
And time forever slipping gently into the lap of nothingness.
Every moment I drift further from my life of desire.
Someone tell me why I am a captive in space,
Tell me how long I will stay tangled in this puzzle of east and west;
How long the shroud of race and colour will obscure our hearts.
Where are you, you raging, storm-laden waves?
Where are you, you anguish rich, storm-bearing waves?
Where are you, you sphinxes who hold the secret of life,
You storm freighted waves?
Rise now and engulf this dark planet that lies in your lap,
The eye of man waits for another Deluge.
THE BEGINNING AND THE END

The body tired with the revelry of last night;
The heart, repentent at the fulfilment of desire;
The mind clouded with strange thoughts.

Who knows the secret of the sphinx of pathos?
How did it begin, where will it end?

In that sacred moment of love
When you looked at me,
God knows why
I felt so fearful of my darkness.

The warmth of lips, the glow of cheeks,
And the spell of those eyes:
These and many more are the joys of life
Oh, but the desolation of the heart.
THE VOICE OF MAN

Today I have heard the voice of man.
Filled with life’s passion,
Vibrant, flushed with emotions,
Surging forward like a wave of molten steel.
The voice of man, not a few howling madmen,
Grim, violent, terrifying,
Hissing like venomous snakes
Swirling on the shoulder of death.

Today I have heard the voice of man
In burgeoning fields, in fat pastures,
In the perpetual pulse of factories,
In long veins of mines underground,
Ploughs scoring the earth’s bosom,
Crackling limbs of giant machines,
Vast ships cleaving the surging seas,
Song, dance, books, buildings, statues,
Countless lips, innumerable eyes,
All crying out for justice now.

Today I have heard the voice of man.
My desires, my heart,
Every fibre of my being
Longs to dissolve in this voice.
O watchdogs of religion,
O flag-bearers of cruel politics,
You tremble when you hear the voice.
But I – I weave my song
From the strands of the voice of man.
THE TEMPEST

See how this wanton breeze strolls by,
Joyful, flirtatious,
Blushing to find itself observed.
Its movement has a suppleness, a charm of melody:
But one day, crazed and raging,
It will come out bare-foot,
And hang over meadows, mountains, deserts,
Swearing, shouting, raising hell.
It will rush into halls dazzling with light,
And smother every shining thing with dust.
The lamps blown out
From the heart of darkness
A piercing cry will sound.
O God, your boundless mercy
Can turn to wrath within an instant.
And laughing, seek a far-off land
Striking against dark and dreadful mountains.
THE BANYAN TREE

Eyes closed, lost in thought,
Like a sadhu deep in meditation.
Children are playing,
Their cries
Spread ripples on the still pond of silence.
Gusts of wind pass,
But the tree does not stir.
Even death seems shy of touching its antiquity
Its body is weighed down by the past.
Our days gaze on its static body
With frightened eyes.
Why do its leaves hide every fresh shoot?
Why do its branches
Return to the ground
And turn into new roots?
TALL BUILDINGS

In the shadow of tall buildings
We crawled all our lives,
Clinging to the walls.
The buildings were tall mountains
And we were ants,
Perpetually on the hunt for food.
Tall buildings barred the way
When friends came together.
The tall houses grew and grew
As we kept shrinking.
At last, one day we disappeared,
Leaving nothing but tall houses.
THE ABORIGINAL DANCE

These are rock whirlpools;
Out of them cries the dark.
A tempest’s heart pulses
In the bodies of pines;
The roar of tigers
In the forests.
Bows and arrows, peacock-feathers,
Tongues of flame leaping from the mouths of pleasure.
Grief like little drops of venom,
Will drip from the ebony breasts of women
Whose arid thighs cry out for love.
And the madness will dance on the sharp-sided stones,
Will turn into blood to beat the drum.
THE OBSCURE CITY

Like the traveller returning home,
When you come back at evening,
Every image will smile fondly at you.
Every memory stare right into your eyes.

You will sit in the silence of your thoughts,
Wonder at the uselessness of toil.
You went out to find something
But did you find it?

Your eyes will be fixed upon the fireplace.
Shadows will flicker on the walls.
And every road will sound with voices.
A city, solitary, like a tree.
There is city in your heart,
A lost, hidden, city.