

## **Jab Vah Gaata Hai, Alaap, Udasi Ka Geet and Jugalbandi**

by Ashish Tripathi in Hindi

Translated by NEHA MISHRA &  
RAVI KUMAR RAI

### **Translator's Note**

This translation aims to acquaint the English-speaking world with the promising Hindi poet Ashish Tripathi. In an endeavour to translate four of his poems naming *Jab Vah Gaata Hai*, *Jugalbandi*, *Alaap*, and *Udasi Ka Geet*, one from each section of the collection *Ek Rang Thahra Hua (A Colour at Standstill)* the idea is to represent his poetic consciousness. These poems transpire with the personal and cultural fabric experienced by the poet, who has drawn his poetic sensibilities and its creation from the sprinting of everyday life. As he experiences sensations within himself and the world outside, his thoughts are accompanied by a keen sense of observation and an evolved taste of poesy. His words are laced with vivid imagery to remark and analyse the antithetical realities of the world. These poems are written in lucid language with a simple syntactical structure, and the poems appeal to both the mind and the heart of their readers without complications. They deal with the experiences of alienation and the ironies of the mundane existence plaguing every day. At the same time, they are also struck by the anguish of unresolved doubts and anxieties surrounding an individual's soul. The intimacy of his poems reflects the society in totality; while these poems may provide us with a glimpse of the poet's heart, the words echo the 'others'.

*Ek Rang Thahra Hua (A Colour at Standstill)* is the first collection of poems by Ashish Tripathi, a propitious Hindi poet, academic, and critic. It was first published in 2010 by Vani Prakashan, dedicated to Chandrakant Devtale, Bhagvat

Ravat, Rajesh Joshi, and Arun Kamal. This book is divided into four sections naming *Vichitra Veena* (Bizarre Veena), *Ikshaon Ke Geet* (The Song of Desires), *Andhere Ki Atmakathayen* (Autobiographies of Darkness) and *Humen Hona Tha* (We Had to Be). Each section highlights the existential anxieties and social concerns of the poet. In the poem *Udasi Ka Geet*, the poet meditates upon the nothingness of life, while the poem *Jab Vah Gaata Hai* displays the agony as the poet is trying to instil some meaning into that nothingness. *Alaap*, perhaps a biographical poem, is about women and their dreams, often crushed by the weights of patriarchy in a male-dominated world. The most remarkable attribute of the poem is the poise that the mother has attained. She has walked beyond melancholia or anger; rather, it is the sense of stoic happiness that prevails in her worldview that has been attained by a rigorous state poise; viewing some sort of meaning into that nothingness. These poems are a soulful mediation on the existential angst of mankind, proposing that only art has the power to lessen the agonies of the feverish and fretful life. Imageries used in the poems, such as darkness, a lamenting cat, and a washerman slamming of clothes, reveal both the vulnerability and stubbornness of the poet.

This translation, being a complex and creative process of linguistic and cultural transference, has the possibility of being fraught with errors and limitations. Some words need to be translated, while some meanings are to be transferred. There is a culture that is to be translocated and finally, there are the original authors along with the intended readers who are to be borne in mind while undertaking any activity of translation. We have tried hard to follow all the principles and have dutifully regarded the above considerations. However, there are quite a few issues that need to be overlooked in these acts of translation. We request the readers, to be kind enough, that to not let these be a hindrance in reading. Some words do not

have exact equivalent words in English, so we have used the original words of Hindi and provided footnotes to them. Although we have tried to produce the precise translation of the word/sentence structure of the source language in the target language, we concede that we must have fumbled at certain places. There are a few deliberate omissions to suit the English readers' sensibility. The most difficult task had been to emulate the poetic rhythm of the original poem, which is unique to every language. In this regard, we have preferred spontaneity to precision. Hope the readers of this translation would enjoy the poems as we did in the original.

### **When He Sings**

As the dense deep dark night  
Like a lonely cat's sobbing  
He sings as well,  
Sensing this,  
Of his existence as such.

Always on high notes  
Like an old radio's sound  
In husky but well-rehearsed voice,  
Yearning for the notes to toil as stones.

In the water, on the bedrock  
Like the washerman scouring clothes,  
He tosses the notes,  
And sings.

Like a quiet lonely man,  
Gazing towards an unadorned wall  
With his harmonium, he stares into nothingness  
He is singing a melancholic love song  
Challenging a prolonged emptiness  
Not wanting to let it come closer.  
He scuttles while he sings

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Between the pauses of musical notes  
He is heard, gasping and panting.

He is warbling  
As if sinking  
Into the void of a bottomless well  
While his hymns  
Sing of the anguish of sinking and floating out.

Once again tonight, as always  
Like an ailing abandoned dog yelping his dirge  
When he sings  
Every word of his song  
Wanders like a dagger in the air

In the distant sky, over the moon  
Kumar Gandharva sings with Kabir,  
'Someday, the swan will fly away alone ...'  
Like an anguished swan  
He is singing.

We don't even realise  
That there will be a day  
When he won't sing,

When no one will bother us  
Neither he nor his song—

As he sings now  
He is being born inside me.

## **2. Yodel (Aalap)**

My mother and <sup>67</sup>Lata Mangeshkar  
Were born the same year.

In their childhoods,  
Their grandfathers gifted them

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<sup>67</sup> Famous Indian singer

Tiny Tanpuras like little saplings,  
Grasping it like a toy  
Mother ran her fingers through.

Both Lata and mother  
Started practising Sargam  
At the same time  
As the sapling grew up  
Their music also groomed up

Alas! My mother's musical journey ceased  
She was to be, unlike Lata.

At her father's home  
Her tanpura slowly fell silent;  
Her long conversations with her mother  
Suddenly stopped,  
No more could she swing on boughs.

In those days, while Lata was cooing  
New scores of melodies;  
Mother gave us  
Soothing oil massages,  
To protect us from evil eyes,  
She put *Kala Tikas*<sup>68</sup> on our foreheads;  
The songs she had learnt years before  
Became lullabies.

Lata regularly steered her tanpura  
And the tanpura of my mother  
Has turned into a leafless log.

Years later, as my mother listens to Lata's songs  
Or when someone opines on Lata,  
The strings of her little old tanpura suddenly reverberate;

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<sup>68</sup> A black dot applied on forehead to protect the bearer from *buri nazar* (evil eye).

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Fresh leaves sprout on her mouldering plant  
Faraway, the overdue yodelling slowly begins,  
Musical notes expand,  
Like the giggles of a cradled child;  
The sound of her songs intensifies,  
Like a child learning to crawl;  
And suddenly the world melts into  
The music of a clarinet.

The breeze blowing  
From the boughs of her old sapling  
Suddenly kisses her face,  
Suddenly the strings of Tanpura breaks  
And the musical notes echo in the air,  
The leaves wither away

At that moment of silence  
Mother just gazes at Lata

Of my mother's toils  
No one talks.

### **3. Song of Sorrow (*Udasi Ke Geet*)**

On the last sojourn of the journey  
Like a river lost  
Between its wide planks,  
Everything seems sluggish, sad and still

Melancholy lives within me  
like relics of some ruthless life.

Nothing exists on the earth now,  
Neither rivers, birds, nor beautiful women;  
Neither songs nor instruments;  
Not even stars twinkling bright and dim,  
Nothing exists on the earth.

My heart breaks  
Like stale bread,  
Like an old hearth,  
Lying in the corner of a vast courtyard,  
I am out of sight.

Time is fleeting fast,  
Like a long summer afternoon;  
Everything passes.

My heart houses boundless sorrows,  
Like an old brook in the middle of the woods and hills;  
The oldest sorrow appears,  
Even with the fall of a single drop—

Like the ruins,  
My heart is stagnant and solitary;  
Someone sleeping in the grave nearby  
Stares at me with desolate eyes,

Nothing exists on the earth.

#### **4. The Duet (*Jugalbandi*)**

They both  
Toil to sing together,

This Art of being together is equally,  
the toughest and the prettiest Art of the world;  
As if it conceals the gist  
of being human within.

They pull up the arms of musical notes,  
As if these are cherished lessons  
And oldest recollections of mankind;

They throw the ball of musical notes into the sky  
And run like a ball boy to catch;  
Like a farmer fluttering his rope they croon,

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Like frolicking waves breaking the shores,  
They play with notes.

Like suddenly petrified rabbits running, hiding  
And then looking out to find,  
They yodel.

When they hold their hands,  
While walking;  
Two little buds blossom together.

Like streams of water flowing down the hill in the rain,  
Like the silence of a giant river merging with the ocean,  
Amidst the melodious silence, they stroll  
In this soothing stillness,  
While they keep their heads on other's shoulders and rest  
They appear to be the first couple.

### **About the Author**

Ashish Tripathi was born on September 1, 1973, in Jamunihai village of Madhya Pradesh. After graduating in science, he pursued Hindi literature, soon completing M.A. in Hindi, M.Phil. and Ph.D. After teaching for seven years at the Government Post Graduate College, Jhalawar (Rajasthan), he is currently a professor at the Department of Hindi, Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi.

He developed an interest in poetry from an early age. His first poem got published in 1986. He has been regularly publishing poems since 1994. *Ek Rang Thahra Hua (A Colour at Standstill)* is his first collection of poetry published in 2010. Along with poetry, he has also worked in the field of literary criticism. Thirty-five articles and 30 interviews of musicians-colourists-litterateurs taken by him have got published in *Tadbhava*, *Vasudha*, *Wagarth*, *Parikatha*, *Natrang*, *Samyantar*, *Sakshatkar*, *Pakshdhar*, *Parichay*,



*VartmanSandarbh, Akshar Parva, Vartaman Sahitya, Himaprastha, Kalavarta, SamayMajra, Bharat Rang, Madai, Kalacharya*, among many other books and newspapers. Along with a book titled '*Bhakti Andolan aur Tulsidas*' his other published book includes '*Samkaleen Hindi aur Rangbhasha*'. Nowadays, he has researched the topic '*Hindi Natakon par Lok Rang: Paramparaon ka Prabhav*'.

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