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### **Trying to Understand Tagore on Guru Purnima**

Lately, I've been thinking of you and the  
space between stars - pirouetting, unblinking,  
tingling - the floating bubbles of nebulae  
gathering into *Kalbaisakhi* clouds,  
on a parched summer aloneness.

How you cut open a shimmering cosmos of  
meta-truths, inspired by Ram Mohan Roy's  
reformation. The Brahmo Samaj's worship of  
the One Supreme God, imbuing your poetry  
with the syntax of universality.

You say humbly, your work was a prodigy of  
Bankim Chandra's literary revolution, the  
uncuffing from a ponderous weight, awaking  
a *prabhat pheri* of liberation,  
through the arabesques of nationalism.

Your God was sought through the Upanishadic  
sieve of love. At the altar of the Vaishnava  
man-God relationship, plucked from the garland  
of lyricism, everything became the Ganga –  
melancholy, meter, mysticism.

A diaphanous sensuousness that mustn't be  
squeezed for juice. Instead, I allow your  
transcendence to hang like *hung curd*,  
in a mystical betrothal with the  
saffron full moon - a *potli* of soft muslin cloth.

And, like Amal in *Dhak Ghar*, who'd heard the  
beckoning of 'the open road',  
to read you is to be free from the over-analysis  
of your critics. To read you, Kavi-Guru,  
is to sit in a temple of surrender called *Gitanjali*.

(Written on the day of Guru Purnima, 2024)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Kalbaishakhi*: The localized downpours accompanied by severe winds in West Bengal

<sup>2</sup> *Prabhat Pheri*: Early morning movement of people singing nationalist songs

<sup>3</sup> *potli*: A cotton or muslin pouch

<sup>4</sup> *Dak Ghar*: The Post Office (Bengali: *Dak Ghar*) is a 1912 play by Rabindranath Tagore, and Amal is its chief protagonist

<sup>5</sup> *Gitanjali*: Tagore's famous collection of poems (Translated as Song Offerings)

## My First Tattoo

At first, it was just a word.

A four-letter word.

I didn't quite know  
what it meant, though.

I was about 12 or 13 years old then,  
and a bit too naïve, you could say.

But it was just another word,  
till I couldn't help noticing  
how it was used more, every time  
I wore a short skirt.  
The hemline hung an inch above my  
scrawny, adolescent school-girl knees.

Soon, the word lodged itself adamantly  
in the space above my knees,  
adjusting itself comfortably within  
that one inch, between my knees  
and my gawky, self-conscious,  
unable-to-make-sense-of-the-world thighs.

Then, before I knew it, this word had  
spread itself – mutating fiercely,  
spawning as if it had a secret life of its own,  
it etched itself deeper,  
within the softer chromosomal folds,  
modifying my epidermis, genetically.

Mind you, it had its own adolescent mood  
swings too. Day by day, I learned to decode  
its temperamental whimsy.

It would shrivel up, desiccated, and dead,  
on days, I wore a longer skirt,  
or a dress covering my bony ankles.

Weaponized with a stalker's stealth,  
a narcissist's manipulative gene, this word  
became a place on my body. A tattoo,  
between my just-about-becoming-aware knees,  
and the hemline of my short skirt.  
Singeing. Searing. Seething.

A tattoo that every schoolgirl learns to wear,  
soon, sooner, soonest.  
If you haven't already guessed, this tattoo,  
embedded on tender schoolgirl thighs,  
grafted into the larger pop misogynistic psyche  
is spelled '*SLUT*'.