Echoes of a Life

A Collection of Forty Poems

ASHOK KUMAR SARANGI

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1. The Octogenarian

"To care for those who once cared for us is one of the highest honours."

My first memory depicts her
as a lively soul — toward whom
I was tenderly inclined.
She made me laugh,
dressed me up,
played with me,
cracked jokes
when I fell into pensive moods.
Those were our sweet days of friendship.

Slowly, I grew convinced
she stood behind my schooling —
and I began to fear her coercive power,
her iron determination,
her policy of instant correction.

She taught me moral science
day in, day out.
Her disciplined routine
was cast upon me like a mould.
Laxity, misbehaviour, disregard —
lived in a zero-tolerance zone.
She could run behind me for miles

to put me back inside the fold.

It is my greatest fortune now
to serve this octogenarian,
glorious lady, as my child —
she, who cannot stand, or move, or sit,
or even utter a word.

Not all are so fortunate as me.

To nourish my ailing mother
in my own arms
may be the greatest fortune
life will ever grant.

Carrying her frail frame against my chest,
I look deeply into her sunken eyes,
trying to understand her old-age pain —
but fail, for I cannot yet reach her age.

She soothed the pain of all of us.
Yet our combined efforts
cannot alleviate hers.

Nothing in this universe
can repay a fraction of my debt to her.

Spending every possible moment with her
is consolation, and consolation only.

2. The Last Consolation

"Some debts are not meant to be repaid —
only honoured."

Nothing in this universe
can repay
what parents silently give —
not success,
not wealth,
not tears.

At best,
we spend the rest of our lives
trying to honour
what can never truly
be repaid.

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