


Puspa Shrestha

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Puspa Shrestha

Before reading

Answer the following questions.

- a. Have you ever grown sad/happy observing things around you?
- b. Point out three things you are not happy about within your surroundings.

A prolific poet, playwright, and critic, Abhi Subedi (1945) has remained one of the eminent personalities in the field of literature in Nepal. Born in Sabla village of Terhathum district, Subedi has written several plays including *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* (2001) and *Fire in the Monastery* (2003). Subedi, who taught at the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for around 40 years, has poetry collections like *Manas* (1974) and *Chasing Dreams: Kathmandu Odyssey* (1996) and *Shabdara Chot* (1997) to his credit.



In the present poem entitled “Soft Storm,” Subedi, with a touch of compassion, contemplates over the absurdities of tumultuous times.

I became soft
 I became soft
 after I heard the tumult and
 crashed on the eerie stillness;
 I inherited the soft
 when the sky grew like crocuses
 over stones and
 became five inches taller
 that very night
 when moon skidded down
 your walls

speaking in the language
of posters and politics
rituals and reasons.
I became soft
as the softness rose like a gale
tearing my roofs
that very night
when the moon sang of
lampposts and gutters
in this seamless city.

I became soft
when homeless children in Thamel
cried with hunger under the bat-bearing
trees of Kesharmahal;

I became soft
when I returned
from the melee
where ceremony
dances with mad steps
on the unwedded gardens of history
growing around protruded rocks.

I became soft
when I alone turned to you
leaving deep dents of words
on these white sheets;

I became soft storm
when I saw a forlorn child
carrying transistor radio around his neck
run around wailing
to find his mother
in the corridors of violent history.

I became a soft storm
when I saw a man
beaten mercilessly
for no reason
before his family
by nobody for no reason
in no sensible times.

I became soft
when I saw
a blood-stained shirt
speaking in the earth's ears
with bruised human lips
in the far corner
under the moon
of history and dreams
playing hide and seek
in open museums
of human times.

I became soft
since you gave words
but did not listen to them,
gave storms
but didn't wait to see its Leela
over the silent stone.

Crocuses have grown
over the stone—
I saw last moonlit night,
storms have loitered
in the narrow lanes
where I too have walked alone

pensively in rain tears
and little chuckles of sun laughter
that have risen and melted
like rainbow.
Soft is my storm
that rages and rages
over silent pages,
silent stones,
silent forlorn shirts carrying war memories,
silent dilapidations of gods' abodes
where dances and songs
are buried under helpless divine debris
in human courtyards.

Soft is what you saw,
I honor your mooneyes
but the mad time spools
winding all that we see and live with,
stone growing in flower
moon humming melodies
history rushing under the lamppost
and over deforested land,
birds singing of bizarre journeys
over the warming earth
rhododendron blooming in winter,
mother earth telling of the tumults
in the songs of the sad birds.
All in unison have created
this soft gale.

But in these hard times
I want to melt like a rainbow

my soft storm in your minuscule sky.

My soft storm

dances in ripples

of your uneasy lake.

Glossary

tumult (n.): violent and noisy commotion or disturbance of a crowd or mob; uproar

eerie (adj.): so mysterious, strange, or unexpected as to send a chill up the spine

crocuses (n.): a type of flowering plants in the iris family

seamless (adj.): moving from one thing to another easily and without any interruptions or problems

melee (n.): confusion, turmoil, jumble

protruded (adj.): stuck out from or through something

Leela (n.): a divine play

loitered (v.): moved slowly around or stand in a public place without an obvious reason

pensively (adv.): done in a thoughtful manner, often with sadness

spools (n.): a cylindrical device which has a rim or ridge at each end and an axial hole for a pin or spindle and on which material (such as thread, wire, or tape) is wound

minuscule (adj.): very small

Understanding the text

Answer the following questions.

- a. When does the speaker grow soft? Enlist the occasions when he grows soft.
- b. What do you understand by ‘this seamless city’?
- c. Describe the poor children portrayed in the poem.
- d. What do you understand by ‘the unwedded gardens of history’?
- e. Why was the forlorn child wailing?
- f. What do you understand by ‘soft storm’?
- g. Why does the speaker call our time ‘mad time’?
- h. What does the speaker want to do in “hard times”?

Reference to the context

- a. The poet uses the word 'soft' with the words like 'storm' and 'gale', which generally refer to disorder and violence. What effect does the poet achieve through the use of such anomolous expressions?
- b. What is the speaker's attitude towards the time he describes in the poem?
- c. What is the speaker like? Is he a rebel? Why? Why not?
- d. Explain the stanza below in your own words:

I became soft
when I saw
a blood-stained shirt
speaking in the earth's ears
with bruised human lips
in the far corner
under the moon
of history and dreams
playing hide and seek
in open museums
of human times.

Reference beyond the text

- a. Write an essay, highlighting your dissatisfaction towards social, cultural, economic and political issues prevailing in Nepal at present.
- b. Suppose you are a rebel, who wants to change the society by eliminating malpractices and anomalies prevailing in the society. Draft a speech outlining your vision for change.