

 **POEM**

AFRICA

Rabindranath Tagore

Translated by Nandadulal Chatterjee

Ecstatic were those primeval days
The Creator, when disgruntled with His own self,
Had been destroying the new creation again and again,
In those days of His impatient nodding every now and then
The tumultuous arms of the sea snatched you off, Africa,
From the bosom of Mother Earth that She was in the orient,
Bound you up, girdled in the tight embrace of vigilant majestic woods
Inside an inner retreat lighted miserly.
There, in the secluded hours of leisure.
You had been strong the mysteries of what is bard to penetrate
Acquainting yourself with signs of scarcely knowables
Spread on lands, waters and skies,
The invisible spell of nature inspired incantations
In the core of your heart, senses failing to comprehend
You had been hurling ridicules at the terrible
In the guise of the hideous.
What you wanted was to triumph over fear making yourself fierce
Attired in the top most glory of horror,
The trumpet of destruction rhyming destroyer's dance

Shadowed damsel, ah!
Under the veil of darkness, the human identity of yours
Was unknown to the eyes jaundiced with contempt

Those people came with steel hand-cuffs.
They – whose claws are sharper than those of your wolves,
The gang of those who kidnap man,
Blind in arrogance who are, and
More so than your dense forest impervious to the sun.
The barbarous lust of the so-called civilized
Exposed naked its shameless lack of humanity.
At your mute wailings, too much for tongue to express
Your steaming wooded paths littered with your blood and tears,
Clods of earth – ghastly disfigured,
Smarting under the spiked boots of the bandits,
Left marks indelible to last for ever
In the annals of your dire humiliation.
Beyond the seas, that very hour in morning and at dusk
Temples were resounding with church-bells in every quarter of theirs
In the name of kindly God,
Children were at play in their mother's laps,
The minstrel's rapture swelled in adoration
Worshipping that which is Beauty.

And now, that the evening stifles in thunderous gale,
In yon western horizon,
Now that the brutes dart from their hide-outs
Declaring in ominous howls the day's coming to a close,
Come ye, oh Poet! Ye who transcend the ages.
Take your stand, in this waning twilight of the night impending,
By the poor woman bereft of all honours;
Do say, "Pardon,"
Be that your message – the final say of your civilization
Amid the ferocious delirium,
Be that your last benediction.

About the Translator

Nandadulal Chatterjee was born in one of the noble families of Bankura District of West Bengal in 1923. As a young freedom fighter he was jailed in 1942 in Midnapore Central Jail.

Nandadulal worshipped Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore as his cherished idol and source of inspiration. He believed that the writings of “Gurudev” constitute an ocean to connect all the continents centring around ‘Sonar Bangla’. A teacher by profession and social worker by nature, Nandadulal embarked upon translating the writings of Rabindranath in English from 1978. The poem ‘Africa’ was translated by Mr. Chatterjee in 1978. The first collection of his translations was published in 2004 in the name of The Golden Barge of Poems & Songs by Rabindranath Tagore posthumously. Nandadulal completed his earthly journey on 06.05.2004.