

AFTER THE CEASE-FIRE

(A message for mother from the battle front)

Gursharn Randhawa

I, the living part of yourself,

Speaking from the land covered with corpses

And drenched with blood,

Am quite hale and hearty

Worry not, mother, I will come soon

Ended at last are the days of pouring fire

And the exhausted murderous battle-bayonet

Has been wrapped in the white bandage of cease-fire

The bandage will absorb the blood, of course

But how will it absorb the hunger of the bayonet?

Hunger which increases day by day

Thank God, mother

The fire of hatred in the minds of rulers

Is not burning but smoldering

And the quite of wind

Is not being disturbed by the fearful voice
Of the siren of war and rattling of guns
And neither are flying
Fire - spitting iron - feathered birds;
After a long time, a clear blue sky is in sight
After a long time are the flocks of gulls visible

War has ended
Mouths of the guns are gagged
But every day
The memory of every bullet shot from my rifle
Gives a new injury to me

War was on
Call me not traitor, mother
You can't understand the heart of a soldier
For many days the target has been evading me
The finger on the trigger continued trembling
The burden of the gun was like the strain
Of memorizing a lesson at school
Often some faces hindered my sight
Faces of yours

Of father

Of "Dipo"

And of "Bira"

But now the commander's order

Has got stuck into my bones

"Fill your hearts with hatred

Erase the memory of every relationship

Take every object before you as your enemy

Laugh, if you are to, at the death of the soldier of enemy

Weep, if you are to, at the missed shot of your gun"

Now it seems, mother

Forgotten are all the relations

And everything else in sight

Looks like an enemy - Even the commander himself!

I fear

How shall take you as mother!

The war has ended

And we have been ordered

To recall our relations and friends

And to get our wounds bandaged

The wounds of the body have been dressed

But nobody bothers about the wounds of the soul, mother,

How painful they are!

Although the war is no more

Yet there are marks of war

On the parts of my body

On the right eye

A bullet inscribed the date of the beginning of war;

A splinter of the shot of enemy

Reduced my right leg to its half;

But worry not mother

I am quite well otherwise

Now I can see much farther

With the help of one eye

Than I could do with both

And my new journey does not need legs

The war has ended

And now we don't talk

Of assaults

And of thrusting bayonets in the chests of others

Now if we talk

We talk of those ill-fated friends
Who went to play the game of fire
Having bullets in their pockets
And could never come back;
Whose mothers
Waiting for them on the thresholds
Will turn into stone;
For whose sons and daughters
The idea of a father
Will be nothing but a fantasy;
Whose sisters' hands
Longing to tie *rakhis* on their wrists
Will turn into the withered branches of mango tree;
And whose fathers
Will be drowned in the depth of their own tears
Mother, at times the thought of the dear village
Is torturing beyond endurance
This time also
The *jamun* tree planted by me in the courtyard
Would have flowered with exuberance
And as usual

My friend would be playing cards
At the platform under the banyan tree;
This time again
The murderer of four persons
Would have become the "Headman" of the village
With fair means or foul;
Aunt "Bachno" would still be waiting for the uncle
Who was declared missing during the previous war

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Translated from Punjabi by S. P.

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