



Saeeda

A Garland Of Liberty

The Poems Of Saeeda Gazdar

Saeeda Gazdar is a women's rights activist in Pakistan, She has published a collection of short stories and a novel *Mallah Ki Biwi*. Another novel is in the pipeline. She also edits a magazine *Pakistani Adah* and writes scripts for documentaries. In 1985, an anthology of her poems *Tauk Vadar Ka Mausam* (the season of jails and hangings) was banned in Pakistan. We reproduce some of the poems here, translated from Urdu by **Manushi**.

In March

Dedicated to women's day,
March 8

*Hesitantly, uncertainly,
Tearfully, I asked:
Amid the uproar of wealth,
The confusion of death,
Amid hatred and contempt,
Disaster and despair,
The bloody sparks of war,
Will we be able to meet?
You said
In March—yes, in March,
When, amidst fair blue breezes,
We both and the children
Settle on this earth
Like bright bunches of flowers,
In sunshine and moonlight
We will halt the murderous attacks,
We will grow the crops of peace,
We will cure each soul
Of the jaundice of dread
We will free each suppressed,
Despairing, shamed desire
From the furnace of agony*

*In March...
Yes, in March,
You and I will meet.*

*When the norms of virtue
Will not be laid down
By the vicious,
When this heart and this pledge of
faith
Will be their own testimony.*

*Then, in the roseate dawn,
This body and face,
This image, once bought and sold,
Will glow with thought and feeling,
Will vibrate with song,
Dance to the rhythm of leaves,*

*Arm in arm,
We will come
To weave the garland of liberty*

*In March.....
Yes, in March,
You and I will meet.*



My heart says

*You say
This is a sin.*

*My heart says
How precious is
This child of my love.*

*In this womb,
Which you have kicked, stoned,
Frayed with your abuses,*

*In this womb,
Sieved with wounds,
How proudly was that life cherished
Which you termed sin.*

*With what care was it nourished
On the nectar of this breast,
How many anxious nights
Have passed, watching over it.*

*Had I not lavished on you
That love which you call sin,
Had I not sacrificed each moment,
Overtaxing my strength,
This child would not have grown,
Nor been so beautiful,
Nor become the heart's hope,*

*Humanity's challenge to
Insult and injury.*

Testimony

*...Listen Mariam, listen Khadija,
listen Fatima,
Today, a law has been framed
Which you should take to heart,
Be deeply grateful.*

*You are the queen of the house,
Mother of the children,
How well you look,
How safe, dignified,
Serving, with bent head.*

*Indeed, you are worthy of paradise,
Therefore, for your own good,
You are told:
"Two women's testimony
Is equal to one man's."*

*After all, it is not right
For you to go out alone.*

*This is a heavenly decree.
Whoever questions it
Is an apostate,
And deserves death.*

*To come out on the streets,
To struggle and fight
For freedom, for rights
Is against feminine sanctity.
This is the work of ruffians.*

*Why exhaust your fragility,
Waste your energy?
You are china dolls:
If you come before people's eyes
You will break into fragments.
...What makes you think
That I who gave you birth
Will be embarrassed to speak
The truth before you?*

*That I will not describe
The bonds between us of love, hate,
honour and contempt?*

*Do you fear women's truth?
Do you think me weak?
...Was my body made for your use,
To produce and reproduce
Armies of slaves,
Blind, deaf and dumb?*

*To support you
Is to dig our children's graves,*

*Therefore, we, not two,
But two crore women,
Will testify against
This injustice and oppression..*

How much blood?

*How long must we survive
On crumbs?
How long beg, plead, weep?*

*To live with dignity, freedom,
To live by one's own to il,
For two meals, a small house,
For education, medication,
For love and truth,
For democracy, self respect,*

*Merely to live a human life,
How long must we sacrifice
Our children's pearl like lives?*

*Must mad youth
Rot in jails,
Climb the scaffold of anguish?*

*Yes, how many deaths must we die ?
How much blood must be shed?*



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