

An issue of housing

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Translation of a poem (আবাসিক) by Shamsur Rahman

This afternoon is like the smiling face of a sleeping beauty.
The air is the restlessness of a flock of deer.
The title of the seminar hangs in the middle of the stage reads:
 “the housing issue of metropolitan city”.
The hall gradually becomes filled with listeners
 like rich houses which are covered with flowers
 on festive days of the year.
The President, the Chief Guest,
 the Special Guest and the speakers are on the stage.
Some are old,
Some are young.

There is a fancy flower-vase and a sprawling glass of water
 on the table in the middle of the stage.
Most people on the stage have their own houses;
 some have more than one; one or two have mansions;
 some live in boarding houses.

All the speakers lectured on the issue of metropolitan housing.
Their statements are sharp and absolutely rational.
There are frequent clicks of TV cameras on the stage.
The hall is lighted with the words competing with flashes of cameras.
Some read long essays full of theory and data.
Some check with the corner of their eyes the responses
 on the faces gathered in the seminar while
 some assess their acceptance by the length of clapping
 that follows a speech.
The floral petals start to fall on their faces.

A boy comes in and sits on an empty chair like an
 unwanted special guest the moment the president stands
 to deliver his speech.

The boy wears an old ripped shirt –
There are as many patches on his dirty pants
 as the number of years he passes after his birth;
His hair is not ever brushed,

He was making sand-castles on the street;
He roams from one street to another like an exiled prince
He picks the dumped papers from the street,
He doesn't dare to pick roses going over the fences
 as he fears the thundering voices.
He sleeps on the street at night beside the closed shutters of shops,
 or near the tin-shades.
He enters the musical palace made of ivory in his dream.

He enters the hall to see what is happening inside
 ignoring the authority for his right to enter.
Or he comes to assess in the seminar:
Why did he come to this world?
Why did he come to this world seven years ago breaking umbilical cords
 of a homeless and rootless woman?
Is he a waste-product of the human civilisation?
How was the event of his birth rational?
Was it necessary?

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