

## POETRY

## Song of the City

by Bahadur Tejani

When father died  
and the hearth was cold  
she didn't like the idea.

But there was nothing to eat  
and no one to till the fields  
so finally  
mother said  
yes  
unhappily  
and I went.

Girls in the city  
her eyes kept crying  
afterward  
girls of the city  
all come  
to the same end.  
A heavy stomach  
and swollen eyes  
your lips hard as  
parched leather  
which no man ever  
wants  
afterward.

Our cousin  
soon tired of me  
and very little to do  
in her room  
with the bed taking all the space,  
so sometimes I went  
and sat on the bar-stool  
at Muguro's  
thanking him  
for not minding me

for being there.

It was the terror  
of waiting  
the not knowing  
where to turn next  
whom to talk to  
that unnerved me.

Once when I needed  
a stretch from the wooden stool  
having tired myself  
from gazing in the mirror  
smarting under the slow  
pain of everyone  
drinking, talking, laughing  
he came.

His eyes unused  
to mine  
fired up  
when I stretched  
and yawned  
so I did it twice  
and from the corner of the eye  
saw  
his two  
play on my dress  
and upraised breasts.  
I could read my  
mother's warmth in his  
fingers when shyly  
he shook hands,  
and it at once  
elated and  
depressed me  
making my heart cry quietly  
in moan of mother  
while we talked heavily  
of ourselves.

In a while  
we were both  
drunk happily,  
for me it was the strong

smell of the city beer  
and intoxicating warmth  
of his laughter  
that had left me  
since I left  
my mother.

It was late  
but mine was the  
agony of the morrow  
thinking of  
this stranger  
who could be  
a friend  
so free  
and clear  
the song of his throat.

In the dark  
of his room  
his burnished  
fingers  
held me in  
a cold power  
and I went  
into an  
eternal sleep  
while mother's  
voice cried in  
my ears  
girls of the city  
girls of the city  
with swollen eyes  
and heavy hearts  
never daring  
to look back  
on home and hearth  
you left behind.