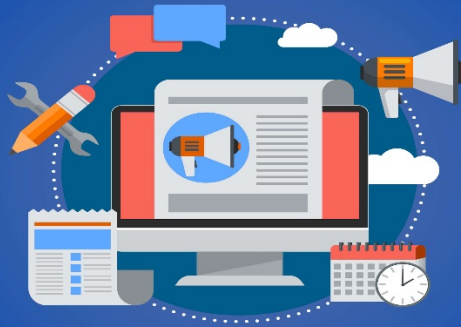


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## Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Refugee

Abhijit Sarmah

*Release me, and restore me to the ground;  
Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave*

— Alfred Tennyson, 'Tithonus'

I.

In a camp of over a million refugees,  
the only unfamiliar face is  
his mother's.

II.

The raven scratches the ground  
but the refugee has no land  
to bury himself in.

III.

The refugee left his childhood  
to the fens,  
now it's a firefly.

IV.

Life and death  
Are one.  
Life and death and refugees  
Are one.

V.

What to count on a Sunday evening?

Planets, stars, dragonflies

Or surviving refugees?

VI.

They say, one must know

What to ask for when hungry

The refugees ask for blue skies

And savannahs

VII.

Every time the old refugee

Tells a joke

It is his laugh that is

Funnier than the joke

VIII.

Life moves at a fixed pace

Like clouds, and

Brown warm water of rivers.

Life halts

Only for the refugees.

IX.

Walking along the elms (the limits)

It is quite common

For him to plunge into  
Happiness. Every other  
Refugee thinks he's crazy.

X.

Often  
Everything looks exactly  
Like how you remember them.  
He told once: a single memory  
is enough  
To live a lifetime.  
*"Them refugees, liars, them bastards!"*

XI.

Portraits of refugees  
Are the easiest:  
Capture their tired eyes,  
Their sun-burnt chests and  
Memories of their land  
On the foreheads.

XII.

Autumn leaves are falling.  
The refugees must be dying.

XIII.

It was not too hungry

For summer, yet

Not too cold for prayers.

The refugee knelt

And was gone.

**Poet's Bio:**

Abhijit Sarmah is a writer, poet and screenwriter from the North-east Indian state of Assam. He has one collection of poetry, *Dying with a Little Patience* (2020), and a chapbook of poetry, *The Voice Under Silence* (2016), to his credit. He has contributed to various print and online journals, including *South 85 Journal*, *Salmon Creek Journal*, *Not Very Quiet* and others.