

Excerpts from *Burnt Beyond Return*

Review by Aditi Dasgupta

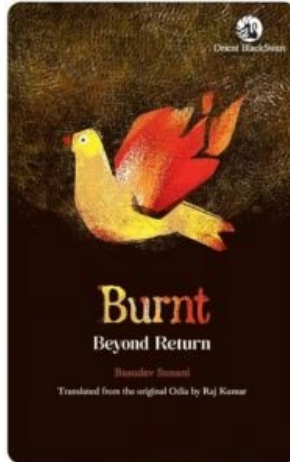


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All the language they had ever mastered seemed to have deserted them. And courage? They had forgotten what it was. They stood there, cowering under the waning light of the earthen lamp, like Egyptian mummies who had been dug out of their tombs: fear, grief, regret and sympathy seemed to have enshrouded them in silence. *(Page No. 28)*

This humble J-shaped organ grandly named the stomach is what every creature walking this earth goes berserk trying to win some food for. What's more, the claw marks of its perpetual insatiable hunger follow us to our very deathbeds. Even as you are burping in contentment having consumed a satisfying lunch, the hunger pangs of dinner make their presence felt. You eat dinner, and soon it demands breakfast. Breakfast over, you find the stomach already growling for lunch. And so on. Man keeps running endlessly in search of that elusive moment of fulfilment in this eternal cycle of bodily needs. He never seems able to lay his hands on that one solitary meal that would put this constant cloying, omnipresent and annoying presence of hunger to rest forever! *(Page No. 41-42)*

Bathed in the intoxicating sounds that seemed to shake the ground like seismic waves of terror, Lalbabu and his cronies gyrated to a slow drunken rhythm. Somewhere deep in the shadows, a wailing body was being beaten black and blue. The powerful arms that had once overcome the lethal horns of a massive blackbuck were now bound by cruel ropes that were cutting into their bleeding flesh. With iron resolve, grandfather was biting his tongue, his mouth clamped tightly shut in a brave attempt to silence the screams that threatened to pour his helplessness into the merciless abyss beyond. *(Page No. 66)*

Life went on as usual. Everyone was happy. Everyone was content. But what is life without a fly in the soup? There was one little mole in this otherwise peaceful community, one individual who did not

share the joy and contentment of the community – the temple Brahmin. He was not happy at having to serve at a place of worship visited by hundreds of untouchables and lower castes every day. Why, his priest community had even threatened him with excommunication for accepting a measly job in a slum full of untouchables. (Page No. 124)

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Basudev Sunani is an award-winning writer. Some of his phenomenal volumes of poetry are Asprushya, Karadi Haata, Chhi, Kaaliaa Ubaacha, Bodha Hue Bhala

Paaibaa Mote Jana Nahin and Mu Achhi Boli. He also has two novels, Paada Podi, and Mashanee Sahara Delhi. Apart from these, he has five volumes of critical essays, Dalit, Punjibad O Bhumandalikaran, Dalit Sanskrutir Itihaas, Dalit Encounter, Ambedkarism: A Way of Life and Brahmanbad O Bharatiya Nari. His work has been translated into English, German, Aboriginal Australian and in many Indian languages. He is a veterinarian by profession, currently, he is a Deputy Commissioner, at the Ministry of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Government of India. He was born and brought up in the undivided Kalahandi district of Odisha.