

In Praise of Trees (Brikhsa Bandana)

-Rabindranath Tagore. 1926

(Translated by Dr. William Radice, 1985)

[Tagore wrote this poem in connection with the annual Tree-planting festival that he instituted at Shantiniketan. Tagore included this poem in the book "Bano Bani" which was dedicated to Tagore's scientist friend Plant-Physiologist/physicist Sir JC Bose. This poem was quoted by the United Nations in their publications to highlight the importance of green earth. I thought it would be nice if MM includes this poem in their celebrations of Earth day on April 22, 2006.

Regards.

--Asim K. Duttaroy]

O Tree, life-founder, you heard the sun
Summon you from the dark womb of earth
At your life's first weakening; your height
Raised from rhythmless rock the first
Hymn to the light; you brought feeling to harsh
Impassive desert.

Thus, in the sky,
By mixed magic, blue with green, you flung
The song of the world's spirit at heaven
And the tribe of stars. Facing the unknown,
You flew with fearless pride the victory
Banner of the life-force that passes
Again and again through death's gateway
To follow an endless pilgrim-road
Through time, through changing resting places,
In ever new mortal vehicles.
Earth's reverie snapped at your noiseless
Challenge: excitedly she recalled
Her daring departure from heaven-
A daughter of God leaving its bright
Splendour, ashy-pale, dressed in humble
Ochre-coloured garments, to partake
Of the joy of heaven fragmented
Into time and places, to receive it
More deeply now that she would often
Pierce it with stabs of grief.

O valiant
Child of the earth, you declared a war
To liberate her from that fortress
Of desert. The war was incessant-
You crossed ocean-waves to establish,
With resolute faith, green seats of power
On bare, inaccessible islands;
You bewitched dust, scaled peaks, wrote on stone

In leafy characters your battle
Tales; you spread your code over trackless
Wastes.

Sky, earth, sea were expressionless
Once. Lacking the festival magic
Of the seasons. Your branches offered
Music its first shelter, made the songs
In which the restless wind – colouring
With kaleidoscopic melody
Her invisible body, edging
Her shawl with prismatic tune – first knew
Herself. You were the first to describe
On earth's clay canvas, by absorbing
Plastic power from the sun. a living
Image of beauty. You possessed light's
Hidden wealth to give colour to light.
When celestial dancing-nymphs shook
Their bracelets in the clouds, shattering
Those misty cups to rain down freshening
Nectar, you filled therewith your vessels
Of leafs and flower to clothe the earth
With perpetual youth.

O profound,
Silent tree, by restraining valour
With patience, you revealed creative
Power in its peaceful form. Thus we come
To your shade to learn the art of peace,
To hear the word of silence; weighed down
With anxiety, we come to rest
In you tranquil blue-green shade, to take
Into our souls life rich, life ever
Juvenescent, life true to earth, life
Omni-victorious. I am certain
My thoughts have borne me to your essence-
Where the same fire as the sun's ritual
Fire of creation quietly assumes
In your cool green form. O sun-drinker,
The fire with which - by milking hundreds
Of centuries of days sunlight –
You have filled your core, man has received
As your gift, making him world-mighty,
Greatly honoured, rival to the gods:
His shining strength, kindled by your flame,
Is the wonder of the universe
As it cuts through daunting obstacles.

Man, whose life is in you, who is soothed
By your cool shade, strengthened by your power.
Adorned by your garland – O tree, friend
Of man, dazed by your leafy flutesong
I speak today for him as I make
This verse-homage ,
As I dedicate this offering
To you.