



## *Majestic Nights: Love Poems of Bengali Women*

**Translated and edited by Carolyne Wright  
White Pine Press, 2008.**

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## Pre-Publication Comments

Although these poems come directly out of an ancient tradition, they feel as contemporary as anything being written today. And though they are the work of many different poets, there's a coherence about the volume as a whole that gives the poems exactly the right context in which to be read. Whether yearning, flirtatious, angry, overtly sexual, bewildered, grieving, or joyful, they give full range of expression to the female experience of loving, both on a purely human physical and emotional level, as songs to a specific beloved, but also to the spirit's yearning for a higher power. Wright and her co-translators have managed to capture the force of this traditional Bengali fusion of loves, a concept little known in the West, and made it seem both natural and inevitable. These are marvelous poems, various, surprising, and passionate. *Majestic Nights* will live on my bedside table for the indefinite future.

—Chase Twichell

*Majestic Nights* is a collection of women's voices, both Muslim and Hindu, speaking to us in Bengali (a.k.a. Bangla) and translated by diverse hands in collaboration with Carolyne Wright, who represents the ideal intermediary, a poet in her own right in her mother tongue of English and one who has taken the time and effort to master Bengali. These lyrics, identified as "love poems," span the full spectrum of that chameleon-like emotion. The female voices therein are assertive: "I want a man, not some deity," says Shamim Azad in her "Conjugal Prayer." They are realistic: "The one with whom we always live / is not called love, but worry," Vijaya Mukhopadhyay tells us in "Companion." They challenge conventional romanticism: "love turned sour like leftover rice / fermented," Dilara Hashem writes with a down-to-earth simile drawn from rice-eating Bengali domestic culture in her poem called simply "Love." *Majestic Nights* is truly majestic, a rewarding read, and reread.

—Clinton Seely

## Praise for Carolyne Wright's Translations from the Bengali

"It's a rare pleasure to read translations of poems that convey them as poetry. These versions from the Bengali by Wright, Banerjee, Datta and others evoke that thrill of recognition."

—Adrienne Rich

"You cannot read these poems without being transformed by the hot breath of the gods, the eternal sweetness of flowers, and the soul of this powerful poet as she mesmerizes you with her alert wisdom, her gift of song. This is one of the finest collections of poetry I have come across in recent years. You need this book."

—Joy Harjo

“Carolyn Wright's translations catch the rhythms of Bengali yet flow with the ease of a native tongue. To begin to see India through a woman's eyes, read these poems. You will not forget these visions.”

—Joseph Bruchac

"These are burning poems, giving off a spell of light, casting deep shadows across continents. They are elemental, rising out of the rich and poisonous soil and storming up from the suffocating waters to face a broken land, fire, wounded life. It's an honest and powerful book in which nothing is spared, but there is still love and it is singing."

—Linda Hogan

Wright handles language adroitly, is never intrusive, has a fine ear, and plenty of nerve to follow her poets to the surreal edge of intelligibility without sliding over into obscurity... In a certain way, the matter-of-fact notes make even clearer that the language of the poetry comes from another, wilder place where nightmare interprets the actual. The poems hover in the region of myth, but it is myth as injured and disrupted as the folk culture and landscape it most deeply expresses.

—Eleanor Wilner



(Original Painting by A. R. Chughtai)