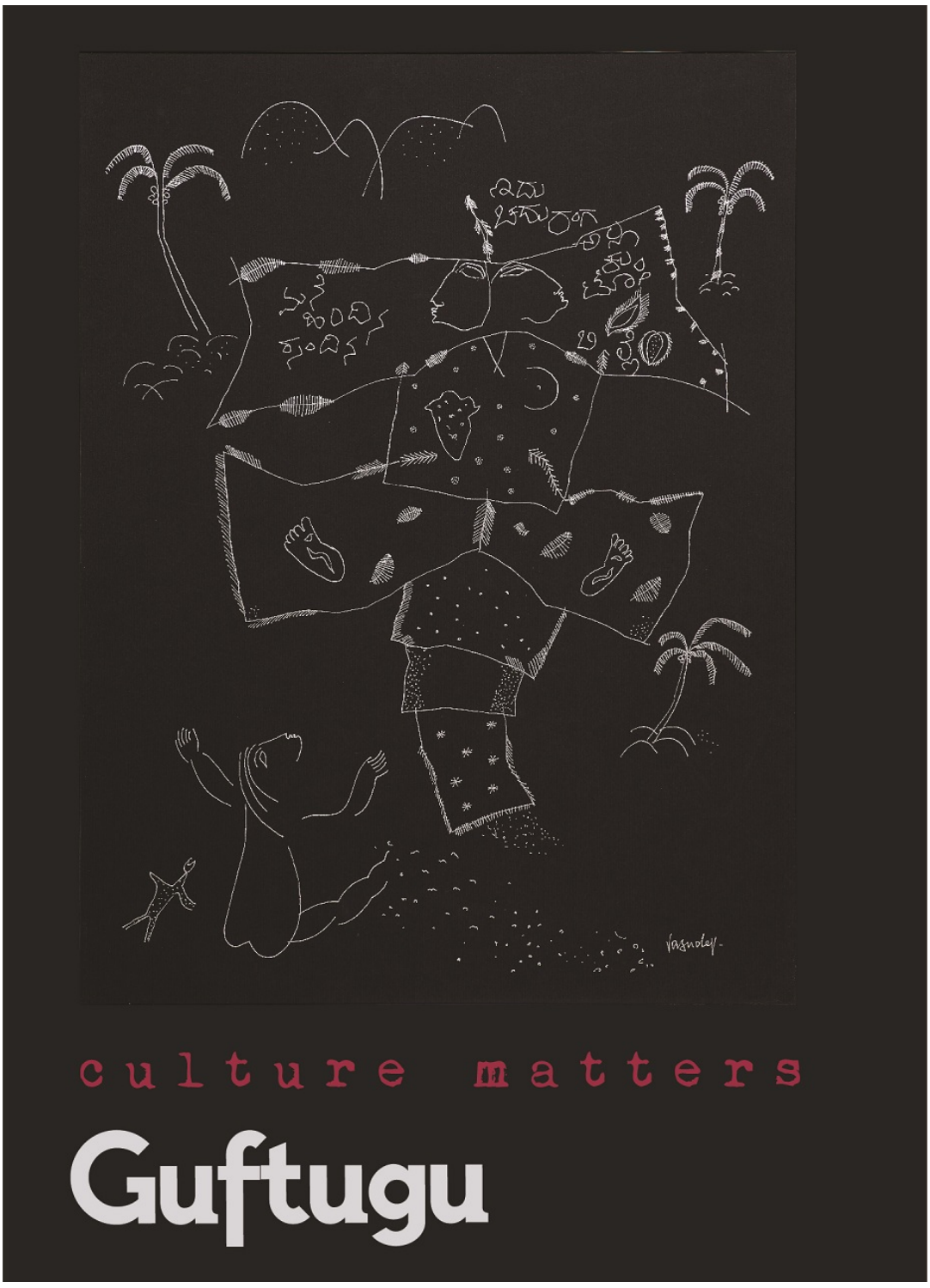
Issue 9



Cover Image: S.G. Vasudev, ‘Hopsctoch’, silver ink on black paper; 56 x 76 cms

About Us

Culture matters. And it *has* to matter in India, with its diverse languages, dialects, regions and communities; its rich range of voices from the mainstream and the peripheries.

This was the starting point for *Guftugu* (www.guftugu.in), a quarterly e-journal of poetry, prose, conversations, images and videos which the Indian Writers' Forum runs as one of its programmes. The aim of the journal is to publish, with universal access online, the best works by Indian cultural practitioners in a place where they need not fear intimidation or irrational censorship, or be excluded by the profit demands of the marketplace. Such an inclusive platform sparks lively dialogue on literary and artistic issues that demand discussion and debate.

The guiding spirit of the journal is that culture must have many narratives from many different voices – from the established to the marginal, from the conventional to the deeply experimental.

To sum up our vision:

Whatever our language, genre or medium, we will freely use our imagination to produce what we see as meaningful for our times. We insist on our freedom to speak and debate without hindrance, both to each other and to our readers and audience. Together, but in different voices, we will interpret and reinterpret the past, our common legacy of contesting narratives; and debate on the present through our creative work.

Guftugu acknowledges the Tata Trusts for a grant towards its production in 2017.

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From the Editors

No Better Time to be Political than Now

There are times when a few lines of poetry can speak better about the trauma that we pass through and the acute need to respond to it both as writers and as citizens than many paragraphs of prose. Both the Buddha and Brecht knew that ignorance is sin and it was the latter, who said,

…the worst illiterate is the political illiterate. He hears nothing, sees nothing, takes no part in political life. He doesn't seem to know that the cost of living, the price of beans, of flour, of rent, of medicines, all depend on political decisions. He even prides himself on his political ignorance, sticks out his chest and says he hates politics. He doesn't know, the imbecile, that from his political non-participation comes the sex-worker, the abandoned child, the robber and worst of all, corrupt officials, the lackeys of exploitative multinational corporations.

At a time when being apolitical simply means to be a silent collaborator in the worst crimes committed by a political class that hates democracy and thinks it is born to rule; can get away with any crime from the planned impoverishment of the masses, and the irresponsible exploitation of the public exchequer to lynching of the helpless, murder of writers and thinkers and even genocide, aversion to politics is no less than deliberate evasion of one's duty as a citizen and a human being. The destiny that awaits the apolitical intellectual has best been summed up by Otto Rene Castillo (1934-'67), the great Guatemalan poet and revolutionary martyr in an evocative and moving poem titled 'Apolitical Intellectuals'. We quote the poem in full:

Apolitical Intellectuals

Otto Rene Castillo

One day
the apolitical
intellectuals
of my country
will be interrogated
by the simplest
of our people.

They will be asked
what they did
when their nation died out
slowly,
like a sweet fire
small and alone.

No one will ask them
about their dress,
their long siestas
after lunch,

no one will want to know
about their sterile combats
with “the idea
of the nothing”
no one will care about
their higher financial learning.

They won’t be questioned
on Greek mythology,
or regarding their self-disgust
when someone within them
begins to die
the coward’s death.

They’ll be asked nothing
about their absurd
justifications,
born in the shadow
of the total lie.

On that day
the simple men will come.
Those who had no place
in the books and poems
of the apolitical intellectuals,
but daily delivered
their bread and milk,
their tortillas and eggs,
those who drove their cars,
who cared for their dogs and gardens
and worked for them,
and they’ll ask:

“What did you do when the poor
suffered, when tenderness
and life
burned out of them?”

Apolitical intellectuals
of my sweet country,
you will not be able to answer.

A vulture of silence
will eat your gut.

Your own misery
will pick at your soul.
And you will be mute in your shame.

Githa Hariharan

K. Satchidanandan

November 2017

A Fisherman Beyond Time

Remembering A. K. Ramanujam

S.G. Vasudev

S.G. Vasudev, Ink on Paper; 29 x 43 cms

ಬೆಸ್ತರು

ಮಚಾಡೋ ಹೇಳಿದ ಹಾಗೆ
ಕವಿ ಬೆಸ್ತ:

ನಿರಂತರದ ಹೊಳೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಹಿಂದಿದ ಮೀನು
ಐದು ನಿಮಿಷದ ಹಿಂದೆ ಬಳುಕಿ ಮಿಂಚಿದ ಮೀನು
ಹೊರಗೂ ಬದುಕಬೇಕೆನ್ನುವ ನಿಮಿಷದಾಚೆಯ
ಬೆಸ್ತ.

ಕೆಲವರ ಕೈರಾಶಿ,
ಈ ಪವಾಡ ಕೂಡ ಅವರಿಗೆ ಸಿದ್ಧಿ.
ನಮ್ಮಂಥವರ ಕೈಯಲ್ಲಿ ಆವು
ಸತ್ತು ಎವೆಯಿಕ್ಕದೆ
ನಾರುವ ಮೀನು:

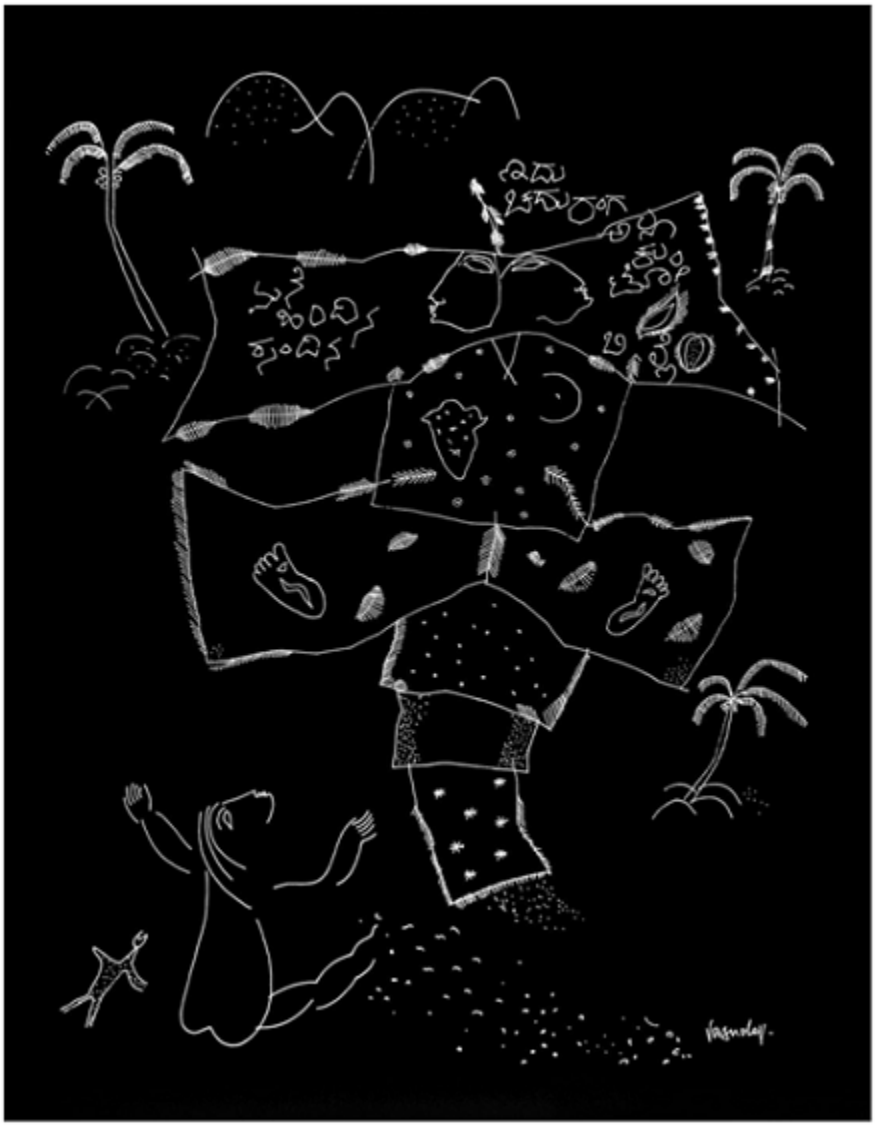
ಮತ್ತೆ ಕೆಲವರಿಗೆ

ರಾತ್ರಿ ಊಟ
ಕೈ ಗರಿಗರಿ ಕರಿದ ಮೀನು,
ಹರಿವ ನೀರಿನ ಸಾರು.

Fisherman

As Machado said,
a poet is a fisherman.
A fisherman beyond time
wishing that the fish caught in the ever-flowing
stream.
a fish that shook and shimmered five minutes ago,
will live even out of water.
For the lucky few,
it is no miracle. They make it happen.
But in the hands of some like us,
it's nothing more than dead fish
rotting and with unblinking eyes.
For some others,
it's dinner.
A dish of crisp fried fish
and rasam of flowing water

Fisherman, *Kuntobille*, a collection of poems in Kannada by A.K. Ramanujan, translated into English by B.C. Ramachandra Sharma.

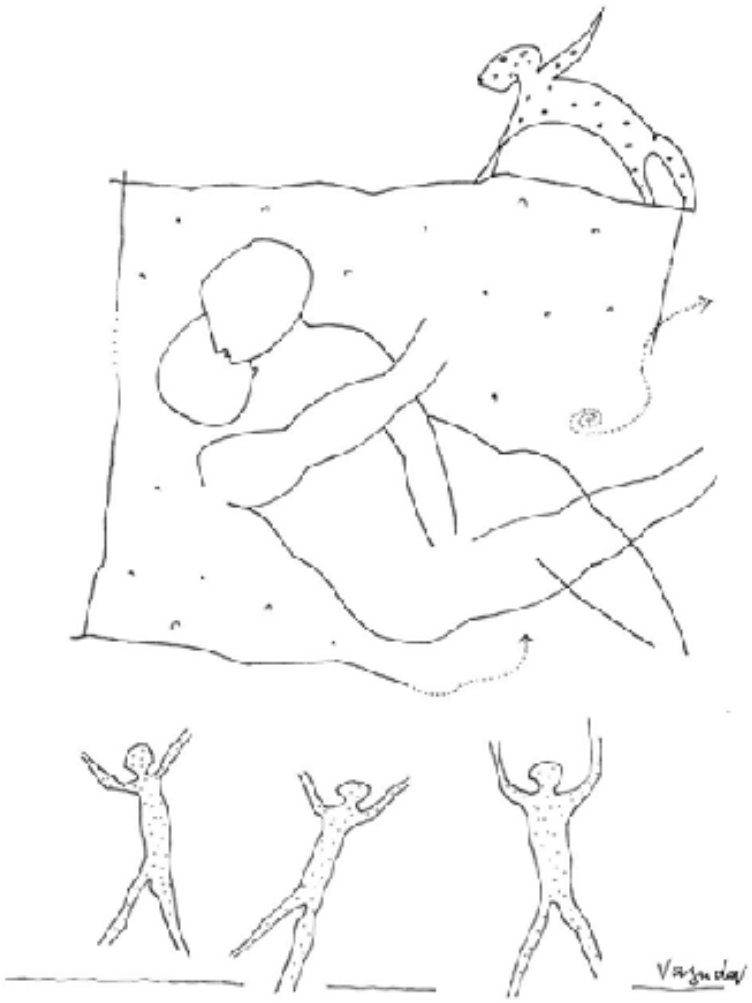


‘Hopscotch’, Silver Ink on Black Paper; 56 x 76 cms

I first met Ramanujan in the mid-sixties, when I was studying at the College of Arts in Madras/Chennai. Girish Karnad introduced us. He asked me if I would design the book jacket for his first collection of poems, *Hokkulalli Hoovilla* (No Flower in the Navel). I did a cover design using letters from the Kannada alphabet in white on a dark gray background. I also reproduced a hand-written version of one of his poems on the back cover, in the process in a way illustrating it. He asked me: 'Don't you want to use any more colour?' I said, 'No. I can only conceive of your poems in black and white.'

The next book cover I did for him was in 1990, for another collection of Kannada poems, *Kunto Bille* or Hopscotch. This time I used brown against yellow ochre. When I met him in the U.S. in 1991, after he had received a copy of the book, he said, 'I wish you'd made it a little more colourful, Vasudev, like those glossy books you get nowadays.' I replied: 'Ramanujan, your poetry does not need that!'

Besides the drawing based on the title poem, Hopscotch, for the cover, I happened to do a few more drawings at that time, based on some of the other poems in the book. When Ramanujan saw them he asked me if I could do a series of drawings, suggesting that we could have an exhibition at which he could read the poems. I had done just seven or eight drawings by the time he passed away in 1993, and after that I could not go back to his poetry for two years. But later I worked on a series of drawings based on 40 or 50 of his poems which had inspired me. I chose the poems from his books, *Hokkulalli Hoovilla, Mattu Ithara Padyagalu, Kunto Bille, Hymns for the Drowning*, and *Striders*, selecting those I felt I could relate to or those through which I felt I could bring out something of Ramanujan.

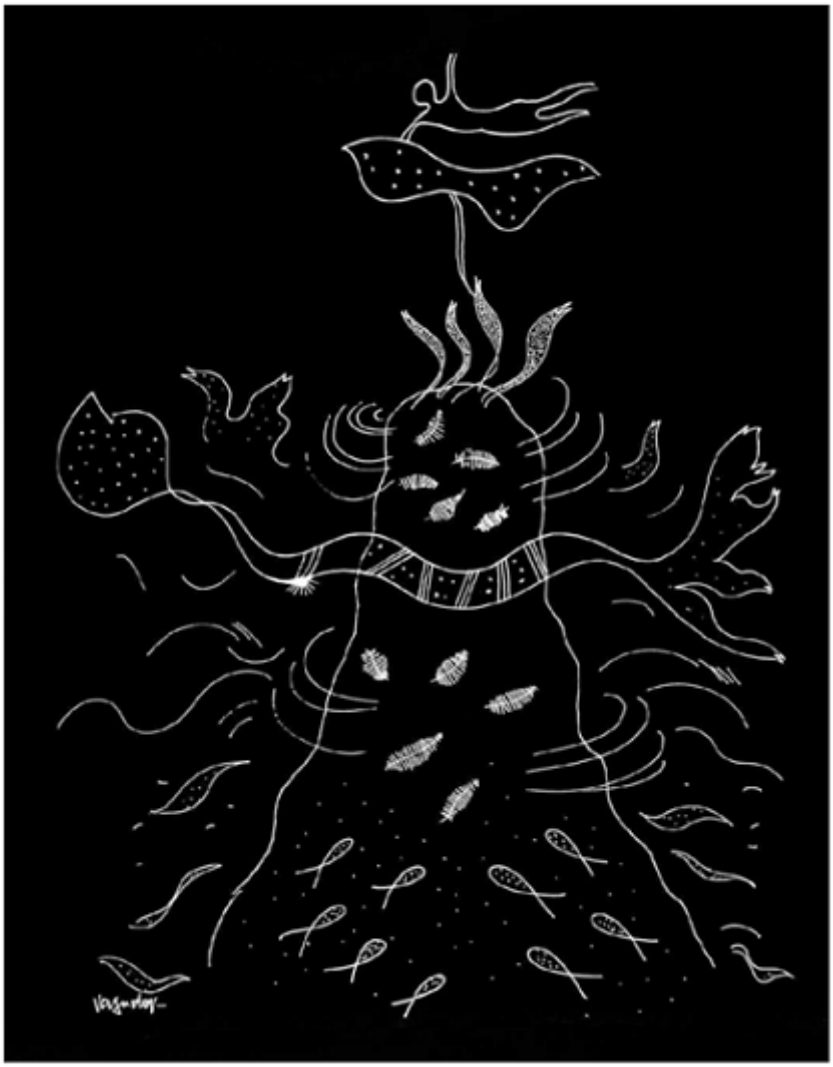


Ink on Paper; 27 x 34 cms

Sculpture

Only sculpture proves
that ghosts copulate
with stone
even when people are looking.

Sculpture; Excerpts from *Father's wisdom, The Striders*, a collection of poems in English by A.K. Ramanujan.



Silver Ink on Black Paper; 76 x 56 cms

A Ship Drowning

A ship drowning,
calling out for help
in a lashing sea.
I tossed in the ocean of births
when the lord
in his splendour
bearing wheel and conch,
called out to me : “O.O. you there!”
showed me his grace.
and became one with me.

A Ship Drowning, *Hymns for the Drowning*, poems for Vishnu by Nammalvar, translated from Tamil into English by A.K. Ramanujan.

Ink on Paper; 27 x 34 cms

If they see breasts

If they see
breasts and long hair coming
they call it woman,
if beard and whiskers
they call it man:
but, look, the self that hovers
in between
is neither man

nor woman
O Ramanatha

If they see breasts, *Speaking of Shiva, Vachanas* in Kannada translated into English by A.K. Ramanujan.

Rhinos Don't Go to School

Salik Shah

Dogon people; Mask: Antelope or Rhinoceros (Gomintogo); Wood, pigment; 19th–20th century/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The doctor had warned me not to get into any new trouble before my arm healed.

Staying at home wasn't my idea of fun at all. I liked to play tree-spotting and bird-watching in the jungle surrounding Madi. That's how I had stumbled upon a rhino calf trying to wake his mother in the forest. He didn't even know his mother had been shot dead. The poachers had

sawed off her horn and the poor calf was trying to turn the cold bulk of his mother over to suckle milk. So, I grabbed a rhino bush and offered the baby rhino a twig full of black berries. But, he refused to eat.

I was angry and very upset by the time I reached the forest office to report the incident.

'How is the girl, mister?' a Tharu officer asked me.

'Which girl?' I said, puzzled.

'The one who broke your arm,' the Tharu replied, and everybody laughed.

'Spare the kid,' another Tharu said. 'Let the missus handle it!'

I had had enough fun made out of me for a day. I turned back and pretended to return home when they finally stopped fooling with me and asked me the purpose of my visit. After listening to my hurried account, they asked me to take them straight to the dead rhino.

'Looks like it was shot two-three days ago,' one Tharu said. 'Let's get the keta away from her.'

The poor calf snorted and squealed as the forest officers struggled to load him up on their jeep. I tried not to think about him but I couldn't stop it. His cries were heartbreaking.

I was nine when my mother was killed in a bus explosion. I am not the only orphan of the Madi bombing. Over 50 civilians perished in the explosion. After she was gone, there was no one to take care of me. My two elder sisters had been married off already . And my father, who was a Hindu Bahun priest, would leave early in the morning and often return only late in the night. I was mostly alone in the house and I didn't like to go to school. The other Bahuns' kids would swear, cough and pretend to spit in disgust when they saw me coming because my father was a communist. He helped perform funeral rites—antyesti—of the crazy red rebels who opposed the corrupt durbar of jackals and thieves.

The night of this terrible encounter in the jungle, I had a strange dream. I found myself picking berries from the rhino bush with my tongue. When I woke up, I couldn't stop myself from considering the possibility that I might have been a rhino in my previous life!

I returned to the crime scene early next morning. It was cold and misty. There was a wide trail on the mud going in the direction of the forest office. The Tharus must have tied the dead rhino and dragged it to their office with their jeep.

There was still some blood on the soil where the rhino had been killed. I bent down and collected the bloody soil in my right fist—it was cold like ice. The jungle was quiet, probably still

asleep. I walked to the bank of Rapti, hunched over, and emptied my fist above the water. A Sanskrit sloka burst out of my lips as the river erased the trace of human sin.

I had no intention of becoming a priest like my father. That was the only antyesti I ever did.

Even today, I get surprised when I try to pick berries from the rhino bushes with my tongue. It is too easy—almost as if I have a natural talent for it; and the rhino's soul is in me.

Two Poems

Anuradha Vijayakrishnan

Arthur Dove, 'Tree', watercolour, tempera and ink on paper, 12.7 x 17.8 cm, 1935/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Tree Rings

Count the circles under my eyes. There is one
for every passing year, every era laid
to rest, safely embalmed, concealed. Layered
beneath detritus of falling eyelashes and congealed
kohl. Observe their rhythmic concentricity, how
they have formed so naturally, ripples on brown bark
to mark growth, wisdom and many kinds of loss. Some day,
a scientist will run curious hands over these
marks, marvel at how life preserves its own stories, attempt

to measure what might have passed. People will teach
children how trees grow old, just standing
in a forest.

The Assembled Skeleton

I am held together by wires and rusting studs. Solid metal hooks
dangle my skull high, not pride.

My makers must be proud of their work; I am fashioned from bones,
so fastidiously gathered.

I have a pedestal and my own dusty box of clear glass. Perhaps, I have
a given name too.

My joints have been assembled from memory. They do not all belong,
meet or exactly match, but have survived.

I do not remember if I am man, woman or any other. My post-mortem-
scars have long disintegrated.

Sometimes, I hear voices calling but they are all different, all hopelessly
dead inside me.

I am blind, of course, and mostly hollow. Murderers and their murdered –
both lurk in spaces between my ribs.

When a strong wind blows outside, there is a slight dance I dance. I must
seem ghoulish in the dark.

At night, ghosts visit me to gaze on bits of their own, passing like damp
through my emptiness.

Sometimes I am tired too, all I want is to decay, crumble, be scattered
equally over all the lands I died in.

Those who pause to stare at me, they must have eerie smiles, emptied
out pits for eyes too.

Amongst them might be a cranium shaped like mine, familial jut of elbow
or familiar arch of jumbled spine.

I am afraid though of losing my balance, of tipping over unexpectedly
into strange, flesh-padded arms.

Redux, Redux

Enter Through the Side-Door

Shreyas Karle

Two containers; 12cms x 7cms (length x diameter); glass; 2016

The diction hole, water boy lessons
The philosophical hole for a litmus test

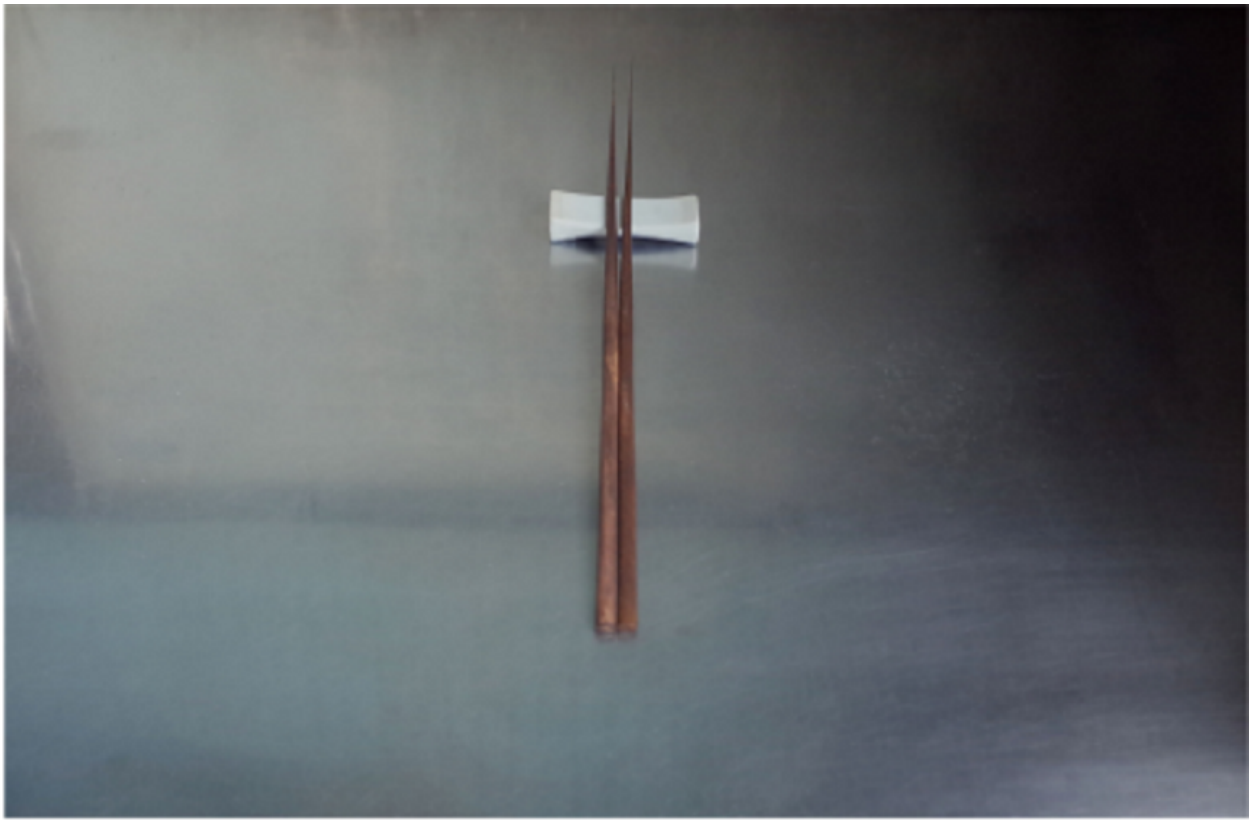
The set of glasses underlines two different notions:

One is connected to the household disciplinarian and the latter to the worldview of an individual.

The practice of filling drinking water to the brim makes it difficult to drink causing the water to spill on the drinker. The diction hole works as a corrector to the language of filling water.

The other glass underlines the overused pessimist-optimist debate of the glass being half-empty or half-full. The given reality is further stagnated by the introduction of the hole, which also disables the idea of a filled glass. In both the cases, the hole acts as temperance to the existence of the water in the glass.

The former idea underlines the routine act and its disciplined water level thus projecting the concern of an individual towards the politics of the domestic. The latter philosophical stagnant lays out the concerns of an individual towards a social spectrum based on his/her personal view. This attitude is common to all kinds of socio-cultural-political backgrounds. The object deals with both inward and outward human behaviour.



34cms (length); wood; 2016

The Poetry of a Taper

> Finally, and this is perhaps their loveliest function, the chopsticks transfer the food, either crossed like two hands, a support and no longer pincers, they slide under the clump of rice and raise it to the diner's mouth, or (by an age-old gesture of the whole Orient) they push the alimentary snow from bowl to lips in the manner of a scoop. In all these functions, in all the gestures they imply, chopsticks arc the converse of our knife (and of its predatory substitute, the fork): they are the alimentary instrument which refuses to cut, to pierce, to mutilate, to trip (very limited gestures, relegated to the preparation of the food for cooking: the fish seller who skins the still-living eel for us exorcises once and for all, in a preliminary sacrifice, the murder of food); chopsticks, food becomes no longer a prey to which one does violence (meat, flesh over which one does battle), but a substance harmoniously transferred; they transform the previously divided substance into bird food and rice into a flow of milk; maternal, they tirelessly perform the gesture which creates the mouthful, leaving to our alimentary manners, armed with pikes and knives, that of predation[1].

The above passage from Barthes' *Empire of Signs* creates a harmony between the food and its instrument (object). Barthes delicately portrays a version of the chopstick caressing the food before it is chewed, swallowed, digested and excreted. The body's system of perceiving its consumable nutrients, in fact, takes the form of an inverted chopstick.

This process can be visualised in the following way: The delicate tip of the chopstick represents the aroma and the sight of the food, leading to a careful picking up of the food which then mingles with the taste buds in the mouth with constant chewing. The middle taper represents the process of swallowing and the digestive system; and the thicker end projects the firmness of the process of excretion with that which is unnecessary, pushed out of the system. The taper in a given piece of wood allows each part to function independently while still belonging to the same system. The uselessness of the foreign hand converts itself into the slender extension of the tip rendering the person a disabled user of the beautiful tool.

53cms x 53cms x 6cms (length x breadth x height); found chair and lace; 2016

53cms x 53cms x 6cms (length x breadth x height); rexine, foam and zipper; 2016

Annoying Rebel

Annoying rebel is providing an escape route, but that's a sex trap!

> As power operates by enforcing spatial discontinuities, Timerman's narrative of that single night demonstrates how resistance to power can overcome the authority of those interior segments. The resistance comes necessarily form within; it links inside to inside, and by doing this it compromises the authority of the two separate cells. The guard positioned as a functionary, attached to a sovereign state that rules by enforcing the interiors. His job is to maintain separations. Thus, by leaving the peephole open, he becomes a spatial revolutionary — a minor architect. "Not following the rules," he abets an act of escape for Timerman and for the unnamed prisoner across the corridor[2].

These escape openings layer the body as its artificial skin. These expect that not just the organ, but the entire body would flow through them. Their temporal gestures merely function as cat-doors of the house.

Anti-Antimacassar

‘Let us live forever into the newness of things.’

The hyperbolic sound of the sentence underlines the way we try to define the permanence of our selves and our collectibles.

> He reasserts that it is the relationship of the collector to his or her objects that is important to the collection because “the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner,” no one will be able to order a collection with the same understanding that the original owner did (67). Collections can tell, for the collector, not only the historical story of the object itself but also the story of the collector — “ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.”[3]

The objects form the third layer of the house — the first layer being made of the walls and the second layer comprising everything from a stain to a scroll (nail of the scroll) on the wall. The three layers of the ‘things’ express their age and intimacy with their respective owner. If a wall is populated with screw holes, it would then not talk about the act of violence, but rather, reflect the popularity of the wall, the owner’s desperate attempts to present a suitable background to his favourite collectibles. The discoloured handle of the tea pot translates into the age of the palm; and the collection of various lids in the kitchen drawer narrates the impermanent and fragile nature of the pot, marking the owner as a devoted tea-drinker. The value of objects lies in their age rather than their newness; born as sterile, the things slowly adapt to a life breathed into them by their owners.

The stitched line with the crocheted borders de-marks the absence of negative space, the missing antimacassar.

50cms x 25cms (length x breadth); brass; 2016

Time on Slopes

The valley of ‘zero slopes’
Contains layered time
Time on the slopes keeps recycling
The aged object
Self-reflective, matter to form
Uselessness is the aesthetic
The thin horizontal is still a slope where
Vertical time slips.

6cms x 10cms (height x diameter); glass jar; 2016

Travelling cream

Moves perpetually in its stillness

> But Eliot's jar rejects such philosophical and spatial authority. Making no claim to either truth or power, it "moves perpetually in its stillness." Its vibrations are speech at its most primitive; Deleuze might have said that the jar began to shutter. Or in Kafka's universe, it might emit nearly silent sounds like the incessant humming of the mouse Josephine. At the threshold of relinquishing all objectivity and object status, the vessel is actively becoming contingent. Like the prose of Finnegans Wake that hums along for 600 pages, Eliot's jar represents twentieth-century cultural transformations in which motions replace meaning, and sounds replace sense[4].

Jill Stoner describes Eliot's language as something that offers doorways for producing the minor; it lets countless movements overlap with itself to define the eventual movement of stillness. The object becomes the metaphor of the shifting space around it. On the other hand, the stillness of the object stands the test of the timeline it has been balanced on. The object narrates the fictional story of a journey that has shaped its reality in the moment of complete stillness.

22cms x 19cms (height x diameter); dental plaster; 2016

22cms x 19cms (height x diameter); dental plaster; 2016

Montaigne's *El Caganer* in Tanizaki's Toilet

> "To learn that we have said or done a stupid thing is nothing, we must learn a more ample and important lesson: that we are but blockheads… On the highest throne in the world, we are seated, still, upon our arses." And, lest we forget: "Kings and philosophers shit, and so do ladies."[5]

In his essays on philosophy of the self, Montaigne evaluates every living being based on scatological theories which render them equal, further clarifying that the philosophical state does not exceed the human condition. In *In Praise of Shadows*, Junichiro Tanizaki highlights the ritual of defecating by talking about the architectural importance of a Japanese toilet in a traditional Japanese household.

> Anyone with a taste for traditional architecture must agree that the Japanese toilet is perfection. Yet whatever its virtues in a place like a temple, where the dwelling is large, the inhabitants few, and everyone helps with the cleaning, in an ordinary household it is no easy task to keep it clean. No matter how fastidious one may be or how diligently one may scrub, dirt will show, particularly on a floor of wood or tatami matting. And so here too it turns out to be more hygienic and efficient to install modern sanitary

> facilities — tile and a flush toilet — though at the price of destroying all affinity with "good taste" and the "beauties of nature." That burst of light from those four white walls hardly puts one in a mood to relish Sōseki's "physiological delight." There is no denying the cleanliness; every nook and corner is pure white. Yet what need is there to remind us so forcefully of the issue of our own bodies. A beautiful woman, no matter how lovely her skin, would be considered indecent were she to show her bare buttocks or feet in the presence of others; and how very crude and tasteless to expose the toilet to such excessive illumination. The cleanliness of what can be seen only calls up the more clearly thoughts of what cannot be seen. In such places the distinction between the clean and the unclean is best left obscure, shrouded in a dusky haze.[6]

The mountain of faeces
Positions the mountain maker
On its pinnacle
The pinnacle is in a state of flux while
The El Caganar is listening to Mozart's
Canon in B flat for six voices

90cms x 42cms (height x diameter); cloth and wood; 2016

90cms x 42cms (height x diameter); cloth and wood; 2016

80 Meters of Clothe for Sol Lewitt

An object is a living being that is in a state of metamorphosis, establishing a dialogue with its recipients.

The frequencies are layered underneath the given visual framework. Unlike Kafka's beetle, they are unaware of their transformed state. They would stop changing if we stopped looking. These objects are primary causes of our thought-refractions — their identities or temporalities are based on the limitations of our understanding.

1.The Empire of Signs by Roland Barthes. Page 18.
2.Towards a Minor Architecture by Stoner Jill.
3.'Unpacking my library' by Walter Benjamin; Towards a Minor Architecture. Page 47.
4.Towards a Minor Architecture. Page 49.
5.Quotes by Michel de Montaigne.
6.In Praise of Shadows by Junichiro Tanizaki

Of Beef, Biryani and Ghafoor

Asma Anjum Khan

Arthur Dove, 'Cow', pastel on linen, 45.1 x 54.6 cm, ca. 1912/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

For a normal Sunday afternoon, Ghafoor looked visibly unhappy. His favourite beef biryani was missing from the menu. *Maai baap sarkar* had banned beef. Though Ghafoor had always been trying very hard to be patriotic, this time, it was getting difficult. Gastronomical appetite proved to be stronger and refused to wane, despite his good efforts.

He was assistant teacher of ancient history in a school. Hence, he was interested in Indian history, for example, the Muslim conquest of India, Islamic architecture, Mughal dynasty and Muslim dynastic rule of India for over thousand years, with the year 1192 being his favourite.

He was home to median height, a balding head, slightly protruding belly and even more protruding eyes. A special feature of his persona was the oft-dripping corners of his wide mouth which he kept wiping with the end of his long-sleeved shirt and when he wore half-sleeves, anything that could do the work would be used, making a 'slush' sound in the process. Sometimes, this mop could be the thick rough curtains hung at the windows of the school office, or the table cloth in the teacher's corner.

Ghafoor said he did everything on time — *received* a heart attack at the right opportune moment, within two months of his retirement (though a bit unannounced; he later regretted lying in the ICU). He felt proud of himself. He got employed at the right time, got married at the second available opportunity to his cousin Saira after he missed the first opportunity with Reshma. (Reshma's brother had caught Ghafoor *blue*-handed with Shabboo, his neighbourhood sweetheart; his denials were effective like that of a minister contaminated with scams). As part of the old dating ritual at the time, the engaged couple watched their first picture together. The young Ghafoor tried coochie-cooing with a sheepish Saira throughout the film while Dilip Kumar romanced Madhu Bala. He always preferred calling the actor Yusuf saab and hated Raj Kapoor, whom he held responsible for appropriating a Muslim man's natural right over the Bombay film industry. He was proud of his Muslim legacy and liked Nirad Chaudhury because he had paid rich tributes to Al Beruni, a Muslim.

It was also at the right time that he was employed as a peon, at the raw age of seventeen in his brother-in-law's school. Making progress with the familial connections, he was then appointed as assistant teacher of history and thought himself no less than Romila Thapar; but, when he accidentally discovered that she was female, he shifted to Habib Tanvir. He actually intended Irfan Habib but often mismatched the two. When Ghafoor, the assistant teacher of history spouted words like, **'India is a great mausoleum of Muslims,'** he actually meant India was full of Muslim architecture but loved the word 'mausoleum' for its sheer alliterative value.

He was quite interesting, as you may have already found out. If you reminded him of his peon days, he would fume — '*Saale*, I helped them get recognition from the education board,' with stress on 'I' — an egoist to the core. With him, everything started with 'I'. 'I got the school recognised, I got the funds, I got it ratified,' though, this singular pronoun of 'I' was never used in the context of school-fund embezzlement. It was not him but the accountant who did it. He was trapped in it, but what the accountant would get in return of this misappropriation was never revealed. However, it was well known in Sheikhupura that this accountant was the son of his wife's elder brother and was married to a daughter of the same wife's other brother. Family

matters were strictly prohibited from being discussed in public. One exception was his Pa-in-law with whom he always dealt in the numerical way of thirty-six — *chhattees ka akdaa*, as the connoisseurs of street language would describe it.

It is said, an egoist man is also the most vulnerable one. Ghafoor was now broken-hearted. His beef was not coming and he had to be a patriot, beef or no beef. Beef biryani was his soulmate. As the Persian word *biriyan* means *fried before cooking*, and has Persian or Afghani origin; and as he too is proud (sometimes) of his Pashtoon ancestry, he insisted on the deep frying of the spices and the long-grained rice. When the aroma wafted all through Sheikhupura that normally reeked of gutters bubbling all around, it felt heavenly. The way those long-grained fragilities popped up and down in the hot water mixed with aromatic herbs, and the mode in which they were cooked — 'barely minimum' — to the three-fourth of their capacity in order to preserve the exact structure of those perfect long granules, stirred every nerve of his being. Ghafoor compared it to the making of a subtle sculpture or a Mughal miniature painting. He sighed and felt proud. The bitter beef memories intoxicated him. He further insisted that par-boiling rice was an art, an art which decided the anatomy of biryani, a subtle art few could master.

But he himself was a man who never knew **subtlety, the art of subtlety, which few can master or muster.** His mouth would become the water tap of Vrindavan society, the moment someone quixotic enough would criticise him. At other times, it was like the mostly dry, mildly dripping faucet of Sheikhupura which would have mercy on them only thrice a week.

Coming back to biryani, the spices and the *dum* gave him a strange kind of thrill and he would feel nostalgic about the days of yore — of *Nebobs*, of *Badshahs*; when, for a breakfast spread, some forty five myriad dishes would be served. When Shamsunnissa, his wife, got to the kitchen, Ghafoor would get busy instructing her, to which, scant respect was paid and abundant derision shown. Nevertheless, Ghafoor being the man he was, could never stop himself from holding forth, which a bystander might equate to playing a flute before the beef, sorry, buffalo.

The suggestion of the buffalo is too obvious to explain to you.

All this was over for him now. *Bade ka gosht* (beef) was banned and Ikram Khan, his headmaster, could no longer look down upon him. In Muslim hierarchy, you are higher in status and upbringing if you have mutton in your kitchen — only mutton, mind it. Eating beef is indicative of your low social and economic status and lower brain power. But in the last many years, the wheels of time have churned rapidly and tectonic shifts in status(es) have happened in the process.

Ghafoor was fed up. Though he loved his beef, he had a beef to pick first with Ikram Khan and then the government. What right does the government have, to put its hand in his biryani plate? Why has it become so non-vegetarian? After banning beef, what would it ban next?

He looked around. Was someone listening to him? He looked worried.

Ever since Ghafoor had been denied his meat, he has been having hallucinations. He sits forlorn (never his habit) for hours on end.

Like all Muslims, Ghafoor too is, sorry was, an ardent admirer of biryani. But now patriotism demands that he *declare* his hatred for beef and biryani. It was not difficult, he thought, if he tried.

He saw Mishra coming with two heavy shopping bags in his hands towards the *chai* stall he was at. Anticipating some fireworks, Ghafoor gulped down the light chocolate-*y*, almost leathery liquid. *Bête noir* Mishra was sure going to pull his beef.

'How you doin' beef-boy?' he laughed. The mischief in his tone was palpable and the laughter pierced the already bruised heart of Ghafoor.

That Muslims are the foodies of the world is an undeniable fact. Now after years of terrorism, they have become food terrorists.

He imagined Mishra chirping.

Would he have to hear such horribilities? Ghafoor's mind was making up the avowals Mishra could possibly make.

His thinking spree started like a marathon.

Can food be labelled as religious? Can it be classified into Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, Sikh, Eesai, sorry Christian? While cakes and pizzas are obviously missionary, dhansak is above board a Batliwala dish; chhole paranthe, Sikh; aalu poori, daal sabzi, Hindu; and does it need to be said that biryani and kebabs are Muslim? Why else then would there be talk of terrorists being fed biryani?

As is clear by now, Ghafoor, the baldy, portly old heck of a Muslim, (what is a Muslim without his beef? Aah! Anyway…) was at his wits end. Among all the cuisines, it's only biryani which holds the distinction of being seditious.

The spree continued.

What is it with biryani? Why are these terrorist guys obsessed with it? Why don't they eat veg-pulao, for example? He remembered reading about the social boycott of Tagore's family in Bengal, because one of his ancestors had passed by a Muslim kitchen and in the process, had made his nostrils a storehouse of that obnoxious smell of pulao. Some others even credited the eating of pulao as the secret of that extra lavish lusciousness of Muslim women. The lengths these fanatics can go to!

Ghafoor thought, but quickly checked himself.

The Muslim culinary history is full of this condemnable food item. The hordes that galloped their way on horseback gobbled a similar concoction. The root word itself is of foreign origin. The Mughals added more spice to it and invented myriad varieties of this meat-rice conglomerate. *Pulao, taahri, qubooli* became younger sisters of biryani, though they rarely posed a threat to the original. Since the very beginning, this evil dish has monopolised the whole of Muslim cuisine making everyone forget *muzghafar, mutnajjan, malpua*, and of course, the patriotic dishes like *dosai, idlis, aalu poori*, etc. Ghafoor shook his head; the stream of his contemplations made him absent to his immediate surroundings. The meatier the better, they declare salivating. His mouth watered too, but he hastily came back to his senses. He must be alert; and *patriotic*, he reminded himself.

Frying the unwashed rice before cooking it in the mutton broth was the pre-historic method, so typical of the unwashed *Maleechha*! Today, they do it the *pakka* or *dum* style, *not the dum maro dum kind of dum*!

The stream stopped for the fraction of a second. Ghafoor admonished himself. His old habit of breaking into songs for each and every of his state of affairs was annoying for him. But he just could not help it. Why, when his grandfather died, his mind played and re-played that oldie, *Teri duniya se door, chale ho ke majboor, hamein yaad rakhna*, (I am leaving this world, O, Adieu!), while his granny kept howling, *Why did you have to go now? Abhi toh pension bhi shuru naheen hui.* (Your pension is still pending.)

He felt irritated.

Shut up, and go take a hike, he told his mind angrily.

Of course Mishra could not hear the ditties. When reminded of music, a thought crossed his mind – 'Are they going to ban songs now? Rafi only for Muslims and Kishore, Lata for Hindus? Oh my God, that would be horrific.' Ghafoor felt a sharp chill in his spine. Mishra did not have the ears to perceive the sound of his gibberish; else, the upper caste would take another dig at his poor self; vulnerable to habits.

Coming back to biryani, the exact difference between the two was still mysterious to him, he reflected with a deep sigh, actually a deeper sucking in of air. But once it's on the table, does one care if it is dum or pakka?

The stream ran unabated.

He had been tolerating this obscenity in the name of food for his wife's sake who, when bored of rolling out dough, goes for dum biryani or pulao. Qubooli is kind of a step-sister to it and veg-biryani? Blasphemous! He uttered, frothing at his mouth. The stream was in spate now.

Little did we know that Pakistanis prefer mutton over chicken. They laugh at our chicken biryani and blowing the matter out of proportion, as is their habit, utter the inanity that only chickens eat chicken biryani!

We the chickens of the world!

He began humming but stopped abruptly. He had suddenly become aware of his surroundings, with an upper caste in the immediate vicinity.

If you happen to be a chicken, sorry, Muslim (God!), there is a 100% chance of you having eaten this reprehensible dish at least once a week, okay, once a month. The day Amman used to announce the advent of biryani, the *baccha* party would jump with joy and this news would be announced to the whole *mohalla*. When she used to put dum to this, silly, obnoxious, shameless, Machiavellian, unpatriotic confluence of rice, ghee, spices and ahem, **that thing which has been banned, with a dash of saffron, that which colours everything today**; even his vegan neighbors would suck in the fragrant air; that malicious aroma was captivating. When the thick rich curd blended with the… (fill in the blanks and just shut up) and the spices were just coarsely grounded to retain the basic flavors, the butter would be melted and would *turn* the onion rings brown, the marination, the spices, the basmati… would take you to a totally different plane of *being*! *But, I must stop*, Ghafoor told himself; *lest people think he likes biryani!*

What a joke! I am a patriot!

He tried smiling; the stream persisted.

His mind threw a flash, and like an automaton he burst into a nursery rhyme from his school days.

Rabb ka shukr adaa kar bhai

Jis ne hamari gaaye banayi!

(*Thank your Lord,*

for He maketh your cow!)

Suppose we make it our national anthem?

He took a deep breath, for the umpteenth time. The breeze was gentle and he felt sleepy, but the cerebral torrent was in the habit of never allowing him any respite.

Your Mom must be making the best biryani?

How many times have you heard this, if you happen to be a Muslim?

But I feel insulted. It's like you doubt my integrity and patriotism don't you? What? You think I should have got used to it by now?

But how can I?

Ghafoor tried, looking puzzled.

Agreed that Biryani has been certified seditious, but which biryani? Shia, Sunni, Barelvi, Tableeghi or Deobandi? I am not talking about the Salafi variety because they always make their own *khichdi*. Let me make a guess. Would Shia biryani add complex condiments? Tableeghi, with extra ghee? Barelvi, with more than necessary spices? And Deobandi must be a fusion biryani!

All of a sudden, woken up from his reverie, Ghafoor jolted severely; Mishra was thrusting something in his cloth bag.

What is it?

Ghafoor was startled; it was rare for Mishra to bring him something.

It's a bomb. Mishra giggled like a school girl.

A *beef bomb*.

He repeated with a minor addition.

The upper caste was grinning from his ear to ear.

Ghafoor scratched his head, rubbed his eyes, tweaked his ears and then finally gasped for breath.

Tere liye khaas smuggle karke laya hoon. (Have specially smuggled it for you.)

Mishra’s voice seemed distant.

Ghafoor choked, the stream began, once again.

This time from his eyes.

But, this time, he made no attempt to wipe it off with his sleeves.

Hairy

Meenakshi Sengupta

Meenakshi Sengupta, 'Go as you like' (series of three works), 9 x 12 inches each, 2017

As a woman talking about womanhood, I often find myself struggling in a world that is made up of conflicting messages about who a woman is, or who she should be. People around the world continue to reinforce misguided views about women. Even in the 21st century, women are excluded from discussions on war or national security, and are mostly presented with issues regarding health and family life. Why is it so difficult to detach women and family? Why is the woman so often judged by her remarkable ability to juggle her family, her career and her personal life?

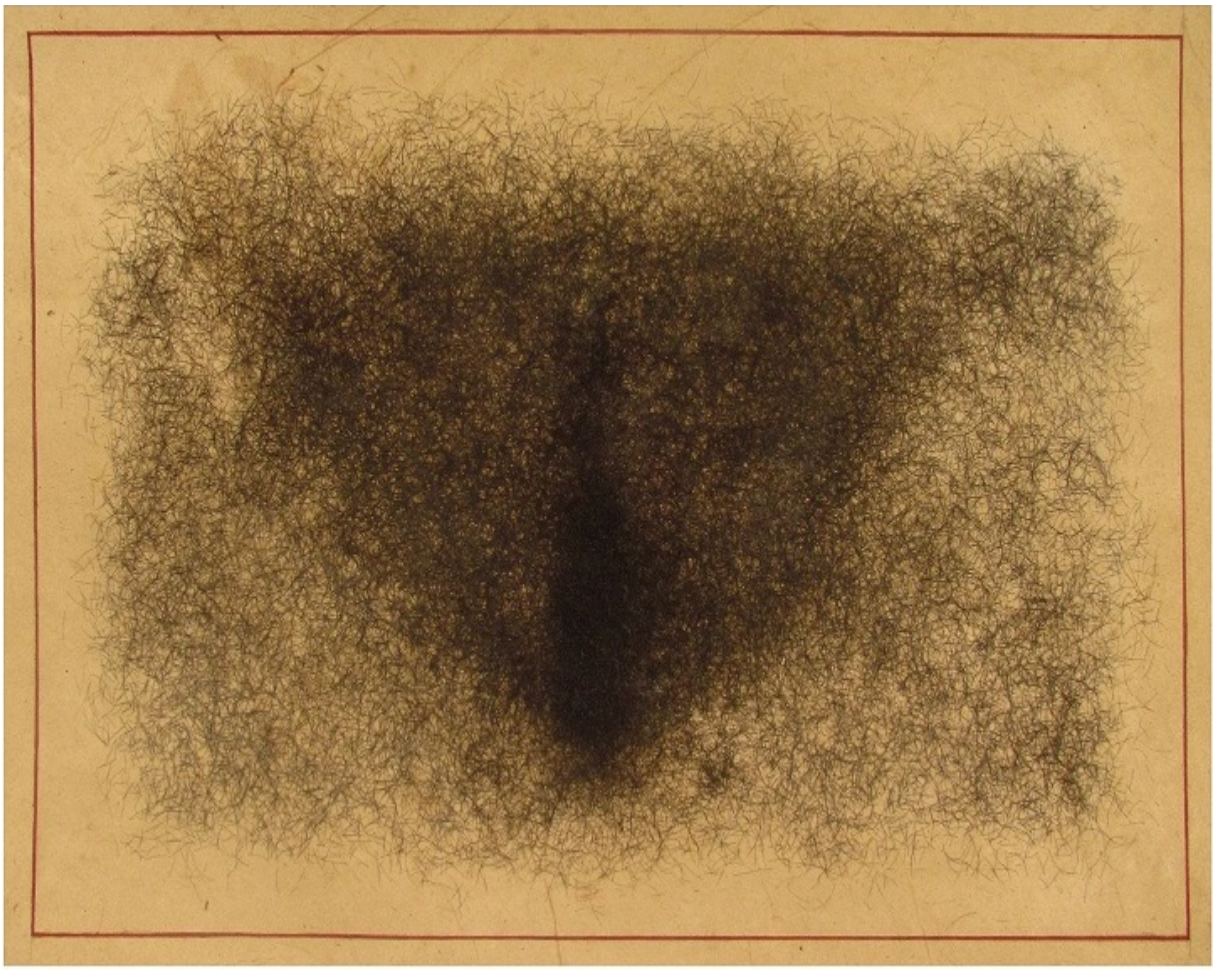
To take the journey of the 'ideal' woman is to be someone's daughter, then someone's wife, mother, grandmother and so on. Even her family name says nothing about her; it first belongs to her father and then to her husband. As she enters the new family, she changes her way of life — from a receiver, to a giver, a giver of life.

Appropriating a variety of familiar motifs and themes from both Indian and Western pictorial tradition, I re-contextualise them in light of the contemporary issues at hand. I deliberately combine icons of 'high' art and art from mass culture with wit and irony to redefine their role as cultural signifiers. I take advantage of a range of media — from gouache to performance, digital

prints, video, and serigraphy to articulate my ideas. The hybrid character of my work subverts the obsolete 'tradition/modernity', or 'Indian/western' dichotomy. It undermines the perception of art as a mirror that reflects a state of cultural purity, and underscores its discursive character shaped by history and culture. I felt the necessity to understand *constructed* feminine qualities, behaviour; and the stereotypes associated with the image of the 'ideal' woman. So, I started exploring taboos that determine and control this image.

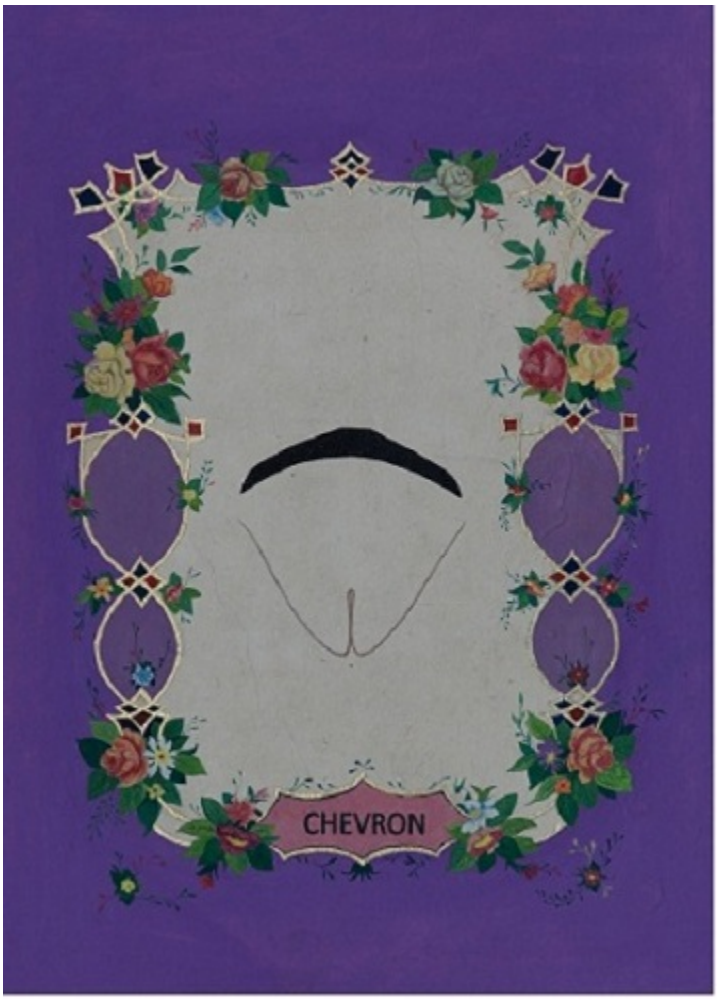
'Mirror Mirror on the Wall' and 'Hairy' explore the delicate space of feminine beauty, its valorisation and exploitation in modern society. I cover the space where the mirror ought to be, with my own hair, creating visual discomfort. The unnatural presence of hair and its celebration suggest that presence or absence of hair on a woman's body has nothing to do with beauty.

‘Mirror Mirror on the Wall’, artist’s hair and water colour on tea-washed wasli, 24 x 30 inches, 2015

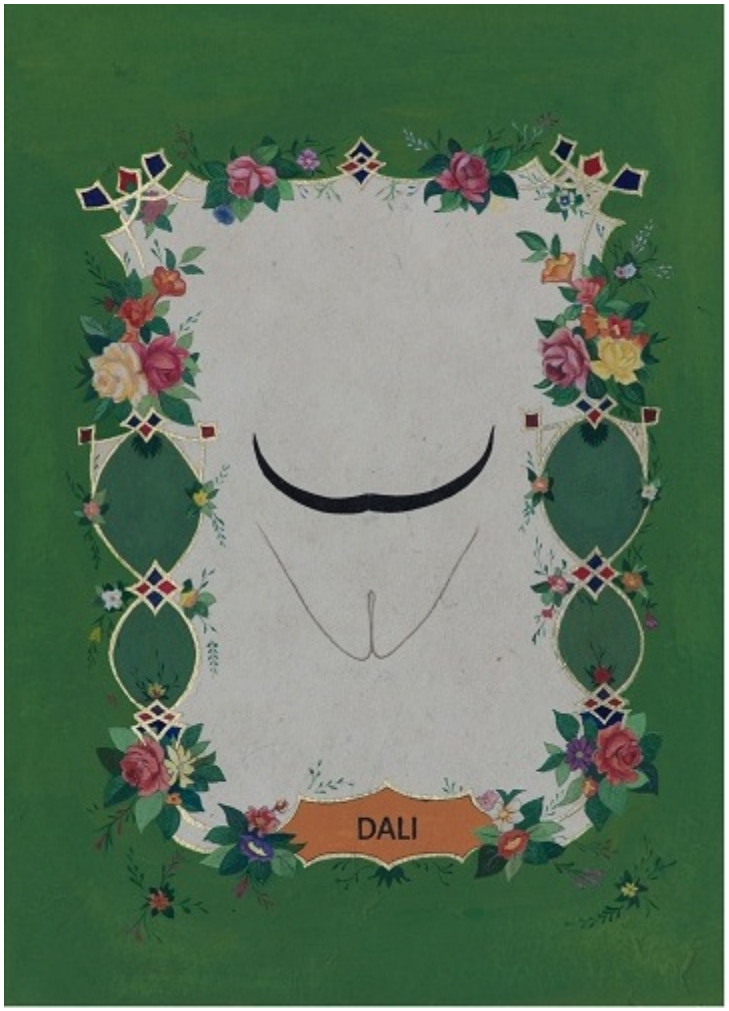


'Hairy', human hair and water colour on wasli, 20 x 30 inches, 2013

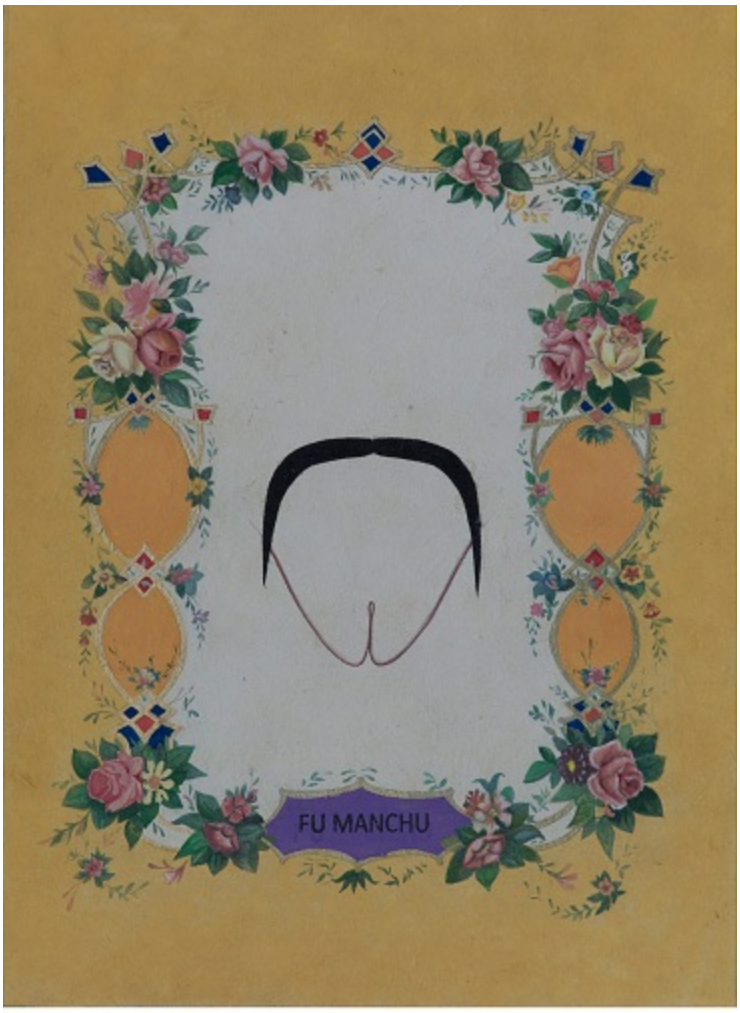
The idea was conceived when I was working on a series of five drawings titled 'Chevron', 'Dali', 'Fu Manchu', 'Handlebar', and 'Imperial' where I replaced pubic hair with moustache. Allegorically, I represent the difference of power in terms of the position of a single element of hair which is both personal and political.



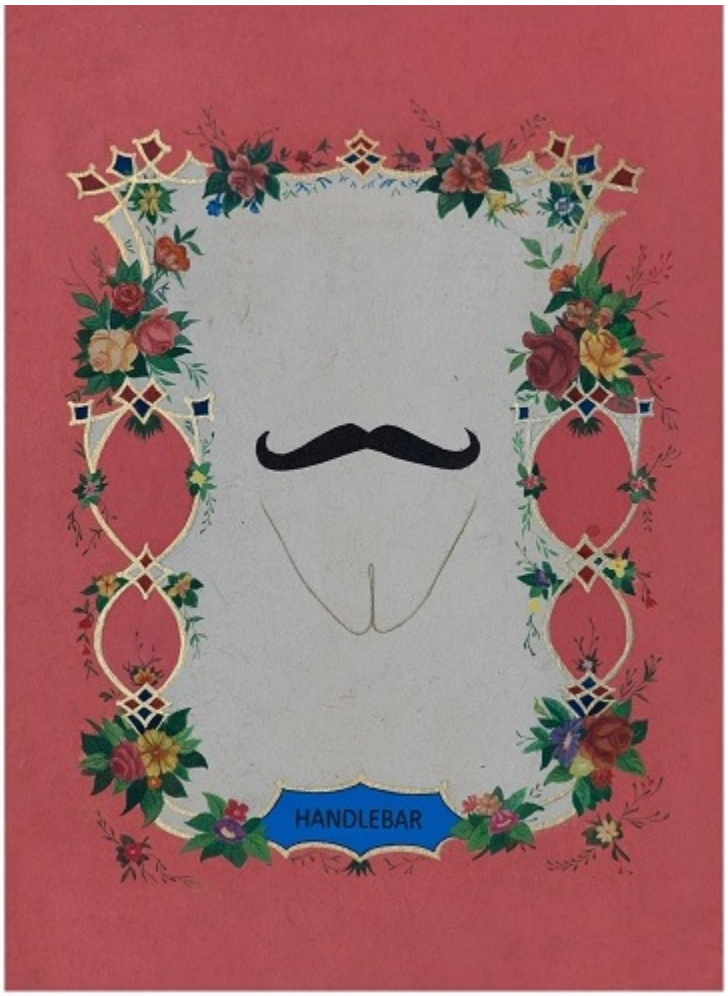
‘Chevron’, opaque water colour and velvet on wasli, 10 x 16 inches, 2013



‘Dali’, opaque water colour and velvet on wasli, 10 x 16 inches, 2013



‘Fu Manchu’, opaque water colour and velvet on wasli, 10 x 16 inches, 2013



‘Handlebar’, opaque water colour and velvet on wasli, 10 x 16 inches, 2013

‘Imperial’, opaque water colour and velvet on wasli, 10 x 16 inches, 2013

Hair on the human body, especially on the body of a woman, can have various interpretations. In earlier times, Hindu women used to sacrifice their hair – a symbol of beauty and bounty — and offer it to the Almighty after losing their husband. This was done to strip the widow of the ‘stigma’ of beauty after the husband’s death. My work ‘Nether Regions’ is a simulation of the traditional ‘alpana’ (a form of floor decoration specially done by women in the house.)

‘Nether Regions’, human hair and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72 inches, 2017

‘Nether Regions’ generally indicates the lowest parts of a place, or someone’s body, that is, the genitals. In the process of the work, when I cut my head’s hair into small fragments, and was covering the spaces between the contours of the work with them, it seemed as though this hair was transforming into pubic hair. We’re living in an era when leaving your pubic hair untamed is so unusual that ‘hairy’ has become a form of niche pornography – it is considered dirty, ugly, sexual and animalistic.

Detail of Nether Regions

Detail of ‘Nether Regions’

A Poem and a Prose Text

Sharmistha Mohanty

Vasudha Thozhur, ‘Batik’, 2005

Not the history

of a life

never what is

personal

Always what is

outside time

never a moment that

begins

to end

Never a thing and

a horizon

never all lines meeting

far away

Though playing together without

beginning or end

Radha and Krishna

haven’t struck an acquaintance

yet

No hope to be

fulfilled

always a returning like

the turning earth

never an arrow moving

forward

Never a receding

far

always an emerging

forth

This invariable face

this variable body

To be one

not a consequence

but an impulse

from where everything

begins

Never things one

at a time

but a manifold

universe

How many suns are there?

How many dawns?

How many waters?

The universe in a child’s

opened mouth

Not muscle or sinew

nothing to resist

the precision of

infinity

Abhimaan

In Sanskrit, *abhimaan*, is arrogance, pride. The word is definite and closed. Great classical languages have words for the grand emotions, the most complex philosophical insights. When this word comes into the vernacular Bengali, it loses its rigidity, it gathers moisture, firm earth giving way to a sudden, still pond in which the trees are reflected, so numerous in the Bengal landscape. It changes in meaning to a sense of self which has been wounded, and which cannot have, or does not want to have, any direct expression of that wound. This can occur only between those who share the most fragile of relationships — lovers, parents and children, the nearest of friends. Bengalis are a loquacious people, but in *abhimaan*, there is silence. It is on the face, in a gesture, in the eyes, and if there are tears they are held at the edge and rarely overflow. In a woman the drape of the sari could almost hide it. We are an argumentative people, but in *abhimaan* there is no argument or fight. The pond is silent but aware, whether at noon, when the trees protect it from the harsh light, or at night, when some distant nightglow makes it luminous. The word combines the tender and the tough, in a way that the two sometimes lose their separateness. It belongs with other emotions like respect, or surrender that are disappearing**,** because the self now refuses to bend. *Abhimaan* assumes a childness, a kind of wound and love, or wounded love, of which only a vernacular is capable, a daily tenderness, a contiguous self, a searing need for the other. Tigers still wander in the mangrove forests of Bengal. There are words that give expression to the temperament of a culture. The long sound of *abhimaan* indicates a feeling that doesn't simply come and go, but stays, for hours, days, months. This word reveals something of the Bengali soul, its exaggerated sense of self come together with its genuine capacity for feeling.

The People on the Ground

Baburao Bagul

Translated by Wandana Sonalkar

Vasudha Thozhur, 'Travelogue — The Aesthetics of Tragedy II', 2008-2010

In that gentle winter night, as the full moon spread sweetness and light on the heartless ground near the Power House, the cold came down on the people like an unseen blind axe. It sliced mercilessly into every inch of their bodies. And so these beggarly, jobless people, who did not possess even the rudest hut, burnt with jealousy at the sight of each other's blankets. Husbands and wives fought over the blanket covering them. Children cried for their mothers and fathers, and dogs whined to work up some warmth.

The cold hurtled over that ground like a herd of maddened elephants, crushing those people under their feet. But it affected David-dada, who was not poor and feeble like those people on the ground, differently. The cold was like a loving embrace. It brought back the life-force into his body that had been beaten into unconsciousness.

He lay, limbs akimbo, covered in blood, among the dense bushes under a tall black leafless coconut palm. His attackers had tossed his dagger near his body. David-dada lived by collecting money owed by the bootleggers, and the shopkeepers who supplied the bootleggers with raw materials. These people, tired of his unreasonable demands and beatings, had, with the consent of the police, thrashed him and left him for dead among the bushes. The cold wind slowly brought him back to consciousness. He got up. Stumbling, somehow bearing the pain, he managed to get to the trunk of the coconut palm. He could walk no further. He sat, leaning his broad strong back against the trunk and spreading his muscular legs on the rising ground. His blood-soaked tufts of hair, now stiff with dried blood, hung over his ears and on his fair, reddish forehead. His neck, not used to bending even after being thrashed, was straight. His ample chest, which somehow had room for humanity as well as inhumanity, withstood the whipping cold easily. His generous and proud hands held his dagger; even sitting there now, he had the arrogant bearing of a tiger. As water washes away sins, so the cold chased away his weariness and his lethargy; it was as if it saw his suffering and gave his godly or ungodly nature back to him.

Meanwhile, the cold pushed and jostled the other poor and feeble people on the ground. It made mincemeat out of young Abdul Kareem who had T.B. Jobless, trying to satisfy the desires of a starved youth, he had sold his blood to the blood bank. He spent the money on prostitutes and *qawwali* sessions and was fast becoming penniless. The cold danced a ghastly dance on his wasted body, and he shivered like a chicken with its head cut off. A pain rose in his toes and fingers, and his empty stomach. When his hands and feet went numb, he shouted and stamped his feet. He lifted his back from the ground so the cold would not settle on his back and chest again. Sometimes, he tried to dig into the ground under his back as if hiding under bed sheets. But the earth under his body did not open its arms to him, or hide him. It left him out in the open, and the cold chased him as if it was hungry for his life. Trying to get some warmth into his body, he rubbed himself raw, yelling, ‘Allah let me live… let me live… be merciful…’

But Allah didn’t listen to him or have mercy on him. And the people around him did not get up, lift him from the lap of death, draw him close to them. Becausethey too were worried sick by the cold. Near him, an old couple, Zunkaavu and Supad, were asleep under their dirty patchwork coverlet. Under their heads, and at their feet, was the saleable rubbish they had foraged from the dumping ground at Chembur — rags, paper, glass and tin — stuffed

in bundles into gunny-sacks. They had only a filthy coverlet over them, and, like Abdul, the cold had driven them to a state past endurance.

They had spent their whole life together, but as the piercing cold made their bones ache, they squabbled and pulled at the covers. Driven out of his village, his job, and the chawl in Mumbai because of his fiery temper, trying to forget his sorrows by smoking *gaanja*, Supad hit his wife. Zunkaavu, who had suffered his blows all her life, was furious, but still she huddled close to him to keep out the cold. She was angry and bickering, clutching at the coverlet. She was telling him about all the injustice he had done to her, all his beatings; and he, cursing, hit out with his knees and elbows, pulling at the cover.

Sixteen-year-old Raamu had spread a sheet of tarred brown paper on the ground and he lay on it with a pile of old newspapers serving as a pillow, covered by a piece of sacking. On his chest was a gunny-bag full of paper, which he held tightly with both hands. During the last four or five years — since his parents died — he had made a living by picking paper up from the road and from dustbins. He too was shivering from the cold. Still, he held on to the load of paper on his chest. He was afraid some vagrant would burn his paper-earnings to save himself from the cold; so even though his fingers were stiff, he would not let go of the sack. He stayed awake in case somebody smashed a stone on his head to get at the sack. There was nobody nearby who might murder him; but in that harsh cold, he saw no good in anyone.

Beyond him, a giant south Indian leper slept with a ragged sheet covering him and a tiny puppy clasped to his side. The pup whined incessantly, trying to get out from under the sheet, while he kept fondling it. His body shook with the cold, while his mind was troubled by memories of his wife and her plump body. He was tortured by the thought of the pleasure he had enjoyed in her company for a good ten years. He wished he had a woman beside him now as he stroked the pup, sometimes with affection, and sometimes with anger at the thought that his wife was sleeping with someone else. He pressed it, and when the dog yelped, he comforted it. The memory of the flourishing domestic life he had left behind pained him; it made him restless.

A little distance from the leper, a mendicant couple lived on a downward slope where they had cleared a spot among the shrubs. Just two weeks ago, the woman's husband had been arrested while they were begging on the road, but the police had let her go as she was pregnant. She had begged all day, eaten the food she had got by begging, and was sleeping in her usual place. Her stomach ached because of the cold. She didn't know if the pain was because her labour had started or from the cold. She cried out from time to time. The troupe of *Faase-Paardhis* who were not too far away, ignored her, even though they heard her shrieks, because they too were being whipped by the cold. Their small children were crying, quarrelling over the blankets. Since it was forbidden to light a fire as the powerhouse was nearby, these people tried to warm themselves with all kinds of antics. Young couples without children hugged each other; some

lay on top of each other, some made love, and the winds that blew against mankind tore away the drapes covering them and left them bare.

As for the young virgin Sona, who lay between her grandmother and grandfather, the cold had aroused a storm of desire in her heart. She shifted restlessly, and her movements annoyed the old couple who were already irritated by the cold. Both shouted at her to lie still. But the waves of longing that the cold had aroused in her would not let her be. They made her move her limbs restlessly. She moved her blanket off her face so that she could not avoid seeing the amorous play of the couples in her troupe. These people, hardly blessed with an abundance of clothing, had found a way to work up heat by rubbing their bodies together. Watching them put this solution to effect agitated young Sona's mind, and she pulled the blanket off her face and stared at them like a madwoman, ignoring the cold and her grandparents' scolding. Annoyed with the girl's behaviour, her grandfather made her get up then hugged the old woman tightly, trying to warm his body. Sona sat shivering at their feet, her eyes darting from her embracing grandparents to the people of her troupe. Her grandfather, still trembling from the cold, commanded, 'Don't just sit there like that. Get behind me and hold me tightly.' She clasped him, and he felt better with the contact of a young, warm body. He squeezed the old woman, and as the trembling of his muscles slowed down, he felt the stirrings of an enfeebled desire. So, he shouted for Sona to get up. As soon as she separated from him, the old woman asked her to sleep behind her. Then he and she, by turns, took shelter from the cold behind Sona's young body, and the exercise made her even more agitated with desire. She moved away from her grandparents and lay with a thin sheet over her. Watching the amorous movements of her kinfolk nearby made her restive and she wished that there was a young man beside her, that he would rub his firm body against hers, that he would squeeze her. She lay some distance away from her grandparents, hoping that someone would come to her, but nobody came, because all the young men in her troupe were her paternal cousins.

Sharp waves of cold were assailing her now, and they stoked the fire of passionate hunger inside her. She sat up, clasping a cloth around her, looking at the fornicating couples among her kinfolk. Then she cast her body on the ground in shame. As the cold intensified, as did the scenes of naked lust around her, she lost her senses. She was ready to commit sin. She stood up, intending to get under someone's blanket. She could see the giant leper from Madras muttering at a distance, Raamu sleeping at his side on a sack, and Abdul, shuddering with cold. As she stood there shivering, wondering which of the three she should go to, she saw someone gesturing and calling out to her. She looked at him intently. Seeing the thick blanket covering him, she took two steps towards him and stopped. The bitter cold had got into her every nerve and muscle. She came forward quickly and stood before the strange man who was on his feet with a blanket on his body. As soon as the young hot-blooded woman came to him, he

stretched his arms, embraced her, and sat down with her. They disappeared together under the blanket.

Resting against the tall palm, David looked at the people with all their troubles. The sight of Abdul, chilled to the bone, tossing and turning, twisted up his insides. Hearing the screams of the pregnant beggar-woman lying among the bushes made his heart shudder. Listening to the painful tale that came to his ears from the quarrelling of the old couple Zunkaavu and Sukad, his generous hands yearned to help them; and the sight of Sona fornicating with a strange man because of the cold, numbed his brain. He was lost in thought, smoking cigarette after cigarette, when a clamour came to his ears from the *Faase-Paardhis*:

'Where's Sona? Where's Sona?'

They roamed over the ground tearing the blankets off any couple they saw. As soon as they saw Sona, her chastity spilt, sleeping with a stranger, they began to beat both of them. Both the young and old of that troupe set to beating the man with any object that came to hand till he was covered with blood. He fell down, but they would not let him go. They were not a cruel people by nature, but they thrashed him without thought for his life because beating him brought warmth and a spark of life to their bodies.

And the sight of these beatings just for the fun of it, of the cruelty that had descended on these people with the cold, caused an explosion in David's heart and he cried out in rage,

'Eh, you *Paardhis*! Leave him alone! Will you let him go or not?'

Clenching the dagger in his hand, he leapt up from where he sat like a cheetah and ran towards the nomads. His furious voice and aggressive movement made the beaters-for-the-fun-of-it move away in alarm. At the sight of the dagger in his hand, they ran helter-skelter; the women and children cried and shouted as they tried to save themselves. Seeing them run away in fear, he turned back. His enraged gaze fell on the ailing Abdul Kareem, tossing and turning, begging for death to release him. David bent, pulled him up by his hair and asked,

'Eh, who're you?'

Frightened by David's voice and the electrifying touch of his hand, Abdul said piteously, 'I'm a poet, all my life I've loved women and poetry, and this is the way I am punished…'

'What d'you mean?'

'Don't hit me. This heartless world of yours has killed me. If you hit me, send me straight to God. So that he won't send me back into this world. Let me go.'

David loosened his grip. Abdul fell back on the ground. He was complaining at having been struck, speaking the name of God, sobbing. A volcano of anger and tears erupted in David's heart. His generous hand went straight to his pocket, but there was nothing in there except a packet of cigarettes. His quick eyes looked around for something to help – Abdul. He saw the sack on Raamu's chest and the bundles near Supad and Zunkaavu's pillow, and ran towards them. Warned by the sound of Abdul's voice, Raamu clasped the sack containing paper, his day's income, even more tightly. David was angered by Raamu's meanness in clinging to his rupee's worth of paper scrapswhen a young man was dying nearby. He ran towards Raamu, who clutched his sack even more tightly and whined,

'Dada, don't take it. Don't destroy an orphan like me. What will I eat tomorrow? … Take the old people's bundle!'

He spoke from his heart, and used all his strength to hold on to his sack. The injured David found this intolerable; he was furious that a wretch like Raamu was defying him. In his anger he grabbed the sack, pulled it open near Abdul and set a match to the paper. He shouted, 'Warm yourself! Warm yourself!'

Abdul felt better with the warmth of the fire and also from the sack that David had thrown over him; he felt better that death had retreated a little. Raamu's desperate words rang in his ears and so he wanted to throw the sack from his body; but because of the force of David's personality, he dared not do it. Meanwhile, David was looking at the dejected Raamu; the boy's pathetic words had pierced his benevolent heart and he stood there, wondering how to repay him.

His standing there made Abdul restless; the couple Supad-Zunkaavu, chilled to the bone, just wished he would go away; and just then the beggar-woman, who had lain down among the bushes so that she could cast the life within her on the ground, let out a howl of pain. That howl made David tremble like a tautened wire. As he moved away, Zunkaavu and Supad gathered their blankets about them and came to sit by the fire. They collected the scattered papers of Raamu's earnings and dropped them on the fire one by one as they warmed themselves. The cruelty made Raamu so angry that he wanted to smash a rock into their heads.

As he looked for a sizeable stone, the old couple warmed themselves and the pregnant woman let out shriek after shriek. David's crazed movement speeded up with every scream of hers; each step he took caused him pain as the cold wind stirred up a fire in his wounds. He walked faster and faster, squeezing the dagger.

And now that her child had come very close to the earth, the first-time mother shrank with shame to see this enormous man advancing towards her. Her body seemed to shrivel up; the

child's rhythm faltered, and the woman longing to see her child and find release from her pain cried out,

'Eh — don't come here, turn back…'

The harsh distress in her voice slowed him down to a stop. He shouted: 'Who are you, you whore, to stop me? If you speak like that again I'll break your jaw.' He came forward. The red mess between her thighs made him shudder in disgust and fear then turn around. Face turned away, eyes shielded, he began to walk away. When he had gone a few paces, he realised that he had done nothing to help her, and he stood still where he was, thinking. But he could not think of what he could do to help her. He opened his eyes to see if any help was at hand. But the cruel sight that met his eyes drove all thought of helping the woman out of his mind.

He could see the old couple Zunkaavu and Supad, driven desperate by the cold, trying to snatch Raamu's remaining paper-scraps they could burn. They were hitting him, flailing him on the nose and mouth. David began to run, intending to bring the couple back to their senses. The couple paid no attention to his threatening shouts. Even before David reached them, they began to attack the boy with their hands, trying to snatch the paper from him. In his anxiety that they should not kill him, David ran, pushing people out of his path. They, in turn, seeing the dagger in his hand, lay quiet after he pushed or trod on them. Meanwhile, the old couple had defeated Raamu and were taking the old newspapers and tarred brown paper to the fire. Raamu quickly picked up a large boulder and brought it down on the head of the old woman. The old woman collapsed; instead of attending to her, the old man turned on Raamu. Seeing the old man advance murderously, a scared Raamustepped back, picked up two rocks. Raamu was so angry, so frightened, that if the old man had taken even one step towards him, he would have smashed his head and face in. Knowing that a man can be driven by fear to do the most terrible things, and not wanting the young Raamu's life to be wasted like his own in jail, David roared,

'Come, boy, put down those rocks. Will you do it or shall I smash your face in?'

Raamu put down the rocks out of fear of David. He turned his attention to the old lady, knowing that the old man would beat him for it. The old woman's eyes were red with blood. The sari on her back and over her head were soaked in blood. The sight of the blood made Raamu turn his head toward David and blubber. The sight of that innocent orphan's tears made David want to hug him. Like the Christ, he stepped forward with his compassionate arms spread wide. Just then, he heard a radiant, fragile note calling to him. A child's first cry.

The feeble cry of the small child agitated his heart. The desire to see the child, to see its glowing flower-like face, kept him from Raamu. It pulled him back. It increased his restlessness. The arms that had been raised to embrace Raamu dropped to his sides. He stood there like a

blackbuck, tensing his neck and eyes, pricking up his ears to detect the sweet note of the child's crying. But for a long time, the sound did not reach his ears. And into his mind, still dazed from having witnessed man's inhumanity to man among the people on that ground, grew a new doubt: Why does the child not cry? Did its mother, turned beast-like in this merciless cold, eat it up like a cat does? Or did she kill it to destroy the evidence of her sin…?'

The suspicion confused him. He turned his back on Raamu and walked away, agitated. And Raamu, who was longing to lessen his burden of suffering in David's embrace, was hurt by seeing David walk away. His piteous eyes followed David's rapid gait. And David, thrown off balance by this sudden rush of human feeling, concerned only that the intense cold should not drive the woman to cruelty, that she should not grow wild enough with grief to kill the child, walked on, pulling blankets off those in his path. And each man he suddenly exposed sat up distracted. Seeing the cruel hard dagger in David's hand, and the power in his body, he would shiver with cold and remain silent. And David, breathless, savage, shouted, 'Get up! A woman has delivered a child… the time of Christ's birth was a time like this…'

He no longer knew what he was saying or doing. He was shouting, pulling off blankets from anyone he saw and piling them on his shoulder. He trod unthinkingly on anyone lying in his path, and as a tumult arose among the people on the ground, this giant of a man reached the leper from Madras. At that moment the leper, imagining the little pup in front of him to be his full-bodied wife, kissed and squeezed it; and just then David pulled the smelly blanket off his body, kicked him, and walked on.

His dreams suddenly divested of colour, the sharp lash of the cold, and David's heavily-booted foot coming down on his gangrenous leg, angered the leper. He got up, picked up the piece of slate he used as a pillow, and ran at David with a filthy curse.

David, not used to being sworn at and assaulted by such an insignificant person, turned around. Shielding the dagger capable of slashing diagonally from the left side of a man's chest to his right groin, he ran at the leper. Seeing the fiery gleam in his eyes, the leper stepped back. When David saw the swollen disfigured face of the leper his mind was filled with revulsion; disgust at the thought of dipping his dagger into his rotten blood caused him to lower his arm. He spat derisively, turned around and walked away.

Seeing the pride of an elephant in David's gait, his tall broad muscular body, the leper's chest burned with jealousy. The derision he had shown him made him want to murder him; and when David scornfully cast off the load on his shoulder, the leper, blind with rage, smashed the slate in his hand into David's head. And David, who was sorely wounded from the morning's assault, who had lost a lot of blood and was fired up only by his inner strength, suddenly collapsed. And at once, the people on the dusty ground, who had been inhumanly exposed to the bitter cold,

set upon David and began to beat him, and the effort of hitting him brought warmth to their bodies and joy to their minds.

And now David, who had lived for so many years terrorising others but remained untouched like fire, was beaten by the people on the ground. He lay on the ground in the dust like some huge stone god, covered in blood, completely still. And each man who had grown elated with the effort of beating him now hunted amid the load tossed off his shoulder, for his clothes, his blankets, his sheets; squabbling as if in a dogfight, shouting, roughly pushing others aside. And the young mother who had just given birth among the bushes laboured to dig a pit with a sharp stone so that she could bury her blood-soaked clothes and the baby's umbilical cord. The cold grew more intense, stirring up emotions of hatred and envy in the hearts of the people on the ground, driving them beyond the bounds of humanity.

Read the original Marathi story here.

This is an edited version of the translation first published in the Beacon.

In Conversation with Keki N. Daruwalla

Understanding the Past and Present of Indian Poetry in English

The Barbarians

K. Satchidanandan

Translated from the original 'മ്ലേച്ഛന്മാർ' by the poet

Käthe Kollwitz, 'Killed in Action', lithograph, 64.1 x 53.4 cm, 1920/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

അവര് വരുമന്നെ് നമുക്കുറപ്പായിരുന്നു

അവര്ക്ക് എതിര്നില്ക്കുമായിരുന്നവരുടെ
വിഗ്രഹങ്ങള് നാം ഒന്നെ ാന്നായി എറിഞ്ഞുടച്ചു
അവരെ എതിരലേ്ക്കാന് കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളുടെ
രക്തം നിറച്ച പാനപാത്രങ്ങളുമായി
നാം തലസ്ഥാനത്ത് കാത്തുനിന്നു,
ഉടുപ്പുകള് ഊരി മരവുരികളണിഞ്ഞു
ചരിത്രസ്മാരകങ്ങള്ക്ക് തീക്കെ ാളുത്തി
യാഗങ്ങള്ക്ക് അഗ്നിയെ ാരുക്കി
രാജവീഥികളുടെ പരേുകള് മാറ്റി
നമ്മുടെ ഗ്രന്ഥപ്പുരകള് അവരെ
അരിശം പിടിപ്പിച്ചാലേ ാ എന്നു ഭയന്ന്
അവ ഇടിച്ചു നിരത്തി ദുര്മന്ത്രവാദം
നടത്താനുള്ള താളിയേ ാലകള് മാത്രം സംരക്ഷിച്ചു
പക്ഷെ അവര് വന്നത് നാം
അറിഞ്ഞതു പേ ാലുമില്ല
നമ്മുടെ തന്നെ വിഗ്രഹങ്ങള് ഉയര്ത്തിപ്പിടിച്ച്
നമ്മുടെ പതാകയെ വന്ദിച്ച്
നമ്മുടെ വസ്ത്രങ്ങളണിഞ്ഞ്
നമ്മുടെ നിയമപുസ്തകം കയ്യിലന്നേതി
നമ്മുടെ തന്നെ മന്ത്രങ്ങള് ഉരുക്കഴിച്ച്
നമ്മുടെ ഭാഷ സംസാരിച്ച്
രാജസഭയുടെ കല്പ്പടവുകള് തെ ാട്ടു വന്ദിച്ചാണ്
അവര് കയറിവന്നത്

ഒടുവില് അവര് കിണറുകളില്
വിഷം കലക്കാനും
കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളുടെ ഭക്ഷണം തട്ടിപ്പറിക്കാനും
ചിന്തകളുടെ പരേില്
മനുഷ്യരെ എയ്തു വീഴ്ത്താനും
തുടങ്ങിയപ്പേ ാഴാണ് നമുക്കു മനസ്സിലായത്
അവര് നമുക്കിടയില്, നമുക്കുള്ളില്,
തന്നെയായിരുന്നു എന്ന്.

ഇപ്പോൾ നാം
അങ്ങോട്ടുമിങ്ങോട്ടും നോക്കി
സംശയത്തോടെ ചോദിക്കുന്നു:
‘നീയാണോ മുട്ഠാളന്?’

മറുപടിക്കു പകരം നമ്മുടെ ഭാവിയില്
മുഴുക്കെ പുക പടർത്തി തീ
ആളിപ്പിടിക്കുന്നതുമാത്രം നാം കാണുന്നു.
നമ്മുടെ ഭാഷ മരണത്തിന്റതോകുന്നതും.

നഗരചത്വരത്തില് ഇപ്പോൾ നാം
രക്ഷകരെയും കാത്തു നില്ക്കുന്നു,
അവരും മറ്റാരോ ആണന്നെന പോലെ.

(ഗ്രീക്ക് കവി സി. പി. കവഫിയുടെ ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’ എന്ന കവിത ഓർത്തു കൊണ്ട്)

We were certain they would come.

We broke the idols of those who
might have stood against them, one by one.
We waited in the capital to welcome them
with goblets brimming with children’s blood.
We removed our clothes to put on barks,
set fire to monuments,
propitiated fire for the sacrifices to come,
changed the names of the royal streets.
Afraid our libraries might provoke them
we razed them to the ground, letting
only the palm leaves inscribed with the mantras
of black magic to survive.

But we did not even know when they came.
For, they had come up, holding aloft
our own idols, saluting our flag,
dressed like we used to be,
carrying our law-books, chanting our slogans,

speaking our tongue, piously touching
the stone-steps of the royal assembly.

Only when they began to poison our wells,
rob our kids of their food and
shoot people down accusing them of thinking
did we realise they had ever been
amidst us, within us. Now we
look askance at one another and wonder,
'Are you the barbarian? Are you?'

No answer. We only see the fire spreading
filling our future with smoke and our
language turning into that of death.

Now we wait for our saviour at the city square,
as if it were someone else.

(*Remembering C. P. Cavafy's famous poem, 'Waiting for the Barbarians'*.)

Blood Knot

Five poems by Meena Alexander

Mark Rothko, ‘No. 3’, oil on canvas, 172.7 cms x 137.8 cms, 1953/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Smoke on Water

I am searching in this poem

For courage, for words

To speak to you with

Who have so often said to me

‘We write the surface only

I am surer of it now

Than ever before.’

*

Colors you bring me

Must be worked out in water

Sepia in grandmother’s hair.

She is dead now

A mere surface, burning

As courage burns

In another’s poems.

This world divides in two.

*

And what is the fuel I bring you?

I think of you

In your house as lights fail

Trying to make

A smoky lantern work.

Your thumb with the mole

At the rim wedges the glass open

And I do not know how to go on.

Mystic Teashop

You come to me and I am full of noises,

That curl in the crevices of ribcage, hollows of wrist,

You stroke me, tiny syllables thrum.

In winter light I quiver and twitch.

You stroll with me to a teashop on a dusty street

And think — Here's a woman quite beside her self

Shall we take tea at a table set by the Muses —

There's Erato fleeing a room

Of starched linen, glass vessels, fretted gold

And cold Melpomene whose petticoat is sodden,

Whose lips have sipped all the tea in India and China,

She still cries out for more.

One Word

We met in a run down town

We were past the summer of our lives.

Before we met I was frightened

Of one word – God.

Now I whisper it

As lotus leaves shiver at dawn,

As mist boils in the belly of the river

As a swordfish leaps spray to its death.

Now I feel your hands

Stroking hair back from my face.

We clasped each other in a house of bone

As Ashoka's lion leapt out of sandstone

And the painted rose smouldered,

Its petals wasted in a blunt mirror.

Deer Park at Sarnath

It seems impossible to begin

To speak of those gone ahead

Intact, fired by breath

Through flowering mustard

They race past a main road

Northwards to the deer park.

In the terrible kindness of the dead

They whisper as they pass

Inscribe yourself if you can

On brick or bone or slate

Then surrender it all with grace

Rejoice in these trees

Jutting windward

A threshold

Cut in rock

With seven kingdoms visible

Is still no stopping place

Clouds consume the palaces

Of the gods

Stone chariots stir in soil

All Sarnath is covered in dirt.

There is no grief like this

The origin of landscape is mercy.

Blood Knot

There'll come a time when I forget your name,

Blood knot that makes the iris bloom

Gnarl of darkness in the tree that grows

Beside the mountain of the ancestors

Mango tree, jacaranda tree, jackfruit tree,

The tree with many children perched in it,

Chattering monkeys with clouds on their backs.

I'll forget the mirror in which I saw your face

And mine cupped together, stout waves of water

That swept us close in a house of salt,

Cormorants with glistening fish in their beaks,

A warm leaf you pressed against my cheek.

There'll come a time when I forget your face,

Lip marks rinsed from a window pane

'Smoke on Water' first appeared in the collection Stone Roots (Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1980); 'Mystic Teashop', in the *Plume Anthology*; 'One Word' was published as 'Una Parola' translated into Italian by Stefano Strazzabosco (Vicenza: Dire Poesia Festival, 2011); 'Deer Park at Sarnath' was first published in *River and Bridge* (Rupa: Delhi, 1995).

Retake — Galaxy of Musicians

Cop Shiva

As a documentary photographer, I am interested in the idea of staged studio-photography. It creates a space for conversation with people — the backdrop creates an opportunity to interact with strangers in a context like *Kochi-Muziris Biennale* 2014, for example, connecting with the history of painting and photography, and embedding it in a public space as a public and interactive project.

I choose the iconic painting by the legendary painter Raja Ravi Varma, currently featured in the Mysore museum. Although Ravi Varma is originally from Kerala, he had a pan-Indian following. The painting 'Galaxy of Musicians' is visionary and choreographs women from different regions of India as parts of a dramatic setting. It envisions 'Unity in diversity'. I wish to reclaim Raja Ravi Varma in a contemporary trans-cultural context.

This painting is inspired by group studio photography. It excludes the common people. I believe in dismantling the aura of the painting and making it commonplace. I use the 'Galaxy of Musicians' as a popular cutout for the local people to interact with.

This is an attempt at a retake of Ravi Varma, to create a more inclusive context to celebrate diversity of humanity and be more inclusive. It also presents an opportunity to create a situation in the public space for conversation and reconnections with history and diversity, set amidst the social and political context of contemporary cosmopolitan Kochi.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The Rāmāyaṇa: Theme and Variation

Romila Thapar

Page from a Dispersed *Ramayana* (Story of Rama), graphite with colour on paper, 26 cms x 34.1 cms, first quarter of the 19th century/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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The epic can be seen as the expression of a certain historical consciousness, even though the events which it describes may not be historically authenticated. The epic form is in origin part of an oral tradition and comes to be 'frozen' into a literary form at a date subsequent to that of the oral composition. It reflects a changed historical situation in which the new is looking back on the old and often doing so nostalgically. The nostalgia is, however, circumscribed by new demands. The continuity of the epic is not merely due to a love for mythology and legend in a particular society. Undoubtedly, the appeal of the narrative, the literary form, the evocation of imagery and symbolism and the ethical emphases, all ensure continuity: but the role of the epic

in the making of a historical tradition relates more closely to its potential function in such a tradition.

The popularity and the function of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* in the Vālmīki version are manifest at many historical levels. As a poetic expression it had a literary appeal which, with the spread of Sanskrit, was introduced into new areas at specific times. In turn it became the model for the development of epic genres associated with Sanskritic culture. The literary currency of the epic is apparent from allusions in inscriptional records. As a theme it incorporates the great universal ethic of the battle between good and evil with a large number of subsidiary themes relating to ethical behaviour in a range of human relationships. At a wider level it functions as a link between the classical tradition and local culture where the epic form facilitates assimilation from one to the other, for what is pertinent to the local culture can be incorporated into the epic through fresh episodes. In the same way, the geographical horizon of the epic can be extended through the inclusion of local places as the locations of events. An even more significant development in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is its function as a text to propagate Vaisnavism, with the transformation of the hero-prince into an avatāra of Viṣṇu. To all these may be added yet another aspect: that the *Rāmāyaṇa* symbolizes the triumph of the monarchical state, and the epic therefore becomes a charter of validation for the monarchical state. As such it can either be used directly where validation is required by groups seeking kinship links with the hero, or else can be virtually reversed if the validation is required for those who were considered the enemies in the original story.

The present paper is concerned with this latter aspect of the role of the epic, and attempts an analysis of three major and different versions of the narrative of events included in the Rāmayaṇa and the degree to which they can be seen as charters of validation referring to distinct and separate groups. The three versions are first, the parallels to the *Rāmāyaṇa* themes in the Buddhist *Jātaka* literature, and second, the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and, finally, the Jaina version of the story, the *Paumacariyam* of Vimalasūri. Irrespective of when the earliest oral tradition was current, these three versions were composed and compiled in the period approximately between the fifth century BC and mid-first millennium AD. What seems significant therefore is the question of the need for these versions and the reasons for the dissimilarities in treatment.

References to the *Rāmāyaṇa* as such in Buddhist sources are met with in the commentaries and in the texts of the later period such as the *Cūlavaṃsa*. The former dismiss the epic with the uncomplimentary remark that it is 'purposeless talk'. But the *Jātaka* literature has many scattered fragments which echo episodes from the story. It has been suggested that these fragments or *ākhyānas* may have been put together in the larger epic, the implication being that both *Jātaka* stories and the *rāma-kathā* derive from a common oral tradition. That

the *Jātaka* versions were not an attempt at an alternative version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* seems evident from the absence of any rewriting of the epic as such in the Buddhist tradition. The stories merely illustrate certain actions by recourse to tales familiar to a wide audience, although the details of the stories often differ from the episodes in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. These differences are important. The *Jātaka*stories associated with the *Rāmāyaṇa* consist either of those which relate events parallel to the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or which contain verses alluding to the narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or personalities involved in the story. The selection is therefore not arbitrary. There are some *Jātakas* where the reference is indirect but quite clearly to the Rāmāyaṇa itself as when a verse describes the emotion of Rāma's mother on his exile to Daṇḍaka or the reference to Sītā's devotion to Rāma as reflected in her accompanying her husband into exile. Rāma is described as *daśaratha-rājaputta*in the commentary to this Jātaka. There is also a reference to a Rāma-mātuposaka, an inhabitant of Varanasi who went to Daṇḍaka, a country which was being destroyed by the wickedness of the king. Other Jātakas refer to places, persons and episodes which are also mentioned in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa or can be associated with this text. Thus Daṇḍaki is referred to as the king ruling over Daṇḍaka which is associated with the area extending down to the Godavari river and his capital is at Kumbhavatī. In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, Daśaratha is forced to agree to the exile of Rāma because Kekeyi invokes a boon which he had given her and the exile of his son is explained by his having to undergo the same fate as the blind parents of the young ascetic whom he had accidentally killed whilst on a hunt. This episode has its parallel in the *Sāma Jātaka*.

The town of Ayodhyā is known but not very clearly located. On one occasion it is said to have been attacked by the Andhavenuputta, who besieged and subjugated the city and then returned to Dvāravatī. This reference to the Andhaka-vṛṣṇi clans of the Yādava lineage is echoed in Puranic records where mention is made of the Haihayas, a segment of the Yādava lineage, attacking Kosala. The city of Sāketa which arose on the decline of Ayodhyā is more frequently mentioned in Buddhist sources and is often associated with the Śākyas.

Mithilā and Videha are mentioned more frequently in the Jātaka literature. A prince of Mithilā studied together with a prince from Varanasi at Taxila. King Videha ruled at Mithilā and was instructed in the law by four sages. Suruci is referred to as the king of Mithilā in Videha. Similarly, Makhadeva ruled for eighty-four thousand years and became a monk when he saw the first grey hair on his head—a theme often repeated in Buddhist texts. The story is further elaborated upon in the Nimi Jātaka where Makhadeva is reborn as Nimi and acquires renown as one who practises all the Buddhist precepts and virtues. He is therefore invited to visit Indra's heaven which he does for seven days making a detour via hell. Nimi also renounces the world on sighting the first grey hair on his head and his son Kalāra-Janaka becomes king. The *Mahājanaka Jātaka* has a long account of the ancestry and tribulations of Mahājanaka

who, having lost his right to accession at birth, manages to regain his kingdom but eventually renounces his princely existence and becomes an ascetic. The descriptions of Mithilā in this *Mahājanaka Jātaka* are reminiscent of the descriptions of Ayodhyā in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa as a city of considerable splendour and wealth. Elsewhere too, Videha is described as a rich land of sixteen thousand villages and with well-filled granaries and storehouses and sixteen thousand dancing girls. Names such as Nimi and Janaka occur in the Puranic genealogies of the Videha branch of the Ikṣvāku lineage. The religious and philosophical activities of these kings are not dissimilar to the descriptions of Janaka in the later Vedic literature except that in those texts the connections are with the performance of Vedic yajñas and the pre-occupation with Upanisadic discourses.

The *Jātaka* story which comes closest to the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is, of course, the *Dasaratha Jātaka* and this has been commented upon at length. Dasaratha is described as the king of Varanasi. He has two sons, Rāma-paṇḍita and Lakkhana, and a daughter, Sītā-devī, from his eldest queen. After her death he raises another wife to the status of queen consort and she demands that her son Bharata be made the heir-apparent. The king, frightened that the new consort will harm the elder sons suggests to them that they flee to the neighbouring kingdom and claim their rights after Dasaratha has died, it having been prophesied that Dasaratha would die after twelve years. Sītā accompanies her brothers and the three go to the Himalaya. Dasaratha dies after nine years. Bharata, refusing to become king, goes in search of Rāma and tries to persuade him to return. Lakkhana and Sītā, on hearing of their father's death, faint, but Rāma preaches to them on the impermanence of life. Rāma insists that he will return only after the twelve years have been completed and therefore gives his sandals to Bharata to guide him in taking decisions. Finally, Rāma returns to his kingdom, makes Sītā his queen consort and rules righteously for sixteen thousand years.

This is in essence the story of the *Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa*, the second book of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. But it also carries traces of the origin myths of various kṣatriya clans, pre-eminently the Śākyas and Koliyas, described in other Buddhist sources. King Okkāka, the founder of the Okkāka or Ikṣvāku lineage and the ancestor of the Śākyas, banished the children of his elder queen to the Himalaya and made the son of the younger queen his heir. The exiled children, four sons and fi ve daughters, paired off and became the ancestors of the Śākyas, founding a city at Kapilavastu. The origin of the Koliyas is linked to this story and is traced back to Rāma, the king of Varanasi who was exiled because he had leprosy. He cured himself as well as the eldest daughter of King Okkāka, whom her brothers had left in the forest. They lived together in a *kol* tree and became the parents of sixteen twins, the ancestors of the Koliyas. Koliyanagara was built at the site of the kol tree. The thirty-two Koliya princes abducted the daughters of their maternal uncles, the Śakyas, in the accepted manner of certain cross cousin marriage systems.

The link between Okkāka and the northern region is emphasized in both these stories as also in a *Jātaka* story which states that Okkāka sent for a Madra princess for his son Kuśa. On this occasion Okkāka is said to be the king of the Mallas ruling from Kuśavatī. The princess curiously has a hunchbacked nurse. The Madras were the neighbours of the Kekeyas in northern India. That the Ikṣvākus were originally based further to the west and appear to have migrated eastwards to the middle Ganga valley is implied in certain references to them in Vedic literature. In case of such a migration the shorter and more likely route was probably along the foothills of the Himalaya and the northern fringes of the Ganga valley.

At some point the lineage of Okkāka was connected with that of Ikṣvāku. The name Okkāka is said to derive from *Okkamukha* because when he spoke light seemed to come from his mouth. The Northern Buddhist tradition equates Okkāka with Ikṣvāku and derives the etymology from ikṣu, sugarcane, the usual etymology in Puranic sources. Was the association with the Ikṣvākus a later attempt to link the *kṣatriya* clans which supported Buddhism with one of the two major royal lineages of the Puranic *kṣatriya* tradition? This may explain why these clans are given no importance in the Puranic accounts. The relevance of Buddhist origin myths to the epic has to do with the association of these clans with the *janapada* of Kosala.

The theme of exile occurs more than once in the Jātaka literature, but of these the *Sambula Jātaka* is the closest in detail to the *Rāmāyaṇa* story. A prince exiles himself on account of leprosy and his wife accompanies him. She is kidnapped by a *rakkhasa* in the forest, but Śakra comes to her aid and she returns to her husband. In spite of her many efforts to reassure him he remains suspicious of her chastity. Ultimately they are reconciled. It is, however, the *Vessantara Jātaka* which is most frequently quoted in connection with the exile theme. Vessantara, the son of the ruler of Sivi, is the epitome of the gift-giving prince since he bestows his wealth in the form of *dāna* on all who ask for it. Finally, he goes to the extent of gifting his famous rain-inducing elephant to the king of Kaliṅga who asks for it in order to terminate a prolonged drought in Kaliṅga. This incenses the subjects of Vessantara who banish him from the kingdom, the loss of this particular elephant symbolizing the loss of prosperity. His wife, in emulation of Sītā, accompanies him into exile. He travels to the Ceta/Cedi kingdom and lives in the Gandhamadana forest. Even here he is beset by greedy *brāhmaṇas*. His children are taken away by a brāhmaṇa from Kalinga and another asks for his wife to work as a slave. Eventually Śakra appears and it turns out that the tribulations of Vessantara are a test of his generosity.

Underlying the many stories there are some themes which appear to be significant not only in themselves but also as suggestive of some of the ideas which might have gone into the shaping of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* as well, although from a non-Buddhist perspective. There is first of all the extension of the geographical circumference. Mention is made of the links and alliances between the *janapadas* of the middle Ganga valley with janapadas in two diff erent directions.

One appears to have been along the northern route, the *uttarapatha*, to the *janapadas* of the Indo-Gangetic divide, Punjab and the north-west—that of the Kurus, the Kekayas, the Madras, Gandhāra and Kāmboja. The other went in a southerly direction via Cedi to Kaliṅga. The route from Kāśī to Cedi is said to have been infested with robbers. But Cedi and Kaliṅga seem closely associated with a frequency of safe travelling. The geographical dimension is emphasized in the theme of exile where banished princes go either to the Himalaya or southwards, as for example to Cedi.

The Cedi *janapada* is clearly an important area. The *Cetiya Jātaka* gives the lineage of the Cedi kings who ruled from the capital of Sotthivatinagara in Bundelkhand. They were descended from Mahāsammata and the succession is given as far as the famous Uparicara, so named because he travelled through the sky. After him the lineage was segmented and his five sons ruled in five different regions, a statement which is confirmed in the *Purāṇas*. The *Vessantara Jātaka* mentions that the Cetarattha/ Cedirāṣṭra was full of meat, wine and rice, and inhabited by sixty thousand *khattiyas* who lived there as *cetiya rājās*. The Cedi-Kaliṅga link indicated in this *Jātaka* is historically attested in the Hathigumpha Inscription. Khāravela, the king of Kaliṅga, describes himself as a descendant of Uparicara Vasu, the Cedi king, and takes the title of Mahāmeghavāhana, as do other kings of Kaliṅga of this period. It would seem that the Cedis migrated or conquered the land to the southwest as far as Kaliṅga, thus extending their control from their original base in Bundelkhand.

Exile in these stories often seems to symbolize migration and settlement and even if the exiles return to their original homes, a connection with the area of exile is established. Colonization was probably expressed in the form of exile, perhaps to provide a dramatic context to the theme and an explanation for migration. Where new land was conquered and colonized the justification for the conquest was given in the theme of exile. The actual process of colonization would be similar in each case, irrespective of the story narrated for its justification. The process is described in the *Jayadissa Jātaka* where fresh land is settled by the king through clearing the land, building a lake, preparing the fields, bringing in one thousand families and founding a village such as will support ascetics by giving alms. New settlements result in the establishment of cities which become the capitals of new *janapadas* such as Kapilavastu and Koliyanagara. The city in turn symbolizes the spread of a particular cultural system.

Legitimacy is bestowed on the new settlement not by the area having been conquered but by the settlers being linked to the appropriate established lineages. Segments of the existing landowning *kṣatriya* lineages migrate to new areas and in settling their claim ownership by virtue of kinship links with the established lineages. The connotation of *kṣatriya* in the Buddhist texts was evidently more that of a landowning group than of a warrior. Thus, those who go into exile are members of the *rājakula* and not commoners. In some cases, as in that of the *Cetiya*

Jātaka, fragments of their genealogy are given to indicate their status; in other cases it is enough to say that they belong to the Ikṣvāku lineage. The repeated occurrence of sibling parentage may symbolize marriage between two exogamous phratries or tribal subdivisions from the period of the original settlement and the emphasis on cross-cousin marriage which, whether actual or not, does indicate the adoption of a system different from that described in non-Buddhist literature. It has also been argued that this type of marriage is a method of stressing purity of lineage, where ancestry is traced back to a single set of parents. Purity of lineage would again reinforce status. The theme of sibling marriage may suggest some traces of a system of succession where a brother and sister rule as king and queen but without conjugal relations. It appears to have been symbolic, unlike the Ptolemies of Egypt.

In terms of political sanction, these stories reflect a mixture of the *gaṇa-saṅgha* system of chiefships or oligarchies and the early stages of monarchy. There are references to the many thousand *khattiyas* or *rājās* ruling in certain *janapadas*, such as Cedi, which would indicate a *gaṇa saṅgha* system. In other cases individual kings are referred to, but in contrast to the two other versions, kingship is still a relatively unstable feature in these stories. Kings can be removed by angry subjects as in the case of Vessantara. Even though he was removed while yet a prince, his father could do nothing to prevent his being exiled. Other *Jātakas* refer to kings being removed by their subjects as also to kings being elected by popular opinion, or situations of crisis where kings are called upon to abdicate.

These concerns are in turn enveloped in a Buddhist ethos. There is an emphasis on *dāna* where gift-giving becomes a major criterion of morality, as also the emphasis on *karuṇā* or compassion, so clearly expressed in the treatment of the story of the young ascetic killed by the king but revived by the faith of the blind parents. The benevolent and helping hand of Śakra assists in this. Central to this ethos is the bodhisattva ideal with the notion of rebirth to help in the salvation of others. In later times the ideal of the king and the *bodhisattva*were to merge, but at this point there is only the occasional king who is in fact a *bodhisattva*.

These four themes—the extension of the geographical area, migration and settlement, social and political legitimacy, and religious sanction—are recognized components of charters of validation and occur, as we shall see, in other versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story as well. In the *Jātaka* literature they are not integrated into a single text but remain as isolated episodes. There was evidently a floating oral tradition of such stories, probably a range of oral epics, and episodes from these were consciously worked into the text of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. That references are made to the text in the *Jātaka* stories would reflect the wide currency of the text at a period subsequent to the mid-first millennium BC.

It would be worth examining the way in which these four themes run parallel in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. This raises the problem of indicating at least some of the interpolations in

the text, as also of sorting out the fragments which went into its making. There are two easily recognizable foci to the story, the events which centre on the kingdom of Ayodhyā and those which concern the period of exile. Within each of these a number of sub-fragments can be detected. It is also generally agreed that apart from specific interpolations, which are many, there are two substantial additions, namely, the *Bāla-kāṇḍa* and the *Uttara-kāṇḍa*, the first and the seventh books. These additions are largely extraneous to the story and appear to have been added mainly for didactic purposes. Both books carry many of the stock-in-trade myths from the *vaṃśānucarita* sections of the *Purāṇas* and from the *Mahābhārata*. In the case of the *Rāmāyaṇa* these are primarily the myths connected with the Ikṣvāku lineage. The first and the last books are again the ones in which the role of Rāma as the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu is highlighted, suggesting that these sections may have been introduced to convert the epic into a part of the Bhāgavata literature. The justification for the killing of Rāvaṇa is sought in the appeal to Viṣṇu to incarnate himself and eliminate evil from the earth. Another aspect of the rise of Viṣṇu is the demoting of Indra, which is apparent in some sections of the seventh book in particular. Indra, who in the Vedic literature is said to have been the protector of the Bharatas and the Cedis and various other clans, was both a warrior-deity as well as a practitioner of magical power as conveyed through *yātu* and *māyā*. The use of his *vajra*, thunderbolt, is symbolic of this. The introduction of Sītā as a fertility goddess and the testing of her chastity and ultimate return to the earth are also included in these additions. It may be suggested that the conversion of Rāma from hero to deity has as its counterweight, the dethroning of Sītā as an independent goddess in her own right.

Apart from these obvious indications of later additions, there are other features which would further support this argument. The first and last books display a heightened consciousness regarding caste differences as compared to the earlier sections. This is particularly noticeable in the insistence on the elevated status of the *brāhmaṇa* in contrast to the śūdra and the prohibition on the mixing of castes. Although *kṛṣi, gorakṣā* and *vāṇijya* are mentioned as the three main occupations, it is clear that herding and agriculture continue to be important. The plough is referred to only in the later books and, curiously, throughout the period of exile no mention is made of anyone ploughing. Merchants adorning the city and the complexities of occupations required for trading societies in the context of developed urban cultures are again features restricted to the first and last books, although references to shops, markets, etc. are made in connection with commerce in other sections of the text. Similarly, in the process of gift-giving on various occasions, cattle, horses and gold take precedence over other forms of gifts. The gifting of villages, although known, is less frequent and is associated with Kosala. A reference to s*āmanta* in the *Bāla-kānda* could also indicate a late date for this section unless it was referring to neighbours.

One may therefore assume the validity of the theory that the original text consisted of what are now books two to six and that the first and seventh are later additions, quite apart from specific interpolations in the earlier texts as well. In the earlier sections the societies of both Kosala and the Rākṣasas are relatively less complex and the Rākṣasas approximate to human society to a far greater extent than in the later sections. The Rākṣasas are seen more as enemies than as demons; they perform ceremonies deriving from Vedic sanction and Rāvaṇa's wife refers to him as *ārya-putra*. The impression is one of fairly equally matched societies but with different ways of life.

Contributors

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12. **Shivaraju B.S.** whose artist-sobriquet is 'Cop Shiva' is a professional artist/photographer with ten years of experience as a coordinator of the art space and residency 1Shanthiroad in Bangalore, India. During these ten years, he has coordinated and managed more than hundred exhibitions and art events, and has assisted more than fifty international artists in residency. In his practice he documents the complexity of

rural and urban India, focusing on people and portraiture as a genre. He is fascinated with the idea of masquerade and the roles people play in public and private. His portfolio includes intimate portraits of urban migrants, people of alternative sexuality, street performers and others living in the hinterland of urban and rural conflict. He captures the diversity of humans who live on the edge and represent the spirit of our times. His works are presented in Gallery Sumukha in Bangalore and Art Heritage Gallery in New Delhi. He has had the opportunity to present his work in seven individual shows in well reputed galleries and museums. It has also been part of several group shows, nationally and internationally, including Chobi Mela in Bangladesh, India Art Fair and Kochi Biennale. He is the recipient of the 2017 grant Prohelvetia-Switzerland and Swedish Art Council and was the 2016 finalist of the most prestigious Harvard University Peabody Museum Robert Gardner Fellowship of Photography. In 2001, he joined the Karnataka Police Department.

13. Working across disciplines, **Shreyas Karle** uses formats such as illustration, collage, video, publications, sculptural forms and collaborative community projects to visually harness absurdity and social puns that shine light upon more serious psychological issues and situations. In his own words, Karle concerns himself with the grammar of art, and his process-based practice comes together in unique ways that is more concerned with the idea than the final form. Karle purposefully works against ideas of linear creative processes and celebrates the accidental findings of research that link his nomadic moments of inspiration. In addition to his work as a visual artist and directly linked to process of his practice, Karle is also the founder and co-director of CONA, an artist run space in Mumbai, and has also served as the Artistic Director of Sandarbh, another artist-run residency in a village in Rajasthan. Karle has participated in the *New Museum Triennial* (2015), *Kochi Biennale* (2012-13) and also exhibited at the ESSL Museum in Vienna. He has been awarded residencies at Gasworks, ProHelvetia, Montalvo Arts Center and various honors such as the FICA Emerging Artist Award, the Bodhi Award, and the Nasreen Mohamedi Scholarship from the Faculty of Fine Arts, MSU Baroda. He is in the collection of the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco and prominent private collections. His projects also include the Aichi Triennial, Japan in 2016. Karle returns to his role as a keen observer of mountainous entities with a new series of drawings. The triangular collaged piece defines and hides the shape of the mountain simultaneously. The vastness of the mountain often results into a single dimensional view of the mountain; the drawing allows the human metaphor to define the rear of the mountain. Riser and tread follow a fixed pattern until a shift in the perspective creates a periodical change in the role-play. The riser becomes the tread and vice versa.

14. **Wandana Sonalkar** has spent most of her life as a university professor of Economics and later, Women's Studies. From the mid 1980's, she has been interested in questions of gender and caste, and Marxist-feminist approaches to Economics; also in bringing different genres of writing in Marathi to a wider readership through translation. Her translation of Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon's history of women's participation in the Ambedkar movement was published by the feminist publication Zubaan in 2008 as *We Also Made History*. She has translated poetry by Tulsi Parab, V.V. Shirwadkar and others from Marathi to English, for the Sahitya Akademi journal Indian Literature. She has been associated with projects aiming to bring multilingual teaching to university classrooms, while teaching at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

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