Bumper Issue 20

Smruthi Gargi Eswar, From *The Logue, '*07', Acrylic, Photo Ink and K3 Pigment Print on Canvas, 25" x 30.5" Inches

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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.

Our Team

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Contributions: *Guftugu* welcomes contributions from writers, academics, artists, cartoonists, film makers, performing artists and scientists. Please email us at guftuguejournal@gmail.com or indianwritersforum@gmail.com with your ideas and/or work, and we will get back to you.

Contents:

From the Editors

Still singing about the dark times

Rollie Mukherjee, 'Shadows beyond the ghost town', watercolour on paper, 15 x 12", 2014

This is the 20th issue of Guftugu, a good time to look back.

In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing.
About the dark times.

In October 2015, we began the first issue of Guftugu with Brecht's help. Five years back, we said: Now, as then, Bertolt Brecht reminds us that we can sing in the bad times too; we can sing *about* the bad times…

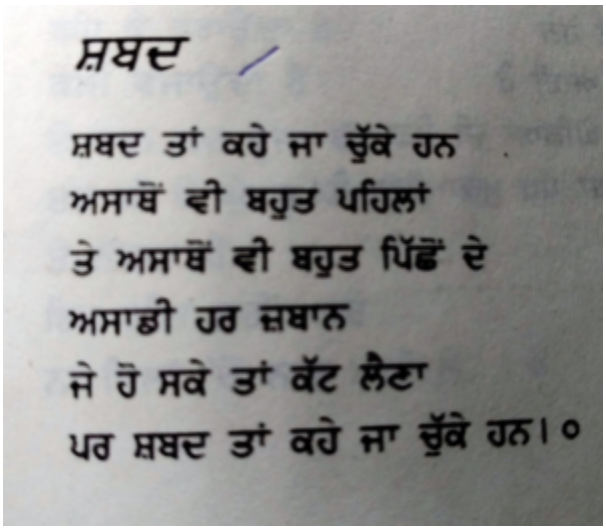
We said: Every day we see new evidence of authoritarianism in India — the sort of tyranny that impinges on our cultural work, and on those who wish to partake of what we imagine for them. Even the day-to-day cultural practices by the wide range of people who make up India are vulnerable to the aggression of the "cultural police" in different guises. These policemen want to tell us all what to eat, wear, read, speak, pray, think. They want to tell us *how to live*.

But we also insisted that: Writers, artists and educators may not be soldiers; but they too have weapons, weapons that are often more effective. We believe this. We believe in the transformative power of the word, the image and the classroom.

Words
Lal Singh Dil

Words have already been said
much before us and
much after us.
Cut off every tongue of ours
If you can,
But words have already been said.

Translated by Chaman Lal



This belief was confirmed in late 2015. In January 2016, we wrote: The spate of protests by Indian writers in 2015 — against the murder of dissenting writers and thinkers, and the suppression of freedom of expression… (has) once again proved that our land is not yet barren… The writers said many things as they began a chain of protest. This is a tiny sample:

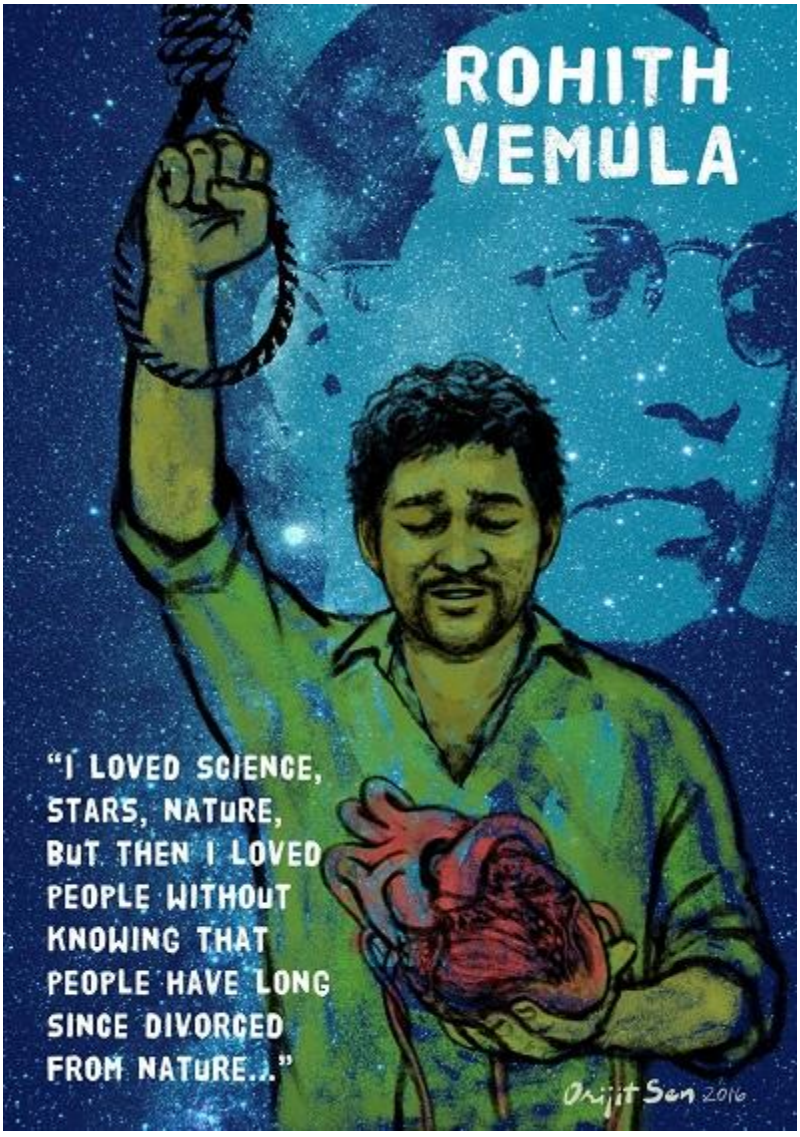
"We cannot remain voiceless."

"These incidents are an attempt to destroy the diversity of this country and it signals the entry of fascism into India."

"Silence is an abetment."

Writers, artists, filmmakers, scientists, scholars… told us about a variety of "official" and "unofficial" efforts to silence dissent and erode constitutional rights. But by speaking up they also told us that the core of our democracy is intact.

The resistance continued. Our youth took up the gauntlet, as they have before, and as they have again. In May 2016, we wrote of the churning in campuses. We wrote of the horrific tragedy of caste in educational institutions. Rohith Vemula, a research scholar in the University of Hyderabad, committed suicide. In a moving letter he left behind, Rohith said, "My birth is my fatal accident." It is hard to imagine a more searing indictment of our collective failure — to live up to a Constitution that promises all Indian citizens equal rights.



Orijit Sen

In July 2016 we wrote about how the voices of the opposition are met: not with arguments, but with threats, abuses, and enquiries based on false charges. We wrote about myth being turned into history and history into myth through senseless rhetoric; films and literature being censored for absurd reasons. We wrote: A new lexicon is underway in which the term "secular" is replaced by "pseudo-secular"; and anyone with a liberal-socialist political persuasion is called a "Nehruvian", considered an effective put-down. Gandhi can be replaced by Godse as a national icon. Discrimination against dalits is on the increase; farmers continue to be forced into suicide, and workers deprived of the freedom to fight for their rights. But despite this long sampling of an even longer list, the voices of resistance have become stronger. These voices are determined that attempts to drown the cries of the people will not succeed. There's dismay and courage on display; argument and debate. There's recognition that India is being unmade. And there is anger at this unmaking of India.

S Vijayaraghavan, 'Panic Field', oil on canvas, 7 feet x 3.5 feet, 2006 – 2007

In March 2017, in the midst of witnessing people's suffering caused by demonetisation, we wrote: … when language is used only to tell lies …that appear in the guise of news and policy and governance, we learn to save our words for the most brutal and shining truth…

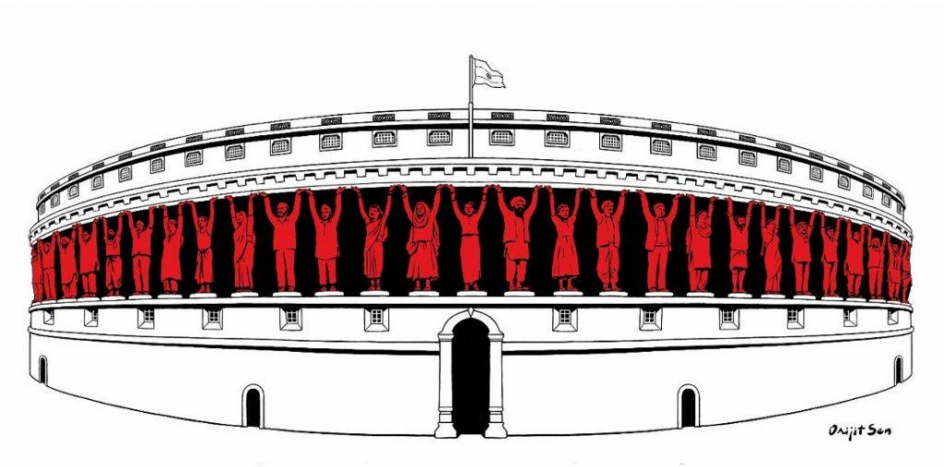
When the writer, the poet, the teacher, the lawyer, or the activist are scorned and hounded — or jailed — for their words and their fight for people's rights, that resolution speaks to us powerfully in 2020.

Then too, our resolution was strengthened when we recalled our legacy in October 2017. We took heart from what our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said in his Inaugural Address at the Fourth P.E.N. All India Writers' Conference in Baroda in 1957. He said that the writer performs a function that is essential to the country… writers and literary bodies have to be autonomous; the state has no business to interfere in these bodies. Nor, Nehru may have added, if he could have seen where these cultural institutions are today, should they toe the line of the prevailing ideology of the day.

These words apply to more Indians than writers. They apply to all citizens. Nehru's words from 1957 remind us of who we are, and where we come from.

In November 2018, we asked Is this the India we want? …A country in which citizens are murdered or attacked for being rational, for being critical, for raising voices of dissent, for just being themselves; for being Muslim or Dalit or women. Intimidation, threats. Hatred. Lynching. Sickening violence. Students and teachers compelled to choose between being leashed in thought and word and being hounded as seditious. Institutions built over the years weakened. Economy and development turned into exercises that mock the needs and aspirations of most people in this country. Secularism, scientific temper and rights promised in our Constitution subverted every day. Our democracy, our India, frayed.

We had resounding answers in the form of words and images. The India we want.



Orijit Sen, 'Farmers' Parliament'

In March 2019, we underlined the link between the India we want and reviving our democracy. It is time to restore an India that is infinitely creative in its cultural, linguistic, racial and religious diversity. Despite disappointment of the 2019 general elections, we continued battling for India. In June 2019, we wrote: There are those who battle the idea of India — an idea that insists that the country belongs to all its citizens. And there are those who battle *for* this inclusive idea of India.

The only constant is resistance, we wrote in September 2019. The insistence on the diversity of cultural practice in India has always been our fundamental premise. What holds the plurality of voices together, what emerges as the central note, is resistance.

From Kashmir, To Kashmir

'Blood in every season', says the poet writing of Kashmir. There's fire in the chinar tree. The poet can see it.

'But there's no sun here. There is no sun here.'

Even as it rains, the poet calls his heart, and our hearts, to be brave:

We will hear words even if the letters do not reach us, even if there is no post office.

We will stand with our sisters and brothers in Kashmir simply because we are human.

We will stand with them like the brave chinar tree, fiery in its suffering.

For years now, 71 years to be precise, the cultural community of India has spoken for equality among all citizens; has fought for freedom of speech; and practised, through language, poetry, song, novel, theatre and film, cultural diversity.

For the last few years, five years, since 2014 to be precise, our voices have had to work harder. We have had to be more insistent about our common legacy.

A gem from this common legacy: On 26 January, 1950, the Indian people — a diverse population that had fought for independence from colonial rule — decided what kind of Republic they wanted to build; what kind of national, collective life they wanted to live. They made promises to themselves through a constitution, and the most fundamental of these promises made up

the Preamble: that We the People of India would constitute a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic that would ensure, for *all* its citizens, JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all; and FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

The Preamble makes no compromises with the principles India lives by, and no Indian should. If there is a political party, or a government, or an ideology that makes a mockery of these principles, we have to resist. And this is what our brothers and sisters across the nation have done, every day. This is what they — we the people — continue to do.

Image courtesy Indian Cultural Forum

And close to the present time, earlier in 2020 with the first of the lockdowns, we declared: The voice is not locked down. We had not forgotten – we have still not forgotten – how 2020 began: the voices of resistance soaring, blending into one voice, a people's voice, saying No to CAA. No to NRC. No to NPR. No to inequality, injustice, to the brazen distortion of the Constitution. The betrayal of every person's rights. Women, children, men, old, young – everyone marched, occupied streets, spoke, wrote, sang. Then came a more literal virus that would show up more than one disease among us. Diseases that have been around for long, and that grow – every time a migrant worker dies walking home; every time a dissenting voice is hounded or arrested; or every time there's proof that hunger is the worst virus of all. In such times, can we fall silent? No. Guftugu presents, in collaboration with many friends, artists and poets, images and words through which our artists, our poets, tell us powerfully, beautifully: The voice is not locked down.

We began the Guftugu project with this conviction: The cultural fraternity speaks in two places and in two different ways: in public space, to and along with their fellow citizens; and through

their critique of our society, a critique embedded in the nuances, layers and texture of their work. Over 20 issues of *Guftugu*, we have presented ample evidence of this.

And here we are, faced with more than one virus. Here we are, our voices intact. This is the twentieth issue of Guftugu. It's a good time to look ahead. To raise our voices, to speak with full-throated strength.

Image courtesy Indian Cultural Forum

K Satchidanandan
Githa Hariharan
August 2020

The Logue

Smruthi Gargi Eswar

"I am looking at the body as a record of a life. In the way it documents the things we experience. As a constant evidence of our past. An internal history as a testimony to who we are, the choices we have made or what we hold secret. The Logue is a collage series that plays with this idea. It's an altered remembrance of an internalised history. And a homage to the natural world that will take us all in eventually."

'09', Acrylic, photo ink, K3 pigment print on canvas, 22 x 22.5 inches

‘08’, Acrylic, photo ink, K3 pigment print on canvas, 30 x 17 inches

‘05’, Acrylic, photo ink, K3 pigment print on canvas, 25 x 35.5 inches

‘06’, Acrylic, photo ink, K3 pigment print on canvas, 25 x 34 inches

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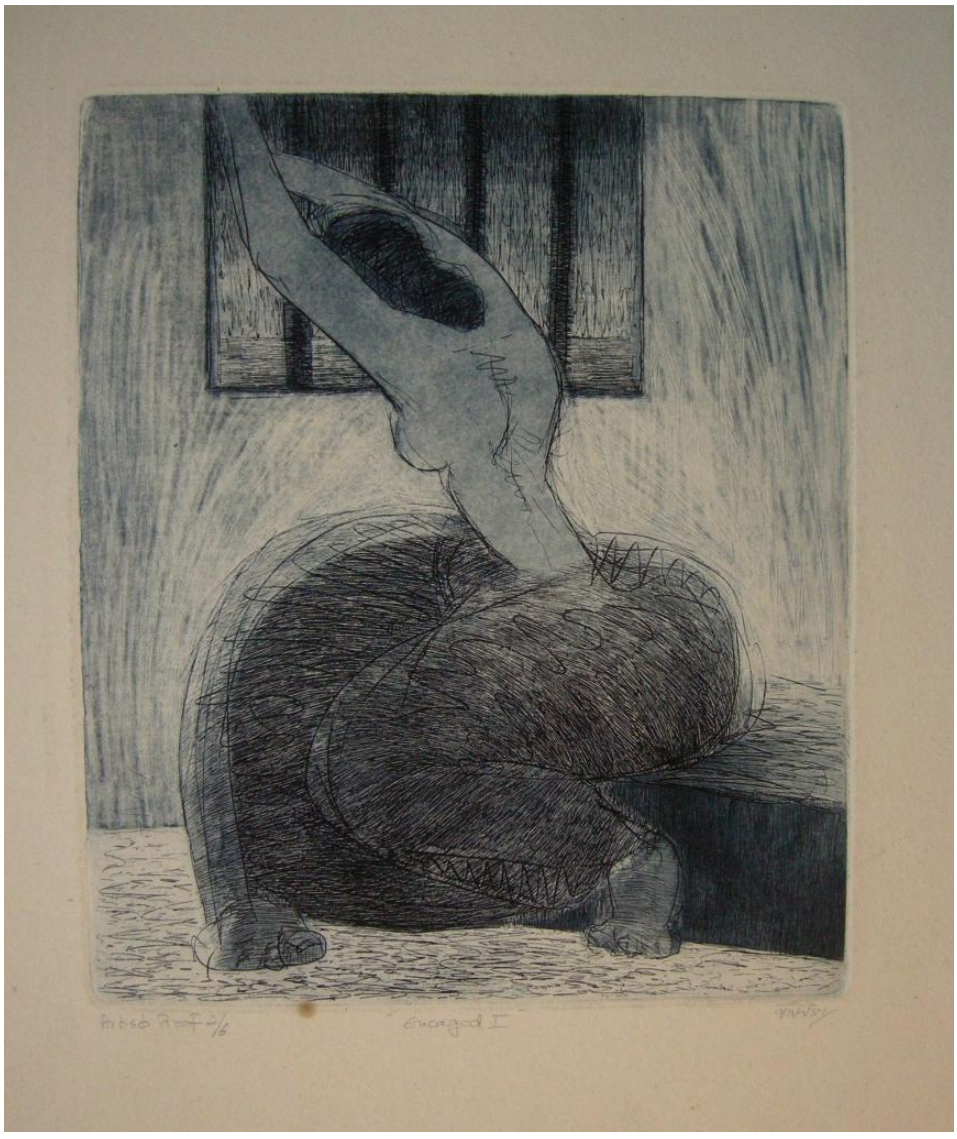
Women

Asghar Wajahat
Translated by Alok Bhalla



Kanchan Chander, 'Encaged', Etching/aquatint, 8 x 11 inches, 1980

1

Even before Shyama's charred body reached her father's house, a crowd had gathered outside. It was larger than when her wedding procession had left. Shyama's sisters, who were still unmarried, were in a state of shock. Her mother was weeping and her relatives could say nothing to console her. Shyama's father and her brother-in-law were standing near the body.

Shyama's husband said to her father, 'Papa, why do you weep? Remember what you said as her wedding procession was about to leave? You are leaving this house as a married woman; now you will leave your in-laws' house only as a corpse.'

Her husband's brother added, 'Chachaji, she was quick to grant you your wish.'

Shyama's father-in-law said, 'Don't waste time. Don't make a scene here. Let's complete the funeral rites as soon as possible.'

2

Even before Shyama's charred corpse reached the police station, the badly burnt bodies of two newly married women were already there. The police station was peaceful. The leaves of the peepal tree were gently stirring in the breeze and the engine of the police jeep was quietly throbbing. When the police superintendent was informed, he finished his prayers etc., looked at Shyama's burnt body and said, 'Yaar, this is unfair, they should burn only one woman a day to death. How can we conduct a proper inquiry if three corpses arrive at the same time?'

A policeman replied, 'Sir, people in my village are more considerate. They drown their daughters as soon as they are born.'

The superintendent softly whispered, 'God, if only everyone were as wise.'

3

Shyama's charred corpse was brought to the court. After all the witnesses had given their testimony, Shyama's corpse stood up and said, 'My Lord, please record my statement too.'

The lawyer representing Shyama's father said, 'Your honour, you can't allow that. How can a burnt corpse testify?'

The Prosecutor said, 'Your honour that would be illegal.'

The Clerk said, 'Your honour, if you allow it, what will happen to legal proceedings of the court?'

Shyama again said, 'Please record my testimony.'

The Judge declared, 'The court cannot accept your testimony because you have been burnt to death.'

Shyama said, 'But other young women are still alive.'

The Judge replied, ‘How does that concern you?’

4

When Shyama’s charred body reached the office of the newspaper, a sub-editor was sleeping with his head on the desk. When Shyama tapped his shoulder, he rubbed his eyes and woke up. He looked at her and recorded her story in a corner of the ‘Your Own City’ page.

Shyama said, ‘I was married only three years ago. My father gave them whatever they had asked for as dowry. But my in-laws were greedy and wanted their son to get married again for a second dowry, so they burnt me.’

The sub-editor said, ‘I know, I know…That’s what I’ve written…newspaper reporters know everything.’

Shyama asked, ‘Why am I not on the front page?’

The sub-editor replied, ‘I wish you could be, but there isn’t any space on the front page. Take a look. The first headline says: The Nation Has Bought Arms for One-Hundred Thousand Crores. The other headlines are: The Government Has Decided to Send a Rocket to the Moon. Eight Terrorists Have Been Killed. A Super-duper Star Has Got a Role in Hollywood. The rest of the page is occupied by an advertisement for perfectly fitting underwear.’

Shyama pleaded, ‘Find a corner for me too.’

The sub-editor said, ‘I…I’d lose my job if I did.’

5

When Shyama’s charred corpse reached the Prime Minister’s office, there was chaos. The officers ran away; the guards on duty began to tremble. Shyama’s face reminded them of the faces of their own daughters. Shyama was suddenly surrounded by armed soldiers of the special security forces.

An officer said, ‘We will shootyou if you take one more step.’

‘I want to meet the Prime Minster.’

‘What can the Prime Minister do…This is a police matter.’

‘What will the police do?’

‘Refer the matter to the courts.’

‘What will the courts do…have they ever punished the people who burnt all the young women before me?…I will not move unless I meet the Prime Minister.’

Shyama’s charred corpse took a step forward.

There was an uproar. At an emergency meeting of the senior officers, it was decided that, before Shyama sees the Prime Minister, there should be a meeting of the Home Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Finance Minister, and the Minister of Social Welfare. Otherwise, Shyama may ask the Prime Minster a question he can’t answer.

6

When Shyama’s charred corpse passed through the market, the people felt sorry for her.

‘Poor thing, yaar…she was burnt to death.’

‘What can one do, yaar…this is a daily affair.’

‘Poor thing…she has ninety percent burns.’

‘Yes, but her father should have bought her a Maruti car.’

‘How could he have…he didn’t even own a scooter.’

‘Then, he shouldn’t have had a daughter.’

‘Yes, it would’ve been wiser to give birth to a Maruti car.

7

When Shyama’s charred corpse reached the school, the girls there surrounded her in silence. Shyama didn’t say anything; the girls didn’t say anything. Shyama didn’t say anything; the girls didn’t say anything. Shyama didn’t say anything; the girls didn’t say anything. Their silence spoke louder than words.

After a while, a teacher said, ‘She had such good grades in the eighth standard.’

The second teacher said, ‘Even in the tenth, her grades were good.’

The third teacher said, ‘If she had continued to study, she would have had a successful career.’

Shyama’s corpse pressed a finger to her lips and said, ‘Shh…shh…the men are listening.’

8

When Shyama’s charred corpse reached the house of the priest who had conducted her marriage rites around the sacred fire, he recognised her.

Shyama said, ‘Punditji, I want to go round the sacred fire again.’

Punditji said, ‘Child, you have already been burnt. Who will marry you now?’

Shyama said, ‘I don’t want to get married. I want to annul my marriage.’

Punditji asked, ‘Child, what do you really want?’

Shyama replied, ‘Talak.’

Punditji said, ‘Arrey, you have already been burnt to death. What difference would talak make to you now?’

Shyama said, ‘Yes, you’re right. It wouldn’t make any difference to me…or to you…But it might make a difference to the ones about to get married.’

9

When Shyama’s charred corpse reached the house of god, he was conducting the affairs of the world as usual.

Shyama asked god, ‘Did you create the world?

God replied, ‘Yes, I did.’

Shyama asked, ‘Do you decide all that happens in the world?’

God replied, ‘Yes, I do.’

‘Did you decide that I should be burnt to death?’

‘Yes, I decided that you should be burnt to death.’

‘Why didn’t you decide to burn my husband to death?’

‘Husbands are gods. They only burn; they can’t be burnt.’

10

When Shyama’s charred corpse reached the office of the Human Rights Commission, all the members present stood up.

They said, ‘This is a crime. We have filed more than twenty thousand such cases in the courts. But, most culprits escape punishment. People have become more and more greedy. They are prepared to do anything for money. Everyone knows that.’

Shyama said, ‘That’s why I am silent.’

The members of the Commission said, ‘You must speak, Shyama… speak… If you don’t speak up, who will listen to us?’

Merit and Reservation

PN Gopikrishnan
Translated from Malayalam by Prasad Pannian

Image courtesy Riyas Komu

I ended up in that Colony.
Our sewage tank had filled up.
We wanted someone to scrape and scour.

Bangalore was a nice city.
Especially for food
A cosmopolitan city
with a cosmopolitan taste,
Sandeep used to comment
after his globetrotting.

"Dad, the pizza we get here
we won't get them even in Italy."
He was right.

Bangalore was *numero uno*
until its septic tanks brimmed over.

And once that happens
Thai Chicken makes you puke.
Adayar Ananda Bhavan stinks like
cow dung.
Café Coffee Day *Cappuccino*
tastes of the sewer.

This's why I've come to the colony.
We need Thimmappa
to clean up Bangalore.
He who sees no difference
between his own shit and others'

I didn't meet Thimmappa.
Instead I met you.
My waist-high.

I am not surprised.
In India the least lustrous statues are yours
We find them in every colony,
at least one…

I too am not an upper caste man
I too studied in a government school
I too believe in equality
I too celebrate science and reason

But
what I believe in most
is *merit*.
Aren't you going on like this
Because you believed in *reservation*?
A rugged statue
on the uneven cement floor
donning a blue coat and round glasses,
as the neighbour
of the shit-scooper Thimmappa?

I searched my way out.
Suddenly, I chanced upon Thimmppa
by the veranda of a hovel

There is a play there
on the 14th of April
The rehearsal is going on.
Thimmappa stands there wearing a blue coat
raising his right hand.
Behind his rounded glasses,
his eyes gagged like
two dragons.

That hand
rises higher and higher.
defying gravity,
One finger stretches ahead,
from those force-folded fingers
piercing through everything around.
It swirls round and stops, pointing to me.

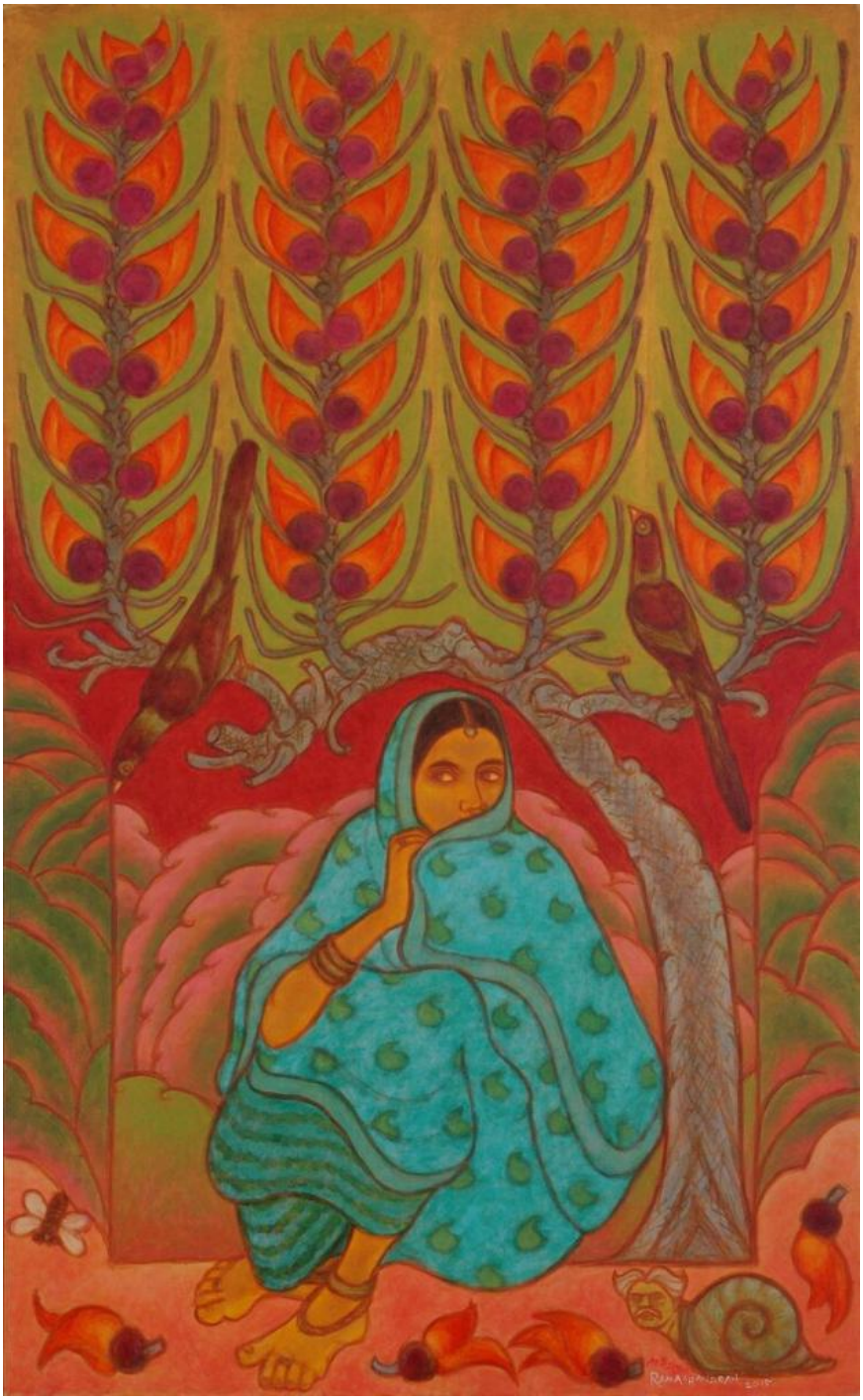
At once, it dawns upon me
Thimmappa's *merit*
and my *reservation*.

Lotus Pond in Decay

Three paintings by A Ramachandran

‘Lotus pond in decay’, oil on canvas, 78″ x 96″, 2017

‘Disturbed Tranquility’, oil on canvas, 78″ x 192″, 2019

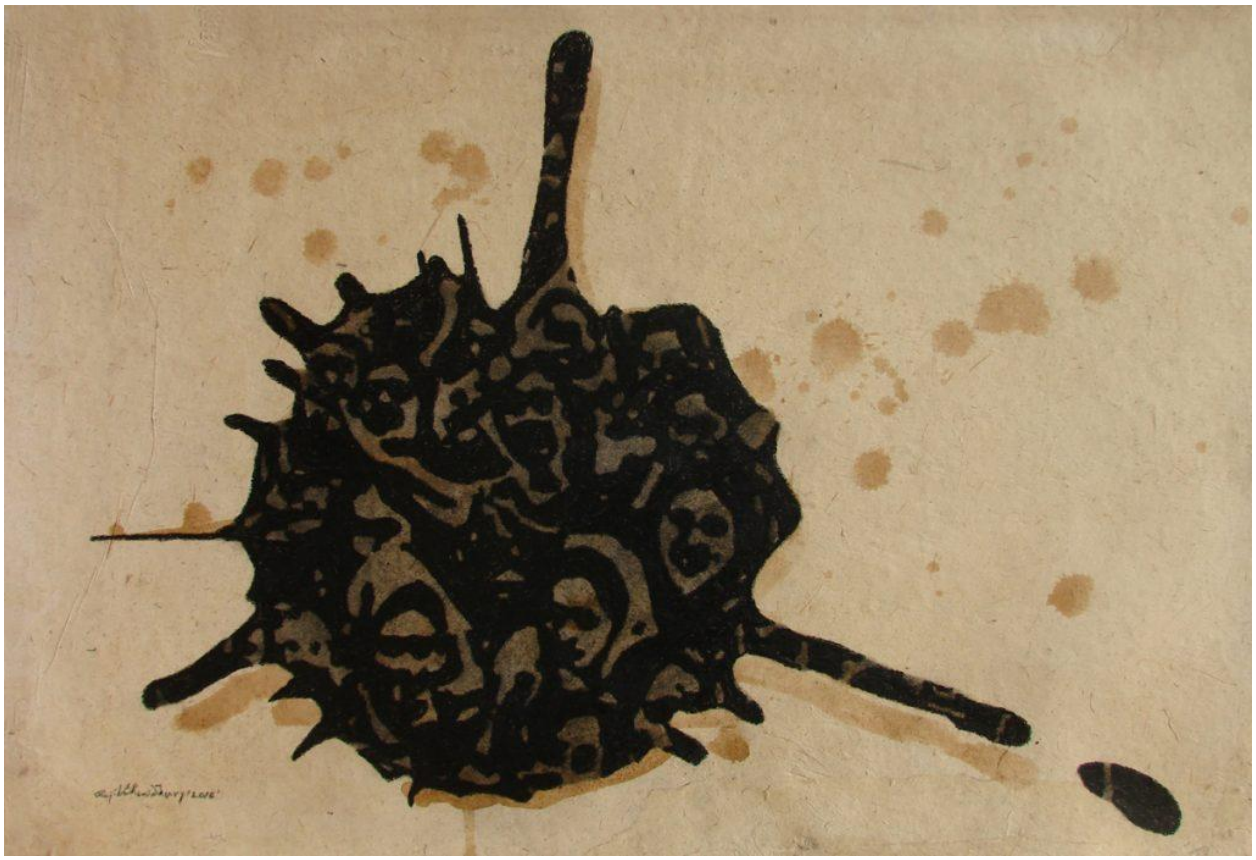


‘Fire Tree – Agni Vriksha’, oil on canvas, 78″ x 48″, 2015

The Testimony

Vaasanthi

Translated by Sukanya Venkataraman



Rajib Chowdhury, 'In the land of roses, apple trees and corpses', Dry pastel and tea stain on rice paper pasted on mount board, 19.5 in X 29.5 in, 2016

Mother was taking a long time to lock the door.

The girl stood mute and inert, trying not to ponder why this simple act would need so much time.

She opened her handbag to check its contents one more time. The brownish yellow paper was there. Someone pulled her dupatta1. Startled, she turned. Her little brother, Chinna Thambi, was looking at her with panicked eyes.

"I do not feel like accompanying you. Both of you can go."

“Why are you making such a fuss?” she asked slightly frustrated. “Behave responsibly. You are the only male in this house,” she said, patting his bony little shoulder.

“What is thambi saying?” asked mother.

She lost her cool.

“Nothing! It is getting late amma! Why on earth are you taking so long to lock the door?”

“I am not able to lock the door dear.”

Amma’s fingers quivered. She could not insert the key in the keyhole with her quaking hand.

“Give it to me. I will lock the door,” the girl said, taking the lock and key from her mother.

A few heads peeked out of the houses nearby. Some neighbours emerged. Amma covered her head with her sari2, almost hiding her face.

The girl held Chinna Thambi’s chilled hands and stepped out. An eerie silence seemed to smother the entire street. Stray dogs lifted their heads and gazed down again, without barking. Birds flew by noiselessly. Even the sound of vehicles seemed absent. The fixed stares increased her apprehension. Her legs seemed to buckle under her. She felt like touching her mother’s sari and muttering, “I do not feel like accompanying you. Both of you can go.” It seemed like the whole street, including the strays, were frozen as they moved forward on weak legs. She expected someone to come forward like in the movies and boost their morale by saying, “You need not go. We will take care of this.”

“So, you are off?” asked the lady next door, in much the same tone as one might ask, “Is the body ready for burial?”. Coming closer, she added, “They say you must speak cautiously”.

The girl turned and spied the lady’s husband at the window. She felt buried in his glare which conveyed a thousand cautions. He had repeated the same words when he happened to see her, without his wife’s urging.

“They say you must speak cautiously.”

She did not need to ask who “they” were who said this.

She was familiar with every frozen person’s voice in this street and the next. They were the ones who had hailed her as a loving mate, one of their own, endearingly. Today, they believed their fate rested on her testimony. She could barely breathe when she felt their collective voices and

fears crawl and climb rapidly onto her back. Even Amma and Chinna Thambi joined them, weighing her down. She felt weary, as if her back had broken.

For some reason, mother hesitated and stood still.

“Amma, get moving! Do not respond to anyone now!”

Amma followed her in silence. Chinna Thambi walked with her, gripping her hand tightly. They saw the old man who lived in the house at the farthest end of the street. He was sitting in front of the small corner shop and smoking a beedi3. It would be hard to avoid him, she thought. He had been visiting them every night for the past ten days to pontificate, including last night.

“Those who are gone, are gone forever. Can we bring them back? You should concern yourself with those who are alive,” he had said.

The girl wondered how he could talk to them that way, sitting inside the smoke-blackened walls. Amma sat in silence, staring at the wall. She then buried her head in her knees. Her back shook with her sobs.

“You will act with prudence if you consider the well-being of your neighbours, relatives and dear ones, of our community.” The girl controlled the waves of emotion rising inside her because there was no need to respond to this old man.

“What’s the point of my standing here and talking if you don’t respond?”

She erupted suddenly.

“Grandpa, what would you have done if you had experienced what we have gone through? What would be your thinking? Would you have let bygones be bygones?”

He was mildly shocked as he faced this question from a young girl, her eyes wide and chest heaving. He shook his head repeatedly as fear gripped the pit of his stomach. He trembled. He left the house in silence. He said something almost under his breath as he was leaving. She remembered the panic, helplessness and anger in his eyes.

“Your quest for justice might endanger all of us. It might endanger what’s left of your family.”

He took courage in her silence and continued.

“If you point out the ones who did it, will their hands be plucking flowers?”

“Grandpa, please leave.”

“Leave!” she shouted when the silly old man opened his mouth again.

She spat on the ground in disgust and cussed him for a long time after he left. She buried her head in Amma’s lap and cried hard when she remembered the helplessness and fear in his eyes. She could almost see the ash-white look of fear in Grandpa’s eyes. There was panic coupled with that fear.

She now walked with her head bowed. She was afraid that he would attempt to talk to her. It was easy to be unyielding within four walls. Weakness engulfed her as she walked along the street. She felt she could trip on a blade of grass. Sighting any police person brought on panic attacks. Her tongue had refused to cooperate when they had questioned her. She had no idea what going to the court entailed. She had never stepped into one before. She had no clue about who would defend her.

She could not understand when the lady next door asked, “Won’t you have a government lawyer to defend you?”

She was not aware of it.

“I guess I will have to talk for myself,” she had responded. She had received an inscrutable and strange glance in response.

“You are a young girl. What can you do alone?”

She had felt angry.

“Ask your husband to accompany me!”

Her neighbour stopped talking after that. However, the news that the girl had received a summon from the court spread like wildfire and impelled everyone to come to her house. She had already been disconcerted after receiving that brownish yellow paper summoning her to court. Now, everyone held forth. They preached. They warned. They blamed her for speaking to the police. They declared that there was no justice for those who were wronged. Their speeches had frightened her more than that piece of paper.

She sensed someone walking with her and turned. The old man spoke quickly, as if afraid she would escape him. “It seems that rascal has some big plan. He has sworn to finish us all off if you speak against him. The police and government are on his side. Think well and make a decision!”

He went back and sat on the bench without waiting for her response. She could have given a whiplash had he stood a minute longer, she thought.

“All of you can go to hell. You have not understood my grief. Who cares if you are alive or dead? I need justice. I am not a thinking human if I do not accuse the guilty person. Why else do we have courts and testimonies?”

She was unable to contain the waves of resentment rising within her. She walked on, breathing heavily. Her eyes misted and her face reddened. She realised that Amma and Chinna Thambi had become deeply discouraged after Grandpa’s speech.

“Amma, come on! That oldie can only talk like that – impotent bastards! Have you also forgotten what you witnessed? Has your anger dissipated?” Amma walked on, afraid to even respond. There was no bus or auto4 because of the curfew. They had to walk four kilometres to reach the court. They were all tired and sweating hard half-way through. They had been unable to eat breakfast that morning. Even Chinna Thambi had been unable to eat. They had each drunk a cup of tea and that was all. She became alert when Chinna Thambi tightened his grip on her hand and slowly turned. Ten or fifteen middle-aged men were following them. They had pulled their veshtis5 tight between their legs, as if readying for a serious fight. They might have been part of the mob the other day, she thought. “Why are you following us?” she wanted to ask but decided against it. Instead, she turned away and walked on in silence. Her tongue had curled into itself. “Why am I afraid when I should be angry?” she questioned herself.

“Hey little boy!” a man hailed, as if talking to Chinna Thambi. “Tell this to your sister: she should not increase her enemies if she wants to live in peace.”

Chinna Thambi looked at her. Her face reddened and she walked swiftly.

“Tell her to think well and speak,” said another man. “Otherwise, things might take a turn for the worse”. She felt like strangling all of them. Chinna Thambi started crying quietly.

“No, no! Stop crying and wipe your eyes,” she scolded him under her breath.

The crowd followed, heckling them. Her legs felt like rubber even before they reached the court. Her heart felt heavy with the sound of an axe resonating within. Her throat felt dry. She realised that Amma and Chinna Thambi had frozen for an entirely different reason. Kishorilal stood before her. He seemed to tower over her, covering heaven and earth, making it impossible for her to move forward.

“You have thought about what you want to say, haven’t you?” he asked in a low voice. “Do you know what will happen if you speak against us? You will cease to exist. The police have been

bought. All witnesses are on our side now. Even your government lawyer has come over to our side."

She felt hatred well within her and searched for the appropriate words to abuse him with.

Kishorilal looked at Amma and Chinna Thambi with narrowed eyes. "Pray that at least these two will live," he told her.

*

There were numerous black coats hovering in front of the court. The summons said she had to present herself in the court at 11 a.m.

"Time to go to court. Leave my way," she said.

Kishorilal moved aside. "Remember," he said.

A black coat approached her and said, "Come on, come on. They are waiting for you."

Amma and Chinna Thambi were asked to stand aside. The court was overflowing. She searched for relatives or acquaintances among the crowd. There were none.

"Who is the government lawyer?", she asked hesitantly.

"That's me," said the black coat standing beside her.

She wondered how this lawyer, who had not even spoken to her until then, could possibly defend her. She remembered Kishorilal saying that this lawyer was on his side.

"Will our case win?", she asked.

The lawyer stared at something distant. "Very hard," he replied, shaking his head and pressing his lips together.

She felt angry.

"Why? Why will we not get justice? Will these heinous criminals not get punished? Isn't there something called the law?"

The lawyer came close and spoke in her ear, “What can we do? The police and establishment are on their side.”

“Aren’t you too on their side?”, she wanted to ask but controlled herself.

“What will the poor judge do?”, the lawyer lamented. It seemed like he was sorrier for the judge than for her.

The court was packed. It seemed to cast a hostile glance at her and say, “This woman is the one who should go to prison.” Gandhi smiled a toothless smile framed on the wall behind the judge’s chair6.

*

The trial commenced. Witnesses testified one after the other. Some lived in her street and had witnessed the incident. They came and stood in the witness stand. The lawyer mentioned that only forty four out of the seventy-three witnesses had come in.

Many insisted that they had been out of town on the day of the incident. Others said that they had only heard about it and had not witnessed it. She looked around, confused. Kishorilal, the accused, stood with his gang and thousands of other Kishorilals. The judge and Gandhi behind him had all turned into Kishorilals. Someone called her to the witness stand.

Her body moved but her soul was afloat somewhere in space.

They asked for her name, where she lived, her father’s name, her mother’s name, the names of the living, and the list of the dead. Total number dead: 14. Her tongue twisted when she uttered their names. She felt sick and faltered remembering their names. The court laughed. So many? In the same house? Yes. They were a large joint family, all living together. Husband, wife, and kids. Was 14 improbable? A man in the crowd uttered something lewd. The crowd jeered. She looked at the judge in confusion. Kishorilal was sitting in the judge’s chair.

“Did you witness the incident?”

The incident. She felt dizzy just thinking about it. She had to remember and string words together to describe the incident… the murderous gang entering the house at night… how they smashed everything inside … how they set fire to the house… how they dragged her father and elder brother into the street and set fire to them… How she, Amma and Chinna Thambi escaped to the terrace in terror… what she witnessed from the terrace, weeping and devastated… how everyone in the street looked on in silence… how the three of them hid on

the terrace until dawn. And how they came down and screamed in agony when they saw the fourteen blackened corpses…

The judge spoke.

“Why are you not answering? At least answer this question. Are your mother and younger brother the only remaining ones in your family?”

She looked up with a start. She wondered if she would be able to provide the right answer.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Where were you when the violent incident happened?”

“On the terrace…”

“Did you witness the incident from there?”

Her stomach lurched in the dead silence of the court. Something powerful rose inside her and strangled her throat. A mix of fury, sorrow, and helplessness hit her like a raging hurricane, suppressing her nerves, her very being. She could only feel air when she tried to open her mouth.

“Speak up! Did you see what happened downstairs?”

The girl bowed her head and was worried what words she would frame. They seemed to slip from her memory. “Are your mother and young brother the only remaining ones in your family?” Who asked this and why? She felt dizzy. She opened her mouth. It seemed to speak of its own volition. Separated from her body.

“No, I did not.”

She was astonished by the stunned silence around her. She felt surprised, as if she too were an observer among the crowd watching her.

“You have informed the police that you witnessed the incident. You have also informed them that these are the accused.”

The mouth spoke, “I lied. Please forgive me. Forgive me.”

The court erupted, making her feel breathless and almost knocking her down. She freed herself from the din and came out of the court. The government lawyer had disappeared somewhere among the crowd.

Amma and Chinna Thambi were waiting for her. She wondered what to tell them. Grief overwhelmed her. She stood, her head bent, totally defeated.

“Let’s go home,” Amma said. Chinna Thambi grasped her hand.

She could feel the sense of relief in Amma’s voice and her brother’s touch.

She wanted to beat her breasts and wail, ignoring the fact that she was in a public street.

Read the Tamil original here.

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[1] A length of material worn as a scarf or head covering, typically with a salwar, by women from South Asia.

[2] A garment consisting of a length of cotton, silk or other material elaborately draped around the body, traditionally worn by women from South Asia.

[3] A type of cheap cigarette made of unprocessed tobacco wrapped in leaves (In South Asia).

[4] A motorised version of the pulled rickshaw or cycle rickshaw. They are known by various terms in different countries including auto, baby taxi, pigeon, tuk-tuk and so on.

[5]A length of cloth that is wrapped around the waist or passed between the legs and tucked in at the waistline. This garment is chiefly worn by men in India.

[6] In India, the photo of Gandhi, who spearheaded India’s independence from the British, can be seen behind the judge’s chair in all courts of law.

एक थी पदमा नदी

मृदुला गर्ग

Boats on the river Padma (1860) | Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons

एक थी पदमा नदी
अल्हड़, आवारा या बदचलन?
अनगिन महबूब नहीं थे उसके
बस दो आशिक़ों की माशूका थी
एक का नाम हिन्द,दूसरा बंग था
उनके बीच इतनी बार डोलती
कभी इसके आग़ोश में कभी उसके
लगता सौ पचास के साथ सो ली
जब जब वह आशिक़ बदलती
आफ़त आ जाती
कगार टूट टूट कर गिरते
झोंपड़े तिनकों से उड़ जाते
मछलियाँ रेत पर तड़पतीं
पदमा इतराती अठखेलियाँ करती

उत्ताल लहरों के आलिंगन से
मछुआरे बमुश्किल जान बचाते
कुदरत कहती अल्हड़ है
सम्भल जाएगी भटकना छोड़
एक की बाँहों में सिमट जाएगी
पदमा न बदली,न सम्भली

कुदरत का सब्र चुक गया
वायु से कहा उठा चक्रवात
पदमा समझ जाए,बंदिश
लगाने को कोई है
वायु ने चक्राकार उछाला
समन्दर की हिलकोरा खाती तरंगों को
पदमा खिलखिलाई चलूँ उस ओर
इधर समन्दरी झंझावात उठ आया
जैसे ही पलटी पीछे से किसी ने
जिस्म उसका दबोच लिया
वह गुस्से से फनफनाई छोड़ो बंग

वह साँस घोटती दानवी जकड़
उस नफ़ीस महबूब की नहीं थी
विकराल अम्फन घात लगाये बैठा था
जैसे ही हवा ने चक्रवात उठाया
जबड़े खोल उसे निगल लिया
विकट राक्षसी ताक़त से लैस बाहर
उगला, कि क़यामत आ गई
समुद्री बेला की ऊँचाई पहाड़ों से
होड़ लेने लगी तूफ़ान का वेग ऐसा
पहाड़ों को चक्राकार घुमा दे
एक बाँह की जिन्नाती गिरफ़्त में
सिर धुनती पदमा को जकड़े
समन्दरी तरंगे उछाल

धरती धराशायी कर
ऐसा ताण्डव किया अम्फन ने
कि शिवशंकर त्राही त्राही कर उठे

दोनों आशिक़ों के पाँव तले कगार धसके
कि समन्दर सदाबहार पर काबिज़ हुआ
वे तटीय हिन्द-बंग के जादुई सुन्दरबन
वे नायाब जड़ी-बूटियाँ, पेड़-पौधे
वे जीव जन्तु, परिन्दे, सरीसर्प
वे सुन्दरी,गगंवा,निपा के पेड़
वे शेर,जंगली बिल्ली,चीतल,ऊद
जल किरात, अजगर,कोबरा, कच्छप
वे सफ़ेद सारस,बाज़,हार्नबिल,सुर्खाब
वे रंग बिरंगे दमकते कौड़िल्ला
वह पदमा की मदमाती चाल
वह ज़िन्दगी की थिरकन
आह, नेस्तनाबूद हो गये
और इंसान...कहाँ गये इंसान...
वह कबीलों से विलगे आदीवासी
वह जंगल में कच्चे घरों के निवासी
वह समन्दर में बेख़ौफ़ उतरे मछुआरे
वह सांवले सलोने ज़मीनी इंसान...

तबाह कर सुन्दरबन
वायु का वेग धीमा पड़ा
तरंगों का उठान कम हुआ
पेट भरे अजगर सा अम्फन
जिस्म ढ़ीला छोड़ सो रहा
कब तलक...पर ...कब तलक ...

At the Edge of Today's Politics

Salim Yusufji in conversation with Chandan Gowda

Chandan Gowda is professor of sociology at the Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, and writes a regular column for Deccan Herald*. He is also a literary translator, and has translated Kannada fiction and non-fiction into English, including* Bara*, a novella by U R Ananthamurthy. He is presently editing and co-translating* Daredevil Mustafa*, a book of short fiction by Purnachandra Tejasvi, and completing a book on the cultural history of development in old Mysore. His most recent book,* A Life in the World *(Harper India, 2019), is a collection of interviews with U R Ananthamurthy and forms the subject of this conversation with Salim Yusufji.*

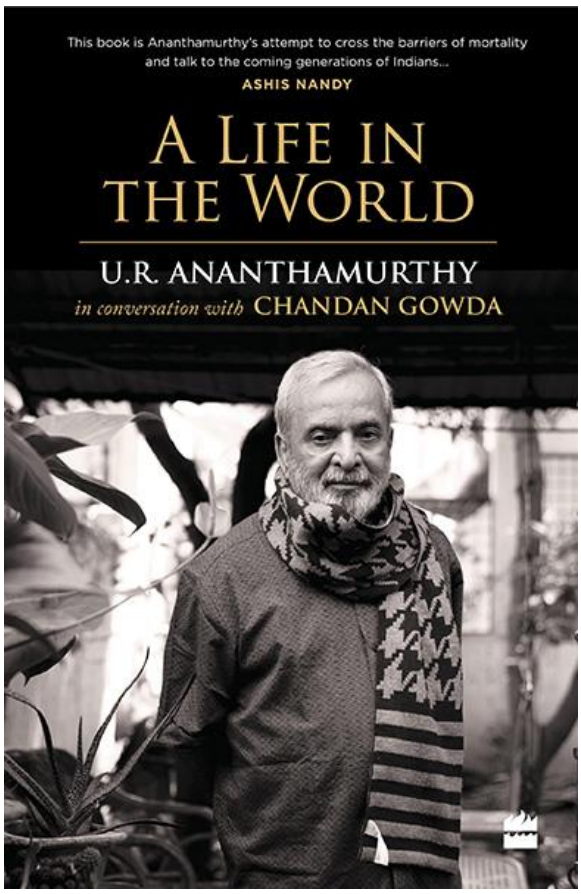

Image courtesy Harper Collins

Salim Yusufji (SY): Let us begin with your many-sided acquaintance with U R Ananthamurthy and his work. Apart from knowing him personally, you've played the lead in the TV adaptation of *Bharathipura*, translated from his work, done these extended interviews with him. Tell us about

what Ananthamurthy has meant in your life as a reader, columnist and teacher, especially how you relate to his imperative that writers localise themselves, be rooted in a regional tradition.

Chandan Gowda (CG): URA was a deep influence. I was drawn to how he had sought to work out the very difficult relationship between the traditional and the modern worlds in his writings and activism. I came to know him well after my college years due to my friendship with his son, Sharath. He was very affectionate towards me. My father and he knew each other well. He had been URA's student in Mysore. There was this old association too.

URA loved conversations. He could talk for hours without letting the intensity diminish. I cherish the time I spent in his scintillating company. His literary seriousness, his ever-wakeful political instincts, his joy in ideas, his interventionist attitude which was rooted in a quiet courage and abjured cynicism or despair, his ceaseless curiosity about everything, his warmth, among other striking qualities, made him unlike anyone else I knew.

The imperative that writers localise themselves, stay rooted in regional tradition is a complex one. Clearly, there is not one local position: the local for instance harboured within it the mainstream and the marginal, the classical (marga) and the folk (desi), both of which contained valuable ways of being and doing, and which wouldn't have been insular spheres and are likely have related to each other on some plane, even if the history of that relation might have been forgotten. The poles within the local will be in a different relationship with the non-local, be it a dominant one or a non-dominant one. For instance, classical Kannada could be in a relation of subordination to classical Sanskrit and free from that kind of relationship with classical Tamil. Similarly, in the modern world Kannada is in a subordinate relation with English. In other words, the marga and desi are shifting categories and reveal mutual interplay, inter-tensions, through time. So being a locally-grounded writer is also to evolve a writerly self within this complex field of literary aesthetics. It didn't imply a closing in on oneself. It was a vantage point for keeping oneself open to outside influence. It even lets writers and artists smuggle in newness inside a culture without it taking the form of an alien imposition or an iconoclastic gesture. Being grounded in local tradition/s allowed one to be what URA was fond of characterising as 'a critical insider'. One wrote as a member of a community. Being an insider required one to be rooted in that community's literary, political, cultural conversations, its metaphoric imagination. URA though was not absolutist about this view. 'If you feel like writing in English,' he said to me once, 'you must write in it.' He was also not relativist about literary value. Whatever the

variations in historical and literary experiences, there was for him such a thing as great literature1. You won't find him making concessions on grounds of political correctness.

SY: He speaks of coming round to accepting the literary value of work done by Indians in English, particularly R K Narayan and Raja Rao. Otherwise, in the ten interviews of this volume, URA presents a highly resolved view of the arc of his work. An occasional note of ambivalence does come through — he both prizes and criticises family life in India — but we don't get a strong sense of shifts and turnarounds in his position, beyond stray regrets about the socialist movement and its lack of sympathy with landowning farmers. Was continuity indeed the dominant note of his thinking and writing life, or was it more of a construction from hindsight?

CG: There were significant shifts on several matters. In an early interview, you might remember, he says he was schooled in Dvaita philosophy as a young boy, but now identified himself as an Advaitin. In the 1970s, Gandhi's philosophy comes to assume a great importance for him. During the 1990s, his friendship with DR Nagaraj, the literary critic, made him more keenly aware of the extraordinary literary achievements seen in Kannada folk epics. He also came to have renewed regard in his later years for his literary predecessors like Kuvempu, whom he and his fellow-writers of the Navya (modernist) phase had taken to be romantics who were naïve about modernity.

Critics have often commented on the shifts in intellectual concern in his fictional works. The ruthless focus on the life-denying aspects of attachment to community and tradition seen in his first novel, *Samskara*, made way for a closer examination of the difficulties of initiating social reform in local society from a placeless liberal point of view in his next novel, *Bharathipura*, and then to the disclosing of the dominance of modern knowledge and its threat to non-modern cosmologies in the short story, 'Stallion of the Sun'.

SY: My impression is that his test of Kannada was its ability to enable diverse voices.

CG: You are right. Enabling diverse voices was important for him, not because that was good to do for reasons of social inclusion or egalitarian ideology, but because of the belief that they exhibited a capacity for high literary accomplishments. And, making space for dissent didn't mean an approval of any kind of dissent. He remained unequivocally critical of violence as a means of achieving political ends, whether it was of the right or of the left-wing variety.

SY: Inclusion demands more than tolerance, accommodation or literary approval. They are inadequate in response to radical cultural criticism, can even seem a brush-off. When URA says that the dalit politician, B Basavalingappa, is justified in his dismissal of Kannada literature, his position is reminiscent of the way Gandhi had once said Ambedkar would be justified in hitting 'us' (caste Hindus) with shoes2. This kind of remark leaves the critic looking intemperate, while robing the speaker in patience and tolerance. The critic's charge, a serious one, of inhumanity at the core of tradition, does not impel a rethink on the value of these traditions. Would you agree with this analogy?

CG: URA's response has to be viewed differently. When B Basavalingappa, the dalit leader and minister for municipal administration in Karnataka, dismissed all of Kannada literature as 'boosa (cow fodder)' in 1973, there were loud protests across the state and even violent attacks on dalit students. URA stood by him at that time. Recalling that episode in our conversations, he said: 'Everyone attacked him. I said, 'I don't think that Kannada is cow-fodder, but if I were born a dalit, and if I had to read only sectarian literature in Kannada3, I would have said what Basavalingappa said. So he has every right to say that. It is not against Kannada as such, it is against what it teaches them.'

This response insists that Basavalingappa had a legitimate view and that view needed to be given a hearing, and not summarily dismissed. Basavalingappa's experience had allowed him an insight that had evaded the upper castes. By saying that he himself didn't think all of Kannada literature was worthless, URA was keeping himself open to a dialogue with Basavalingappa, a stance that does not take away the dignity or the weight of the latter's response.

An excerpt from URA's response to 'the Boosa Movement' that appeared in *Praja Vani*, the leading Kannada daily, in 1974, might be good to revisit here: 'Is it any surprise if the panchamas view Kannada literature, which is filled with the literature of the very sects and religions that has kept them out from the start, as meaningless? Also, when the panchamas give up the sectarian heritage of Kannada literature, might it not be possible for them to bring in a genuine newness into Kannada, as it happened in the case of Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra?' (translation mine)4.

SY: There's an anecdote in the book about the Udupi Pejawar swami, who is accused of purifying himself with cow urine after visiting the homes of dalits. He later reveals — to URA, in

confidence — that he had not in fact undergone a ritual cleansing, merely allowed the report to go uncontested. That rather defeats the point of challenging caste, don't you think?

CG: While recalling that episode from the early 1970s, URA explains that such a gesture from a religious head could 'convince my mother that untouchability is wrong.' He adds: 'She can never be convinced with any of your rational arguments. But when the Swamiji, whom the older people worship everyday at home, does something like that, there is a change of feelings among them.' He is really pointing to the challenge that lies for modern activists in engaging the socially orthodox minds. I see at least two concerns here. One, the socially orthodox people are attached to a model of social order which is at variance with the one driving the vision of secular egalitarianism. A proper understanding of these attachments becomes necessary for engaging them. Well intentioned secular exhortations in favour of caste equality in themselves might not then be adequate to bring about, to use URA's phrase, 'a change of feelings,' a genuine change of heart. Besides, custodians of religious morality like Pejawar Swami, who are authority figures for the believers, need to be understood and even made room for in the scheme of activist struggle.

Clearly, Pejawar Swami's visit to dalit homes disturbed his followers who then felt impelled to deny it ever happened. The Swami's silence in response though shows that he didn't want to upset the wishes of his followers any more than he already had. He feared that they would reject him. URA also recalls him admitting that he lacked the strength to take them on. The work of 'challenging caste,' URA seems to suggest, happens in several ways. Some individuals are more heroic than others, some are more creative than others. And, the radical activist option is unlikely to be available to all. I see URA asking for patience and understanding in how the efforts to challenge caste can only be multiple and incremental. Abjuring external activist standards of what counts as caste reform and what doesn't, the reform of caste is better viewed as emerging out of a variety of well-intentioned acts, both large and small.

SY: A couple of years before *A Life in the World*, you published a selection of Gauri Lankesh's writings — including several pieces that appeared in English for the first time[5]. She, like Ananthamurthy, was a cosmopolitan figure committed to writing in Kannada — which she had to learn as an adult. There have been several instances in Karnataka's cultural life of writers choosing Kannada over English; Girish Karnad is another figure who comes to mind. Each of them had an independent voice and broad sympathies, but do you think their choice bolstered

the political hegemony of Kannada? It is the language of an overwhelming majority in the state, but not of every native community. Do you think the role URA played in the renaming of places confined cultural horizons, by strengthening one set of claims to belonging over many others?

CG: All of them were bilingual personalities. They participated in discussions in Kannada as well as in English, were featured in newspapers in both languages. Gauri Lankesh wrote a weekly column for *Bangalore Mirror* for a couple of years. Their activist interventions, even when expressed in Kannada, therefore cannot be seen as exclusionary affairs. If your work is directed towards Karnataka, Kannada becomes a necessary medium of engagement. Most speakers who see themselves as belonging to other language communities of the state, especially those outside Bengaluru, understand and speak Kannada since they would have learnt it in school. Writers and journalists from Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and the 'smaller' languages lacking a script of their own, like Tulu, Beary, Konkani and Kodava, have registered a distinct presence for their language worlds in the Kannada public all through. I'm yet to hear an accusation that democratic activism in Kannada has posed a linguistic threat to non-Kannada speakers. Besides, thinking and writing in Kannada offer a bulwark of resistance to the hegemony of global activist paradigms that travel so smoothly in English.

In his view, since Bangalore was the capital city of the state, it ought not to alienate the people in the rest of the state. The British had anglicised the local name, Bengaluru, and the new imperatives of state building in independent India behoved the retention of the local name. Other Kannada writers like P Lankesh and Purnachandra Tejasvi also subscribed to this rationale. In *A Life in the World*, URA clarifies that such a move would help Karnataka evolve in a democratic manner and that he felt confident the renaming wouldn't imply altered cultural realities on the street in the anglicised cantonment areas. Since the official renaming of the city as Bengaluru wasn't happening at the instance of a chauvinist political party or activist group, it didn't portend violence or aggression towards the non-Kannada speakers. He had also told me once that renaming the city as Bengaluru disallowed the corporate imagination of the city as 'Brand Bangalore,' from succeeding.

SY: I was thinking of the larger trend of renaming cities in India. Many of them weren't cities at all in pre-colonial times, becoming urban with a new character, demography, institutions, a transplanted energy, as a national melting pot of sorts. Their deracinated or corrupted names flagged them as neutral ground, with no single founding community. The local names had

co-existed with the colonial ones, but with the official renaming these cities sank back into the soil. We have seen a fair bit of bullying of 'outsiders': flare-ups between Kannadigas and Tamil speakers, the rough treatment of students from the North-East and from Africa. This was in Bengaluru, but similar altercations have occurred in Mumbai and elsewhere. There's an electoral calculus that promotes nativist assertion. Do you think URA factored that in adequately?

CG: The activism aimed at securing a symbolic centrality for Kannada in Bengaluru, a phenomenon seen after the city became the capital of Mysore state following India's independence, has not gained electoral significance. So an electoral calculus cannot have informed URA's suggestion for renaming the city. He probably saw the renaming of Bangalore in the same spirit as the one that animated the renaming of Trivandrum, Madras and Calcutta as Thiruvanathapuram, Chennai and Kolkata, and not the one behind the renaming of Bombay as Mumbai. At the same time, the anxiety among Kannada speakers about the city being engulfed by 'North Indians' — a term that refers to everyone from outside South India and the North-East — has been building up in recent decades, an anxiety that has displaced the older one pertaining to Tamil speakers. These tensions would have evolved even if the city had continued to be called Bangalore in English language media (it has always been Bengaluru in Kannada language media and official correspondence).

It is possible to view the renaming act less as an abridgement of the freedom of non-Kannada speakers and more as a nudge to the latter to engage the local Kannada world in some way, which is a gesture in conformity with the ethics of reciprocity in India's linguistically organised federal polity. You are right that the cities had a happy bilingual nomenclature in colonial times. But in a federal union, where the three language policy has brought in a model of linguistic fairness and parity which asks people moving from one state to another to learn the language of the host state, the common remark of Kannada activists will seem morally legible and reasonable: 'We learn Hindi when we go to Delhi, why don't they learn Kannada when they come here?'

The cultural prejudice against migrants from the North-East and African students, which is not specific to Bengaluru, is indeed worrisome. The overcoming of prejudicial relations with these communities though will need to unfold against local cultural memories and will perforce take locally specific activist routes. In its over five hundred-year-old existence, Bengaluru has held

out traditions of civility which allowed for extraordinary linguistic, religious and regional diversity to co-exist. The romantic hero of several commercial blockbusters in Kannada cinema for instance is the son of Nepali parents. Marriages between local men and women with people from the North-East are also taking place. Except in a couple of instances of engineered riots, the tensions between communities have not broken out in violence.

Vested interests have played the Kannada card for extortion and gain in Bengaluru. In a crowded democracy where the paths for the legitimate pursuit of power and resources are restricted to a few, the vested interests would have played another card if the Kannada one wasn't around. In any case, to the extent the vested invocations of the Kannada card attract tacit popular support, it should be clear that there is a problem. And, this problem cannot be dealt with appeals to generic models of cosmopolitanism, but will have to be worked out through a creative moral engagement with local cultural realities.

SY: Would you say the tide ran out very suddenly on progressive writers in Karnataka, that Ananthamurthy and Karnad's were lonely voices at the time of their passing? Was Karnataka's literary culture shoved to a side, in the same project of erasure followed through violently with M M Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh? How do you view the alteration of cultural life in Karnataka?

CG: URA and Karnad's espousal of democratic causes found support from among the socially sensitive individuals. In that sense, they were not lonely voices. But it was clear that they were among a shrinking number of Kannada writers holding forth on matters of political significance. A robust tradition where writers participated — and were indeed expected to participate — in political discussions was on the wane. Kannada writers had been a vibrant political presence in the state for decades, with dalit, non-brahmin and women writers raising crucial questions towards expanding democratic activism.

A strong farmers' and dalit movement in the 1980s also helped create a healthy democratic milieu in the public. Over the last two decades, most writers came to show a decided reluctance to take public positions, especially on the politics of the Hindu right wing. A journalist like Gauri Lankesh, who took over as editor of the influential political and literary weekly, *Lankesh Patrike*, in 2000, following her father's death, and human rights activists from non-literary backgrounds, became increasingly vocal in political discussions. Except for occasional interventions, the literary community appears to have abdicated its prior role as conscience keeper of local

society. Indeed, political outspokenness is risky today in a way it never was previously. The absence of security alone, though, cannot explain the retreat of writers from participating in political debates. While some of the younger writers do exhibit political courage, the writers for the most part are staying private in the present.

While marking these broad trends, we will also need to note that 'the public' itself is a bigger as well as a fragmented entity, with the explosion of television and print media outlets. The middle class has also expanded and its interests tied to the attractions of economic growth, which then realigns its political and social idealism. The near-disappearance of mass-based democratic movements has also not helped vis-à-vis the sustenance of political idealism. The opposition parties in the state are not showing any signs of evolving a vision of democracy that approximates to the altered socio-political realities of the state. On the whole, a grim scenario. I however haven't stopped hoping for a miracle.

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1. For an extended discussion of this issue, please see my 'A Writer's Horizon,' Seminar, No. 666, February, 2015 (https://www.india-seminar.com/2015/666/666_chandan_gowda.htm).

2. Speaking in Hindi to the Gandhi Seva Sangh, March 4, 1936: 'Had I been in Dr Ambedkar's shoes, I would have been as angry. In his position, may be, I would not have been a believer in non-violence. When overcome by anger, a person does whatever comes to his mind. Whatever Dr Ambedkar does, we must bear it in all humility. Not only that, it would be a service to Harijans. If he really hits us with shoes we must bear even that…'

3. Historically, the major Kannada literary figures have belonged to the Jaina, brahmin, lingayat and Vaishnava Haridasa traditions. The large body of Kannada poetry composed by sufi poets in medieval Karnataka has been collected and published in recent years.

4. URA wouldn't be as categorical in his claim about the exclusion of dalits from all sectarian traditions now since he came to later appreciate the presence of dalit poets in lingayat literary history or in the making of major folk epics and folk religiosity in Karnataka.

5. *The Way I See It: A Gauri Lankesh Reader* (2017).

The Rain Eclogue

Anjum Hasan

MP Pratheesh, 'The Brink/images from an unfinished poem'

The wind is desperate here and the rain's wild, sharpened slant knocks the power out.
"Almost everyone traverses their lifespan, from birth to death, with eyes closed…
If we open our eyes for just a moment, a great and terrible cry will burst forth from us
and we shall scream and never stop." I'm reading one more disregarded novel and you're

Mumbling explanations in your sleep. The storm makes tunnels of the lanes between
hedgerows and houses, squalling in pain, and I think, what about hearing?
Do we traverse our lifespan with our ears blocked up as well because try as I might
I cannot hear the howling, the landscape carries no echoes of your distress, not even

Monsoon furies approximate to how you would break upon us if there was anyone
to listen. The rain stops, all returns to stunned peace, the crickets harmonizing with the gurgling
in the gutters, and even though he said, describing dry-eyed his betrayal,
as they took him away, "I earnestly hope you will speak out before your turn comes,"

We would rather not open our mouths, not even for a moment, to say what we are:
shipwrecked with all the hulking historical dreck of our divided selves. Last week,
when the winds were still playing tug of war between southwest coast and Arabian Sea,
I took in the silence, how sunlit and lazy, just the faint buzz of welding on a new roof

Melding with the sighing breeze and the sweet, silly twittering. And later, walking

on that winding road above folded hills that fall away to this same sea, I saw a flash
of exceptional blue in the swoop of a bird and tried to memorise the shape of its tail
so I could look it up in my handbook. Malabar whistling-thrush. “Remarkably long

Human whistling, up and down the scale, thus nicknamed ‘idle schoolboy.’” With what measure
of muteness to honour your saying, woman whose name I’ve forgotten, I can go hungry but
what to tell my children? And you, a man in a million, who said, I’d rather die
on the road than stay here, how to offer you more than that stifled scream, how, as the

Poet said, to hold in a single thought reality and justice, how to save you from becoming
a washed-out memory lost to the daily drama of the rain? How the light clouds up every
half hour, how romantically the mist drifts in, how fiercely a blackbird knocks at our
windows each dawn, trying to kiss its reflection, so I hammered some rusty nails

I found in a bag under your desk and strung up curtains on the outside to shut out
that cold, orange-ringed eye, to resist the battering of its lonely refrain. Our neighbour
down the lane – who drifts about all day tending to his fruit trees and flowering plants,
worrying about coffee prices and labour shortages, who finds the needle of his suspicions

Always pointing at Mohammedans, though he also distrusts the working classes,
the feckless poor, the dubious immigrants, but who is all the same a model of decency,
served his government, paid his taxes, (mostly) resisted demands for bribes, dirtied
hands only with his native earth – this gentleman tells me such birds can die, that is,

Willfully break their necks on the glass they’re trying to breach. All I can do is
make these broken idylls with the old phrases my father would bring up to justify
literature’s superiority to life – say, the milk of human kindness, say, sweetness and light.
As the novelist knew, our eyes will never open. The Draconian speaks elderly rubbish

From both sides of his mouth and I hear my father’s voice night after unheeding night,
“The Supreme Court called him a modern-day Nero”. You Nero, and we the hard
of hearing, and we the dim of sight. And here again the rushing sweep of maddened rain,
drumming loud as the cement mixer nearby with which they’re trying to create that

Elevated feeling the chance to make more money can bring – plain to see in the valley
before us which is choking with gains, one profitably unpretty house after another.
And then it clears to reveal the mynahs on the electric wires, black on black against
the sky’s grey blank – utterly sans insight for us who fiddle while home burns.

This poem first appeared in *The Hindu* on July 12, 2020.

When an Instrument Seeks You

Sumana Chandrashekar

It was sometime in 2008. Appa and I were at a concert in Bangalore, performed by musicians from Trinidad and Tobago. In the middle of the concert, an artist brought a large steelpan onto the stage, introduced the audience to this curious instrument (most people in the audience were seeing and hearing it for the first time), and played a brilliant musical piece on it. On our way back, the sound of the steelpan still dancing in our ears, Appa said, 'We should try and get a pan.'

Cut to 2012. I had forgotten about the steel pan until I happened to watch a video on Facebook. My friend had tagged me on one of the handpan videos that had been doing the rounds. I remember – I heard it once and I could not stop. One video led to the other and I found myself watching handpan videos on YouTube for hours on end. There was something deeply mystical and profound about it; just like my ghatam.

In 2013, during the Frame Drum Festival in Freiburg, Germany, I saw the instrument up close for the first time at a drummer's house where we were rehearsing. A small handpan with a burnt copper finish was lying on a cushion in a corner of the room. I had felt its presence throughout the rehearsals and I longed to run my fingers over the instrument which was so near, yet so far!

But we had to rush after the rehearsals. I rued my bad luck but convinced myself that I would soon find another pan to play on. Little did I know that this would be a long seeking.

Friends who knew of my search for the handpan began sending me more and more videos. Some of them who were travelling in Europe would often take videos of buskers playing the pan on the streets only to send it to me. I began reaching out to musician friends in India and Europe to see how I could procure one. While none of my friends in India had ever seen a pan except in videos, in Europe, many of them had seen the instrument or knew friends who played it. But there were still no leads on how I could get one.

Amidst all this, I discovered a beautiful connection between my ghatam and the handpan. In the late 1990s, Reto Weber, a hand percussionist, met Sabina Schärer and Felix Rohner of the PAN Art Hangbau AG in Bern, Switzerland. Felix and Sabina had been building steelpans since 1976. Reto had come to them with the idea of changing a steel pan into a 'sounding pot in steel with some notes to play with the hands.' He was looking to blend the sound of the ghatam with that of the steelpan. And that's how the first Hang drum (*Hang* is a Bernese German word for Hand) came into being. A detailed history of the Handpan is available here.

My search continued. Joao Sousa, my friend in Portugal who makes exclusive clay musical instruments wrote to inform me that he had started crafting handpans. With great excitement, we did the costing for the making and shipping of the pan to India only to realise that I would not be able to afford it. I was disappointed but I pulled myself together once more and resumed

my search. The following week, another friend told me that a Russian made handpan might be available in Bangalore in a few days. I contacted the store that was procuring the pan but to my dismay, I was told that the store won't be able to get it as the pan got stuck at customs in Mumbai.

I went to London in June 2017. On the very day that I landed, I saw a pan player busking in Covent Garden. This had to be an auspicious sign. Perhaps a pan was not so far from reach this time. I called Appa and said that I might be coming home with a pan this time. For four days, I made online searches and calls to music shops without any luck. I only had a couple of days left in London now. Disheartened, I got on a bus one evening with no particular destination in mind. A woman sitting next to me started a conversation and within a couple of minutes we were talking about music shops. 'Maybe you should go to Footes or Hobgoblin Music. You will have to get off at the next stop,' she said. My eyes glittered with hope. I thanked her and I jumped out at the next stop.

But how was I to navigate my way without internet or GPS? Unlike in India where people enthusiastically advise you on ten different ways to reach a certain point, I found no help on that cold rainy evening in London. I did manage to find Footes but the store was closed. After two hours of walking in the vicinity, I spotted Hobgoblin Music at the corner of a street.

Tired yet relieved by the sudden discovery, I stepped into the store and said, 'I am looking for a handpan. Can you help me please?' Paul Gardner, the shop manager who was at the counter, raised his eyebrows and greeted me a large warm smile. 'Not a handpan. But I can show you this.' He handed me a small, bright red tongue drum. 'Try this,' he said. My jaw dropped when I saw that the drum had an Indian brand name. 'How come? Can you tell me who makes this brand in India?', I asked. Paul said, 'I don't know the Indian company. We source it from a seller in Europe.' My heart sank again. I shared with Paul all about my search for a pan and he assured me that the universe will help me find one. Paul is a stand-up comedian, a writer, and a musician himself. We jammed a little and spoke about bagpipes and percussion in Carnatic music. As I was taking his leave, he said, 'I have a surprise for you.' He promised to email me the cover page of a ghatam text book written in Tamil, possibly in the 1960s or 1970s. 'Clearly the book is out of print and might not be available even in India,' he said. Within a few hours, the email was in my inbox.

Sumana Chandrashekar with Paul Gardner

Back home, I looked for the contact details of the Indian brand tongue drum. A website link said that the company selling it was based in the Czech Republic. I called the Czech number and they said that a music shop in Mumbai makes these drums for them. I called the Mumbai shop. They seemed to have been guarding a secret and slowly they began evading my calls. Soon I realised that the company made all their sales outside the country. From Mumbai, my search took me to Rishikesh, Gokarna, Auroville – all dead ends!

Sometime in early 2018, Daniel Waples, one of the best known Handpan players, was performing in Bangalore. My colleague Shubham Roy Choudhury, who was well familiar with my search for a pan, insisted that we go for this show. This was the first time ever that I listened to the pan live. I couldn't speak with Daniel but Shubham directed me to Chirag, the person who played with Daniel that night. After the concert, I reached out to Chirag and his wife Priya and we exchanged numbers. A few days later when I called Chirag, he said that he had started making his own line of handpans and wanted to show me a prototype. We soon met at a café and, for the first time, I held a pan in my lap. It was a dream come true. Seven months later, following many conversations about the kind of pan and the scale I wanted, my pan began to take shape at Chirag's Chirp Studios in Bangalore. And in what I see as the most beautiful moment of my life, Chirag and Priya came home and delivered my pan in August 2018, on my birthday. My journey had comea full circle. Like the boy in Coelho's *The Alchemist,* I had found my treasure right at the place from where I had begun my search. Today, I am a part of the

growing handpan community in India – a vibrant, passionate and generous community of makers and players.

Appa had left us when I finally got my pan. And in the next few months that Amma was with us, the pan had become her greatest comfort. I would play the pan for her till deep into the night, allowing its sounds to caress her and drift her into sleep.

As a traveler, I have always known that it is the journey that gives meaning to the destination. Sometime in the middle of this journey on one occasion when I was feeling low, Appa had said, 'You will have to wait my dear. Maybe the pan is also seeking you.'

He was right!

Buddha's Last Meal

A Poem by Anand Haridas

'Fasting Buddha Shakyamuni', schist, sculpture, 3rd-5th century | Image courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art

Wisdom, like a river,
Will not let you in
For a second time.

Dust returns to Light,
Realised Siddhartha
Before he woke up as Buddha.
By then, he had lost the crown
And won an empire.

Even then, the piece
Of rotten pork
Did not give him

A second chance.

The Bird

Dusk,
Spread over the sky
Like a blood-stained cloth.
Siddhartha, standing by the river,
Looked up.
Sad.
Just sad.
He did not know why.

A flapping noise startled him.
An ominous black bat
Across the sky.
Then silence.
The young prince stood there
Listening to the silence.
Dust has settled down, long
After the cattle returned home.
This hour too will pass, thought the Prince.
Night will reign soon.
The night of sadness.

Young Siddhartha stood thus
Looking at the horizon.
Behind him, the woods waited
For the dark night to settle down.

Suddenly, from nowhere
A bird darted across his view.
Just another life
That missed the hour of return
And hurrying back home.
We all do that, he thought.
But no!
The bird did not fly.
It fell out of the sky.
Just like that.

Siddhartha turned around
To face Devadutta, grinning.
‘Nice shot, was it not?’

It took a while for the Prince to understand
That it was not life, but death
That flew across the sky overhead.
That dash life makes before the night catches up.

The princes rushed to the bird together.
‘It’s mine. I saved it.’
‘It's mine. I hit it.’
‘The bird is a free life.’
‘Only till my arrow struck. My arrow made it mine.’

Siddhartha learnt,
For the first time,
That weapons decided owners.

‘Then, the light went out of his eyes,’
His charioteer would tell the world later.

The Battle

The screech of the vulture
Jolted the Emperor out of his daze.
He looked around.
Heaps and heaps of men in arms.
Some dead.
Some still alive,
Barely.
Some crawled.
Some cried.
He tried to keep walking.
Something stopped him.
A soldier was clinging to his foot.
My soldier? His soldier?
The man has lost his armour.

There were no signs on him
To tell who he was.
He just clung on to life.
His feet.

The sound of swords
Swishing through raw flesh.
Whizzing arrows.
Neighs of wounded horses.
Cries of death.
Oh! The war sticks to your soul
Like a deep red stain.

The Emperor must learn to ignore
The living and walk with the dead.

The Emperor kept walking.
Before him, stretched out
The kingdom of dead.
Names in the State Registry.
Faces unmarked.
Limbs severed from bodies.
Once bled, who is who
No one knew.
Insignias do not matter.
When death reigns,
Names, registers, labels, marks –
Nothing matters.

The Emperor kept walking.
Like all battles,
This too will end.
Flag will fly high.
Musicians will sing.
Dead will be dead.

The Emperor kept walking
Till the end of the battlefield.
Beyond the last dead body
Was the parched land.
Further ahead,

A mount.
On which stood the Monk.
A bird in his hand.
An arrow in its heart.

The Emperor stopped walking.
He gasped.
As he crumbled on his knees,
Dusk fluttered behind the Monk
Like a blood-stained cloth.

The charioteer remembered later
That his master cried all the way back to the Palace.

The Meal

'Who's it now?'
'A monk,' said the boy.
'Tell him, the lunch hour is long past.
'Tell him, come by late evening.'
'I told him.'
'And?'
'He stood there. Smiling.'

She rose from the bed,
Wet from her sweat.
The sultry afternoon
Hung to her heaving breasts
Like her misplaced dress.
She walked past the boy,
Who giggled at her muffled swearing.

It was a long night yesterday.
The lover had left just a while ago.
She could still feel his breath
On her nape.
She had only closed her eyes,

A smile on her lips,
When the boy knocked.

Angry, she stomped to the kitchen.
There was nothing.
A fly buzzed.
Slanting rays from the window
Splashed across the floor.

She stepped outside.
The stench hit her first, then she saw,
A bowl of pork from last night's feast.
She turned away, stopped, turned back.

Holding the bowl at arm's length,
She rushed across the house.
The boy ran, as far as he could
From the smell.

Holding her breath, she emptied
The bowl into the wooden plate
The Monk had stretched towards her.

Before she closed the door,
She looked back at the Monk.
He was still smiling.
An arrow pierced through her heart.
His smile owned her life.

The Chariot

The chariot gathered speed.
He felt like throwing up,
As he felt the warmth
Of fresh blood in his palm.
The last throb of life.
Hunters own the hunted. Always.
Nothing remains.
It's all empty.

He trembled.
From inside the speeding chariot,
The trees looked
Like dancers of death.
The smell of blood stuck to him,
Like the attire to a woman's body
On a sultry afternoon, soon after
Her lover left her,
Thirsting for more love.
He cried.

He sat down by the roadside.
He was tired.
He was hungry.
He put the wooden plate down.
He then picked one bit of the rotten meat
And started chewing.

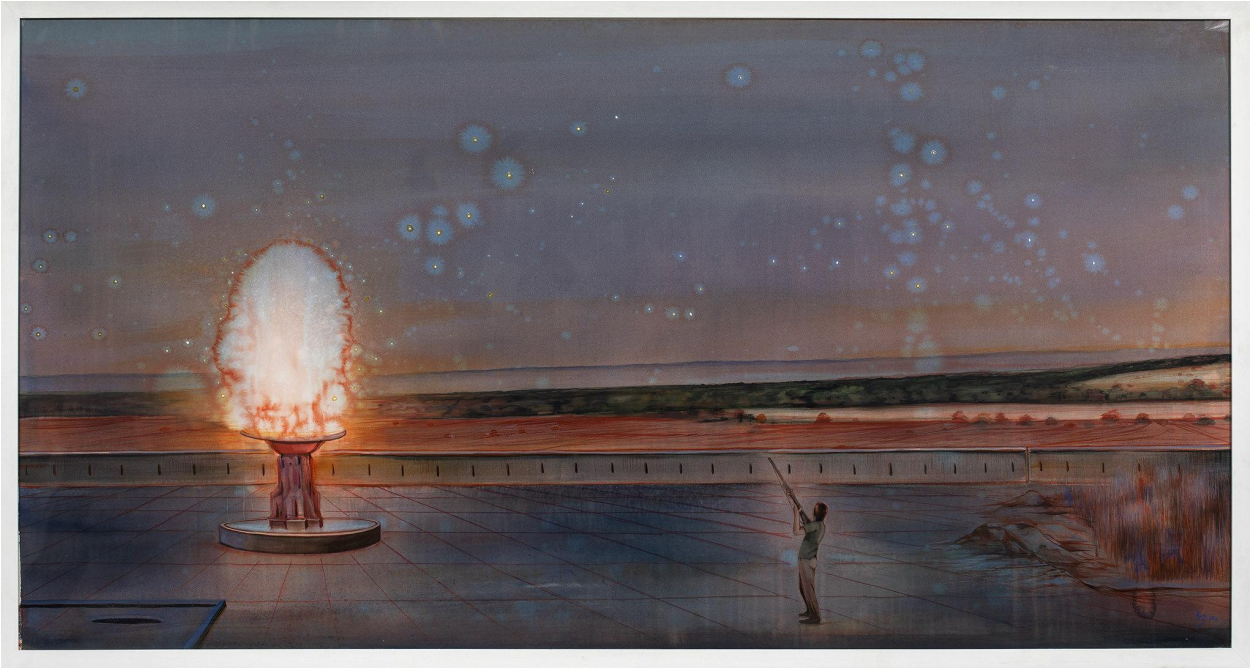
A chariot sped past him.

Untitled

Three paintings by Sujith S N

‘Untitled’, Watercolour on paper, 32.5” x 80”, 2019

‘Untitled’, Watercolour on paper, 34” x 71.5”, 2014



‘Untitled’, Watercolour on paper, 36″ x 69”, 2017

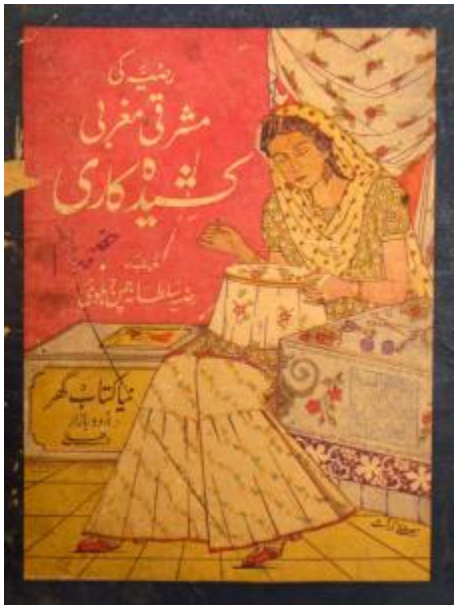
These paintings have been shared here in collaboration with the Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi.

Ishtihar Tasveeren

Visual Culture of Early Urdu Magazines

Yousuf Saeed

In India, printed Urdu literature and Urdu language have recently been associated with Muslims and Islam, often assumed to be reflecting religious orthodoxy and austere iconoclasm due to an apparent absence of images, or at least the images of human figure in its contemporary printed examples. Furthermore, the ignorance about Urdu's eclectic and celebratory past is often so acute that in a recent example, couplets of 19th century Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib were attributed by Mumbai Police as inciting hatred and terror.1 But this one-sided stereotype of Urdu may not necessarily be a construction of the non-Urdu people alone. Even many 'Urdu-*wallah*s' or Muslims consider it not only their language but also a symbol of their religious identity rather than a shared cultural entity. A handful of Urdu speakers though do make an effort to deter this identity myth.2

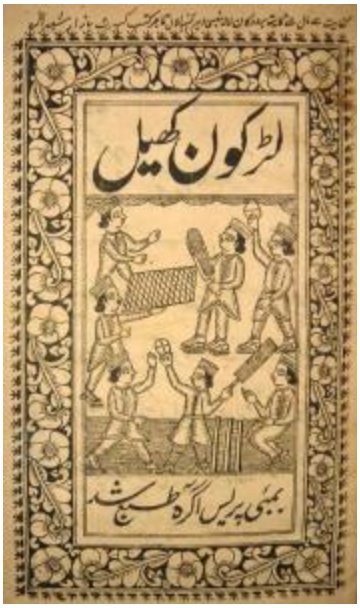


Razia ki maghribi mashriqi kasheeda kaari (Razias eastern-western embroidery), cover of an embroidery book published by Naya Kitab Ghar, Delhi, Circa 1940s.

This typecasting about the language however did not always exist in India. Urdu language or script was the most common medium of mainstream communication, especially at the time when print culture began thriving in north India. While today's Urdu printed literature such as books, magazines or other ephemera may reflect a lack of liberal visuals or artistic creativity,

probably due to a decline in its readership, Urdu printed ephemera in early 20th century or before was the main carrier of ideas, news, business and education, with a large pan-India readership that was not restricted to Muslims alone. Its popularity can be gauged by the fact that Urdu magazines carried advertisements of almost all mainstream trade brands just as today's major newspapers or magazines do. Most importantly, the advertisements and the illustrated features in popular Urdu periodicals were not restricted in any way about the depiction of culture, arts, cinema, glamour, and women etc. In fact, these were as liberal and celebratory as any mainstream magazine today. They also catered to the religious or cultural needs of Hindus and other communities as much as they did to the Muslims. Similarly, Urdu was one of the first Indian languages in which progressive ephemera such as greeting cards, calendars and business stationary etc. were printed and used widely.3

Soon after India's independence in 1947, however, one witnessed a decline in Urdu's print culture, primarily since Urdu was removed not only from being a medium of education but even a subject in most schools in north India, mainly in Uttar Pradesh, which ironically was its birth place and natural home. In short, the entire subsequent generations were schooled without an essential language and script that their immediate ancestors were familiar with.4 Naturally then, the first thing to be affected was Urdu's connection with mainstream media, industry, politics, and professional lives of people. Slowly, as the Urdu-literate generation dwindled, so did the liberal and inclusive image of the language and its printed literature. And today, much of Urdu works published in India are restricted to religious themes or the issues of Muslim community alone, and that too bereft of any liberal visual depictions. Through this short visual essay, the author would like to explore what caused Urdu to be gradually associated only with Indian Muslims even though its early print culture was not restricted to Islamic or Islamicate themes and was a more inclusive media for mainstream secular communication.



Ladkon khel, a chapbook about boys' games. Published by Bambai Press, Agra. Undated, possibly circa 1890.

Urdu played a crucial role in almost every sphere of north India's intellectual life in 19th century. It emerged not only as a language of courtly poetry but also of popular prose, to spread religious values, for the moulding of public opinion, and for the transmission of knowledge and education. In 19th century there was a boom in commercial publishing, not only to cater to the elite among Urdu and Hindi readers but also the neo-literate non-elites who had so far not accessed the written or printed word. According to Francesca Orsini, a large repertoire of popular literature such as detective novels, theatre transcripts, songbooks, saint biographies, serialised narratives, and popular poetry, printed on cheap paper, provided an activity of pleasure for thousands of new readers.5 Moreover, for those who see Urdu and Hindi today with two distinct identities, this early print culture also reflected a considerable hybridity and fluidity between the two languages. In the 'commercialisation of leisure', according to Orsini, the boundaries between Urdu and Hindi had somewhat collapsed. Obviously, much of these chapbooks also contained attractive illustrations, some on the book covers while many printed inside, such as those depicting characters or scenes in the works of fiction, often in the tradition of the older book manuscripts. The title of many of these books contained the word *ba-tasveerat* (with pictures) to attract the buyers. Some of the famous publishers of such illustrated Urdu literature were *Matba'* Naval Kishore from Lucknow besides others in Delhi, Kanpur and Lahore. Naval Kishore Press, in fact, was the most prolific publishing house that brought out a large number of titles in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic and Persian.6

European looking man and woman in an advertisement for Okasa, a health drink. Printed in an Urdu magazine, Mumbai, 22 August, 1937.

Along with print technology from Europe, there came European commercial products and their advertising images appearing in newspapers and magazines in English as well as local languages. Looking at a few mainstream advertisements published in English press in early 20th century, a distinct feature of representation seems to be the contrast between European and Indian facial features and lifestyles, as if different products were meant for clients of different classes or identities, even if the product was imported from Europe. This is interesting because the two contrasting advertisements were often published in the same English periodicals or printed spaces that were seen or read by Europeans as well as the Indian elite.7 But often, the European dress or mannerism is also presented to the Indian readers (such as in a 1930 Urdu advertisement for a health supplement drug Okasa) as a role model of modernism which the Indians (or Urdu readers) ought to adopt. The style of art or illustration used in much of this print culture is definitely influenced by photography, even though the photographs themselves are not used so liberally due to technical limitations. Much of colour printing in early era was done in Europe since colour presses were not so much in vogue in India until the start of 20th century.

Ismat, the cover of an Urdu magazine for women. Issue of February 1938, published from Delhi by Rashidul Khairi (editor).

Many illustrated Urdu newspapers and magazines had started appearing in north India from the middle of 19th century, mostly published from Delhi and Lahore, some of the first being Avadh Akhbar8 and Dehli Urdu Akhbar which was started in 1836 by Maulvi M. Baqar. These were followed by many other periodicals, and soon there appeared some women's magazines too, catering mostly to the purdah women in ashraf or elite families of north India. Among them, Tahzib un-Niswan was started at Lahore in 1898, whereas Khatun of Aligarh ran from 1904 to 1914. Similarly, Ismat, started by Delhi's Urdu novelist Rashid-ul Khairi in 1908 ran the longest until 1950s. These magazines raised important social issues, especially the degrading position of Muslim women in society, even though reaffirmed their domestic roles by dealing with topics like sewing, cooking, childrearing, and home economics etc.9 Many of them carried images not only to illustrate the topics but also for decoration. This popular print culture also featured illustrated Urdu books on cookery, embroidery and other similar topics that were quite sought after in the families. The images at this point carried a somewhat European style of human features and backdrops, and there was no hesitation in the depiction of human body, even of women.

Photograph of an unidentified film actress printed along with Urdu poetry. Magazine Alamgir, Lahore, 1935. Photo by S. Shah Ali, Hyderabad.

In some of the early Urdu magazines, the printed visuality and 'beauty' is not taken purely for its sensuousness. There have been efforts to connect or compliment the images with ideas in written word, especially poetry, which is supposed to take the images to a higher level. Many magazines carried images of natural beauty or pretty women, usually in colour, accompanied by creative captions and often complete poems written to pay tribute to the image. Some magazines, such as Alamgir of Lahore (circa 1920-30s) carried reproductions of oleographs depicting scenic beauty (often painted by the local artists like Hakim Faqir M. Chishti or Prof. Allah Bakhsh), which were 'commented upon' in romantic poetry by well known poets.

Advertisement for Woodwards gripe water in Urdu, published circa 1930s. The Urdu text says 'granny told my mother, and mother told me, Woodwards gripe water keeps babies healthy'.

Delhi and Lahore were not only great centres of print production but even had complementary business relations until 1947 with a large postal traffic between them.10 Besides books and magazines, these two centres also produced other popular ephemera such as religious and decorative posters and calendar art that was sought after all over India.11 But the 1947 Partition of India gave a big blow to the print culture as these large business centres were cut off. The family business of Ismat magazine was carried from Delhi to Karachi by Rashid's son Raziq-ul Khairi, and continued there for long. But the partition also reoriented many businesses on both sides of the border, and after a brief lull, Delhi's Urdu print culture picked up slowly. There appeared many other popular magazines in Urdu from Delhi around 1950, some of them continuing until the end of the 20th century.

Whether in the magazines meant specifically for women or for general readers, when it came to attracting potential buyers towards a product, the female body has always been used as a staple feature in advertising right from the time commercial advertisements started appearing in India. Urdu magazines and their advertisements were also not devoid of such gender stereotypes. The female body not only solicited the attention of the male viewer, it also assuaged masculine anxiety in reproducing and reaffirming traditional roles for women. This regressive tendency of the media towards women is somewhat paradoxical given the advertising industry's self projection as the face of "modernity" and "progress". In Urdu printed literature, most of the

images and advertisement messages reflected a romantic notion of the female body, largely promoting cosmetics and beauty products. Moreover, the modern woman also had many more chores to do in her daily life, as the advertisements showed – maintaining new standards of domestic cleanliness, handling the new gadgets of kitchen and laundry, and using newer ways of keeping the husband and children happy.12 In a popular Urdu novel of 19th century, Mirat ul-'Arus (the Bride's Mirror) the protagonist Asghari's house was in such perfect order "as if the house were a machine, with all its works in good order".13

Advertisement for perfume products from Asghar Ali Mohammed Ali of Lucknow. Published from Lahore in 1931.

Advertisement for *Jharan hair oil*, printed in the Urdu magazine *Musavvir*, Mumbai, 1941.

Advertisement for Murphy radio featuring Indias beauty queen Miss Naqi Jahan. Printed in the Urdu magazine *Sham'a*, June 1967, Delhi.

Roghan-e Tilismi (the magical oil), advertisement for an oil to enhance virility, available on mail-orders. Circa 1930.

Studying the commodity images and their advertisements in late 19th and early 20th century Indian print is like conducting archaeology of the times. Each product and its promotion tells us so much about the development of society in colonial India, the likes and dislikes of people and even the social hierarchy being addressed in the advertisements. A large number of printed ads are about wonder drugs and magic pills that can treat all your ailments and miraculously bring back your youth. Many of these products are European while some also use traditional Indian medical systems like Ayurveda and Unani. There seems like a mass anxiety about bringing one's health back using all sorts of oils, lotions, potions and tablets. Through these magazines advertisements, one also realises that an active culture of mail-order purchases were already common then, since most advertisements provide the option of sending the product by post and payments by money-order.

Advertisement for Radium tonic pills, printed in Urdu magazine *Bisvin Sadi*, June 1976, Delhi.

The wonder drugs abundantly included potions for enhancing sexual vigour and virility, and treatments for infertility. There are drugs that are ‘guaranteed to make women give birth to a male child only’, stressing on the ‘misfortune of families that have not had a son despite trying hard for many years’. There are of course advertisements for illustrated chapbooks such as kama-shastra and kokh-shastra that explain to the newly wed couples the secrets of a blissful married life in simple Urdu. Then there are naughty and secretive booklets with erotic tales of a beautiful woman’s nuptial night and so on (with titles such as Suhagan ka Suhag). All these books could be ordered by mail and ‘will arrive at your doorstep in an unmarked parcel for secrecy’ said the ad.

Urdu advertisements for clocks and wrist watches from General Trading Agency, Ludhiana, Punjab. Printed circa 1930.

A number of mechanical devices and commodities that had just arrived from Europe became not only a craze but also a symbol of high culture. Radio and gramophone were the most common forms of mediated entertainment, and such gadgets were commonly advertised in Urdu periodicals. Many other innovative imported products were available in the market to inspire awe and wonder from the buyers, such as alarm clocks, portable printing machines, shaving machines, toy pistols, torchlights, movie projectors and even devices that made you invisible! Gramophone records were especially popular among the Urdu readers as a large number of recordings of qawwali, Urdu poetry and Islamic devotional music was made available on from early on, and their advertisements regularly featured the latest released discs.14

An advertisement for His Masters Voice gramophone player published in 1935 in an Urdu newspaper.

From the pre-1950s era we move on to the second half of 20th century where new magazines and Urdu publishing houses started emerging in print centres like Delhi. Old Delhi or Shahjahan had a large business of hakims or traditional doctors, some of whom hailed from families that served the Mughal rulers. New businesses emerged from such families, with brand names such as Hamdard and Sham'a Laboratories that are active till date. Besides selling their traditional pharmaceutical and health-related products, such companies also helped in establishing a vibrant culture of popular print. Urdu periodicals like Bano, Biswin Sadi and Sham'a emerged as some of the most hot-selling family magazines in north India. Along with them came small-sized 'digests' such as Huma, Huda, Shabistan and Mehrab that focused on religious as well as general topics. While Bano and Biswin Sadi catered to women's issues, Sham'a (along with its Hindi counterpart Sushma) was the most celebrated magazine devoted to Indian cinema. Sham'a has been very liberal in printing glamorous images of film actors and actresses along with the film gossip. Of course, these magazines also printed advertisements of the products from their parent companies.

Cover of the Urdu magazine *Bisvin Sadi*, printed October 1960, Delhi.

Advertisement for United pressure cooker, printed in Urdu magazine *Bano*, April 1976, Delhi.

Advertisement for Super Surf. Printed in the Urdu magazine *Bisvin Sadi*, October 1969, Delhi. Advertisement designed by Lintas.

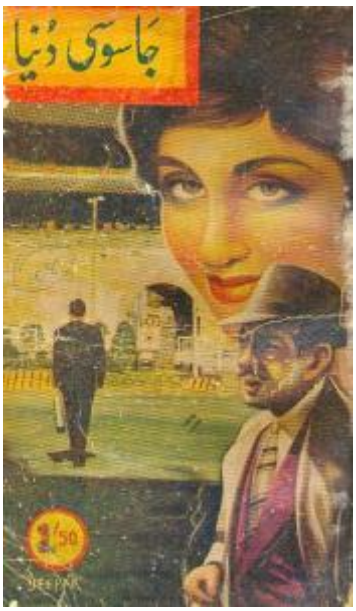
The body of a woman continues to remain a prominent feature in much of later 20th century print culture. Images and art styles change but the older domestic roles of women get reinforced with newer products and services. The women in Urdu advertisements not only work in offices and drive scooters but also attend parties with male friends. But they also have to use more advanced types of detergent powders and futuristic pressure cookers at home.

Advertisement for Lux soap featuring Indian film actress Sharmila Tagore. Printed in the Urdu magazine *Sham'a*, June 1967, Delhi. A byline of the advertising agency Lintas can be seen in Urdu at bottom left.

Among various commodities of print era, soap has been the most evident symbol of modernity, hygiene and a projected beauty which has been represented in popular print literature through its advertisements, specifically that of one soap brand – Lux.15 It was projected as the soap used by the film stars and there was hardly any famous cinema actress of Indian cinema who did not appear in the Lux soap advertisements. Since popular cinema represented the dreams of millions, the image of luxury soap too allowed them to imagine themselves like the film stars.

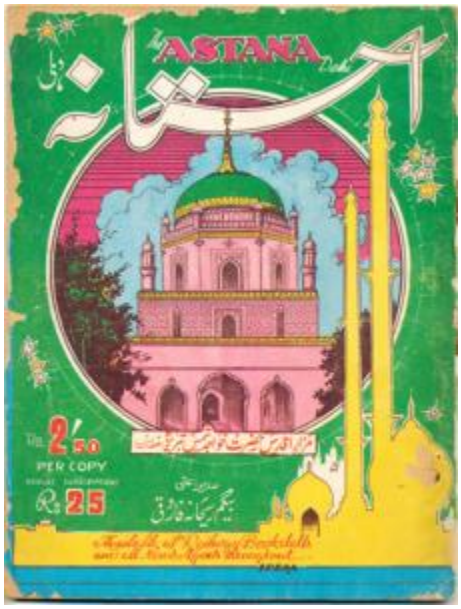
There was no dearth of periodicals devoted to detective stories and novels right from the late 19th century. But from the mid-20th century, Mujrim and Jasoosi Duniya emerged as the most sought after digest-sized volumes with popular detective characters like Imran and others. Jasoosi Duniya's author Ibne Safi was born in 1928 near Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh) and later moved to Pakistan. These detective novels are characterised by colourful cover art that itself could be documented and studied.16 The covers are usually filled with pictures of pretty women, guns, blood and gore that not only reflect the story but also attract the buyers who would probably purchase them at bookshops on railway platform or the roadside shacks.

Wardatein (Incidents), the cover of an Urdu detective novel published from Delhi, 1940.



Jasoosi Duniya (Detective World), cover from a series of novels by Ibne Safi, a popular author who started publishing from Allahabad in 1940s.

Ibne Safi ki Jasoosi Duniya (Ibne Safi's Detective World), cover of a detective novel. Circa 1960.



Cover of a religious magazine *Astana* featuring the Sufi shrine of 'Hazrat Khwaja Shams Tabrez, Multan,' published at Delhi, 1970. The saint's name is Shah Shams Sabzwari (died 1356), not to be confused with Shams Tabrezi, the 11th century poet and spiritual instructor of Mevlana Rumi, who is buried in Khoy, Iran.

It would be incorrect to assume that 20th century Urdu print culture was only filled with liberal images of women and sensuality. One cannot ignore a large volume of literature devoted to religion and Muslim identity. Delhi's publishers produced periodicals like monthly Molvi (1950-60s), Aastana (1970-80s), and the digest-sized Huda that focused on devotional literature

– inspiring stories from Islam's history, religious poetry and sermons. There were images too – mostly of the buildings of Mecca and Medina shrines as well as those of Indian Sufi shrines. The magazines also carried art work based on calligraphy of Qur'anic literature in Arabic. But even these magazines until 1980s were liberal enough to carry advertisements of all the regular commodities such as clothes, shoes, clocks and all other worldly objects required in daily life. However, they did carry ads for fashionable burqas (veil) that were meant for modern Muslim women, stressing yet again on ideas of modesty and chastity of women in the Islamic society.

'New fashion burqe' for purdah-nashin (veiled) women, an advertisement published in 1950s from Delhi.

Looking at these advertisements in Urdu magazines one may wonder as to what is so special about them. After all, most of them are simply Urdu versions of the mainstream product advertisements appearing in English or any other Indian language. Why should one see them segregated from the mainstream print and commercial culture and as something special? Well, probably their being Urdu versions of the regular product ads is really not a big deal. But what is special is that much of the examples presented here are from the early and mid-20th century which one doesn't see any more in Urdu print culture. They belong to a sort of a golden era of Urdu print culture through which one can learn a lot about the openness and eclectic tendencies of Urdu readers.

It is important to document and study these images because many of those liberated periodicals are no longer printed, and new Urdu magazines are not considered commercially

rewarding by the Indian industry and commercial establishments to put their ad in them. Until the 1980s, almost all major advertising agencies in India had creative staff or resources in Urdu due to a high demand in the language. A large number of ad campaigns were originally conceived and designed in Urdu rather than simply copied from the English templates. Their artists too often came from a lineage of Indo-Muslim artistic tradition, such as those doing calendar art, which too has almost died. The decline of Urdu print culture may have occurred parallel to a process of 'ghettoisation' of the Indian Muslim community in India since 1947.17 These have been complex processes and no single factor can be considered responsible for them. But Urdu language and its print culture is not dead yet. New magazines and popular literature is being published, but the tendency has mostly been to impart values of a rather sanitised religion among the new generation of Muslims. The visual culture of these magazines reflects icons and motifs of the Arab world rather than India, as the new global Muslims increasingly seek their cultural identities in Arabia.

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16 Ibne Safi's several detective novels have recently been translated and published in English along with their cover art by the Blaft Publications, Chennai. See http://blaft.com

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In the Night of Curfew

Chandrakant Patil reads his poems

Anatomical Error

Pallav Chander

‘Untitled 7’, mixed medium on paper, 8×11″,2020

‘An Actor Prepare (2)’, mixed medium on linen canvas, 36×24″, 2020

‘Untitled 9’, mixed medium on paper, 8×11″, 2020

Riots and the Artist*

Varis Alvi

Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon

Leslie Machinist, '*Riot*', acrylic, ink, and charcoal on paper, 1988 | Image courtesy Smithsonian American Art Museum

Having witnessed the Nazi atrocities, Thomas Mann remarked that "in our time the destiny of man presents its meanings in political terms."1 Actually, Mann was alluding to a fairly complex and obscure feature in the web of causality that lurks behind the tragedy of present-day man. Our age is so deeply immersed in politics that we no longer have any agency in the satisfaction of even our own instincts and spiritual desires, rather it is the political institutions, parties or agendas that preeminently decide their fate. Whether political or something else, at the end of the day an institution remains only an abstraction. Man's association with an institution or an ideal is not a blood relationship, and neither is it visceral, visible, or physical. Hence, it is a purely nonhuman relationship. It is tragic that Man has offered up his sound and enduring human relation-ships as a sacrifice at the tenuous and abstract altar of political concepts and ideals. Rather than being a flesh-and-blood entity, a complete being, Man has thus come to be viewed as a political unit, an abstract idea.

Man didn't kill another man in the carnage at My Lai or Ahmadabad, but a dominant political abstraction certainly did. It killed Man in his full-ness, thinking all the while that its victim was none other than a concept–disguised, accidentally, as a man. This is by far the most telling example of the dehumanization of contemporary man: neither the killer nor the one killed possess even a modicum of human greatness. And the process of killing and dying is occurring at such a hideous level that one feels neither sorrow nor amazement. When, at My Lai, the skull of a wounded child is blown to bits from a distance scarcely eight feet away, or, at Ahmadabad, an entire family of ten, children included, is burned alive in just one house–exactly what is one supposed to feel? Sadness and stupor, pity and fear–in other words, the feelings that tragedy inspires in us? But what is happening around us is singularly devoid of the barest trace of tragic majesty. Our violence is as meaningless as our agony and pain is senseless. Entirely unproductive! Our violence and our atrocities have risen so far above all ethical consideration of good and evil, and reached such an extreme form, that they appear laughable. One time I went to see a slaughterhouse with a friend. A slew of bulls tied to ropes just stood there chomping on the fodder. The butcher would go over to them and run the sharp edge of his knife across the throats of a few. The bulls just chomped on, still standing, as though nothing at all had happened to them. Then, one by one, they would collapse to the ground with a thud. Seeing this, my friend observed with a laugh, "How funny!" And I too laughed. Another time a student of mine was relating an incident that happened during the communal riots. Mostly what they did was round up a man, douse him with gasoline and set him on fire. Now and then the victim, his body burning away, would suddenly rise to his feet and start running, and then, "It was so funny," my student said, "the wild goose chase." This should do for man's blood relationship. As for pity, here are a few sobering lines from Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera:*

My business is too hard, for my business is arousing human sympathy. There are a few things that stir men's souls, just a few, but the trouble is that after repeated use they lose their effect. Because man has the abominable gift of being able to deaden his feelings as well, so to speak. Sup-pose, for instance, a man sees another man standing on the corner with a stump for an arm; the first time he may be shocked enough to give him tenpence, but the second time it will only be fivepence, and if he sees him a third time he'll hand him over to the police without batting an eyelash.

(1998, 95)

I recall something which Mrs. Indira Gandhi had said after touring the devastation at Ahmadabad: "What saddens me the most is that people have not even had shame over the dreadful situation!" But who should feel shame? What did the American press and people say about the My Lai massacre? Just that such things do happen in war. The riots in Ahmadabad elicited the same response from the Indian press and people: Riots and water make their own path! Remorse, shame, sadness, anger are all human emotions which only living human beings

experience, not political abstractions. Having already become a mechanical entity in the technological age, today's living human being has, regrettably, under the tight control of political expedients, turned into a political abstraction as well. Any wonder that emotional springs should dry up in such a man? We see with our own eyes how this cold man, indifferent to all considerations of good and evil, is drifting farther and farther away from his nature and his world and, unaffected by human feelings, is being divested of his instincts. We forget a basic fact, namely, that any situation which has to do with Man is, first and foremost, a human situation, and only subsequently social, political, and moral. This inevitably permits us to ignore the human aspects of the situation and investigate only its social and political aspects. Absent from the writings of politicians and newspaper columnists is precisely this human perspective, as if these people do not have the foggiest idea that riots are primarily a human problem. If it has been made into a major problem, then this is the consequence of exploitation by political rogues and of their insatiable hunger for political power. The entire struggle of the contemporary artist/writer is against this cunning, self-delusional, inhuman, cold, and phony society. In the midst of this commotion he is trying to somehow protect his human qualities and values because he knows that the source of his art is none other than his own human self. If this self becomes twisted or warped, he too will turn into an instrument of this brutal society, producing nothing better than journalistic trash. Instead of succumbing to political ideals, parties, and movements, he tries to formulate his own ideal where he can deter-mine the values of human existence. He wants to preserve the living aspects of his emotional, spiritual, and instinctual life from the influence of the political and social pressures that are determined to destroy them. This is not walking away from lifeís struggles, rather it is setting those struggles on the right course. There was a time when both our liberal-minded lawyers and politically savvy critics used to laugh at these lines of the poet Ḥāfiẓ:

rumūz-e maṣlaḥat-e mulk khusravāñ dānand

gadāʾ-e gōsha-nashīnī tō Ḥāfiẓā makhurōsh

(1969–7o, 218)

Subtleties of the empire's affairs–kings know;

You, Ḥāfiẓ, a beggar who sits alone in a corner,

don't you shout!

However, the contemporary artist/writer fully understands the significance of these lines. If the field of action unfolds into a deathly rampage of power-crazy people, it is entirely preferable that he embrace the values and relationships that are dear to him and seek the peace and quiet of a cloistered life. Never has an artist/writer been able to stop a society on its way to destruction, but he has been able to preserve those ideals, memories, and experiences which

would have surely been annihilated had he given up his secluded life to join the mob of crazies. Such a character in the artist/writer is not exclusive to our own time, indeed it has always been the same across the ages. Hence, what we call the history of human culture is defined by the creations of the cloistered artists/writers. These creations enshrine the finest experiences of human existence and–having been expressed through the medium of color, musical harmony and rhythm, word, and dance–they have reached us in the form of a long tradition. Thanks to this tradition, we have managed to preserve some remnant of values in a world filled with violence and superficiality. What are these values? Millenniums of cultural evolution have slapped so many artificial layers upon them that it has become impossible to even find a clue to the fundamentals that define man. If we scrape all the layers off, he is reduced to merely a biological entity, functioning through a con-glomeration of basic instincts, which, if nothing else, are at least human. This is precisely what prompted Muḥammad Ḥasan ʿAskarī to make the facetious remark that he infinitely preferred looking at pictures of nudes over reading short stories about the intercommunal rioting of 1947. Looking at nudes was, at the very least, a human thing to do. The mind of a person who reads pornographic novels or looks at obscene pictures is, by comparison, healthier and more human than the mind of a person who pores over Savarkar's2 and Golwalkar's3 books and looks at the pictures in *Mother India*.4 That obscene novels and nude pictures excite his sexual instinct can hardly be denied. But, however wrong such arousal might be, the perusal of the writings of a biased and highly communal mind inevitably transforms man's humanity into a nauseating abstraction. Today as we witness an upsurge of linguistic and communal prejudice and of Fascist forces gathering ever more power around us, a profound sense of vulnerability settles into our hearts. In this vulnerability we see an unambiguous and painful reflection of the death and destruction of all our cherished dreams. These are not dreams of unrestrained pleasure and limitless happiness, but of simple human relationships that characterize a living society. A heightened form of these relationships is the one between a man and a woman. Born purely from their innate attraction for each other, it obliterates the smallest trace of otherness and promotes, instead, a sense of togetherness, intimacy, awareness, confidence and cooperation between them. Perhaps this is why Yeats perceived sexual love to be the most attractive refuge from the general atmosphere of political anarchy around him:

How can I, that girl standing there,

My attention fix

On Roman or on Russian

Or on Spanish politics,

Yet here's a travelled man that knows

What he talks about,

And there's a politician

That has both read and thought,

And maybe what they say is true

Of war and war's alarms,

But O that I were young again

And held her in my arms.

(Yeats 1997, 356)

In other words, whether war, politics, prejudice, or hatred–none stands any comparison to the embrace of a beautiful young woman. The embrace, in its highest form, is emblematic of the human relationships that result from living together, trusting someone, pledging to live and die with that someone. It is these relationships that receive the severest blow in communal rioting, and it is mutual trust that suffers most. After all, it is in the trust of one's neighbors that one feels safe and sleeps peacefully. But, today, numberless people are killed as they sleep:

abẖī maiñ apnē gẖar mēñ sō rahā tẖā

abẖī maiñ gẖar sē be-gẖar hō gayā hūñ

abẖī lōgōñ sē milkar khush hūvā tẖā

abẖī lōgōñ sē ḍartā pẖir rahā hūñ

(ʿAlavī 1995, 327)

Moments ago I was fast asleep in my home;

Moments ago I was made homeless.

These are the very people it pleased me to meet;

These are the very people I now fear.

Can there be an experience more dreadful than that a man should fear the very same people he sees every day, shops for his daily necessities at their stores, hugs or scolds their children? Relationships of blood and bonds with the land are the very marks of human society; their loss renders man a living corpse. It is these characteristics that contemporary man is beginning to lose, slowly but surely. His greatest problem today is none other than human relationships: as a human being, how does he relate to other human beings? what is the nature of his relationship with them? Otherwise we all live under the pretense of human friendship. So, it would seem, this robe has finally been slit open. But exactly what shape is our body and our soul underneath:

utār pẖēñkūñ badan sē pẖaṭī purānī qamīṣ

badan qamīṣ sē baṛẖkar kaṭā pẖaṭā dēkhūñ

(*ibid.*, 343)

Let me tear off the old tattered shirt from my

body,

to see a body more tattered and torn than the

shirt.

Or how relationships have been severed in an instant:

maṭṭī tō kaччī hai lēkin

ṣadyōñ kā rishta pakkā hai

pal bẖar mēñ kyā ṭūṭ gayā hai

(ʿĀdil Manṣūrī5)

Surely the earth is raw, it is weak,

but the bond is centuries-old–and firm;

how it has snapped in an instant!

When the only connecting link between two individuals is death and murder, man is confronted with such unbounded despair that only death can relieve him of it. And it is the confrontation with death that produces self-awareness in him. The protagonist in many Hemingway stories is freed of all bonds and his true essence becomes revealed to him precisely at the moment he comes face to face with death. Now the decision whether to live or die, or on what conditions, should he decide to live, will have to be made by him and him alone because until he confronts death he doesn't become himself but remains divided.

yahāñ tō āʾīnē hī āʾīnē haiñ

mujẖē ḍẖūñḍẖō kahāñ par kẖō gayā maiñ

(ʿAlavī 1995, 321)

Mirrors–everywhere here

Look for me, where am I lost?

It is death that presses the scattered elements of the world into a unified whole. In its presence man is compelled to choose between life or extinction.

maiñ nē bẖī apnī maut kō dēkẖā qarīb se

aur is kē baʿd jīnē kī ḥasrat na kar sakā

(*ibid.*, 350)

I, too, witnessed my death from up close

And then felt no longing to live.

One who cannot entertain a longing for life after coming face to face with his mortality, is truly freed. This freedom is akin to the Sufi's gnosis which they attain only after experiencing the extinction of their individual egos (*fanā*). A world fashioned by political poets, a society founded upon banditry and plunder, exploitation and brutality that shackles everyone, the structure of our values, saturated with toxic hate, contempt, and moral cunning–all these fall off an artist at one fell swoop, transforming him into a caring and compassionate human being who cares for others and is able to feel their vulnerability. In place of hate, contempt, and anger, an anguish is born in him that resonates with limitless human sympathy.

aurōñ kē g̱har jalā kē qayāmat na kar sakā

g̱har jaṙgayā magar maiñ shikāyat na kar sakā

(*ibid.*)

By burning down others' homes he couldn't

bring down the heavens–

My house too was reduced to ashes but not even

a complaint escaped my lips.

Those who had come to set fire to the house had not the slightest idea that

g̱har mēñ tḫa kyā jō mirā ġam usē ġārat kartā

(Ġālib 1989, 137)

What was there in the house that my pain

would've ruined it.

But, of course, the sense of futility swelled manifold after the rioters had set the house on fire:

tḫī tō sahī par āj sē pahlē itnī ḥaqīr faqīr na tḫī

(Ṣiddīqī 1955, 100)

It was there though never before so weak and

insignificant

The pyromaniacs couldn't see what the poet could: both were victims, both utterly ruined, those who torched the house and he whose house was torched. Both were facing the fundamental torments of life. The arsonist too had walked out of his house–no less desolate and dreary– leaving a slew of unresolved conflicts behind. For the moment, though, he had turned his back on his frustrations and worries, as he walked out, matches in hand, to set another house of sorrow on fire. How can one complain about such a man! or even contemplate revenge at such a level of depravity! So the artist cannot even put such human feelings as hatred and revenge to use; instead, he is wracked by a terribly strange feeling of suffocation:

us nē mujẖē tabāh hiyā is kē bāvajūd

dō čār din bẖī us sē main nafrat na kar sakā

(ʿAlavī 1995, 350)

Though he ruined me

I couldn't hate him even for a day or two.

"Couldn't hate"–not because of some moral excellence, but simply because who was there to hate.

mujẖē diyā na kabẖī mērē dushmanōñ kā patā

mujẖē havā sē laṛātē rahē jahāñ-vālē

(Zafar Iqbāl 1962, 78)

The world never gave me a clue to my enemies

and made me fight with the wind all my life long.

The people who've come to kill him are not really his enemy–they're just a collection of unfamiliar, unknown, invisible, and utterly abstract faces. Lifeless political robots. An invisible contagion of disease and epidemic. They can destroy you, but you cannot hate them because they remain invisible. One sees only men of flesh and blood, whom one can trust:

apnē sē baṛẖ kē tujẖ pe mujẖē eʿtimād tẖā

afsōs tū bẖī mērī ẖifāẕat na kar sakā

(ʿAlavī 1995, 350)

I trusted you more than I trusted myself

Pity–even you failed to protect me.

One can, of course, feel sorry for such a man, but hate him one cannot. In other words, the artist is facing a situation where a normal human response just won't work. Indeed, the situation is so extraordinary that he is dazed, no longer able to exercise his faculties to determine the nature of his emotional reaction. His internal and spiritual struggle was already too wrenching to begin with, now he must also face a nonhuman struggle provoked by the actions of insane men. How well the spiritual and material anguish comes together, and how the dirge of one's spiritual shattering merges into the elegy on the disruption of one's external and material life in the following lines:

masjid shahīd hōnē ka ġam tō kiyā magar

ik bār bḫī maiñ us mēñ ʿibādat na kar sakā

(*ibid.*, 350)

The gutted mosque did sadden me, but alas–

I couldn't pray there even once.

For the individual, his awareness of leaving the mosque unattended was already serious enough to precipitate a veritable spiritual and cultural cri-sis in him; he must now add to this the further irony that the rioters destroyed it precisely because they thought it was a well-attended venue. Man's true predicament was that he was drifting away from the mosque, which was hence becoming desolate on its own.

Muḥammad ʿAlavī's poetry on the communal riots depicts a man who has suffered a terrible jolt and, in the dizzying aftermath, has become estranged from his roots but is, nonetheless, still engaged in the hopeless struggle to reconnect with those roots. The most salient characteristic of this poetry is its portrayal of a mind that has been scorched beyond limits, and, therefore, chooses to express its sensitivity in concrete and specific experiences, rather than in general statements. Here, sensitivity does not denote making a plea in the name of a love for humanity, or carefully balancing the scales. This is because the very nature of communal riots has undergone a drastic change, and the communal madness of the majority is thirsting for blood, forcing Muslims to think, in the words of poet Nūn Mīm Rāshid,

ai khudā

āj apnē ābā kī sarzamīn mēñ

ham ajnabī haiñ

hadaf haiñ nafrat kē nāvak–e tēz–o–jāñsitāñ kē

(1957, 108)

O Lord,

today in the land of our ancestors

we are strangers,

the butt of hatred's archer–of sure aim and life-

taking.

Not only is their condition reminiscent of a wounded animal surrounded by hunters, they are also being made to feel as though they are deadly beasts that had better be exterminated mercilessly. Bhartification [i.e., Indianization], personal law, across-the-border loyalties–all mere excuses to justify the religious bigotry that is lodged deep inside these Abstract Men who thrive on politics. The entire society is turning into a political abstraction and, likewise, views the entirety of the minority as a political abstraction. This grossly inhuman situation has brought the artist to the brink of limitless despair. The only way to neutralize it is for him to pre-sent himself and the human values of which he is constituted to those who have lost perception of those human values. It is not a question of begging for mercy in the name of humanity, but rather a question of presenting one's wounded humanity with all its tragic agony just so that people might realize that he who was slain at the height of spring was a flourishing man. However, the Political-Abstract Man and the man in the fullness of his possibility have drifted so far apart that no channel of communication is left open between them. After his permutation into a political being, an artist simply cannot think about Bhartification, personal law, and four wives. Neither can a Political Man understand, like an artist, the personal conflicts of an ordinary person or empathize with his afflictions and his emotional and social conundrums. If a man must stand guard outside his door with a gun in hand simply in order to go in and shoot down his three young daughters in the event that rioters attacked his house–so that they would at least die with their honor intact–in the face of such situations that stretch man's patience and spirit to the breaking point, to say that all this mess is the consequence of your marrying four wives and being disloyal to the country simply makes a dreadful situation downright ridiculous. What else can an artist, besieged by this tragic ridiculousness, do but say:

abḫī rōyā abḫī hañsnē lagā hūñ

tō kyā sač–muč maiñ pāgal hō gayā hūñ

(*ibid.*, 321)

I was just now crying, and now laughing.

Have I gone mad–truly?

Self-pity, wailing and weeping, or indifference–none will help an artist face this situation. The collision he is experiencing is swiftly carrying him toward perfect self-awareness. Man is a victim of his own contradictions, his emotional frustrations, and his spiritual dilapidation, capped by

the contradictions, violence, cunning, and affectation of the society in which he lives. Thus the artist is cracking up from within and without. Only the search for a suitable weapon with which to confront this situation could help him keep his fragmented self together. Such a weapon is contempt; however, its expression in the poetry of ʿAlavī and others has so far remained underemphasized. By contempt I mean a contempt full of zest and brio, the kind which Caligula expresses in the eponymous play by Albert Camus:

This world has no importance; once a man realizes that, he wins his free-dom. And that is why I hate you, you and your kind; because you are not free.

(1958, 14)

In other words, the artist reenters the domain of existence (*vujūd*) after experiencing extinction (*fanā*). Now, though, he accepts life on a wholly new condition, which does not negate but confirms life. He does not accept to live on the terms dictated by the Abstract Man. And he is able to proclaim, as he stands at the edge of a cliff peering down into the abyss of nonbeing: "The world you've fashioned has no importance at all. Now I know this, and am therefore free, and choose life freely."6 On human and biological bases he is–a robust and fulsome man–at war with an entire society founded upon artificiality and deceit, with its darkness so bereft of intensity that it resembles the pale darkness of a sickly, decaying and waning night:

akēlā ṯẖā kisē āvāz dētā

utartī rāt sē tanhā lāṛā maiñ

(ʿAlavī 1995, 321)

I was all alone, who might I have called for

help–

I fought with the waning night all on my own.

This is so because in the age of Abstract Man communal riots too have acquired an abstract form. In the obscurity of the societal fog a man whom we can hardly make out kills another man whom he doesn't even know or recognize. This has rendered the act of killing and plunder so mechanical that one can scarcely feel any natural human reaction to it, such as anger at these inhuman actions, or pity and sorrow at such a tragic event. Without a consciousness of good and evil, even man's crime and sin lose all their capital of human significance. He just picks up a spear and drives it straight through the heart of a living person, in exactly the same cold, unfeeling, and mechanical fashion that he makes love. He has no interest in the warm body, writhing in the heat of passion. Per-haps, in a way, he even fears it. To him the parabolas, the tautness of a young healthy female body, drowned in the nectar of Sanskrit lyrical poetry, are nothing more than mere geometrical lines and circles. Sadly, in our society the perusal of

dāstāns and *Koka Shastra* is seldom for any reason other than to excite one's own sexual desire, certainly not to learn how to arouse the other body. We don't maintain a record of our sexual life; nothing like a Kinsey Report is available. But were such a report ever constructed, all the deceit of our sexual morals would become exposed. Perhaps then we would understand that kissing has absolutely no purchase in our sexual conduct, nor female orgasm any significance. Our acts of killing and lovemaking are simply forms of masturbation: drab, meaningless, cold, mechanical, and self-centered. A man who cannot see the sudden gleam in the eyes of his partner during the sex act, or absolute dread in the eyes of his victim when he kills him is masturbating in the darkness. If he would see the victim's agony and dread and still proceed with the killing, then we could perhaps say that this was a blow administered by a man, not by the blade of a guillotine. By a lost and anguished man who perpetrated a meaningless and profitless murder, so movingly expressed by Munīr Niyāzī in the poem:

tēǵ lahū mēñ ḍūbī tẖī aur pēṛ khushī sē jẖūmā

tẖa

bād–e bahārī čalī jẖūm kē jab us nē mujẖē dēkẖā

tẖā

gẖāyal naẓ̣rēñ us dushman kī aisē mujẖ kō taktī

tẖīñ

jaisē anhōnī kōʾī dēkẖī in kamzōr nigāhōñ nē

ye inṣāf tō baʿd mēñ hōgā kyā jẖūÅā kyā saččā

hai

kaun yaqīn sē kah skatā hai kaun burā kaun

aččẖā hai

lēkin pẖir bẖī ēk bār tō mērā dil bẖī kāñpā tẖā

kāsh ye sab kučẖ kabẖī na hōtā mēñ nē dukẖ sē

sōčā tẖā

gẖāyal naẓ̣rēñ us dushman kī gahrī sōč mēñ kẖōʾī

tẖīñ

jaisē anhōnī kōʾī dēkẖī in kamzōr nigāhōñ nē

kaun hūñ maiñ aur kaun tẖā vo jis par hōnī nē

vār kiyā

kaun ṯẖā vo jis shakhṣ kō maiñ nē bẖarī bahār

mēñ mār diyā

(1983, 80)

The sword had drowned in blood, the tree ha
swayed in ecstasy
The spring breeze had sailed with abandon
when he looked at me.
The enemy's wounded eyes were staring hard at
me
As though those dimming eyes had seen some
impossible thing.
What is false and what is true–that will be
decided later
For who can say with certainty who is good and
who bad.
Still, for one brief moment, a tremor rocked my heart:
If only none of this had ever happened–I had
painfully thought.
The enemy's anguished eyes were lost in
fathomless thought:
As though those dimming eyes had seen some
impossible thing.
Who am I? and who was he–assaulted by the
inevitable,
The man whom I'd killed at the height of spring?

This is the true human situation! It's been an animal, and even a human instinct to try different methods of relaxing the opponent at the time of combat. Face-to-face combat is more human for this reason, unlike the battle in which gunshots are fired from a distance or bombs dropped from high altitudes, because such encounters foreclose every possibility of human communication. Countless good poems have been written about war and bombardment, but a pilot who drops his lethal payload on a silent city from up high in the dead of night, still awaits a poem such as 'Mērē Dushman kī Maut'7 (The Death of My Enemy). How can such a poem be written about these rioters who round up all the men, women, and children, herd them into a small room, yank off its corrugated tin roof, douse it with gasoline and then torch it, burning the occupants alive; kill more than a hundred occupants in a single *čālī*; and, after peace is established, spew out learned sermons about communal rioting. In journalistic pieces just about every progressive and secular intellectual has only this to say: all this mess is because Muslims marry four wives, follow their own group, and refuse to recognize Hamid Dalwai8 and Chagla9 as their leaders. Nobody ever talks to those young widows who wake up screaming in their sleep, 'Don't kill him! Please don't kill him!' After the riots communal parties take out a massive procession to protest against rising inflation, but, in fact, it is to have a celebratory march over their victory in the recent killing. All the enlightened people immediately start praising the procession to high heaven. Not one among those who kill indiscriminately in the dead of night, nor those who look the other way at those killings in their journalistic articles drafted in broad daylight and mentioning only the national stream, cry out in agony and say: '*kaun tẖā vo jis shakhṣ kō maiñ nē bẖarībahār mēñ mār diyā'* (who was he I killed at the height of spring). This handful of words is a proof of the last few remaining bits of humanity. This murderer is an infinitely better individual than the Political Man who doesn't himself kill, but does create the conditions which prompt a man to divest himself of his humanity and engage in spilling blood. The Machiavellis of our age, totally bereft of all creative, spiritual, and esthetic impulse, have no qualms about getting thousands of innocent people murdered with impunity, validating their actions by blaming the death of their victims on the fallacy of the latter's ideas and misguided political actions. Rather than show remorse at the death and carnage, they prefer to give speeches in town halls, arduously locating the reasons for the killing of women and children in the Persian script, Urdu language, four wives, Tughlaq and Ghori Sultans, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the Khilafat Movement, and the practice of donning burqas. Take a hard look at this man, because today, through his many books and articles, he is trying to subvert the entire history of a people, bending over backwards to convince them that their present misery is the inevitable consequence of the insane and shameful deeds of their forefathers. He has lost the ability to empathize with the pain and suffering of others.

In T. S. Eliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral*, the four knights, after killing Becket, address the audience and provide the justification for their heinous act with compelling logic. Keep in mind that in the spiritual levels Eliot has assigned to Thomas Becket, the chorus women and the

knights, the latter occupy the purely animal level. They give profoundly logical speeches, show Thomas Becket to be full of hubris and of himself, and consider his murder a political and national necessity. They say:

No one regrets the necessity for violence more than we do. Unhappily, there are times when violence is the only way in which social justice can be secured. At another time, you would condemn an Archbishop by vote of Parliament and execute him formally as a traitor, and no one would have to bear the burden of being called murderer. And at a later time still, even such temperate measures as these would become unnecessary. But, if you have now arrived at a just subordination of the pretensions of the Church to the welfare of the State, remember that it is we who took the first step.

(Eliot 1963 [1935], 82)

At their animal level, what the knights fail to perceive is that Thomas Becket's entire struggle was precisely against taming this pride and self-conceit. His greatest temptation was the most dreadful form of pride, namely, the pride of martyrdom, and he fought against that temptation as well. The discourses of the four knights reveal a mind utterly incapable of understanding the mind of another. Our age is not unaware of the moral consequences of justifying violence as a political necessity. Eliot's knights make full use of political reasoning and the entire cadence of their speeches is saturated with diplomacy, not much different than the political commentators' speeches in the wake of My Lai. Read this sentence of one knight with a minor variation of words and the meaning will become as clear as day: 'At another time, you would condemn *the victims of My Lai Vietcong* by vote of Parliament and execute *them* formally as *traitors*, and no one would have to bear the burden of being called murderer.' So all that happened, happened on account of suspicion, while, in fact, there was no room for *suspicion*. The statements made by political commentators after the riots wouldn't have differed much, namely, the minority was disloyal to the country. It needs to be Bhartified. During Baroda riots posters demanding 'Leave Hindustan!' sprang up everywhere. Just about everyone was complaining that they'd become sick and tired of Muslims, and newspaper columnists too were touting Muslim narrow-mindedness, religious fanaticism, backwardness, hooliganism, isolationism, insistence on their own personal law, and how all these went against the welfare of the country. 'But, if you have now arrived at a just subordination of the pretensions of the Church to the welfare of the State, …' These political commentators are as incapable of understanding the raging mental conflicts of an ordinary Muslim as the knights were of understanding Arch-bishop Thomas Becket's spiritual turmoil. An ordinary man's mind remains a closed book to a political being. When life's problems appear daubed with political color, they metamorphose into political issues. It is only art and literature that have the capacity to express the problems of life and create the man in whose eyes we can see the gleam or fear, and meet with him at the purest human level. How many characters are there in Urdu fictional literature that anyone would want

to kill as Muslims? Hardly any. But one would be hard pressed to find a single Muslim in the political histories being fabricated today that anyone would want to leave alive. One cannot foist the image of a people arising from political histories on even a single member of that community, because man is not merely a political entity. Our society is in the clutches of a man who has become divorced from human instincts and emotions. Such a man erects concentration camps and gas chambers, commits genocide, raises private armies, and murders culture and language. This accomplished, he then, like Eliot's knights, justifies his actions in journalistic pieces and political books. What can an artist feel before such a man except a sense of anguished helplessness:

ik bẖīṛ hai andẖī sī čalī ātī hai

ik tēġ–e ḥaqārat hai ke lehrātī hai

ik jañgal ug rahā hai lamḥa lamḥa

ik būnd bačī tẖī sō bahī jātī hai

(Fārūqi 1977, 48)

A crowd, surging forward blindly

A sword of hate that keeps swishing in the air

A jungle that grows every instant

A drop, just a drop was left, it too is flowing away.

How can one even begin to talk to this blind crowd, this geometrical jungle, this maze of lifeless lines! A drop, just a drop of blood which you had somehow saved from the merciless incivility of time's dehumanizing forces, saved it from turning into bitter and turbid water, how will you save this bright drop of warm blood from the swishing sword of naked hatred? No poem can be conceived about this blind crowd. In vain is poor Sulaimān Arīb10 trying to get it across to this sight-deprived crowd that heís lost all hope in them, in the humanity of humans, in those who slice off women's breasts and rape mothers and sisters with impunity. One despairs when there's hope. But what can one hope for from the ever-growing jungle of Abstract Men. One who masturbates before women can hardly be expected to show any regard for their breasts. The man who tears the posters with pictures of beautiful women in the name of religion and morality is the same man who, again in the name of religion and morality, lobs off their breasts. How can the artist address a society so filled with cunning and self-deception? If the other shows regard for his human state, one can talk to him making humanity the point of reference. But how can he when the other is so devoid of human decency. The only course left open for the artist/writer is for him to clench his teeth and let the shaft of grief penetrate down into his

heart, and to rivet his eyes in a protracted vigil on the scene of devastation unfolding before his eyes with its cargo of burned habitation and disfigured and charred bodies:

āñdẖī nē girā diyē gẖarōñdē sārē

nannẖī guṛyā kī be-ḥijābī dēkẖūñ

(*ibid.*, 47)

The dust storm has felled all toy-houses

How must I see the little doll in all her

nakedness!

And keep on witnessing, in dazed immobility and pain.

ʿĀdil Manṣūrī's poem 'Khūn Mēñ Latẖṛī Hūʾī Dō Kursiyāñ' (Two Chairs–Bathed in Blood), peerless and easily one of a kind among poems on communal riots, does precisely that, in its remarkable restraint, in its ability to maintain a quiet melancholic and mournful cadence all the way to the end-line in what sounds like a dirge about the poet's self and his people–all of which give the poem its extraordinary intensity and tenderness. At no point does the timber of the poet's voice become loud or shrill, or the tide of emotions overflow. Its style is that of melancholy eyes and clenched lips–simple like a tribal dirge, filled with the soul-wrenching desolations of Greek tragedies, and refreshingly free of self-pity, of wailing and lamentation, accusation and blame or sneering and of the kind of self-righteousness that makes poems about communal riots so banal. In other words, the poet doesn't consider himself separate from or better than the riot-makers, or that he is following the Straight Path (*ṣirāt-e mustaqīm*) and can look down with contempt upon those who have deviated from it. His mental state is preeminently that of total bewilderment, of unspeakable dread over what has happened and is happening, his inevitable fate in all distressing periods of history. One will find the same painful bewilderment frozen in the wrinkles of the old woman's face who, at every turn of human history, rummages through piles of ashes in the gutted dwellings, with her dull eyes and tremulous hands, looking for the scorched bones of her loved ones. Her eyes have, on the one hand, a tragic resignation that provides the strength needed to endure heavenly calamities, and, on the other, a sense of bewilderment because the dreadful gruesomeness of what she sees is beyond all conception of terror:

Every horror had its definition,

Every sorrow had a kind of end:

In life there is not time to grieve long.

But this, this is out of life, this is out of time,

An instant eternity of evil and wrong.

We are soiled by a filth that we cannot clean,

  united to supernatural vermin,

It is not we alone, it is not the house, it is not the

  city that is defiled,

But the world that is wholly foul.

(Eliot 1963 [1935], 77ñ8)

This terror, beyond all conceivable limits of time and space, finds its most lethal expression in *King Lear*, and especially in the scene in which Lear enters bearing the corpse of his most loved daughter Cordelia in his arms ('How must I see the little doll in all her nakedness!') and cries out in pain, 'Howl, howl, howl, howl!'11 This very cry of Lear is transmuted into a quiet lament, a mournful dirge in ʿĀdil Manṣūrī. There is neither complaint, nor even a whiff or remonstration. Like Lear, ʿĀdil evinces no interest in the enemies or their death or their character. Once a man has been robbed of his most prized possession, he loses all interest in those who robbed him of it. Like the old woman who rummages in the debris of gutted dwellings for the bones of her loved ones, he too gathers what has been robbed, burned down, and slaughtered as an eternal symbol of wounded humanity, and lovingly recites its elegy:

khūñ mēñ latẖṛī hūʾī dō kursiyā

shuʿlōñ kī raushnī mēñ vaḥshi āñkẖōñ kā

hujūm

rāt kī gehrāʾīyōñ mēñ maujzan

ajnabī baṛẖtē hūʾē sāyōñ kā shuʿūr

nīm-murda sā ye čāñd

kōʾī dōshīza kā jaisē adẖ–kaÅā pistān

aur us par khūn mēñ latẖṛū hūʾī dō kursiyāñ

maiñ jō ab ÅūÅā huvā āʾīna hūñ

ēk sē dō, pāñč, pandra, das hazār

mērī in lāshōñ kō kafnāʾēgā kaun

naʿraʾ-e takbīr meḥrābōñ sē dūr

mērī in lāshōñ kō dafnāʾēgā kaun

čashm–e shab–bēdār kē khvābōñ sē dūr

dūr shuʿlē

aur shuʿlōñ mēñ čamktā ik makān

aur shuʿlē

aur un mēñ khūn mēñ latẖṛī hūʾī dō kursiyāñ

haḍḍīyōñ sē sar uÅẖātā ye dẖuvāñ

ye dẖuvāñ jō ajnabī sā lag rahā

bū tirē ajdād kī

bū mirē ajdād kī

pẖēlā gayā

tīrgī mēñ jugnūʾōñ kī jagmagātī nōk har sangīn

kī

āsmāñ par tiktikī bāndẖē hūʾē

raushnī kī muntaẓir āñkẖēñ udās

band kamrōñ kī fiẓā mēñ sīlanī sāñsēñ udās

aur udāsī kē parōñ kē darmiyāñ

khūn mēñ latẖṛū hūʾī dō kursiyāñ

(Manṣūrī 1970, 6)

Two chairs bathed in blood

The crowd of beastly eyes in the glow of flames

The thought of alien, advancing shadows

swelling in the depths of night

This half-dead moon

like a maiden’s breast slashed in half

and the two chairs over it, bathed in blood.

I–a shattered mirror now:

one, two, five, fifteen, ten thousand–corpses all

My corpses–who will shroud them?

The cry, ‘God is Great!–far from the arches

My corpses–who will bury them?

Far, far away from the dreams of an ever-wakeful

eye.

Flames leaping far into the distance

A house shining in their glow

Flames

and two chairs bathed in blood.

The smoke, there, rising from the bones

the smoke that feels so strange

has wafted everywhere

the scent of your forefathers

the scent of my forefathers.

In the darkness, the point of every bayonet–like

flashing fireflies

Eyes frozen in a stare at the sky

waiting for reassuring light

moist breaths–despondent in stuffy rooms

and amidst the wings of despondency

two chairs–bathed in blood. !

-Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon

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***'Fasādāt aur Fankār,' from Vāriṡ ʿAlavī, *Tīsrē Darjē kā Musāfir, Muntakhab Tanqīdī Maẓāmīn* (Jodhpur: Amit Prakāshan, 1981), 230ñ52. Annotation and translation of Urdu poetry are by the essay's translator.**

1. In the absence of any reference in the Urdu original it is difficult to locate the source of the quote; however, it appears as an epigraph to W.B. Yeats's poem 'Politics,' which is quoted by Vāriṡ ʿAlavī on the following pages.

2. Vinayak Damodar 'Veer' Savarkar (1883ñ1966) was a fierce Indian nationalist who propounded the doctrine of Hindutva and was linked to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination by Nathuram Godse.

3. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906ñ73), a champion of Hindu militancy and fundamentalism, he was the chief of the Rashtriya Sevak Sangh. He strongly advocated that Indian Muslims should either adopt Hindu culture, civilization and language or live in perpetual subjugation to Hindus.

4. A Bombay-based magazine devoted to the promotion of communalism.

5. Reference to published source not available.

6. This is a translation of the Urdu translation of the quote by Vāriṡ ʿAlavī.

7. The poem just quoted.

8. A secular Marathi Muslim who advocated modernization, liberalization, and integration of Muslim communities in India. In his book, *Muslim Politics In Secular India*, he exposed the communal politics of Islamic fundamentalists and said, 'unless Muslim communalism is eliminated, Hindu communalism will not disappear.' He believed that a uniform civil code was the only answer to guarantee fundamental human rights for all Indian women. His Marathi novel *Indhan* (1965) is viewed as a classic of Marathi and pan-Indian fiction. He died at the age of 44.

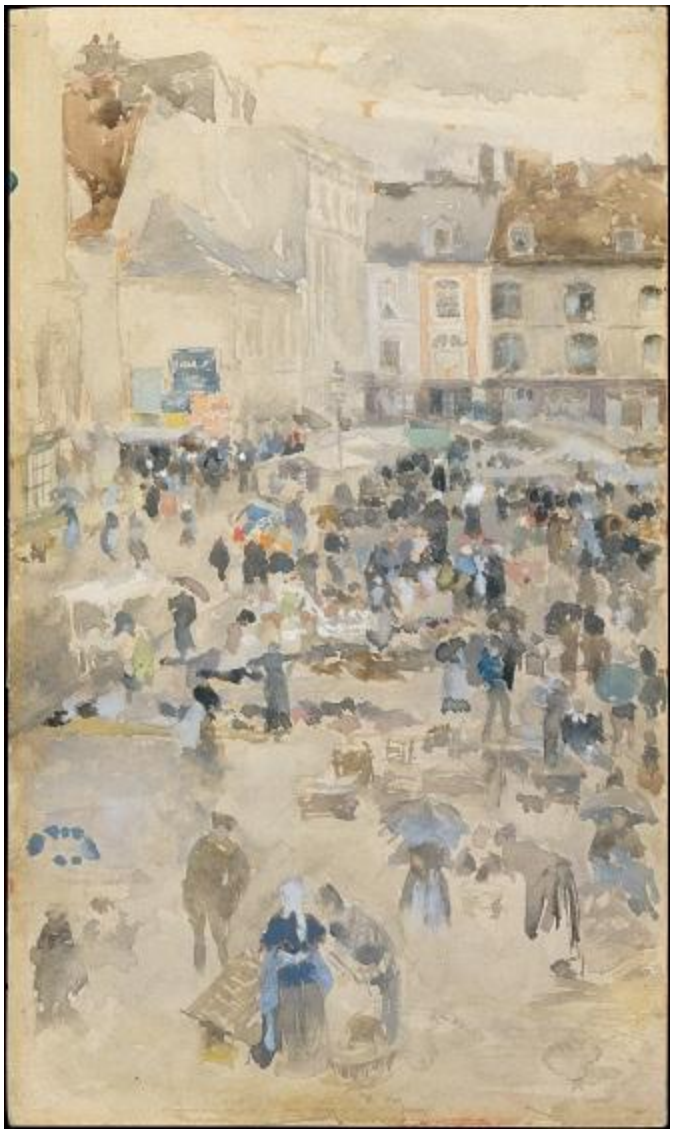
9. Mahommedali Currim Chagla (1900ñ81) was the first permanent Indian Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court. After his retirement in 1958, he served as the Ambassador of India to a number of countries, including Ireland, Mexico, and the U.S.A. He was an ardent supporter of the transformation of Indian Muslim society and its Personal Law.

10. Sulaimān Arīb (1922ñ70) was an Urdu poet and editor of the monthly literary journal *Ṣabā* (Hyderabad, India).

11. William Shakespeare's *King Lear* 5.3.57.

Transience

A Poem by Riyaz Latif



James McNeill Whistler's 'Market Place, Dieppe', Gouache and watercolour on wove paper, 1885 | Image Courtesy The MET

and when

on the spires of our breath

we had shaped some space,

that conversations with lofty clouds would follow,

that collisions with azure fogs would occur,

bearing tides of worlds
would descend the birds of Time,
alight, flutter,
in the flapping of their wings
carry the dance of misty islands'
burning crimson twilight–
brooks of Being would murmur
on the spires of breath–
it was then revealed
all is vain
nothing anywhere rests–
in each breath we too float away
far from ourselves,
veiled from the eyes of our shores, our horizons–
we, akin to an emotion astray
that eventually dissolves
in the caress of roving moments–
we, in houses, in offices, in the crowds on streets,
we, in groaning crawling bus-lanes,
in the encirclements of
cinemas, banks, ration-cards, crumbly bedsteads–
ensnared in existence's desert-tracts–
on weary computer-screens
inscriptions of lost worlds
votaries of Star TV
we, shattered bricks of the collapsing Berlin Wall
with fresh demons of our past lodged in our chest
O friend, we are Glasnost
homeless fruits of Russia's disintegration–

we, lamenters of Bosnia-Croatia's congealing blood–
a morsel of heart's empathy in Africa's famished mouth–
Ram, we are done for!
sowing the primal seed of creation in sleeping waters,
inventing a god of existing epoch,
bearing the shroud-less corpse of Kashmir–
in the sizzling assemblies of SAARC nations,
we, often, on UNO's pulpits
drowning questions in questions,
in the realms of our impoverishment
smiling and weeping at the world–
we, in roaring hollow slogans:
"Bring Peace"
"Grow More Trees"
"Multi-Party Formula"
"Eradicate AIDS"
"Save the Whale, the Dolphin"
have we been able to
save ourselves from the tempests of this body?
we, in the body, in the soul,
in the vibrant cupola of expression–where?
on nullified frontiers of revelations, of illumined dust–where?
on the earth-expanses of faces
akin to pause of beauty, we, for a passing instant, meditative–
crystals of lips bereft of mirth
oceans as if had wafted away, vaporized
when does water rest in rivers?
when does meaning halt in words?
on the splendor-abodes of the parchment

the nudity of torn words–
from reflection, from speech, from tongues, from expositions
slips away the wilderness of meaning–
we are adrift–
where are we?
we, splashing half-filled goblets, savoring Mughlai delicacies
we, on grand roads of cities
we, in resplendent hotels
we, in ampules of blood,
in the burdened, shattered sighs of ailments–where?
from the nameless crevices of mind's mists,
the ones we have abandoned
in the occult chasms of our age,
emerges perpetually a voice:
you are in the clamor of earth's evolution
traversing spectral darkness of innumerable yonis–
sprouted from the roots of the primeval,
you are enigmas carved on the tombstones of your own souls!
rending you asunder, they shall blaze through you:
the creation of light, freshly forged stars, expanses,
inebriated streaks of lightning, heady planets, winds–
rending you asunder, they shall blaze through you:
veiled epochs, mountains, streams, grassy meadows,
woods' green leaves, mouths of caverns,
pouncing panting flying crawling myriad species of
birds, animals, insects, bugs, butterflies–
you, earth's rising–
you, in the wastes of hushed births–
you, centered on the weighty circles of untold centuries–

rending you asunder, they shall blaze through you then:
men of bygone eras,
in wrecked columns, in arches,
unknown civilizations intoning
as green moss on stones of ruins–
cities shimmering in vision,
spread habitats, childhood's alleys,
cows, dogs, goats,
portico, cedar-chest, books, radio, soap!
rending you asunder, they shall blaze through you:
robots, microchips, strands of DNA,
and the absolute sorcery of the atom's core–
all shall blaze through you
across to probability's transformed glances,
across to vistas soaked in rainclouds of absence–
you, in changing glances
you, in changing vistas
you, in mutable bodies, your faces metamorphosed–
you, in the weighty circles of untold centuries,
in the breaths of infinite births,
in innumerable yonis,
have sculpted your death with a void-chisel
you, in death, in perpetuation too–
you, beyond death
or maybe not!
the voice emerges but …
when do uprooted voices sojourn?
playing Malhar and Darbari on the lyre of winds,
caressing cultures carved on ancient stones,

robbing my forebears' faces,
it slips away secretively
beyond the last abode of the skies–
what rests here?
from the nameless caverns of mind,
from the foggy fissures of our age,
have skidded and toppled
trade unions, red cross, literary forums–
shamans of knowledge is withered body
Chomsky, Foucault, Derrida,
Marx, Lacan, Heidegger;
all birds of radiance beyond our insights–
far away from the coop of mind–
why, Mr. Parrot?
at the mere thought of passion, the desert was set ablaze?
the sun of thought set in the veins of waywardness?
the sun snuffed in the veins
adrift on cadence of blood
the sun has flowed away, holding on to blood–
does blood ever rest in veins?
it gushes away leaping and springing audaciously like Amazon
gathering the verdant leafy passion of
the dark forests of its shores along,
beyond the colors of its waves, its horizons–
and do colors stay anywhere?
colors, extinct from faces,
colors, fugitive from flowers,
colors, vanished from the range of walls–
Picasso's dismembered elements

Dali’s vexed breasts embedded in dreams
are now desirous
for someone to come and ossify them
in the heart of absolute light, of absolute colors,
in the heart of the rhythms of nimble heavenly spheres–
but the nimble heavenly spheres
afloat in their own ruminations!
what rests here?
tanks, armies, bombs,
Hiroshima lurking in bone-shafts,
all flowing–
all transient–
we, in bodies, in souls,
in boundless skies of our depths–inside,
miasma-like, disappeared somewhere–
nonexistence, whirlpools of strange births,
abstract precincts of Time
cannot contain us–
all is transient–
who resides now across moments?
where now the haze of uprooted voids?
where now uprooted voids where now?
who rests here ever?
what sojourns ever on the spires of our breath?
no birds of Time now
no thunder of clouds–
azure fogs and dance, vanished,
no call of brooks anymore–
all is transient–

and we, on this lonely spire of our breath

have shaped some space,

have betrothed your barren world–

(Translated by the poet)

Read the original Urdu version here.

Tiny Things

MP Pratheesh

Claypot, Rainwater, Fallen Leaves, Paper and charcol, 2020

Claypot, Rainwater, Fallen Leaves, Paper and charcol, 2020

Claypot, Rainwater, Fallen Leaves, Paper and charcol, 2020

Claypot, Rainwater, Fallen Leaves, Paper and charcol, 2020

Artist's note:

This compilation of images could be seen an extension of meditations on language. While writing poetry, words take you across the barriers of time and to all possible distances. Behind them is an awareness of the insignificance of the human race and the dewy-hope that poetry

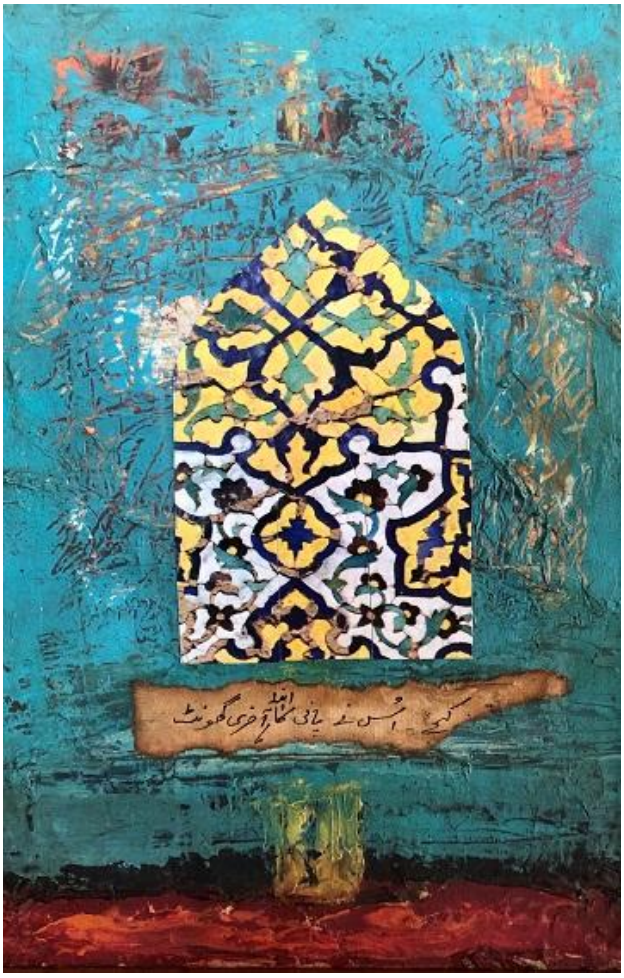
and language provides. It also carries within inevitable moments when a melting language vanishes into water or wind. Amidst the two, I inhabit poetry having secured in my palm things mysterious and naked

Saba Hasan: Dialectical Visual Expression

Suneet Chopra

Contemporary Indian Art has often been uncritically described as eclectic. This description is purely a formal one. In truth, the elements of different styles, symbols and even colours have a dialectical relation with each other, rooted both in our social life as well as our cultural and historical links.

Not many artists have the rich store of such intellectual raw material as Saba Hasan has, a deep emotional link with the flow of the Arabic cursive script, Persian miniatures and colours associated with the painting traditions of our tribal art, Buddhist wall paintings and international Modernism of the West.



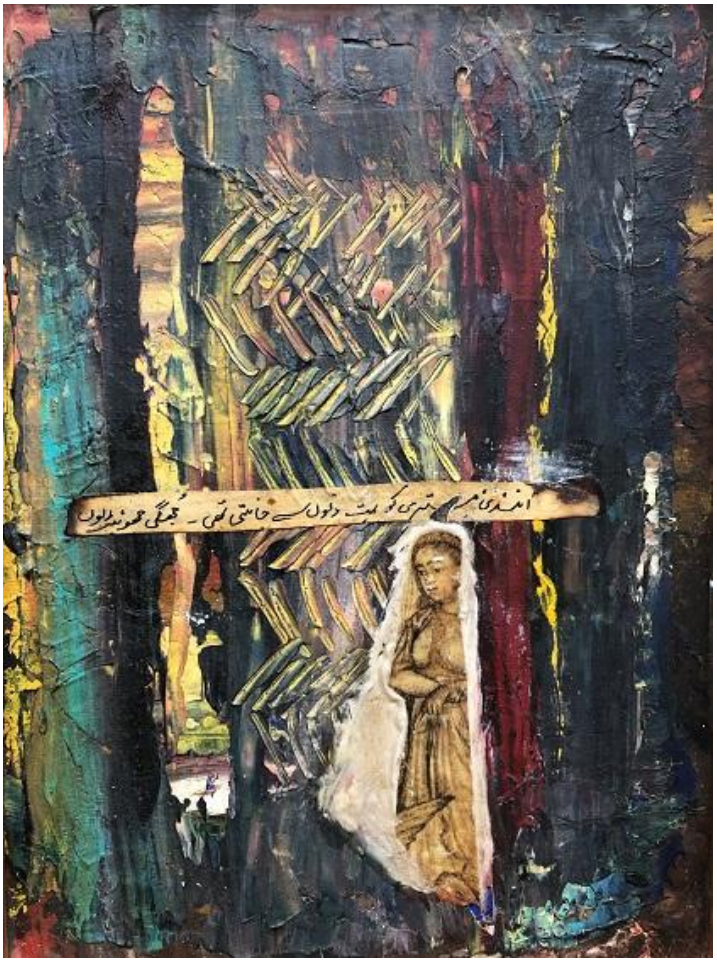
Saba Hasan, '14 Mosques and a Dargah', Miniature in mixed media and oil paint on board, 10.5 x8 inches, 2020

But this is not divorced from history, not only of the past but also of the present, as her titles of these miniatures from the Old Testament and Shaheen Bagh suggest. While referring to the

camaraderie of women often shown together in miniatures in this painting the artist is alluding to the democratic protest led by Muslim women against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

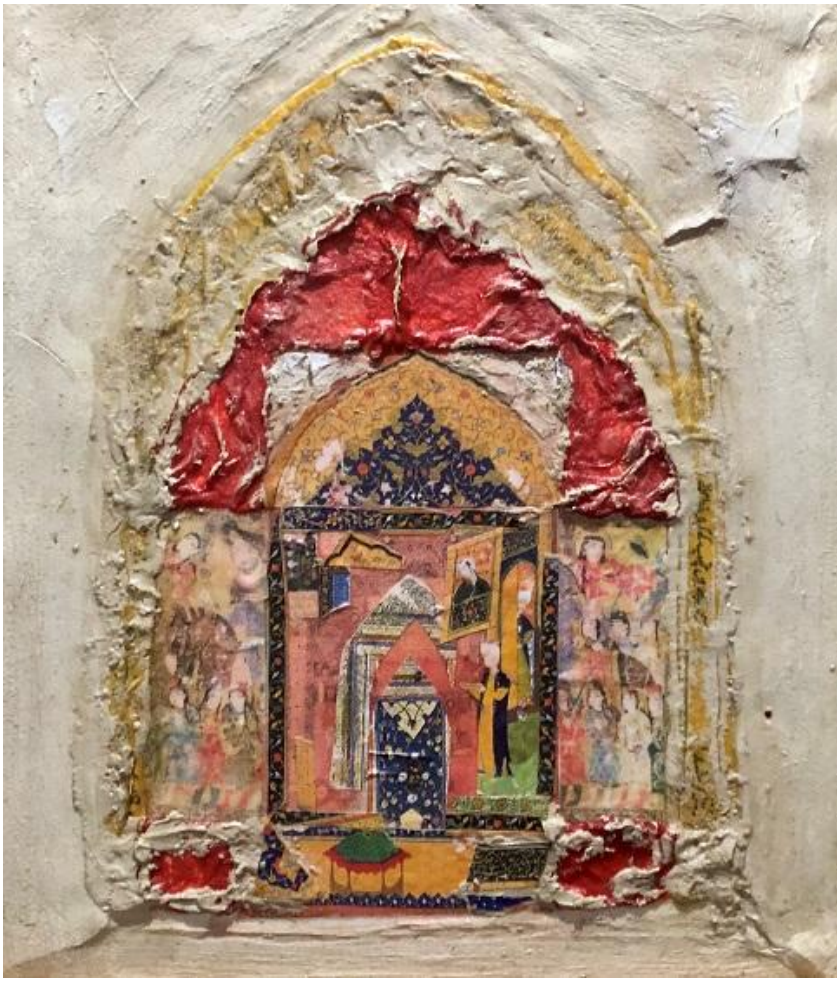
Saba Hasan, 'Waiting for Jibreel – 3', Miniature in mixed media and oil paint on board, 10×8 inches, 2020

Ibn Mariam here could equally signify a Kashmiri mother waiting for her disappeared son to return. The work 14 mosques and a Dargah refers to the muslim places of worship attacked during the East Delhi riots earlier this year but it also exists by itself as the artists rendition of a vivid spiritual dominion.



Saba Hasan, ‘Maryam waiting for her son’, Miniature in mixed media and oil paint on board, 10.5×8 inches, 2020

Saba’s works, whichever genre they may belong to, encompass these multitudes and carry with them that element of the first strike. It can be a smudge of charcoal, a dash of colour in a layered space of different tones of white and off white. It can be colour emerging from layered applications of different tones or it can be a flash of light in a web of shadow.



Saba Hasan, ‘Rebuilding our Homes’, Miniature in mixed media and oil paint on board, 13 x11 inches, 2020

For the discerning eye these formal characteristics give one the feeling of the light at the end of a tunnel, which provides a visual arousal of hope even in the darkest of surroundings. This element of hope is reflected in the powerful undercurrents that characterise her work evoking a profound sense of empathy with the human condition.

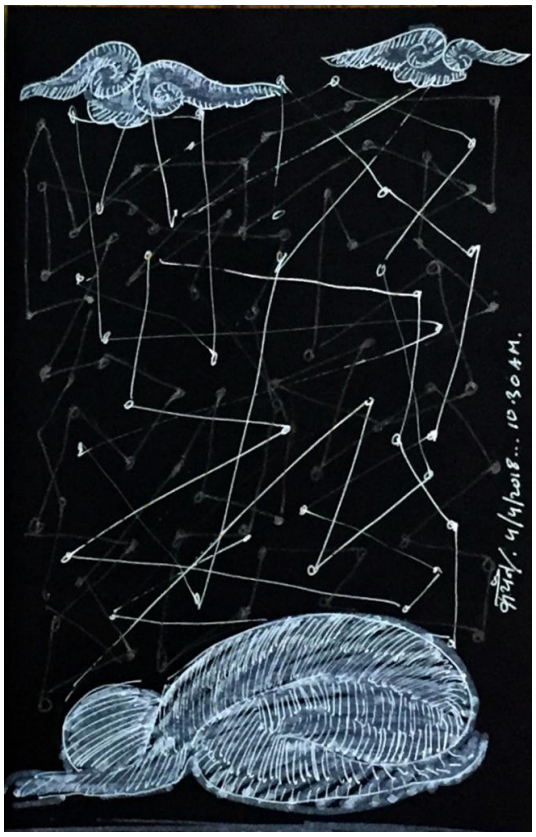
But her art is not poster making. It has an interplay between different styles, and colours with a powerful level of expressionism in white swathes of action painting. So the process takes on the role of the harmonizer in her works giving an element of post modernism to the visual presence in what is essentially a modernist exercise in a traditional oriental miniature format.

Her use of linearity, spatial compositions , textures, the interplay of light and shade creates a canvas so varied that ultimately it draws the viewer to the essence of art that is the content around which different formal edifices are constructed making each work of art a material entity in itself.

Saba Hasan, ‘Women gathered in Shaheen Bagh’, Miniature in mixed media and oil paint on board, 12×7 inches, 2020

This is the most important quality of good art where the artist uses her own freedom of expression and allows the viewer to do the same for himself or herself to unravel the mysteries of her artistic endeavour. These miniatures painted in a time of constant introspection are an engrossing experience for viewers to start individual journeys with to ponder over and enjoy bearing current history in mind.

A lesson in poetry appreciation
Two poems by Pratishtha Pandya



Kanchan Chander, 'Drawing 7', acrylic and pen on paper, 4×6", 2018

A lesson in poetry appreciation

I wish I can teach you
How to hold my poems
You hold them as if
you were not holding them at all
You let the petals breathe
a bit longer in your cupped palms
In the tender light of your love
Orange and white Parijaat blossoms
You gently pick each one
Word by word
One at a time
And inhale the scent
in long deep breaths

As if you were smelling it for the very first time
As if you were trying to memorize the smell
As if you were trying to reach someone by smelling it.

I wish I can teach you
How to taste my poems
How to pluck the right notes
Distinguish dark purple ones,
almost black ones
The long and ripe ones
From the small, dark red, unripe ones
Savour the silky-smooth shiny Jamun skin
On your lips
Before you dig your impatient teeth into
The succulent, translucent pink and white insides
Smelling of spices and dark earth
You need to be really patient with these poems
Open your heart
To the astringent sweetness
Before your kalakhatta stained tongue
Falls in love with its colours
And let an Indian summer
Blossom inside your mouth.

Relationship/સંબંધ

“પેલીની સાથે તારો સંબંધ શું છે, કહે તો?”
PELINI SAATHE TAARO SAMBANDH SHUN CHHE, KAHE TO?
(What is your relationship with her?)
My poems often ask me
Curious and insecure
They want to know
which language I am really serious about
My English ones wonder
why I sometimes write in one
but speak in another
Gujarati ones don’t understand

(why I even need more than one)
હું છું તો બીજીની શું જરૂર છે?
HUM CHHU TO BIJINI SHUN JAROOR CHHE?
why I need one as much as the other.
Is it about excitement
or just nature
or some vicious design
that drives you?
I say, I don't know.
પણ એ બેય માનવા જ તૈયાર નથી
PAN E BANNE MANAVA J TAIYAAR NATHI
(they are not just ready to accept it)
What makes that one
more attractive than me?
each one persists.
Is it her texture on your tongue
or my feel beneath your skin?
Is it about the smells that I bring along
or the silences she breathes in your lines?
what does really matter to you?
they keep asking.
Do you like to love in one
and curse in another?
Do you experiment with her
and trace the familiar pattern over here?
Or do you just know nothing
but absolute surrender?
I say, I don't know.

Classics and the Idea of India

Dorothy Figueira

A manuscript illustration (18th c.?) of the Battle of Kurukshetra, fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, recorded in the *Mahabharata*. | Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons

How do we teach the classics of the Indian tradition today? The classroom is neither isolated nor is it insulated from the outside world. Politics affects what we do, whether we are situated where I am speaking in the US or where my readers may find themselves in India. Although I will be primarily addressing the idea of India as it is currently configured in the American educational system, I feel that several of the points I raise are relevant also to the Indian classroom.

People who have heard me speak or read my work on the developments in the institutionalization of Indian Studies in the US may be familiar with this anecdote with which I wish to begin this discussion. When I was an undergraduate almost 50 years ago in a small upstate New York women's college, I could study India in seven different departments: geography, religion, classics (where someone could do some Sanskrit), history, art history, anthropology or music. Why there was even someone on the faculty who was a key investigator

at Mohenjo Daro! Now in the large public university where I presently teach, in a state with a considerable Indian population, India exists exclusively in the English Department in the form of English-language authors of Indian extraction. Gone are the days of India specialists teaching India in various departments, gone are the days of Indian language instruction being available in large land-grant universities throughout the American Midwest. Gone are the days when an undergraduate can learn anything real about India in many large universities in the US. Gone are the days when an undergraduate might read *Sakuntala*. She has been replaced by Jhumpa Lahiri. Now, I like Jhumpa Lahiri as much as the next person does. But she does not teach me anything important about India. She teaches me about her experiences as a second-generation American of Indian descent. She is a good immigrant voice. She should not replace other Indian voices. She should not replace the classics of the Indian tradition. But she does and this is the sad story that I now will relate — how India went from being a topic of inquiry in itself to its present commodification in American universities today. To understand the place of Indian cultural products in the US today, we must first examine the role of identity studies in American academia.

In the late 70's, factions within the American university community began to view literature as an outmoded form of cultural capital belonging to the bourgeoisie.1 An important stage in this process of radicalization involved the rejection of the canon of dead white males in favor of what might be termed the cultural studies model. But, it soon became apparent that dismantling the literary canon often had less to do with installing a more immediate and less conservative hierarchical format and more to do with establishing a new authority, grounded in identifying with and marketing marginalized populations. In the case of American universities, these commodity populations were first packaged and marketed under the rubric of identity studies.

The 70s in the States also saw the emergence of Black Studies and Women's Studies programs, devised to represent the experience and cultural production of then underrepresented blacks and women in academia. One important thing to note is that these programs were usually staffed with African-Americans and women, respectively. The representation of underrepresented groups expanded over time to include other minorities (Hispanics, Native-American) and hyphenated ethnicities (Asian-Americans). Identity Studies was thus born as a discipline. It was subsequently institutionalized as multiculturalism (MC) and was supported by a theoretical superstructure devised to justify its inclusion. MC thus entered the curriculum in the United States as a bureaucratic structure purporting to foster minority rights. It claimed to open the canon and the university up to subalterns, exiles, and others. Ideally, it sought to facilitate canonical (i.e. dead white male authors) being supplanted in the curricula by authors from underrepresented groups (always writing in English). As a corollary benefit, dead-wood

white male professors would ideally be supplanted by women and minorities in the classroom. This latter goal succeeded in the hiring of a significant number of white women and privileged elites from Africa and Asia (model minorities). It succeeded to an incredibly lesser degree in the recruitment of traditional American minorities, such as Blacks and Hispanics. Nevertheless, MC claimed success in re-envisioning the world from a decolonizing and anti-racist perspective.

Although MC theoretically claimed to attack Euro-centrism, a number of scholars were not convinced. Some found it questionable that MC assumed that "certain people" might do well in academia studying themselves rather than studying cultures that were not their own "heritage", or working in fields where they were truly under-represented (such as the hard sciences). By encouraging traditional American minority students to study themselves, MC was seen by some as contributing to their further balkanization in American universities, a process that, since the inception of Affirmative Action in the 1970s, was well under way. Minorities could enter American2 academia, but were managed, that is, directed toward fields that showcased their ethnicity, so universities could use one minority placement to make two political statements: Universities could show their commitment both to diversity hiring as well as flaunt their promotion of minority studies.

Acknowledging difference was all that mattered. Actually learning about the foreign cultures from which these groups might spring or their languages was not necessary because studying their victimization (real and imagined) in American society took precedence. MC also took for granted that minority and hyphenated Americans should study themselves and that beneath their differences there were some underlying values that brought them together. As a theory of diversity, MC presupposed and required the notion of the assimilationist "common" culture and fostered a social order founded on the principle of unity in multiplicity3. The increased lack of interest in the world fostered by such a pedagogy, needless to say, fit well with the general dumbing down of American university curricula. It fed into the good old American exceptionalism and triumphalism.

What is little acknowledged by higher education management wonks is how the institutionalization of MC within US academia replicated that of the corporate-level structures, since universities are also corporations4. We can, therefore, compare multicultural educational practices to corporate diversity management initiatives that derive from the assumption that racially and ethnically diverse groups need to be controlled in ways to contain conflict and fortify power relations.5 While purportedly offering representation of neglected groups. MC just provided an illusion of liberal reform that did not, in fact, exist.

Postcolonialism (PC), like MC, also claimed to engage the Other. It shared with MC many of the same deficiencies and brought its own set of critical problems. PC seemed to be more concerned with the location of the theorist than the location of the term "postcoloniality", 6its a-historicity, and its universalizing deployments.7 Postcolonial theory never seemed to define what was actually being done with which body of works. No matter. Essentialism beset discussions of postcoloniality from its arrival on the critical scene in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and the cottage industry in the postcolonial theory that it spawned. As time went on, it seemed that no society could not be deemed postcolonial. The important thing to note is that postcolonial criticism (just like MC) also did not demand knowledge of languages beyond English, although French texts were sometimes included. So those classes on Indian languages taught in a number of large American universities, a course on Tamil taught to 3 students, could now be replaced by a class on the Indian short story taught in the English Department to 100 students. From the point of view of the administration (ofttimes made up of rather culturally deficient scientists), India was still taught, but now with a higher enrollment and more tuition money was coming into the coffers. That India *per se* was not being taught did not matter since (once again) representation was what counted, not the nature or logic of that representation.

The postcolonial archive differed from what might have been the canon in a more general literature course, where India might have been represented by excerpts from the Panchatantra or an episode from the *Mahabharata*. Now the canon dealing with India consisted of a handful of endlessly recycled articles by a small group of theorists and a limited body of English published texts, usually Kipling again and maybe one of Spivak's translations of Mahashweta Devi, as if these authors were totally representative of India or even its postcolonial situation. Vernacular texts that might not deal with postcolonial theory's focus on colonial oppression did not enter the discussion. The primary function of India in postcolonial analyses resided in critical theorizing. In fact, the critic's location and the master narrative of victimization (a fetish borrowed from MC) often totally eclipsed the national historical situation and exegetical context of any text analyzed. Meanwhile the postcolonial critic divided history into manageable and isolated segments, while at the same time arguing against the false homogenization of Orientalist projects.8 It did not matter if this Indian Other risked being indiscriminately leveled out among various competing Others.

These theories thus enabled individuals, who are truly cut off from any effective social action, yet buoyed by their security as academic professionals, to claim solidarity with the disenfranchised, rebrand themselves, and propagate the illusion of effective intervention in real time and in the real world. This alienation from real powerlessness (like the academic Marxist's guilt vis à vis the worker) can then be compensated for by a posture of powerlessness vis à vis

representation. The result of such a critical stance is that it allows a privileged class of academics the possibility of forging a wide-ranging identification with the marginalized Other. At work here was the age-old problem of the engaged intellectual and the pretense that academic criticism can function as a political act. It is a prime example of how critics attempt to displace "textual culture" with "activist culture," as Aijaz Ahmad presciently noted.9 Regardless of their own socio-economic status and privileges, the postcolonial critic (like the multicultural critic before him/her) speaks as/for minorities, their under-representation, and their victimization. They function, as Deepika Bahri has noted, as "victims in proxy".10 The problem was that Indians were not minorities in America; they were immigrants and their children, who might be largely ignorant of the parents' birth culture, were American enough to buy into the idea of studying themselves and to relish the exceptional status that this positionality afforded them.

So, India went from being studied for itself, its *bhasyas*, and its history; it now appears in US curricula under the rubrics of MC, PC and most recently WL, another project designed to include non-Western literatures and taught by scholars trained primarily in English Literature. These rebrandings happened much to the amazement of comparatists among us who worked in Asian languages and literatures all along. In this format, the West still interprets the rest. The above cited pedagogies, all claiming to be bringing the literatures and cultural productions from the margins to the center, really just seem to allow critics from the center and scholars of English-language literatures (both in the East and West) to co-opt the margins.

The practical reason for all this packaging of the Indian Other, whether it be a newly-minted WL departments, or Multicultural and Postcolonial Studies programs, or even the even newer Transnational Literature programs, is obvious: all these "specializations" are relatively easy. They do not involve in-depth knowledge of India or demand learning Indian languages, skills that have fallen by the wayside among American students. The inability to train students in languages and literatures derives from a decline in learning and standards dating from the 60s. The pedagogical response to these lower standards is to universalize them.11 Under these pedagogies, the foreign Other, India in this instance, can preserve its own heritage as long as that heritage speaks English,12 as Vijay Prashad has noted. Such pedagogies also feed American isolationism. On an intellectual level, they vitiate the need in a humanistic training to seek to engage alterity or to practice hermeneutical inquiry. You can engage the Other on the cheap; you do not risk having to have any of your ways of thinking challenged.

It offers in exchange a far more prosaic vision of the world. Studying India in this format confirms the hegemon status usually accorded to English departments in American universities. Since they now teach the world in translation and thus have the first say in how the humanities curriculum should be organized. They appropriate authors and works from other literatures and

disciplines rather than defer to the general expertise of other scholars. By lifting subjects and authors from other fields in which they are not themselves experts (philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, etc.), English departments shove aside experts and cultural theory in this process of colonization.

A substantive course on India can now be replaced with fad courses (Dalit Cinema, for example) and these can be taught by a peon class of under-educated graduate students. Such reduction in quality and competence plays into the hands of lazy administrators who desire to promote themselves by cutting costs and dealing exclusively with cheaper faculty. With such curricula in place, administrators can placate the identity politics of their institutions without doing anything substantive to combat persistent racial and gender inequities. English professors and English departments thus become the custodians of "international" "cross-cultural" and "worldly" research and teaching.

In *Otherwise Occupied*, I made the case that all these academic theories and pedagogies of the Other were constructed and are used in the United States to undermine Affirmative Action by influencing institutional policies for recruitment. Theoretical constructions of the Other proliferated in direct proportion to the failure of statistical evidence to support the success claims of institutional diversity. To once again quote Aijaz Ahmad13, under the guise of studying colonialisms of the past we facilitate imperialisms of the present. American WL claims to be a democratizing pedagogy because it does not demand the learning foreign languages. So, as a first generation American of Hispanic descent, I can and have been accused of being an elitist because I studied Sanskrit. But I ask you, what is more exclusionary and elitist than practicing a brand of criticism that claims to champion a voiceless and under-represented world but does so only in the English language by people trained in English literature? Since when does the imposition of Western ways of thinking on the non-Western world make us non-elite and democratic? It does not. But what I find even more astonishing is how this process of the American corporate university's commodification of India has been wonderfully abetted by the Indian diasporic community.

I thank my lucky stars that, as a student, I transitioned from the History of Religions to Comparative Literature which has been a safe haven for me for the past 30 years since it has not been embroiled in the kerfluffle that have beset the practice of Indology in the United States. Why, I have been able to sail safely through the shoals of the politization of Religious Studies, even as one of "Wendy's children" (the reference here is to the perceived problems posed by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's work, her perceived negative depiction of things Indian, and the perceived deleterious effect perpetuated on the world by her students) because I taught Comparative Literature. In recent decades, the middle-class professional Indian diaspora in the

US and the Sangh Parivar have been quite active in processing their "anxieties and concerns about how India is presented within American education."14 The Indian diaspora in the US, the most educated immigrant community in the history of US immigration and the ethnic group that pays the highest percentage of taxes, has militated to exert supervision over the field of Indian Studies. There have been demands from diaspora groups in the US that call for a "knowledgeable diaspora evaluation and monitoring committee to oversee what goes on in universities courses and departments that teach India."15 It is asserted that such oversight should not be left up to the oversight of the universities or American-based scholars, but should be assessed by diaspora communities. In short, the Indian diaspora in the US has been calling for the privileged ownership of knowledge about India and its dissemination. It presupposes that "scholars should work for the diaspora and submit their research in the discipline to the diaspora's interests in presenting India as a commodity to the American public."16

Amartya Sen has described this situation as an attempt to "miniaturize the broad idea of a large India – proud of its heterodox past and its pluralist present – and to replace it by the stamp of a small India, bundled around a drastically downsized vision of Hinduism."17 From the ideological perspective, he outlines a process very much like what I have just described from a pedagogical perspective. Both the commodification of India in literature pedagogy on US campuses and the militancy of the diaspora with regard to the teaching of Indian religions seek to achieve the same end: the levelling out, simplification, and diminishing of what we learn about India. Both "reform" projects stem from a political agenda: In the case of post-structural literary pedagogy, we find a cooptation of the Indian Other under the guise of inclusion; in the diaspora militancy we have the installation of a specifically sanctioned version of India, to the exclusion/erasure of the other Indias. The stakes are high. Publishers are wary of publishing books that challenge or problematize this vision of India, out of fear of having their offices vandalized, their books shredded, and their authors threatened. The Kurukshetra has shifted its location and the battlefield has even moved to California, where concerted attempts were made to revise history textbooks published and taught in America, demanding the excision of any mention of caste, Untouchability, or the condition of women in India.

Where does this scenario place a text such as *Sakuntala*? In a world literature class, India is represented either by Kipling's *Kim* (not the real India, of course, but the India through the lens of English literature) or Jhumpa Lahiri, the India of the immigrant's *imaginaire*, or even worse, India is represented by the "pity porn" of books such as Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* or more recently, Megha Majumdar's *A Burning*. I might teach the *Ramayana* in a class on comparative epic, but is it worth the risk of being subjected to pressure by my students (or their parents) not to teach it as literature but rather as an historical text to be understood literally? Placing the *Ramayana* in its historical context or teaching it as a work of fiction created by human authors

living at various times and showing how the human imagination can transform an historical period into something else might cause me real problems in the fragile university environment in which we now live in the States. Teaching a literary text as revealing history rather than as history can have grave consequences. Maybe, I will not teach *Ramayana* and just have the students read the *Iliad,* the *Aeneid*, or the*Odyssey*? The ability of scholars who have studied something to be allowed to teach their expertise may well be a luxury of the past. With identity politics, the positionality of the interpreter now counts more than expertise. Being the child of Indian immigrants, the grandchild of Indian immigrants, or even the white English professor dating or married to an Indian immigrant rebrands one as an expert or an Indologist! This is the same situation of positionality, nurtured by MC and postcolonial criticism, where being a member of a given group affords one the right to claim some genetically-based expertise. This is racist, of course, but no one cares. University identity politics combines with a concerted effort on the part of the diaspora community to dictate what one studies about India, who gets to teach India, and what one needs to teach, certainly not the wrong India. There is pressure on the part of the diaspora community to teach India from a faith-based perspective, clearly not the mission of a liberal education. Last week, in my undergraduate course on the Self, a course that will explore St Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau, Nabokov alongside the *Rig Veda*, the Upanishads, the *Gita* and Buddhist scripture, I found myself teaching the Purusha sukta and comparing it to other myths of creation. I am always careful regarding religious sensibilities when I read religious texts as literature. But this year, for the first time, the discussion of Purusha sukta gave me pause. But I might be just as cautious were I to introduce students to Sanskrit *kavya*, discuss love poetry, or even teach *Sakuntala*. Being seen to disrespect Hinduism by teaching Indian classical literature, given my very positionality, or being accused of "sexualizing" Sanskrit poetry is not something I wish to bring upon myself. So, under such conditions, what can be the fate of teaching the literary classics of the Indian tradition in the American Academy? If we cannot critically approach Sanskrit texts but only celebrate them as we do when we equate them with identity or heritage, then these texts become fossilized objects, rather than living texts for reading, discussion, and delectation.

Notes:

1. Excerpts of this analysis of MC, PC and WL will appear in "Comparative Literature in the US: Can this marriage be Saved?" In Eugene Eoyang, Gang Zhou, and Jonathan Hart Comparative Literature Around the World: Global Practice*. Paris:Champion, 2021*, pp. 23-43.

2. Throughout this essay, I use the term "American" to denote the US experience of these trends.

3. Epiphanio San Juan, *Hegemony and Strategies of Transgression: Essays in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 223.

4. Wahneema Lubiano, “Like Being Mugged by a Metaphor: Multiculturalism and State Narratives”, in Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

5. In fact, David Rieff has argued, the treasured catchphrases of multiculturalism – “cultural diversity”, “differences”, the need to “do away with boundaries” – resemble the stock phrases of the modern corporation: “product diversification”, “the global world”, and the “boundary-less company”, Russell Jacoby, “The Myth of Multiculturalism”, *New Left Review*, vol. 208, 1994, p. 123.

6. Its practitioners never formed a consensus as to what constituted reading a text from a postcolonial perspective or what differentiated a postcolonial text from a non-postcolonial text.

7. Ella Shohat, “Notes on the Post-Colonial,” in *Social Text*, vol. 31/32, 1992, p. 99.

8. Deepika Bahri, “Once More with Feeling: What is Postcolonialism?”, in *Ariel*, vol. 26, 1995, p. 52.

9. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London, Verso, 1992, p. 1.

10. Deepika Bahri, “Once More with Feeling: What is Postcolonialism?”, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

11. Personal communication with Gerald Gillespie, Emeritus Professor of Comparative Literature at Stanford University.

12. Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 112.

13. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London, Verso, 1992, p. 222.

14. See Paul B. Courtright “Speaking about, for, to, Against, and with Hindus: Scholars and Practitioners in the Diasporic Postcolonial Moment” in Wendy Doniger and Martha C Nussbaum*, Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right*. New York: Oxford 2015, p. 300.

15. Rajiv Malhotra, “Does South Asian Studies Understand India?” htip://rediii.comllnews/2003/dec08rajiv.htm. Accessed Nov 7, 2005, cited in Wendy Doniger, “The Fight for the History of Hinduism in the Academy” in Doniger and Nussbaum, p. 311.

16. Courtright, *op. cit*., p.303.

17. Amartya Sen, The Argumentative Indian: Writing on Indian History, Culture and Identity, Gordonsville FSG, 2005, p. 72, cited in Doniger, *o*p. cit*., p. 311* .

विद्रोह की कहानी

माधुरी आडवाणी (कहानी) और गोपा त्रिवेदी (चित्रण)

समीरा की कढ़ाई लगातार चालू थी। कई दिन, कई रात बीत चुके थे कढ़ाई करते पर समीरा ज़रा भी नहीं रुकी थी। सोते समय भी उसे कढ़ाई का खयाल आता और वो जाग जाती। सुबह के कोहरे मे मैं उसके घर जा पहुंची। उसने मेरे फ़ोन का और मैसेज का कोई जवाब नहीं दिया था।

“अरे समीरा, समीरा दरवाज़ा खोलो।”

हाथ मे चाय का कप थामे समीरा दरवाज़े के पीछे से मुझे देखने लगी।

“ऐसे क्या देख रही हो? चोर नहीं हूँ।” मैंने मुस्कुराकर कहा।

“मालूम है| डर लग रहा था कि कहीं कोई पुलिस ना हो।” वो सोफे पर बैठकर बोली।

“कैसी बातें कर रही हो? तुम्हा रे घर पुलिस क्यों आएगी ? और पुलिस से ड़रना कैसा ?” मैने उसके पास बैठकर कहा।

कई दिनों से शायद वो सोई नहीं होगी| उसकी आँखों के नीचे काले गड्ढे ऐसे फैल रहे थे, मानो हँसते हुए चेहरे पे कि सी ने सचमुच काले बादल चिपका दिये हों।

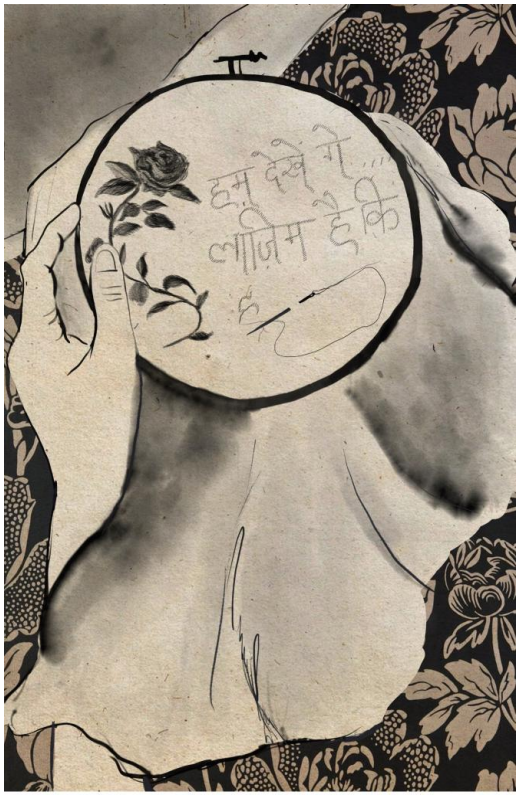
“पुलिस, डर... क्या बोल रही हो समीरा? क्या हो गया है तुम्हें? ना फ़ोन उठाती हो, ना मैसेज का जवाब| क्या चल रहा है तुम्हारे साथ?” मैं बोली।

“क्या चल रहा है? तुम्हें क्या हो गया है? कुछ दिख नहीं रहा या अंधी होने का नाटक कर रही हो? यह अंधापन प्रीवि लेज है तुम्हारा| तुम्हें फरक नहीं पड़ता इसका मतलब यह नहीं की चुपचाप बैठे रहो|” समीरा ने चिल्ला कर कहा।

उसकी बातें मुझे चुभ रही थी। कुछ मिनटों तक उसके आज़ादी के नारों वाले रूम मे चुप्पी छायी रही।

“I am sorry Pihu! पर मैं बहोत गुस्सा हूँ, बहोत ज़्यादा! रोज़ सुबह उठकर एक नयी न्यूज़! कभी ट्रांसजेन्डर बिल, कभी Citizenship Amendment बिल! बिल बना बनाकर ये हमको चूहों की तरह इन बिलों मे डाल रहे हैं।” समीरा ने इस बार थोड़ा pun का इस्तेमाल किया पर उसमे गुस्सा था, डर था, चिंता थी और साथ ही एक जोश भी।

समीरा काले फूल और लाल पत्तियों के बीच इक़बाल बानो की गायी हुई फ़ैज़ अहमद फ़ैज़ की नज़्म “हम देखेंगे” के शब्दों को काढ रही थी| सूई और धागे का काम ज़ोरो -शोरों से चालू था। और हम देखेंगे की आवाज़ भी उतनी ही जोर से गुंज रही थी।



“हम देखेंगे, लाज़िम है कि हम भी देखेंगे।

वो दिन कि जि सका वादा है...”

इसी आवाज़ के बीच मैंने उससे पुछा –

“यह कढ़ाई जो तुम बना रही हो, और यह गीत जो तुम गा रही हो, उससे क्या हो जाएगा? मतलब जो कानून द्वारा लिखा लिया गया है, वो तुम्हारी कढाई और गीत से क्या बदल देगा?”

“पिहू , कभी-कभी ना मुझे तुम्हारे सवालों पे हँसी आती है| पर ये ही तो गलती है – ऐसे सवालों को हँसकर टाल देना। ये ही तो गलती है कि जिसे नहीं पता उसे बताने की कोशिश भी ना करना। तो चलो इस बार तुम्हें बतलाती हूँ इस कविता के बारे मे जो विरोध की कविता है, आक्रोश की कविता है।” समीरा बोली।

समीरा की खिड़की के पास कागज के बने पंछी सर्दियों की हवा मे झूला खा रहे थे| समीरा ने एक पंछी को खोलकर उसमें लिखी दुष्यन्त कुमार की कविता “चिथड़े मे हिंदुस्तान” मुझे सुनाई।

“कल नुमाइश में मिला वो चीथड़े पहने हुए,

मैंने पूछा नाम तो बोला कि हिंदुस्तान है।

मुझमें रहते हैं करोड़ों लोग चुप कैसे रहूँ,

हर ग़ज़ल अब सल्तनत के नाम एक बयान है।”

“कुछ समझी तुम पिहू ?” समीरा मुझे बोली।

“हाँ समझी| हर ग़ज़ल, हर कविता, हर गीत हवा मे थोड़े ही बनती है| वो तो हमारे आस-पास हो रही घटनाओं का बयान है|” मैंने मन मे उमड़ रहे कई विचारों को कुछ शब्दों मे डालकर कहा।

“अच्छा अब ज़रा बताओ कि आज वो कौन सी लोकतांत्रिक जगहें हैं जहाँ पे इस तरह के गीत, कविता और ग़ज़लें तेज़ रफ़्तार से और बड़ी तादात मे आगे बढ़ते हैं?” समीरा ने पूछा।

“Of course, सोशियल मीडिया और इंटरनेट पे|” मैंने फ़ौरन जवाब दिया।

“समझदार हो तुम पिहू। कहने की ज़रुरत नहीं है कि क्यों कश्मीर और आसाम में रातों-रात इंटरनेट बंद कर दिया गया| State को डर लगता है कि सच बाहर आ जाएगा, कि ये युवा पीढ़ी हर चीज़ डॉक्यूमेंट करके अपनी सोशियल मीडिया की walls पे रख देगी।”

तब तक एक और पंछी खुल चुका था जि समें दुष्यंत कुमार के कुछ और शब्द सुनाई दिये –

“सिर्फ हंगामा खड़ा करना मेरा मकसद नहीं,

सारी कोशिश है कि ये सूरत बदलनी चाहिए।

मेरे सीने में नहीं तो तेरे सीने में सही,

हो कहीं भी आग, लेकिन आग जलनी चाहिए।”

हवा कुछ तेज़ी से चलने लगी थी, मानो उसने भी रुख बदलने का दढ़ निश्चय कर लिया हो। खिड़कियां दीवारों से टकराने लगी थी और घर के दरवाज़े की कुंडी हवा मे खुल चुकी थी।

दरवाज़ा खुलते ही एक शक्स दिखा। ढीला पायजामा और उसपे कुर्ता पहनकर वो समीरा की खिड़की की तरफ़ देख रहा था| दरवाजा खट-खटाकर वह बोला –

“आपकी विरोध की कविता के शब्द बाहर तक सुनाई दे रहे थे। मेरे पास भी एक कविता है जो सुनाना चाहता हूँ| अंदर आ जाऊं ?”

“जी, ज़रूर।” समीरा ने चाय बनाते हुए कहा।

तीन कप चाय के बीच मैंने उससे पुछा, “अरे आपने अपना नाम नहीं बताया।”

चाय के कप को मेज पे टिकाकर, अपनी डायरी के पन्ने पलटाकर वो बोला, “मैं कौन हूँ, उसी का पर्चा है ये कविता”

– ‘लिख लो मुझे’, वही सुनाता हूँ –

“लिखो,

मैं हिन्दुस्तानी हूँ.

आगे लिखो,

मेरा नाम अजमल है.

लिखो,

मैं हिन्दुस्तानी हूँ.

मेरे बाप-दादाओं ने

यहाँ की ज़मीन सींची है

इसी में जिए

इसी में दफ़्न हैं वो.

उनकी जड़ें नारियल और पीपल से भी गहरी जाती हैं

इस ज़मीन में.

हाँ वो कभी ज़मींदार नहीं थे

बस मज़दूर थे

पर जड़ तो हर पौधे की होती है

छोटा हो या बड़ा

ये धरती ही उनकी जड़ है

ये धरती ही उनकी महक है

ये धरती ही उनकी चमड़ी है

काग़ज़-पत्तर दिखाएँ?"

कुछ पल की चुप्पी को तोडते हुए मैंने पुछा – "क्या इतना बुरा है NRC और CAA तुम्हा रे लिए?"

"मेरे लिए?" उसने मेरी तरफ देखकर कहा।

"ये हम सबके लिए गलत है| संवि धान से सेक्यू लर "secular" को काटकर धर्म के नाम पे सि टीजनशि प देने की बात हो रही है रिफ्यूजीस को Citizenship Amendment Act में| और National Register of Citizen में दस्ता वेज़ के द्वारा साबित करो कि आप भारतीय हो| अरे कौनसे दस्तावेज़ और कागज़ात? कितने गरीबों के पास हैं यह कागज़ात? कि तनी महि ला, मजदूर, किसान, आदिवासि यों, बेघर, आपदा से मारे गए लोगो के पास है यह कागज़ात? देश की गिरती आर्थिक व्यवस्था में अब करोड़ों रूपये लगाये जाएंगे नागरिकता साबित करने के लिए? किसका राज्य बन रहा है ये? इंटरनेट बंद कर देना, छात्रों पर वार करना, कौन सा युद्ध है ये?" वो बोला।

"मैं बताना चाहूँगी..." दरवाज़े पर एक और आवाज़ सुनाई दी| समीरा की दोस्त सम्पदा प्रोटेस्ट से लौटी थी। अजमल के पास बैठकर उसने अपना फ़ोन निकाला और जसिंता केरकेट्टा की कविता "सेना का रुख किधर है" सुनाई –

"युद्ध का दौर खत्म हो गया

अब सीमा की सेना का रुख़

अपने ही गांव, जंगल, पहाड़

और कॉलेज के छात्रों की ओर है

कौन साध रहा है अब

चिड़ियों की आंख पर निशाना ?

इस समय ख़तरनाक है सवाल करना

और जो हो रहा है उस पर बुरा मान जाना

क्योंकि संगीनों का पहला काम है

सवाल करती जीभ पर निशाना लगाना

खत्म हो रही है उनकी

बातें करने और सुनने की परंपरा

अब सेना की दक्षता का मतलब है

गांव और जंगल पर गोलियां चलाना

और सवाल पूछते वि द्यार्थि यों पर लाठि यां बरसाना...”

सम्पदा के आँसू उसके फ़ोन पे जा गिरे इसी कविता की ये लाइनें सुनकर। वो बोली, “छात्रों को लाठी से मारा जा रहा है, उनपे हमले हो रहे हैं और अभी भी हम शांत बेठे हैं।”

“पर ये छात्र क्यों लड़ रहे हैं?” मैने पुछा| आज मैं अपने सारे सवालो का जवाब चाहती थी। कभी भी विरोध ना करने वाली अचानक इस भीड़ मे कैसे जुड़ जाये, बिना कुछ समझे? समझना ज़रूरी था।

सम्पदा अपने चश्मे को साफ करते हूए बोली... “क्योंकि वे गुलाबी रंग का चश्मा नहीं पहने हुए हैं। संविधान का प्रीएम्बल याद है उन्हें, पढे-लिखे हैं यह छात्र। बाकी रोज़ काम पे जाना और शाम को लौट आना ही आपकी पढ़ाई लिखाई का बयान नहीं है।”

वो इंटरनेट पर एक प्रोफेसर का विडियो दिखाने लगी जो सड़कों पर अपने छात्रों के साथ संविधान का प्रीएम्बल दोहरा रही थी। अगला विडियो अजमल ने दिखाया। शिलॉन्ग के एक रैपर ने विरोध के संगीत का रैप बनाया था। लोग उठ रहे हैं, जाग रहे हैं। सबके फ़ोन पे एक आवाज़ है। ये कहानियां सड़कों के दृश्य दिखा रही हैं। लोग सड़कों पर हैं अपनी आवाज़ों के साथ।

“इन्कलाब ज़िन्दाबाद

इन्कलाब ज़िन्दाबाद जाग उठा है।

लाठी के बीच

टीअर गैस के बीच

बन्दूक और बिल के बीच- इन्कलाब ज़िन्दाबाद

इन्कलाब ज़िन्दाबाद, इन्कलाब ज़िन्दाबाद।”

दरवाज़े पे एक और आवाज़ सुनाई दी — चिराग के फ़ोन पे मलयालम में देश भक्ति गीत बज रहा था जिसके शब्द कुछ ऐसे थे –

“बि ना डर के चलो, चलो मेरे साथ।

बाज की तेज़ी से चलो मेरे साथ।

चलो मेरे साथ

चलो मेरे साथ

बहादुर लोगो, चलो मेरे साथ।

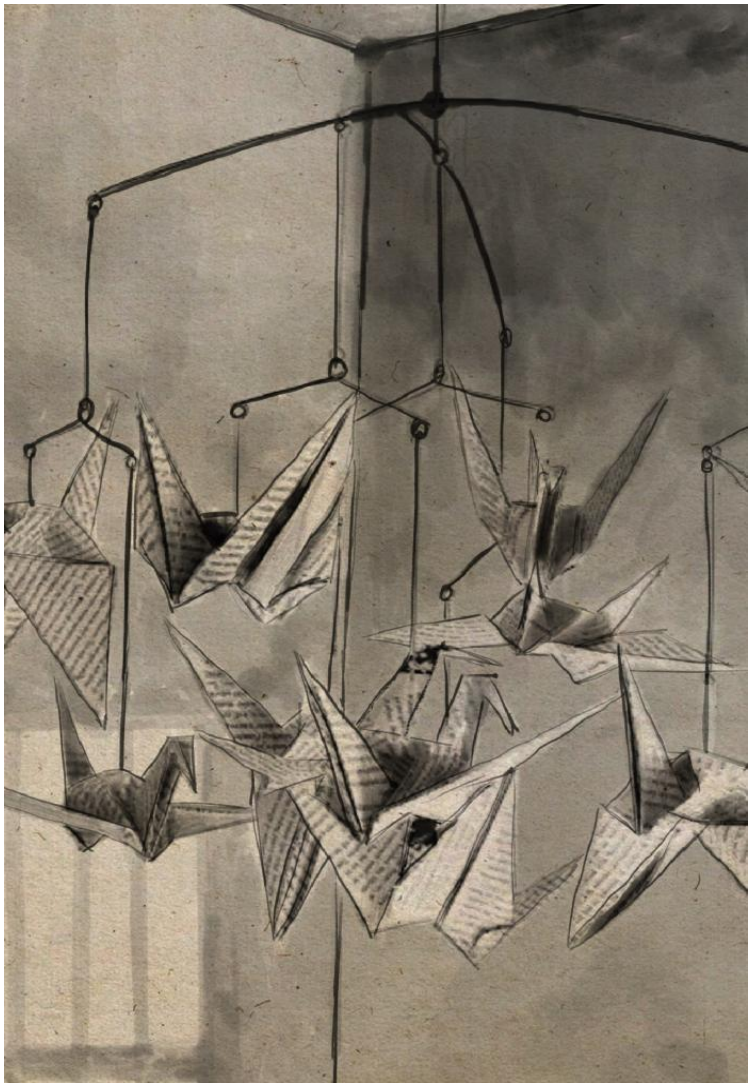
….”

बाहर एक जुलूस निकला। सम्पदा उठ खड़ी हुई और उस जुलूस के साथ नारे लगाती हुई बाहर चली गयी । चिराग अभी भी दरवाज़े पे अपनी विरोध की कविता के शब्द सुना रहा था। अब अजमल भी उठ खड़ा हुआ था। एक हाथ में अपनी डायरी लिये उसने भी नारे लगाने शुरू किये- “अभी भी जिसका खून ना खौला, खून नही वो पानी है!”

उस आज़ादी के रूम मे चिराग की आवाज़ मेरे और समीरा के कानो मे गूंज रही थी।

समीरा उठ खड़ी हुई । उसकी कढ़ाई जमीन पर गिर गई।

“समीरा बाहर जाना ख़तरनाक होगा। मम्मी पापा से क्या कहेंगे? अगर ज़िंदा ही नहीं रहे तो क्या लड़ेंगे?” मैंने उसे कहा। समीरा ने बिना कोई जवाब दिये, खिड़की के पास से तीसरे पँछी को खोला।



उसमें पाश की कविता “सबसे खतरनाक” थी –

“मेहनत की लूट सबसे ख़तरनाक नहीं होती

पुलिस की मार सबसे ख़तरनाक नहीं होती

ग़द्दारी और लोभ की मुट्ठी सबसे ख़तरनाक नहीं होती

बैठे-बि ठाए पकड़े जाना – बुरा तो है

सहमी-सी चुप में जकड़े जाना – बुरा तो है

सबसे ख़तरनाक नहीं होता

सबसे ख़तरनाक होता है

मुर्दा शांति से भर जाना

न होना तड़प ना सब कुछ सहन कर जाना

घर से नि कलना काम पर

और काम से लौटकर घर आना

सबसे ख़तरनाक होता है

हमारे सपनों का मर जाना”

समीरा पंछी के साथ बाहर उड़ चुकी थी। कुछ क्षणों तक खिड़की के बाहर जुलूस को निहारती हुई मैं भी दरवाज़ा खोलकर बाहर निकल पड़ी। क्योंकि सबसे ख़तरनाक तो घर में बैठना था।

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Drawing Resistance is a Hindi/English zine published and co-edited by Vidyun Sabhaney, Shefalee Jain, Shivangi Singh and Lokesh Khodke. It brings together visual art, poetry, short stories, essays, reports, and conversations reflecting on the current socio-political climate.

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Lal Singh Dil (1943-2007) was born into a dalit family in Ludhiana district. He was part of the Naxalite movement and was arrested by the police. His first book of poetry is *Bahut Sare Suraj* (Many Suns), published in 1971. He then wrote his autobiography *Dastan*. His poems have been translated into Hindi, Urdu and English. A selection of his translations and memoirs, *Poet of the Revolution*, was published in English in 2012.

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Riyas Komu was born in 1971 in Kerala, and moved to Mumbai in 1992 to study literature. Dropping out during his final year, Komu eventually obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Fine Art from the Sir J. J. School of Art in 1997 and 1999 respectively. The artist's oeuvre, spanning several different media and genres, is particularly noted for its strong political overtones. His paintings, to put it in his own words, carry a protest symbol one way or the other.

Originally from Ahmedabad, Gujarat, **Riyaz Latif** is currently a professor at FLAME University in Pune. He emerged as a significant voice in Urdu poetry during the last decade of the twentieth century, and his poems have been published in reputed Urdu literary journals of India & Pakistan. Along with two collections of Urdu poetry, *Hindasa Be-Khwaab Raton Ka* (2006) and *Adam Taraash* (2016), as well as a book of translations into Urdu from European poetry, titled *Mera Khoya Awazah* (2014), he has published a number of articles, and has translated Urdu fiction and poetry into English.

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Saba Hasan is a multidisciplinary artist. She has worked on book installations, photographs, paintings, videos and sound since 1998. Her work was showcased at the 55th Venice Biennale at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, as part of the Imago Mundi Collection (2013). She also received the Raza National Award for painting in 2005.

Salim Yusufji was a schoolteacher for fifteen years. He has previously edited *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*, a selection of reminiscences by people in close proximity to B R Ambedkar, and co-edited *Battling for India: A Citizen's Reader*.

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Vaasanthi is an award winning Tamil writer. She writes in English too and her books include *Amma: Jayalalithaa's Journey from Movie Star to Political Queen* [Juggernaut], *Cut-Outs, Caste and Cine Stars* [Penguin], *The Lone Empress* [Penguin], and *Karunanidhi: The Definitive Biography* [Juggernaut]. She was also the editor of the Tamil edition of India Today for nearly ten years.

Varis Alavi (1928-2014) was a literary critic based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. He penned more than half a dozen collections of critical writings in Urdu; writings to which he brought both erudition, an acerbic wit and compassion—evident in the essay above. Widely read in English literature, Gujarati and Urdu, he was Professor and head of the English department at St. Xavier's College Ahmedabad till his retirement.

Yousuf Saeed is an independent filmmaker, writer and designer based in Delhi. Yousuf is among the founders of Tasveer Ghar and maintains the design and upkeep of the website.

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19. You hereby indemnify *Guftugu* and undertake to keep *Guftugu* indemnified against any and all losses, damages, costs, liabilities and expenses (including without limitation legal expenses and any amounts paid by *Guftugu* to a third party in settlement of a claim or dispute on the advice of *Guftugu*'s legal advisers) incurred or suffered by *Guftugu* arising out of any breach by you of any provision of these Terms and Conditions (or other illicit or unlawful use of this website), or arising out of any claim that you have breached any provision of these terms and conditions.

20. This website and the Terms and Conditions are governed by and are to be construed and interpreted in accordance with the laws of India.

21. In the event of any dispute arising out of the use of this Website or interpretation of these Terms and Conditions, the Parties shall attempt to mutually resolve the matter through negotiations. In the event no resolution is possible, the Parties shall proceed to arbitration, before a single arbitrator, to be appointed by *Guftugu*. *Guftugu* shall make the appointment of the sole arbitrator within two weeks of notice of the failure of negotiations (which maybe given by either party). The decision of the sole arbitrator shall be final and binding on the parties. The arbitral seat shall be in Delhi and the Indian law, as applicable, shall govern proceedings.

22. The Courts at New Delhi, India shall have exclusive jurisdiction to adjudicate any dispute arising under, out of or in connection with these Terms and Conditions or any usage of the *Guftugu* website.

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