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Editorial

Osmosis: Writing Occasionally

Mystic Wisdom comes with a prize tag
Of pain; the melting pot of memory
Scorches. Translation is redemption. No text
Is smug as a stone, lapped in its culture.
Paper flower on the wind of breath,
The Ramayana travelled further than Rama.
Now, more than ever,
The market forces a green osmosis-
Ancient dynamics of
Self and other.

Can the Dalit speak and be - Red?
Nora speaks, even if three sisters can't reply.
Be consoled; oil, sand and Sheikh
Can't stop Sultana who spews
Three novels and a boy.
Only connect! The city of the Djinn
Is just mouse clicks
Away.

You need to travel
To find out where
Home is;

If heartache of love
Is more than
Heart attack –

Fear in a handful
Of sand -
The Mummy

Awaits.

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Bama's Sangati as a Translated Text

“Translation involves the transfer of meaning contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs through competent use of dictionary and grammar, the process involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria also.” (Bassnett 2004: 21). This analysis of Bama's novel Sangati takes into consideration both the linguistic and the extra-linguistic criteria of translation and examines the purpose of translation and the problems faced in the process of translation.

Meenakshi Mukherjee says ‘The act of translation is voluntary because the material is chosen by the translator, urged by the compelling desire to recreate.’ (Das 2005: 6). The Dalit dialect used by the author is in keeping with the intention of the book which is to awaken Dalits and help them realize their worth and power. This semantic aspect of the book, called “invariant core” by Popovic (Bassnett 2005: 8) has its place in the translation too, which can be seen as a means to create an awareness of Dalit life and culture. The English version can provide a window into Dalit life, not only for the huge majority of people who have no knowledge of Tamil but also for the so called privileged classes within the Tamil community who are either unaware or oblivious of the existence of a unique Dalit culture and language which cannot be dismissed as an unimportant version of mainstream Tamil.

The English version of Sangati may also help Dalits, especially women, form a collective identity with other underprivileged classes of the world (like the women of Iran for instance). The epics were translated from Sanskrit to the local languages in order to make the masses ‘understand’. Translating the dialect of the Dalits into the language of power of this century – English, can be seen as a way of writing back and demanding of higher castes that they ‘try and understand’. The version of English employed in the translated text can be regarded as an indirect contribution of Dalit Tamil society towards the establishment of Englishes rather than English.

Andre Lefevere and Lawrence Venutti state that translation is not a mirror- like, faithful reflection of the source language text, but more of refraction (Bassnett 2004: 8). In the process of decoding the source language text, a new re-coding takes place. Therefore the act of comparing the “original” with the translation and judging its value based on how much of the source language text it has, is unjust. “The best translation is one that does not read like a translation at all. That is perhaps the paradox of translation. It is replete with the excitement and joy of a voyage of discovery normally associated with an original work” (Das 2005: 58). Those who have read the translation before reading the Tamil version will recognize that Lakshmi Holmstrom's work fulfils this demand.

No two languages express the same social reality, consequently, there are always problems in translating aspects of culture. "Choice" is an inherent part of translation. For instance the title 'Sangati' can mean 'news', 'local gossip', happenings' etc, apart from the meaning chosen - 'events'. The term can refer to both serious and light subjects. All the meanings of the word 'sangati', are relevant to the text. This example indicates how the role of the translator is not to merely replace words in one language with their equivalents in the target language. It involves choice between various similar words and compromises that have to be made at times, as in the case above.

In any language, some words have a culturally specific connotation which will not have a linguistic equivalent when translated into a different language. Sammuga Kezhavi says, "See how she is trying to needle me?"(2006: 39). But the Tamil text says, "Embuttu lakkalunu (nakkal) paathiyaa avalukku?"(1994: 43). A Tamil speaker knows 'needling' someone is not the same as "nakkal". The situation is made more complex when some words in the source language have multiple meanings. In the novel, the word "*paavi*" is used to mean 'poor fool', 'wicked one' etc., according to the situation. The sensitivity of the translator towards these situation-bound meanings becomes critical.

The translation manages to set the slang apart, as unique and different from mainstream Tamil, as was intended in the source language text. The constant shift in the scenes and the way women's speech jumps constantly from subject to subject in the novel is conveyed by having sub-divisions within each chapter to indicate shifts. The author has innovatively employed unique sentence constructions to re-create the colloquial language of the Dalits. Rather than saying, 'Patti has very clear eyesight', the narrator says "She had very clear eyesight, patti".(2006: 5) The narrator's mother says, "Her father won't allow her to stop off now."(2006: 9). Though these are not grammatically correct, it creates the effect created by the source language text.

Sometimes, when translating from the source language to a target language, certain explanations or variations may be essential. For instance, the account of the celebrations that accompany the 'coming of age' of a girl includes a description of how sarees are put up "like a curtain"(2006: 15). In order to bring out the meaning more clearly, a sentence in the source language is sometimes split into two in the translation or vice versa. For example, the line "*Engamma adi konnu poduvaa*"(1994: 83) is translated as "my mother will kill me, she will beat me so hard" (2006: 71) because the English phrase "beat to death" has a literal meaning, unlike the Tamil.

Expressions that are intertwined with everyday social practices can be re-created in the target language at times. For example, the narrator has not yet been 'married off', so Holmstrom has "everyone will tittle-tattle about it"(2006: 9). This is a very intelligent

translation of "*naalu peaer naalu vidhamaa pesamaatanga?*"(1994: 9). But often, such expressions are a major source of "cultural untranslatability." The Tamil text has a casual phrase, "*Varattumaa tha?*"(1994: 126), very common in the everyday life of any Tamilian. The expression rises out of the belief that it is inauspicious to say "I am going" or "*naan poren.*" This was replaced by something which can loosely be translated to mean "We will see/meet later." But it cannot mean what Holmstrom gives: "I will see you, wont I?" (2006: 104). One needs to be cautious while traversing the dangerous waters of translating from one culture to another.

In order to bring out the colloquial style adopted in the source language text and to differentiate it from mainstream Tamil, Holmstrong uses transliteration followed by an explanation in English. This retains the music of the Tamil words, eg. "...named him Kaaturasa, king of fields" (2006: 6); "Aunt, my periyamma" (2006: 4); "Chavadi, community center"(2006: 62).

The rhythm of Tamil is captured also through translations like "Water geeter."(2006: 6). Transliteration of a kind unique to India can also be seen in lines like, "*Oru tayathula kadumaiyaana panjam ...*"(1994: 3). The English word 'time' has been assimilated into the local language. The phrase 'mike set' derived from English at the outset is translated as 'loudspeaker' in the target language text. It is clear that the divide between English, Tamil and 'englishes' needs to be identified and more importantly, tackled in translation.

In the case of the translation of culture specific idioms, the translator ideally looks at the function of the idiom rather than its literal meaning and tries to find an equivalent in the target language. The novel opens with, "If the third is a girl to behold, your courtyard will fill with gold."(2006: 3) which is a translation of the saying, "*Moonaavadhu ponnu, muththamellaam ponnu*"(1994: 1). The translation conveys both meaning and rhythm though it is not a word-to-word translation. Sometimes the translator replaces a proverb in the source language with one in the target language based on the principle of equivalent effect (i.e. the effect created on the reader in the source language should be recreated with readers in the target language.) The phrase, "*adikkoru dharam ammaavaasaikku orudharam*" (1994: 39) has been translated accurately, as "once in a blue moon" (2006: 35). Some proverbs, however, become linguistically or culturally untranslatable. For example, the line, "*mannukkulla irukkura mayiraandi, urikka urikka tholaandi*" (1994: 76) does not have an equivalent in English. The translator therefore, renders it as follows: "So long as it is hidden in the earth, it claims to be big, but when you start peeling it, its nothing but skin (2006: 66).

Thus, translation is a matter of intelligent choice based on the translator's knowledge of both the target and source language. It calls for a lot of creativity because it is not a literal and mechanical word-to-word translation. De-coding of the source language text

is followed by a new re-coding. The translation, once created, becomes a separate text with its own beauty and worth, independent of the source text. It thus becomes more transcreation, rather than mere translation.

Sometimes, the liberty of the creative translator is employed to manipulate the translation, in order to propagate individual view points through it. Holmstrom does this on a minor scale and manipulates the source language text, only to bring out the theme of the book even more explicitly. The pictorial depiction of a 'broken woman' in the target language text, underlines the plight of Dalit women. The translator clearly dichotomizes the "I" and the "other" in the text. The Dalit women occupy the centre while all others are pushed to the periphery. In the scene where the narrator's neighbours shout at her husband, asking him to return her money, the man replies, "If I ever come across big money, I will..."(2006: 64). The first half of the sentence can be found only in the English version. Holmstrom suggests that the man will never pay her back, as he is not likely to come across big money at any point of time. The addition exposes the man's tall talk as well as highlights the economic powerlessness of the Dalit.

Some phrases provided by Holmstrom are amusing as they do not even hint at the meaning intended in the source language. "*Potta kazhudha maariyaa irukka*"(1994: 6) has been translated literally as "She is just like a donkey, look"(2006: 7). The last line of the novel reads "I am hopeful that such a time will come soon"(2006: 123). But the source language text uses the phrase "*manasula padudhu*"(1994: 150) which conveys an intuitive feeling, not a hope.

The magic created by the Tamil Dalit dialect in the original is not, and cannot be fully rendered through a translation in English. Frost's wry comment, "Poetry is what is lost in translation," is apt. However, perhaps one can say that poetry of a slightly variant kind is produced even if the same music is not reproduced by Lakshmi Holmstrom.

Translation has become an inevitability in today's closely knit globe. It brings nations closer and aids in a mutual understanding of each other's culture. The translator becomes a liberator – "someone who frees the text from the fixed signs of its original shape making it no longer subordinate to the source text but visibly endeavoring to bridge the space between source author and text and the eventual target language readership"(Bassnett 2004: 6).

Anusha Subramanian

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Of Reds and Other Hues

The Nobel Prize is not an award for a single achievement – it is an international recognition of one person's magnificent accomplishment and an entire lifetime devoted to a cause. More particularly, the Nobel Prize for Literature is an indication of a writer's reach and the enormity of a writer's contribution towards literature. The beauty of literary achievements is that they extend into the spheres of political, humanitarian, social and religious affairs as well. Writers speak for their people, their generation and their century. That's why it is heartwarming to read that Orhan Pamuk, the forthright and innovative young Turkish writer who has encompassed a variety of genres in a short period of time, has bagged the sought-after award in 2006. He is a writer "who in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures", according to the Swedish Academy in their press release. And truly, Pamuk has managed to create a separate language of his own with his powerful imagery and his evocative prose. He has written history in Istanbul and mystery in Snow. Then, he gives us My Name is Red, and in one very swift blow, makes us immediately and acutely aware of his diversity.

In his Nobel Lecture on 7 December 2006, Pamuk says:

When I speak of writing, what comes first to my mind is not a novel, a poem, or literary tradition, it is a person who shuts himself up in a room, sits down at a table, and alone, turns inward; amid its shadows, he builds a new world with words.

Here is an image, distinctly similar to the one Virginia Woolf draws in A Room of One's Own, and yet different because of the "new world" that Pamuk speaks of. He not only creates this world, but also invites you into it with a certain seductive flourish of his pen. And when he invites you, you have no choice but to follow. In that moment, he is a magician with a wand who casts a spell. Giving in to that spell, wholly and completely, is the best – often the only – way to read Pamuk.

My Name is Red, the book that made Pamuk a familiar name even among the non-literary circles, is set in the late sixteenth century at the heart of the Ottoman Empire. Two miniaturists are found dead and the only clues to their murderer seem to lie in a series of paintings. The story is narrated by several characters in the first person, each offering a unique point of view and each a storyteller and a bard in his / her own right. The technique of shifting narratives, providing unique identities and stories piled on stories that Pamuk employs is brilliant. Effortlessly Pamuk slips in and out of the minds of various different personalities. He is a veritable master of the art of indirect characterisation.

Pamuk's novel has a meta-fictional dimension. If the Islamic state disliked the use of European "perspective" in miniature art, Pamuk shows us the importance of perspective in literature by employing a number of characters who are intensely personal narrators of a harrowing political story. And when we are numbed by the various angles to the story that Pamuk offers us – not a la carte on a silver platter, but as a dizzying array at a buffet – we are forced into stringent objectivity.

The novel is particularly noteworthy because of how easy Pamuk makes it for someone - anyone - to read his intricately woven prose. The ornate nature of the language does not, somehow, impair its readability. Instead, it adds to the ambience in a way that even pictures cannot. Actual pictures are described in such striking detail that it is the description that carries more weight than the picture itself. The novel allows itself a very Eastern pleasure in description, but retains a powerful plot and fascinating characterisation. As Dick Davis puts it:

This novel is then formally brilliant, witty and about serious matters. But even this inclusive description does not really capture what I feel is the book's true greatness, which lies in its managing to do with apparent ease what novelists have always striven for but very few achieve.

Interspersed within the story are short allegorical narratives and innovative methods of interior duplication. Each character, acutely conscious that he has an audience, tells his own story, adding numerous others to serve as examples. My Name is Red holds within its covers a number of stories, many of them standing separately, unlinked either to the main story or to any other in the novel. Repeated allusions to the Koran and Islamic rituals and scriptures make the novel seem numinous, but without artificial exoticism or unnecessary appendages.

The significance of these allusions lies in the fact that everything that is social, political or even personal in the Ottoman Empire stems, particularly during this period, from a rigid belief that Islamic religious works and scriptures are sacrosanct. They are also so entrenched in the local mindset and philosophy that stories and verses from the Koran flow in the very bloodstream of these intensely religious characters and become almost an endemic fixation. To interrogate is to show proof of atheism, and to think differently is to be an infidel. The universality and immortality of the Islamic belief system are never to be questioned. And Pamuk, rather than questioning them, as the ordinary anti-fundamentalist would, revises them instead, to explain that change is not heresy, it is a transfer in outlook. Once again, perspective becomes important.

No ideal reader exists but it helps to trace trajectory paths into the novel, treating each viewpoint with care and stepping out now and then to view the entire picture. It is

necessary to sift through various layers and find little fragments that are not visible to the naked eye.

Pamuk's imagery is heartrendingly vivid, drawing painstakingly as it does, from artistic techniques and phraseology. In this novel, everything is to do with art and aesthetics. Art is an alternate universe for Pamuk's characters, all of whom seek solace in colour and beauty, all of whom transfer their passion to their art and their devotion to their craft :

Had I taken Shekure's portrait with me, rendered in the style of the Venetian masters, I wouldn't have felt such loss during my long travels when I could scarcely remember my beloved, whose face I'd left somewhere behind me. For if a lover's face survives emblazoned on your heart, the world is still your home (Pamuk 37).

Pamuk is most compelling when he weaves his little romances. These are intrigues that explore the intricacies of human nature and enforce a psychological understanding of each character's motivations. Every single one of Pamuk's characters is in love: with art, with Islam, with women, with money, with fundamentalism, with politics and with the self. Love is the most concrete emotion that Pamuk writes about, and he writes about it in as direct a fashion as possible, linking the emotion causally to the actions and responses of his characters. Everything, including murder, is for love. What Pamuk has achieved is a psychological thriller, a political expose, a fundamentalist statement, a philosophy, a historical narrative, an artistic endeavour, a love story and a murder mystery, all rolled into one. This is a classic whodunit with its classic twists but one that refuses, stoically, to be bound by conventions. Transgressing the boundaries of literary genres it binds all parochial categories in one grand oeuvre.

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Manasi Subramaniam

Masks and Memory: The Poetry of Ramanujan

The mind is a palimpsest – experiences one stores in the mind, a memory-film ready to be played at will. Some crystallize and turn into yardsticks against which one measures future incidents and circumstances. These yardsticks outline one's tradition. They become rather like glasses through which one looks at life. Certainly there is fluidity to tradition unless one closes oneself to experience, if one is too wary to see without one's glasses on. If one is bold enough to put those glasses aside, one may see the incongruity of being placed simultaneously within one tradition that celebrates births and mourns deaths, as well as another that looks at birth as a failure to break away from the repetitive cycle of births and deaths. Ramanujan appears to recognise the flaws of such spectacles. It is this consciousness that takes away credulity, this consciousness that introduces him to the criticality of masks. Role-playing has always been a requisite to life but those glasses are alibis at moments when one happens to overlook the necessity. Without the pair, masks are crucial.

To liken the mind to a palimpsest implies an element of choice, but the mind is not very compliant, so that even if one may decide what to keep in and what to keep out, one may not be able to erase entirely the things one wishes to shut out. What the mind preserves are the forces that brown 'the gold of day' ('If Eyes Can See' 264). They colour a person's days and allow him a certain degree of personalisation, because one cannot possess them otherwise. Days may be golden only if one removes all associations attached to them, but that will remove even the barest link one shares with them. Just as air browns an apple, memory matures days into brown. But this only proves the pervasiveness of memory, the 'fires in a mirror' ('Looking for the Centre' 184) that have been reduced in intensity.

'The Hindoo' seems to endorse tradition/memory with a touch of irony: 'he doesn't hurt a fly or a spider either' (62) since the former may be his 'great swinging grandmother' and the other, 'playing at patience centered in his web', his true ancestor. It stands to reason that, as far as the Hindoo's tradition is concerned, a spider and a fly may easily 'mate in murder, [making] love with hate' (63) as they occupy the regular roles of hunter and victim.

Meanwhile, the Calicut muslin, the record of King Harsha and the monks, and the swastika in 'Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day' (74) construct a link for an Indian. The bank clerks in the rainy Madras of 1965, the Fulbright Indians in Egypt and the Professor of Sanskrit in Berlin come 'home' to memory through a story, an article, a symbol. In its capacity to construct, memory is a web that hosts those who share common experiences. Many webs become webs of tradition, within which individuals are

connected by manners, ideas, even prejudices. A case in point is that, even if it is addressed rather ironically by the poet, there is a 'tradition' that when shared by the reader, remains a crucial entry point into Ramanujan's poetry. Does memory, then, construct the self? Do revisit 'The Hindoo': if one should occupy ambiguous roles in life, isn't the self dismantled?

Memory constructs and dismantles as death does. The scorpions in "Death in Search of a Comfortable Metaphor" die to '(burst their) back and (give) birth to numerous dying things', while the remains of bodies become 'fodder for working ants and humus for elephant grasses that become elephants' (273). It is through memory that the self in 'A Meditation' is connected to 'the tree that (topples)', and it is death that permits it to be cut up in 'convenient pieces' and made into 'a butcher block table', 'a butcher block chair', and 'rolls of paper with a logo in a watermark' (239). Memory dismantles because it disallows the self to be rooted in the present: it allows one to journey, for instance, 'by answering ordinary black telephones' and 'all calls of nature' ('Chicago Zen' 186). Memory brings past to the present, so that as 'the traffic light turns orange on 57th and Dorchester', one stumbles, falling into 'a vision of forest fires, (entering) a frothing Himalayan river'. The corollary of memory is that the existence of the self is never rooted in the present. The course of life never parallels a journey down a flight of stairs where one moves from one level to the next, because memory is pervasive: "the last step (is) never there" (188).

With the interference of memory, the centre of life is a blur. If the zilla spider in 'Looking for the Centre' finds LSD responsible for breaking its 'routine symmetries' so that it is 'not at the centre' and does 'not feel the tug of spidersilk' (184), memory is the simple chemistry that spoils the current existence of an individual. Yet to do without memory is 'to lose bearings' and renders one simultaneously 'dizzy, terrified, and happy.' If one may revert to the 'web of tradition' discussed earlier, it is clear why one is dizzy and terrified. Completely detached from the web, one is like the "black hen" ('The Black Hen' 195). The black hen on the embroidery is unsettling since it is created 'stitch by stitch, dropped and found again' and one cannot overlook the structural elements of creation – the yarn and the cloth. The fragility of it is too immediate, too apparent not to provoke unease. It is troubling to look at human beings as entities that can be undone and unknotted as easily as one may undo the stitches that craft the black hen. Yet to do without memory should be cheering because at any rate, it is a privilege to be responsible only to oneself and to be sure that external circumstances do not have a hold on the self. After all, these webs turn into voices of authority that press for ceremonial deaths, for cremations 'in Sanskrit and sandalwood' ('Death and the Good Citizen' 135). In their necessary position within the web, human beings are deprived from the splendid, solitary existence of animals. Elephants are allowed to die 'grand lonely deaths' ('Death in

Search of a Comfortable Metaphor' 273) precisely for the lack of authority that will have dictated otherwise, to die the ceremonial death of human beings who have adopted tradition as a voice of authority.

The dilemma remains that one cannot invent oneself: there is always the inevitable intervention of memory. It seems that with every mask one invents and dares oneself to wear, there are the 'watchers' ('Looking for the Centre' 184) within the self, already too familiar with the face disguised.

Nirmala Iswari

All quotations are from:

Ramanujan, A.K. The Collected Poems. New Delhi: OUP, 1995.

Delhi: City of Djinnns

“ It is true... People are coming here drunk, worried or tired of the chores of the world, but always they leave this place refreshed”

This is a description of the famous partridge fights in Delhi, provided by Punjab Singh, an amusing taxi driver to the author and it can be extended to the whole of the magical city of Delhi. It is this image of Delhi that William Dalrymple paints in his travelogue, City of Djinnns- a vibrant splash of colour on an already multi-hued map of India. A city of magic, endurance and mystery, an oasis of past splendour and layers of captivating history. Delhi is 'rich', in every sense of the word: rich in its crumbling palaces and ruins, rich in its diversity of people, (ranging from Muslims frozen in the Mughal era to Punjabi migrants during the Partition) rich in its power to charm and enchant visitors and settled citizens alike, and rich in its possession of all things 'grand'. Simply put, it is a 'city of djinnns', a haven of spirits that endeavour to preserve its uniqueness for posterity.

In this essay, I attempt to interpret Dalrymple's brilliant text in the light of the many ever changing faces of Delhi. The author traces the city's history backwards in time, while rooted in the present. The reader is presented with a technicolour slide show of Delhi's glorious past, while witnessing the death and resurrection of many of its wonderful facets with each passing era. The constant shift between the past and the present of Delhi helps in creating a mosaic image of the city and an interesting overview of all its ages in the mind of the reader. As Dalrymple explains, “ In Delhi I knew I had found a theme for a book: a portrait of a city disjointed in time, a city whose different ages lay suspended side by side as in aspic, a city of djinnns”.

The title of the book is a perfect description of Delhi. Djinnns are the spirits of Islamic belief that roam the city, invisible to the human eye. According to Sufi mystics, djinnns haunt every nook and corner of Delhi, and consider their city so beloved that “they could never bear to see it empty or deserted”. Delhi has an enduring spirit-the djinnns are seen as a preserving force which raises the city, for every time it is razed to the ground: “... it rose like a phoenix from the fire”. In this sense, Delhi can be seen in the light of rebirth and reincarnation, a city that allows its magical presence to linger over the land, appearing in different ages in different 'avatars', an ever changing and lasting symbol of perseverance and strength.

Dalrymple also presents the diversity of culture within Delhi. As he strolls down the narrow alleys of Old Delhi and the well-planned avenues of the new city, he notices that the strong Mughal Islamic strains of the former and the Punjabi Sikh and Hindu aspects of the latter serve to create a sort of cultural divide within the walls of the India's capital.

Another fascinating aspect, in relation to this religious bifurcation, is the co-existence of different millennia, side by side in Delhi. The sprawling skyscrapers of New Delhi continue to reach rapidly into the sky, fuelled by the onset of western culture and modern globalization, while the old city cowers in its tiny niche, still suspended in the gloom of a glorious but by-gone Mughal era, unwilling to leave the splendour of the once beautiful ruined palaces and forts behind. Thus, the many layers of Delhi overlap and complement each other, and the discovery of the city lies in peeling away each of these layers of art, religion, legend and magic, to reveal the true face of Delhi...

The history of Delhi is unravelled by means of a unique method, as Dalrymple, avoiding a conventional chronological account, goes backwards in time and history to review the evolution of Delhi. Dalrymple picks his way through the Partition and the Anti-Sikh riots, then the British occupation of India and Independence, then on to the Mughals and the first kings of Delhi, and finally to the epical world of the Mahabharata, which chronicles the foundation of the city. This kind of retrospective view to the history of Delhi causes the author and the reader, to question the changes that the city has undergone over the years, and Dalrymple persuades the reader into viewing the initial years of Delhi as prosperous and flourishing, while the present is somewhat subdued and degenerate in comparison to the opulence of the age of the kings. However, the writer takes an objective stand, and does not offer his own opinions and judgments on the past and present. The present is seen to possess as much grandeur and cultural richness as the past, and the past contains as much politics and architectural skill as the present. Thus, the reader is left with a singular image of Delhi, one that shows it as a city caught in the vortex of a cultural maelstrom of time that swirls around it, and multiple facets and quirks all contribute to what Delhi is today.

The City of Djinns has an underlying tone of violence, chaos and conflict throughout the text. Dalrymple's chronicle is generously interspersed with vivid accounts of the battles and wars of the past, and the bloodshed and violence of the freedom struggle in the present era. Even the weather, which the author describes along with each historical event, somehow reflects the intense emotions of each age, from the biting chill of the Delhi winter to the fiery heat of its summer. Dalrymple's eye for detail also contributes in reinforcing the vividness of his descriptions. Each aspect of history is 'humanized', the inhuman statistics of war are substituted by personal accounts from people who suffered, the story of every Sikh in Delhi is summed up through the experiences of Dalrymple's taxi driver, the pain of every Muslim forced to leave his beloved city is caught through the pain of a professor exiled to Pakistan. The Mughals are brought to life, through the description of not only their awe-inspiring buildings, monuments, art and power, but also through an account of their personalities and everyday lives. Therefore, Dalrymple's text differs from the conventional historical narratives because

of its imaginative attempt to bring history, which is usually seen by most as an incomprehensible subject, down to a basic and fundamental level, by which every reader can witness the slow formation of Delhi.

But for all its chronological explorations of Delhi, City of Djinn is a travelogue not history. The journey into the past takes on a definite yet rugged course, and the historical occurrences along the way are but signposts that lead on to the discovery of its true essence. This grand journey into the past of Delhi runs parallel to Dalrymple's descriptions of early travellers like Ibn Batuta, and to those of his own journey through the intricate twists and turns of the maze-like city. In his travels however, Dalrymple establishes a link from age to age, and thus the connection between different episodes in Delhi's past permits the reader to view the city as an amalgamation of several times, cultures and people. Though the unravelling of its fascinating past may be considered as his motive for the travelogue, the object of the author's quest is the spirit that defines Delhi. Dalrymple is fascinated by the bustle of the bazaars, the once-splendid but crumbling monuments, the narrow, winding alleys of Old Delhi and the well-planned structure of the new city, the life-loving, reckless nature of the modern population and the scholarly, laid-back attitudes of the older generation. Dalrymple thus follows every change in the city in an attempt to interpret the varied voices and faces of a mystical Delhi.

Though the writer primarily presents Delhi in a vibrant light, the reader is aware of the multiple perspectives that the city is viewed from. In the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "New Delhi is the visible symbol of British power, with all its ostentation and wasteful extravagance". An old British citizen who lived in Delhi at the time of Independence castigates British colonization: "...I think you must never take land away from a people. A people's land has a mystique..." The writer of the *Muraqqa-e-Delhi*, which is an absorbing eighteenth century account of the city, "saw Delhi as a vibrant and sophisticated city, full of glamour and intrigue;" But in contrast, as Dalrymple points out, "modern Delhi is thought of either as a city of grey bureaucracy, or as the metropolis of hard-working, 'nouveau-riche' Punjabis. It is rarely spoken of as a lively city..." One is thus left with the impression that Delhi is a pot-pourri of many diverse aspects. To Dalrymple, it is a magnificently rich and mysterious city, awaiting his literary explorations into its history and essence; to the average Indian, it is the city he has never or only once visited, a city defined by the mere label of 'capital' that he attaches to it; to the colonizers and invaders, it was a land of unending wealth awaiting their plunder and exploitation; to the younger generation of today, it is the city of dreams, of modern opportunity and development, the popular 'metro' of the country; to the Mughals, it was their beautiful creation, their luxurious abode and asset; and, to the Delhiite, Delhi is simply 'home'. It is therefore fascinating to realize that eventually, the city is defined by the various perspectives that it is viewed from, and these differing angles present us with a fragmented, mosaic-like, kaleidoscopic picture of the city of Delhi.

The aspect of perspective also raises the question of reader response. Dalrymple's views of Delhi, though objective, inevitably affect the reader's image of Delhi. In a personal sense, my ideas and impressions of Delhi were completely transformed after the City of Djinns. The travelogue becomes an exploration of perspectives, and in this text, Dalrymple's journey into the heart of Delhi is also, in a sense, a journey into his self, though in City of Djinns it is not as primary a focus as it is in the works of writers like Peter Matheson. Through his discovery of the tale of William Fraser, one of the first Scots to have ruled Delhi as a Nawab, Dalrymple finds an ancestral link between William Fraser and his wife Olivia. Apart from this personal link to Delhi, Dalrymple also finds his own attitudes changing in the course of his journey. By the end of his visit, he is completely in awe of a sprawling city, rich in its ethnic diversity and culture, and the physical journey of exploring the city is thus transformed into a travel through the varying states of mind of the author, the reader and even the people of Delhi. Delhi and its people are engaged in constant change, a process which continues to add to and refine the magical essence of the city.

Dalrymple's narrative thus carries the reader on an amazing ride through fine nuances. His clever blend of present and past, and his structured, coherent and amusing style of writing enhance his exploration of a city that is as amusing and lively as the narrative that encases it. The Delhi we picture at the end of this travelogue seems to be waiting apprehensively at the next turn of a labyrinthine historical maze, unaware of what the future holds for it, its path only illuminated by the fading brilliance of the past. There are the potential dangers of westernization, as Dr. Jaffery, an Islamic scholar, points out: "In this city, culture and civilization have always been very thin dresses. It does not take much for that dress to be torn off and for what lies beneath to be revealed." And yet, Delhi is almost fiercely protected by its 'djinnns', the guardians who love their city so much that its endurance is their eternal mission. Delhi thus is, now as in the past, the "city of djinnns".

Roshini Pochont

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The Veil Is Torn!

Imitiaz Dharker believed that the veil is not a garment that conceals a part of the body but rather a state of mind. Today, the concept of the veil has triggered much controversy. Many Muslim women are forced to jeopardize their careers in the West by clinging to the veil. In the Western world there seems to be a general awareness that Muslim women need uplift, although the question of what they stand to gain remains unanswered. We are all aware of the age-old reasons for this condition – illiteracy among underprivileged women and their disempowerment in a male dominated society. But if ignorance and poverty are the key jailors, how can you explain the plight of privileged women born into royalty? For them education is not a mere dream and money is not an obstacle.

The confessions of the Saudi royal Princess Sultana, carefully yet cautiously documented by Jean Sasson in her novels Princess, Desert Royal, and Daughters Of Arabia give a public audience insights into a world which was strictly concealed from the eyes of the world. These revelations are shocking, painful and moving and never fail to arouse a wave of sympathy in every reader. Sasson's novels highlight the inescapable problems that plague all women, especially Muslim women. To be born into a family that has unlimited access to money and power is the dream of every man born today. But it is hard to imagine that precisely the same factors could also drive a woman to the point of suicide or make her life not worth living. The extent of influence possessed by the Saudi Royal Family, not just in the Middle East but also in powerful nations such as the USA and UK is well known. The startling fact is that "Royal women live as virtual prisoners, surrounded by unimaginable wealth and luxury, privileged beyond belief, and yet subject to every whim of their husbands, fathers, and even their sons" (Desert Royal).

The tales documented in the earlier mentioned novels were done so in secret, as the identification of the protagonist could have been severely devastating both for Sasson and the princess who told the story. The royal princess's confessions can be looked upon as a personification of the saying "The truth shall set you free." The most prominent problem that is faced by Muslim women is that of an unsteady marriage especially because of the provision made for a man in the Holy Quran—that he can marry a maximum of four wives with the consent of his previous wife. Of course, the same does not hold good for a Muslim woman. That would be scandalous and outrageous and above all, the Quran forbids it. Scholars have theorised that the earlier leniency towards men was shown by Prophet Muhammed, because of the shortage of men in comparison to the women at that time, which therefore called for such flexibility and for no other reason. Because of the misinterpretation of this law by some Muslims, the

chaos that evolves is tragic. Sultana was lucky enough to have a husband who loved her although he couldn't keep to a monogamous relationship. She tells us that there was no limit to the pleasures and luxuries money could buy them. They led a truly extravagant lifestyle but she paid a price: "I found myself helpless against the unassailable power of Saudi Arabian men; I had let myself grow discouraged. Yet, so long as women in my own country can be married against their will, physically abused and raped under the sanction of the law, even legally murdered at the whim of their fathers, husbands and brothers, how could I stop fighting?" (Desert Royal).

Sultana had it all, money, family influence, power; she was so powerful that no common man could dare to touch a single hair on her body, but what if the threat came not from the outside but from within her very own family? Sultana painfully recalls the rigid structure she was brought up in. She recognizes that a Muslim woman is "A prisoner in gilded cage with no vote, no control, no value but as a mother of sons, she is totally at the mercy of the men in her life...her father, her brother, her husband" (Princess).

She speaks of the distinct demarcation made between her brother, herself and her sisters as a child. Her brother was spoilt by the power he was given as a member of the royalty from a very young age. He enjoyed misusing it. Sultana narrates how her brother enjoyed flaunting his power as a child and spared no instance where he could add to the misery of his sisters and also to that of his mother. While her brother was sent to the best schools and colleges in the world, her father had to be immensely pressured by her mother to arrange so much as a good tutor for her daughters. And Sultana painfully recounts her unpleasant memories as a child living within a system that never gave freedom. She was born into a family that had all the luxuries in the world but one that never allowed women to taste freedom.

Women in these circumstances are immensely insecure; they try to break free but are dragged back and confined deeper and more severely each time. They arrive at the point of suicide over and over again. They cry and cry alone. Their spirits are suppressed and gradually stolen from them. They are not valued for what they are, they are taught to be submissive and to have no voice. Sultana's attempts to interrogate the society in which she lived met with severe retaliation and yet she managed to speak out. Her story projected the raw truth that it may not be easy to break free but it is time things took a turn for the better. And Sultana dared to give voice to millions of women less privileged than herself.

Women's participation in public life is supposed to invite evil and create social disorder, largely because of the temptation they pose to men. Although women have achieved important advances in the public sphere, the stereotyping of the good Muslim woman

as a mother and a wife has never died. Islamists, both male and female, continue to disseminate this concept in order to counter more liberal ideas of women's roles that they see as imported from the West. Embedded in Islamist movements throughout the Muslim world is the ideal image of a veiled wife and mother as the pillar of social order and the family. Some Islamic organizations praise women's roles as mothers and wives but still permit them to engage in public life if need drives them to do so; other confine women to their own households, denying them all public roles, as in the case of the Taliban. Sultana realizes that Muslim women must forge their own freedom by raising their sons differently:

“All thoughts of a daughter vanished when my yawning son was placed in my arms. This male child would be taught different and better ways than the generation before him. I felt the power of my intentions creating his future. He would not be backward in his thinking, his sisters would be given a place of honour and respect, and he would know and love his partner before he wed. I swelled with pride as I considered the good to mankind that would flow from the tiny body in my arms. Without doubt, the new beginning of Arabia would start with my own blood” (Desert Royal)

Sijil Raj Zachariah

Domesticity, Sexuality and Violence: Nora's Sisters Speak Up

Nora, our dear ancestral sister! After you slammed the door of your marital home in 1879, we are meeting you to tell our stories. Transgressing the boundaries of borders, cultures and historical time we come to meet you. We are from India, a sovereign nation sixty years young. We bear the history of many pasts – far, farther, near and immediate. In our most immediate past, for the past five years we have been wrestling with the domestic violence bill in our parliament. We have struggled to arrive at an acceptable, tangible definition of violence. Now, the bill is passed. We shall have to wait and see how it is enforced and activated in reality.

Before we come to the reality of courts, laws and life, let me introduce our team: our elder sisters and your younger sisters – Savithri, Benare, Kamala, Sarita, Champa and Laxmi. We are from the universe of modern Indian drama, represented by two of our most important playwrights, Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulker. Almost 125 years after you left your children and husband in order to fulfil your duties to yourself, stating categorically “I believe that, before all else, I'm a human being”, we, the female protagonists of Indian drama, for the most part signify roles or stand for the universalising category of humanity. Somehow, that universalism is never gendered.

I am Savithri from Adhe Adhure (Neither Half nor Whole) (1969). I struggle for 'completion' within a warring family. I try to find some meaning in relationships – with my husband, employer, former lover and finally, my husband's friend. My space in the play is the domestic world and it seems self-contained. Except that I cannot contain myself within it. The play presents my world and centres on my experiences, only to turn the tables at the end to prove that it is after all not my world. Sharma quotes Vasudha Dalmia (2006) to explain how towards the end Mohan Rakesh's women characters burst forth into long speeches, in which they lay bare their inner conflicts and seek understanding. “There is a shift to the emotional point of view of the man in the last confrontation..., allowing him the last word, so to speak” (127) According to the last word- a verdict- I demand too much of a single person and I would feel the same emptiness and restlessness with any other partner I may have chosen. I, a career woman, the sole bread winner of the family, am considered insatiable in my sexual needs. I have little time for my children. My elder daughter turns out to be disturbed in her marital relationship; my son resents me for having a flirtatious nature and my younger daughter suffers at my hands. In other words, I, Savithri, am not domesticated enough and therefore deserve to be punished with a family which is a never-ending drain on my emotional resources. My use of 'I' is significant as I, the speaker here, have had an opportunity to present the role of Savithri, my one and only English play so far. I have had to struggle with these dilemmas. Thanks to my friend Anoushka, who directed the play, one could at least voice this unease.

It is not eight years Nora, it is twenty two years of married life!

But I do not figure out the purpose of my relationships within the family nor am I allowed to walk out. I destroy the family. All because I tried to seek an identity- a new found one in the modern age.

This is India, Nora... I am Benare, from Tendulker's Silence! The Court is in Session. Domesticity is not just the everyday running of the household. It is legitimised, mandatory reproduction motherhood sanctified by the institution of marriage. I become an unwed mother, and not out of coercion. I face extreme violence and double standards from my friends and even my partner. As an accused in the mock- court, I am given ten seconds to give my statement. The stage direction says that "[She is motionless as before. From somewhere in the background, music can be heard. Then light changes...]" I, Benare, begin my long speech. "Yes. I have a lot to say. For so many years I haven't said a word". Once my speech is over, the light changes and the judge pronounces that "The time is up. The accused has no statement to make. In any case, it would be of no use. The cup of her crime is full". Tendulker, my author, in one of his interviews has said that this long speech was added as an afterthought upon the compulsion of the Director and the group members. He did not want to give Benare that speech as he thought it was not 'in her character'. He was almost locked up to write a speech for me to explain my logic. But of course he decided that I could do it only in fantasy. It is difficult for a contemporary Indian author of such complexity like Tendulker, to whom I owe my existence, to imagine that a woman can actually speak out.

Much worse is my plight Nora. I am Champa in Sakaram Binder. The play is a scathing attack on the institution of the family. Sakaram the binder takes in only women deserted by their respective husbands. He does not offer any long- term promises. He gets into contractual relationships with the women who come his way. But women like Laxmi shift their loyalties to him. He too expects the women to be faithful to him, while they stay with him. So, what purports to be a critique of the family is actually a re-play of family structure, outside the parameters of the same. I am different from the other women he encountered as I am not deserted. I leave my good- for- nothing husband. My sexuality is my burden. I cannot have sex without getting drunk. I have my own unfulfilled desires and can make my own choice. Sakaram however, will not have it so. Laxmi faithfully reports my faithlessness to him and he murders me.

I am almost like your immediate sister Hedda Gabler. I could have murdered my loveless, sexual partner. But that is not to be, since I am an Indian woman who has taken to

drink, multiple lovers, and husband-bashing. Naturally, I get murdered. I can expect nothing better.

I did leave my home Nora; but the home and hominess never left me.

Laxmi, on the other hand, carried her home wherever she went. She had nowhere to go; but she took her gods, black ant and crow with her. They helped her to survive. She was not to be overlooked. Even Sakaram could not evade her presence. Laxmi's presence in the next room made him almost impotent. She wielded respect. She did not leave her home voluntarily. Domesticity, thy name is Laxmi in *Sakaram Binder*. So, she can turn against another woman and help murder her and be a witness. It is this juxtaposition that irks me most, Nora. Why should a woman be either virtuous or villainous?

The cycle is complete. The trap laid. The chains have been tightened. If at all a woman speaks, it has to be in fantasy. If she goes her way, she will be destroyed. And this is the representation of two great masterminds in Modern Indian Drama. There are not many exceptions except when the writers re-read mythological figures.

Nora, you would be surprised to know how some of our women writers turn the tables. Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out deals with how the violent sounds and noises from the neighbourhood raise the demons of fear. Plays directed by women often interrogate conventional gender construction and representation on stage. There are organisations in almost every small town of the country addressing these issues day in and day out. In most of them cultural activism plays a lead role. So, there are members of various groups staging plays, readings and holding meetings in every corner. They keep wrestling with the powers-that-be over definitions of violence, security and the right to stay at home or leave. Experience has shown that that one of the biggest enemies of women facing violence is the ideology prevailing in all organs of the State that a woman's rightful place is in her matrimonial home and nowhere else, notwithstanding the fact that she is facing torture in that home. The law makers and enforcement authorities are no exception to this prevalent ideology. Hence the draft bill against Domestic Violence defined 'violence' as one in which "He, a) habitually assaults or makes the life of the aggrieved person miserable by cruelty of conduct even if such conduct does not amount to physical ill-treatment ". Apart from legal definitions, violence is often interpreted as a form of love by many women. In Tamil we have a saying 'It is the hand that beats, that will embrace as well.' This acceptance of bodily hurt as part of love blinds many women to the violence surrounding them. Only when it explodes beyond a particular limit, they wake up and by then their voices are choked in fear, frustration and desperation.

Therefore, Nora, we need many more Noras to articulate an examination of life, selfhood and assertion. We need them to do it in reality, not in fantasy. We don't want to deal with mere aesthetic abstractions and possibilities. Our lives are complicated enough already. We want to speak up here and now! We invoke your spirit to survive, to live, and to feel our self- worth and dignity.

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(This paper was presented at a seminar on 'Nora's Sisters' held in New Delhi on 2.11.06 and organised by the Royal Norwegian Embassy, India and the Munistry of Foreign Affairs, Norway)

Home and Away

So there we were, students from Stella Maris and Loyola, ready with our luggage and boarding passes, anxious yet excited, waving fondly at our parents, yet wanting to leave quickly as well. We'd been warned, "Expect the unexpected," and "It's a different world out there". We thought we were prepared, but who can ever be prepared to land in a new country and live there, after having lived in a completely different country for twenty years.

And so my five months in the Australian National University (ANU for short) went, with constant change and never-ending surprises, and most of the time I couldn't help but compare this new land of opportunities, with my motherland. Sometimes I was awestruck by what I saw and what I discovered and sometimes I thought how things were taken for granted, how people lived with certain assumptions.

The first assumption I had to deal with was that Indians can't speak decent English and ours is a country of 'dirt', 'forests', 'tigers' etc. (these are actual responses from some of my friends at ANU). So many times I heard, "You speak such good English. . . better than I do!" And each time I had to restrain myself from pointing out that I wouldn't have got a scholarship at a renowned university if I couldn't speak English. I had to explain that not every girl had an arranged marriage (and then realized people didn't actually know what an arranged marriage was, so had to elaborate on that as well), how the rich and the poor managed to live almost side by side in the same cities, and how Aishwarya Rai is not a representative of the average Indian female.... And a million other things. I abandoned certain assumptions of mine as well. For instance, not all Americans are empty-headed and boys can cook, and sometimes much better than girls!

Things really are taken for granted sometimes. The complete independence that students have for instance. One does one's own cooking and laundry; at another level one can also decide which lectures to attend, walk out of a lecture if one finds it pointless and work up to eleven pm in the libraries. The campus newsletter '*Woroni*' was a perfect example of freedom of speech. I can't say what was written so if you really want to know you'll have to ask me later! Anyhow, I guess there's a reason why they give so much freedom and facilities to the students – they expect quite a bit of hard work in return. It's unlike Stella in the sense that if a student wants to pass a course it's entirely up to her to do it and no one nudges her to work. Complete independence can come with a lot of responsibility. (Yes, I'm aware that I sound very old and preachy but you'll see when you live on your own)

As we rushed back home to begin our 5th semesters, all of us who went for the semester abroad wanted to stay longer. But let me also add that Australia was not home. I discovered that I have an identity, a clear-cut identity, as an Indian. And I missed home. Sometimes randomly, in a fleeting thought, sometimes deeply. I missed dōsas and speaking in Tamil, my mother's Bengali food and Marina beach, my dogs and my friends. Hence I was happy to return to the heat, pollution and dirty, bumpy roads. For I also returned to mangoes, spicy food, saris, diyas, multiple religions and languages. My mother keeps saying how much culture, how much life our country has despite all the squalor. Only after living abroad do I know what she really means.

Jai Hind, indeed.

Dakshayani Ravichandran

Ace of Hearts

- i) The first time was the saddest. You never realise how alive you are, how unsullied by tragedy, until something occurs that gives you a full-on, close-up perspective of something less. You will know when this happens; the maze of your intestines winds a little more tightly, sour acid eats at the inside of your stomach, and your heart—who knows what mysteries occur in your heart, because for weeks afterward it is absent from your chest. I was a young boy of indistinct age, the way all young boys are. During the holidays I ran around in shorts and a torn t-shirt, I had skinny legs that were always covered in mud. One evening my parents had a very grand party. I knew it was a very grand party, because I was made to wash my hair, and scrub the soles of my feet. So I sat on my bed looking miserable and raw and clean, everybody left their coats next to me so I might feel important.

Sometime during the evening, a tall man with drooping shoulders came into the room and sat next to me heavily. He ate the air, kept ballooning till he filled the room. For years now i have played the same scene over in my head, i cannot imagine him more completely than this. He ate the air. There was something particular about his manner, a consuming grief, and his nearness made my eyes prickle embarrassingly. He glanced over at me and looked almost surprised, as if he had just noticed me. Then he took my palms in his and traced the faint criss-crossing lines, the purple and green veins that were only just visible. His fingernails were almonds, I was on Pluto, I was on a small frozen planet that wasn't. I didn't know where to look; the view from Pluto is bleak, always bleak. A warm tear spilled onto my palm, I didn't know where to look. The skin over his knuckles was softly wrinkled. His hair was flaming, his eyes were watering, his watch strap was a handcuff. He ate the air, he wouldn't stop eating the air.

He left and I stared at my palm's morosely, my scarred knees. The tear was still in my palm, I cupped it like a diamond; I didn't know where to look. That night everybody left smelling like alcohol and worn off cologne and promises never made. That night, I kept listening for it, but I couldn't hear my heartbeat.

- (ii) The second time was the loveliest. I was twenty three years old and in love with a girl. I had been in love before, but not with the same grace, the same lilting melody. In our century love is a commonplace thing, we love people and places and objects with the same voracity, we love them with the same words. So perhaps you will not understand when I say that I loved her more than any place or object, I loved her more than any person, I gave up my vainglorious self-love so I could love her a little more. You might think that when you are impossibly in

love with someone, your heart pounds in an impossible way and keeps you awake at night. This is only half true. When I was impossibly in love with her, I lay awake at night listening for my heartbeat and never heard it. When you are impossibly in love with someone, your body cannot contain your heart; it grows slowly away from you and blooms in the body of your beloved. This is the most beautiful betrayal, the most forgivable.

I loved her. I took her to the circus; when the clowns came on she wept and I held her. When I had loved her for forty nine days, I presented her a necklace that belonged to the forty ninth wife of the forty ninth sultan of Morocco, who is said to be the most beautiful woman who ever lived. I held her and said, they are all wrong, you are the most beautiful woman who has ever lived, to which she replied my arms are too plump. When your heart has taken residence in another's body, you want to take care of them forever. I loved her. Then one night I heard an unfamiliar noise and searched the house for intruders and found none, but I returned to bed and the noise was still there. It was a thuck-thuck-thuck and it echoed jarringly like a wounded animal's cry. I loved her, I lay awake all night.

The next morning there was a note at the door: your heart, it was too much of a burden. I'm sorry, etc. I loved her. I lay awake for many nights after that, getting used to my intruder heart whose bloom had worn off. It was the most beautiful betrayal, the most unforgivable.

- (iii) The third time, I thought it would be the last. For a month on end I experienced a pain like no other. In the mornings I would wake up to a burning in my calf, as I brushed my teeth it would move up to my abdomen, during the day it would swirl around in my head like wine that must be spit out. In the evenings it would slowly fill my lungs with the fury of a genie uncorked. Sometimes, just before sleeping, a particularly malicious pain would enter my teeth and I would lie for hours in open-mouthed agony. If you have ever encountered a pain like mine, you will understand why for one month I was able to think of nothing else. In all my life, nobody had known me as intimately as this pain; I would not reveal it to doctors or friends. For one month I protected it, cursed it, saw to its every need. I was a martyr, sacrificing my body at pain's altar.

Every night my heart pounded a little louder, so I might stay awake at night and listen to it. But I was exhausted from tending to pain; the incessant heartbeat was a minor annoyance, like a cramped toe. This is a sad cliché, but I will repeat it because it is true: you must not ignore the murmurous repetitions of your heart. All day I spoke to my pain in tongues only we could understand. After a month I was almost dead from fatigue. Then one night as I lay awake ignoring

the beat of my heart, it occurred to me I could not hear it anymore. I cautiously raised my arm and there was no pain. Every limb, every bone and every joint—I lifted, shook, twirled, bent at unnatural angles but not once felt a twinge.

Some weeks later my heart returned, but the pain never did.

Soumya Poduval



Fear

Fear does sometimes lie on the grass
Shirt buttoned up; fingers spread on the chest,
Drumming along to the rhymes of
Wind, of footsteps, of grass rubbing.
To these are the fingers drumming,
Drumming.

And the eyes may be quite peculiar
If not for things unusual
For if drunk, drunk only on cider, and
Craving pauses at white bread.

But he does,
While drumming, he does
Befriend the clock and dare him to tick
The sleeping eyes dare and dare until they fall sick.

Nirmala Iswari

Mummy

Why

Do you choose to curl up into a shriveled
Semi-circle, hair twisted and choked into control?

Why

Do you shackle yourself with old gold
Bangles that slither around your hands?

Why

Do you bandage your red body
With a white sari?

Unwrap your silk bandages and lurch
Out of your tomb.

Let the sun melt your waxy skin, let it gush
In steaming rivers while you moult
Into a shapeless pool, stretching to reflect a sky filled with
Many, many, many stars.

Spin,

Like a frenzied chakra, into
A foaming mouth.

Wake us from our drugged slug sleep.

Churn us

From soft fluid cream into butter lumps, drawing
In a sea of buttermilk.

Mould us into hard bricks of butter.

Loom over us,

Giant Rakshasi, whip us

Into creamy ice sculptures.

Make us stone with your red spinning eyes.

In your Name, we emerge, bronze-plated...

Resham George