

Chandramohan SATHYANATHAN**1. BEEF POEM**

(1)

My harvest of poems
Will be winnowed,
If done deftly
The lighter, shallow poems
Are blown away,
While the meatier, heavier poems
Fall back into the tray,
To become the fire
In my belly like
Beef.

(2)

Mastheads with nausea
Against beef eating
Consider my poems
"untouchable"

(3)

Mastheads
First have vegetarians and non-vegetarians
And then non-vegetarians and beef eaters
On either sides of their lines of horizon.

(4)

For some poets
Beef is the
Locus of all the
Food for thought in the world
Like Buddha's begging bowl.

(5)

When I manoeuvre sharp curves of history
In my rear-view mirror
I see some trucks overfull with cattle
Waiting at the check points
Like strands of fables
Edited out of history textbooks.

(6)

Pressure cooker's whistle
Like one-eyed search light:
Hawk's eye on our bellies.

(7)

A dead cow preserved in formalin
Like Hitler's penis in a museum.

2. THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBURKINI

"I created the burkini to give women freedom, not to take it away "
-[Aheda Zanetti](#)

1

Burkini is a language
Terrifying those ignorant of its text.

2

Cops patrol her tan lines
Like dams patrol
Rivers flowing above danger marks.

3

All you need is in that bag:
Change into a garment
More palatable for the cops in uniform.

4

Some garments cling too close to your surname
Like a metaphor
Too loud for good poetry.

5.

Sea surfing can be tiring
Like an infinite ebb and flow of a questionnaire.
Batting an eye lid can be a tad too immodest.

6

Tether yourself close to the beach.
Do not surf too deep into the ocean.
Never self-intersect in circles of knots and tangles.

7

Bruises sustained from frisking
Metamorphose into festering wounds.
Gangrene could gnaw at your surname.

8

Erase your footprints from the sands.
Waves of time rarely wash the footprints of a scuffle.
Prolonged scuffle can bury us all in a deep hole.

9

Do you remember the first corpse?
The sea sucked off a turbulent beach?
The sea spat it out after three days of frisking.

10
 The footprints of scuffle
 Implicates you from shore to shore,
 Blowing up all bridges between you and anyone.

11
 During this conversation
 Some territory has been ceded across
 The tan lines of your body.

12
 Your body stripped off the garment
 Remains an evacuated language.
 Can a language be a scarecrow?

13
 History will catch up with you
 In your rear-view mirror
 Even if you are full throttle in your
 Pursuit of happiness.

3. WRITE POETRY

They ask me why do you write poems?
 I write poems --the people have the right to keep and bear arms.
 They ask me what new artillery I had invented.
 Heckler poems --dynamite at election rallies.

—

4. THE MUSE IN THE MARKET PLACE

In the neo-liberal world
 a dog with a collar crosses
 the road at the zebra lines.

The vernacular was never its surrogate womb
 This poem was not conceived with translation in mind
 Will never let it be adopted
 Or exported to worldwide markets
 Nor will the metaphors mellow down
 To make it amenable to translation

Into an alien tongue.
 This poem refuses
 to undergo painful procedures
 like a long, intrusive questionnaire
 cleansing its tracts
 before it is granted a visa
 to be read at international festivals
 to allow its taut contours,
 its line-breaks and paragraphs,
 to be frisked
 at airports and check-points,
 with every image bent like a question mark
 into ludicrous submission.

—

5. PORTRAIT OF THE POET AS A YOUNG WOMAN

Her hair
 Freshly harvested dreadlocks
 Unedited gospel of love
 Off limits to combs.

Tresses like streams
 Of eternal fire
 From the arsenal of her body.

Poems conceived in a celestial tongue
 When stars align with caesarean precision.
 It is our own language.

Her verses
 Are neither left nor right aligned
 Time zones hinge at every line break
 Like sunflowers un-aligned to the scorching heat.

Every evening, on her terrace,
 she lets her hair down and flies kite,
 Her verses tell vivid stories
 Stitched together in myriad colours.

Her verses gurgle like a river let loose.
 She never braids them
 With her bare hands
 Before a poetry reading.

When her poems are read
 No boyfriend or pimp is allowed
 Inside the reading hall.

Her kite, un-tethered from her surname,
 Soars high, til it gets entangled with the stars.
 Attempting to translate her poems
 Is like making love to a capricious mistress.

Her curly, kinky stream of verses
 Sway to the rhythm of her gait
 Untamed by the clanging of her anklets.

Her book of poems,
 a treatise on dishevelled hair
 and tresses on fire.

—

6. KILLING THE SHAMBUKAS

*Jim Crow segregated hostel rooms
 Ceiling fans bear a strange fruit,
 Blood on books and blood on papers,
 A black body swinging in mute silence,
 Strange fruit hanging from tridents.*

This poem draws its inspiration from the poem "Strange Fruit" (1937) by Abel Meeropol, and is about suicides of Dalit-*bahujan* students in institutions of higher education in India. Vemula Rohith is the recent victim.

—

7. MY PSYCHOLOGICAL LYNCHING (written after watching Shankar's "I")

I was at a movie-hall the other day
 the hero hailing from the slums
 speaks in an uncouth slang,
 his Anglo Saxon girlfriend sets him right
 with a tight slap!

From then on
 The hero sways in sync with his heroine,
 a paler version of his former self.
Keep the body, take the mind.

8. PLUS-SIZE POEM

This poem refuses to be
 The world's wife.

This poem is not pimple-free
 Is printed on rough paper.

This poem has cellulite on its rear end,
 Its rump outsizes itself off the market.

This poem walks the ramp with a self-edited gait
 Without introduction or foreword from veterans.

This poem does not opt for offshore liposuction
 To make oneself eligible for international prizes.

This poem eludes the trap
 In the hourglass of time.

—

9. GRAPES OF WRATH

(A poem on migrant laborers in Kerala)

The displaced of capital have come to the capital-
Anne Winters

Faceless migrant lads
 Tread landscapes of tongues
 To be greeted with a lispng embrace
 In God's own country.

—

10. A LOCAL TRAIN CONVERSATION

"Cricket is an Indian sport accidentally discovered by the English"

-- Ashis Nandy

Caste in a local train can be deceptive
like the soul
of a Pakistani fast bowler camouflaged
in a three piece suit
and Anglicized accent.

Though seated opposite me,
I can feel him charging on to me.

If my surname is too long
I could be *-caught behind*.

Will I be trapped *leg before wicket*
If I attempt a bloodline crossover?

I try to camouflage
into stripes of concocted ancestry
along fresh water currents.

Can I switch over to
My mother's surname
like switching from
active voice to passive voice
in the midst of a harangue?

Hope I do not lose my nerve
at abrasive queries like *bouncers*.

I try to find myself a place
in his skull
beyond his caste mark, amidst his eyebrows:
like trying to find my way around
an ever changing map!

He tries assessing me with an *in swinger* first
"What is your full name?"

Then he tries an *out swinger* that seems a lot
"and what is your father's name?"

By this time, he loses his nerve
And tries on a direct York-er
"What is your caste?"

11. KISS OF LOVE

*"Correct our watches by the public clocks.
Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks."
T.S.Eliot, "Portrait of a Lady"*

Two pairs of lips
Lock in a kiss
Losing the sense of time.

Heads turn to
Adjust wristwatches
From a public clock.

Locked lips
Turn the wheel of time
like prophets.

—

11. UAPA

(A protest poem against UAPA)

It is like a virus, all of us could be tested for it.
When you are being tested for this virus
And if the test turned out to be negative
The cop will plant the evidence from his
Kit,
With your signature coerced on it.

It is contagious,
If your friends protest your
Being injected with this virus,
They too get infected.
The virus attacks after long gestation periods
Of surveillance.

This virus feeds on its excreta.
Those inflicted and quarantined behind bars
Act as deterrents for anyone who might
Want to mess with those in power,
Even long after their release.

This virus takes various sizes and shapes
But always the teal of the flag opposing
The incumbent.
Tomorrow it could be your turn
And silence is not always golden.

12. SUNSTROKE

Infinitesimal strides of a slithering python-like procession
Cleaving a deep gorge on our landscapes.

Our fists held high like flaming torches
The light at the end of an epoch-long tunnel.

Only our sun will rise tomorrow -
We could be the sunstroke on your pale pigmentation

We paint our canvas with the color of the sky
You could snore all day (like our erased history) and spite this sun.

Our lives disentangled like
Disjoint pages in history-books coming apart.

We strive to evict a shadow from our lives
As if our sun is perennially laboring out of an eclipse.
