

**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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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## 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.

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## 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 lisping embrace  
 In God's own country.

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## 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?"*

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## 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.

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## 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.

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