

Wifi For Breakfast



Collected New Age Indian Poems

Wingword Poetry Prize 2017

An anthology of winning and commendable poems

WINGWORD POETRY PRIZE 2017

An anthology of winning and commendable poems

First Edition



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breaking the clitoris

“Girls can be athletic. Guys can have feelings. Girls can be smart. Guys can be creative. And vice versa. Gender is specific only to your reproductive organs (and sometimes not even to those), not your interest, likes, dislikes, goals, and ambitions.”

— *Connor Franta*

#NotAllMen

Lusha Jetley

It is estimated that the average human
Meets 80,000 people in their life.
Now that that's established, we know that
We aren't talking about all men.
Let's go back in time.
One. 1933 to 1945,
They weren't all Nazis
Two. 1949 to 1976,
They weren't all communists.
Three. 1095 to 1291,
They weren't all Christians.
Four. 16th December, 2012.
They weren't all rapists.
There are three ways in which you can not solve a problem.
One, you choose to ignore it
Two, you consider it invalid
Three, you pretend it doesn't exist.
One, two three,
This is how you deal with inequality.
One, two three, four -
All the way up to 92,
Women being raped on an average,
In my city;
But not by all men.
For a group that hates PC culture,
You sure use it to take apart generalisations.
Ask a man about rape,
And he'll say,
Not all men.
I'll let you in on a little secret,
Pssst. We don't think it's all men either!
It's just enough men.
It is estimated that the average human meets
80,000 people in their life.
Assuming half of them are men,
I'd say 39,990 men have made me feel

A little less.
39,990 strong,
Auto-wallahs,
Cab drivers,
Clerks,
Salespersons,
Passerbys,
Papa's business heirs,
Rich kids from good schools,
Cousins,
Uncles.
We never said it was all men,
Just enough of them.

Rape?

Trijita Mukherjee

He is a friend.

When you are busy escaping the abuses of a relationship
call him, in his presence there is warmth and comfort.

He will tell you to come over,

That he has bought a bottle of rum and there will be music.

After you have confessed about

The crimes you have committed against humanity

He will tell you to forget about it all, tell you it happens.

It will be a cold night, so sit outside on an open terrace.

Sing that song you both love- abhi na jao chhod kar

And caught up in the flow of that song and the guitar

You will suddenly feel him leaning towards you

And there will be a kiss on your cheek

You will smile the first time.

He will lean in again a few seconds later but this time

This time you don't want to be kissed

He is trying to get at your mouth and has almost succeeded

but

Resist.

You will maybe think that it's alright to kiss but no

It is not, you think. You don't want to be kissed.

You leave your song and guitar behind

And come into his room

His friend lies there on a bed reading

You may not perceive everything too well

Because well, you are drunk.

And then the details are blurry and you don't exactly remember

The sequence.

But there is a memory.

You are lying bent backwards

In his closet

And he is hovering over you and you remember

You remember

Bleeding. Menstruation. Periods.

And you remember

He put his fingers inside you

Vagina invaded

And he was convincing you that it's okay

That it happens.

You wanted to push him but you couldn't
Your body and your mind
Betray
Friendship
Betrays
Today memory,
Betrays.
You wonder now- did I want it?
But no, you cry, no I didn't.
I couldn't do anything because I was so drunk
I couldn't push him off, fight him off of me.
You comforted him after that
Saying such things happen, don't feel too bad.
He was your friend after all.

Abrus precatarious

Divya Karthikeyan

My teacher groaned at the sight
of a fish market, smirked
to deliver a diktat
"Girls should be seen not
To be heard"
But weighted thought carries with it
Its own punishment
I swallowed a red bead on the ground
Once
Then twice
Then four
The librarian laughed and
Asked me if I wanted to end up
A dead cow
Told me I would be barren and bear no
Pretty girls preening
In front of circular mirrors losing
everyday
to their floundering
minds, pricking their
ink clotted nails in
the light peering through
their oily plaits
muttering a little prayer
clutching their rosaries with
a bead rested
on the verge of joining the others
grappling
with how to talk mutely.

Shame

Sonal Sharma

they tell me to have shame run back to your mother no better hide shame too late now it's that time of the month again shame don't enter the kitchen or cook for yourself shame sleep on the floor so your husband doesn't force himself on you because he is right but you are just not fit shame how are you wearing white shame can't you make it stop shame little girls asking their mothers maa am I dying when they first stain their panties shame don't enter temples because the God who made you in her likeness obviously didn't bleed every month shame don't eat pickles shame stay away from cats and dogs and men they can tell you smell funny shame just basically stay away shame what's wrong with you girl believing you can do all that when you're shedding your body shame why you walking like a penguin shame why you breathing shame you got no shame shame girl have some shame shame really why so you can outrun me at the marathon so you can pretend you're smarter when I miss office for five days and steal my contract so you can teach me how to behave so you can tell me what to eat so you can build walls around my dreams and tell me I can do everything but that because come on my body is fragile on those days so you can tell me I am limited on those days so you can write poems about how beautiful my body is and continue to restrict it on those days you with your staunch ideals and rigid beliefs of what a woman should look like and live like you with your poems perfectly rhymed your sentences perfectly punctuated your dreams perfectly lived simply because you don't bleed for five days a month so let me break conventions here this is a poem without commas and dash dots and full stops and punctuations because we were always taught to hide ours we were shamed for our periods so here is a poem without one does it make sense to you does it because my body punctuates itself every month it marks beginnings and endings it breathes life literally it regenerates and recuperates shedding the excess it knows how to build itself and has phases like the moon my body is a master at the art of letting go and that is beautiful so you women who have been taught to hide and live just because nature is running its natural course on those days go ahead have no shame build empires no shame plan world domination no shame go to work no shame wear white and peach and beige and yellow no shame go mountain biking no shame make your favourite dessert no shame call your friends over and cast a goddess circle no shame breathe no shame live your life no shame. period.

Menstruation

Archita Mitra

every month I become a moon
that sheds her skin,
losing each of my faces
to the call of the werewolf-black
sky
sometimes I think, my self-hate
is a sentient being, a carnivorous
plant, clawing its way out
(inside me)
I wear a crescent smile
and bear the pain
like the burden of motherhood
and my names (which I did
not choose)
in my waning skin
blood trickles like dusk
or shame, a crimson thread
that has entangled me
in a girlhood-shaped labyrinth.
sometimes, I wish so much
to turn into mannequin
or plastic, but like everything else
my body is someone else's
and comes with a price
tag

Kitchen Warrior

Kajol Runwal

To women who grew up in kitchens.
Capes draped like sarees,
Fingers; a pinch of salt,
Tongues; a punch of tamarind,
Can you imagine houses without these sugar-hearts making them homes?
They are Olives with Popeye-strength.
At the helm of the house.
Your two-square meal is not their mundane routinized task
But the only work of art that anyone ever serves selflessly.
Spoons, spatulas, knives and their rest of the weaponry,
They are not the victims of your patriarchy.
Not the best from the dowry.
Not the diamonds for you to showcase and flaunt.
They're the heart and soul of your family tree.
Most of the days you rush out.
Leave without thanking
For the ginger-tea and the homemade butter cookies,
Oven-baked in all the warmth, that she could ever gather.
Instead, you leave leftovers for her to collect.
As she blurs the line between her duties and dignities.
You call this homemaker- "a housewife".
And once again take everything she's ever done, for granted!
She grinds her insides for you.
This is what selfless fine mincing looks like.
Her fingers marked with all the cuts and burns
of all the hot-tawa accidents and Kadhais-incidents.
But the deepest of her scars, don't even bleed.
They silently weep on nights that crumble and fall apart.
But on the mornings, that follow these awful nights,
She smells of earth again.
She smells of all the spices that she's made up of.
Of all the grinding, mincing, mixing and fixing.
Of all the fire-cracking tadkas.
Of all the heady turmeric fragrance, that can shoot your skulls open.
Of all the pepper and its fieriness.
Of all the honey and cinnamon healing your rotten throats.
This is toughness, that knows tenderness.
This is being rock-solid and still melting at the core.
This is compromising, even though she calls it a promise.

It is a tug of war and she never complains about stretching at both the ends.
It's a miracle to give spoonfuls after spoonfuls, without even keeping a count.
The least you could do is learn the grace of gratitude.
For all those women who grew up in kitchens.
With their capes draped like sarees.
Fingers; a pinch of salt.
Tongues; a punch of tamarind.
Hearts, like crushing sugars.
Making houses, homes to live in.

Darling Mother

Wikim Ajang

My mother does not know,
She does not remember-
The day she was born,
The mother she lost.
The legal papers state it was the 6th of April,
But she tells of vague memories
Of her mother who said it was
Maybe in May when they pulled out the dead millet stocks.
She slept inside the warmth of her mother's womb
Oblivious to the world outside burning ,
The men cut and burned the forest-
It was the time of Jhum.
The tiny foetus curled up
In a sleep, maybe listening to the jargon
Of men with lashing tongues and hands,
Or maybe she heard things she couldn't listen.
Hoped for the people to stop,
My mother did, the noise to subside -
"I waited till the world ceased burning,"
She says, for the smoke to die.
My mother with her little hands grasped
Things she could not hold,
She might have cried a soundless cry
With her lips still shut, and tiny legs kicking.
I wonder what babies think
When they blink in for the first time,
The bright lights of the strange world,
Maybe it's just queer for them- the air outside.
"She died young, my mother" ,
My mother says, I wonder how she looked;
Did we share the same eyes?
Would we both own the same broken dreams?
I owned a single pair of slippers,
And had to remember to make 'em last;
The world had so much for me to discover
So, barefoot did I make myself walk.
Feet planted firm on the ground,
The child with the carefree laugh
Lost her happy soul somewhere
Along the way to Orphan town.

Walked her barefoot way to love,
She found a piece of her soul-
Drifting on the ever flowing waves of memory
She found a piece every lap forward.
She had a talent for replacing,
A habit to swallow bitter compromise-
Ignored the old hurt, I wonder about possibilities
Of things turning up if she spoke at last.
My Darling Mother,
The sky isn't so high, if you believe.
Mother, the world isn't so big, you see,
Its just that our wombs are too small for us.

Red is my favourite colour

Eesha Roy

Red, the cheeks of the sweet little child on the hospital bed.
Red, the colour of the first sweater that Granny made.
Red, the colour of the first birthday dress that Mum bought
Red, the colour of the jersey of my basketball squad
Red, the colour of the petals of the flower that I first drew
Red, the colour of my first dancing shoes.

And then,

Red was to be hated
Red was to leave me every month. Hate.
Red was the colour of my white skirt. Hate.

I once wore a red skirt do you remember? I still do. Where was the hate?

Red was to be felt ashamed of.
Red was to be whispered.

But hey you,
Red is my sense of power.
Red is my power of growth.
Red is my sense of pride.
Red is my pride of womanhood.

Red is my favourite colour. PERIOD.

21 Barbies and 1 Ken

Ekshikaa S

When I was young and 9,
You bought me
21 Barbies and 1 Ken.
Lustrous hair, Sky blue eyes
Slender arms and impossible thighs.

A childhood indifferent to men and mousse,
Grimy, painted and torn shirts,
We spat out spit and bled like fools.
Strewed dry colour, drilled the earth.
Mud in our fingernails, silver in our teeth.
Late nights learning football, slapping on grease.
A tryst among abandoned sinks,
cobwebs, weed and rocky steps
Fallen sparks and rising depths
To recite Rudyard's 'If' flawlessly.

'But You always played with boys' - you say.
And yes I did in my bubbling days.
Kicked the ball and hit the pool
them in their trunks and me in my suit.
Cracked the windshield, brought down the fence.
Hurling our bicycles, raced through the bends.

When I was young and 9,
You bought me
21 Barbies and 1 Ken.
Yet I still see you turn pale Mom,
When you hear the word 'girlfriend'.

Scarred shins from broken buckets,
Bruised palms from scaling trees,
Smearing ink on blotchy knees
With demons to love and gods to appease.

When girls were taboo and body-hair was not.
Egos were budding, and emotions weren't taught.
Quarrels on who'd be forward and who takes defence.
Indifferent to stereotypes, the internet, and offence.

Chest-bumps were all it took to make amends.
Maybe that's why for me boys will always remain great friends.

When I was young and 9,
You bought me
21 Barbies and 1 Ken.
And after all that we've travelled through,
you're appalled that I'm a lesbian?

From A Father

Meghna Bhattacharyya

Remember one thing dear boy,
fear is irrational,
don't be a twat.
You're a man.

Don't you dare show it.
I raised you right son,
now don't prove me wrong.

Don't look at me like you look at your mother
Doe eyed, dreamy, so full of wonder,
No. I want you to be a man
and everything that a man should be;
tough, powerful, aggressive,
staring down danger straight in the eye,
show the women their true worth
and the place where they truly belong;
at your feet, begging for mercy.

No. Men don't hug.
And even if you've been lying in a pool of blood
With a knife held to your throat,
Do not ever, ever, show the slightest hint of fear boy

Because no matter how much you deny it,
You're still a man,
And men don't fear shit.

Homeless

Tanisha Nag

Woman, where do you live?
I ask because I just heard Beuli's story.
Her son said to her, "Who wants you anyway, Ma?
I have done you a favor.
I have let you stay in this house all these years,
in spite of all that you have done wrong and in spite of your flaws.
Had my father not been so kind, had it not been for our big hearts,
you should have been thrown out of this place years ago.
Leave, but you should be grateful, Ma."

I think you have heard it before, haven't you?
We all have. Does it make your blood boil?
Sometimes do you forget that you are just a guest
in a man's house? Forever?

Don't. You know?
They will blame you. I just heard them say.
"What a thankless woman," they said.
"She does not even cook!"
"But of course she was always like that,
never once giving a second thought to household responsibilities.
Her husband and his family have tolerated her for so long."
"Who else would have accepted a woman like her?" they asked.

You don't have a home. But of course, you know that.
You have heard it before, no?
You must leave after marriage.
That is what you have been told.
Your friends, your life as you have known and understood,
must be thrown away and left behind.
Your home after marriage is not your own, either
for that belongs to the husband and his family
and you are just a guest, coming to stay for a long, long time.
Beware, for you can be thrown out if you are not quite good enough.

You must be tolerated, you must not have flaws,
and every second of your life,
you must depend on the kindness of the stranger you married.
But woman, where do you live if you have no home?

Yes, I shop

Shruti Shukla

Yes, I shop
but that's only the half-truth.

Yes, I shop
because he doesn't realise that the house we once built together,
with so much effort, needs maintenance;
like buying cleaning liquids, getting fresh bedspreads,
like fluffing pillows every day, changing foot mats every quarter of a year,
like making up after every fight, like getting up after every night
like any other relationship, this too,
needs maintenance.

Yes, I shop
because he doesn't know how I like my salad, and with which sauce;
Just for the record, it's honey-mustard without any garlic, in case you're listening,
baby.
I shop, because he doesn't know the brand of baby food I feed the kids. And I know;
I know more, about how much spinach he likes in his morning smoothie,
which vegetables he won't eat at night,
and the fish he would like to cook over the weekend.

Yes, I shop
because I have a pretty amazing taste in clothes,
my personal sense of style,
raw, homespun and just mine;
I feel—bright colours, perfect fits and shiny necklaces make life better.

Yes, I shop
because dressing up my babies make me believe
that I have the potential of becoming a kids' stylist—
if that's even a profession.
Or better still, go for a mommy-baby fashion fiesta;
Now that surely is a bona fide! Daah, I have googled!

Yes, I shop
because I know he would ask me to pick a shirt for him on Saturday night,
the exact size that he would prefer, and what would be a little too tight
I know the exacts, when all he would be able to anticipate is—
“Have you lost weight, sugar!”
Well, do I have to?

Yes, I shop,
because he doesn't buy gifts for me, anymore;
Instead, he prefers to lend his credit card when he wishes to spoil me,
because that my darling is more practical, but less warm.

Yes, I shop
even after a long day at work.
I shop, because I am expected to, when he has a long week.

I shop, because that makes me be in control,
to peruse and check on the toll.

I shop,
because I like to;
I shop
because he doesn't.

one way ticket

“Today is the first day of the rest of your life.”

A Ride Away From Home

Meghna Chatterjee

Winter cloaks the streets in black. Our car is a beacon
Headlamps stretched in a concrete cone
of light.

You tell me of your days in the dark,
Head cradled in Nana's lap, in a
time when power was a myth
in India.
The bugs left your skin blanched but
you let them stay anyway, ears
intent in fables that I could tell my child
someday.

The street lamps are milestones in sleep,
a goodbye from home unraveling;
I wonder how I'll fit into the New York skin.

The trees are kings and queens in the
dark;
We make our way across a concrete sea
The road behind a palate of
tire tracks
and all the things I was supposed to do
before I turned eighteen.

You ask me if I remembered my Visa, my
passport, my books, myself
You forget I'm not five anymore,
I tell you not to worry.
Your eyes are a liquid brown, open and empty, like broken windows at dusk;

The road
to the airport is a gamble in the dark,
We sit
in our silence, contemplating our own stars,
Hands folded in an almost mannequin-like pretense
of indifference.
Your hair falls in auburn waves,
mirroring mine.
In the dark, I am more like you than I'd thought.

Chopstick fumble at hawker centre

Rohan Naidu

(closing time, Maxwell Food Centre, Singapore)

Ah boy,
that egg will become chicken
by the time it reach your mouth
if you hold chopstick like that.
Here, I show you how.
Put finger like this--
no, no, not that one.
Ah yes. Now, can eat or not?

can eat, Aunty, but
sometimes, when I ache for home
I let a dumpling slip
through these foreign fingers.
Maybe my Ma will hear it splash into the soup
and come hurrying out of one of these kitchens
to teach her son to eat again.

Monachopsis

Merab Wangchuk

We sit inside cars
wishing it'd never stop
and lights don't guide us home
We find cheap hotels to stay the night.
The city never sleeps
and lovers never stay,
Neon signs all are the same.
We visit graveyards for fun
Refuse to be photographed
for the fear of dead souls,
Flyovers are our escape routes
Never invited to parties
and we never go to church.
Store clerks wrinkle their nose
Smell of our cheap perfume
remind them of their days
spent scraping the mall floors.
A bit of cocaine never killed anyone
A pot of marijuana gives us freedom.
We'll be damned if they complain again
Here, car doors are expensive
than overdosed vomit.
Let's go back to the time when
drinking wasn't the only way
to be inspired to write.
Stop borrowing envelopes
to post letters to companies
that will never publish our books.
Do riders at the back
wish to be in the front?
Do elephants want to fly?
Coffee reminds us of times
we refused cigarettes,
Moles on the right shoulder
of women we declined to love.
If everybody found redamancy
you think we'd ever have poetry?
Well, we await at train stations
with strangers resting against us,
a dose of caring on the run.
Reality is jagged

Prescribed madness and medicine.
We'll never be famous,
We'll return to small towns
we desired so much to leave.
We have wandering hearts
But money this month is tight.

The Letter Poem

Trijita Mukherjee

(for my mother)

This is to remind you
To leave the back door open
For the stray cat to come in--
She likes to sleep on the doormat beside the fridge
It is warm there.

I am sorry I left out some milk for her-
I know you didn't want me to.
She dirties the place sometimes--
But she is so tiny and looks so hungry
And refuses to let me touch her.

Hug the newspaper after you have read it—
It likes to be loved. It is a newspaper after all.
It bears so much of sadness from all around the world
That it gets exhausted
And it cries with bitterness and dreads coming alive the next day.

Don't worry about me.
I have always liked to sit on porches.
And lie on the bed without switching on the fan
I have always talked to animals more and people less
But there's a breeze and I promise not to cut myself...
And I will be fine.
Know that I will come back
To stare at dining tables, and panic at cooking gone wrong
To lose myself in day dreams in a crowd, and
Making caramel custards and sleeping late-
So breathe, when I walk out the door.

Homecoming

Zainab Ummer Farook

I left home –
and I breathed
clean air for the first time, Ma.

Never mind that
it was Chennai Central,
reeking of grime and filth and sweat
and metal and watery coffee

This air was free

This air never breathed in
the guilt we etched on your pores

for daring to hold a passport
to the Island of Insanity –

we, of the Nation of Normalcy

This air never heard the chilankas
of duty

clatter in alarm

as you danced across the Line of Control

the water tugging at your ankles
first, and then your thighs and hips
and torso

dragging down under
even your untameable hair

This air never saw you
resurface –

kicking and biting and punching
and spitting at dad

who waits patiently every single time

you sail away

and this air never saw you wear my angry hands
like a life-jacket

my hands – laden with Dicorate and Mirnite
and Ativan – oblong grey pills and tiny white tablets
whose generic names and dosages
I could tell you even today

(Valproic Acid. 700 mg. Mirtazapine. 7.5 mg.
Lorazepam. 1 mg.)

and this air
never saw me Google their chemical structures
on the eve of my 12th standard board exams

trying to place my grief and fatigue
within double bonds and
hydroxyl groups and benzene rings

This air never touched pencil tips
broken by my failure
to figure out how your terrified screams

defied all known laws of physics

and drilled through floors and walls
and doors and my skin of steel

with a force it never should have had.

When I left home, Ma,
for the first time in seventeen years
I breathed air that was free of you.

I breathed air that was free,
or so I thought until yesterday
when the blindfold slipped

and I saw air

coiled round and round like a
stubborn umbilical cord

pushing
spoonful after spoonful of memories
down my forgetful throat:

me burying my face into the folds
of a nightie faintly smelling of onions

you holding my shaking hand
through the haunted house of trigonometry

us rolling eyes at my sister's terrible puns

over cups of coffee made exactly the way I like it,
loaded with milk and heaped with sugar –

the rich steam wafting into my nostrils
from across seven hundred kilometres

I choke.
The air refuses to budge.
I scream.
The noose tightens.
I panic, sending papers flying everywhere,

wondering
HOW WAS THIS HAPPENING
if gravitational force was inversely proportional to
the square of distance between two objects?
when the cartoon anvil struck –

Newton was right, after all, and I was wrong
(again)
I never left home, Ma.
I never left home.

Between Continents

Yashodhara Trivedi

I rally with a wall of clothes —
six layers of Indian cotton turn mush
against the tyranny of an English winter.
My freezing bones are built for a sun plucked clean
from the horizon, winking from the corners
of snapshots parceled across the Himalayas.
I outlive a snowstorm
spooning the heater in a walk-in closet
masquerading as bedroom —
too cold to fall asleep, too tired not to.
The thrill of experience perseveres.
Shuffling around in mismatched socks,
nostrils ablaze with the scent of candles that mimic
the spices in my father's cooking, I ache
for mustard-hilsa and piping hot jalebis.
Weekdays are for gentle paranoia
manifested in stockpiling — with copious tins
of chicken stew, hot cocoa and herbal tea,
the common cold beats a survivor out of me.
These skills are rendered worthless now,
like farming in a landfill
or hitting jackpot in monopoly.
Weekends turn to drinking games
with chilled mimosas and ice lollies.
My body sinks
in a pool of sweat, all thawing limbs
and glistening chest, slapping away mosquito wings.
Everything reeks of the tropical sun —
my tangled hair, the tie-dyed sheets,
this water bed and toasted skin.
When dawn splits open the old skyline,
the crows begin to raise new hell.
I stumble barefoot across the room
and make love to the air-conditioning.

Greens to Greys

Avantika Chaturvedi

I am of the kin
That grows up switching houses,
Filling them up to call their own.
In the same city, for five years
I had five homes,
And every time I'd leave,
I'd take a piece of it along.
The peacock feathers
Shed in the backyard of one
Adorned the next,
Mom's hibiscus from one's garden
To another's walls.
My mere lifetime became a museum
Of doormats, lime paint and echoes in empty rooms
That reside safely
In each of my bones
Like relics preserved,
Too precious to be displayed.
But I saw in movies
And I saw in my grandfather,
People I never understood
People who left parts of their bones
In homes,
Their hearts inside bricked walls.
Light wrecked to darkness
Like their concrete fours-
Until now.
Only my home is not guarded by brick walls
My home has no walls
It is vast open lands
That smell of freshly cut grass,
Clean air and chilly winds in September
My home is lush green forests
Residing April blossoms
And wide endless roads.

My home is not guarded by tall walls and wrought iron gates
It is guarded by greens on chests,
Combats on foot
And heavy metal on shoulders-

Infallible during mere earthquakes,
That simple floods cannot corrode.
My home is not grey or white or yellow or pink
My home is green through and through
And for the first time in eighteen years,
I have been rendered completely homeless.

Cocksure

Divya Karthikeyan

Delhi is a harsh teacher

She beats me into giving up the me
that compromises
scratches my lips with her manicured nails
when I need to sigh

She never asks. She stands too close.
I can feel her wet breath in my ear arousing a creeper
once in a deep slumber in the pits of my stomach
what was a lasso.

I am rudely awoken at the liminal 3 am now bathed
a rich red, gulping up her eerie silence as practice
to swallow a little more pride with each passing day.

As she gets louder, my voice softens and betrays its years.
The lessons come fast and strong and I forgo
the basics to focus on tougher loves.
Those loves will come in the test she says.

When the lacerations blacken
my body will not forgive.
She pronounces perseverance wrong,
but I cannot correct her.

Tough love gets tougher by the month, a light rap
on the knuckles will leave bruises tomorrow.
I confuse what to fear for what to learn.

I will try harder today, and wear my best smile and
Be cocksure. Ask for what you want, but ask like it isn't a question.
To draw her diagrams, I need to erase. I peer
into the others' notebooks, and they have found their way to draw around their
already sketched pages.
She says I don't draw smart, do I need a compass?

When will I leave. How long will I stay.
Have I eaten her food here.

Does my mother miss me.
In my mind, I never left home.

lost on a highway

Adulthood is a time we begin to carve our own identities. We decide who and what we love, what our passions and opinions are, even who our friends are. During this time, we deal with a mammoth social jungle of labels and stereotypes concerning our bodily appearance. Our identity becomes fat or skinny, fair or dark, gay or straight, rich or poor, boy or girl or none. We try to figure out the individual beneath the labels: the person only we truly know of. It is our job to invent oneself, discovering the universal question “Who am I?” and making peace with it.

First Generation Immigrants

Debarshi Mitra

They hold languages
at the tip of their tongue
like immigration I.Ds.
At night when they dream,
myths of two different lands
hover over their eyelids,
like two unsure strangers
at the edge of their bed
gazing so intently at each other,
half in disbelief
and the other half
in longing.

English

Debarshi Mitra

I used to wear it on my head like a crown
when we went to my father's ancestral home
on some Sundays, the railways leaping in time
several centuries
taking us away from the city and to that other world
where concrete was sparse and the pale yellow of disease
left its unrelenting trace everywhere. Growing up in the city
there was little congruence I could find there.
Inside the house, surrounded by other relatives, sometimes
my (now dead) diabetic aunt would drag her body across
the hall to pick up a fruit kept on the table,
her eyes gleaming while she looked directly
at me and asked, "What do you call this
in English?"

Seeking a well-spoken gallery assistant

Urvashi Bahuguna

When I first moved to the city, I said
the word fragment with a wide-eyed aye

my classmates cringed & corrected
not fray like hem coming apart but fraa

like a small-town exhaled from the mouth.
I shake my head bird-like when grandmother

says bis-kut. What is kut, dadi? Its kit like
please leave the hill-talk in the hill-town.

When a visitor to the gallery asks: what
is the half-finished bridge over Kochi river

supposed to be, will I be able to say
Kalashnikov without tripping? When a

crane frames the highway, will I be able
to say ferris wheel without someone wanting

to get off the ride? When I get the job

and go home my teeth polished like silver
my every word a penny I will hear: avois,

how fancy fa like a fat prized hen cy
like wash that damn mouth out with sea.

Alfaaz

Sneha Roy

They said, Alfaaz was born
With a foreign tongue ;
Which whipped and danced around
In its small ballroom of ivoried molars and canines,
Like the London Bridge was falling
Inside the roof of her tiny mouth.

Like a forest fire, the tongue danced
And the local people blew out their lanterns ;
And pretended to be asleep,
To hear her drawling beyond the walls
And invoke Shakespeares
In the little Britain resting,
On the brim of
Her inked Indian lips.

They said, Alfaaz had a serpent for a tongue
Hissing London summer breezes,
It's fangs encrusted
with stolen kohinoor kisses ;
For it shone as it spoke out loud
Shedding skins of syllables
Of soliloquy ; about the
Vermillion sun rising
On her mother's forehead every morning.

Like the bonfire licking ghee
Her mouth widened like a den:
Consuming its lion tinted basmati,
Burning a kiss on the floor of the
tongue she bit into in then ;
Flooded with a bloody Thames trickling slow
Finding its mother river
in the Ganges' flow.

Now they say, Alfaaz is
Born with an exotic tongue ;
Which whips and dances around
Spewing native tales like liquid gold,

Finding its fire in an Indian hearth
Burning brighter :
To no longer be tainted as foreign.

Some tongues simply dare
To choose their own homes
To reign.

Thank You Note

Priyam Gupta

Is there anything more idyllic to a writer, or reader, than the sound two words make when they merge and entwine as if they were crafted specifically with the purpose of finding one another in the assemblage of a fraction over a million of them in a leather-bound collection that is the totality of this language?

The words I speak of were informed by their mothers and fathers, that on the fateful day of their union, the realm will celebrate with joy, or mawkishness, or even laughter, and in that moment, everything will feel alright, everything shall fall into place. There might even be revelations in the shower, and a benevolent smile shall wrinkle someone's face. The words I speak of, they flow with effortlessness not in their singularity, but only when they are placed contiguous to one another, words such as "unbroken egg" or "prima donna", or the more impersonal "cellar door" and the most personal "Chaloge? Haan."

This is how poetry is born, when everything seems to fall into place or falls apart when even one of the set of two is missing, or worse, has been usurped by another.

This poem began as a homage to the beauty of poetry, and of words, whereas truth be told, it is really about the time I waited in a lashing downpour for a rickshaw for more

than twenty goddamn minutes, and when I finally heard one of them say “haan” to my “chaloge?” I composed an ode which is in part angst-ridden for all those who turned me down, and in part a “thank you” note.

Onomatopoeia

Dhruv Trehan

At breakfast,
you read to me, from your favourite newspaper,
articles about intended duplicity. The World was
quiet for the Dawn to unfold, in its mellifluous
entirety, and the only sounds I could make out, in
my state of hungover reverie, were,

your muffled sighs, hmm and ch ch ch,
escaping your chapped lips like the whispered
whistle of my antique electric-kettle, expressing
your discontent with the unlikely turn-of-events
that haunt the modern World,

your words, de-st-ruc-tion, and car-na-ge,
carefully let out, each syllable, made love to,
uttered with affection and regal gentility,
with due care afforded to each of their
individual fragilities, like baby birds,
unfurling their wings and chasing the
dawn for the first time,

and, the gentle tapping of your feet,
tak.tak.tak, on our concrete floors,
like morning dew, falling, leisurely,
on dried and withered autumn leaves

and, the clatter of your teeth,(it was slightly chilly)
a monotonous tone with no ups and down, like the
clamor of those thousand pairs of feet, rushing
for the first metro, trying to avoid the curse of traffic
and imminent banality,

and, the crunch of bread under a blunt butter knife
and a melted condiment, shining in morning shades
of amber, just as in verse and rhythm as
the drowsy and cursory pleasantries of children
being dragged to school at ungodly hours,

and, the rustling of the cheap recycled paper stuck

in between your sweaty thumb and index finger,
the rustle of leaves from the first gush of wind that
heralds a new Spring every December,
and, the beating of my heart against its bony cage,
nothing but a silent observer.

It was then that I decided if you were ever to be a
figure of speech, you, darling, would be Onomatopoeia.

Kalyani

Trijita Mukherjee

this is a quiet town.
a town so quiet that
you can hear the sound
of an axe skinning away
at a piece of wood.

the sound of a singular
bell on a hero cycle,
when the cyclist slowly trails
along an even slower road

that leads to the blacksmith's
shop at the end of the road.
the blacksmith's hammer's
clank-clank-clank,
punctuate
a drowsy town.

at 2 o'clock
on an ordinary afternoon
if you walk towards
Central Park,
taposh-da will be
pulling down the shutters
of his grocery store--
his wife
has just drained the starch
from an earthen pot
she has boiled rice in
for the last 25 years.

further down
biren-da would be brewing tea
and selling biscuits and other
such eats,
for the bank officials,
when they step out
for their hour-long
lunch break.

later on

maybe around 5 o'clock
when you are walking
back home,
the boy at kamal furniture store
will be sprinkling water
from an old pepsi bottle
on the floors
of the shop--
the afternoon dust will
then settle down,
giving
way
to a lesser quiet evening.

winding down
the lane
by the lake, which leads
up to the gates of your
home,
you see amal-dadu sitting
at his doorstep
smoking a biri. .
"kire? kamon achis?
kobe asli?"
you smile at him
comment on the weather,
and refuse an invitation
to a cup of tea.
"nah.. aaj jai."

you will reach home
open the gates
that creak
with the sound of years
of coming and going--
solitary footsteps
and bags, lost.
you will sit in your room
switch on the fan and
hear the pages of your diary
flutter--
it is the sound of
the slumbering sadness
of a quiet town
you will know.

The Wait

Vancouver Shullai

I am thirteen years of ignorance,
Five years of mistakes and three years
Of telling myself not to do them again.
I am Khasi with no Khasi name.
Catholic, with no Catholic name.
I am christened with Imagination,
Watered with Precision
And salted with Detail.

It has been exactly one hour
And thirty six minutes
Since I arrived at the airport
And exactly seventeen minutes
Less of that, that I saw a Maruti 800
With dents and scratches and a family.

I wanted to imagine right away.
To create a personal motion picture
For my mind and my mind, alone:

You see,

There was Dada with little Riya
Sitting in the passenger seat next to Rajah —
Their loyal driver who has a North Indian wife,
Pregnant with their second child.
In the back seat was Anjali, first child
Of Dada, with her son, Ritesh —
Brother of Riya.

Heading home after a trip to New Delhi
Anjali was only waiting for a hearty lunch.
Riya, just as hungry, was waiting to get away
From her grandfather's sweaty arms.
Rajah was waiting for a phone call,
While Dada was waiting to rest.
Ritesh was fast asleep to wait for anything.

(It was an affair of waiting.)

Dadi waited at home with a warm pot of rice,
Dal, papad, sabji, Italian pasta
And three buckets of bathing water.

In their Japanese-themed living room
Was Anjali's beloved Francis, whose erudition
Included a Master's degree in Psychology
And seven Spanish words, one of which meant window.
He sat and he read a book of a British writer
And waited on his wife and children to return.

The Maruti 800, model 1998, entered the gate —
The sound of which made Dadi run with joy,
Francis sigh and the papad burn.

There

Vancouver Shullai

There, where postcard-like photographs are taken from,
There is where I wish to stand.
There, where the grass, intoxicatingly green,
Perfumes the tranquil'd land.
There, where I can walk barefoot
And naked – unashamed;
There, where the waterlogged mud
Can fuck my christened name!

There, where the world won't judge
The lustful moans of my feet;
There, where my solidarity thrives –
Aloof from man-woven creed.

Oh! Take me out of this wooden bench
And silence this uselessness!
Silence the commands, silence the rules!
Silence the exasperating cement-mixing machine
Outside the window, too!

The Nomad

Haalah Shaikh

Only you could
sit with your hands buried in the sand of distant lands
And delight that your feet have left the ground
and found in galactic vacuums some anchor.

Strange, but it is only fair
that you've chosen this life
and this despair
Rife with uncertainties
Of not knowing where your next meal will serve

So there is no return
And no respite
You will not thrive in my enterprise

So I suppose if that makes you happy
Having nothing asked and nothing said
given your dispositions of emptiness
You can ride this unsettling wave

But it will only ever be you
who writes about the blister
On the underside of your foot
and the dead butterflies on the sidewalk

You've married the Mercurial
and called it joy.

An Emotional Faucet with a Permanent Leak

Farah Maneckshaw

When they conduct an autopsy
On my corpse, they will state conclusively
That I was-
70 percent emotion
30 percent self-deprecating humour and a
100 percent awkward.

If punctuation marks were people,
I'd never be a full-stop, dignified and silent,
But an infinite series of exclamation marks
In that text from your mom.
Never the bubble of calm,
Always the sea of chaos.
For I never learned to reel in feelings,
Leaving them flopping frantically
Like a flailing fish on the line.
Me, chasing after them
Hopelessly,
A puppy chasing its tail.

My tear ducts wore themselves weary
Upon the sad demise of
The caterpillar I fondly called Fred
(May he rest in peace)

I have been flung out of classrooms,
And have tumbled down staircases
Bubbles of laughter exploding from my lips

I let guilt pierce me like shrapnel
After slaying a mosquito of paternal mien
Worried I orphaned the rest of his kin

And tap danced on the tight-rope
Between agony and unadulterated bliss

I have been cautioned-
In a world where salt water is shame,
Vulnerability is a chink in your armour

And splaying your soul open to be read
Is Achilles foolishly drawing targets
At the back of his own feet

But I won't be vacuum in the spaces between the stars,
Or the empty space between the words of others
I'd rather burn like the sun than like Icarus,
So this blazing train-wreck of emotions is me
I'll sew my feelings to my sleeves again,
And call this train-wreck a human hyperbole.

Numb

Niharika Mathur

He beckoned me to raise my hands high
I pushed my limits and let out a cry
Eyes shut, fists furled, agony rippled through my spine
I then conformed, and lied down in a position supine.

Panting and sweating,
My eyelids were almost down
As I trudged along the everlasting mill,
The chills I felt knew no bounds.

Hurling gibes at me, he pressed me more.
I bent my knees as my thighs became sore.
Every inch of my body was falling into crumbs
I couldn't feel anything, everything was so numb.

My shoulders slugged against the dragging weight
I suppressed my pain but it just wouldn't abate.
Whimpering, crying, shambling along,
I knew he could see nothing wrong

Who gave him the right to rule over my body?
Ordering me, directing me- He commits great folly
Though I gave myself in, to be treated like that
All efforts I made, seemed to lay flat.

I don't mind him controlling my diet or my walk
Numbing me so much, that it seems like a crime
Seriously, one has to go through a lot,
To reduce their waistline!

6 poems and a farewell

Nilesh Mondal

i.

(Paharganj)

hotel rooms,
empty like palms,
one bed- two pillows-
a light year's
distance between
bodies wrapped
in cold cream sweat
and blue
night light,
invite us in
here lovers find their way
through sweet shops, with
masjids as road markers,
turn right
where you held
hands first, turn left,
where the sunlight
tricked your eyes into tears,
there is a sudden silence,
perhaps it's Sunday,
perhaps this market
will never cry out
its fares again for
unsuspecting buyers,
perhaps there won't be
another night
like this,
where your head will be
on my shoulders, your
hair damp with winter
dew, and we'll both watch
the sun rise, innocent,
but ripe with secrets

ii.

(Kunzum cafe)

we turn up too late, the forts
have closed at Hauz Khas,
and we're left looking, our
vision slipping through
gates, falling on the courtyard
where kings touched ground
and lovers touch third base
today, falling out of grace,
falling, so it's an effort,
picking ourselves up
we make a beeline,
to Kunzum,
magic happens here,
I've always believed, storytellers give away
their stories, and musicians, rip
from their throats,
strings of pearls
like a song, break it
and let it, fill the floor
but nothing happens tonight,
there is coffee, but no conversation,
fragrance, but
nothing to soothe
my longings, for this
trickster of a city
next door, in a shop for antiquities
German tourists haggle for a bargain
and I wonder if they will ever need the
grandfather clock, and three Hitchcock
posters, the way I needed a miracle
but it's 9, and the bars
are slowly filling
up like they're glasses,
and the music is
getting louder, and I'm wondering if
this is how it feels
to come looking for
time, but finding a
broken clock instead

iii.

(Chandni Chowk)

here, our bodies afloat

on cold marble,
head tilted till the sky
is a dome, close enough
to brush off with a flicker
of our eyelashes,
the minarets like spines,
old, tall and arching into our eyes,
close enough for our lips,
to blow away dust
from the spires, with a breath
here, pigeons flock and feed,
and coo in dulcet tones,
and the old man guarding shoes,
at the doorway to this monument
will tell you, if you press
your ears to the
stone corridor,
and listen, you'll know
the cooing is a song your grandmother knew,
and you've forgotten, without fail
here, Pappu loves Meena,
is etched on stone, at the farthest
edge of the eastern minaret
lovers no one knew about,
no one will find,
no one remembers
but their words remain,
faceless, ghosts
waiting to touch,
stranger fingers
here, ittar sells in glass bottles,
labelled with names, distinctly American,
the shopkeeper
tells me, 'take one for the
woman you love,
another, whom
you've held onto, for so long'
and I bring with me, one
to keep safe in my cupboard,
never to open, another
I drop into the street, watch it
shatter, and the breeze
takes it away, to the other
side of the city,
'this is for you',

I whisper
'this is for you'

iv.

(Green Park Extension)

that evening, climbing stairs
to the second floor, every step
like quicksand, seemed
to shift too fast, and there was
an urgency in everyone's voice,
as if summer had arrived, but
no one had heard
the cuckoos yet
I sat crouching in a corner,
back scraping against the
sofa, toes curled, careful
not to touch someone's knee,
while someone in a white kurta
recited in Urdu, a poem about
the queen who went mad
in her own chambers, and
the king whose grief echoes
through the corridors
of his palace, still
I listen enthralled, not knowing,
in a week the only things I'll remember of this
evening, would be someone's eyes,
someone's white cardigan, the way
the brown of the evening melts
into fair skin, and how giggles
become a whiff of breath,
stuck between my ribs
waiting at the metro station, for the
returning train, I'd later ask her why
we keep taking turns, waiting for
the night to turn colder outside,
and she'd tell me,
'in Delhi, you don't
say, go
you say
stay, just a moment
more, a moment
more won't hurt'

v.

(Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib)

our first Christmas
in the coal belt,
we walked through the fog
to get to a church and lit a
candle, for whom,
we never asked
at home, mother would weave
a garland of white flowers,
which didn't have fragrance,
blossoming only after sunset,
and she'd put the garland
around a bust of Jesus, (which she had bought,
after much bargaining,
from a 'fixed price' shop
at the fair of Hazrat Pir)
years later, kneeling
on cold marble
grey as ocean foam,
gurbani echoing
across
the halls,
the silence
the calm
the psalms
floating,
find me
again,
deep in the
heart of
Sis Ganj Sahib

vi.

(Ugrasen ki baoli)

it started near Central Park, that
feeling, of a journey that'll end
when the sun sets
inside the park, couples sit soaking
the winter sun, someone holds his
hand over his girlfriend's eyebrows
shading her fair skin from sunlight,
some retired men discuss politics,

fingers absentmindedly undressing
peanuts, tongues hungrily snatching
them away, someone comes to me,
his shadow like a mountain, eclipsing
me, asks if I want my ears cleaned
'are they dirty', I ask
he looks at me, and
walks away without a word
at ugrasen ki baoli, someone
narrates the story of the baoli,
before it was deserted, the
queen, would walk down these steps
and dip her toes in the pristine water
outside, sentries stood guard and
maidens, fair and beautiful waited
with muslin towels to wipe the moisture
of the queen's honey-milk smeared skin
but the hours went by, the queen bathing
and the king wondering
if it'd all been a mistake,
if a well would eventually
steal his lover's affection
but here I was, centuries later,
staring into the same abyss,
this city hasn't changed either,
it still stole,
affection from lovers,
turns grief into
monuments
and me, into
memory

vii.

(Farewells)

finding mother's first
grey strands,
I tell her she's
getting old, she tells
me, for her it means,
I'm growing wiser
this time last year, I had
gathered
darkness
in my outstretched palms

and a city had kept me warm,
just
by looking at it, all night, across a
river that
neither told me to leave,
nor called me back
tonight, pubs are crowded,
restaurants suffocating,
people see strangers and
smile, every city I have loved,
every
place I have given
my heart,
or taken with myself,
a whiff of empty streets
and promised to remember,
grows older
tonight, I wish someone
is keeping
my letters,
hostages of desire, I
hope someone is keeping
those cities warm

expect no expectations

“I’m not in this world to live up to your expectations and you’re not in this world to live up to mine.”

— *Bruce Lee*

Trauma

Mahika Khanduri

Blue ink, stays scattered as words, across the sheet.
A torn exam paper, with limp ends,
covers my school table, as a residue of my knowledge.
My shirt is heavy with sweat.
My desk retains the time-passed carvings.
My pencil box, punctured by the staple pins.
My mind carries the trauma.

T, not for the terrific scores I received,
but for the tragic loss of my mental state,
for the terrible lack of understanding shown for my condition,
for the triumph of anxiety over stability,
for the triumph of insanity over benevolence; over my humanity.

R, not for the radiant smiles on my parents' faces,
but for the rage that I manifested
through continuous sips of strong, bitter coffee at midnight,
through the muffled bawling in the cushions,
through the crumpled pages,
through the excessive use of bandages.

A, not for the astounding looks from the teachers,
but for the alarming amount of syllabus;
from memorising the adverse effects of taxes on production,
to evaluating the atrocious methods of the Nazis;
from being apathetic about the intricate formulae of 3D figures.
to cramming the awful structure of benzene;
...
from almost dying,
to somehow surviving, to fulfil my feat.

U, not for the upgrade in my grades,
but for the unrealistic education standards set by the society,
which I met,
but at the cost of my health.
At the cost of my body, at the cost of my humane self.
At the cost...
of my sanity.

M, not for the mesmerising handwriting highly appreciated by the principal,

but for my mindfulness, that went missing;
the meliorism, that turned into mistrust;
the magic in life, that became mundane;
the mercy, that never came.

A, we have here, once again.
But this time, it won't be the same.
As monotony needs to be broken at times,
may it be in this poem,
or with the anxiety I experienced on pre-exam nights.
Because I am not the only one to have suffered,
the pressure, compulsion, duress, of scoring
and of competing with one another.

And now...
Blue ink stays scattered throughout my bed sheet.
A torn fabric, with hanging fibres
masks my pillows as a residue of my screams.
My blanket is heavy with scribbles.
My desk retains the screeching nail marks.
My pencil box, punctured by the compass holes.
My mind... still carrying the trauma.

To Mum & Dad, from your perfect daughter

Meghna Bhattacharyya

Thank you.
Thank you for all the shimmery things in my life,
for pushing me forward,
to not let defeat put a smear on my success.

Thank you,
for hitting me with reality,
stripping me naked of dreams
and washing my thoughts clean of any wonder.

Thank you,
for showing me that I
don't need to go out to the jungle
to find snakes;
I can find plenty, right here, in school.

Thank you!
Santa isn't real?
And neither is magic?
This is my nine year old self saluting you.

Thank you,
for introducing me to a world
where nobody really cares anymore.
where the number of 'likes' decides a person's worth,
where beauty is more than brains.

Thank you,
for saying this so many times
that it drilled its way into my soul
that no person is really genuine.

Thank you for telling me
you have faith in my intelligence,
but you don't have faith in me.
I really do mean it when I say
thanks,
because the world is a nasty place
and you taught me how to hit back.

You taught me how to say 'no'
and you taught me
how to know the bad from the good
you taught me how to survive
to protect and
prevent and perfect
and persist and protest
And just, be present,

But in this rush of emotions
and friendly relations
and loud vocal assumptions

You forgot to tell me to live
I've learnt to survive the harsh cold tide

But how do I let myself go in the warm mellow breeze?
I will exist, sure

But will I really be alive?

Dear Everyone

Zeneeva Pervez

Dear people of Indian society,
Enemies of peace, propagators of depression and anxiety.
You are manipulator, murderer, killer.
You kill our dreams year after year.
No, really, don't you feel slightest bit of shame?
Expecting medals in Olympic game!
When you yourself are the one,
Who wants to see only an engineer in your son.
That badminton gold could have been in his name.
If he had not been forced to only solve math problems.
You disregard our dreams to fulfill yours.
You defile our heart, which was once pure.

Dear Mr. IJK,
Your son could have been the one lifting that world cup today.
But you ridiculed and rubbished his dream to become a cricketer
And so he copes with his sorrows with depressing songs at his guitar.
And you Mr. XYZ,
Can't you see your daughter dances great?
Her name could have been taken with the likes of Michael Jackson
If you had let her take her own life's decision.
And dear Mr. PQRS,
You must be deaf to not hear your daughter's melodious voice.
She could have been the country's next singing sensation
If you had not decided to step-up and kill her passion.

Dear mom and dad,
I have always tried my best to make you glad.
But what about the tears I shed in the dead of night -
Away from ear-shot, away from everyone's sight?
I cried when once my rank shifted from second to fifth,
But you shattered me more by saying you were ashamed of me for it.
When I got good marks in board exams again,
I regained your love and respect only then.
I know you made, and still make many sacrifices to make me happy
But frankly, your behaviour sometimes makes me feel so crappy.
Do you even know what my dreams are? I doubt.
You have been too busy taking decisions for me, counting me out.
You make me feel less like a human and more like a show piece,

My success- my reward, my marks- my trophies.
I love you both, so I am still in the battle.
So, be a little considerate and stop your endless rattle.

Dear some family members,
Who are just names in old contact numbers,
Who never called before, but you know, today is result day
And so, you suddenly remember us and have many things to say.
You know what? We exist for the rest of the year too.
And we would do perfectly fine without that one-day-of-support from you.
So, why don't you remain ignorant and let it pass?
Oh right! You love to make life hell for us.

Dear bragging uncle and aunty,
You know, my life was all fine and dandy,
But then your daughter became a doctor
And your son got a job in an IT-sector.
But, you know, five years passed since that day,
You don't need to remind us that still today.
We have got all details memorised, so now can you stop?
You are one of the reasons that we are a flop.
"If they can, why can't you?" My mom says.
She doesn't understand we are all different in more than one ways.
"I don't like it, I have my own dreams."
All goes unanswered, no one hears my screams.

Dear first cousin,
You said my friends won't be there for me if I don't win.
There's a very good chance that you are right.
But it would be because you stopped me from making friendship tight.
Whenever my friends planned something, I pretended to be sick
Cause you told me not to go on "silly" picnic.
Since I am an only child, you are closest to a sibling I have
But do you have any idea about me, my likings, my fave?
Do you know I am allergic to my favourite food?
Do you know I love writing poems? No dude!
Where were you when I needed a shoulder to cry on?
Why, at a party with you guys, I feel left-out and forlorn?
Do you know who stood by me when I felt lonely?
Those very friends about whom you think so lowly.
Speak against them again and our relation ends
Cause rather than you, I choose my friends.

Dear idiot friends and besties,
I am sorry, I could not keep my promise.

I backed out of every plan at the last minute.
It hurt you all a lot, dinnit?
You probably thought I no more care.
But it hurt me too, you aren't aware.
I am ready to go to Amazon with you all.
Its my parents who aren't letting me to go to that mall.
"It would waste your valuable time," they state
Later in life I'll have no precious memories to recollect,
Cause my only memories would be properties of cos and sine
So, I'll be punished for a mistake which was never mine.
So, can you all be a little understanding and forgive me?
There won't be anyone like you all, love you, silly!

Dear children of next generation -
All astronauts, pilots, chefs, actors, designers in fashion,
The world is very big and not at all good
So, save worries about future and enjoy your childhood.
You'll most probably have to do some 9 to 5 job,
All your dreams will be broken, no one will see you sob.
So enjoy your life while you can -
It has all colours now, it will soon be wan.

Dear everyone who dictated my life,
You are lucky I am not the vindictive type.
Well that's the reason isn't it? Why you force us to change?
Cause you know we are too helpless to take revenge.
Do you know why I have been accepting all this?
To prove you wrong; to show just money can't bring peace.
You just have to bear with my occasional sarcastic remark
It may feel insulting, but its nothing compared to making my life dark.
But force someone again in same ways
And then you will have me to face.
And I'll be worse than I ever can be.
And then you'll be really sorry.
So from next time remember this.
I'll find a way to make you pay, I promise.

Nothing (or the poem about my education in the classroom)

Sushruti Tripathi

Nothing
Is what I feel in classrooms
When I “learn”
Because I don’t
Because they aren't educating us.

They aren't teaching us
How to breathe.

How to breathe
When in broad daylight
You feel like you're underwater.
Drowning.
Millstones around your neck,
No fight left,
Just drowning
In a sea,
Or a gutter,
Or a washing machine.
We drown everywhere.

Because they aren't teaching us
How to see

How to see through layers of paint
Through the touch of an unknown hand
When you're blinded by tears
How to see through the blur
See the murkiness behind a seemingly innocuous candy
Handed by a stranger or an uncle or an aunt
How to see when you're young
What the weathered mind is cooking
That the fish is a'hooking
Drowned, blinded.

Because they aren't teaching us
How to listen

How to listen to warning bells
and know the sound of an oncoming train.
That nightingales are to be heard and loved.
That a call to arms can be ignored.
When the pressure cooker is full and brimming,
How to recognise the slight whistling, heavy breathing
Before it all hits the ceiling.

Because they aren't teaching us
How to taste

How to taste the rust in the air
The world dying out, its joints coming apart
The taste of lips
Do I sin? Is it love?
Is this what love tastes like? Forbidden fruit?
The taste of water and that of alcohol
That of addiction, to taboo
They refuse to talk. They won't say.

Because they ain't teaching us
How to feel

How to feel on our own.
They tell us
What we ought to feel
How we ought to feel
Refusing to acknowledge
How we actually do.
Refusing to answer
What that means.
Ignoring the feeling of an entire generation
Being trained in classrooms
To not feel
And how to feel, what to feel
When what we really feel
Is nothing.

Nothing
Is what I learnt in classrooms.
Nothing
Is how I feel.

i-Gen the wireless generation

“It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.”

- Albert Einstein

An Ode the Odd-Ones

Aratrika Ghose

Our generation is stuck in greyscale.
With one foot in the past and another in the future,
With miles of generation gaps,
And zero relatability.
They say our generation is fickle and confused,
Because none of us stick it out till the end,
Because none of us have the tenacity,
Because we're carbonated drinks,
In plastic bottles,
Waiting to foam and fizzle out.
We're obsessive, compulsive, we're socially awkward,
Unless we're protected behind firewalls,
Sitting in front of hypnotic screens,
Trying so hard to be liked,
By strangers of little consequence,
With no such thing as privacy,
But lives documented in a series of posts,
Photographs, videos, and shares.
Our generation can never truly forget,
We can never erase memories, or move forward.
Digital footprints like cookie crumb trails,
Lead the way back to square one.
Our generation is gender sensitive,
The third wave of feminism is drowning reason,
Propelled by hashtags and slogans,
And opinions and ideas,
All quiet women are oppressed,
And all loud ones are whores.
If my neckline is modest, I'd be taken as a victim,
The higher my hemline is, the more liberated I am.
With odd fixations about absolute freedom,
Our generation believes in independent choices.
Your decisions are not mine,
My social responsibility is to disorder the societal fabric,
My responsibilities are selfish and whimsical, my life is mine and mine alone.
Hypocrites pretending to be revolutionaries and rebels,
Conditioned to function differently,
By old-school upbringing,
Alarmingly awakened by the call of social media,
We're reeling in chaos,

And romanticizing depression.
Our generation celebrates the broken,
Idolizes the wounded -
We're all escapists, with Plan Bs,
And exit routes, well planned.
Quick to run, quick to suffer,
All for free love and instant gratification,
Our cause is different from anybody else's.
Cigarette smoke and alcohol,
In a haze of a concoction of hard drugs and pills,
Our generation will burn out before it fades out.
In the course of our lives,
We might never learn what love is,
We might never find true joy,
Pessimists of the world gather to conquer,
To consume and annihilate all happiness.
Our generation is the grey winter rain,
Our generation is awakening,
Is the bridge between then and now.
Step over us, as you enter a new realm,
Burst our bubbles of naive dreams and ambition,
Those which you may never understand.
Our generation will be stuck in time,
Our generation is the sacrifice for the free world,
So that tomorrow music is free and tasteful,
So that art does not fit your straight-cut rules,
So that poetry is uncontained and moving,
So that jobs are driven without the motivation for money,
So that weather is dictated by clouds and not moods,
So that sex is driven by love and not power,
So that friendship is not a consequence of solitude,
So that technology is not convenient, but revolutionary,
So that politics is not disregarded in everyday life,
So that wars are stalled by deliberation,
So that no man, or woman, or child, is identified as anything but a 'person',
So that ordinary is no longer an insult,
So that we can all stop trying so hard,
So that the world comes of age,
And humanity prevails.
Our generation took the lid off the box,
May the next live under free skies.

A Friendly Foe: World We Inhabit

Devapreeta Jena

In a world that is hostile, why do you seek companionship?
In a world that is nonchalant, why do you seek permanence?
In a world that is driven by passive love, why do you go on hunting evidence of love?
Yes we are talking about post-modernism,
where everything is modern,
except people

Where relationships are governed by utility, and education motivated by prospect of
securing a job
Where we unconsciously consume half-fragmented pieces, and label them as
knowledge

Aren't we all suffering from amnesia?
Our memories facing senescence, not because we are turning old
But everybody wants to give up the capacity to undergo the trauma of a memory

We are on our way to become labourers
We will happily sell our labour without any questions

And forget to ask basic existential questions
Because we do not exist anymore
we are simply worms occupying space
Yes, in foreseeable future, I envisage an apocalypse
We won't budge, because we have been trained to become consenting individuals

This apocalypse is nothing like the World Wars; it would creep slowly in our lives,
and seep into our lives without asking our permission.
What is this apocalypse we are talking about?

It is something that once Hannah Arendt warned us about, the ultimate fate of human
condition
Where everything will get mixed up, and you will lose your discerning power to
demarcate different realms.
The realm of labour, the realm of work and the realm of action
Politics have become just a medium to address the immediate
Revolution has found itself limited on streets and social media
And angst is expressed by sharing memes on Facebook
If this is not repression, then what is?

Reading has acquired an altogether different hapless twist, everybody is a reader now
Everybody reads, in juxtaposition with everybody consumes, consciously or
subconsciously snippets of information, enlightening quotes, and short excerpts
picked from books.

Readers they are, aren't they?

Vomiting vociferously names of authors, being a relentless quote monger

Is this a beginning of knowledge or,

Is this a beginning of the pretense of knowledge?

But, I defend this pretension

What is youth without pretension?

I rebut, pretension is dialectically embedded in authenticity

A successful pretension can only be carried out by an authentic reader

They say, we will sacrifice authenticity in our mindless drive to elevate pretension

Love doesn't need to be re-invented anymore

it is just provided like any other commodity right at your doorstep

Aren't we seeking sanitized version of love,

love without conflicts;

propagated by dating sites and matrimonial websites?

Nonetheless we are living, political beings

We are the next progenies of critical thought

We have made a difficult promise to ourselves

not to live like automatons anymore.

Quarter Life Crisis

Jaisal Kapoor

your hair's been in a bun for days--
less Gigi Hadid and more Unemployed Millennial Chic
you're twenty-three and have to make your own dentist appointments
and you don't want to
and it's not okay to eat left over dumplings for breakfast every week
and all your friends are committed
to startups and food blogs,
but net promoter scores and chia seeds can't hold you down
you wait patiently for the day when poets start making bank
so you can buy a boat with all the poems that come out of you
and sail around the world with your dog you ironically name Gigi
and let your hair loose

We Are The Internet Generation

Rabia Kapoor

We are the internet generation.

We are the ones with such carefully manipulated virtual lives that sometimes we end up envying ourselves.

Wishing we could live the lives we're pretending to live on social media.

We are the children of instagram and snapchat.

We labour over our pictures to make sure everyone knows what a good time we're having.

We take fifty pictures from angles we didn't even know we had to show people that we're effortlessly good looking.

We made our homes on Facebook and twitter.

Posting every small achievement and every popular opinion

on public platforms within a 140 characters

not because we care but because we know

we have observed

we have learnt

we have mastered the art

of retweets and likes

of hashtags and shares

of little red hearts with a pulse that is determined by double taps.

Welcome to the Internet Generation.

Just a few basic instructions before we take off.

There are no exits to your left or right.

In case of an emergency, we would recommend you update your Facebook status and hope for the best.

There is no need to fasten your seatbelt as you will be glued to your screen, scrolling through tumblr for the next couple of years moving as little as you possibly can regardless.

Your cabin attendants will not be serving you food and thus you might find that you have gone three days without eating, but feel free to pick at the leftovers that you dropped on your t-shirt last week.

Thank you for choosing the internet,

We hope you have a pleasant journey

and God help you there's no turning back now.

No one prepared us for the internet generation.

We have grown up in a world where we have felt indestructible and vulnerable at the same time.

We have grown up in a world where cowardice seems bold
as obscure usernames abuse and bully twelve year olds
and the people behind those usernames would not dare look you in the eye in real life.
It's a shame.

We have grown up in a world where we can celebrate ourselves
where we can find people who love the things we love
where we can find people to love the things we love with
where you can spend entire nights talking to people you thought you'd never see
again,
smiling stupidly at your cell phone screen
Sharing youtube links and weird-ass memes
and you feel all the feels with such intensity.

No one prepared us for the internet generation.

Beta, when a person and free wifi fall in love...
Beta, a stork birdy called Flipkart brought the iPad to daddy...
Beta, think of mummy as a bumble bee and the pollen as the apps... ?
When your internet connection got installed at home
we fused together and created a little void
Gradually the void got bigger and eventually... Pop!
It turned into you!
An insatiable child
Begging for attention constantly
ping ping ping ping always crying about some notification or the other
Mummy i want this update mummy I want that update
please watch this ten minute video of people popping pimples, mummy
and then half way through the video, when I'm invested
the child changes his mind,
stops buffering.

But at the end of the day, any parent would understand, it's a love hate relationship
The child is a result of your mistakes, your carelessness
So you nurture it and let it grow.

Welcome to the internet generation

It's a houseful theatre, Showing Now: A Drama of Contradictions
where we feel mighty and a hundred feet tall
and we feel insignificant and about this small

where we come face to face with honesty and with lies
where we can reveal ourselves completely and still be able to hide
Where we've found people we lost somewhere in our childhood
but we've lost people sitting across us eating Chinese food
We've watched the continents click together and fall into place
but we've watched each man become an island in so many ways

We are the internet generation.

we are a bittersweet conglomeration
of mundane thoughts and extraordinary ideas
of the same thing being said again and again and again and again
of the same thing being said differently and blowing us away
of boring pictures and misinformed rants
of art that punches you in the face and in the heart
of a million people fuming because a dog was abused and nearly died
and a million people smiling because of a video of a Coldplay concert, where a small
autistic boy cried.

I am the internet generation.

I am a section of mankind that has relearnt the beauty of clouds and wires running
across the sky,
of a time where everyone is an artist, and everyone is full of words and images and
colours,
of a place from where one voice can echo across the oceans and the seas and shake
the entire planet,
So, please don't tell me things like "my generation is a lost cause"
because I might seem this small but don't forget that I am also a hundred feet tall

If my cell phone were my wife

Sourav Panda

The first thing the feebly sleepful eyes look for,
when the warmly orange rays of the sunlight
knock on them,
stretching the delicately strong lashes,
is you.

There cannot be a better mirror
or glass,
like the metallic sheen of a lake at the crack of dawn,
or your eyes.

Just like the dewy grass
under my feet,
smuggling in gentleness
between the toe and fingers,
is your touch.

The rumbling sea,
like the vibrations contained in
the breath of the water,
holding and letting go of all the silence in the world,
is the way,
you wake me up
from the deepest of my slumbers.

Like my delicate secrets-
dark or gay,
kept away well,
from all the bandits of privacy;
in the strongest of the locks, veiled from the the devils' eyes
in the midst of a sea of pirates,
are you.

Irreplaceable at the moment,
unthinkable to part with at any hour,
none have the power to attract me,
like you do, with a small nudge.
One glance at you and , I am all yours.
But as the night comes,

you withdraw, to yourself
sinking in; powerless and low
leaving my hopes of cuddling a little,
in abandonment.

You radiate, like a tall glass of venom,

And all I can do,
is look into you,
with the lens of sympathy and pity.
And in the deserted desire of making you stay longer,
I drop you-
at your lover's place.

Disconsolate at the thought of both of you
so well connected, despite my solitary love for you ,
making out , all night, every night,
so passionately, cutaway from all calls of material.

Sacrificing you for you,
has become an affair I look forward to every evening,
for your own satisfaction,
because deep within,
I really know, my love for you is nothing but the day's job;
what really turns you on is the filling up of your socket
with love, all night long.

Yet with the dispassionate call of a lone loving husband,
I shall never keep you away from light.
Because, when in the next morning,
recharged, you would be dutifully standing by me,
I, shall forget to feel cheated.

Despite the hurtful array of emotions that
can end stories nastily;
the first thing my feebly sleepful eyes would look for,
when the warmly orange rays of the sunlight
knock on them,
stretching the delicately strong lashes,
is you.

Mornings

Anuradha Rao

strike in a cyclone of emails
that lie unopened for months
The '1372' squatting stoically near INBOX
bothers me by its shameless existence,
unchanging, till it becomes so cold
I pour it down the sink with my cream-covered cup of tea.

He knows I do that, unfailingly before lunch
The gleeful office attendant
Yet he brings me steaming adrak chai every day
with an irritatingly loud 'Good morning!'
and yellow, paan-chewed, broken teeth
as obviously gleeful as him.
I never return the greeting,

but sometimes, I fantasize
Crooning my blue pillowcase with black squares,
now holes where happy dreams disappear;
Lilting sunny days of laughter
Humming the spring in my once youthful steps,
hurrying to take me
to a future I didn't expect lacked good mornings
So I sing under my breath
when I revengefully click
'Mark all as read'.

an inch into adulthood

“When we are children we seldom think of the future. This innocence leaves us free to enjoy ourselves as few adults can. The day we fret about the future is the day we leave our childhood behind.”

— *Patrick Rothfuss*

Deserters

Satyaki Mitra

I finally am young still
yet
aged enough,
to write about wistful departures
and
people leaving.

You never really let go.
You only sit back
and do nothing
almost voluntarily,
out of an aching feeling of helplessness caving down on your chest cavity.

I have finally lived long enough
to still be able to feel
how it feels,
when familiar views disappear inside speeding rear windows
with no real hurry.

I am finally old enough to keep on telling people
not to leave,
only after being sure
that their time has come
indeed.

I am
finally old enough,
to understand how barely
you can keep people
yet how easily
you manage a montage of memories with them,
right up to the very moment of their customary departure.

Breathe some time inside a few balloons
and
pretend it's your 10th birthday once again,
every day on the basis of an alarm clock repeat.

People

do not always repair
with the celluloid passage of time.
A few of them start resembling
the broken toys
from the night of your 10th birthday.
The toys you barely remembered thereafter,
after accidentally having snapped their limbs.

We all are trapped
inside a never ending birthday party
that celebrates passersby from this reality,
or maybe that.

Goodbyes
are like bluish-green balloons up in the air,
filled with sighs
and a rubbery odour that smells like meadows blooming in graying shades of what-
ifs.

They say that grief
is almost like a slowly drying cut,
especially the one that itches like mad
during the latter half
of the healing days.
Sometimes,
you only want to dig deeper down
into it
just to check
if it still pricks.
Whoever said
that some wounds never heal,
surely never learnt how to peel dead skin off
the right way.

Indian Summer

Rohan Naidu

backyard stadium day/night cricket
slipper boundary wall/chalk wicket
Saurav Sachin Rahul Laxman
(brother neighbour sister cousin)
airborne missile windshield danger
falling rocket injured stranger
broken window screamer aunty
helter skelter players scanty
hasty dialling mummy hotline
safety harbour watchful feline
scooby papad dal-rice lunching
grandma chasing second helping
four-foot athletes sunstroke braving
second innings icecream craving
lengthy shadows umpire mummy
final whistle embrace tummy
sweaty clinging towel saree
temple journey clutching rupee
bribing goddess filing motion
yearlong summer ideal notion
bedtime ghostcheck kisses plenty
awoke six-foot overnight twenty

Monsoon Musings

Aditya Sharma

Half way into its orbit,
As earth spins round the sun
Distancing itself towards cold nights of winter,
The clouds break silence.
An orchestra opens with a fan fair,
Of thunder, shower and clouds retreat.
Monsoon marks its melodious return.

Memories rush into me
The monsoon melodies,
Whose musings have filled my ears.
Like a rewinding cassette
I'm taken aback,
Attentive and patient,
To days old and new
Listening to sounds that appear,
And disappear, as the rains shower
And the sky celebrates its interim Diwali.

I hear the pakoras crackling in hot oil,
And tea kettle fuming mute.
An evening of cool breeze
After a rainy affair in the afternoon.
The sun seemed wet too,
For dusk had a vanilla sky.
Tea shops about the corner
Hustling in conversations.
Orders made, bills paid and coffee uncles critical of new vegetable prices.

Walking past by the playground,
With an umbrella in hand
I witness young boys playing football.
My ears absorb sounds of splashing muddy waters
I hear songs of victory,
Quarrelling teams over fouls and
The angry gatekeeper,
Shouting to end the game in instant fashion;
"Keep off this ground, it's private property"

I remember mornings,

Whose previous night had it rained.
The grass was wet,
So was the news paper at the doorstep,
And the milkman who delivered milk.
Showers at night,
Ruled the sun over its might
Casting a spell: cool and breezy.
I missed the sun, sometimes.
For rainy days would seem like a daunting task.
Students with uniforms in white would understand.

School reminds me,
Monsoons meant early break of classes
Into amazement of the good gracious rain showers,
Or the late ending of the last class of the day
Because the bell keeper wouldn't get wet,
The good gracious rains seemed such a pain then.
We sat inside classrooms looking out of the windows,
The clouds seemed to be getting darker.
Time was at the essence.
The sound of the bell still resonates years later.

Monsoons got us empty roads and,
Bye lanes less occupied with their parking space.
Those lanes operated as mini cricket grounds.
The wickets and players took position
And a one day match during afternoon showers was in order.
Shots beyond the boundary,
Meant calling out at the bus stop
To return the ball.
The esteemed audience at the bus stop pavilion,
Took much pleasure at the games.
Entertainment was for free,
The tea stall, however
Charged 5 rupees for tea.

Monsoon days as such,
Brought reflection and memories together.
Musings both mute and sensuous
Given life in the mind canvas.
So until the orchestra of monsoon continues,
Dream a little dream,
Dwell into memories, reflect,
Resonate, sing and observe.

For the sun seems wet,
And the sky vanilla.
Rejoice and listen,
The monsoon sing it's a capella!

Swings and Ice cream

Sneha Rozelena Anthony

To and fro-
Like a pendulum
Exchanging stories of fears and pasts.
On a hard wooden seat
Held mid-air by strong metal chains.
Cool breezes and ice cream to numb our pain

Until one day we swung no more
The weight of our fears too heavy for the chains.
'only for children' it said.

Depression

Riya Dey

Is depression,
The way you wake up
In mornings
Everso desirous
Of never waking up again
Is depression,
Memorising every detail
Of your daily routine
Such that it pours
Into the subconscious
Is depression,
The want to leave
Leave everything
And disappear
For once and for all
Into the earth
And never want to return
Is depression,
The selfish desire
To give up on the ones
Who taught you life
Is a boon
And something to be treasured
Is it the innate want
To hurt yourself in bodily scars
So bad that
You cry all that out
What you cannot while staring at
The ceiling every bustling morning
Is depression how,
You want to stop in front
Of cars with screeching tires
And for a second, wish
Things were different
Completely
Is depression,
The search for the way out
Of the hollowness you feel
Despite being around people

And receiving cuddles, hugs and kisses
Without any trace of genuinity
Whatever
Is depression,
Being tired of living?
Maybe hiding that you are,
Is worse
Beneath happy smiles
Laughter and grins
While fading into walls
Seeping with silence,
And creating fences
For the heart's defence.

All cracks are smiling now

Jash Dholani

I'm so broken I want to sell myself
At second hand shops
Each limb to a different trader
I want myself dispersed
Distributed and destroyed
Reshaped into alien monstrosities
That don't tiptoe to the mirror
And mourn their decay.

I tiptoe to the mirror
And mourn
My decay.

I set clean lines to paper
And chart my path out
Flesh to the cannibal markets of China
Skeleton to the bone collections of billionaires
Face postmarked to the address of my first lover
And heart thrown into the dumpster
With other household things
That were used
And misused
Until they aged into irrelevance.

Rest of me cast into open air
For vultures
And time
To pick on.

Imbroglio

Kavya Jayanthan

Where have all those days gone?
When we wove blankets of dreams
and slept in them,
dreaming of only happiness and
chewing gum.
Where is it lost?
maybe in all those years of mundane living,
where all we heard was lies
to evil we were unwary,
evolving from diamonds
to people with dark hearts
but a countenance placid.
Placed in this imbroglio
closed in by walls of structure,
those bubbles of dreams
pricked by the pin of doubt,
they ruptured.
Where did we lose ourselves?
maybe in those numerous streets we walked,
with dark alleys on one side
and bright lights on the other,
where survival stripped us naked
of our dreams
and all we had left were
trench coats and bad decisions

'native' is not the same as 'innate'

Sreelakshmi Sudhakaran

can you wear a life that doesn't fit you right
but think that the colour
blends naturally against your skin
anyway?

can you continue to wear it
warily; reluctantly;
for nothing else but this sole reason?

will you catch yourself
stealing secret glances at the mirror
to admire the ease with which you appear to wear it
while chafing against the
cut
texture
feel
all the same?

will you
(when you can)
cast it off in haste...

...but remember it still in
erratic, unexpected moments
with
some degree of fondness?
some degree of relief?

i can.
i will.
i do.

Abruptly aware

Saniya Heeba

Have you ever lived
the pauses between your breaths,
swallowed completely
by that uncertain spell between
inhale and exhale, abruptly
aware
of a stranger's impassive face
masking a tangle of thoughts
you will never get to unravel,
or of the relentless drumming
of a woodpecker's beak
against a bark, oddly reminiscent
of a migraine,
or of the intrepid dancing
of moths around sixty-watt bulbs,
flickering swiftly out of existence,
or of the million stories hidden
in the mundane and the banal—
names carved on park benches,
tattered receipts pressed between
pages of worn out paperbacks,
boarded-up windows of houses
wallpapered with moss—
of all eternity
clasped in a heartbeat?

Or are you too enslaved
by the ticking of your watch,
chasing shadows
of ephemeral things?

the art of rebellion

“I am a real rebel with a cause.”

Nina Simone

Truth

Tanisha Nag

I want to tell you the truth.
But you already have
a warped view,
an opinion,
sharp criticism,
debates going on,
articles written,
abuses hurled,
and stones pelted,
Why ask if you already know?

Assimilate

Poulomi Roy

on the 14th of september 2009
as i fastened the seat belt
of my united airlines flight
i looked at my mother
as she politely declined
a lunch of turkey meatloaf
mashed potatoes and apple pie
and i asked her:
what if i don't fit in?

maybe it was the fallout of being
raised in a consumerist economy
that the lehman brothers had razed to the ground
or maybe because you
learn at the age of seven you'll
never truly belong
when the color of your skin is
constantly being compared to items from
the produce section on isle nine
olive, cocoa, yam?
and then as you start to
lose that indian tan
they think you're a
starbucks styrofoam cup
as they scribble
latte, mocha, caramel across your name
then why am i wrong when i asked
becky if that makes her cocaine?

so when i ask my mother
if i will ever fit in
she remembers how
9/11 wasn't the collapse of the twin towers
it had always been a gaping hole
in the middle of lower manhattan
9/11 was the nightmare
of living in a neighbourhood
where they bought us pie every weekend
and maybe that's why she hates pie

and the neighbours told us that
they didn't want any trouble
and it still haunts my mother
that the first words that left her
mouth were 'we're not even muslim'
she had to throw an entire demographic
under the bus so that her
husband and child didn't have to
be a statistic in the NYPD database

Expat is a word you can afford
to use when the color of your skin
matches the picket fence
around your house, white
not when you're named Jamal, Shekhar or
you're from Jackson Heights
then you're an immigrant
the immigrant whose back they broke
to rebuild the american dream
they fought the war against
terror in queens
where little sikh boys
had to shave their hair
and muslim girls
were told that wearing
the hijab drew attention
the kind that left you dead
so you better assimilate

hold up a picture of the brady bunch
and try your best
to be like them
pantone may call your skin is swatch number 470C
but that shouldn't stop you
from replacing khakra with doritos
and aamras with sunny d
and before long
you'll have assimilated into
lil polly, nick and jamie
because pronouncing katherin with a
q is easier than pronouncing poulomi.

so imagine my surprise when
you look at me and reduce
me to yet another item from

the produce section
this time the coconut
"because you're white
on the inside and brown
on the outside"
i have spent the last 14 years
of my life trying to assimilate
and now i am too foreign for away
and too strange for home

the color of my skin is not
caramel, mocha, chestnut,
ebony, chai latte, hazelnut
frappechino, glazed chocolate donut
it is the color of the soil
in dhaka bangladesh
a land of my own so foreign to me
that i don't even know the
name of my great grand mother
a women who miscarried at six months
on a goods train bound for calcutta
amidst cattle fodder and goats
wearing a hijab, an identity she
could'nt even call
her own because she was a
hindu bengali woman
and it was 1947 and if you found
yourself on the wrong
side of the border you should
have just parted your legs
because the men will take and take
and when they have nothing else
to take they will take your identity
and your home
and your children will grow up not
knowing their own
they'll call this new country their home
that woman didnt give me this
skin and her identity
so that i could be told one day
that i talk like a white person
the color of my skin is brown
like the color of the clay
the kind they use to guild

the idols of indian goddesses
and i refuse to assimilate

Your Death Is A Lachrymal To Your Mother's Tears

Shrenik Mutha

Junaid,

i've seen pictures of your funeral
only because it was teargassed

the pictures make me wonder-

if your death wasn't reason enough
to mourn, to cry,
to let the tears out?
that they threw teargasshells
demanding for a few more tears

-you were all of 12, Junaid-

wikipedia reads, "typical manufacturer warnings
on tear gas cartridges state-
Danger: Do not fire directly at person(s).
Severe injury or death may result."

i am sure they read these warnings
probably for them-the gassers, the occupiers-
the mourning might be valid now.

Junaid, did the teargas affect you at all?

your body lies next to your house now and
your mother can see the mud loose
beneath which you lay buried.
oxygen can still be sucked in through these cracks
and teargas could also enter again.

do not worry Junaid,
these cracks can serve as lachrymals
to your mother's tears for you, for her bereaved son

Junaid, should i suffocate the ruin now?

you're dead Junaid.

a few tears arrive

-you were only 12, Junaid-

the teargas are fired to make the others cry more
keeping them too busy to demand
Azaadi

until then

they will go
find another funeral
to teargas

if that'll be difficult

they will go
find another body
to pellet

Child of War

Aditya Lakshmi Ravichandran

Dear child of war, you sit in the orange chair
With a side of face covered in red
You look around perplexed, in oblivion
Run your little hand to the bloody side
You look at your hand once, then wipe it off
In that orange chair, fearless
You observe as more children like you
Are brought in to sit in those chairs.
Do you, child of war, want to play
A game of hopscotch with them?
Have you grown up too fast
Even before your wounds are dressed?

They take you to an infirmary
You sit mum, no words uttered
A sweet nurse dresses your wounds
Too soon to be called battle scars
Sweet child of war,
Do you know, by now, that
Your older brother couldn't make it?
Would you believe the writer
If she said he was in a better place?
Would you remember him at all, years later
Or let his memory and face fade with time?

You have seen plenty
Child of war, more than people
Tri-fold your age
You should be read bedtime stories to,
Not be read as the morning headline
Do you know, my child of war, that you
Are a symbol of hundred other children
Sitting in the orange chair, or
Trapped in the bitter war, or
Lying face down, dead?

Borders

Ankita Shah

There are borders made of tall concrete walls,
Relentless mountains
And wayfaring rivers that have tasted blood,
Borders made of armed men,
Dead, alive, forgotten,
Borders made of distorted religions,
Borders sharp as sword that have cut limbs and breasts and children,
Borders we create everywhere we go
Like self-proclaimed universes in comfort zones.
We draw borders on mind and soul
Drop bombs on ideals we bemoan,
Air raid people who won't conform,
Until they fear even the sight of a shooting star.

We create borders arguing over truths, unmindful
That truth comes from the word 'tree',
Of which, there are than one kind. But we
Aren't kind enough to listen to a story that does not resemble us.
Instead we create borders over and over,
We draw so many lines that look like horizons stacked up
One over the other, so the sun is devoured sooner.
We're a world that raises walls around it
Each time a light wants to enter,
A world that wants the dusk to fall soon
So more bombs can be dropped,
Some more dreams may be shot.

The border between India and Nepal is only a divider,
Few armed soldiers and a signboard. But in school,
No blackboard could ever subdue the curiosity over my small eyes.
My name was replaced by 'Nepali!'
Its tone like an abuse I had to survive.
And each of these borders continue to divide
Two sides, that are no different from each other.
If we drop this facade of courage, we'll see our borders are made of fear -
The fear of our selves. We are the faces beyond the horizon
For someone else.

Syria

Ananya Ray

Syria,
Where are you, Syria?
Across a thousand miles of deserts and seas and oceans
That roar and lash and claw at my feet,
But never, ever make room,
Are you there, Syria?
I am stuck here, in a land of strangers.
Strangers who give me curious looks in the shops
In the streets, rolling down their car windows as I pass by,
Measuring my life's worth,
From my pallid skin, my headscarf, my dark owl eyes and my bony hands.
And as the cars rush by in a whiff of smoke
That smells like a kick between your legs,
I stand, shopping bag in hand, my brow damp and fingers trembling
And whisper under the ghost of a breath,
Where are you, Syria?
Back in the apartment I share with four other women
Who left home to find a shelter,
I live off food stamps and old charity clothes
With sick stains and specks of blood.
The only thing of any real value in this room,
Are our passports.
With their shiny laminated faces,
They once promised me the refuge they never gave.
And as each lost girl weeps herself to sleep at night,
Passports buried under their pillows with the dreams,
I cry into my cold palms
Where are you, Syria?
And as drunk men feel me up in the bar
Where I wait tables,
And they rub their dirty hands against my thighs,
And scratch me with their sharp, grimy fingernails
Whenever the beer is too warm
Or I don't unhook the top button of my shirt for them.
I cry into the empty mugs after my shift is over.
And weep for you, Syria,
Where are you?
Maybe the man who groped me in the dark, on my way home
Knows where you are,
How you are doing.

Maybe the white lady who wouldn't let me into her shop
Has an inkling of your whereabouts,
Or how the messiahs in black robes are treating you.
Or perhaps, the reverend of the local church
Who warns godfearing men
About us dirty immigrants
In his Sunday sermons.
He may know whether you have enough to eat,
Or if you are cold and weeping blood
Like me.
Syria, life is no better, here, on the other side.
It is, as if somebody twists a knife through your heart
Throughout the day
And starts twisting again the next day
And the day after.
Till you throw up your innards.
Till your tears dry up.
Till your breath becomes short and ragged
Like that of a dying animal.
Syria, my daughter,
I could not bring you onto that boat,
I am sorry.
But now, it seems, I cannot bear to see you turn into the woman
I see in front of the cracked mirror everyday.
I would not be able to stomach it.
Trust me, one day, all this will end.
Till then, don't breath.
Don't speak.
Don't step out of your room.
Die of starvation, Syria, or a bullet in your heart.
But not of painful nights in a prison cell,
Of murderers leering at you through the bars.
Or a savage between your legs.
Don't bend over like I did.
Let the tears dry up on their own.
For when they do,
The thousand miles of deserts and seas and oceans,
Will dry up, too.
And I will find my way back to you.
Goodbye, my Syria,
Maybe it's best if I don't know anything about you,
Anymore.

blood is thicker than chai

“When everything goes to hell, the people who stand by you without flinching — they are your family.”

Jim Butcher

The curd won't form, now that you're gone

Rohan Naidu

Your vest on the drying rack hasn't yet heard
so it crosses its arms in questions: where has he gone,
when will he be back? For the curd

has turned sour and refuses to be stirred
and asks like its father and grandfather to be drawn
from milk by the man in the vest--it hasn't yet heard

the alarm go unanswered
and grandma win no arguments before dawn.
"The biggest lie in America is 'curd

is yogurt'. We are South Indians, okay: only curd is curd.
Here, pack this. One spoon in milk, leave it on
for five minutes, and it will be all set". When I heard,

I searched for your leak-proof plastic as my eyes blurred--
the aluminium foil still held your finger dents.
They refused to send pictures, so I thought about curd

going sour when I thought of it all.
Today, I stopped calling it a vest and wore your banian instead:
it doesn't need to hear, if it hasn't yet heard.
Maybe, this banian-ed man can form sweet curd.

Phone Call

Kaavya Ranjith

this morning
my father called me
i heard the deep, rough baritone of his voice
and suddenly realised how much i missed him
the smell of his leather office-bag
the way his shirts are all impeccably white
how he always asked for the dosas that weren't crispy, but soft in the centre
quite like him
this morning
my father called me
and a woman near by struck up a conversation
and after three long months
i heard
the spicy calm of my mother tongue
the salt of the coast
i heard the coconut-oiled glaze
and the curled syllables of my hometown
this morning
my father called me
with the koel and the crow in the background
of that inter-state call
i could've sworn
i heard the roar
of the monsoon
breaking the banana flower
and i suddenly realised how much i missed him.

Mother

Syed Ali Mudassar

Mother, I was this close to telling you,
That I've found someone I could call love and mean it,
That I've found someone whose beauty cannot be described in words,
That I've found someone I'd give my entirety to be with.

Mother, I was this close to telling you,
That I want to be a better person for her,
That I would bend every rule of mine to let her in,
That I don't want to imagine a life without her.

Mother, I was this close to telling you,
That everything has changed with her in my life,
That everything has become so beautiful, it brings tears to my eyes,
That everything about her makes me feel so proud that I want to cry.

Mother, I was this close to telling you everything,
But then you spat at me words,
Words which the society filled you in with,
"Do not do anything that would be a disgrace to us"

Mother, if only you had chosen your son over the society,
You would've seen the best thing that has ever happened to your son after you,
You would've seen why your son is a happier person when he talks to her,
You would've seen that your son is in love with someone worth dying for.

Mother, if only you had seen your son as an individual,
An individual who doesn't need the society to decide whom to love,
An individual who takes sole responsibility for everything he does,
Even the mistakes.

Mother, I've made many mistakes throughout my life,
This doesn't feel like one,
This doesn't feel like something wrong,
This doesn't feel like something I would regret.

Mother, if only you had trusted me a little more,
I would've told you that her name means beautiful,
I would've told you that her name is just an understatement of the person she is,
I would've told you that her name still makes me nervous.

Mother, if only you would've believed in the choices that your son makes,
I would've told you that her name also means pure, and pure she is,
I would've told you that pride is a feeling that doesn't touch her,
I would've told you that she has more morals than I could ever have.

Mother, if only you had enquired a little more about her,
I would've told you that her touch is as healing as yours,
I would've told you that her voice is as soothing as yours,
I would've told you that her smile is as contagious as yours.

Mother, you would've loved her, because I love her,
and your love for her would've been like getting lung cancer from passive smoking,
But you've made your choices, and I've made mine,
I know you'd say this is madness, so I'd like to ask,

Mother, what is love if not madness?

Roots

Letitia Jiju

long before adolescence had bit into my flesh
and then gradually
over the years sank its teeth into my soul,
sly predator
i had a fondness for mangoes from Kottayam.
the kind that swayed in the dull moist wind
we had a tree whose roots seemed ethereal.
my grandfather seemed to know exactly when
the mangoes were to break away from their
temporary attachments.
he never could make any such
premonitions about his own children.
he often cites this as one of his failures
and even if he doesn't articulate it
i know this.
he would quickly climb a ladder,
pluck each wobbly young mango
one by one
and hand them to me.
my grandmother would peel their skin
slice them into cubes and feed me.
she's partially deaf now.
the other part, she pretends most of it.
her selective hearing is her disposition,
not from aging or peeling away mango skins
or her children.
she wears it like a cloak at nights
walks the hallways,
a captive in her own home,
steals short-lived glances of her grandchildren asleep.
the crickets can hear her.
they always do.
silence has settled into this house
the way a dying moth rests its cold wings.
the mango tree was cut years after the moth had died.
i cannot look at my grandfather,
his hunched back, protruding belly
as if he stomachs his loss.
my grandmother's mouth breaks into
the saddest smile and i pray that i'd

never have to see it again.
her detergent hands cup my face and i smell the mangoes.
and i hear the crickets.
and i see the dying moth.
and i wonder if my lineage is of inherited ghosts.

And There Came A Year

Ankita Shah

And there came a year

When the January morning dragged itself out of bed,
Looking through the weariness of yesterday,
Sticking at its eyelids,

When mother drew the curtains at half past eight,
Acceding the death of the creeper
She had long tried to save,
When father and I, did not crave
For kheer, made every year until this one
When the ashes reduced to air -
See-through and transparent,
Beyond them, a Monday and a window pane
Where a crow cawed, uninterrupted by food.
On other years, he was mistaken for grandfather
But not this one.
In this one, the memory too, had crossed over.

On My Grandmother

Sihi Nagathihalli

A body marked by wrinkles
Each one like a fold made
to hide a part of her life
Each one of those little secrets threatening
to poke out from underneath the shells
so she wrinkles and folds them in deeper over time.

Shakespeare said one of the last stages of life
made us behave like second children.
If my grandmother is a child
I have only seen refugees with the pain she hides
But then again she is a refugee of her own existence.
Her eyes burn with violence
They look like a dark man swimming in a blue ocean.
A memoir to the warrior that was
and a talisman to the woman that is.

She moves in millimetres and in inaudible pain
She's screaming at a decibel my youth cannot hear,
Every time she closes her eyes I fear
I will never see the ocean again.

The world has always labelled Krishna
to be the supreme romancer but Yama is the real lover.
He knows we all belong to him
and promises peace on the other end
A dreamlessness, a love of non-existence.

He saw my grandmother a year back
but he also saw the disease
It hurts him to receive those who die because they lost.
A woman like her that's not how she leaves.
A warrior's death is what she deserved
And she got better, felt even invincible for a moment-
a moment so small-
the moment a leaf touches the ground-
and the leaf lost lustre.

As she's weakened illness holds death in a reign
and he is only allowed to approach her slowly

and watch her writhe.
I've made peace with her becoming dead
Old people die, others die too sometimes
But I cannot watch her dying
And neither can death. They both weep,
Prevented from being with each other.
Eventually is such a long word.

I remember when she told us
she saw her dead husband in her dreams
I wanted to ask her what it was like to see him only in her head
But I was afraid she would think I was asking for her.

I no longer know what to ask
for I no longer want answers
I just want her peace.

first kiss

Still

Debarshi Mitra

It seems at this time of the night,
I could bring my neighborhood to a standstill
just by wishing if it were so. Only the street lamps
flicker in nervous anticipation and precisely

at the designated corner, the night watchman
holds up his unfinished cigarette
and sucks time into his lungs. The windows
remain shut, all stray dogs occupy their respective
places in the universe. Not a leaf dares to quiver.
Even the shadow of the thought of you in my bed
refuses to leave.

(Un)wisdén

Dibyangee Saha

Of sun-dried pickles, the terrace smelt
From which I saw you kick the dust
Off empty streets on Sunday noon
Of gully cricket and college lust.

The sweat soaked jersey on your back
The stellar spins your fingers knew-
While mine counted the runs you made,
Our stolen glances soon outgrew.

The others often wondered why,
While I, just too well, would know
Why every time you hit a six,
The soaring ball chose my window.

Kintsukuroi

Bikash Kena

I keep telling them
Not to tattoo their lovers name.
But my own body is a phone book of memories.
Scribbled in faded gold,
Stories of love
Are etched on my glass soul.

With You

Trisha Coelho

When I'm with you

m h t b s
y e r e t
a a

sofast s o s l o w soquick

Winter

Vancouver Shullai

You were like Winter –
Seasonal and frigid,
But something I was so fond of.
You were beautiful
The way frostbitten leaves were beautiful –
A charming façade, yet no warmth.
But I was hooked, I tell you,
Attached to this sin because of how right it felt
At the wrong time.

You come and you go.
You came and you went.

And whilst silence turned into Spring,
I never liked flowers.
Then walked in Summer,
But I never loved the Sun.
Autumn then knocked,
But when I opened the door
'Twas a cold gentle breeze that said hello.

Winter stepped in and kissed my bones.

Winter was you.
You were Winter.
And even though the temperature dropped –
I was in love with the cold.

Solace in Imperfections

Chitrika Bhargava

You always find yourself comparing
all your lovers with
that idea in your head,
the idea of finding the perfect one.
You delude yourself, tell yourself lies
and end up jeopardizing
every relationship because of this.
But you've got to understand,
no matter how perfect
they might seem on the outside,
each and every person you know makes mistakes
cause no one's perfect my love.
Everyone has flaws.
And to have flaws is to be human,
Our flaws set us apart,
they make us who we are.
All you can really hope is to find someone
whose imperfections fit perfectly with yours.

As We Walk

Ashwita Angeline Ashok

You never have enough.
You say it is because you are ambitious;
But this is all I have to give.
You could drive me to insanity,
And I would welcome it,
For sanity is an illusion for a fool.

You crave greatness,

But I have craved it longer.
You wish to burn bright,
And that, I need.

When all you see is hollow,
You come to me,
With pretty words
And a friendly smile.

And you are so lovely,
That I take your outstretched hand.
I allow you to pull me out
From toxic, addictive loneliness.

As you walk ahead of me,
You seem to glow, as you so desire,
And I trail behind you, questions erased.
Hypnosis is your art.

You and I, we are creatures of desire,
Longing keeps us alive.

Love cannot penetrate our souls, not entirely:
Perhaps, for that, we are cold,
Unfeeling.

Our longing will take us far down this road,
Even if we never arrive.
The walk is desperate,
Unpleasant,
But since we are maddened beings,

It is pleasing;
For we long.

You shall forever be stronger than I,
And you do not require my company.
I shall walk too, however,
Half a step behind.
When gazing straight ahead becomes a chore,
You might glance my way.
It might be cold,
But I will long.
For you and I are creatures of desire,
And longing keeps us alive.

Love Me Now

Rajani Bala Nanda

I told him one evening over black tea
that eventually I'd leave him,
perhaps for someone who barely even enjoys
the sound of my laughter, let alone moving mountains
to make it happen.
He laughed.
He was certain that I'm joking.
They all are.
When you serve the bitter truth
without dressing it up in some fancy lies,
they think you are joking.
Most people do not know how to trust the bare truth.
And so, he went ahead and built a home inside his head
with me waking up in his arms every morning
until our hair turns grey and skin gets wrinkled
..and beyond.
I warned him again.
Don't do this to yourself.
I am not here to stay.
You are not my home, merely a motel to my heart
on a lonely highway.
I have you because I want to have someone in this moment.
But when this moment ends,
I will leave.
So don't get attached to me,
Don't plan your rosy tomorrows with me
and write poetry about forever.
Tomorrow is too far away,
forever is a long time,
I'll be gone by the midnight.
There will never be such mornings
where you'll wake up having me wrapped in your arms.
So if you must love me,
love me now, in this moment
when you have me in your arms,
when I have you in mine.
When both the Sun and moon
is in the sky,
where there's no tomorrow
and no forever,

where your heart isn't threatened by a woman
with dark black eyes, that shines
brighter than the Sun and all the stars combined.
Forget tomorrows and all the days after.
Forget creating a family, buying a mortgage,
raising kids, growing old...
forget what the world is trying so hard to sell you
everyday.
Forget everything that doesn't exist in this moment.
Love me now.

Tetra Packaged Love

Rukhsar Khan

I wish I could sell it to you
in six layers of packaging,
in a flashy store with high ceilings,
complete with an instruction manual
and a warranty card.

Instead, here I am,
standing in the corner of a street,
giving it away in tiny, little packets
to anyone who has a smile to offer
or maybe not even that.

My love, my love
does come free,
but I'm sorry
it has no guarantee.

last kiss

stuck

clementine

of all the sounds tongues can make
the ones that bring about a melancholy ache
in the wake of things left often unattended, alone
like flipped over mattresses in attempts to forget the worn.
and all that's torn you tried to stitch back in your head
of all the words ever been read
the ones that leave you hanging on the wrong side of the bed
begin with an
“ i should've said - ”

Becoming Unbecoming

Hiya Mukherjee

Since we live on opposite ends
of the city,
We argued every night
About where we would have lunch,
And who would take the longer journey,
While what we were really asking
Was only, is the timing right?
Are we there yet?
Have we shed enough ego,
to wait for the other for 2 hours
only to be won back by a careless smile,
And a book?
When it's finally time to sit and consider
Our losses, be it time or mind
Or whatever else we have invested,
It's oddly cryptic, because both of us
take our generosity very seriously.
I ask you to order for me sometimes
and more often than not,
you let me choose the drinks.
As we stumble back home,
you hold me close with an intimacy
only inebriation can induce, as I
groan about spending too much.
Suddenly, as if you need to please me,
You start throwing money all around,
The streets jingle with coins
The air smooths 20rupee notes,
The beggars smile toothlessly,
Hurrying to grab them all,
The shopkeepers — some glare,
Some call us to look at their fare,
But me, I just keep on walking.
I always found your generosity becoming,
But I liked you more when
you weren't so ambitious about it.

colourblind

clementine

I have trouble seeing colours.
maybe it was the result
of watching too many
blood red sunsets with you
or letting my eyes light up
to all those beautiful rainbows
while
clutching my chest in pain
imagined of times
you won't be
twirling around in the kitchen
in your bright yellow printed skirt.
I haven't been able to tell shades
since you painted the walls grey
and your nails blue,
wearing my fading turquoise shirt
in the balcony sitting alone,
you had my world at your feet.
and for once you didn't run to me
when i opened the door
after a long day at work.
but i drank your favourite red wine anyway,
while slowly sinking back into the chair
in which i woke up the next morning
and threw your name across the floor,
but you weren't there to catch it.
I wrote you a note
and put it up on the mirror,
in case you'd come back,
'cause i went to work anyway.
in brown shoes,
green pants and a
purple shirt that didn't match
in an odd and unsettling combination
adding up to a white tie
around my neck
and it all made me look like a clown.
that's when i realised
that i had forgotten all my colours
and that the world

had become a tangling mess of turmoil
that you left behind
i couldn't stand straight
or breathe right
'cause the walls looked black
and i didn't recognise my bed
or the curtains
or the man in the mirror
looking back at me.
then i learned, i couldn't walk
'cause each tile seemed a different shade
and i kept losing myself between rooms
so i tried to learn how to crawl.
but in vain,
everything i looked up at
seemed bigger and brighter
than they really were
and it scared me
gave me nightmares
of the ceiling falling
and crushing me under its body,
taking the sky down with it
that i didn't remember how to look at, anymore.
so i stayed.
and i stayed still in bed
under sheets of changing hues
trying to fathom
the lack of goodbyes
and trying to recollect
the colour of your eyes.

Received

Akanksha Varma

You, me, ripped jeans,
cigarette ash, beer, iPod.
That was seventeen years ago
and that is seventeen seconds ago.
Nothing much has changed
Except those superficial
wrinkles next to our eyes,
the rings on our third
finger and the slight
loose fat on our arms.
Nothing much has changed
except when our song
came, we felt a tingle
imagining our future and
now we feel nostalgia
imagining what could've
become of you and me, us.
Nothing much has changed,
except that our previously
clandestine meetings are
now known to our husbands.
Nothing much has changed,
except that I'm afraid to tell
you how I still feel about
you and that you are now
afraid to hear what I may
say, even though you know.
Nothing much has changed
in these seventeen years.
It is still a small party.
You, me, ripped jeans,
cigarette ash, beer, iPod
and our unsent vestiges
of love, received.

Ignorance

Harismita Vaideswaran

I didn't know your heart would rust
because I kept it beating
but now I taste the poison-metal
on the tip of my tongue
I see it stain my wrists
and nestle underneath my fingernails,
too
late

The knives in my hand
are melting

I cannot remember what it is
to be able to protect your crown
to heal your scars
to light your dark nights

I have forgotten the language of affinity
we created:
you and I
nestled in each other
by the roaring sea
beneath a twinkling sky

I cannot remember the poems
we whispered
you and I
to the moon
when she longed for her lover
and wept
for the ocean

I have forgotten
my love
I have forgotten

Minima

Jash Dholani

Everything important
Can be said
In three words.

I need you
You are beautiful
Kiss me now.

Although lies
Need longer
Sentences.

I was going to call you but
The meeting started early and then
I had deadlines all day long, I'm sorry -
Gotta rush again!

Farewells
Should be short.

Amen

Bye.

Remnant of You

Shrutee Choudhary

Sometimes I wonder if you changed the scent of my skin
Just by touching it for as long as you did.
My manner of speaking must have become like yours
Over the years somehow and now I can't even tell them apart.
Parts of you were so deeply integrated with mine.
Do you remember?
Our days used to have the same storyline.
Sometimes, even today, when my hair brushes against my shoulder,
It's a lazy afternoon again;
Your breath is on me and your kiss is about to rest
On the nape of my neck.
I wonder if we slowly become the people we love.
Today I look above,
And see clouds turn into objects just the way you did.
The hallways of my heart still echo your footsteps,
It remains the most familiar sound.
Maybe that's how it goes -
I used to be myself once,
Now I'm just a remnant of you.

The Great Weight

Gayatri Hariharan

You do not need me
to illustrate
or narrate
the great weight
in the seed
of being

But,

within the dim fog
that hangs
over all
therein lies
no reason

In spring, I was told
the spindle cannot hold
anymore
yet quietus ripened to
a season

And,

Silly me, tumbling down
blood lily trees
I returned
only to find
your unwilling knees

At morning, we sat
timid like cats
breathing the air
of surrender

arms in a hold
a slender, white gold
girl smashed
asunder

Swiftly, we gave all that we owned

and quite quickly we grew blind

But here I am, little lamb
to remind you we are damned
that we may seek yet, we may never find

Contributors

Ananya Ray is a seventeen year old student from Kolkata who is madly in love with all things related to literature and, wait for it – biology! Brought up in a quintessential Bengali household, she had been encouraged to write by her family ever since she was a toddler. She likes to write on social issues and prefers modern poets like E.E. Cummings and Pablo Neruda. A quizzing enthusiast, she also enjoys public speaking, music and pizzas with alarmingly high content of cheese.

Anuradha Rao is a 23 year old from Chennai. She excavates poems from the humdrum that is reality; for her, poetry makes the unremarkable come alive. She likes to think of writing as her private safe space. Anuradha's work has appeared or is forthcoming in Journeys, Inspired by Tagore, Cake Magazine, Peace, The Literary Nest and Women Artists' Datebook. She is a feminist who enjoys contemporary fiction and hot chocolate.

Archita Mitra is a wordsmith, visual artist and tarot card reader, with a love for all things vintage and darkly fantastical. A student of English Literature at Jadavpur University, she also has a Diploma in Multimedia and Animation from St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. With several awards and publications to her credit, she enjoys working on challenging creative projects. Some random things she likes: cryptozoology, Byronic heroes, magic, The Sandman by Neil Gaiman, period costumes, Loki, rabbits, Lana Del Rey, black holes, Tim Burton films and blueberry milkshakes. Find out more on <https://architamitra.wordpress.com>

Jaisal Kapoor is a 23 year old graduate from New York University. Having lived in the US, France, and Italy over the past four years, she has found her way back to her hometown, Bombay. She has been published in the Gallatin Review, in which she received a special mention to the Rubin Prize for Poetry. She is an avid fan of comedy, travel, astronomy, and all things literary.

Supriya Shekher is a high school student from Jammu and Kashmir. She is a physics enthusiast drawn to writing because of her quest for alternate realities. She lives in her own head more than anywhere else and can recite the whole script of Interstellar off the top of her head. She runs a blog "Unicorn Enslaver" aptly named after her life's dearest ambition. She is a travel junkie, slightly whimsical and believes that if there was a scale for quirkiness and awesomeness, psychedelic punk rock would do off the charts.

Aditya Lakshmi R is a 22-year-old, who is pursuing a course on Womens and Gender studies. She has worked briefly with Times of India and a crowdfunding organization called Milaap. Poetry has always been a safe haven for her to escape to. She has been writing poems from the age of 10. She believes that writing helps one to verbalise their unspoken thoughts with utmost honesty, when the existence of a singular truth or reality is itself debatable.

Vancouver Shullai is the winner of Wingword Poetry Prize 2017. A twenty-one year old lad from the hills of Shillong, his style of poetry revolves around giving the ordinary a recognition that is often forgotten. An explorative artist, Vancouver finds inspiration in the unnoticed details of everyday things. Vancouver is currently pursuing his Master's degree in English Literature in Christ University, Bangalore. Owing to his love for art, Vancouver enjoys singing and music. He has amongst his laurels a National Child Award for his exceptional ability in singing from the Government of India, which he recieved in the year 2010. Having performed in many places, Vancouver now seeks a stage for his poetry!

Lusha Jetley is a high school student studying in New Delhi, India. She is passionate about saying what's on her mind, which has led her to explore all forms of writing and public speaking, from debate to slam poetry to even essay writing, all of which have brought her many laurels, and recognition as one of the best debaters in the country. She was recently awarded as the runner up in a collaborative writing competition at the Global Round of the World Scholar's Cup in Athens, hosted by Yale University, among 1500 students. She will also be giving a TED talk at the TEDx event, hosted by DPS RK Puram in the latter half of the year.

Sushruti Tripathi is a lawyer who now lives in London but wants to retire as an author-professor in Shimla with her own dance school. Taking a gap year from work to teach children how to write and perform poetry as part of Artists for Social Change in India has been one of her best decisions till date. A member of Delhi's Poets' Collective - a family that restores her faith in human goodness each day, she is also a Balshree awardee in Creative Writing. She is pro the oxford comma and anti pineapple on pizza.

Avantika Chaturvedi is a second year literature student at Hindu College, University of Delhi. A dog enthusiastic and a raging feminist, she calls her poetry her escapism. She draws inspiration from her one true love, the night sky. She is an aspiring travel journalist and spends her days scheduling her next journey.

Suveni Madan is a high school senior who lives in New Delhi. She is a page poet but occasionally explores spoken word too. She is interested in Philosophy, Anthropology, Linguistics- mainly semantics, Astronomy, and Literature. She's particularly fond of books, winter, Doctor Who, and tea.

Sourav Panda is a banker for his bills, and the rest of the hours he dreams of stargazing by the hills. He was the winner of the first poetry slam in Odisha and is one of the founding members of the Bhubaneswar Poetry Club which organizes spoken-word slams, open mics and poetry recitals. He believes Wodehouse helps him survive the day and Camus, for Sourav, has made many a night 'painfully splendid'.

Syed Ali Mudassar found his love for poetry in the second year of engineering college. His journey henceforth has been rather poetic. He writes more than he shares so if you end up reading one of his poems, consider yourself special. Food, music, and poetry are all the fuel he needs to get his life up and running. He currently works as a content writer at a startup.

Mahika Khanduri is a high school student who lives in New Delhi, India. Her creativity is sourced by her heartfelt passion for dance and freestyle poetry. Vibing the spark of a creator, she runs a blog where she not only publishes her poems, but also freely voices her emotions through her anecdotal adventures. A compassionate human being, an independent soul, and an avid traveller, Mahika is receptive to new ideas and has a practical approach towards life. She manages to channel these qualities into her work, which successfully make her creations relatable and appealing to the readers.

Eesha Roy is a 21 year old IT professional from Pune. In spite of being a part of the technical world, she has never pulled herself back from what her heart has yearned for and that's Art. She has always had a deep connection with Literature, Music and Cinema and she never let that passion die amidst the chaos caused by the society. Poetry happened to her as a result of extensive traveling, lack of a listener and need of expression. She feels that through writing, she can express her innermost feelings without the fear of being judged and also hopes that her words might give some sort of company to at least one person who needs it, in some way or the other. She is greatly fond of theatre, dance and music and performs throughout the year. A believer of destiny, miracles and positive vibes, she believes art has the power to heal, inspire and evolve. She strongly believes that one can never have enough of Rabindrasangeet, Shah Rukh Khan, Traveling, and Chocolates.

Urvashi Bahuguna is a poet who grew up in Goa, and currently lives in New Delhi. Winner of the Emerging Poet's Prize, an Eclectica Spotlight Author Award, and a Sangam House fellowship, her debut collection of poetry is forthcoming from The Great Indian Poetry Collective in 2018. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Nervous Breakdown, Orion, Eclectica, Kitaab, Jaggery, Muse India and elsewhere.

Debarshi Mitra is a 22 year old poet from New Delhi , India. His debut book of poems ' Eternal Migrant' was published in May 2016 by Writers Workshop. His works have previously appeared or in anthologies like ' Kaafiyana' and to literary magazines like ' The Scarlet Leaf Review' , 'Thumbprint', 'The PoetCommunity' and 'Leaves of Ink' among various others. His second collection of poems, ' Spare Change' is forthcoming in January 2018. He is currently enrolled in an 'Integrated PhD' program in Physics.

Saniya Heeba should not be trusted with her own bios because she spends a considerable amount of her time making up stories. Even so, she'd like you to know that she is currently a graduate student of physics whose study of cosmology ensures a constant state of existential dread. Much of her poetry is, therefore, an attempt to find meaning in everything banal. You can find more of her stuff (fiction, art, dubious social commentary and other ramblings) at saniaheba.wordpress.com

Aditya Sharma is a Masters student at University of Oxford, studying Social Anthropology. His interest in poetry developed over his passion for photography. He uses poetry as a means to re-imagine photographs and provide them with greater meaning. Aditya writes mostly about everyday life, his memories from before time, human emotion and themes from the Social Sciences. Besides writing poetry, Aditya also performs poetry, enjoys possibly all sorts of food and loves adventure sports.

Merab Wangchuk Muktan being her full name, she prefers to go just by the first two as that's how she's always been known. Gorkhali -Indian by origin from Kalimpong, she is a small town girl thorough and thorough. She started writing after an English teacher convinced her that the gods of written words were in her favour. Most of her writings are in free verse and deals with everyday life, social issues and native lives. Like every other person, she hopes to travel all over the world and bring those places alive in her works. Merab is in her final year of college and currently lives in Kolkata.

Priyam Gupta is a 21-year-old Copywriter in Mumbai. She has been writing since she was eleven, and reading since she picked up her first box of cereal. She believes she is smarter than she actually is, which is perhaps why she feels like an imposter in her own body. Aside from writing poetry with her signature 12-inch-long pen, she occasionally dabbles in screenwriting, filmmaking, and hysterical house-cleaning.

Meghna Chatterjee is a sixteen year old studying at G.D Birla Centre for Education, in Kolkata. She has placed twice in Young Poets' International Poetry Award, and has been published in Canvas Literary Journal and Navigation the Maze anthology. She enjoys watching cats and politicians, and creating fiction, mostly in verses, when she is supposed to do something more important. She wishes she lived in a book, and wants to travel the world someday.

Zainab Ummer Farook is your average college student - broke, confused, hopelessly lost, and with a penchant for living in denial about looming adulthood. That she finds her bearings in poetry is a realization which dawned on her quite recently, despite having written poems since sixth grade. While long, narrative poems are her forte, she hopes to be better at writing shorter, more condensed ones someday. Currently in pursuit of an Integrated Masters in English Studies at IIT Madras, Zainab finds comfort in fairy lights, chocolate in all its myriad forms, and her ever-expanding collection of books.

Sneha Roy is a twenty year old English literature major at Tezpur University, Assam. Sneha is an ardent debater and poet. Intensely intuitive, absolutely passionate and highly emotional, she is a living relic of everything bordering on extremes; which needs to make its presence felt, be it through her pen or her voice. She is a follower of the secret cult which believes in the God of Procrastination, who never fails to provide her the necessary pressure in the eleventh hour to attain her much desired Eureka. She attains her high ruminating over love, phoenixes and everything magical digging on a plate of something extra hot and spicy on a rainy day while listening to Bollywood music.

Aratrika Ghose is a final year Chemical Engineering undergraduate who grew up as a quintessential Bengali, with roots strongly grounded in literature. Over the years, her poetry has undergone a massive transformation - as a young girl, she won twice in a row at the Scholastic Writing Awards and used rhyme to pen out of her pain. With the changing times, she has found true love in Slam Poetry and now uses her blank verse as a powerful tool on-stage to disorder the social fabric. A self-proclaimed feminist, cynic, and perfectionist, most people claim that her feline instincts and impulses precede all others. Her trysts with life, so far, however, have taught her that a good nap can heal almost anything.

Kaavya Ranjith is an 18 year old performance poet based in Pune, although she was born and raised in Dubai. She currently studies English at Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, where she spends her days researching about fashion, visual art, and interior design. In her free time, she likes to think up different ways of saving the world, and is also working on her second book.

Dibyangee Saha is a second year student of English Literature at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. Nothing defines her more than her poetry- unpredictable, idiosyncratic and hopelessly romantic. She writes in an attempt to understand herself and the world better. However, more often than not, she surprises herself with what comes out on paper. When she's not fantasizing about authoring an anthology, she is planning her post retirement life in Paris- playing french music in quaint coffee shops and studying surreal art.

Farah Maneckshaw is majoring in psychology from St. Xaviers, Mumbai. When she is not reassuring strangers using the wrong washroom that gender is a social construct, she uses poetry as an excuse to smother people in copious amounts of emotion. She's passionate about atrocious puns, her dog Sir Lancelot and overanalysing her friends. She has published an e-book of poetry and her poems have been featured in various magazines and anthologies. On occasion, when she manages to subdue her crippling stage fright, she tries her hand at spoken word.

Kavya Jayanthan is a 21 yr old, college student of Science from Kerala, India and an ardent fan of Albert Camus. Being a military brat, she has led a nomadic life since her birth and is still can't decide how to explain her ever changing address to people. She likes all kinds of pasta, and reading books a little too much. On unusual days, she writes poetry and tries her hand at fiction. She is also the Editor of her University newspaper. She likes Tea, the swinging 70s, Fleetwood Mac and the perfect room temperature i.e 22 degree Celsius.

Sreelakshmi Sudhakaran - known simply as 'Sree' among friends and family - is a 23-year-old psychology graduate, living and working in Bangalore. From amongst her many interests, she is especially passionate about literature, and working with people, and manages to fulfil both needs by teaching English and Psychology to middle and high school students respectively. She enjoys books, coffee, and long conversations, all of which she indulges in, separately and in combination, in her free time. Writing being her first love, however, she hopes to formally study creative writing in the near future.

Akanksha Varma, from Ghaziabad, India, is a 19 years old English major at Shiv Nadar University. Her interests include watching English drama shows and cooking. Her poetry was originally an outlet for her teenage angst but has evolved into something that has stayed with her. Her poems have been published in various online magazines like Brown Girl Magazine, The Bombay Review, and MadSwirl. More of her writings can be found at her personal blog: www.akankshavarma.com

Devapreeta Jena is 23 years old who just completed her masters in Sociology from Ambedkar University, Delhi. Her discipline made her to look at things objectively, therefore most of the times she finds herself analyzing things around her, be it politics, literature or people. But she makes sure that her sanity is also kept intact and she finds the medium of poetry the perfect medium to turn silences, innuendos and subtleties of life into words. Often she struggles with words, because her objective self is always in conflict with her subjective self. She loves reading fiction, contemporary theory and has discovered newfound interest in psychology. She thinks that poetry can become a platform where one can ask questions to oneself as well as to the whole society. She thinks through poetry one can seek beauty in harsh memories and even in nauseating experience of everyday life. She has currently taken a break from academics and exploring poems by Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire.

Sihi Nagathihalli is doing her Bachelors of Design in Bangalore, India. Writing is her way of making sense of the world outside and inside her head and she particularly loves doing it through lots of references and grand metaphors. Sihi is obsessed about books and photographing the sky and while the latter makes her fall quite often, she swears it's worth the view.

Shrenik Mutha is a poet who uses poetry as pleas to be heard, as pathways to reach people, as tears in times of death and despair, as slogans in spaces of resistance. Words for him are a way to remember the forgotten, to call out the silenced, to take the grime of the personal and whip it into a batter which is inviting, but as sour and dirty in its taste, to become the balm to wounds and heal. In his work, there is a clear identification of the personal as privileged and political. His work is an act of making the self more transparent, vulnerable and intimate to the world.

Jash is 20. He studies at Ashoka University. A lover of both solitude and spotlight, Jash writes to find quiet and he writes to make some noise. A selected young critic for Mumbai Film Festival, one of the invited writers for the coveted Mentorship Program of Jaipur Literature Fest, and a published author, Jash is working on a novel and wants to make films in future.

Rajani Bala Nanda aka Rose Nanda is a writer, yoga instructor, and a psychology student. Her writing ranges from love, self love, relationship, heartbreak, to women empowerment, gender equality and sexual harassment. She believes that poetry is the wine of her life and she's keen on remaining forever high on it.

Ashwita Angeline Ashok is a brand new, slightly disoriented medical student, and has lived in Trivandrum, Kerala, for all eighteen years of her life. She blogs sporadically but obsessively, writes self-involved poetry ridden with angst, and pens the occasional short fiction piece. She has a healthy dependence on feminism for sustenance, reading for happiness, and Game of Thrones for fever-pitched passion.

Satyaki Mitra is one quirky oddball with a penchant for Literature and the Arts, but very ironically happens to be a Fourth-Year student of Law. He's the one who always carries a book around in his bag while he is on his routinely breaks from the odd-shaped and unscented reality when commuting, or even during the recurrent daydreaming zone-outs. Passionate about music and cinema with an unusually weak spot for fictional characters who always end up dying, Satyaki is definitely your go-to guy if you wanna rant about the pointlessness of life over a stereotypical cup of steaming coffee at some ironically fancy cafeteria.

Nilesh Mondal, 23, is an engineer by choice, a poet by chance and a traveller at heart. He has worked as a writer for Terribly Tiny Tales and Thought Catalog, been an editor for Moledro Magazine, and interned with Youth Ki Awaaz and Inklette magazine. His first book of poetry, Degrees of Separation (Writers Workshop) featured at #2 on the Amazon Poetry bestseller list upon release. His second book of poetry is scheduled to come out by the end of 2017.

Gayatri Hariharan is a 24 year old visual communication graduate who loves to draw, watch films, read and write in order to embrace the existential angst that creeps up then and again in her everyday more palpable struggles of being a full time model and a human being. Although she is generally required to be tight lipped or with parted lips (according to the photographer's will), nothing excites her more than a discussion about Virginia Woolf, Plath and the flux in the identity of a woman in a world of frivolous unrealities.

Zeneeva Parvez is a Bengali girl and is currently a Nursing student at AIIMS, Bhubaneswar. Reading and writing is her passion and her aim in life is to become a writer. She takes inspiration from things around her for her poems. She loves exploring new things, learning new languages and chocolates.

Chitrika Bhargava is an English undergrad student who lives in New Delhi. She embraces imperfections of all kinds and encourages others to do the same through her poetry account @solaceinimperfections on Instagram. When she's not dreaming about publishing her own poetry book someday, she could be found binge-watching just about anything. She's a passionate reader and an obsessive junk eater. Harry Potter is her favourite series and she goes back to it whenever she needs inspiration.

Rukhsar Khan is a 21-year-old poet hailing from Mumbai. At the tender age of 8, when everyone was reciting works of William Wordsworth and Rudyard Kipling, the little Rukhsar started fidgeting with rhyme schemes of her own. She began writing professionally around 4 years ago, right when she began her engineering. Coincidence? Not so much. From free verses to opinion pieces, from haiku to rants - she's tried it all, and believes there's a lot more to learn yet. She co-founded Ladies Special (www.ladiespecial.com) which is her way to unfurling the stories that hide behind the eyes of Women in Mumbai. Ways to her heart? A. Dreamy Rumi Poetry B. Cheesecakes C. Puppies

Shrutee Choudhary is a graduate in Advertising, who currently resides in Mumbai, India. She believes that she belongs to an older era, perhaps one that filled our world with love and poetry to begin with. That's possibly why her writings are influenced by the likes of Pablo Neruda and Ernest Hemingway. She loves to read, take pictures and act, when she isn't writing. In a way, she is all about touching different lives with her stories, told through every possible medium. Pretty selfish and selfless at once; quite a paradox, don't you think? She is currently working as a writer for Terribly Tiny Tales, writing a script, as well as working on publishing her own Poetry book.

Ankita Shah lives in Bombay but often wonders what it would've been like to grow up in Nepal and write in a language her mother could read. She proudly admits that she started writing when she fell in love but immersed herself when she fell out of it. Her recent work is about her family and her identity. She works with an arts and culture not-for-profit and also co-runs The Poetry Club (TPC). She is passionate about Indian classical music, birding and eating between meals.

Clementine is a train wreck of a teen, lives inside a coffee cup (black, no sugar). She likes spending most of her time reading and researching over old and forgotten unsolved cases. She has great interest in forming theories about time. it's dimensions, dilation, distortion, travel through, everything. she is greatly influenced by words of any form, be, lyrics, poetry, prose, or even epitaphs on a tombstone. she likes to think about think we don't so often do.

Harismita Vaideswaran is a 21 year old postgraduate student of English at Delhi University. A Tamilian brought up in Delhi and Mauritius, she is perennially dreaming of home, and blue seas. She writes historical fiction bordering on fantasy, and eclectic poetry about everything from the imposter syndrome to Doctor Who. She considers her grandmothers responsible for her forays into storytelling. Her literary heroes include Girish Karnad, Kamila Shamsie, A. K. Ramanujan, and J. K. Rowling. When she isn't devouring fiction, she can be found reading about pop culture and cinema, and obsessing over classical music, theatre, dogs, and the idea of time travel.

Kajol Runwal is an Economics student from Symbiosis, Pune. 20-year-old Kajol has a keen eye for stories and is a part-time reporter with a local newspaper. She often finds herself musing over the extraordinary of everyday things and her poetry is a

patchwork of vivid images woven with the thread of a strong narrative. She's a small-town girl, a feminist, a bibliophile and needs her caffeine-fix, strong and sugary!



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