

The Shrine of the Goddess Shakti

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

My wishes hop step after step
and reach her first.

My washed body, draped in immaculate white,
trail behind each time;

It hurts, the cause is unknown to me,
as my feet negotiates the bloodied corridor
where sharp rays of blood splays on the floor.

The spot of the sacrifice is teeming.

Amid the melee I no longer see
the innocent faces;
they have been severed off their necks,
and those awaiting death in stoic silence,
their innards uncoil and wriggle out,
the eyes squeeze out a ray of forlorn tear –
'Please takes us away from here,'
they would have uttered
had there been a voice tucked in there.

I can't see their faces

I can't see the slaughter's hands,

or his cutlass, or knife, or other tools;
all I see is the splash of red,
the blood of the sacrifices
and its scarlet dash,
and amid this scarlet carnival
I stand
armoured with my wishes before the Goddess
Secure. Tall.

I shall leave the shrine
and return home in a while.
I will carry home the meat of
the sacrifice and some fresh blood
securely wrapped in taro leaf.
My family, my kith and kin
will be overwhelmed;
The aroma of the blood
will seep into their body and
blend in their veins,
'the goddess will answer our wishes' –
their thirst will turn rapturous.

The shrine would be flashing
in all my dreams,

my eardrums resounding
its thunderous miracles,
beside the edge of my four-poster
would be standing that innocent goat
whose flesh holds out
the possibility to my redemption,
whose tear testifies the notification of my triumph,
whose blood smells of my prosperous future –
and the goat would be asking me:
‘What is the color of the wishes
you have said before the Goddess?
Is it a shade deeper than my blood?’

Adivasi

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

When the tricolor unfurls and
flutters above your head,
and you stand before it on the ground,
what are your musings on your motherland, Sir?

The fluttering flag christens a festival;
you see, 26th January or 15th of August.

The way you understand our independence,

and the Republic Day significance
we do not. It escapes us;
if only we had the brains to gauge that!

As we gather sal leaves in the forest,
and tread the trails up the hills,
our infants dangling from our backs in cloth slings;
when we splash our nude bodies
in hill runnels and shake our frenzied legs
after a toast of rice beer, and
chase games with the speed of lightning,
your intrepid high pixel cameras catch us.
How much our photographs sell for
in the country and abroad, Sir?
Does the knowledge help us either?

Our photographs, framed and embellished,
bedeck the walls
of your drawing room
hotels, offices, airport terminals;
our photos turn billboards
and adorn the city roads.
We never get to see
how we look in our photographs.

Like we never get to see
where our country lies in myriad maps.

Our country for us
is the kewra flower we pluck in the woods,
and the sal and *kendu* leaves, *mahula* berries;
the waters in our streams,
and the spirits who grudge us their fury;
the barren hill slopes
where we slog to yield a crop
is what we know as the country,
and the hollows in the trees,
the herbs and the wild *kurei* flowers.

When your country becomes the tricolor
and flutters above your head,
we see flocks of vultures
circling in our sky above.

When your country
manifests in the national anthem
in jazzy sopranos,
in panting breaths we chase the tiger
that has snatched from us our food.

When your country dazzles in billboards

of thirty-two-by-twenty-five
we set off to trace ourselves in the wood.

When your country morphs into gorgeous MOUs
and dwindles in official files,
we see our life throb in dry mango kernels,
and some other time
in halved *kendu* plums.

You are the denizens of the civilized society;
We are the primitive adivasis;
Or so the truth goes –
and the official records and documents
ceremoniously swear to this.

Sculpting your man

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

She stands stupefied
as she sculpts the man
she has desired through births and rebirths.
And sometimes she is pound to smithereens.

Yarns of red, blue and yellow intertwine,

like a pullover she is knitting;
she knits her faith into her love
as she sculpts her man,
lost, charmed, sparkling.

Steady earth beneath the feet;
steady sky stretch above;
Earth's stretch to sky
blends into her infinite endurance;
and she sculpts her man thus
with care, ever so oblivious of herself.

In the heart where waters of eternal oceans
break into rapturous waves
a woman sculpts her man;
the waves recede to the shores,
so it looks.

But with each wave the woman is crushed
and relapses to herself.
Her subsistence loses out
to her smoldering core's canyon,
yet she persists with the casting
of the lord of her psyche,
with a handsome blend of warmth and submission.

Time grows older.

With the knowledge –
I can't sculpt my beloved to perfection –
she delegates her entire life to the job;
perhaps, her share of virtues fails her;
for, just as the moment of Ecstasy
announces its arrival, something slivers.
Reality overtakes dream.
Incessantly. Each time. As if on Nature's dictate.

She collects the sticks, straws and other junk,
declared unworthy of building a nest,
and resumes her job;
the world watches with anxious nerves;
the collective slander and din
oozes from Time's nook and cranny.
Only,
the woman now has become a faint grin.

A woman sculpts her man
in the tremors flickering beneath her chest
as she carries through the rites of passage;
with the baby Sun of charm lurking in her pupil;
in the endless quiet beneath her skin
and the clamor and commotion of her conscience –
Woman sculpts Man –
away from human knowledge,

in absolute mystery.

In the innermost arroyo of her soul.

The Thumb

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

Oh, did I have the time to repent!

You asked and I submitted my thumb
happy and content.

Between your deceit and my innocent gaze
lay the severed finger,
it lay there and, and turned history.

No!

No explosion thundered from anywhere,
in the frontiers of your half-smile
my fate stood its ground genuflected,
steady. Restrained.

The unyielding blood jets
spurting from the cut were never enough

to wash off
the layers of your machination;
the quivering smirk in the corners of my lips
managed to brave the sharp pang,
yet failed to imbibe in you the art of neutrality.
As I put my primordial ambition
on the sacrificial altar
you stole your glance away from me
in extreme calculation.

To look blissful is an art.
The art you taught me on that day and I learnt.

I learnt,
the luminous star in your anxious firmament
I will no more remain;
I learnt,
this inertia of mine your blessings bequeathed
ensured your liberation,
from the inexplicable dread,
and forever in Creation.

I and my inanity!
Why should I curse my destiny?

Who doesn't seek immortality
in the humble exchange of a thumb?

Last Night, the Woman

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

Last night, the woman
stripped herself of her shadow
she was wearing as her clothing.

She trudged miles and reached
the netherworld of memories;
there she hopped about the courtyard
resplendent in her red floral dress
as if she had been a sparrow.

With care she audited the garden
and plucked a red rose for her bun,
she wore the flower
and immersed in coy bashfulness
at her image in the looking glass.

Last night, the woman,
like in her olden days she had done.

reminisced her ancient sins and love;
weighed her disobedience and capriciousness
tears and losses,
and before anyone would know
erased everything in a hurry
from mind's canvass.

Last night, the woman
remembered the numerous dishes
she had cooked, and their taste,
segregated the experience
her heart knew when she had been
serving the dishes,
from life's collective span;
and then she remembered
how she served herself her food –
and swam a leaping gaze on its compulsion
after she lifted carefully the lid
of her contentment.

Last night, the woman
darted towards the pond abruptly,
the pond of her childhood
and sat on its bank; tossed

to the waters fistfuls of absentmindedness,
waited pretty long for someone,
came off as evening fell,
her pedlar's basket brimming
with her endlessly bruised ego,
to the palace of invoking tears.

Last night, the woman
felt her sores and scars,
peeled their desiccated coats,
her grief, wound, infatuation, fascination
fear and penitence
she let fly into the sky
like wisps of silk cotton.

Last night, the woman
trod restless long strides inside herself,
smiled faintly
at the retreating heat of her body;
She beckoned Mother Earth and
held out her name on a platter,
snapped a pair of brackets after the name
and pronounced

I don't owe any one any debt any more.

Last night, the woman
retired
to an assured eternal lull;
the brackets lay beside her name
the following morning,
with the year of her birth and death
engraved
between the brackets.

Tiger (I)

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

Look for pugmarks
here and there
here and there sinister gloom
perhaps
the symptoms qualify enough
to let the world resign to doom.

Tiger(II)

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

What does tiger know?
Of the luxury of
The little woes
That is life..*****

Tiger (III)

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

While the tiger dozes,
the earth sleeps,
in supreme satisfaction.

Like the way
devi's eyes shine on the pandal,
when a sacrificial buffalo's head
hits the ground.

That exultation finds expression
in painting
in sculpture,
in stories,
and in poetry.

While the tiger dozes, the earth sleeps in supreme satisfaction.

Capital

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

What is the capital of a woman?

family

love

purity

or is it sin

This question

I ask myself

a number of times

And

stay silent

every time I ask.

Konarka

By Dr. Gayatribala Panda

One says,
standing still in one posture,
year after year,
without any movement:
that is our uniqueness;
that is the novelty.

A few other voices join in;
our nudity is
our protestation.

After turning to stone,
having experienced
delight upon delight,
bellows upon bellows,
it is the excuse for wonder,
for the wayfarer
and for the tourist.

Is Konaarka a temporal fragment,

made in equal measure,
of abundance and remorse!

Times has no answers.
