

Oppression and injustice

Someone Else's Crime

Anna Vera Williams

I will grow tomatoes

When you've set me free.

I will live at home in peace

Where all will let me be.

I will wake up cheerful

In the morning to the sun.

I will feel at peace at last,

Once my Freedom's won.

I have been imprisoned here

For someone else's crime.

I have lived my life in fear,

And I have done my time.

All I want, is to feel safe -

Relaxed and calm and free.

I have been good, to fellow men.

Why aren't they good to me?

I try to keep my head up high,

Imagining the day

When I will be allowed to fly,

When I will go away,

And wrap myself in someone's arms

Who knows me as I am.

I try to think about that day,

As hard as try I can ...

I will wake up smiling,
In the morning sun.
I will kiss the one I love, and
Once this battle's done ...

I will grow tomatoes in
My garden in the grass,
And tie my hair behind my head ...
And when this storm has passed,

I will sit up late at night
With cats and cups of tea,
I will live no more in fright
Once I have been set free.

I only want this misery
And fear and pain to end.
I only want a life at peace
Surrounded by my friends.

But that will be another day.
Today I must remain
Within the madness of this place
In fear, and hope, and pain.

But always, I hold up my head,
Imagining the day
When I will be allowed to go,
When I will fly away ...

Not now. It isn't over yet
I must sit out my time,
As I have done, for all these years,
For someone else's crime.

God is Dead

Faraz Ahmedr Naveed

What is GOOD? What is BAD?
Who is HAPPY? Who is SAD?
What is LOVE and what is HATE?
Who is IDIOT, who is MAD?

Who is crying? Why is this fight?
What is justice? MIGHT is RIGHT!
I am happy so others go to HELL
The others should yell that's what I can tell.

My God is right, the others' are wrong.
I can say that 'coz I am strong.

But let us just, get rid of this God
Who can bring no peace but fraud, fraud, fraud.

We will live like harmless worms
Developing the world into wonderful forms

We can bring the peace ourselves
There is no need of God's seat belts!

In the Name of God

Bharat B. Trivedi

Spineless slaughterers-
planting bombs,
blowing up innocents
in cold-blood,
inflicting casualties
making rivulets flow with blood
weaving a web of conspiracy
spreading terror
to perpetuate fear in minds,
all in the name of God!

Callous cowards-
preaching hatred and practicing violence
singing dreadful lullabies
of sleepless nightmares
dancing in the rain of bloodshed
they quench their scarlet appetite
with human lives and
blood of the unfortunate victims
all in the name of God!

Brutal butchers-
slaughtering the poor civilians
spitting venom of vengeance
brutally annihilating bodies and souls
painting the verdant land crimson
with blood-stained brush from the palette of
caste, color, creed, race and faith,
all in the name of God!

Ruthless ravagers-
stabbing brotherhood in the back
burying humanity deep down
the grave of dead heart,
slashing the secular souls
with deadly daggers and
savage scimitars of religion
without a grain or remorse
all in the name of God!

Mindless murderers
of mankind, peace and harmony
turning cities into graveyards,
sowing fatal seeds of hatred and
harvesting crops of contempt
Don't burn the roses for the sake of vicious thorns
for helpless tears I can see in Mother India's eyes
seeing her children die!

For God's sake
stop this madness, reprisal and carnage
in the name of God!

The fear in Lhasa

Woeser

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Now a city of fear.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Where the fear is greater than all the fear after '59, '69, and '89
put together.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Where the fear is in your breathing, in the beating of your heart,
In the silence when you want to speak but don't,
In the catch in your throat.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Where constant fear has been wrought by legions with their guns,
By countless police with their guns,
By plainclothesmen beyond counting,
And still more by the colossal machinery of the State that stands
behind them night and day;
But you mustn't point a camera at them or you'll get a gun pointed at
you,
maybe hauled off into some corner and no one will know.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Where the fear starts at the Potala and strengthens as you go east,
through the Tibetans' quarter.
Dreadful footsteps reverberate all round, but in daylight you won't
glimpse even their shadow;
They are like demons invisible by day, but the horror is worse, it
could drive you mad.

A few times I have passed them and the cold weapons in their hands.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,

Where the fear is now minutely scanned by the cameras that stud
avenues and alleys and offices,
and every monastery and temple hall;

All those cameras,

Taking it all in,

Swiveling from the outer world to peer inside your mind.

“Zab zab chi! They’re watching us”--among Tibetans this has become
a byword, furtively whispered.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa:

The fear in Lhasa breaks my heart. Got to write it down.

On the road out of Lhasa - August 23, 2008

The court house

Basil Fernando

In a land called Injustice

In a place called City of Fear

There was a court presided over

by a man called Mr Absurd

The court sergeant was Mr Drunkard

The Mudilier was Mr Bribery

There were many clerks and peons

Who had no names

The Litigants were the ordinary folk
Who thought they came to seek justice
About which
They had no notion

Some thought it white
Some thought it black
Some as liquor
And others as bribery

Summons were never written
But issued
Fines were never paid
But consumed

Mr Absurd said
He held the balance
Holding on to the shoulders
Of Mr Drunkard and Mr Bribery

In the appeal court
Mr Absurd was held in high esteem
The wisdom of Messrs D and B
Received nation's applause

Who else is there to come?

K G Sankarapillai

Summer.

Sunday.

The married are all at home.

Alone in the deserted lodge

I am waiting for someone.

Is there anyone else to come?

The water-jug has a hole.

It lies in a corner of the verandah

with the long neck of a camel.

Is there anyone else to come,

Tired, sweating thirsty?

The fortune-teller with his parrot is gone.

The villager looking for the house of the

E.N.T. Specialist is gone.

Everyone comes here with a thirst,,

Along the same road yesterday came

The prophets and the messiahs

Sacrificing man to fate.

Gone are the emperors who

Tempting us with shady trees and wayside wells

Robbed us of our human lives.

Gone are Huen-Sang and Vasco da Gama.

And Gandhi with the old time on his watch,

Gone too are the lip-revolutionaries

Dancing their tiresome plenums,
Draining the jug to its final drop.
Gone are all the minor characters
That I knew would come.

But from our train
Dalhousie still waves his green flag.
American wheat leers at our hunger:
Long live free India.
Is there anyone to come?

Those who have once entered
Refuse to quit.
They linger on in disguise,
A mind, a face.
Banners, rallies, maxims, people's ministers:
How soon they were all turned into
Oppressors masks!
As if the hand that supported the head
Suddenly rose to bite; like a serpent
our sleep breaks into delirious sobs.
Is there anyone else to come?

The seminar of crows
on the neem over the yard
The future is as dark as themselves, they believe.
No crow announces the arrival of a guest
Yet I leap up, sure that someone will turn up.
Who is to come at this mid-day hour
When flowers droop on the banks of the lake?

My dear friend?

My future bride?

A new ship in the harbour with

Answers to all the questions?

A Red Star over the land?

The liberation army?

Who is to come at this mid-day hour

Who, tell me, who?

It is Sunday.

May be the church is dispersed

Or the morning show over.

A herd of sheep passes along the Bannerji Road:

They are, all of them, lame.

The summer-path is blazing hot like a butcher's knife.

Let not poor Buddha appear flow.

What can he do if he does come?

Which one of these lame creatures

Can he choose to save

Upon the mercy of his mere ten Lingers?

Voices of the oppressed

K G Sankarapillai

'Dalit' means broken, oppressed, untouchable, downtrodden, and exploited. They come from the poor communities which under the Indian caste system used to be known as 'untouchables'. They constitute nearly 16 percent of the Indian population; about 160 million.

The caste system, with a history of more than 3000 years in India, is a shameful system of social segregation, which works on the principle of purity and impurity. Purity is rich and white or whitish, impurity is poor and dark. Hidden powers of wealth can be easily traced in every feudal Brahmanical concept of the ideal. Material milieu of purity and beauty and prominence and command and comforts is also wealth. Economic division is reflected in the social classifications. But it should not be registered that caste is racial or economic. Dr Ambedkar says that the caste system came into being long after the different races of India had commingled in blood and culture. To hold that distinctions of caste are really distinctions of race and to treat different castes as though they were so many different races is a gross perversion of the historical facts. Ambedkar asks: What affinity is there between the Untouchable of Bengal and the Untouchable of Madras? The Brahman of Punjab is racially the same stock as the Chamar of the Punjab and the Brahman of Madras is the same race as the Pariah of Madras. The caste system does not demarcate racial division. (Annihilation of caste – in writings and speeches vol.1 .p.49 Dr .B.R. Ambedkar)

Historically the caste system is a socio-cultural menace of Hinduism. But it is followed by Muslims, Sikhs and Christians in the country. The traditional Hindu society is divided into four main hierarchical caste groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Beyond this fourfold caste structure, there is a category of 'ati-shudras' or Dalits (as they are now called), which is forced to occupy the lowest position in this abhorrent social order. A devilish and disgraceful residue of the very long history feudalism in India.

The practice of untouchability was formally outlawed by the Constitution of India (by the mastermind Dr B R Ambedkar) in 1950. But in practice, the Dalits are still subjected to extreme forms of social and economic exclusion and discrimination; physical and mental torture. Their attempts to assert their rights are often met with strong resistance from the higher castes, resulting in inhuman torture, rapes, massacres, and other atrocities.

Dalit reality in India today is not a mark of national pride –

- As per official statistics, an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers who clean public latrines and dispose of dead animals
- 80 percent of Dalits live in rural areas and 86 percent of Dalits are landless.

- 60 percent of Dalits are dependent on casual labour.
- Only 37 percent of Dalits are literate.
- Three Dalit women are raped every day.
- At least one crime is committed against a Dalit every day.

Independent India has witnessed a considerable amount of violence and hate crimes motivated by caste, even though the law of the country doesn't permit it.

First used by Jyotiba Phule, the term 'Dalit' was later popularized by Dalit leader Dr B R Ambedkar to reflect the situation of the millions of Dalits within south Asia, who are systematically and institutionally deprived of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in every aspect of life. But the Dalits are now redefining the word, and with it their identity—Dalits are those who practice equality, believe in equality and fight for equality!

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The Dalit movement is an anti-caste movement fighting for the construction of a modern secular and democratic Indian identity.

The term 'Dalit literature' can be traced to the first Dalit literary Conference in 1958 in Maharashtra, in India.

There are numerous theories about the origins of Dalit literature. Buddha (6th c. B.C.), Chokhamela (14th AD), Mahatma Phule (1828-90), and Professor S M Mate (1886-1957), are hailed as its originators by various activists/ideological groups. These great men were deeply concerned about the plight of the untouchables. They fought against all the unjust divisions in society. A huge mass of literature is created in the light of their teachings and visions.

But it was Dr Ambedkar, a great modern visionary, renaissance leader, the architect of the constitution of India and an ardent critic of the caste system, who demolished the myth of divine origin of caste hierarchy. He inspired and initiated the creative minds of India to enforce the socio-cultural upsurge for the total emancipation of the Dalits.

Dalitism is the ideological habitat where various socio-cultural sensibilities and politico-economic groups co-exist. Opposition to the Hindu intellectual traditions in general and the oppressive caste hierarchy in particular is the central concern of the movement.

The Dalit Literary movement started in Maharashtra, the home state of Dr Ambedkar. A collective endeavour of the Neo-Buddhist elites to create a new culture of social equality, it is based on wider socio-cultural, political ideas to transcend the narrow space of the old concepts of culture and social hierarchy to new and open space. Uttam Bhoite and Anuradha Bhoite have described it as a protest movement organized against the traditional Hindu social theories of life and liberation. A sense of collective identity and solidarity are seminal for a protest movement. Dalit literature was evolving in a dialogic structure towards this direction as a communication system for various segments of the movement, the Dalit writers and Dalit intellectuals. Dalit writing is addressing the oppressed, the untouchables, the victims, and the oppressors. "It is not our wish that what we write should be read only by the untouchables. Our writers strongly desire that it should be read by the touchable as well." (Raosaheb Kasbe in his essay 'Some issues on Dalit literature').

Dalit poetry became popular mainly through poetry readings and alternative media like the little magazines and posters and hoardings and creative collectives.

Birds of the same feather from other states of India were inspired by its liberative spirit, straight and strong style, and poignant poetic images. Great poets like Narayan Survey, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arun Kamble, Josef Macqwan, Saran Kumar Limbale, Arun Dangle, and many other poets wrote stunningly new Indian poetry in the sixties and seventies. They portrayed the life and struggles of the lowest strata, the low caste. The prominence of Dalit poetry in modern Indian poetry is undoubtedly great. It could consolidate numerous socio cultural and ecological movements in post colonial India. It remains powerful even though some of its leaders were hijacked into power games by India's ruling political parties.

A contest

Basil Fernando

An army I command
Fear me, says the chief.
At my command the flesh bleeds
Bones appear, disappear and reappear.

I bear only the pen
Ceaseless streams of thought
appear, disappear and reappear within me
Without any promptings, says the victim.

Fear me or you shall die,
Says the chief.
The stream of my thought
Knows no fear and does not stop, says the journalist.

Identity card

Mahmoud Darwish

Record!
I am an Arab
And my identity card is number fifty thousand
I have eight children
And the ninth is coming after a summer
Will you be angry?

Record!

I am an Arab

Employed with fellow workers at a quarry

I have eight children

I get them bread

Garments and books

from the rocks..

I do not supplicate charity at your doors

Nor do I belittle myself at the footsteps of your chamber

So will you be angry?

Record!

I am an Arab

I have a name without a title

Patient in a country

Where people are enraged

My roots

Were entrenched before the birth of time

And before the opening of the eras

Before the pines, and the olive trees

And before the grass grew

My father.. descends from the family of the plow

Not from a privileged class

And my grandfather.. was a farmer

Neither well-bred, nor well-born!

Teaches me the pride of the sun

Before teaching me how to read

And my house is like a watchman's hut

Made of branches and cane

Are you satisfied with my status?

I have a name without a title!

Record!

I am an Arab

You have stolen the orchards of my ancestors

And the land which I cultivated

Along with my children

And you left nothing for us

Except for these rocks..

So will the State take them

As it has been said?!

Therefore!

Record on the top of the first page:

I do not hate people

Nor do I encroach

But.. if I become hungry

The usurper's flesh will be my food

Beware..

Beware..

Of my hunger

And my anger!

War only means absence of love

Basil Fernando

War only means absence of love

On my side of the fence

I have put up the white flag

And grown araliya plants

In the house there are rooms

With beds for two

Clean towels
And a rice cooker
The boy downstairs
Can make kites.

Bombs confused as apples we eat

Basil Fernando

There is this confusion
And lack of solution
Passers-by confused as foes
We fight

Bombs confused as apples
We eat

Simple destruction
Becomes the solution

What is it all for?
“Do not ask such silly questions”
Says the common opinion
Everyone lives by such

At the junction you meet Hemapala
A common man, as they say
He chews betel, spits red on the road
And says, “Me no soldier, I no kill”
Who kills then? So many are killed
Someone must

“Do not ask such silly questions”

Says the common opinion

Skeletons in everyone’s backyard

No one admits murder

To live in confusion and deny a solution

Absolves every one, no?

Who can keep backyards clean, anyway

When burials take place after midnight

Dogs bark no doubt

Whatever you may see, can you shout

“Who, who is there,

Whose body is it that you bury?”

Of course you can’t help dreaming

About these things

But can you tell anyone

About your dreams?

That’s absolutely subversive

It is wise to be silent, no?

Reckoning a tyrant

Layad Kasiyanaphi

Alas, what have you done
Glorious tyrant, Oh lonely queen
The land bleeds, tears overflow
Your sheepskin can not conceal you now
Martyrs, orphans and widows
Have soaked with blood and tears
Your magnificent robe that now stinks.

Alas, where have you sent
Innocent civilians meek as lambs
So frightened and fled their homes
Upon the sight of your pack of wolves
Yielding weapons of death and terror
With smirk on their faces that rejoice
Upon the death of gallant fathers and mothers
In mockingly and treacherously murderous means.

Alas, how did you become
Bersek ruler of unparalleled greed
Begging for pity and piety
Amidst the chaos you brought to this land
Robber of dreams, thief of hearts
Slayer of angels, cause of turmoil
I did not ask for your bloody sacrifices
Nor the bridges and towers you chose to build.

Alas, why did you steal
Lives, dreams and laughter from homes
In capricious ways and whimsical manners
Your pledge to kill, maim and punish
So called terrorists and destabilizers.
With your command of terror and deathly silence
As you so desperately hold on to poisoned power
That you even brazenly invoke the Holy God's name.

Come now, I have no other will
But to let you know of your disdainful works
For I have heard the cries of my people
I have known of your blasphemous acts.

Go now, for you are but doomed
Walking straight to the path of hell
In your beginning you must have been born
Attached with minions of demoniac nature
Obsessed with power, prestige and vengeance that blinds
Assuming pretense so thick that renders you incomplete
Calling upon wealth and stealth up to the heavens.

Now is the time to reckon you and your kind
For it has been written, it has been said,
it has happened long before time
Remember the age-old stories and great mysteries
and don't you forget The Writing on the Wall
"Mene mene tekkel upharsin"
God has numbered the days of your queendom
He has brought it to an end.