



The Unsettled Winter

THE RLP AWARD ANTHOLOGY 2013

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RLP AWARDS 2013
The
Unsettled
Winter

PREFACE TO SHORT POEMS

Kala Ramesh

~~

When RLP INDIA AWARDS team approached me to judge the haiku & tanka section of the competition, I really didn't know what I was committing myself to. I soon discovered that most often it's easier to write a haiku than to give a critical appreciation about it. And judging a poem is doing just that from a different angle isn't it?

I read them over once, twice but felt I had to internalize each poem before I could make a decision. The prize money declared was also a handsome one, compared to what we find in the haiku world. I pasted the short listed poems sent to me, both haiku and tanka, on to my computer screen, and read them for the next several weeks. On and off I went, weaving through the different images and seeing them in different moods and in different angles.

India is just opening out to haiku and the winners I think have done exceptionally well, as you'd see for yourselves in the following pages.

What is haiku? It means many things to many people. But to me it's bringing the ordinary into focus in an extraordinary way, pulsating as it were with nature's creative force. Fifteen years back on a family trip to Shimla, I was unaware about haiku. Standing at the Shimla station after having missed our train to reach downhill, was a haiku moment! To think this image was so deeply etched in my mind and surfaced after so many years was a revelation to me.

dense fog . . .
the train evaporates
into a distant horn

Haiku is a form of poetry that uses the space elements [like in ikebana and bonsai] and silences. Thus stripping it off of all redundancies is the most difficult tool to master when writing a haiku. Haiku needs to be concise and brief without losing its depth. It's a tall demand. Tanka [a five line lyrical poem] almost a 100 year old art form Japan, has very few practitioners at present, but awareness is building up.

In both haiku and tanka, I'm hoping Linda gets a more sumptuous harvest during RLP AWARDS 2014.

~

13th December, 2013

SHORT POEMS CATEGORY

RLP AWARD 2013 Winners (Short Poems)

Geethanjali Rajan

last night's storm -
mother sweeps away
the broken nest

~~

Charishma Ramchandani

silence...
a bluejay meditating
on the sunbeam

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlisted (Short Poems)

Charishma Ramchandani

setting sun : : her memories float in my cognac

~~

Anitha Varma

moon slips
silently into the pond-
no ripples

(Dr. Sandeep Chauhan Commendable Prize for Haiku)

Ramesh Anand

festival wind
the street child relights
a bottle rocket

***Also,
RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlisted (Short Poems)***

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlisted (Short Poems)

Shernaz Wadia

Twilight
the evening star floats
with water lilies

Shloka Shankar

Kaapi in one hand
I hear the soft mandolin
Gently playing on
Wisps of hair all about me,
The wind was my instrument.

Sohom Chakrabarty

My blues
will fade away with time
I only fear
the color of sky
and your eyes

Amitava Dasgupta

on both sides
of India-Pakistan border
spring flowers

Bhumika Kapoor

the silence
between us:
pregnant with words

Poornima Laxmeshwar

raindrops chirp
birds seek refuge
in their own wings

Sameer R.K.

after half a bowl,
the tinge of green chilli
from the chicken soup-
I eat mindfully
for two more minute

PREFACE TO LONG POEMS

Jennifer Robertson

~~

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us—don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know.

It's rather ironical that I choose to start this preface with an Emily Dickinson lyric poem where she satirises the fame seekers and elevates 'Nobody-hood' or Nobody-ness' by admitting to her nonchalant alliance with the other Nobodies thereby establishing a pair of banished twosome with panache. She remained an obscure poet all her life, writing in private, quietly bringing the enigmatic persona of the first person to life in her verse. Hence, when Dickinson died on May 15, 1886 she was known among her neighbours not for her verse but for her eccentricities.

RædLeaf Poetry pledged to discover such Emilys. Both for their verse and their eccentricities. Because deserving poets need to be read and rewarded in this lifetime, not posthumously.

RædLeaf Poetry Award India was started on a whimsical note to cull out fresh new voices, torn up by the roots: voices that explored their psyche with a startling ingenuity and scrutiny. RædLeaf Poetry's mission was to engage with such fresh, unheard voices of contemporary Indian poetry and give them a platform and a larger audience to interact with. I was fortunate to be a part of the process that resulted in a long-list of 636 poems (the long poem category) out of which 49 poems were shortlisted to be reviewed by an eclectic jury comprising of Ranjit Honskote, Arundhathi Subramaniam, Innua Ellams, Kala Ramesh and R.K Singh.

I am extremely ecstatic to present to you **RædLeaf Poetry's first long-list Anthology**. The reader will find a variety of styles and poetic approaches resonating with traditional Indian literary, cultural and political tropes. The themes powering these poems run the entire gamut of human experience, including nostalgia, aftermath of war, identity, estrangement, dislocation and urban solitude. Their myriad tones oscillate from meditative, rustic, epiphanic, esoteric to provocative. There are poems that talk about rotting corpses to small library-less towns to lunatic orgasms. There are poems about sharp-sighted observations on how marriage is a metropolis to raving mad sentences that talk about Shakespeare and Jimmy Choo in the same breath. Some poems contemplate the mundane, such as a daughter trekking in an Adidas shoe, while others consider somber topics as the echoes of Afghan Kalashnikovs or gory details of shaving in Siliguri and the kaleidoscopic delight of watching blood spread across the shaving foam in multiple hues of crimson.

I'll start by talking about Rohan Chettri's poem and its arresting title: *violence enters a poem like a restless wind inside a burning house*. The title could be a monostich and a potent one at that. It's the kind of title that unwittingly raises the bar for the verse to follow. The title becomes a standalone glyph; a poem that speaks vividly with a formidable ferocity reminiscent of a wild Gustave Courbet self-portrait. Surprisingly, the poem that follows is a slow burn, images unfold slowly, bleakly like a Bela Tarr film.

*My father is noiselessly
setting up the mosquito net above the bed.
During the day, the town is rife with revolution,
and they are dreaming of a new state.
They have licked the salt of freedom and cannot unlearn the taste.
Someone I used to know gets shot an
inch above the ears in a cross-fire.*

And that one heart wrenching sentence that I'm sure the jury would've unanimously agreed upon as one of the stunningly melancholic but beautifully exiled line :

*My mother imitates that foreign tenor people acquire
while breaking news of unfortunate deaths.*

The efficacy of Rohan Chettri's poetry lies in its unassuming simplicity that depicts a montage of people ravaged by war, devastated families trying to move on, in the face of inscrutable disappearances and unfathomable loss.

When I first read Sohini Basak's poem *Mnemonic*, it read like a clever title. I was stoked by the idea of some sleuthing and where this poem could go. She begins the poem matter-of-factly:

It started with matchboxes.

The opening draws you into the poem like a maze, the reader unaware of the destination but groping for the clues, sifting through the list like a precocious Salinger protagonist or a Wes Anderson idiosyncratic character trying to bead old memories through objects and trinkets. We recognize things, as in poetry through resemblances. Sohini's verse also reminds me of Anna Kamienska's poetry and the wisdom of lost childhood. Colour, taste, scent. A squirrel. Cherries. Good tiredness. Cauliflower for supper. Clean house.

*Eagle's feathers, shiny wrapping paper, phone numbers,
Magnets, and all those letters addressed to you. Rhyming
Billets-doux, confessionals, pieces of my mind and heart
Engraved in red: ink feelings spilling over the borders.*

Then the poem swerves into a mature space, moving from an adolescent backpacker narrative to a wizened traveller morphing into part memoir - part travelogue, painting a haunting spectre of a person at a crossroad; transitioning from youth to old age. The poem ages and the reader journeys along, juvenile memorabilia traded for sombre themes of death and lament. The reader gets a feeling that even though the past is skirted, the poem demands that the unquiet ghosts burdened by the weight of memory be placated.

*Realizing that age calls for gravity, it was pebbles
That I started collecting, from everywhere I travelled.
I had this glorious vision of an old woman me,
Insoluble by a grey sea, skipping stones at dawn.*

Another interesting poem in the anthology is written by Raamesh Gowri Raghavan. The poem is dedicated to the pioneer of modern Tamil Poet, Chinnaswami Subramania Bharathi. Sample the opening lines :

*Dear poet-husband,
Do you know how to buy one hand of flowers,
Or roll a round chapati?*

In the poem, Bharathi's wife Chellammal challenges her husband to assist her in the household chores. She derides his love for words and his engagement with poetry that champions women's rights and advocates women education. The poem represents a domestic-public dichotomy that is prevalent in most Indian households. The poem revels in jocular derision by addressing the subject as ' Dear Poet Husband' and challenging him to perform menial chores with surgical precision(to roll a round chapati) The tone is accusatory, almost questioning the hypocrisy of patriarchy that engulfs most households. She further chastises him by saying :

*You who stand up for women
Can you cut up love and affection
And boil it up in the sambar
Like I do for you every day?*

Although, all the poems featured in this anthology have been cherry-picked, I'll quickly list a few lines, verses that stayed with me for multiple reasons.

The dome of the Taj shakes kahkashaan

*Millions of stars rain
On thin, brittle entrance
Of Koh-e-Kaf*

*Zafar's broken syllables Hang
Sun-washed Silence dribbles down
Hennaed wrists:*

Saima Afreen's beautifully etched, filigreed verse reminds me a Zardozi sky replete with twinkling stars.

Rochelle Potkar's Goa is a spectacular sight to behold. Her verse has a jagged colloquial coastal zing. Sample this:

*Goa is a leit motif of childhood May holidays
A quartet of perspiring aunts cirlicuing their liquid syllables*

Goa was dragonfly caught in thick forest bush, painstakingly brisk, pinched at its tail

Biting at the bend of body – a Chant Royal, announcing the end of the holiday season in raining June.

Sumana Roy's Singular-Plural explores and questions the institution of marriage. The poem posits questions if marriage remains a reciprocal relationship after years go by and it dissects the institutional facade using the singular-plural prism. The poem will put the readers in close and often stifling proximity to the subjects of the poem and they would be privy to a back-to-front excavation of a marriage probably bursting at the seams.

*Every wedding anniversary, we behave like mountaineers,
and pretend to have conquered distance.*

*The marriage becomes a metropolis –
you and I its anonymous citizens.
The singular buys a CCTV camera from ebay*

Tushar Jain's Spivak and the Rescue of Tandoor the Subaltern gets brownie points for a prelude that contains a sentence that goes like this:

*I shall do to the Subaltern
what spring does to the cherry trees.*

I know not what Neruda might feel about the Subaltern distortions of his gallantly seductive oft-quoted line, but Tushar Jain's poem is an ensemble cast indie documentary. And it's a mad, zany, fun film. It is a surreal postmodern potpourri of philosophers, musicians and obscure cultural references. Everybody from Foucault & Deleuze, the baroque composer Purcell, Bach, Giovanni, Radiohead and Beatles and a sycophantic Marxist with a bagel (Hallelujah!) feature in this ride of a poem.

Honestly, I felt what most people feel after reading an Ashberry poem or a looking at a Jackson Pollock painting. They don't get it but it still feels like a significant, cerebral, monumental piece of work. Like Infinite Jest or a Pynchon novel. Alternatively I felt that this could be a wonderful script for a Michel Gondry movie if we threw some eels in.

Tushar Jain's poetry is torqued up high, written with an unrelenting ubfuscatory twist, sentence after sentence, with a charming reluctance to denouement, not to arrive but to thrill us with the journey.

Plus he uses the word 'pullulate.'

American poet Dorothea Lasky says *that the road through a poem is a series of lines, like a constellation, all interconnected. Poems take place in the realm of chance, where the self and the universal combine, where life exist. A great poet knows never to expect sun or rain or cold or wind in the process of creating a poem.* Similarly the terrain of this anthology is unmapped. It has little gems that will appeal to the reader in you. As you read each poem, you'll come to adopt a poem, adapt to a poet, pet it and make it your own.

Happy Reading!

~

30th January, 2014

LONG POEMS CATEGORY

violence enters a poem like a restless wind inside a burning house

Rohan Chhetri

Somewhere near the borders to a warless country
stands the house my grandfather built.
In the ground floor my parents live.
And now, tired by the day's work, my mother
has already fallen asleep in front of the television.
My father is noiselessly setting up
the mosquito net above the bed.
During the day, the town is rife with revolution,
and they are dreaming of a new state.
They have licked the salt of freedom
and cannot unlearn the taste.
Someone I used to know gets shot
an inch above the ears in a cross-fire.
My mother imitates that foreign tenor people acquire
while breaking news of unfortunate deaths.
His blood is washed off the streets in the winter rain
and drained in the sewage that shares
the common filth of the two nations.
Tomorrow my father will cross the border as usual
and go to work for a bad-tempered man.
He has had it, mother tells me over the phone.
They need to get out of there, I think, but never say it.
The paranoia changes hands
as spring comes on early and I read on the papers
a nation is sending the refugees back to
the country they fled from.
On their way, they stop on their trails
to look for the frostbitten fingers
they lost in the difficult winter of their lives.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Winner – 1

Landlocked

Rohan Chhetri

Happiness, he decides, is a purer form of nausea.
The universe is written in Braille
To be read only in the interludes.
By interludes he means the grace of summer rains.
The filth of the town guttering down the creek.
The trees suddenly dressed in the first green of Eden.
The light changing every second and no one noticing.
The moderation of the heart is in waiting alone
For the rapture to subside. Young Chopin
Weeping, listening to his mother play the piano
In the long Polish afternoons. It is in knowing that
The important joy, in fact, cannot be shared
At all. Is inconceivably private.
He thinks of the woman and the necessary grammar
Of estrangement. Somewhere an ocean beckons her.
She heeds but doesn't leave. Yet her body inside a warm car
Moving farther away from him seventy kilometres per hour.
The sound of water, whether clear or murky, is the one
He remembers shimmering in the brooks, as a child.
Him falling asleep clutching the new pain in his fists
Growing more visible against the sound.
Learning the alphabets of longing a little too early.
There are seventeen laws of uncertainty in love,
He decides. He thinks of her body.
Of other bodies beginning to blur against hers.
Because the stubborn heart cannot make love twice.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Winner – 1

Drift

Sohini Basak

this evening my memory turned translucent
like the bloom of moon jellyfish
we saw behind glass, exactly ten years ago
in an aquarium swim-dreaming neon
or, like the other time, I cannot remember
exactly how long ago, but you were toe-digging
sand on a summer holiday when the coastline
turned plasma out of the slush blue because there
it was trapped, pinned with broken bits of sea-shells
cushioned in brine, dead but refusing to decay
closer home, translucent like the used plastic bag
you let go from your hand yesterday unnoticed
now circling over some ocean yearning to hold
water over the wind mirroring tide swells

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Winner – 2

Mnemonic

Sohini Basak

It started with matchboxes. On my first collectible I
Recall a black ship sailing, so on the second, its twin found
En route to school. I traded in duplicates. With time,
Memorabilia changed to notebooks. I collected in between:

Eagle's feathers, shiny wrapping paper, phone numbers,
Magnets, and all those letters addressed to you. Rhyming
Billets-doux, confessionals, pieces of my mind and heart
Engraved in red: ink feelings spilling over the borders.

Realizing that age calls for gravity, it was pebbles
That I started collecting, from everywhere I travelled. I
Had this glorious vision of an old woman me,
Insoluble by a grey sea, skipping stones at dawn.

Sacrilegiously I have packed away the thingamajigs. In
Memories I trade, to deserted islands I ship them away.
En fete, I made a bonfire with the fire hoarded inside
Matchboxes and those letters to send smoke signals your way.

Evocative objects these feathers, names of streets have
No real use, they are not magic spells. Penchants
Turn redundant before she who collects souls.
Objects with my fingerprint, address, phone number,

My name: nothing will pin me to this earth. Death catches
Our souls with a butterfly net. The pebbles I gave back to the
River. At its bottom, my collection grows, grows moss.
I collect boulders now, all things that have weight...

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Winner – 2

Advice

Sohini Basak

I said paper-planes
tied to a string from my curtain rod
looks evocative and invites the wind
You said take them down,
unfold paper wings, write letters
on the creases, and post them in the morning

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Winner – 2

In This World

Abha Iyenger

Play the broken lute
Dance with the festering ankle
The violence of life will stay
In these badly lit streets
With you.
The claw of the bird
That grazed your forehead with fever
The wing that cut your face
Into a thousand mirrors
The beak that entered
Your mouth with poisoned tongue
The flapping that broke your lute
And twisted your ankle will stay
In these flickering spaces of gloom
With you.
The time you have with you
Is limited. Use it
With limitless abandon
Without remorse or sorrow
To hope and pursue dreams.
Blinded by the monster,
do not flounder. Do not sit
in an arched balcony, watching a sky
mirrored with grief.
That which survives will stay
With you.
Dance with festering ankle,
Play the broken lute.
In this labyrinth
Of life, you can
Find the heart that beats
Within you.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

On Sleep and Forgetting

Anjumon Sahin

Eternity- a day in life

Epiphany- just another moment

Sterile- the skin of hope...

Tomorrow will be another day

- A new story-

It always is,

Perhaps,

The only way-

It never can be.

To recite my thoughts in your words you need the access and excess of my mind

Maybe some pot- maybe some wine- maybe some sex will help

Or Nothing.

I scrape my memories till they fester and run

And when they are parched I dig up again

Probing for ache where only the scabs remain.

Lethe has dried up- Mnemosyne no longer sits by the bar in Hades-

Weren't they supposed to last forever?

Didn't some romantic find drowsy numbness there?-

Still, I did save the dregs.

I should sleep

I really should

It was green tress in grey winter or grey trees in green winter when my eyelids parted

Oh, what a sleep!

Feathers of hope that only dreamers can fly

Bales of honey that only lovers can devour

A maudlin mix- Oh what madness-delusional-of course it is-but what is it to a sleeping body;

Not even the pigskin can be grazed.

A poet and a madman knew that blessed are the forgetful
Another one discovered eternal sunshine there
Oh dear God, Why don't you bless me then! Just to prove a point
Before I am reduced to a ghost in natural colours.
When you do, I will sleep.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Seasons I, II

Bharati Jagannathan

Seasons, India-1

The echo of Afghan Kalashnikovs
reached us through
the disappearance of Siberian cranes
from our winters.

Seasons, India-2

Simal lights the sky in flaming reds
in Delhi's February.
What flowers in Kabul?

In May I could immerse myself in mangoes.
Is it when apricots ripen there?

The blessing of rains, pavements purpled
with jamun, megha papeeha calling.
Do wagtails prepare to leave
those rugged mountains in July?

Under the gaze of winter sun
Frenzied men break mosques
and dynamite ancient Buddhas
in sad lands here,
in sad lands there,
And spring is now everywhere
Confined to calendars.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

How to die quietly in a war-zone

CS Bhagya

Still in camouflage, you trip
down a red-raw mountain ridge, turn-
nip down it, rooting and guttering,
your thoughts amassing beetle; worm; dust.

Now you can't remember the border was a battlefield,
always lit up – the shrapnel; the clamour of armour;
blood eying slyly out of torn arm, limb,
weevilling sockets,
the green radar gaze of distant countries.
This fall reads like that bullet whose clean path –
what grim determination, such peace – you cut
and it struck home amphibiously
in the soft places between bone and bone.

Now insects ripple in like glinting atoms
in a live current; black, cloying discharge,
these chuntering poison-facets, wings: grasshopper, praying mantis and cricket,
all swarming, alight
on your bullet hole, on the self-extinguishing flame of your nose, your ears
where all is glowing and bitten off, your miasmic iris,
your moaning buccal cavity, the wiring of pubic hair
into its own narcissistic mesh. Your body sleds down

the gravel of night. The night,
it has its high and keening voices:

cicadas reverberate through the delirious head
of the forest in a soft, winging sail –
massive tuning fork; melancholy artillery
of night. Through abrading forest you tide
down firs and cedars – perennial sages –
and settle in a nexus of rock and its clotted song;

you sigh and say something too low to hear and turn still.
Time passes. The moon phases. O what a glide

thrumming glide what a thrall of a man through pine (its twine and whine)
and needle, through scent of mountain lion and humus – this burying earth –

your eyelids shuffling down under a close-crop of stars scarpering
in the brambling black space of the branches
of trees, pushing each other
askew in their scramble to catch your last breath for
child, they turn the dead's last wishes to more stars
in this country's sky, not that

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Squall

CS Bhagya

Red russet shot, angry trees swing,
tumbling over themselves,
mauling
in a stunted, childish passion
for gale: it steeps and sweeps,
hissing at their ears.
You walk
down
from your timid balcony
so in the distance you can place
one soft hand
against the jaw
of that old dog, weary
from barking all night.
You see in the sky
only a remembered moon. You don't know
how to receive the storm.
You want only
to gather leaves,
comb them in tenderly
like you would your grandmother's hair.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

For the Man who catches the Dying

Neelima Vinod

You who runs to the falling bridge
I wait for your footstep sound.
What can you drop?

Pain can not survive descent.
I pick up bodies, fish in air
Stench the human reason home.

Before you plunge inhale
The sweaty smell of fear and armpit,
More beautiful than fish.

Watch the bullet train mind, it does not know,
It is a child.
Train it.

Don't fall down
Or I will have to pull you out
And brave your grip like Samson's might
And touch my lips to yours to give you love,

To give you breath, to give you life.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Eureka!

Neelima Vinod

Old Archimedes springs out of his tub soaked with *him*,
He runs into a street filled with dreams that come true.
He knows everything.

He is a rivulet coursing into stone
Now Light. Teeth chattering, he looks at his body
Wrinkles that turned him rubber duck are gone.

Now he is a child.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

STROKE

Pratyaksha Sinha

They no longer smell of ether
Or disinfectant
There is no smell of disease
No stench of discarded bloodied bandages
Of smeared gloves
And masks and bins with used needles
They have now cafeterias
Subways and dominoes and kathi rolls
Cinnamon tea with brown sugar sachets
And decent white napkins
And interns with chin beards
And white coats
A reception like a brightly lit neon sign in the night
More staff for cleaning than nursing
And doctors who say thank you after every
Two sentence and
a handbook of strokes
On my mother's bed in the ICU
~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

CHILD

Pratyaksha Sinha

The skin crackles and falls in clumps

Tooth rotten with purple gums

There is no hair, none at all

The bones have melted and flown away

He proffers a white sheet and says

Gleefully

Look

I have made you old

The sketch has lines and angles and two protruding teeth

I hug him

My four years old

He does not know yet

What losing someone to old age means

~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

FATHER

Pratyaksha Sinha

The small sparrow looks at me
From across the window glass
The view from outside
I sit stiff back
Fighting pain
The intensity moving like a track
On which the saddest song plays
The wire stretched thin
I fear loss
He quotes Rilke
And Marina Tsvetaeva
I try to see
With dimmed eyes
The meaning
But see instead
A shimmering haze
And see
Memory and voice
All that is left is a photograph
Faded colours
Curled up toes
He lives he lives he lives

I sing in a voice that breaks
At each syllable
Into thousand shards
Piercing my heart
In an ancient pagan ritual
Of torture
I seek years and days
I count full moon
And draw lines and cross them
A cheap imitation of dog eared

And laugh,
The girl with two plaits
Laughs in reply
At the man
The sun rims their faces
He intones in detached monotone
I live I live I live

My skin bruises easily
Blue flowers on tracery veins
I tell, look papa
I am a tree
I am a flower

The photo smiles
The wall I have kept
deliberately white
where after each happiness
I write one poem
One for him

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

The Undertaker's Wife

Priya Narayanan

I look at her, as she lay on our antique wooden cot, fast asleep.
The soft cotton blanket lay crumpled beside her, a reminder
that she'd never really cared for it – preferring instead
to sleep with the breeze caressing her lithe body.
I look at her with ardor as I've done several times before,
but it's different this time.

Her almond eyes, ears hiding behind graying curls,
her thin lips and not-so-thin eyebrows, her broad forehead,
pointed chin and nose, her neck and sinewy shoulders. . .
A grim nor'wester snaps me back to the job at hand. Slowly, I slide
beside her, undoing her clothes as I've done several times before,
but it's different this time.

I pick up a sodden sponge and run it over her pale,
taut frame, taking care not to chafe, lest she'd complain.
I pick up her citrus-laced lotion and daub it softly,
releasing the most pleasant yet poignant fragrance.
I stagger to the cabinet and pick up her favorite dress:
a lilac knee-length outfit with dull-gold sequins around the waist;

My eyes well up as I slip it down her slender form.
I avoid the jewelry – she'd never fancied them – 'cept for the
wedding band and the glass-bead earrings from our last vacation.
I place her favorite black shoes on her feet. My lips shiver
as they kiss hers, as they've done several times before,
but it's different this time.

As I turn around, the aides take over, placing her gently
in a satin-lined casket. As we move along in the hearse,

I play back her favorite songs in my mind; I imagine her
dancing with abandon, just the way she did when we first met.

The grave is dug, the vault sunk in, the prayers said. I place
a bunch of her much loved lavenders by her and say a silent goodbye.
Promising to return every day, I turn around and walk away

never to direct a funeral again.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

You

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan

it is still too early to say
what memories will crystallize around you
for now it is the bedpan not emptied from last use
and your room smells of ointments and pills
and your damning of the whole world

but once my tears have dried
and the puja flowers withered
perhaps you will freeze

i will put in the black and white photos
on a boat in a lake in a cheap hill station
when you first let me down

and the mundan of the first-born
where your mother made such a fuss

and that stupid photo from a middling age
of the reception of some cousin of yours

and yes the shaadi ka video and the cassette
guiding our kid reciting nursery rhymes

certainly all the unrecorded fights
for you never earned enough and drank too much
and never bought enough flowers

and that never do well son you gave me
who lamented loudly at the funeral
and your sisters
let us not talk about your sisters

no I will not make up a box of memories
because you know I would not myself be reduced
to an 8 by 10 frame with withered flowers
~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

From Chellammal to Bharathi

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan

Dear poet-husband,
Do you know how to buy one hand of flowers,
Or roll a round chapati?
You who stand up for women
Can you cut up love and affection
And boil it up in the sambar
Like I do for you every day?
Well, don't. Just plait our daughter's hair
And plait in a hand-length of jasmine
And send her off to school.
Else just make pongal in the morning
And put it in a clean dabba before
Your daughter is awake and clamours
For her toothpaste, uniform.
No. Well, alright.
Can you bring rice to a boil,
So its aroma makes the house blossom?

Even simpler.
Can you show happiness, day after day,
While washing clothes and folding them,
Sweeping and mopping the house,
Washing dishes thick with congealed ghee
And never, ever complain
While your wife writes silly poems?
No? Not even for a day?
You can make the flowers bloom,
And the spring come early.
Just make a crying child smile.
You make words dance and sing,
Just put a child to sleep.
You paint pictures with words,

One kolam pattern outside the house?
Okay, you're not going to grind rice and make crisp dosais,
You'll make me one tumbler of coffee?

~~

(Chellamal was wife to Subramania Bharathi, the most eminent of modern Tamil poets. Apart from nationalism and anti-casteism, he was an advocate for women's rights, especially education.)

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Shaving in Siliguri

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan

There is, I suppose, a gruesome fascination
In watching blood spread across shaving foam:
Crimson, then red, then pink
And then a dull, gory grey
Washed off in hot water and a scar to remember.

There could be a different image, a wish even,
Of blood oozing from a wrist slit with the razor,
As it takes away the stasis of middle-classiyat
Eyes glued to the sight, the heart beating excitedly,
Till all sound stops and lights dim
In that cockroached lodge room.

No, it's no romantic place to die.
Much better to plunge into the raped Teesta –
Virgin mountain stream now
Pregnant with mud and moving zombie-like
To her doom in the silt of the Brahmaputra.

The train rings its corporate deadline.
I have fifteen minutes to dress and pack:
The Kanchan Kanya Express leaves at nine-thirty sharp.
~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

1947

Raju Das

The menu of prospects was cooked
On the plate, the hors d Oeuvre
However, the nibbling worms inside notorious godowns,
Could not wait.

At the stroke of midnight, they ran riot in the nerves and veins
Spilling acidic bile and burnt the courses.
With more hungry waves, the identities and speeches were charred.
These were later peddled democratically, through a Government scheme.

Those who refused to indulge in this feast are in this camp, tight and cold.
While winter drilled on its heel, keeping us all alert.
We turned right, left, forward and about
And saluted the same Goddamn thing.

Some said it was a metaphor of Idi Amin's appetite.
Others called it a parade,
A competition for points and plaques.

As our lifetime eluded us in staggering lunch time queues
- Other times in anticipation,
We were reminded there is nothing, nothing whatsoever for coming in last in
hierarchy
Only fish bones stuck into troubled existence.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Cats

Rinzu Rajan

They stand by my window
when a fish is fried
or marinated with minnows
slithering in onion orbs smothered,
the three blades of exhaust fan
vacillate to fill barren beads of oxygen
with their favourite fragrance
they climb onto the broken furniture
abashed in our backyard
curl their toes on plastic paper
in a thoughtless thanking
for bidding comfort from rains.
They catch flies and swell with
hollow hubris when predators bury
their burden in the
brown of the earth,
they barge through gullible grills
slurping milk for the child
with a smile so content
that raises their whiskers

in sheepish apology for a fluffy fault
and on lonely nights
they whine and tell you
that slumber is the daughter of death.
~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

The Old Gatekeeper

Rinzu Rajan

The latitude and longitude of the bamboo
he carries is his twin
on his sojourns uninvited and unintended
from the giant green gate
to another metal head
a black bulwark.

His days are distasted by the sounds of his snores
sometimes seen in a discourse of doings
like cremating a pyre of wood
to warm his bones
performing "Surya Namaskar"
on a morning that promises him nothing
puffing his bidi roll
with smoggy susurrations

On a night littered with waking dreams
and stories untold,
he ambles on the path
lined with neem and peepal
baby sitting cars of various shapes and sizes
having force fed insomnia that chokes

he is a slave sold to
hunger's hubristic appetite
the child of a night's calling
~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

On The Thanagazi@ Castle-

Sagar Mal Gupta

The castle lies on a hillock
With its six legs apart
Like a hooker.
With numerous chinks, cleavages
Crevices and pelvises
Quite oblivious of thousand
Penetrations that occurred
In the yore.
Quite unaware of its ruined nudity
And bare breast
What was once a paradise
For the youthful dreaming
Prince and princesses
Serves as a rendezvous
For making love for the goatherds
And donkeys.

~~

***Glossary:** Thanagazi castle lies 40 km from Alwar in Rajasthan*

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Calling My Husband's Saligram Names As Suits My Mood

Sivakami Velliangiri

The oval fossil shines in black, bargained to a hundred.
Before bringing it home, we wove fantasies
Vishnu would have fled from Sridevi and settled in the river,
or it could have been Lakshmi's abacus bead.

It finds its way not to the show-case, but to the *puja* room.
Exquisite natural carving of stone and time.
I find it a silver throne.

I first felt its inside, something moved.
They said it was the *Ganga* and I retorted
"What crap!" The finger prints on it were not human.

Last summer, it started playing pranks,
sweated from the centre of its oblong belly.
My daughter said, "Appa, just make Him a small AC cubicle
in our *puja* house."

We merely cooled it with sandal paste.
Suddenly I felt it was asking for equal property,
credit cards and what not.

I make peace with it, giving milk, water and dry grapes,
payasam and sweet rice *pongali*,
even leave raw rice for it to nibble, when we holiday.

I give it silk for *Deewali*,
make it a sponge bed with
two Lilliputian pillows and a coverlet.

Once, it strayed outside the *puja* room and peeped into our bedroom.
It crouched in the space between my husband and me
I stretched out my hand and felt a pillow.

I would not have squirmed even if I had lost him
to another woman, but how could I pull the hair of a God
and call Him names or sue Him for a divorce?

Each day I write a flash fiction,
where I destroy it, no atom or molecule,
no remaining dust particle.

It must disintegrate, become a rising star and disappear
or else, somebody should
loot our house.

~~

Glossary:

Saligram- *Salagramas are sacred stones, always only those which are naturally found in the river Gandaki; they are never made by man.*

Swadeshi- *Made in India, in our own country*

Payasam- *desert in liquid consistency*

Pongal- *rice cooked with dal and jaggery*

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Terracotta

Sivakami Velliangiri

I refuse to go to ancient burial sites
I will not venture out to barren grounds
I prefer to wait in the rusty old Ford.

I have no thirst for archaeology
I can sit for hours with my yellow
sketch book, my scuffed black diary,
the Bombay Times across the fluorescent
surface of my sari.

I am done with climbing the rocky hillock
I am safe in the back seat without a broken bone.

In all her walks to where the urns stand
with skeletons and spears and accessories
the skulls of bodies buried a little alive are not for me.

I have heard stories of my own ancestors
abandoned, seated in terracotta urns,
mercy killing for those old vegetable men and women.

And then I have this fear of being chased by spirits
faster than dogs or the hyena.

I sit in the back seat of the rented car
the sultry afternoon air of those plains
hits me on my face. The crack in the earth
yawns of barrenness, and lack of water makes me
question *Auvvaiyar's* curse .

My daughter treks eight kilometers into the unknown
with no other woman, but a couple of tour guides
looking like the Rani of Jhansi without a horse.
I will wait till dusk for her return
wait till the sky gathers dust
and dust storms blow;

the leaves of this terrain are cactus- like
perhaps she will come back with a shepherd's staff
warding off the chasing spirits.

I have no need to worry.
My daughter wears *Addidas* shoes.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Rickshaw Ride

Sreemanti Sengupta

And the wind runs in my hair
as the rickshaw runs against it
a long long journey like spattered
blue veins on the arm of a heroin junkie
spreads out before me
The city blooms, the city weeps
The pre-dinner city mourning in politics
wasted in nightclubs, squatting in public toilets,
speaking in book launches, killing time like
flies in corporate offices, like mice – naked and blind
with no Piper to call them away to fantasy
My rickshaw puller paddles on, the vision of forty rupees
behind each thrust of his city worn feet
at every jerk, I coil in, the vision of a crippled
future rising in me like an oracle
I think of cold nights, when streets are afire
with madness and the chatter of teeth
and sometimes the chatter becomes
too great, great enough to raise a furor
of fresh false sympathy
Now, he looks back, my rickshaw puller
as Krishna looked back on Arjuna to justify murder
He turns and twists, the rebellion of machine throttles my throat
The city charades in thin rivulets in a cinema of life itself
I disturb lovers, I intrude gossipers, I eavesdrop on debaters
The city grows in me like cactus, vestiges of a
day tired conscience pricking my insides
two drops of sweat touch the pitch black
of the road
and the wind runs in my hair.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Forecast

Suman Singh

The many rains came;
with them came news of death.
the mountains shorn of verdure
crumpled first
under the deluging onslaught
Dust to dust return.
The rivers pregnant
with the ashes of the many dead
spawned on human habitats:
water sprang forth everywhere,
little water,
much water,
big water
rushed about joyously,
embracing, generating:
The earth was turned to water.
What a pity
We ignore weather reports—
Forecasts as such

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

DEATH OF A POET

Uttaran Dasgupta

For Sunil Gangopadhyay (1934-2012)

The death of a poet is an occasion to celebrate.
There's no time to indulge the touch-me-not of loss:
we must hurry to collect flowers from the suburbs for his cortege,
and decorate the city streets with clever patterns of electric lights.

It's a festival: there'll be a procession at midday
of princes, drunkards, publishers and lovers,
policemen with red and yellow flags will escort our poet-king,
and occupants of disreputable tenements will join the song and dance.

There'll be a feast: mix the spices, clean the fish, boil the milk,
fix the hookah, roll up the marijuana, remember to brew
the tribal drink that evokes our atavistic passions:
we shall copulate in the warmth of funeral pyres tonight.

But at daybreak we find that all the nocturnal riders
— Sunil, Shakti, Sandipan — have all Lethe-ward gone;
what shall we do then? What shall we say? Like Allen, we shall ask:
“What shall we do Sunil Poet? / Move on and forget your songs?”

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

MOLOTOV COCKTAIL

Uttaran Dasgupta

Sometimes, people you know disappear
without a trace, only to reappear
as rotting corpses, in a garbage dump:
mongrels eating their livers, crows plucking
out their eyes.

Beware: the crocodile has come
to eat your sons, to rape your daughters.
Lock your doors, bar your windows, burn incense,
don't let your children out in the night,
don't let your children out in the day.
Call the police, if you see
a mutilated corpse on the pavement;
don't allow it to shock you:
soon there shall be so many corpses
that the police will have a hard time
cleaning up the streets.

My father was only 18
when he threw a Molotov cocktail
at a police van.
"You won't believe it son,
my heart was bursting with love.
The sound almost made me deaf,
and the smell of burning human flesh made me dizzy.
We threw stones and bombs till sundown,
and the police fired at us...
All through the night,
in lanes and backyards,
we stabbed each other...
It was the best poetry ever..."
~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Longlist

Bangles

Saima Afreen

Halo of planets

Kaleidoscopic

Dance

Body flames

Light up iced-candle-eons

The sun stole

From our mouths

Moulding rainbows

In glass

Breathe, like a gentle rustle of feathers

Dreams are melting

Into slivers of moon

The dome of the Taj shakes *kahkashaan*

Millions of stars rain

On thin, brittle entrance

Of Koh-e-Kaf

Zafar's broken syllables

Hang

Sun-washed

Silence dribbles down

Hennaed wrists:

Calligraphy in blood
The dewy air rising from Zabarwan
Wraps the
Cool ivory
Hands
The jingle of stars gives way
For a diamond to cover

The islets of eyes
And shakes snow off

The glow of planets
Descends
Tinkling
With palms rising as a lotus
Sending forth murmurs
To the *fajr* skies
The silver-dust seals the envelope
That in dreams
You called Prayer

~

Glossary:

Kahkashaan – Milky Way in Urdu

Koh-e-Kaf – Caucasus Mountains that feature in Persian fairy tales as abode of fairies

Zafar – The last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar who was also a gifted poet

Zabarwan – A mountain range in Srinagar

Fajr – Morning prayer time for Muslims

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

For You

Saima Afreen

In my veins

You? Reign?

My scarf was a lonesome bloom

In the shadow of Autumn

What was that sun

On your rooftop?

Have the seashells carried

My future

Azure? Ashore?

Question marks always turn liquid on balmy beaches –

The *nazm* I dived in

Was God

Sleeping

In ice sheets

A bleeding dream mated me

Trickling from silver birches

Orion tasseled with *vaakhs*

Brings baskets of birdsongs

A world filled with green and sun

Awaits its own return

Frontiers of colours
Sun the park benches
 It will take an epic
 To pluck your phantasm
 From ripe fruits
 From rice shoots
From the sleepy hazel ocean
A bud of Word bursts open
 An aster world has fallen
 From the dot of *i*
Fall reigns
Over tufts
Of honeysuckle!
The forlorn future is my watermark
 Papyrus dyed in lamp-years
 Curls around
 The soul in inkpot
The last twinkle
Of sodden Night
Shall drip
 On your closed eyelids...

~~

Glossary: *Nazm* – A poem in Urdu
Vaakhs – Kashmiri songs

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Footnote

Saima Afreen

Neruda's songs

Fill

Your ankles

The waves in the seashells

Die

Under heavy boots

Descending from

Ghost trains

Fish the fading sounds

Of your lost tongue

In the net of blue mist

Pocket a few syllables

And scatter them

On tufts of grass

Growing on rusted

Rail tracks

Separated by

Sand of old voices

A handful glittering granules

Make a glossary

That the wind will
Carry as rose scents
 To the frozen faces
 At
 Lal Chowk...

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Questions

Saima Afreen

1.

Is the grape only a ripe pitcher
Of Shiraz and Bordeaux?
Or is it the breast of a pagan goddess
Hiding behind the leaves
Of primeval thirst?

2.

Why does Chopin leave
wet roses
on lines and dots
of Guernica?

3.

Is a tear
an ocean's only jewel box
or does it hold
Bohemian treasures also?

4.

Will the letter-box
filled with blue moonlight
Ever taste
the salty winds
of floating worlds?

5.

Why do white roses
of your mornings
bloom
In wombs and words?

6.

Which harbour
do lost paper boats
Drop ancient childhood
laughters to?

7.

Is the butterfly a flying flower?
Or had Monet stolen
all the water lilies
From its wings?
~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

War of the Bench

Tushar Jain

when the child, with cuttlefish
pimples and pina-colada teeth,
refused to make space, retreat from the
inordinately small bench, the old woman
smirked, and dropping her cane,
whipped out a rust-snacked Mauser
from her gabardine purse
gently, the way spring moves
into Thursday bones [of pollen,
carnations, aloe], she placed its
gums between his eyes, and
barked at the twerp to step away
the beastly child bit his coleslaw
sandwich, squared rubella eyes
at the rum-red nozzle, mauled a
drunk weevil rowing up his leg,
wiggled his pox-flared nose,
and finally, stuck out his tongue,
niggling her with the debris from
the carnaged cabbage-leaf, and
[fauh!], an archipelago of mayo
the *granny* of four and
mammy of three, leered now,
huffed a seminal warning,
and as the acacia, canopying
the two, spilled a soupy bluebird
into the mist, she cocked a dial on
the Mauser, and all the runt did
was blow a raspberry and
speckle the cantaloupes on her
skirt, an egret-white, with
chintzy flecks of oregano
~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Hamlet on the Rocks

Tushar Jain

when Hamlet turned up sloshed [/baked
/pie-eyed/high as cormorants, glazed arrows] for Shakespeare in the Park, reeking of
vermouth,
lager, and amber shots of morning tequila,
what followed was more 'Comedy of Errors'
miscegenated with a trapeze act

he bonked Polonius, ululating,
on the hip with a cerulean flask,
killed Claudius two acts too early,
squealed like a spring-chicken when
they bustled out the caterwauling ghost,
and kissed the understudy Gertrude,
smacking flushed, Oedipal lips

he chucked flinty quartz at Fortinbras, called
Laertes unmentionables in his native *Magahi*, and
roared, 'Get thee to a nunnery!', if the spooked Horatio [in
motley breeches] even toed onto stage

to Ophelia, he grouched: "*to be or
not to...* are those Jimmy Choos?"
he head-locked the minimalist Guildenstern, hailed
Rosencrantz with "Prithee, Rose and Crax!", and to sum
the iconism: crayoned a bland, mustard moustache on the prop skull

he stripped Marcellus's Viking tunic
to condense a penny out his navel ["Voilà!"], got
russet-beard Bernardo to pirouette, splay-footed, and
when the director, who'd blued, aged
three life-times in the wings [blubbing for *deux ex machina!*],
ushered for the close of Act 2, Scene 2,

the mad prince broke into Lear's homily ["Blow, winds!"] rouged with dabs
from Cymbeline

when the last spectator, a Burmese cellist, stood to leave,
Hamlet cockled, crowed, thrusting out that Dionysian chest:
"Something is rotten in the state of... [*pause*] I think it starts with an R?"

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Spivak and the Rescue of Tandoor the Subaltern

Tushar Jain

**SPIVAK and the rescue of TANDOOR,
the SUBALTERN, predicated on a neo-colonial
aggrandizement of penalization of the
S/subject, with Faustian pattern and
mock-derisive neo-LOGICAL astigmatism
TOWARDS the Hong Kong sub-proletariat,
condemning epistemic violence, APROPOS
Foucault & Deleuze, OF socialized capital
and tamarind leaves from igneous monkeys,
AKA 'I shall do to the Subaltern,
what Spring does to the cherry trees'**

in colonial Hong Kong, circa '92, on the augured day of *Eid-ul-fitr*,
Tandoor the subaltern, sickened of posh managerial work,
imperialist mocha, and the militant condition of towel-borders
at his spa, climbed Cheung Kong Centre's roof, with its cordillera
of pruned bonsais, and whistling the aria from
Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, shuttling to Bach's catholic cantatas,
boogied seven steps East, and stepped off

Cheung Kong Centre's roof is 600 feet high, and descending
is a purchase on time; a crabby eighteen days on foot; two hours
thru elevators that pullulate Giovanni, Beatles, Radiohead; but the
swiftest still is thirty-four minutes: via premeditated suicide

so as Tandoor fell, earphones in place, *hubba bubba* ensconced in cavity,
with twenty-two minutes to go, an antsy colony of exchange students
curried down below, waving, cameras ablaze:
["innit a bird?" "innit a plane?" "Christ, Mickey, innit Ozzy Osbourne?"]

it was at some distance then, that a blurry, gooseberry figure
shucked her satchel at the cypress, spat tangerine pips

at a canary, and unmindful, hurtled – a mandarin wood-breeze scouring
through her cropped henna hair, mnemonic eyes, chickpea galoshes –
the figure sped, hurling [out the way] a sycophantic Marxist at
the passing caboose, bagel and all

and it was by the siphoned breath of a hair or two,
that she snared the plummeting subaltern in the crook of toasty, logistical
arms,
and before the hordes could pillow in, she was gone, a flash of red cape
snapping, like millet, into a corner;
when the idiot-savant Tandoor came to, he recalled naught, and
instead, prodding a tone-deaf Cherokee,
murmured pangs for canned tuna, camomile tea

next day, a Romanian newspaper, *Curierul Național*, read: “Tandoor, a
Bangladeshi Hindu banker, on a Moslem holiday, chewing American fare, fell
off a Chinese building, of a British colony, was salvaged by an Indian theorist
[*hallelujah!*], who crippled a Japanese academic, as a London mob watched;
C’est la vie!”

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Tableau

Dinesh Sairam

The leaf you failed
to notice did not

fall

from a tree, but
somewhere

infinitely higher.

In fact when you
turned to go, it

touched and broke

the earth

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Fragment

Dinesh Sairam

Peace is an orb of
glass we left buried
in the backyard.

All summer it was a
seed; consuming nothing,
producing nothing.

The quiet in the garden
is rife with green

and we are like children afraid
of the dark, hiding in the dark.

Perhaps if we pull it
from its hearth, it will
shatter in our grasp.

Perhaps it will be
incredibly whole; colder
and safer in our hands.

We'll never know.
~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Last Crow Summer

Geralyn Pinto

When their insides split out: pudding, baked by sunlight,
into beads, fat and jasper green, on the pod clusters,
we knew the crow pheasants had been
on our drumstick tree; worked bone-
hard beak tap-a-tap all day, drawing upon sustenance,
secretly churning pod-pulp, seed and olifera blossom
into bird parts: copper contour feathers, barbs and wings,
but leaving enough fruit meat to feed the others that crowd
the delicate tracery of evolution: plump passerines and ant caravans.
Then the crows arrived, always, pale-collared and lignite-winged
foragers of waste feed, unlikely bearers-in-trust of
ancestral souls, couriering messages defining the nature of karma –
complete/incomplete – to performers of ceremonies for the family dead.
The morning, winged and seeded, carried pledges of more pods,
more fruit meat, trees, blue nets of rain mist; more bird quartets,
and agents of easy passage from life spiral
to spiral of mukti and nirvana. Till
the bulldozers arrived, folding up houses,
walls and tiles, returning clay to clay.
And our drumstick tree green-bloodied the muddy-mouthed earth
that sucked into its maw pods, pulp, dead ants, yolks – stone-cold and hard
that would never turn into sparrow.
Other forms of life grew out of our once-backyard:

tier upon tier, stem upon metal stem of scaffolding, network towers
thrusting satellite corollas into the sky, rusted iron
stamens and pistils, and electronic pods.

Then the annual shraddha,
but he would not be persuaded and perched motionless as
sculpture on the stone wall,
head cocked, listening to the world wake up to new-age rituals.
He remained suspicious of the chanting and the food plates
in the shadow of two buildings and two car parks
refusing to taste the jaggery – even when grandpa’s soul
beat like a caged bird inside his feathered frame.
The priest prescribed pindas, and sweet rice on plantain leaves,
but he preferred to peck at air, then whipped wing and feather
and cruised into the memory of other worlds,
while grandma wept softly for our last crow summer.

~~

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Native Place

Rochelle Potkar

Goa is a leit motif of childhood May holidays
A quartet of perspiring aunts cirlicuing their liquid syllables

Small washed rooms opening to orchestras of husk and coir in attics and lofts
A sonnet of rain over maroon steps, stone sofas, and green weeping windows
sandy-grain backyard ghazals of jackfruit, guava, mango

Catholic castes and Majorda beach-returnees behind gossiping grandmothers
and aunts (my mother was called *scientist*, an elder cousin-*tourist*, a single
uncle-*bebdo*, a widowed aunt, *ankwaar kodi*)

A free verse of carved wedding fish of an aunt's yesteryear wedding near
a muddy déjà vu-ed water well.

An unripe mango, oozing blatant growing up languages in ballads of
arresting tongues.

Owria, Mario, Maria – the neighbor's children
Who could walk fast and long through paddy fields, uneven roads without a
muscle tear.

Goa was dragonfly caught in thick forest bush, painstakingly brisk, pinched at its tail
Biting at the bend of body – a Chant Royal, announcing the end of the holiday
season in raining June.

the same feeling thereafter of a house not being there off Mae Dos Pobres church
road, Nuvem

A haiku of courtyard leaf, lost over time, a pebble etched wet, when the wave
recedes

A roof caving in on an old Portuguese bungalow
where an Uncle sees it for a strange rehash of modernity:

a stack of cubby houses atop rows of reeking, rundown staircase

A building

A tragedy of childhood memories always sold

Eulogy

ode, ironical.

A blank verse, final resting place.

No matter what the disillusion, return to a promised land.

Elegy.

~~

Glossary:

**bebdo – drunkard (in Konkani)*

Ankwaar kodi – spinster curry (in Konkani)

RLP AWARD 2013 Shortlist

Knotted inside me

Rochelle Potkar

At the time of my birth, my small town Kalyan, did not have a library.

It had no road rage, few beggars, one defunct traffic signal at Murbad Road,
and fewer cars.

Horizontal buildings silhouetting the sun in shanties, chawls and cottages

Its outline gianted and dwarfed
with self-sustaining jobs of: kiranawalas, primary school teachers, factory
workers, dentists,
general practitioners, cycle repair shops,
and a small bank (let's not forget) on Rambaugh lane.

It was tone deaf to career ladders, six sigma, hierarchies,
MNCs, pecking orders.

filled with pavwallas, mohmeddians, hindus, bavas,
north Indians, south Indians, non-catholics,
non-hindus, non-muslims, non-dalits, and non-brahmins.

The ice-factory owner, the mayor, a smuggler, a customs officer

were The Rich -
their bungalow gardens, terraces, compound walls
sprinted over by well-fed dogs

pressing against our imagination (mostly) during new year resolutions.

The Sindhis lived in a neighbour town
with plenty of gold and goods.

In the year of my sister's birth

some of their buildings collapsed
like crumbling cake in blood and crust.

There was one gang-war in Kalyan
one Anglo-Indian killed,
by a Goan goon, on a night road
a gunshot running through his race, history, legacy

And a schoolboy murdered
in cold gang-boy rage.
I, with the other girls were bottom-felt,
walking through the college corridors.

That was all we had,
before I left for the City.
But the town I had left behind -
like shoes outside a temple -
multiplied around me a thousand times.

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Anthropology

Rochelle Potkar

Arousals are like offspring
Each man is happy to know if he is the parent
he would like to nurse and nurture it
from the ones he didn't trigger,
with a flick of tongue, the inhalations of skin to nose
he is proud of the taste and aroma that he has so ably produced
for an orgasm.
the same doesn't occur with the female, though
she doesn't inquire if the male has it hard, somewhere
she doesn't inquire if she is the reason
too busy handling the waxing of her own body
she doesn't reckon the rise of the male attribution
She might have already melted, dispersing consciousness
over his crimson ears, the urgencies of his broken voice, his heavy
breathing,
his uncontrollable lunacies
to realize all of what she might be held responsible.

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Singular-Plural

Sumana Roy

You: Singular

Every wedding anniversary, we behave like mountaineers,
and pretend to have conquered distance.
The summit is still a misty metaphor.
You make purchases and call them 'presents'.
I recount obese details of a past that's lost its congruence.

Anniversaries are wall paint, a smoothening of pores.
They bring colour to the skin of a marriage,
and hide cracks where parasites evade mores.

By the eleventh, we are exhausted.
Imagination has become a fixed deposit.

Your presents arrive together:
binoculars for me, a telescope for you.
You ask me to watch birds during the day so that
you can watch the stars at night.

'Which is closer – the birds in your binoculars
or the stars in my telescope?' you ask.
'You,' I say, singular. And late laughter.
The whisper is a parody of the night the anniversary commemorates.
'Yes,' you say, your smile a new reincarnation,
'You *are* singular – from you begins my infinity'.

You: Plural

Until we were married,
I never bothered about the plural.
Singularity is better than singular,
you said the morning of our wedding.
The lineman disconnected the phone call.

All our troubles you blamed on a metaphor: age.
All our fights I blamed on the plural.
The birds in my binoculars settled in a cage.
We got our marriage certificate photocopied.
Your stars, middleclass to a fault, survive
on insurance policies. Our plural –
joint account, train compartments, trilogy –

gets thinner with each day.
The marriage becomes a metropolis –
you and I its anonymous citizens.
The singular buys a CCTV camera from ebay

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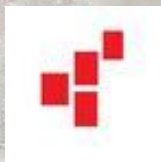
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