



Anish Vyavahare



Seasonal Labour

May -

Midday summer heat
descends like a coloniser,
burns away all desire.

Forbearance trickles down temples.



Trees dare not make a sound,
even leaves hold their breath,
the wind is still as the king's guard.

Tar streets rise up in protest,
but the rebellion dies a mirage.

Childhood is under house arrest,
and liberty
is a full season away.

June -

The sky is pregnant past her term,
dark as obdurate hope
her belly hangs in the distance.
A tongue lolls out
of a dog's mouth
curious about the weather.
Mushroom child awakens in dark corners,
fungi armies amass for citywide takeovers.
The Banyan stands still in meditation,
conserves vitality,
even the leaf children of gulmohur
stare listless, upward,
a thousand eyes, a thousand spirits
imprisoned in inaction.
And the sky, luminescent artist,
casts a twilight glow for this
day long photograph,
stock still, potential energy,
like the edge of eternity.



July -

The sky, dark
like a ripe plum,
skin burst,
flesh pours succulent,
a veneer of brilliance
colours every surface -
the tender green
of sprout
grows erect into bark,
monsoon wheedles
the young into age.
The air, excited, inebriated,
dances, fights,
dance-fights with the rain,
goes door to door,
intoxication
adorns her breath,
like jewels adorn
bottoms of window grills,
hang heavy
on tips of Ashoka leaves
and lobes of lovers.
Aashadha lies heavy
on the earth,
she oozes infectious lust,
valleys run wet,
desire peaks twice
on every chest,
this is the reign
of Charvak,
a celebration
pours from the heavens
like ghee



on the yadnya of sansaar.
Mountains
preside over the ritual,
shawl of moss,
bhasma of cloud,
hum mantras,
slowly
and
lowly
then faster and louder
and faster
till the earth shakes
and in her throes
shakes every being
in an orgy
under the plummeting sky,

which, by Ashwin will be
as spent as
the breasts of a crone.

Embrace

Come,
we welcome you with brave arms!
March your infidel-branding armies, you incessant godmen;
we, are not afraid of you;
we don't even understand the things you say.

What is the meaning of this one god and one father
and this punishment and retribution and



sin, sin, and so much sin, even these bounties
that you speak of?

You come to deny, maim, kill, bribe, corrupt, erase
in the name of your blue eyed version of a desert god
who will grant us divine pleasure through this
multi-level marketing scheme of granting his
benevolent wrath on the misguided?

Ha! Hahaha!

Let me welcome you to India my friend;
India, the Bharat, the Sindu-sthan, the Indu-sthan, the Hind, the Hindustan.
You are welcome to impel, wound, slight.

Come, kill a generation or two,
loot some metal while you are at it.
Grab some land, build your temples of indoctrination,
demand some concessions.

But then go away quickly, my friend.
Otherwise, this place will devour you.
You will no longer seek your enslaved virgins,
or your Prepaid Heavenly Contentment Combos.

You will forget about your strictures and your psalms.
Your god will become one of many;
their mothers will become Aais and Maatas,
and while the demographics of your gods swell,
the god himself will become ours.

You convert, you snatch, you own.
Bharat simply assimilates, absorbs, accepts.

March your largest armies,
inflict your fiercest evangelists;
this land is older than your gods
and you will have no escape from her tolerant languor.



Stub

Three men sit on a tree stub,
wait for the bus,
where earlier all the men in the village
gathered around the tree,
dipped sunsets in cups of
chai paid for in bulk of months,
the chaiwala kept impeccable accounts.

The men of the village
were agarbattis around the shrine of tree,
they smoked bidis, global citizens,
they debated economies and
fashions of women,
their fingers always smelled of newspaper ink.
The men of the village,
they planted hierarchies
deep around the chauthara of the tree,
baboons, they scratched
each others' backs in an unchanging line.
The men of the village, they were bullies,
they were bullied,
they wed their children in holy bonds of fuckage,
children who ruled
the kingdom of tree in the day
when the men of the village
toiled in their fields, in their shops,
in the village next door,
earned their places for the evening
under the tree,
their slice of shade
battered in gossip,
dipped in tea,
ignited by maachis.



That was then,
Now, three men sit on the stub of the tree,
wait for the 21st century to arrive on diesel fumes.
The stub is still fresh wound,
amputated hand,
no fingers reach the sun
that has drowned the ~~village~~ highway in a forever noon.
Children do not play around bleeding flesh,
they don't hug phantom trees,
squirrels don't run up and down bus-stops.

The bus rankles to a stop,
drags along a cloud of progress.
The country is desperate to step into the future.
Like an urchin, it flings itself into the race,
desperate, it crawls in from a gap under the fence,
blindsided, it steps into a cake of shit on the other side.

Mumbai

Ask me for whom she is a mother,
not a mistress
for I love her far different
than as the double spread
they leech at every night.
They stroke their hunger,
they stroke their ambition,
ejaculate fantasies of
bright spotlights
she will shine upon them tomorrow.

Ask me for whom she is a mother,
not a mistress



for when I lie with her
I listen to her heart beat
and it doesn't quicken my own.
Gropes don't descend from my desires
all over her giving self.

The streetlamp outside my window is her gift to me,
our private moon, flawless and radiant.
It brings to us the orange flame of the gulmohar
from the edge of the footpath and lays it insistently
at the edge of our sleep.

I lie with her
and I listen to her heart beat.
I gaze up at her from within her bosom,
down from an empty terrace,
outside a lone car.
Her breathing is laboured
like a truck that needed servicing miles ago.
I know she will outlive me,
but the rich cholesterol of real estate
that clogs her arteries is enough
to worry me, to make me wonder,
what will they do next?
They keep cutting the hem of her mangrove skirt
indecently short.

They build flyovers across her armpits,
they don't want to deal with her discharges.
They have dug tunnels, lain tracks
for their long fingers to worm under her flesh
even if they call it an emergency bypass.
But this is a ticketed ride, my Mumbai
these bhadwas groom.
Stand in line at the toll-naka
with an offering of your self esteem
each time you glide over craters



they carve into her skin
to mine contracts of incessant gold.

She clamours, runs, always in a frenzy,
she is a goddess of multiple arms,
multiple tasks,
multiple names,
multiple asks,
she doesn't please all,
but she pleases some a lot!

And she gasps at times,
wheezes,
her breath collapses on itself
because of so much running around,
because of the rising cost of onions,
because a filmy hero got sent to jail,
because some bombs betrayed a son.

She gasps, wheezes, collapses on herself...

And then she shakes herself out of her agony!

Her affairs with disasters are always only one night stands.

Sometimes, very rarely, she gets to sleep.
The music of a cloudburst is her lullaby,
the sea bathes her as rain in an embrace
with all the comfort of a companion
that never leaves her side.

Sometimes, very rarely, she gets to sleep,
I like to watch her sleep.
But Mumbai, my mother, they only allow her to rest
when she is drenched, cold, and shivering.



Home

In a corridor lined with thook stains and ennui,
guns totter around
waiting to hit puberty,
waiting to make sense of 72 virgins.

Burkhas that only stay indoors
smell of polyester sweat and poverty.
Flimsy walls, of homes the size of
walk-in closets, are adept at containing
domestic disagreements, aromatic cooking,
and giggles.

Sanctions for too much noise, fun, ambition, or breathing
are a knock on the door, a glare,
a rape, a severing of limb, murder,
rape by object, torture of a family member,
in times of too much boredom, all of the above.

In a corridor lined with thook stains,
flesh is marked with bullet scars,
blood is laced with cortisol,
death is bestowed as punishment, relief, happenstance, reward.

In this corridor policed by virtue,
all it takes to sustain hell is the idea of heaven.

Manflag

In a not particularly fascist regime,
at a not particularly liberal time,
two persons on opposite sides of a divide



become the colour of their sides,
enter a new age two player trance.
No padmaasan,
they get into a shoutaasan,
arms limp at their sides,
teeth bared at each other,
throats hoarse,
ears sacrificed,
catatonia grows
anthills of hubris around their legs,
then torso,
man (and/or woman) becomes flag,
billows in the winds of *now*,
afraid of amounting to nothing
tries to convince the era itself
that it is an exceptionally momentous one.

Anish Vyavahare is a performing poet based in Mumbai. He is a freelancer, and offers creative writing programmes, in his city and elsewhere.