

Prathibha Nandakumar, (1955)

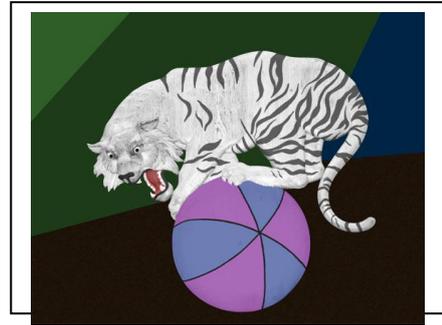
The Tigress

He is the animal trainer
makes even the fiercest of fierce animals
crawl, jump, stand on hind legs
just by the crack of his whip.

He puts his head between
the dangerous teeth of the tiger
pats his appreciation
waits in anticipation
of applause.

This tigress
that roamed the deep jungle,
terror of the forest,
now sits cross-legged in front of him.
Is she a tigress or what?

Someone once asked her about it.
She just smiled and brought out
her long sharp nails
hidden well under her paws
and scratched her head.



Eunice de Souza (1940)

Bequest

In every Catholic home there's a picture
of Christ holding his bleeding heart
in his hand.

I used to think, ugh.

The only person with whom
I have not exchanged confidences
is my hairdresser.

Some recommend stern standards.
Others say float along.
He says, take it as it comes,
meaning, of course, as he hands it out.

I wish I could be a
Wise Woman
smiling endlessly, vacuously
like a plastic flower,
saying Child, learn from me.

It's time to perform an act of charity
to myself,
bequeath the heart, like a
spare kidney –
preferably to an enemy.



Mallika Sengupta (1960)

Women.com

Today, on our Computer Day
Come let's place our hand on the women.com button
This very own history of women
From illiteracy to women.com.



Once upon a time from this woman
You snatched the chance of reading the Vedas
All of you said women were just housewives
Men had the right to Sanskrit
Women's language, the language of the Sudras was different.

After a thousand years when the girl
Prepared herself for a girls' school
Bethune and Vidyasagar stood by her
All of you said
Women who read and write
Are bound to become widows.

Then when the woman entered the office space
Mother-in-law's sullen face, and the husband was suspicious
All of you said
What's the use of a family run with a wife's money?
The woman had to fight the storms and tempests.

Inch by inch in the thousand years the woman
Has earned knowledge and power
Inside a fiery heart, tranquil outwardly
Today half the sky is in the woman's palm

The world is an amlaki held in the woman's fist
Just a touch of a button

One day you had denied her knowledge of alphabets
In her hand today is the computer world.

Suniti Namjoshi, (1941)

Grass Blade

As the first blade bends,
 Grass Blade murmurs,
"I bend, but do not break."

Foot
keeps coming down.

Passionate Grass Blade
mounts a campaign:

 Grass blades henceforth
 to be made of glass.
 Feet henceforth
 to travel shoeless.

People walk away —
 Why get hurt?

Oak Tree observes,
 "Feet are not relevant."



The Sleeping Fool

(inspired by the painting by the same title by Cecil Collins)

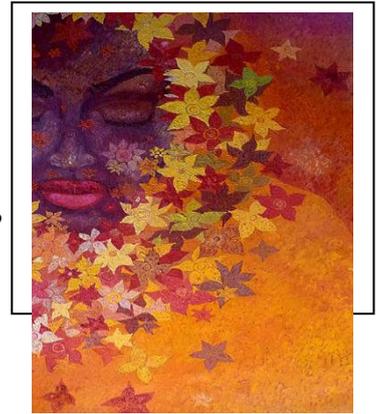
The dreamer absconds with his dream,
props his stone bride beside a stream,
where he washes, bathes, and gathers daisies.
These she refuses. He cannot please.
He runs, scampers, leaps and weeps,
He recites his verses; she keeps
her pure silence, her chaste repose. “What
do you want ?” he screams. “That
which you will not grant: to be, not seem
to be, to be the dreamer, not the dream.”



Debarati Mitra; (1946)
(Ananda Puraskar for poetry in 1995)

Extreme

Just because I didn't light a match, did you think there was no fire?
Why should I declare the maximum temperature count?
Rambling through endless tunnel tracks in the underworld forest
Why should I guide you by the hand –
Clusters and clusters of blood-red flowers, so many flowers
With leaf-stalks, burn ceaselessly like the pyre of *sati*.



If on a *Puja* dawn
I stand alone like a thief under the *Palash* tree
I know the trees, branches, even the shadows
will draw me in.

The deer's loveable face retreats
like a blue cloud
if I get close.

The *Dadhimukhi* bird understands
The sun spot within the deep mine's womb understands
The *Basuki* snake understands.
Man does not - why and when
the hot wave is felt,
the vein explodes like a glass bottle,
lips glitter with pure brightness like molten gold.

Released from the lunatic asylum
the body
is firework in the whole sky,
the soul
merge into the grass flowers in the horizon,

shadowing river Baitarani's current.

Petticoat, sari, hair, eyes haven't been burnt

Am I safe therefore?

Just because you didn't light a match

was there no fire?

Anamika (1961)

(Bharat Bhushan Award for Poetry (1996))

Without a Place

This is how the *shloka* goes —
 women, nails and hair
 once they've fallen
 just can't be put back in place
said our Sanskrit teacher.

Frozen in place out of fear
we girls held on tight to our seats.

Place, what is this 'place'?

We were shown our place
in the first grade.

We remembered our elementary school lessons

Ram, go to school, son,
 Radha, go and cook pakora!
 Ram, sip sugar syrup,
 Radha, bring your broom!
 Ram, bedtime, school tomorrow
 Radha, go and make the bed for brother.
 Aha! This is your new house
 Look Ram! Here's your room
 "And mine?"

Oh, little loony!

Girls are wind, the sun and the good earth
 They have no homes

"Those who don't have a home,
 where do they belong?"

Which is the place from where we fall



become clipped nails, fallen hair trapped in combs,
fit only to be swept away
Houses left behind, paths left behind
people were left behind
questions chasing us, too left behind
Leaving behind tradition,
it seems to me I'm as out of context
as a short line
from a great classic
scribbled on a BA examination paper

But I don't want
somebody to sit down and
analyse me
to pigeonhole me
At long last, beyond all contexts
with real difficulty
I've gotten here

Let me be hummed
like an *abhang*^{*},
unfinished.

* A devotional song; also means indestructible