

Bambaiya

(The peculiar slang that belongs to Bombay alone)

This city has its own voice
Jerry built language
Refuse sifted from many tongues
That the rythm of the city
has hammered into shape

Ragged syllables raise a thin spine to the sun
Sentences are given as communion
Words pass as coin
Among those clinging by a handhold to the city

Here language is a poised abstract sculpture
Compounded of garbage scroungings

It is a whistle in the mouth of misery
To pipe the rich to shame

It is the city too vast to swallow
Broken to bits that fit in the mouth

It is a passport of belonging
in a city few can possess

It is the clanking discord of armour
Welded from tin cans, railway tracks,
corrugated iron sheets

It is the lifted head of the spirit
White hands rising joyous
above the dark city

Struggling Writers

See them clump at the tea stall
Clotted in knots of frustration
Tellers of tired tales

Each has a working bit of story
Carried in the bowl
Of a skull filled with
the mush of film songs
Romantic sequences fading to sunset
Mythology of twins seperated at birth

Their lives swim submerged
in flickering darkness
Locked in the womb of halls
Awaiting the knife of midwife fate

Each believes that
One day his dreams
Will sell on black
Outside the halls
of his own enchantment

1993 – Black Friday

Thirteen wounds had my city
Thirteen mouths and they spoke to me

I stood by the Exchange
The proud face of the building
Became knives blown on the wind
the angry blast
scattered
Husbands, fathers, sons

In the street of the Tiger
I waited, patient petition in hand
The street roared
The street leapt

brought it's victims down in mid stride
left them mangled and scattered

I stood, token in hand
At the counter
When the bombs went off in the basement

The building tremored
Refused to buckle to it's knees
It took three days
To reach the voices in the basement

By the sea rocks rooms
Were let out to wind and rain

Wombed in the hall
I thought I was safe
But then the flickering images on the screen
Became too bright to bear
Light slashed my eyes
razored images across my
Ruined retinas

My voice was heard
Screaming in the gap between
The first blast and the second
Then fear thrust its dry fist
Into the gullet of the street

My right hand held my ticket stub
The other held three coins
They melted and fused and became

A cipher in silver
Nothing else remained

The gullet of the choked bazaar
Was torn open
Tattered flesh was hung upon the
phone lines that shivered with
the sound of hundreds calling
calling to their lost ones

Thirteen wounds had my city
Thirteen mouths
They are silent now

Fishwife

Bejewelled in the spangles she has shrived
From her lolling catch
Perfumed with dank fish and ageing seas
Loins girded for battle
Her hoarded life tugs heavily
in gold bands at her ears
Her hands have been pickled
in sliding silver mountains
dark from fumbling
in the coiled envelopes of fish
She is witch wise, shark tooth strong
Enduring like carbuncle rocks
Salt wisdom carried on the tip of her sharp tongue

Second Class Ladies Compartment

It is a little house on wheels
Here is everything you could ever need
to set a house

Hands move, stripping beans
Choosing fruit
Knitting

Here many lives spool
Meet at a common junction
Move in common cadence
The women sway in the measured rhythm
of old camaraderie

Here they assume no double parts
Here they are not daughter-wife-mother
They are just tired women
Swaying dreamless
on their way home
home already
More truly than they ever will be anywhere