

Two Poems

by [Ankur Betageri](#) (November 2018)

Sati S.



The Funeral Pyre, 1948, Atul Dodiya, 2014

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).

—Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

1.

Lady, how does it matter

who
you

saves

from being barbecued
on your husband's pyre?
Sane men prevented brown women
from becoming brown kebabs
but your kebab-brain sees 'white' everywhere
makes Rammohun Roy turn in his grave.

2.

You pour sacerdotal kerosene
on young minds and gaslight them—
Can the subaltern speak? you ask
and answer: No, if she does, she isn't a subaltern.
For if she spoke
how could you treat her like an animal?
How could you tell the world
that the widow tied to the pyre
wasn't screaming for life
but for moksha denied?

3.

Indian subalterns are subaltern
because they are subjects of priestism.
It is this Indian logic of imperialism
which keeps them out
of the category of the human.
85 percent of Hindu widows
didn't have to undergo sati—
though it is precisely them
that Gramsci would have called subaltern.

4.

The point of your deconstruction
of your postcolonial affirmation
is to shield priestly power
from all criticism—
'critique is colonial
only Bhakti is Indian'
who can miss this idiot decree
no matter how rambling your dissertation?

5.

You have built your academy

of deliberate deafness
around a human abattoir
the screams—*you* will interpret
the complaints—*you* will code
you will edit the tapes of history
and decide what will and will not go—
you who produced the subalterns
won't *you* decide how they shall be known?

6.

Will these lines be laughed at,
will they be rubbished with sneers?
Will the discursive machine of academia
make white-noise of human speech?
The archives contain even the sati's speech
but who makes the archive speak?

The Greenbeard Effect



The Double Secret, Rene Magritte, 1927

So nun-like your dress
yet you so unlike a nun
your smile, sun-like
lights up the earth
the horizon of your gaze
is where earth and sky meet—
why, this is not me
these are—genes singing in me.

How could chance conjure
a face so radiant and perfect?
a look so serene and determined
so fearless and irreverent?
Not the sun-poured cathedral
not the crucifix raised up with prayers
it's the chariot of passion
blazing across your face
that make my genes lose themselves
like tears in the rain.

How should I articulate this excess
that is neither I, nor you?
A sadness shall stay in us both
for our genes—they will feel the distance.

Ankur Betageri is a poet, short fiction writer and visual artist based in New Delhi. He is the author of *The Bliss and Madness of Being Human* (poetry, 2013) and *Bhog and Other Stories* (short fiction, 2010). He teaches English at Bharati

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