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Our Guilt Trips and their Exodus

They have come from the hills,
flooding the plains; cooks,
waiters, coolies, masons.
Called 'Neps'¹ *en masse*,
this generic term deceives
their skin, tanned by sun,
and molten tar, they foster the
arteries of our growth.

*By the rivers of Tsangpo,
Padma and Brahmaputra
Tears deluge to more tears
They search for Zion
in these callous plains*

We search for our 'civilized'
traces, call them 'primitive' ;
their women are lissome, men
do not 'threaten', we praise their
candour, honesty and dimensions!

*By the rivers of Tsangpo,
Padma and Brahmaputra
Tears deluge to more tears
They search for Zion
in these callous plains*

As the thought pendulum swings,
we fear their *kukris* at night. We
wonder if they bear portable home maps
behind their smiles to check and cross-
check, if their folks still live safe and
huddled in memory's tattered rubble.

¹ Neps for Nepalis is an umbrella term used for all the people of the Northeastern part of India, who come to mainland India in search of jobs. India's Northeast is a strife-ridden area comprising eight states. It is also one of the most ethnically composite areas in India, plagued by ethnic conflicts and militancy.

*By the rivers of Tsangpo,
Padma and Brahmaputra
Tears deluge to more tears
They search for Zion
in these callous plains*

They are angels again at sunrise,
when they leave for summer,
we believe they have a mule's spine
to load and unload the nightmarish
burden a nation that clings to our skin.

*By the rivers of Tsangpo,
Padma and Brahmaputra
Tears deluge to more tears
They search for Zion
in these callous plains*

They have spread like slick over the sea,
their memories stay and never leave without
a trace. Have we not had enough transferring
our guilt *in lieu* of patronage
we dole out in coffee spoons?