

Paul GnanaSelvam

## White Christmas

Our Christmas is not white,  
though we have been christened by whites,  
baptized and reborn,  
purified like clarified butter,  
in a language we will one day colonize.

Our Christmas was never white, for  
the monsoons kept it dark and menacing,  
past the many sea-crossings  
schemed and maneuvered by  
the kings of the East Indian Company  
into lands our Rajas once ruled.

Our Christmases were never white, though  
we waited at Burmese teak desks,  
pulled wide sheets of woven reeds,  
and tip-toed about the stately residencies—  
abandoning the pungent taste of toddy for  
fine liquor.

Our Christmases were never white, but  
bustling we were,  
to keep our masters important and happy, their  
eyes sparkling jade like the lush green estates of tea and rubber,  
even baking cinnamon scented fruit cakes and shrubbery biscuits—  
amid the stuffy offices overrun by peons and *mandurs*.

Our Christmases are rather coloured,  
for we make it up  
with fake santas and induced snow,  
stunted sledges but surreal reindeers,  
plastic baubles and *made-in-China*  
fir trees—  
and the season announced at shopping malls, a fortnight  
before advent,  
the real story untold and forgotten.

Our Christmases are coloured,  
that it disturbs the eyes,  
mid-night masses a glitterati of silk saris, jippas and

916 gold, benches brimming with seasonal visitors,  
the timely repeat of dusty hymnals  
the altar crawling with wines of berries,  
the star of Bethlehem dazzling alone in a vacant sky.

Our Christmases are tangy and spicy, sure to  
sear your tongue and burn your throat, flu, sores and  
ulcers are definite after features, we  
curry the goat, chicken and turkey, an offering  
interspersed with adulterated biscuits that stay for all seasons,  
*achi-murruku* and *athirasam* for good tidings, and  
all things good to fill our platters aplenty.

Our Christmases are coloured, though  
we are merry and gay, our sharing  
is besieged by the rising costs,  
our merriment moderate,  
our homes are open to those  
selected from last year's guest list  
or we just decide on a vacation, leaving  
our homes under key and lock.

Our Christmases are colored, streaked  
with a strange shade of grey, from  
those whispering that the cross be rendered  
unseen and noiseless, a necessary license  
to belief in Christmas, of  
He who came  
to call upon the blind and the deaf.

Our Christmases continue with off whiteness,  
in a shade of our very own.