

Rochelle Potkar

## Food Bowl

Where else, if not this land scattering seeds to wind,  
waiting for the shaft of ripe sky harvesting crops of rain?  
Take from the sky if it gives  
the ground in falling water levees, bullock over till,  
credit from middlemen, seeds, ads for pesticides, poor irrigation,  
arsenic and mercury – a cancer train from Bhatinda to Bikaner.

Alcohol on empty stomachs.  
Take babies with no brains, the resistance of pests, and  
friendly insects dying.  
Take cotton disembarking in clouds in crucifix branches,  
hills like salt pans in the ritual of GDP,  
no gunk on biodiversity: soil or species.  
Take the backstory of a tiffin,  
law into your hands, a sip from the tin.

Under colonial-keeping these were just *injuries*.  
Take the widow, her debt 'n inheritance.  
No marriage for her – indentured servant.  
Take late rain from a ditch at a point  
the baton changes hands off the green revolution . . .

Take hundred spoons from a bowl, in the highest-stressed  
profession.

Our land exporting cereals, with images of India Gate, Taj Mahal,  
and a woman's round face like a plate. *Annapurna devi*  
four hands to give grain, hold vessels, ladles.

Take her god husband – like the government – telling her  
life is an illusion,  
Take her anger, churn of earth to barren.  
Hunger waking in bodies  
even the Buddha needing a meal before illumination.

Take a toss of the last coin,  
in the gamble of the huge gap  
the fact that *Annapurna devi*  
has still not returned.

## The Toys of Chitrakoot

From *bhurkul* to *gular*, mango, *shisham*, green bamboo,  
slow-heated, drawing moisture off limbs  
bodies passed through lime glue, bound with tamarind seed paste,  
the toymaker traces features,  
fine-stroking with hammer, filing paint, bringing dolls to life  
under wigs.  
He remembers his children, vacant-chested, sent back from school,  
kitchen stoves clutching cooking pots with no food  
– leaves of cacti  
lacquering on lathe  
colored by his expectant wife with *alta* and turmeric.  
A brush from goat's hair, clay, oil, lac, dye spread amid dreams  
– rags, watercolour, red sanders carving kingly elephants,  
annihilating trains to build bridges,  
bridges for aeroplanes, rattles,  
horse carriages, to make new women.  
As the rain chisels flatland, plastic bubbles from machines  
– Chinese toys overcasting the market  
given to  
sacrificing a child's play of  
pots, teacups, dirt, rope, cardboard boxes,  
before the gods on eves of weddings, rites of passages  
in chorus-fingers of *samsaric* sawdust.  
Now concave-eyed, sculpting,  
the toymaker makes a toy for himself  
for when his children leave to become

mechanical engineers in irreverent cities.

Trapped in a crucible of water,  
rippling reflections from *dudhi sundari*, *punki*, *koraiya*  
wood

in warehouses of idols

with no boon powers –

bangle-stands that act like fortresses.

His minuscule house dangles with hay  
to the winds.

The toymaker plants molten gobs around a pipe  
and blows from the reverberating caves of his ribs,  
splintering breath, burying his howls deep,  
blossoming glass moons under cloud-capitalisms,  
as the rain dwindles all his footprints  
on the rough earths of Chitrakoot.