

Anjana Basu

Puja Parapluies

renoir's parapluies battling spoke for spoke with the selfie stick canvas sagging overhead and the light yellow in that tired evening rain on the goddess' face workers pushing through both stick and spoke snagging a lace or a sleeve with a curse thrown in someone pushes back a stray hair and outlines a lip and raises the stick again to capture goddess not yet made flesh or thrusts out an arm and the crowd clogs in a confusion of umbrellas and frames unframed while a child wails for ice cream though nothing really moves except the fine dust of rain sifting through

Ladies of Calcutta

the shaped hair like a shell framing the back of the head with the oyster's gift draped below in understatement the whispered nuance of nacre part of the discipline of sophistication all chic and smooth till slipping down the shoulder sings the song of the bra strap that little slip both women shared across the lime green cocktail dress and the black sari with the pearls and the sibilance of the shell different statements that peeping fabric strap both white demure sliding without protest unfelt unseen till the end in collision with the whip band of leather

Attic Tales

1

the smell of paper and mellow must of memories
tucked away up there in a quiet corner
waiting for time to tell tales
of a cranapple summer
and a few snatched moments of romance
the song of a roof stomped down
for another season of rain
for evening saunters under the twilight
as the darkness falls
cascading like her hair

lying back to count the stars
no heat seeps up from the forgotten day
the roof is singing.

2

Summer afternoon
The sun bakes the terrace
Till the old stones scream
and dream of what they had never known
Icebergs in the heart of the sea
Mountains unchallenged by the eye of the day
In the corner room the two
Generate their own summer
Under the fan's whirring circles
That sometimes sound
like a pigeon's frantic wings
Or the troubled beating of a heart
Forbidden love is as hard as an old stone
Though the corner room keeps its secrets

Pheesh Pheesh

Pheesh pheesh dhoti starched and crisp with anticipated lunchtime relish the babu walks bag in hand nose held high past the roks where the para loafs Sunday pisciculture spared, their rohu bought by some eager soul drawn dripping whole from the water crisply the babu stakes his ilish claim trailing the honour of family name in his wake, a Bengali who knows his feast not a western bowl or east Bengal dish to clatter uselessly in drawing room matters the rubber slippers unerring through the slimy scales perfect weight he never fails in judgement eyes sharp and bright as mustard seeds the oil in the wok being heated choonk chonk with the clank of the spatula the rok jumps up to admire the fish still dripping absolutely ripping says the foreign returned prof how do you do it without a single spot on your white cotton through all those narrow trails lined with dripping pails and banana peel but your flip flops trot nonstop without a single spot ? not hard says the babu if you hold it high and dream of lunch the delicate crunch of the fish bones eesh kee pheesh it sits easy on that post prandial nap in bengal's warm lap dhoti cast aside in flagrant greed the babu quivers in ecstasy prawns ilish bekti swimming through his veins what reigns in the bazaar scaled up or down his passion in sleep he shivers the para sniggers at the starched polish but covets that fish which all afternoon lingers mustard swathed on aluminium, served to the gentle sway of fans by wives and mothers in red bordered sari array. Here chicken shall have no dominion just the fish head chewed instead of their own and so rok stock and barrel to bed. Eesh! Says the rest of India still dreaming of pheesh!

About the Poet

Born in Allahabad, schooled for a time in the UK, Anjana Basu has to date published nine novels and two books of poetry, *The Chess Players and Other Poems* from Writers Workshop and *Picture Poems and Word Seasons* from Authorpress. Her first poem was chosen for the Illustrated Weekly by the then Poetry Editor Kamala Das. Her poems have appeared in an anthology brought out by Penguin India. Since then she has featured in *Kunapipi*, *The Blue Moon Review*, *The Phoenix Review*, *The Ginosco Review*, *The Salzburg Review*, *Prosopisia* and *Indian Literature*, to name a few. Most recently she was published in *Muse*, an anthology of NE poets.