

JASMINE FRACTALS

Poems of Urban India



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Shanti Arts Publishing

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Pudding Magazine (“Aviary”); *Shot Glass Journal* (“Monsoon Daze” and “Werewolf and Birdman Hallucinations”); *Taj Mahal Review* (“Himroo”); *Verse-Virtual* (“Accept,” “Goan Cashews,” “Lyrical Life,” and “Seer”); and *Wilderness House Literary Review* (“Aviary”).

“Girl Child” and “Lights Out,” as well as the photo that accompanies “Harmony,” are comprised in the 2016 anthology *Veils, Halos and Shackles: International Poetry on the Oppression and Empowerment of Women*, by Kasva Press (editors Dr. Charles Adès Fishman and Smita Sahay).

Certain of the photographs paired with “Holi Days” and “Maha Kumbh Mela” have also been featured independently, in *Cargo Literary*.

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STREETS OF INDIA

Quick-shifting figures
jolt into kaleidoscope-focus,
along the spaghetti-mapped roads
that form urban Bangalore —

right-of-way cow
mindlessly minding the median,
chewing thorny strands
of meager-dry landscaping . . .
Tata truck maneuvering bullishly
("horn OK please") into this lane . . .
coconut vendor thrusting his machete
into another green-yellow shell, spongy husk,
to cut thirst for a clutch of workers . . .
jasmine-scented girls
blithely weaving between two- and four-seaters . . .
buses belching clots of day-drained corporates,
stop after lurching stop . . .

a bhutta-wallah applying chili-lime
to corn freshly roasted curbside,
while a dog nestles under his cart's rusty axle . . .
customers elbowing through Escher planes
of the tarped vegetable market,
to haggle, with crosshatching bravado,
for the crispest long beans and bitter gourds...
energy-grinning kids, in rumpled uniforms,
swarming the sugar-cane press . . .
school-age / school-deprived panhandlers
holding basketed baby cobras,
to shock a few rupees out of the pockets
of startled passersby . . .
sari-clad transvestites
zigzagging through an idling intersection,
grabbing the gazes
of drivers both compelled and repelled
by their aggressive solicitations . . .

male laborers wiping sweat-pocked brows,
as they sift and shovel sand, mix concrete by hand,
while females convey wood or water buckets
atop their even-keel heads . . .
pedestrians dodging potholes and open ditches,
to reach the chai vendor's stall,
let masala-laced gossip slip past their parched lips . . .
temple-keepers rewrapping their saffron dhoti cloths,
lighting ghee candles and incense sticks,

which send coils of black smoke snaking
into polluted pores of a ruddy sky,
where the wisps perform mating rituals
with knots of diesel exhaust.

A rerooted American, I shut the window,
turn the nearest A/C vent straight into face,
and slide deep into the brief privacy of this SUV.



GIRL CHILD

“Save the girl child,”
states the squatter’s-rights placard
intrepidly hanging
amidst jewelry-store banners
and real-estate billboards
whose clichéd hollow gazes
take in the dizzy spin of NH7, below.

Bangalore’s IT elite are not immune
to this holdover dilemma —
the familial demand
that each couple bring forth a baby boy
to fulfill ancestral duties
and shoulder the financial burdens
of the clan.

The Prenatal Diagnostics Techniques Act,
in place for two decades,
holds little sway, when black money
can buy, for anxious parents,
the immediate verdict
of a portable ultrasound machine,
illegally used, in the privacy of home,
to determine if a quick but never easy fix
is needed — a quiet termination
of their once-anticipated joy.

Save the girl child. Save us all.

WEREWOLF AND BIRDMAN HALLUCINATIONS

LSD-eyed Werewolf
stares across the credenza,
at Gollum-grinning Birdman.

Their dark-alloy shapes
obey shifting slices of sunlight,
bearing a dull, oil-rubbed thud
that mirrors the weathered skin
of the Nagaland artisan who fired them, by hand,
and bartered his wares
with a Mandalay pharmacist,
to attain vaccines and antibiotics
for his tribal-headhunter village.

Werewolf and Birdman
feverishly await further permutations.

