

PRECARIOUS

poems

APARNA HALPÉ



Bay Owl
PRESS



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For Chittha and his Fond Girl



ATLANTA



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MĒ GAUTAMA BUDU-RAJYAⁱ

“Welcome
To Dancesport 2009!”

The Queens shivers forth
flamboyant plumes of studded,
buttoned,
belly twisting,
bra stabbing
Samba blazing
giddiness.
Shrieking banshee tits
and asses
dole
immaculately rehearsed
fire for the groins.

The young grow feral
as the aged doze

i “This Kingdom of the Gautama Buddha.” Referring to a victory slogan entitled “This is the Kingdom of the Gautama Buddha” depicting Sri Lankan “Buddhist” cultural icons including the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, flanked by soldiers in military fatigues and armed tanks. The image is frequently displayed on the rear windows of local buses.

uncomfortably
in their Kandyan pleats,
growing cold
in all this
borrowed
fertility.
This is sport
we are told.

And unto us is born
an age
of anything
but
reason.

Rites
of
Passage.

Milk seeps
a rancid economy
through her slip.
Rewati averts eyes
from the curl
in a young soldier's
lip.
Her child suckles
the thin reek
of paroxysmal sweat.



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Her keening glance
still caresses
the bloody compound
where flies gather up
the loving dead.

His lotus eyes
blaze outward yet,
willing her run,

Run!

But

in this safe place
of bootedge kick
and gunmetal wire
there is
nowhere
to run.

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Wonderful!
Is the Lord!
The Mighty King!

Mahā Rajāneni,
Mē Gautama Budu Rajayay.ⁱⁱ

ii “Mighty King, This is the kingdom of the Gautama Buddha.” Referring to the victory banners which honor President Mahinda Rajapaksa as the “mighty king.”

PAST KELANIYA

A night journey once
home bound
in an intercity bus.

We speed
to avoid shadows
of friends
on liquid pavement.

Outside a circle of light,
a dog runs away
and a slouchy drunk
bouys up
on ghost palms

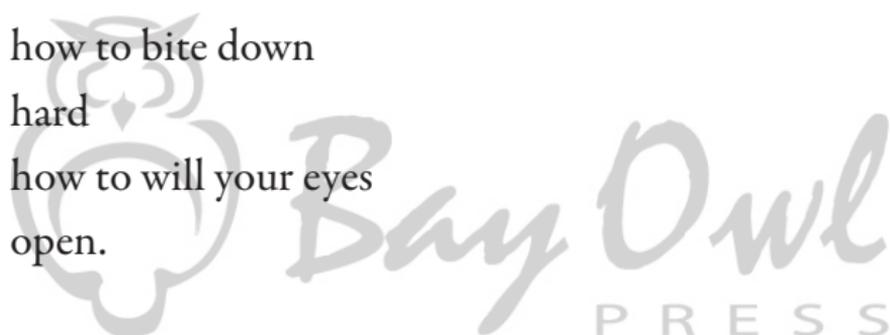
A
Fist
Crashes
Down.

We were gone
before there was

time
to panic
or feel guts
hammering down
ears;
before
the teeth hands ribs
start shaking.

Later
I learned
how to bite down
hard
how to will your eyes
open.

But at 14
I was terrified
that the dog
ran away.



MATHAKAⁱⁱⁱ

Speechless
I stand before
your stark beauty
spreadeagled
before the sightless eyes
of millions
silent in their
complicity.

Sister,
this day
do all women
walk naked,
garbed only
in the searing shame
of your

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iii “Mathaka” (memory) is a reference to the re-election poster campaign of President Kumaratunga, infamously titled “Mathakada” (do you remember), that made use of doctored archival footage of torture victims from the late 1980-90s. Families suddenly recognized their missing on the sides of bus stands and ticket booths. As “Mathakada” this poem first appeared in *Channels*, Vol 10, Ed. Anne Ranasinghe, English Writers Cooperative of Sri Lanka, 2001.

agony.
Suspended in voiceless
screams
our tongues cry
silence
while
that sickle smile
hovers the earth
reaping harvests
of our barren memory.

Trapped in the echoes
of this darkening day
we stumble on
blindfolded
seeking in shadows
your life
your forgiveness

our freedom.



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