

***TRANSLATED WOMAN***

**By Usha Kishore**

I travel between cultures,  
I journey between languages,  
I am the witness of merging  
histories and geographies,  
I break barriers with dreams.  
I am a translated woman.

I keep liaisons with many tongues,  
Malayalam woos me in northern ballads,  
Tamil makes love to me,  
Hindi whispers sweet nothings  
and Sanskrit courts me in style.  
French flirts with me,  
while crafty English flits  
around me in magic realism.  
I am a translated woman.

My insides are a tug of war  
between East and West,  
who keep their trysts in darkness;  
they have met and courted somewhere  
and now live together in sin.  
I am their progeny. In the East,  
I am fairer than the fair;  
in the West, I am darker than the dark.  
I am a translated woman.

I am the soul of the other  
in the body of the self.  
My landscape, the interplay  
of light and dark; my aesthetic  
is here and there. I spin Odysseys  
in *Carnatic ragas*. I am a cross  
between a *rudravina* and a *stradivari*.  
I am the brushstroke of Ravi Varma,  
dipped in Monet's colours.  
I am a translated woman.

I traverse the seas and plant myself  
on alien shores. I transfer my thoughts  
into borrowed songs. I transcreate  
myself in new forms. I translate  
my consciousness and crafty English  
makes poetry with my tears.  
I am a translated woman.

{The term "translated woman" is an adaptation of Salman Rushdie's phrase "translated man."}

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***WRITING IN EXILE***

{ Inspired by the English translations of Chinese poetry  
by Aliya Ma Lynn and Karen Bowden }

Ten thousand miles of darkness  
and light; not a day passes  
without thoughts of home...

Ten thousand paths to tread;  
it is this one I choose -  
writing in exile...

Ten thousand waves crashing  
in the Irish sea; one Indian woman  
fishing for poetry ...

[Featured in Krityaezine, 2006]

***KAMAKHYA***

Buried in the blue  
mountains, a stone lies  
incarnadined, fecund.  
It is I, goddess of passion,  
primeval woman, raring to birth the world.  
Alush labyrinth of triangles, decoding desire  
in core *mantra*; a lotus energy shrine in bee-hive matrix;  
my fluid spring, an ever fertile hum; my mouth hungry,  
devouring time. I am the womb of the universe, in dark hues  
of darkling bronze. I am Kamakhya, flaming in camphor, adorned in  
stars; my breath, the living air. Invoke me in word, whisper, thought and dream.  
I shall appear in apparition and oracle, allegory and parable, rising in monsoon spate,  
flooding the earth with my primal blood, staining the sky with visions of dark eternity.  
My psychic song flows in your veins, carrying promises of verses to come. I am infinite  
soul spilling forth in countless forms, my endless female hungers wooing the heavens. I am  
laden cloud, twilight rain, water in its element; a ritual beyond time, bleeding in cosmic myth.

{Kamakhya is the presiding deity of the Kamakhya temple in Kamrup, Assam. Translated  
from Assamese  
as the goddess of desire, Kamakhya is said to be a Tantric goddess, associated with Kali and  
Durga.}

**RAINMAKERS**

In the dwindling light of the setting sun, invoking  
an elusive empyrean realm, yoked to the destiny  
of a parched land, nubile women, clad only in

youthful air, plough barren fields, chanting  
*mantrasto* appease Indra, King of Gods robed  
in dusky twilight, armed with rainbow and thunderbolt.

They chant of the sky riding on rain, they chant  
of cloud elephants drenching the scorched earth,  
they chant of storm birds flying the skies.

They dream of carving their names in rain, they dream  
of wooing the weather gods with bare breasts, they  
dream of opening the heavens with virgin flesh.

Their fragile lives caught between myth and legend,  
these chaste brides of Śakra, the water-bearer, rake  
subdued pastures and sprinkle the shrivelled soil

with tears, harnessing climate change, earth eccentricity  
and sun paradox to Indra's *svajra*. As rice bowl  
after rice bowl dries up in the blistering plains,

a nation tempts the monsoons with vestal nudes.

{In certain parts of rural India, in times of drought, young unmarried women are made  
to plough barren fields in the nude, to invoke the rain gods.}

[The poems featured in the current issue of *Episteme* appear in Usha Kishore's second poetry collection, *Night Sky between the Stars* {CyberwitIndia, January 2015}.]

**Bio:**

Indian born Usha Kishore is a British poet, writer and translator from the Sanskrit, resident on the Isle of Man, where she teaches English at Queen Elizabeth II High School. Usha is internationally published and anthologised by *Macmillan*, *Hodder Wayland*, *Oxford University Press* (all UK) and *Harper Collins India* among others. Her poetry has won prizes in UK Poetry competitions (the most recent being the winning poem in the *Exiled Writers Ink Poetry Competition*), has been part of international projects and features in the British Primary and Indian Middle School syllabus. The winner of an Arts Council Award and a *Culture Vannin* Award, Usha's debut collection *On Manannan's Isle* was published in 2014 by *dpsdotcom*, UK. A second collection, *Night Sky between the Stars*, has been published by *Cyberwit India* in January 2015. Forthcoming are a book of translations from the Sanskrit, *Translations of the Divine Woman*, from *Rasala Books India*. Usha is now working on her first novel.

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