

KARGIL

By Sudeep Sen

*Our street of smoke and fences, gutters gorged
with weed and reeking, scorching iron grooves //
of rusted galvanise, a dialect forged
from burning asphalt, and a sky that moves //
with thunderhead cumuli grumbling with rain,*

— DEREK WALCOTT, *Tiepolo's Hound*, Book One, (II).1

Ten years on, I came searching for
war signs of the past
expecting remnants — magazine debris,
unexploded shells,
shrapnels
that mark bomb wounds.

I came looking for
ghosts —
people past, skeletons charred,
abandoned
brick-wood-cement
that once housed them.

I could only find whispers —
whispers among the clamour
of a small town outpost
in full throttle —
everyday chores
sketching outward signs
of normalcy and life.

In that bustle

I spot war-lines of a decade ago —
though the storylines
are kept buried, wrapped
in old newsprint.

There is order amid uneasiness —

the muezzin's cry,
the monk's chant —
baritones
merging in their separateness.

At the bus station

black coughs of exhaust
smoke-screen everything.

The roads meet
and after the crossroad ritual
diverge,
skating along the undotted lines
of control.

A porous garland

with cracked beads
adorns Tiger Hill.

Beyond the mountains
are dark memories,
and beyond them

no one knows,
and beyond them
no one wants to know.

Even the flight of birds

that wing over their crests

don't know which feathers to down.

Chameleon-like

they fly, tracing perfect parabolas.

I look up

and calculate their exact arc

and find instead,

a flawed theorem.

WINTER

Couched on crimson cushions,

pink bleeds gold

and red spills into one's heart.

Broad leather keeps time,

calibrating different hours

in different zones

unaware of the grammar

that makes sense.

Only random woofs and snores

of two distant dogs

on a very cold night

clears fog that is unresolved.

New plants wait for new heat —
to grow, to mature.

An old cane recliner contains
poetry for peace — woven

text keeping comfort in place.
But it is the impatience of want

that keeps equations unsolved.
Heavy, translucent, vaporous,

split red by mother tongues —
winter's breath is pink.

GRAMMAR

*she has no english;
her lips round / in a moan
calligraphy of veins*
— MERLINDA BOBIS, 'First Night'

My syntax, tightly-wrought —
I struggle to let go,
to let go of its formality,
of my wishbone
desiring juice — its deep marrow,
muscle, and skin.

The sentence finally pronounced —

I am greedy for *long drawn-out vowels*, for consonants that
desire lust, tissue, grey-cells.

I am hungry for love,
for pleasure, for flight,

for a story essaying endlessly — words.

A comma decides to pr[e]position
a full-stop ... ellipses pause, to reflect —
a phrase decides not to reveal
her thoughts after all — ellipses and
semi-colons are strange bed-fellows.

Calligraphy of veins and words
require ink, the ink of breath,
of blood — corpuscles speeding
faster than the loop of serifs ...
the unresolved story of our lives
in a *fast train without terminals*.

I long only for italicised ellipses ...
my english is the other, the other
is really english — *she has no english;*
her lips round / in a moan —
oval, rich, nuanced, grammar-
drenched, etched letters of glass.

PS: Photo credit to Danielle Devaux.

Bio:

SUDEEP SEN [www.sudeepsen.net] is widely recognised as a major new generation voice in world literature and ‘one of the finest younger English-language poets in the international literary scene’ (*BBC Radio*), ‘fascinated not just by language but the possibilities of language’ (*Scotland on Sunday*). He received a Pleiades Honour (at the Struga Poetry Festival, Macedonia) for having made “a significant contribution to contemporary world poetry”. Sen’s prize-winning books include: *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (HarperCollins), *Distracted Geographies*, *Rain*, *Aria* (A K Ramanujan Translation Award), *Ladakh*, *The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry* (editor), and *Fractals: New & Selected Poems/Translations 1980-2015*. A new book, *Blue Nude: New Selected Poems* (Jorge Zalamea International Poetry Prize) is forthcoming. His poems, translated into twenty-five languages, have featured in major international anthologies; and his words have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Newsweek*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Independent*, *Telegraph*, *Herald*, *Harvard Review*, *Hindu*, *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, *Outlook*, *India Today*, and broadcast on BBC, PBS, CNN IBN, NDTV, AIR & *Doordarshan*. Sen’s newer work appears in *New Writing 15* (Granta), *Language for a New Century* (Norton), *Leela* (Collins), *Indian Love Poems* (Knopf/Random House/Everyman), *Out of Bounds* (Bloodaxe), and *Initiate: Oxford New Writing* (Blackwell). He is the editorial director of AARK ARTS and the editor of *Atlas*.

As a photographer and graphic artist, his work is part of many professional print portfolios, magazine and newspaper pieces, book jacket covers, private and public collections some include: *Hindu*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *New Indian Express*, *Swagat*, *Gallerie*, *Biblio*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Molossus*, *World Literature Today*, *Indian Design & Interiors*, and others; plus books covers for publishers such as HarperCollins, Peepal Tree, Mulfran, Wings Press, Women Unlimited, Gallerie, Aark Arts, UPL, Bengal Gallery, and many others. He has also published two books of photography, *Prayer Flag* and *Postcards from Bangladesh*. His photography is professional

represented by ArtMbassy in Berlin
[http://www.artmbassy.com/kuenstler/sudeep_sen.pdf].

Sen was the first Asian to be honoured with an invitation to participate at the Nobel Laureate Week in St Lucia in 2013, where he delivered the Derek Walcott Lecture and read his own poetry. A special commemorative limited edition, *Fractals: New & Selected Poems/Translations 1978-2013*, was released by the Nobel laureate Derek Walcott himself. The same year, the Government of India Ministry of Culture's awarded him the senior fellowship for "outstanding persons in the field of literature/culture".