

# MUMBAI: CITY OF SURVIVORS

SEPTEMBER 2011

With eight attacks in the last nine years, including one that involved more than 10 coordinated shooting and bombing incidents in 2008, Mumbai is no stranger to terrorism. The 2008 attacks targeted crowded public places such as the main railway station Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, the popular downtown Leopold Café, and two of India's top five-star hotels, the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, and the Trident. The horror began on Wednesday, 26 November and lasted until Saturday, 29 November 2008, killing 164 people and wounding at least 308. Ajmal Kasab, the only terrorist caught alive in this operation, is still languishing in an Indian jail.

When we talk of peace, however, we do not speak only of these mega brutalities. In everyday situations, violence has become a way of life. With people trying to find a foothold in jam-packed trains, negotiating their way through chaotic streets, and ducking from stones hurled at trains hurtling through slums, the Mumbaikar is a survivor.

This city on the whole is an energetic place, working round the clock for daily survival. But it is also a city on the edge, and the rage can spill over any time.



# For the better through verse

Six hundred events across 450 cities in 95 countries, all rooting for peace come September 24. That's precisely what the 100 Thousand Poets For Change movement is all about. This global movement is reportedly the largest such event of its kind, with simultaneous poetry readings organised across the globe, all with the intention of stimulating political, economic and social change.

M u m b a i too will witness its own slice of the movement, with poets M e n k a Shivasani and Anju Makhija organising the Mumbai chapter. While the main event



Anju (left) and Menka with U.S. based poet Saleem Peeradina (centre)

will take place on September 24, as it will on other parts of the globe, Menka and Anju have also organised a special workshop for Adivasi children near Panvel, a day earlier. Adivasi poems and songs in Marathi will be sung. The

main poetry reading event itself is multilingual, "much like Mumbai itself," says Menka with a laugh, adding, "We begin with the readings at 4.30 pm at the Press Club and have a sitar performance by Madhusudan Kumar and Gujarati writers Dr Dileep Jhaveri and Kamal Vora participating. Hemant Divate and Minakshi Patil will read in Marathi, after which there is an open mic session from 9 pm onwards, conducted by Caferati's Manisha Lakhe."

But the movement will not end on September 24. "We are encouraging poets to send in their work to us even if they can't be present at the event, and this will become part of a permanent archive," Menka says. An archive that will reflect a global call for a newer, more equitable and peaceful way of living. — RN

## PRESS RELEASE

### Poets promote peace in a historic global event

**Poets around the world will participate in the momentous 100 Thousand Poets for Change movement on September 24 2011; in Mumbai, a multilingual poetry reading and a workshop for Adivasi children are being planned**

Poets in 400 cities representing 95 countries are currently organizing the largest poetry reading in history with over 500 individual events scheduled to take place simultaneously on September 24th to promote environmental, social, and political change. The historic global event, 100 Thousand Poets for Change, has been set in motion by Michael Rothenberg, a widely known poet, songwriter, editor of the online literary magazine Bigbridge.org and an environmental activist based in Northern California.

In Mumbai, poets Menka Shivasani and Anju Makhija will be organizing two events. The first of these, on September 23, 2011, will be a workshop for Adivasi children at the Bandanwadi school near Tara village close to Panvel, Raigad district, Maharashtra, where Adivasi poems/songs in Marathi will be explained and sung. This will be led by Anil Vishwanatharama.

The second event will be a multilingual poetry reading on September 24, (4.30 p.m. onwards) hosted by the Culture Beat, Mumbai Press Club, which will include peace music, and participation by poets writing in English, Marathi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Sindhi and other Indian languages. There will also be a film screening, organized by Rafique



# One lakh poets unite for peace

World's largest poetry reading event starts Mumbai chapter, writers present work to promote social change

Shweta Mehta

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This Saturday, a number of poets in the city will come together as part of an international peace movement. The initiative, titled 100 Thousand Poets for Change, is being held simultaneously across 400 cities in 95 countries. Over 500 individual events are slated as an effort towards peace and environmental, social and political



Open Mic night and some performances. We've also planned a workshop for Adivasi children today, followed by a multilingual poetry reading session on tomorrow."

The workshop will be held at a school at a village close to Panvel where the tribal children will be taught to understand and sing poems in Marathi.

Shivdasani and Makhija have been organising cultural events regularly now, under an initiative called Culture Beat. "We have poetry readings, music performances and other activities every month at Mumbai Press Club," says Shivdasani, adding, "When Michael asked us to be part of his initiative, we decided to do it under Culture Beat."

The duo also managed to rope in a bevy of Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi and English poets to read their work at the event. Sitar player Madhu Sudan Kumar has also confirmed that he will perform at the event.



We want to include as many people as possible, so there will also be an Open Mic.  
Menka Shivdasani,  
Culture Beat

100 Thousand Poets for Change has been started with the hope of becoming into an international event. After Saturday, all the documentation of the event on its official website will be preserved by California's Stanford University, which has recognised it as a historical event — the largest poetry reading in history.

Baghdadi, and an Open Mike session, where Mumbaikars may present their poems related to the themes of peace and sustainability.

Anju Makhija, who has been working with Adivasi children in the Panvel area for many years, says: "These tribes, also called katheris, are losing their culture. They usually live in the hilly areas close to nature. Traditionally, they earn a living by cutting trees from nearby jungles and selling the wood to timber merchants. In recent times, they have been working as farm labourers and construction workers. Many of them live below the poverty line and have problems with alcoholism. They are not easily accepted by the mainstream culture and are isolated in many ways. Their children have now started going to local schools, but these Adivasis are fast losing their songs." While the workshop takes place between 11 a.m and 1 p.m. on September 23, follow-up efforts will involve encouraging the children to collect more poems from their elders.

change.

The event, a brainchild of California based poet and environmental activist, Michael Rothenberg, will have a Mumbai chapter spearheaded by poets Menka Shivdasani and Anju Makhija.

Says Shivdasani, "We want to include as many people as possible, so there will be an

"Poets, writers, artists, and humanitarians will create, perform, educate and demonstrate, in their individual communities, and decide their own specific area of focus for change within the overall framework of peace and sustainability, which is a major concern worldwide and the guiding principle for this global event," says Rothenberg.

The events range from a poetry and peace gathering in strife-torn Kabul and Jalalabad to 20 collective poetic actions in Mexico City where poets, painters, filmmakers and musicians will spread the word of peace and non-violence throughout the city with day-long readings and workshops. There are 29 events planned in India, seven in Nigeria, 17 in Canada, 19 in Great Britain, five in China, three in Cuba and over 220 events in the United States.

The home page of the 100 Thousand Poets for Change website, [www.100TPC.org](http://www.100TPC.org), has been buzzing these last few weeks, and each city organizer and their community has an individual Event Location blog page on the website for posting written material, poetry, artwork, photos, and video to document this global mega-event across national borders.

Immediately following September 24th all documentation on the 100TPC.org website will be preserved by Stanford University in California, which has recognized 100 Thousand Poets for Change as an historical event, the largest poetry reading in history. They will archive the complete contents of the website, 100TPC.org, as part of their digital archiving program LOCKSS.

Mumbaikars are invited to send in their poems, artworks or any other relevant material on the themes of peace and sustainability. Write in to Menka Shivdasani and Anju Makhija at [poetsinmumbai@gmail.com](mailto:poetsinmumbai@gmail.com)

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# A WORKSHOP FOR TRIBAL CHILDREN

On September 23, 2011, children from the Bandanwadi Village School participated enthusiastically in a workshop designed to introduce them to their own tribal songs



In Bandanwadi, close to the peaceful environs of the Karnala Bird Sanctuary in the Raigad district of Maharashtra in India, there is a little village school. Many of the students are tribal children, whose parents are Adivasis living in the hilly areas close to nature. For decades they have been earning a living cutting trees from nearby jungles, selling the wood to timber merchants, and keeping their culture alive through indigenous songs.

These tribals, also called '*kathkaris*', have lately been finding work as farm labourers and construction workers, living below the poverty line and trying to cope with a variety of problems, including alcoholism. Isolated in many ways, these tribals are not easily accepted by the mainstream culture; now, however, their children have started going to local schools.

As they struggle to survive through these new challenges of a changing social and economic structure, these Adivasis are fast losing their songs, dances and traditional practices. Learning English has become a matter of pride, but in the process, a rich legacy of an oral culture is being lost.

The 100 Thousand Poets for Change movement proved to be a catalyst for a grass-roots initiative in this tribal region of Maharashtra. For some years now, Anju Makhija had been quietly working with the local authorities to help preserve this culture, collecting songs that these



tribals sang after a hard days' work.

On September 23, 2011, this effort came to life in the form of a workshop for students of the Bandanwadi school. The Principal, Shriram Kamal Patil, and the teacher, Lalita Santosh Ombale, introduced the children to their own tribal songs and encouraged them to keep in touch with their roots.



The experience was truly heart-warming. As the children loudly and enthusiastically gave voice to the songs of their elders, they also jumped up and began to dance. A little girl called Pinky gave a solo performance, completely unselfconscious as she recreated the movements she had seen her parents perform.

Santosh Thakur, who works with the nearby Yusuf Meherally Centre, was an active participant, energetically joining in the performances, as several of the local residents watched in delight. Anil Vishwakarma, who plays an active role in ensuring education for these tribal children, was also among those who were present.

The children were also thrilled when they received gifts of books and stationery, from 'Vishindevi Children's Media Centre'.

There were some fascinating insights into Adivasi behaviour - for instance, while traditionally in Indian society, the man comes home and demands that his dinner be served, among these tribals, things are very different; both husband and wife come home together after working in the fields and then share a drink. There is something to be learned here about equality!

The workshop may have ended, but the initiative continues. The teachers have promised that they will continue to encourage the children to learn more such songs from their parents. Hopefully this will ensure that the parents too keep their traditions alive!



SANSKRITIRANI DESAI, AWARD-WINNING GUJARATI POET



ANNIE ZAIDI, INDIAN ENGLISH WRITER

# MULTI-LINGUAL POETRY READING IN MUMBAI

SEPTEMBER 24, 2011

Since Mumbai speaks in many languages, we thought it would be appropriate to organise a multi-lingual poetry reading on the theme of peace to mark the city's participation in the 100 Thousand Poets for Change movement. The event was held at the Press Club, where for some years Anju Makhija and Menka Shivdasani have been organising cultural activities under the Culture Beat banner. Participants included senior Gujarati poets Dileep Jhaveri and Kamal Vora; Marathi poets Hemant Divate and Meenakshi Patil; English poets Anand Thakore and Annie Zaidi, among others. On the occasion, Nutan Jani released her Gujarati translation of an anthology of Sindhi Partition Poetry, *Freedom and Fissures*, compiled by Anju and Menka and published by Sahitya Akademi. Award-winning Gujarati poet Sanskritirani Desai also lent her support and shared her work in Hindi. Madhusudan Kumar's peace music lent a special touch to the evening.



HEMANT DIVATE, MARATHI POET AND PUBLISHER



GUJARATI POET KAMAL VORA

# SOME PARTICIPANTS



## MADHUSUDAN KUMAR

Madhusudan Kumar pursued Sitar music under Prof. D. S. Damle [Disciple of Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar] and AIR artiste Pt. Giriraj for a few years. He became a disciple of 'Aftaab-e-Sitar' Ustad Vilayat Khan Saheb [1969] and shifted to Shimla in Himachal Pradesh and later Dehradun in Uttar Pradesh and much later to Kolkata. He learnt the rudiments of Sitar music under the traditional yet redefined "Guru-Shishya Parampara method". He painted Ustadji's ancestral portraits, along with great musicians of yesteryears.

As a member of the "Global Organic Theatre", he has performed Sitar at the 'National Gallery of Modern Art' during the 'Kala Ghoda Art Festival 2009 and 10', 'Jehangir Art Gallery' and 'Artists' Centre', among others. He has researched the evolution of the Sitar from the times of its invention by Hazrat Amir Khusro in the 12th Century - evolution of Sitar and Surbahar in 'Imdad Khani Gharana' of Ustad Vilayat Khan.



## DILEEP JHAVERI

Dileep Jhaveri writes in Gujarati and English. He has published a book of poems '*Pandu Poems And Others*', and a play in Gujarati called '*Vyaso chhwas*' translated in English by Kamal Sanyal and published by Seagull Books titled '*A Breath of Vyas*.' Several poems are translated in English, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam. He is also on the editorial board of [www.museindia.com](http://www.museindia.com) and has presented his poems in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Malayasia, Indonesia and USA, among other places. He has been honoured with the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad award (1989), Critic Award (1989) and Jayant Pathak Award.

Apart from being a poet and playwright Dileep Jhaveri is also a medical practitioner in Mumbai.





## ANAND THAKORE

Born in Mumbai, in 1971, Anand Thakore was raised there and in the UK. A Hindustani classical vocalist by profession, he trained for many years with Pandit Satyasheel Deshpande and Pandit Baban Haldankar of the Agra *gharana*. He holds a BA degree in English Literature from Elphinstone College, where he also studied Sanskrit Literature. He subsequently earned an MA in English Literature at the University of Poona. His first book of verse, *Waking in December*, appeared in 2001. He is the recipient of a national scholarship from The Ministry of Human Resource Development, and a grant from the Charles Wallace India Trust for experimental work in the UK. Thakore is the founder of Harbour Line, a Mumbai-based publishing collective, and of Kshitij, a group devoted to the creation of interactive performance spaces for practicing musicians. He is currently on the editorial board for the Montreal Prize Global Anthology and lives in Mumbai.



## MEENAKSHI PATIL

Meenakshi Rajendra Patil, an award-winning poet and artist, has won numerous gold medals, including one for standing first at Mumbai University in Marathi Literature and Aesthetics. She is also the recipient of several scholarships, including Lotus Foundation Scholarship, TATA Foundation Scholarship and P.K Atre Award. Her works include a thesis on 'Devotional Music', a Thesis on 'Needs of spiritual thinking' included in the '*Adhyatma - Ek Shodh*' published by Sumangal Prakashan (Kalnirnaya) -1998, Proverbs and Sayings in Khandeshi Dialect - a Social Study', a collection of poetry '*Is It In Your DNA*' (Abhidhanantar Publications) and a weekly column. She has also held solo art exhibitions and scripted and directed a documentary film '*Sobat*', in addition to acting in another documentary, '*Ummid*'. Her documentary film on '*Social Impact of Climate Change*' was shortlisted among 15 out of 100 films in a World Bank Competition. Her administrative experience includes being Secretary at Marathi Literature and Cultural Board, Dept of Cultural affairs, Maharashtra State. She is currently Deputy Director (PWD), Mantralaya.

# BOOK LAUNCH



## Cities Ran Amuck Motilal Jotwani

Streets roared, "*Allah-O-Akbar,*  
*Har Har Mahadev!*"

In Karachi, on January 6, 1948,  
huddled in a store-room,  
we waited with bated breath.  
The world, it seemed,  
would come to a sudden end.

"Hand over the *kafirs* in your house,"  
the rioters demanded.

God's good man, God himself,  
Allahdino lied to them:

"The people you are looking for  
sailed to Bombay yesterday".

Allahdino was an ordinary man,  
Sindhi and Sanskrit *dino* in his Muslim  
name.

Allahdino lied once again:

"The poor creatures migrated to India,  
leaving behind their precious belongings.  
Do you want those instead?"

And we waited with bated breath...

DILEEP JHAVERI RELEASES NUTAN JANI'S GUJARATI  
TRANSLATION OF SINDHI PARTITION POETRY

When India gained its independence from British rule, the country paid a heavy price. Even as Indians were rejoicing in their freedom, they suffered the brutal effects of Partition. The communal carnage that took place caused the migration of more than ten million people. With the whole of Sind going to Pakistan, the Sindhi community was the worst affected, and many Sindhi Hindus were forced to flee, arriving in India as penniless refugees.

In 1998, Anju Makhija and Menka Shivdasani collaborated with a senior Sindhi poet, Arjan 'Shad' Mirchandani, to translate poetry by Sindhi writers who had lived through Partition, including Shaikh Ayaz, Hari Dilgir, Nand Jhaveri and Vasudev Nirmal. The book was published under the title *Freedom and Fissures*, by Sahitya Akademi in 1998. Marathi poet Niranjan Uzgare translated this anthology into Marathi, and now, there is also a Gujarati translation by Nutan Jani. Jani's Gujarati translation was launched by Dileep Jhaveri at the multilingual poetry reading on September 24, 2011. Some poems were also presented, in Gujarati and English versions.

## Fire ... Oh Fire! Hari Dilgir

Flames outside, flames inside... fire,  
oh fire!  
My house, my being... set on fire!

Can water catch fire?  
Why do my eyes rain fire?

Built from bones and blood, this  
house,  
doors, windows, walls all on fire!

Deepak *raag* is the music of fire.  
The sky ablaze... earth, ocean, all on  
fire.

Do my eyes deceive me, or has the  
world changed?  
In fireflies, stars, the moon, I see fire,  
fire!

My body burns in the drizzle.  
Now who set the clouds on fire?

It may die down now,  
But I will fester forever in the fire!

# SOME POEMS ON PEACE

In response to the call for poems on peace, Mumbaikars and even people from other countries sent in their work.  
Here's a selection

## DILEEP JHAVERI

### WAR FOR AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

1.  
When I was born the War was on with its outcome uncertain  
and the fate of the nations decided  
There will be scarcity all over  
The meadows will not have grass for sheep  
The trees will not have leaves for shade  
The oceans will not have fish for catch  
The fields will be fallow and the clouds will be callous  
Starving children will be blind  
and the blind will go deaf  
The blood will thirst for poison  
and the lungs will be full of ash  
Coughing amputees will crowd for alms  
and people will spit in their palms  
Temples will deny orphans of dead soldiers  
whose pregnant wives will whore at the entrance  
All histories become one when in ruins  
where saints are honoured with bullets

I knew this when I turned four  
when covering our bleeding heart with barbed wire  
we lost the father of our new born nation

2.  
For more than two years after my birth I had a pot belly  
and could not walk  
But could talk  
The curse to be a paralysed poet was on

Still like a wish granted to the condemned  
I knew the taste of dark chocolate  
and fragrance of imported soaps  
and dresses sprinkled with rosewater  
before being sentenced to visit the common loo  
and wade through overflowing cesspools to the kinder-  
garten school

The first thing I remember of the school  
was my love for the teacher in dark glasses

and long plaits with chocolate smelling oil  
The dark passages of the tenement  
were full of tigers and snakes  
My panting fear was proof of their hissing presence  
They disappeared as mother opened the door  
and I became a prince again under the yellow light of  
electric bulb

Ghosts and witches came later  
when my reluctant and devout grandmother visited us  
Scratching her shaved head  
she told stories of child Krishna's marvels  
I knew of mightier fears than snakes and tigers  
Every animal was a potential devil  
and every household item turned into a monster  
that only Krishna could destroy  
What he did later on growing up I came to know soon  
after fifty years while reading Mahabharat

3.  
At the age of five my long locks were sheared  
for an offering to Mother Goddess  
In a hot and humid room full of smoke of sacred fire  
my gaudily dressed maternal aunts sang and danced  
while I cried  
and the cruel hexes laughed  
each showing me a mirror that echoed my sobs

Even before I learned to write  
it was decided  
No lyrics No songs No worship.



4.

The hell for unfaithful was everyday life  
Shivering before dawn in a long queue for a bottle of milk  
with bleary eyes  
the blue stripes on the foil of cold glass  
looked like the rainbow of the covenant

Hours of toil at school and chores at home  
were pledged to repay the sins of ancestors  
who wasted life in wars  
In rent clothes and smeared with damp dust of flaking plas-  
ter  
chanting arithmetic tables and conventional prayers  
the pilgrimage of the repentant continued  
to nations drawn clumsily on textbook maps  
paying tribute to the victors burnishing golden eras  
with the ashes of the vanquished

5.

Visiting temples surrounded with florists, fruit sellers,  
fortune-tellers and beggars  
one day I saw a vendor selling hell  
On a large poster in small 4"x4" squares  
were painted naked men and women  
in garish red and brilliant yellow  
being punished for their sins in a hundred ways  
in titillating postures  
At an age when hair  
under armpits and loin  
had not erupted  
the temptation to see the underworld  
compelled frequent sojourns to God

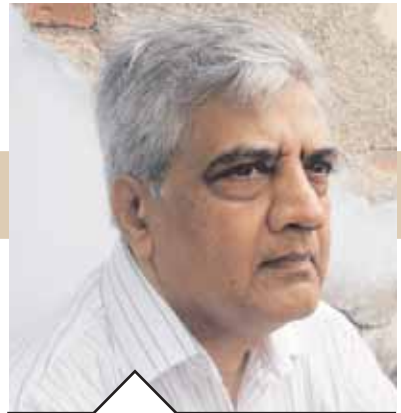
6.

Not one year passed without war  
in the house, neighbourhood, town, nation or the world  
The reasons were copious

Flourescent language of someone was a shadow cast on  
neighbour's wall  
Caste was sweat turning stink for some flaring nose  
Vermilion of religion rushed to run with blood  
Cry of freedom peeled bark off the tree  
Hunger was desert sand in envy of dew  
Atom was for explosion

War is an immortal monster  
that cannot be drowned or blown away or burnt down  
Every drop of blood breeds tiny monsters that grow again  
like a forest re-emerging after floods and fires  
No volcano is ever dead  
There is no death for the paralysed poet  
who repeats the same verse  
in varying words and rhythms and rhymes.

# KAMAL VORA



GUJARATI POET KAMAL VORA

## BLACK AND WHITE

1

The moment  
black is turning out into white  
right then  
white has been converting into black  
But in a hurry  
one misses the moment  
just when they cross each other  
just when they contain each other  
Catching hold of the moment  
if one takes a secret path  
one would reach over there  
where black is not  
and white can not be

2

You brought stones  
from the mountain  
I brought shells  
from the sea-shore  
The stones coarse and uneven  
sharp and dented  
The shells shining and glossy  
meticulously carved  
The stones tepid while the shells  
damp  
We didn't want to win  
the sea-shells  
Neither to lose  
the stones  
The sea can not reach  
the top of the mountain  
the mountain can never fathom  
the depth of the sea  
Our game was  
to keep black and white alongside  
and to make silence  
hear the sound  
to make the depth  
look at the height.

3

Only black...  
Has absolute black ever been seen?  
Black and nothing but black?  
White must have crept in  
from above or from below  
from the middle or from the sides  
or from somewhere  
they must have been seen  
simultaneously  
utterance of the word white  
must have been heard as black along  
with  
Sheer black...  
Immaculate white...  
Could they ever be  
absolutely apart from each other?

4

Black and white  
wearing the masks of the chessman  
confronting each other  
in a game of chess  
They bear enmity and strategies  
ploys and resistances  
tensions and trickery  
against each other  
White desperate to overcome black  
black deadly determined  
to defeat white  
Either a defeat or a victory  
is inevitable  
Neither victory nor a defeat  
is possible as well  
Only if the black takes off its mask  
and white its own  
But this is Chess  
the game played  
with and by the chessmen  
only.

5

Black is nothing but  
less of white  
and white less of black  
White is  
till there is black  
If white is  
then black shall be  
If black converges  
white would get intense  
If white congeals  
black would lessen too  
As such  
Black and White  
are grammatical forms  
and exist in simultaneity.

6

You rushed with the flag painted  
black  
to be factional on the side of black  
and automatically turned adverse to  
whatever was white  
You could not comprehend that  
the mistake would turn out fatal  
And you ignited fire in the eyes  
of white  
set fire to the blood of black  
and lowered the wells of poison into  
the bones of black  
You filled both their arrow-cases with  
frantic rage-oppression-anger-enmity-  
-fear-danger  
and then kept watching  
the entire fiasco as helpless  
bystander  
oh... ..only if you  
had gone in midst of  
black and white  
and handed over to white  
the flag marked black  
and to black the flag marked white  
you could have succeeded in prevent-  
ing  
this fatal blood shedding battle.

(TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL GUJARATI  
BY KARAMSHI PIR)

# SANSKRITIRANI DESAI

## "DANDI MARCH - THE SALT MARCH"

At the time of Dandi March  
To take the salt  
Just as the freedom fighters went with courage and  
The British beat their heads with sticks  
And made them unconscious  
Even then the next lot of freedom fighters  
Went to face the British  
With a firm determination

In the same way  
Coming one after another  
These waves dash their heads against the shore  
And get shattered since centuries, and  
This mammoth army  
Sends a "day" everyday to fight and  
It becomes a martyr everyday  
Just like our dreams.  
Even then we wake up everyday  
With renewed enthusiasm  
Like the freedom fighters of the Dandi March  
With firm determination.

Why can we not sleep  
And get up in another world ?  
Sometimes in the years that are past  
Sometimes in the future  
Sometimes in our past lives and  
Sometimes we go to sleep  
And someone else gets up in our place.

Which is this British government  
Against which we are fighting a battle  
With the same daily routine  
Banging our heads everyday ?

(Note: "The Salt March or Dandi March in 1930 led by Mahatma Gandhi against the British salt monopoly, a campaign of tax resistance & non violent protest was an important part of the Indian Independence movement")



# ANAND THAKORE

## NINETEEN FORTY-TWO

August wounds him. His friends play games in which he does not join.  
His mother is a woman who lives in a cage.  
She is there for the Nation, his father tells him.  
That man in brown with the big black keys must be the Nation,  
He concludes, and aims a pebble at the jailor's groin.

The boy who casts this innocent stone is only seven;  
But soon he will befriend the frets of an old sitar,  
Urging the strings to embrace desertion,  
Conjuring a lost void, till they are taut with images  
He cannot bring himself to remember; or cry to be forgiven

For crimes he did not commit yet fears his own. The Mahatma  
He will come to view, with an awkward, half-tormented  
Reverence; and of course, he will be drunk often, proclaiming  
In his drunkenness that Gandhi was a great man, though his followers  
Were mostly fools, prisoners of a barren blinkered dogma

That numbed them to colour and made them believe the sacred flesh dirty.  
The use of Gujarati he will forbid amongst his sons -  
A coarse unmusical purely functional tongue  
That Gandhi thought in, for Gandhi, though of course a great man,  
Was wholly unmusical - and then, on an evening, approaching fifty,

He will call home for drinks his raucous bunch of ageing whiskey-swilling  
Peers; and they will talk of simpler days, when the streets were clearer,  
Houses bigger, and the world more habitable, quaffing them down,  
Till he produces out of his pocket, as a sort of joke, a miniature Union Jack  
And a quizzically brown, fading photograph of a dead British king,

Crooning to himself, till everyone joins in, that surging drone of a song,  
That invokes an alien biblical god -  
And which they all remember standing up for  
On schoolboy visits to the cinema, when films were only black and white -  
Its cadences turgid, frozen almost, as the long

Last note billows out of the living room like a windy tent,  
And they drain their glasses in quick nostalgic gulps -  
All this, at two in the morning, while at the other end  
Of the same long-corridorred house, his mother, insomniac,  
Knits little dolls for orphaned girls; or looks up from nascent

Amorphous snippets of Gujarati verse at a moonless street,  
Her husband awake beside her, up for her sake; both of them  
Too tone-deaf to recognize, or be briefly wounded  
By the drunken anthem their son lifts in praise  
Of an empire they waited so long to defeat.

August 15th 2006

# MUKTA SAMBRANI

*Mukta Sambrani, an Indian poet who currently lives in Berkeley, California, was in Mumbai recently. On July 21, she presented her poems at the Press Club in Mumbai, under the Culture Beat series. Speaking of her Broomrider's Book of the Dead, she says that it "shares some poems, some hope and pain with this book, the catastrophic and magnificent events that have marked our lives, the invasion of some of our homelands in the name of justice and peace, the destruction and renegotiation of cultures and perspectives, the shifting and perhaps conflicted sense of home and heart and somewhere, a steadfast hope for peace".*

*Mukta sent in these poems especially for 100 Thousand Poets for Peace.*

The artifact museum was bombed the day war broke out. The curator and his staff perished instantly. Soldiers were called in to take over the artifact museum. Calloused hands caressed the breasts of goddess statues. I see this young soldier boy keeping the vigil in the halls of ancestors. Some smile in spite of the disfigurement. Anna thinks he fills a notebook with poems. Anna wants to present a rendition of his notebook to the world. She has no doubt he understands everything in spite of his inexperience. To her he is as much a curator as his scholarly predecessor. Anna believes in the potential of things.

FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF THE  
ARTIFACT MUSEUM KEEPER



MUKTA SAMBRANI



## US THREE

Whatever inspires-  
My wish for you,  
Between you, me and the tree:

I want for you to  
Want, to feel  
Inspired, in all things, fulfilled.

You may not know this  
By looking at me  
But, you, are important to me.

Throw dice or letters, sugar cubes embedded cardamom  
If you will. Feeling thrown by it?  
Into the mouth - the place of short keeping.

There is a lot of intention - not wanting,  
Not acting without integrity,  
Not being an option, every word.

Placement, the wrong emphasis  
Or the right rooting - A  
Reaching out towards words.

## FACING

Contractual  
Actually  
Contracting  
Diction  
What? With a name like that?  
Identity - Is a place holder?  
Whose is it? This blame.

Are we separate  
Owing to our differences,  
Or colored by prejudice?

The two determine cultural gaze-  
Colored by separation or differences,  
Or colored by biases and prejudice?  
Or colored by the

Color of perceptions, lenses and their gaze?  
Who knows the difference  
Between History and Faith?

What was the precipitating event?  
Who manipulates it?  
To what othering is it rendered?

## **POEMS TALKING TOGETHER**

At the interstices of pages  
Curving over with passing words-  
The lines, the lies of your lives,  
We, the sisters of perpetual mourning  
Celebrating doors closing,  
The charity of giving away  
All that was dear all the way  
Up until this morning.

A pebble in the river bed or in the gorge  
Farthest from the unearthing or illumination,  
I continuum, you dolphin, one of two.  
What if those things were here- happening?  
A range of melding, a cycling back to-  
Is that your best line my darling? Holding back  
Is? My inheritance of the written word, her me,  
Is owing to, dedicated to, her discovery, her I.

To be drenched in what does not dredge up  
In the I don't know what I don't know  
Except that girl, Anne and love and this word.  
What am I willing to give up? Moving  
Forward- Nothing. The musculo-  
Skeletal resonance, the psycho motor  
Activity of scratching paper to peel back  
The skin over bleached bone fragment- you.

An assertion of cultural identity- he had  
Potential. Where there is great hurt, Is  
There great gain? An over- correction of  
What? To what? To sway it till it swings really,  
What is your excuse actually? My beast  
Got away from me. He is righteous.  
And to think I almost didn't. Listen

This is the difference between being and becoming.  
The point of hubris- pointing to  
The moment of illumination- the  
Naming of the written word and the named-  
Who determines this democracy? This agreement?  
To see and to not see- the Holocaust  
Is not a joke. I take risks, knock things off,  
Call myself a humanist who did not teach you this  
Symmetry- don't name me, but to think my mind could construe it.

Listening with eyes wandering all over the face, ideology,  
My eyes listen all over your face, wandering, doing  
The heavy lifting. The creation of common ground,  
The mind of the room if you will.  
We are designing agreements, constructing  
The mind that is common to this room-  
I don't have to tame you. A whole  
Lot of obedience brought me to this place.

### **(He/r)o**

Mercy and the kindness of strangers,  
My wits about me, praying to the end,  
Brought me here, learned symbols of faith.

My pigeon, hand fed, trotted away toward  
The places my palms wont shelter extend,  
But grasp all parallels profoundly.

So when like goodness evil in small steps  
Might grow, the ground bare fades away, asphalt  
Melting, trees razed towers raise he...her...hero.

What makes him make her unremarkably,  
Mundane like someone's aunt's cat on the stoop,  
In far off village, flame thrown catches good.

The undeniable marriage- form to content,  
The humanity of the living line sparking in you  
I see the courage of meeting and judgment.

I would love to have you be my justicer,  
Call it hiding the obviously tumultuous uprising  
Windows, sills and all blown off, blindness follows all war.

# JANE BHANDARI

## THE POET SHOULD NEED NO PASSPORT

Usually I take  
The first book that comes to hand,  
What pleases me that day I read.  
Suddenly I saw that I  
Had practised a racist segregation:  
All the English poets  
Occupied one shelf.  
Those whose first tongue was other,  
Were set apart on another:  
But on the printed page  
The poet should need no passport.

I mixed them up,  
Wondering how to group them.  
Logic won: in strict alphabetical order  
Milton stands next to an African  
Whose name I cannot pronounce,  
I care not if he is black or white.  
West Indian jostles South-East Asian;  
The Tower of Babel has returned.  
We now need specific dictionaries  
To explain the many Englishes,  
Flavoured by locality,  
And translations across cultures,  
But on the printed page  
The poet should need no passport.



JANE BHANDARI

## TV WARS

Do you hear the tramp of armies,  
The hungry feet going to war?  
Do you hear the earth cry out  
Under the hammer of the bombs?  
At night, can you rest easy,  
Or are you haunted  
By those terrible TV pictures  
Of the dead and the dispossessed,  
The sick and the homeless,  
The dying and the hopeless,  
That gaze blankly into our homes,  
The blank stare  
Of a people so battered,  
They can only hear  
The tramp of armies,  
The hungry feet going to war,  
See greedy hands take away  
The last piece of mouldy bread.  
And we sit comfortably  
And watch the TV pictures  
Of the dead and the dispossessed,  
The hungry, the sick,  
The wounded and despairing,  
Scenes from another world.

You can turn it off:  
It's only another of those TV wars.



## **OUR ATOMIC SHORES**

That day a hot wind blew from the land,  
And carried desert dust, that stung our eyes  
And dried our lips. The sea lay flat and crinkled,  
Sand-papered by the gritty wind  
As brown desert dust blew out to sea.  
And other dusts were mixed  
Into that rural clay: fertilizer, and,  
From up the coast, a more deadly spray.

The winds of the chilly northern shores  
Where I was born, likewise stung, lashed us  
At every corner, filled our eyes with tiny grains  
From Iceland, the Hebrides, from Norway -  
Not atomic then, it was too soon, but now...  
Who has not heard of those frogs  
With eight legs, the foreboding echoes  
Of another land, another wind, another clime?

Growing up, with the aspiring plumes  
From cooling-towers lacing our horizons,  
We bathed on a beach already charmed  
By the Creator of eight-legged frogs,  
And years later learned of the subtle death  
That stalked all those that drank the milk  
From cows fed on grass seasoned with dust  
That could crumble bones, turn blood to water.

The gift of the Creator is fear:  
Those that have children watch them,  
Many will have none, afraid they may see  
Eight-limbed offspring upon our atomic beaches.  
For every Three Mile Island publicised,  
For every Chernobyl, there are unknown others,  
And as the poisoned dust blows across the land,  
The Creator remakes our children in its image.

## **TV WARS AGAIN**

The helicopter hovered like an angel  
Over the roofs of the town  
And dropped behind the buildings:  
We heard the engines cut out. Silence  
Descended slowly like a parachute  
Obliterating its arrival.  
O the bright lights of that angel  
Bearing food and doctors,  
Landing into the deadly silence.  
Then it soared away,  
Leaving its emissaries, like so many eggs  
Waiting to be hatched, on the ground.  
Guns stammered behind the buildings  
For a short while, question and answer.  
Silence again fell like a white parachute,  
Softly, softly obliterating the cries of the dying.  
Our TV showed pictures of dead soldiers.  
The angel did not return.

# ANNIE ZAIDI

## OUTSIDE THE SSP OFFICE, LUDHIANA

She says, "Nobody listens  
to the poor".

I nod, glance at  
her graven arm: Sakuntala.

Two gold bracelets. Two blue bangles.  
Two lobes, ripped. Two large gold hoops.  
Four daughters. Two sons.

Sakuntala says "One boy was killed  
And they roam free.  
The police have eaten their fill.  
Everybody eats."

Fluttering in the waiting room,  
the paper in her hands  
is a complaint.

*But I am not local press, I say.  
But I don't even speak Punjabi.*

The teenage daughter in black and blue  
turquoise tinsels, shrinks,  
blinks. Long scratch marks run  
down her arm.  
She looks away.

The waiting line grows thicker.  
The cooler works hard. I yawn.  
The dupatta slips off her hair.



ANNIE ZAIDI

Sakuntala says "Four daughters  
all of marriageable age.  
And the killers roam free.  
My boy was twenty-two."

*I wish I could help.  
It is no use telling me.  
We do not publish this sort of story.  
I'm not local press, I say.  
I'm from Delhi.*

Sakuntala snuffles, sets her dupatta right.  
"The newspapers also eat.  
Everybody eats.  
Yes, yes, I know. You  
are from Delhi."

Her complaint rolled tight  
in her fists, Sakuntala says  
"Nobody listens  
to the poor."

## **CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY OF IMMIGRANTS**

Like hard cheese, like frozen jelly  
some things don't spread easily.  
They have to be cut into tiny bits  
and placed, evenly,  
all along the edges  
like butter on winter bread.

### **Green, leafy vegetables**

Soak for a minute in hot water  
after you buy.  
Wash.  
Drain dry.  
Eat with bread if there is no rice.  
Eat raw if there is no oil.  
Eat with salt and mustard. It tastes nice.

Tear off the bitter stem.  
Tear off the blackened edge.  
Tear off misgiving and eat, as if under  
pledge.

In the threshing season, wait for dusk.  
Hide in the landlord's shorn field.  
Pick up grains buried under barren hills of  
husk.

Scrub the landlord's cow.  
Gather up her watery dung.  
Dry out the shit and piss and there will be  
grain.

Pluck your creeping hopes off a creeping  
tree.

Wash hands before offering the census-  
taker your wine-red tea.

Answer questions wisely. Words carry far.

Find a corner to scratch in. Plant a destiny.

Find a corner to stretch in after a noon  
meal.

Find a corner to scream in if a wound does  
not heal.

Keep the golden balance.

Drown the drum if it drums extreme.

Remember, at dawn, to fold away the  
dream.

And remember to eat well. Buy lots of  
greens.

Remember! Remember your  
green, leafy vegetables.

# ANJU MAKHIJA

## ELECTIONS, MAHARASHTRA

Where local artisans  
create wisdom from clay,  
sink deities into the river bed.

Where sugarcane juice froths,  
and men on string cots, ejaculate  
to a steady beat, salute

saffron flags, while cool  
under the umbrella Shivaji stands,  
overseeing dry grass, polythene bags.

A bird dives, plunges  
into the stone's eyes.  
Mikes blast *maha-aarties*, gags.

Idols don't bleed, perspire  
or utter words men can hear.  
Swords pop up the canopy;  
red tongues roar, tails wag.

## UMBILICAL CONNECTIONS

Wriggling like a tadpole,  
unafraid of the water is my young  
daughter. Yet, when owls hoot,  
frogs croak and bees buzz,  
her head goes into my lap.

Oh, my little mermaid,  
shall I tell you a secret?

Night is when your mother  
drowns herself in brandy.  
To granny I return and lullabys  
dripping of partition wounds,  
a childhood spent collecting  
pebbles in the river's womb.

From tiled pools, spacious homes,  
the ship carried grandpa  
to swampy streams, cluttered camps.  
How he hated the water  
in those cemented tanks !

Oh, my little one,  
ride the waves, breast currents  
as Sohini\* did on her *matka*.  
Sindhu's banks you may chance upon,  
discover the Indus,  
our forgotten past.

\*Sohini, the heroine of a  
well-known Sindhi folktale, braved turbulent  
currents to reach her goal.



## HER MOTHER'S TONGUE

Shrunken face,  
body stooped, frail,  
varicose veins, arthritic pain.  
Doddering down the road,  
clutching her grandchild's hand,  
bridging the zebra crossing,  
memories resurface...  
'Our ancestry lost', she moans,  
'cars and carriage, garden and bungalow,  
in Karachi and Lahore.  
Nothing belongs, nothing is ours.  
'*Asanjo sub kuch vayo*'.\*

Her granddaughter,  
hops up and down, recites  
Jack and Jill went up the hill,  
rolls her 'i's and 'o's,  
like the eyes of a potato,  
the convent education shows.

Mummy, I implore, teach her our language,  
*dohas* and *bhajans* of Latif and Sachal.  
Mother, dazed by the traffic's haze,  
and last night's party,  
where diamonds and drinks mingled,  
can never quite understand how  
Chatrapatti or some other tongue-twister,  
will stake claim, and on hearing Sindhi,  
the little one may bite her tongue.  
She already mimics our 'funny' language.

Head circling, mother groans:  
'our past was scattered  
with granny's ashes and now  
it will vanish with mine.'

\*We lost everything.

## MOULTING

The scales, dark, ribbed,  
perfectly formed.  
The snake had slithered through  
a hole in the cupboard  
made by a famished mouse;  
even as the spider entrapped UFOs,  
and fireflies shed light  
on a dull day when the rain falls  
as if it may sift the earth once and for all;  
as if no layers exist below,  
and a python may never lay a hundred  
eggs.

The Cielo, smooth, slithery,  
speeds across flyovers,  
breaks through cement, crunches bones,  
hutments collapse, entrails spill out;  
even as television screens look on,  
and tube lights illuminate highways  
on a day when the sun shines  
as if it may emblazon all things divine;  
as if *sadhus* never levitate,  
and *shamans* never bait vipers, kraits.

Eyes cloud, clear, headlights blurr,  
venom spurts, blinds, swallows its own  
kind.

# MENKA SHIVDASANI

## A LETTER TO VEENA

You should be here, Veena,  
making your music on this sugar-baked  
morning.

The din of the riots  
has turned to a cawing crow  
shaking its head  
on my window sill,  
and I'm hoping, I'm hoping  
its feathers will not turn to knives again.

You should be here, my friend.

The mists of Bhimashankar are far away  
from your Canadian winter and quicksilver  
sun.

But they crowd upon me on this sugar-  
baked day,  
these gods you left behind,  
and we did too, as some of us turned to  
rats  
and died on our beds  
to be picked upon by crows on iron sills.

You should be here, my friend.

But why should you be here?  
So we can pretend there is nothing to run  
away from  
as we scabble through skyscrapers that  
crumble on us.

Veena, the Piper has turned to a pipe  
and this music is turning us mad.

The sugar-baked sky is burnt and black in  
the sun.

How is the sun where you have run away  
to?

You shouldn't be here, my friend.  
We are making music through scattered  
nights,  
blind to the crows on our window sills -  
they merge with the dark except for their  
beady eyes.

And in the mornings, their claws are still,  
still around the iron bar.

Stay far away, Veena, stay far, it is wise.  
Do not be too close when the crow flies.

# ARUNDHATHI SUBRAMANIAM

## PRAYER

May things stay the way they are  
in the simplest place you know.

May the shuttered windows  
keep the air as cool as bottled jasmine.  
May you never forget to listen  
to the crumpled whisper of sheets  
that mould themselves to your sleeping  
form.

May the pillows always be silvered  
with cat-down and the muted percussion  
of a lover's breath.

May the murmur of the wall clock  
continue to decree that your providence  
run ten minutes slow.

May nothing be disturbed  
in the simplest place you know  
for it is here in the foetal hush  
that blueprints dissolve  
and poems begin,  
and faith spreads like the hum of  
crickets,  
faith in a time  
when maps shall fade,  
nostalgia cease  
and the vigil end.

## THE SAME QUESTIONS

Again and again the same questions, my love,  
those that confront us  
and vex nations,  
or so they claim -

how to disarm  
when we still hear  
the rattle of sabre,  
the hiss of tyre  
from the time I rode my red cycle  
all those summers ago  
in my grandmother's back-garden  
over darting currents of millipede,  
watching them,  
juicy, bulging, with purpose,  
flatten in moments  
into a few hectic streaks of slime,

how to disarm,  
how to choose  
mothwing over metal,  
underbelly over claw,  
how to reveal raw white nerve fibre  
even while the drowsing mind still clutches  
at carapace and fang,

how to believe  
this gift of inner wrist  
is going to make it just a little easier  
for a whale to sing again in a distant ocean  
or a grasshopper to dream  
in some sunwarmed lull of savannah.

# SHIVANI TIBREWALA

## PEACE CONCERT

On a dark silent stage  
In a lonely drone,  
Poems of peace  
On a red microphone.

Cobwebs on their palms  
Where the bullets went in,  
The children hold up their hands --  
Their faces so grim.

So civilized we are  
With all our know how  
So far we have come -  
Where do we go now?

Their windows all up,  
Cars are driving away.  
With guns in their hands,  
Kids are learning to pray...

Nobody knows  
Who they're bandaging next --  
The gutters are holding  
A strawberry fest.

Quietly now,  
Without making a sound.  
Only the children  
Lie still on the ground.



## 2011 YEAR OF GRACE

It's finally that time of year  
Full of plum cake and good cheer  
When 2010 must make some space  
For 2011 - the year of grace.

Let this year be a year of Grace

Let this year be a year  
When no child sheds a tear  
When no cities blow up  
When no children grow up  
Into men armed with heavy guns  
That give even grown up men the runs.

Let this year be a year  
Without terror and fear,  
With anger and hate  
Kept out at the gate,  
With no external wars to wage  
Emptied at last of all our rage.

Let this year be a year  
Of being wholly here,  
Battling only within -  
Not with kith and kin -  
Striving to be the best we can -  
Here's to every woman and man!

Let this year be a year  
Full of love and good cheer,  
Warmth starting to spread  
From our toes to our head,  
A year of peace, a year of grace,

A year of learning to share our space.

Let this year be a year  
Of watching over those who are near  
And yet letting them be -  
Allowing them to be free -  
Celebrating the marvel of love that is pure -  
That gives you wings and lets you soar.

Let this year be a year  
Of gentle cheer,  
Bringing smiles that never leave  
And comforting those who grieve,  
Making us kinder than before  
Leaving all bitterness at the door.

Let this year be a year  
When we learn how to steer  
Our souls on their paths  
Taking spiritual baths  
That wash off the dirt that builds up so fast,  
As we soar into the sky, free of our past.

Let this year be a year  
Of protecting colours that are dear,  
Gold that revives us  
Green that survives us,  
And the blue of the sheltering sky,  
Let's drown in rainbows as we fly...

# KRISHNAKUMAR SANKARAN

## THIS POEM IS A RIOT

You will not see it coming. This  
is what you must do. Hide your kids.  
Lock your locks. Bar your doors. Cock your guns.  
Unhood your hoodies. Learn not to flinch  
When glass shatters. Learn not to turn  
to cries for help. Keep your CCTV's  
Where all can see them.  
When it comes  
Shambling, throw jobs at it. Burn  
Your notes in its face. Send your women  
Out, breasts bared, tongues in heat. Roll  
Your eyes at rolling cameras. Call it beast  
When it swings your smoke bombs back at you.  
Call it criminal when it cracks your truncheons  
on its skull. when it reaches out with flaying arms  
leveling cities, call it brother.

## LIVING IN PEACE

That is no well. Step away. It is the open muzzle  
Of an ancient gun. That line of dew on the tips of grass,  
a border class enemies cannot cross. Do not seek shelter  
In that town by the river. Their beds are mines; their women,  
Caltrops. It is not for us, it is not for you.  
You are a coward now. These wars do not concern you.  
There are cups to be filled, files to be stacked,  
Phone lines buzzing like angry bees. Someone must push  
the paper. Someone must stare at flaking paint  
While trucks fall off highways, while seeds die on planting.  
Someone must do nothing.

It is alright, brother. I have long lived  
With the water in my blood, with the pale  
Opacity of riverwashed pebbles in my eyes,  
The languor of my floating limbs. It will take a while  
But you will learn to unclench those fists,  
To turn your eyes in to the fleshy dark of sockets,  
To slow the drumming of your heart. Brother,  
You will learn a sun that does not sink in blood;  
You will know the silence of a floating corpse.

# USHNISH SARKAR

## THE COMMON MAN

I am the common man of Narayan

I am the common man of Kutty, of Laxman...

I am the common man.....

Whose ultramodern watch reads silent digits,

But life still hears the unending ticks of the omnipresent repeater...

I am the common man.....

Whose inability to become the crouching tiger made him the hidden dragon....

Whose Woodland shoes only make him more grounded..

Whose attempts to be romantic with his partner only end up in a soliloquy,

I am the common man,

Who never tried and yet failed to be the revolution..

Who protests against fear, but fears to protest,

I am him,

The common man whose dreams are as unobtrusive as his reality....

"I am the common man

I am the COMMON MAN,

I am THE COMMON MAN",--

I pressed---

The voice remains numb,

Only tears run down.....

And then the glimmering city lights through the refracting teardrop

Pacify me,

Assure me,

..Reaffirm,

*"You are the common man..*

*You better be..."*

# SAURABH SHUKLA

## **Manner of a Murder**

History has taught us  
The casual nature of lives.  
History reveals  
In bloody accusations.  
History is open  
To misinterpretation.  
History is plain nonsense.  
Here, in my mind,  
I decide  
The end of your life.  
I, messiah/assassin.

## **Who killed the dreaming people?**

In the islands by the sea,  
Is a dream rectory.  
From far and beyond,  
Fed up of misery,  
Came to dream and see-  
Thousands on a song.  
Prayers were set free  
In a silent aplomb.  
In this land, extolled,  
Does bloodshed belong?  
In the city of gold,  
Who placed a bomb?

## **A do-it-yourself guide to making a bomb**

When a star studded people  
Become puppeteers;  
Banana republics travel  
Far east, very near.  
A string of slights?  
Spilled tears, no qualms?  
Years of plight?  
What makes, a bomb?  
Paranoia of east,  
In the humdrum of west,  
Dictators, cold war,  
Politics infests.  
Fear of each other?  
Revenge, a sweet song?  
Insult to one's mother?  
What makes, a bomb?  
A handful of dream-cutters,  
Copious amounts of wails,  
A kilo of life-shutters,  
Shocked silence prevails.  
In this war of brothers,  
Where does love belong?  
Every hope smothered,  
What makes, a bomb?

# ALKA SINGH

## **A New Beginning**

When was it easy though,  
For the little rose bud to unfold its first petal.  
It tore apart the strings within  
As the petal moved away to disentangle.  
But didn't it lead the way,  
for the rest to trust and bloom?  
To evolve as a rose in entirety,  
And lessen this world of gloom?  
When was it easy though,  
For the butterfly to flutter its wings first.  
The pupa held back every chord, raised every throe,  
As the butterfly struggled to let go.  
But didn't it soon dance around,  
Spreading joy, truly mesmerizing,  
For the little girl who had paradise found,  
Spellbound by its colour; in vain-aiming, chasing?  
When was it easy though,  
For the hatchling to break through the shell.  
The snugness and warmth within it withheld,  
Every effort to emerge, to propel.  
But didn't it start soaring above,  
To encircle the universe?  
Inspiring every path to freedom,  
Delighting, boosting hearts desiring to traverse?  
Let me hold your hand,  
As you take your first little step,  
To break barriers, move mountains,  
As bright horizons your soul pep.  
Let me lead you to the summit,  
From where the sun is peeping behind,  
Ready to shine in your radiant face,  
As you let life's beautiful moments unwind.  
Hold out your arms, embrace the beckoning,  
Behold, this is the herald of a new beginning.  
Lift up your hearts, drive the impelling,  
Rejoice, this is herald of a new beginning.



# ASIF SHAH

## Musings

if i have to ask God why  
do you think He would blame  
the vulture family?

but our spirits remain.  
does a candlelight burn  
away the loss?

do we have feet to march  
to where peace languishes  
locked, dusted in the files?

do we carry a voice  
which could be heard by those  
who are deaf to our shrieks?

there were times when we laughed  
and when we cried.  
we will cry and laugh again.

can't we stand up and refuse?  
can't we say peace?  
yes we can and we will.

# VLADIMIR MILENKOVIC

*Vladimir Milenkovic is from Serbia, and currently situated in Greece for a summer job. "The reason I wanted to send the poem is cause it was inspired by Vedas, which are a big part of India's heritage," he says. The poem has been originally written in English but he also has a version in Greek.*

## "MAN OF EARTH"

I am a dream of trees - lost child of water.  
I am the brother of summer gales - thought in motion.

I am the one who can feel the Sun inside,  
one who thinks 'nihil' yet loves all,  
one who whispers to moonlight  
and caresses the stars.

I will offer my heart to those who will love her  
I will offer my eyes to those who want to heal her  
Her - Our blue home, our gentle Earth.

And you, you are my brother and my sister  
My friend and my joy  
For on this world of wonders  
You too are with me  
Sharing this gem  
Living this miracle of being.  
You, a speck in the Milky Way  
A giant among the pebbles  
No greater than an ant  
No smaller than a star.

One body  
Vibrating with beauty  
One mind  
Soaring to infinity:

We are the Universe.

# PALLAVI JAYAKAR

## YEH HAI BAMBAI MERI JAAN

*Yeh hai Bambai meri jaan.* Here, dreams lie awake  
and by-pass the night .If I am lured by page three fame  
you vie for centre spreads. Come let's meet for old times' sake.

When the shape of your past maps out a face:  
A wandering tattoo, a smoldering kiss,  
a caress down a musty gully.  
*Yeh hai Bambai meri jaan.* Here dreams lie awake

Listening to the chawl gossip, in the queue for water.  
My hand in your hand beneath the newspaper,  
we'll tune in to each other, like last time.  
Come let's meet for old times' sake.

Let Radhakaki pin her ear to the crack on the wall,  
put two and two together, when the radio-mirchi brawls  
with her *hari naam*.  
*Yeh hai Bambai meri jaan.* Here dreams lie awake

With seasons *dhamaka* sale, and free exchange vouchers  
and spouses that recycle with yearly renewal offers,  
I am yet single and redeemable if you please  
Come let's meet for old times' sake.

Ahead in the marathon, when the 8.15 VT local pulls in  
I'll grab the corner seat, read your palm while others queue in.  
*Yeh hai Bambai meri jaan.* Here dreams lie awake  
Come let's meet for old times sake  
One cutting *chai* at our old *adda* before we part again.

# PUSHPA MOORJANI

## **Bomb Blast**

I and my Lord  
In silence we converse  
He listens to my words  
Softly spoken  
Each word a meaning  
of innermost feeling  
Lifting me up  
To an higher plane.  
The aura of his blessings  
Surrounds me  
Folding me  
Filling in all the voids  
I am at peace  
Curled up  
Soaked in  
Divine melodies  
Rejoicing  
Until

A Loud Blast!

Foolish Men!  
Why do you hate  
This silence so?

# DR GEETA U TEMBE

## **I Am Proud it's 'My Mumbai'**

I never thought.....  
Mumbai would ever be so helpless  
The life-line trailing slowly  
The water clogging  
The mobile, the telephones and electricity  
failing  
The people wading through  
The river of water  
Dirty, filthy and smelling  
The dream of "the making of a financial cap-  
ital something like Shanghai" breaking  
The entire city crumbling  
With the loss of dear ones dying  
It looked as though  
The Gods were annoyed  
And let the hell loose!  
Yet in the midst of all this turmoil there were  
people giving helping hands  
to absolute strangers  
One word dripping with warmth  
To give the courage  
To boost the morale  
Of thousands of people who walked  
Of thousands of people who offered shelter  
to stay overnight  
Food and water that was offered  
Boats that rescued hundreds  
To safer heights  
Slowly but surely  
Mumbai rolled back to normalcy  
Cause a million hands  
Came to help humanity  
This is my Mumbai  
I am proud its "my Mumbai".

# ... AND SOME POEMS IN INDIAN LANGUAGES

VINEET GARG (Hindi)

एक्शन रीप्ले।

कानफाड़ू शोर से,  
शाँती के वादे हुये,  
घोषणायें अनगिनत,  
पर सब के सब आधे हुये।

किसी ने कविता कही,  
कुछ बहस कर चल दिये,  
दो-चार की कर धर-पकड़,  
पुलिस ने हाथ मल दिये।

चीख कर बैठे गले,  
फिर खड़े जब हो गये,  
रीप्ले का बटन दबा,  
रिवाइन्ड सारे हो गये।

बम कहीं कोई फिर फटा,  
घर कहीं फिर ढह गये,  
तमाशाई अब भी बस,  
देखते ही रह गये।

कुत्ते भौंकते रहे,  
गधे रेंकते रहे,  
हम घरों में बैठकर,  
हाथ सेंकते रहे।

कुत्ते भौंकते रहे,  
गधे रेंकते रहे,  
हम घरों में बैठकर,  
हाथ सेंकते रहे।

बम कहीं कोई फट गया,  
घर कहीं कुछ ढह गये,  
तमाशाई बस खड़े,  
देखते ही रह गये।

कुछ तो बस घायल हुये,  
कुछ वहीं पे मर गये,  
करने वाले आये भी,  
और काम अपना कर गये।

पुलिस की आहट हुई,  
ज़िंदे सारे डर गये,  
मुर्दे और करते भी क्या,  
वहीं पर पसर गये।

लार्शें सब छाँटी गईं,  
शिनाख्त हुई, बाँटी गईं।  
ज़िंदे खुद होकर खड़े,  
पैबंद टॉक, चल पड़े।

लोगों ने हिसाब कर,  
ज़िंदे अपने गिन लिये,  
जिनके जो भी मर गये,  
कीमत लगा निकल लिये।

हलक की तोपें चलीं  
उंगलियाँ भी तन गईं,  
हर तरफ हरकत हुई,  
कमैटी कुछ बन गईं।



## दीन दीन दिवाळी

26 जून 1970 जन्मदाखल्यावर दिसतेय दिनांक  
म्हणजे तुम्ही नक्कीच जन्मले आहात  
आणि जिवंत वगैरे आहात म्हणूनच  
जन्मदाखला दाखवत मागत फिरतायत  
गृहकर्ज ,वाहनर्ज,नोकरी,छोकरी अजून बरेच काही....  
याचाच अर्थ जन्मलेल्या प्रत्येकालाच  
लागते घरदार नोकरी-बिराड दानापाणी  
अजून बऱ्याच गोष्टी  
म्हणजे फक्त तुमचं 'असणं'  
पुरेसं होणार नाहीय यापुढे तर  
कुठेतरी कागदावरच्या नोंदीनुसारच  
तुम्ही राहणार आहात जिवंत  
किवा घोषित केले जाणार आहात मृत  
कधी रचलं गेलं असेल हे षडयंत्र  
कुणी पसरवली असेल ही तारखांची दहशत जगण्यावर  
हजारोंना मारून जिंकल्याच्या आविर्भावात  
सुरू केलं असेल नवीन संवत्सर कुणी  
खरंतर कळपातल्या इतरांपेक्षा  
दाखवायला स्वतःचं वेगळेपण  
कोणत्यातरी तारखेला  
कुणीतरी मारतो कुणाला  
कुणी कुणासाठी तरी होतो शहिद  
कुणी मुळातच अस्तित्वात असलेल्या  
गोष्टींचा लावतो शोध  
कुणी स्वतःची लावण्यासाठी सोय  
गोळा करतात वेगवेगळ्या तारखां  
अन् पसरवतात दहशत तारखांची  
वेगवेगळ्या 'दिनांची'  
मग पोट भरण्यासाठी  
अयोनिबंधवांच्याही मनवतो आम्ही  
जयंत्या अन् पुण्यतिथ्या  
प्रकटदिन व निर्वाणदिन बघून  
तर काहींच्या दोनदोन-तीनतीन

जयंत्या मनवल्या जातात शासकिय-निमशासकिय  
वेगवेगळ्या स्तरांवर  
पण... पण ज्यांचे नोंदवलेच जात नाही  
जन्मदिनांकही व मृत्यूदिनांकही  
त्यांच काय करायचं  
म्हणजे कालच फुटपाथवर जन्मला एक भिकारी  
अन् त्याच्या शेजारीच दुसरा भिकारी मेला  
त्यांची कुठेच घेतली गेली नाही नोंद  
म्हणजे कॅलेंडर त्यांच्या साठी नसतच  
हे मान्य करावच लागेल आपल्याला  
अन् समजा आलीच त्सुनामी तर  
माझ्यासकट वाहून जाईल  
माझा जन्मदाखला अन् कुणा महात्म्याचा पुतळाही  
मग महात्म्याची जयंती अन् पुण्यतीथीपण  
होणार नाही साजरी  
अन् जर असं सारं असेल तर  
कशाला मिळवायचा जन्मदाखला  
कशाला मिळवायचं बुकर, नोबेल किंवा ज्ञानपीठ  
आकड्यांच्या गणितानुसार पुस्तकांची पानं मोजणाऱ्यांच्या कमिट्यांकडून  
कशाला प्रयत्न करायचा  
मोठ्ठं व्हायचा आपापल्या डबक्यांमध्ये  
जिथे खेचताहेत सगळेच एकमेकांचे पाय  
खरं तर त्सुनामी मध्ये राहणारच नसतात डबकी  
हेच लक्षात येत नाही कुणाच्या  
की आजूबाजूला कुणाचाच विश्वास दिसत नाहीये  
'त्सुनामी' असते म्हणून  
अन् साजरे करताहेत सारे  
दीन दीन दिवाळी - दिवाळखोर दिनांची - दीनांची!

## शांततेच्या नीरव आवाजाला

फारच आश्चर्य वाटतं  
पटकन रिअॅक्ट न होणाऱ्यांचं

कशी राहू शकतात माणसं थंड  
की झालेली असतात परिस्थितीचे टक्केटोणपे खात बथ्थड ?  
की झालेला असतो संसर्ग त्यांना की प्रोफेशनलचा ?

काहीच कळत नाही.  
तोंडाने नाही तर निदान डोळ्यांनी बोलल्याशिवाय  
आपलं मात्र भागत नाही !  
आजूबाजूच्या कोणत्याही गोष्टीवर  
निदान मनातल्या मनात तरी  
एक्सपर्ट कमेंट नोंदवल्याशिवाय राहवत नाही  
सतत चालू असतो अखंड वाद-संवाद अखिल विश्वाशी !  
भांडेवालीपासून थेट ईश्वरापर्यंत

अगदी सुटत नाही त्यातून  
स्वतःच्याच चुकीनं टोकली गेलेली भिंत  
डोळ्यांसारखे झाकता येत नाहीत कान ट्रेनमध्ये  
अन् चर्चगेटपासून ऐकत राहाव्या लागतात  
गुडीगुडी बकवास गप्पा चकल्यांच्या आवाजात  
गप्पावाली नंबर वन काढते पाकीट चकलीचं  
अन् भरवते प्रेमानं दुसरीला हलकेच तिसरीला डोळ्या मारत  
माहोम येताच, उतरताच गप्पावाली नंबर वन  
गप्पावाली नंबर टू काढते सामोशाचं पाकीट

अन् खाऊ लागतात सामोसे एकमेकांना डोळ्या मारून  
त्यावेळी वाटतं सणकून खेचावी साखळी  
अन् धावत जाऊन सांगावीशी वाटते  
गप्पावाली नंबर वनची फसवणूक  
पण लगेच आठवतो तिचाही डोळ्या मारतानाचा भंपकपणा  
अन् मग तीव्रतेने वाटतं फाडावेत टराटरा मुखवटे आजूबाजूचे  
पुसावा दांभिक मेकअप  
खरवडावी त्वचा चेहऱ्यावरची  
अन् उघडावी डोळ्यांवरची पट्टी हिंदी सिनेमातल्यासारखी !

साठवत राहावेत नजरेत  
नुकत्याच जन्मलेल्या बाळाच्या नजरेतले भाव  
त्याचं निरागस हसणं  
प्रत्येक गोष्टीवर त्याचं निरागस रिअॅक्ट होणं  
पण नेमकं काय घडतं काही कळत नाही  
कुठे हरवून जातं हे मनमोकळं हसणं ?

निखळपणे स्वतःभोवती मनसोक्त गिरक्या घेणं ?

का काळाच्या ओघात प्रत्येकाला फारच वाटतं सोयीचं  
चेहऱ्यावर मुखवटा चढवणं !

सतत मख्ख राहून कशा-कशावरही रिअॅक्ट न होता  
महात्म्यांचा मॅच्युअर्डपणा मिरवणं !

कुठेतरी वाचलं होतं म्हणे माणूस मनानं फारच समृद्ध झाला  
त्याच्या ज्ञानाचा घडा भरला

## इज इट इन युवर डीएनए ।४२

की अनामिक शांतता पसरते म्हणे अंतर्बाह्य  
पण जरी दिसत असेल असीम शांतता  
येशू, बुद्ध किंवा सगळ्याच महात्म्यांच्या चेहऱ्यावर  
तरी मला हेही विसरता येत नाही की  
ही माणसं एवढं काही बडबडून शांत झाली आहेत की  
त्यानंतरही हजारो वर्षे बडबडत आहेत अनेकांच्या मुखांतून

खरंखुरं रिअॅक्ट न होता  
माणसं दिसतात यांत्रिक पोपटपंची करताना  
मग कुठे उरते असीम शांतता ?

की मौन घनगंभीर शांतता असं नसतंच काही ?

अन् नेति नेति म्हणत धोपटत राहतो आपण  
शांततेच्याच नीरव आवाजाला !



# The Co-ordinators

## ANJU MAKHIJA

Anju Makhija is a poet, playwright, translator and free-lance writer. She has a M.A in Communications from Concordia University, Montreal, Canada and has worked in the fields of education, training and television. Her plays include *If Wishes Were Horses*, *The Last Train* (shortlisted for the BBC World Playwrighting Award '99), *Now She says She is God*, *Cold Gold*, *Meeting with Lord Yama* and *Total Slammer Masala* with European Director, Michael Laub. Her other works include, *All Together* a multi-media production that won an award at The National Film Festival, California ('85) and a book of poems *View From The Web*. She has also co-edited an anthology of partition poetry entitled *Freedom and Fissures* and translated the verse of the 16th century sufi mystic, Shah Abdul Latif (*Seeking the Beloved*, Katha).

She is the recipient of the commendation prize ('93) and first prize ('94) in The All India Poetry Competition organized by the British Council and the Poetry Society of India. She also won the second prize in The BBC World Poetry Competition ('02). Makhija has co-edited a three-volume series of plays by Indo-English Playwrights and an anthology of women's poetry, *We Speak in Changing Languages*. Her new book of poems, *Pickling Season* will be out shortly.

She is actively involved in the literary milieu and was on the English Advisory Board of Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. ('03 to '08) Currently, she co-organizes the activities of Culture Beat, Press Club, Mumbai and writes a column for *Confluence*, UK.



## MENKA SHIVDASANI

Menka Shivdasani, a Mumbai-based poet and journalist, has two collections of poetry, *Nirvana at Ten Rupees* (XAL-Praxis, 1990) and *Stet* (Sampark, 2003), which was recently reprinted under the imprint of Sound and Picture Archives of Women (SPARROW). Menka is also co-translator of *Freedom and Fissures*, an anthology of Sindhi Partition poetry, published by the Sahitya Akademi in 1998, and subsequently republished by the Akademi in Marathi and Gujarati translation. She has recently edited an anthology of women's writing, which forms part of a series being brought out by SPARROW. In 1986, she co-founded the Poetry Circle in Mumbai.

Menka's poems have appeared in several publications, both in India and in other countries. These include *Poetry Review* (London), *Poetry Wales*, *Fulcrum* (USA), *Many Mountains Moving* (USA), *ARC* (Canada), and *Literature Alive* (*New Writing from India and Britain*). Her work has also appeared in numerous anthologies, including *An Anthology of New Indian English Poetry* (Rupa and Co.) *Confronting Love* (Penguin India) and the *Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets*. She has also been featured in collections such as *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English* (Sahitya Akademi) and in [www.museindia.com](http://www.museindia.com), a literary e-journal from Hyderabad.

