

In the City of Sanctuary

Nita Mishra

...it was not with rods, iron bars
or anything of the likes of that
it wasn't in lonely stretches
in a world labelled as violent
conflict ridden society
or where parts of women are mutilated
or life taken when conceived

It was not violent
't was not what you think it would be like

He approached
he approached with wide-eyed innocence
blue
blue like the bluest the skies can get
reflecting in his glass eye
the depth of the blue seas
in the other
her brown eyes absorbed
the perennial waters of his blues

His words
wrapped her in an embrace
of warmth
of pashmina Shimla shawls
of the afternoon Delhi winter sun

It was not with pure physical violence
She would have known
what to do then,

It was not with tricks
nor was it an act of seduction under
the influence of alcohol

It was not that she was cornered in a
room, unlit streets,
the Delhi Metro, *Dilli* buses, or the trains
it was not a poor, uneducated
unemployed, colored youth

nor was it an uncle, a cousin, a servant, or
a madman

It was with words
Words
the city of sanctuary
identifies with
equality, justice, rights, security,
the climate, well-being, dignity,
livelihoods, development

Words that lift temporarily
the white man's burden

The day came
it happened
it happened with
with soft gentle words

The day came
it happened
time and again
the rape of her trust
her surrender
In the city of sanctuary

In rooms where
ideas of justice are shaped
On the streets where
the white man marches
making hoarse his voice
For the rights of the vulnerable
in what he labels
poor, insecure, underdeveloped
continents

He teaches...
In the city of sanctuary

Nita Mishra

I always wrote. I wrote field reports, research papers, academic articles, and (what I thought was) unreadable poetry in my private journals. In Dublin, as a bored mother and a restless housewife, in 2008-2009, I found myself persuading the Writeaway Dundrum group of writers to let me join them. Soon I found myself challenged, enjoyed their kind feedback as well as the shock value of some of my writings, and wrote more. Never before had I been so encouraged as a writer. The plan was to write the novel. But a lack of patience found me writing more and more in poetry-prose format. I found it faster, easier and punchier. Some of my poems were written within minutes in reaction to people's comments on me. It was therapeutic to do so. It was as if ink spilled through my index finger (tip) non-stop, and painted words. Although I had already published in two anthologies, I discovered, quite by accident, that my poem was discussed in an academic book. I read what the author had to say about it, and kept pinching myself – how did she know this is what I meant? I also realised, my poems were not mere rants anymore. There were intelligent people attaching intelligent meanings to them! I was also enrolled for a PhD thesis on rights at UCC at the same time, which I submitted recently. An academic manifesto which challenged my Hinglish-English. I do acknowledge now that my training in English was perhaps basic, compared to some of you here. The dream, however, is to write a ballad on 40 years of experience from a women's rights perspective! Finally, acknowledging the value of every single experience, I would say that what India endowed me with, manifested in Dublin. For me, the personal was always political, and my poems reflect the same.

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