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DESIGN STATEMENT

The print issues of *TAB: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics* are special editions, each published at the beginning of the calendar year. These issues reflect the mission of Tabula Poetica: The Center for Poetry at Chapman University to create an environment that celebrates poetry in various forms and venues. The annual print issue engages the reader with poetry as a material object and asks that the reader negotiate between image and text. The design of this issue does not assume a traditional role of quietly framing content; instead, design actively shapes the reading of the entire page. The special print editions of *TAB* will continue to experiment and explore the intersections between form and content, object and space, and reader and reading.

The monthly 2014 electronic issues pick up elements from the January 2014 print issue, which embodies an expression of time and space. From beginning of the journal, each page employs atmospheric and, at times, abstract photography of the sky taken at different times of the day. Text has been placed within various objects specifically chosen to interact with light. These objects include water, glass, blinds, wrinkled paper, and windows. The sequence of time is reflected in the progression of the journal, beginning with morning light and moving to night. Experimentation with space is conveyed through the different voices of the authors included in these issues. The print issue's spine is unorthodox, creating unexpected vertical and horizontal movement in the reading experience. The physicality of the object forces the reader to acknowledge its presence. The *life* of this interactivity becomes an individual journey of pages unwilling to be turned passively. The space in this issue challenges readers to take in more than merely text and image but also a full-body experience of holding and disorientation.

Monthly electronic issues follow each annual printed issue. Using these differing formats—print and digital—allows experimentation with design and materiality in a time when print and electronic dissemination coexist. *TAB* will not force either format to adapt to the other. The reading experience in virtual spaces is different than that of a printed journal. The electronic issues are shaped by Open Journal Systems, a federally funded, open-access system from the Public Knowledge Project designed to serve the public good globally. While the electronic files can be printed, each electronic issue will be formatted for ease of reading on the screen. Decisions about page size, typography, and composition are driven by the online reading experience, rather than to mimic a print version. *TAB* also makes use of the audio/video possibilities of digital dissemination.

T O S H I A K I K O M U R A



READ OR DREAM

Idling, as though at a traffic light,
thoughts keep rumbling. At night
the refrigerator hums as loudly as
lawn-mowers on Sundays: restless
imagination colors the pitch-black room
into persistence of memory. When I'm
sure that I might not sleep till late
tonight, I sit upright
on the bed, reach for the bedside-stands
for a romance
(not harlequin, more like Ovid)
and, under the penlight, read:
alphabets turn the obstinate memory
into a repository,
like labels, like an
archival reorganization schematized in
private spaces. I begin
to hear past voices, sins
of my ears: I listen
to recollect what they say, or mean
to say, and in their afterlives,
I live—
I dream I am an Orpheus,
singing to revive the inanimate. Those
historical voices
merge with mine: a metamorphosis

exhaustive enough to alter even
the cellular nuclei—a genuine
rewriting. In self-replication and synthesis,
I dream again of becoming an Orpheus.

THE REST ROOM, THE LOOP OF IMAGE

The rows of mirrors facing one another
reflected back
itself, and a self washing hands. Kaleidoscopic
in its vertiginous flare

of sanitary fluorescents,
I, for a moment, looked like a saddened
salamander trapped under a stone
in its thick membranous skin,

and, unable to move away,
thought of the stone-house in the field of
lonely trees, a windowless one that imbues
the interior with a night in midday.

H A R I M . G .



H . S . K O M A L E S H A



In an age when fundamentalist ideologies are setting the tone for all discourses and defining the contours of the public and private lives of individuals, an urgent need arises to engage ourselves with these dangerous ideologies and explore ways of finding viable alternatives to them. Despite their ideological differences, basically all fundamentalist voices propagate an essentialized notion of reality, dismissing and demolishing all other voices that are not in tune with their version. This way of thought fosters a utopian dream for a society based on immutable principles. At this juncture, an ideology translates into concrete political actions that include not only unleashing propaganda against the people who are considered as the *other*, but also adopting violence as a means of political confrontation. Moreover, this is a reciprocal process. While the intellectual naivety of fundamentalists results in political terrorism, their political vandalism leads to intellectual stifling, by colonizing the space for intellectual debate. The controversial decision by Penguin to revoke and pulp all the copies of Wendy Doniger's book, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, following the reservations raised against it by a Hindu fundamentalist organization, is the latest example of this dangerous trend. Thus the alternatives to fundamentalist ideologies have to be sought not by physical encounter with the fundamentalists but by nurturing those sources of survival that have nourished humankind since time immemorial and that characterize the human.

At precisely this critical juncture, poetry can make positive interventions by transforming the very terrain of terror through rich imagination that celebrates plurality and diversity; upholding the *multi* as against the *mono* of fundamentalism, poetry acts as a perfect antidote to the reductive mechanisms of fundamentalist ideologies. While fundamentalism gives a uni-dimensional narration of reality, poetry does the opposite by celebrating plurality and defying order. When fundamentalism operates on a reductive principle by pinning down the diversity of life to narrow definitions and binaries, poetry thrives on an expansive principle by embracing life in all its variety and imperfections. Through the medium of language and emotion, poetry emerges as a creative safeguard by turning the terror away from waging war against others to waging war against oneself; by shifting the battleground away from landscape to mindscape, poetry indeed acts as a powerful antithesis to all fundamentalist discourses. This has been the universal role of poetry as Rukmini Bhaya Nair says in her book, *Poetry in a Time of Terror: Essays in the Postcolonial Preternatural*:

By engendering multiple languages, genres, and discourses that ensure a stubbornly indelible space for interpretive license, literature teaches us again and again, generation by generation, to delight in our imaginative capabilities and thereby eschew self-hatred and despair. This is the function that is performed by all poetry- ranging from mother's lullaby across cultures (Hush-a-bye-baby, *Chanda mama dur ke*), to the most arcane prose poetry (James Joyce, John Ashbery, Junot Diaz), to mystic supplications (Baul, Sufi, Dervish). (vii-viii)

In *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*, Almond et al. define fundamentalism as "a discernible pattern of religious militance by which self-styled 'true believers' attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors" (17). Despite their difference in beliefs, the fundamentalists of any religion have a monolithic conception of history, often couched in a mythical past and a rigid conception of right and wrong. The sacred scriptures and rituals become dangerous

when they are fetishized, politicized, and monopolized to impose a unilateral conception of religion. Great poetry can counter the vicious politics of fundamentalist discourse, for the very reason that it thrives on sensitizing language and life, as opposed to the fundamentalist endeavor of purging reality of all ambiguities and so-called impurities. If fundamentalism limits the limitless by tying God to a particular post such as place, class, color, and sect, poetry does the opposite; it infinitizes the finite by extending the human capacity to hear, see, and feel that which exists outside oneself. Thus poetry champions the cause of human freedom from all fetters and fetishes. Great poetry invariably evoke a sense of sacred that involves understanding rather than judgment, compassion not punishment, penitence not guilt, forgiveness not hatred. In this context, we can locate the significance of Arun Kolatkar's *Sarpa Satra*.

Sarpa Satra retells the opening story of the *Mahabharata*, the snake sacrifice conducted by Janamejaya. Although, the *Mahabharata* has been an inspiration for many great works in Modern Indian literature, Kolatkar's poem stands out among them for the way the poet uses the epic to bring out the issues that are specific to our times. The snake sacrifice done to exterminate the entire species of *Nagas* becomes an allegory of the communal massacres of our times. The fact that the poet uses a sacred text like the *Mahabharata* which is used by the Hindu fundamentalists in India for furthering their communal agenda, makes the poem all the more relevant; Kolatkar is confronting the discourse of communal hatred by making an alternative reading of the epic, challenging the version of the fundamentalists. But the scope of the poem is not limited to the communal polarization in Indian politics; rather, the poem deems violence of any kind as a violation of the laws of nature, which give the space for all living beings to co-exist in harmony. *Sarpa Satra* is a great poem not only for its content, but also for the way the poet creates an aesthetic that can effortlessly carry his message to the reader. By speaking in modern idiom and through the use of present tense, the poet makes it absolutely clear that his main concern is with his own times rather than a mythical past.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are more than literary works. They have occupied a huge space in the collective psyche of the Indian masses and have permeated all kinds of discourse in this country for many centuries. Hence, there is no wonder that Indian writers often tend to bring in characters and anecdotes from them. Any retelling of an epic becomes meaningful only when it moves the already familiar story into an untrodden plane by bringing in a new dimension. Kolatkar displays a unique creative vigor in making the epic talk about the predicaments of contemporary world.

Sarpa Satra is quite different from the other English poems of Kolatkar. Although his other poems too have political undertones, they are, unlike this poem, not as candid and overt in their treatment of contemporary politics of our times. Gorwri Ramnarayan, who wrote a play titled *Sarpa Sutra* (Serpent Speak) based on Kolatkar's poem, has rightly pointed out that the retelling of the myth becomes an 'action replay' of the violence that happened in the recent past and in our times:

This Slaughterhouse ritual from the *Mahabharata* becomes an action replay of wholesale decimations, by generations, through the centuries. Intellectuals, artists, sages and statesmen relish the stench of burning flesh, as writhing snakes fall into the flames, still clutching at wives and children. The myth becomes a dim pentimento, looming under a series of visuals painted one over the other. We sense the annihilation of entire races across the continents, and those witnessed in our times in Nazi Germany, Hiroshima, Palestine, Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq...

Throughout the poem, Kolatkar uses words that are anachronistic; although he is narrating a story that is set in an entirely different period, the poet clearly indicates, by employing the modern idiom, that he is talking about our times too. The fact that the poet uses a story from *The Mahabharata* to talk about our times makes the poem all the more relevant since it is a text that the religious fundamentalists appropriate and distort for vicious political benefit. Kolatkar takes them on their own turf by using the same epic as a tool to expose the absurdity of the politics of hatred and revenge. As Bruce King points out, “In modernizing the language and tones of the Mahabharata, he is also offering a liberal or common sense revisioning of what in India has become a text used to justify the violence of reactionary Hinduism (King, “2004: Ezekiel, Moraes, Kolatkar” 215). *Sarpa Satra* retells the opening story of the *Mahabharata*, the snake sacrifice conducted by Janamejaya. The *Mahabharata* is narrated for the first time by Vaishampanaya, one of Vyasa’s (the author of the epic) disciples, during a snake sacrifice conducted by Janamejaya with the motive of exterminating the entire species of snakes. Janamejaya is the great grandson of Arjuna, the great warrior of Pandava dynasty. He comes to know at a later stage in his life that his father was murdered by Takshaka, a snake, which lost its family when Arjuna and Krishna torched the Khandava forest; hence, he decides to take revenge for that by decimating the entire species of *nagas* from the planet. For this purpose, he conducts a *Yajna*, which will bring all the snakes into a pit of fire.

Kolatkar gives a twist to this familiar tale by contrasting Janamejaya’s version with that of Jaratkaru, a snake woman, Takshaka’s sister. It is interesting to note that the poet retells the story through a subaltern character. By making such a choice, he strategically locates himself on the other side of the political divide, in opposition to the center of power. In fact, many of the poems in his other collections are also from women’s points of view. His most famous Marathi collection, *Bhijki Vahi* (Tear-stained Notebook), comprises twenty-five poems based on the painful lives of twenty-five women. We can find, in this collection, women who are quite different in every respect: mythical characters such as Jaratkaru, Kannaki, and Laila; historical personalities such as Virgin Mary, Hypatia of Alexandria; a famous writer like Susan Sontag; and even his own sister. What is common to all these women is the utmost pain that they have to undergo in their lives. *Sarpa Satra* is basically a transcreation of the poem on Jaratkaru in *Bhijki Vahi*. Foregrounding the voice of a woman who is plagued with trauma and pain because of the violence inflicted on her race, Kolatkar brings out the malevolence of racial persecution.

The absurdity of Janamejaya’s project is exposed at the very outset. Janamejaya came to know about the way his father died and the reason behind it much later in life and hence it is a tale handed over to him by his relatives. Based on such a vague narrative, he determines to set the record straight, without giving even a second thought, and that too in a ruthless manner: “My vengeance will be terrible/ I will not rest/ until I have exterminated them all.” (“Sarpa Satra” 187, lines 52-54) Thus for the mistake of one, he takes upon himself the task of wiping an entire species out of the planet. On the other hand, Jaratkaru’s narrative is humane and attentive to the details. She narrates the entire story to her son, Astika, detailing each and every event. The contrast between these two narratives tells us that the perpetrators of violence and their victims are bound to contradict each other. Jaratkaru, unlike Janamejaya, speaks of the pain that many had to suffer during the series of events that is eventually heading towards the destruction of her species. Since she has gone through many traumas because of the mindless violence of others, she can only have contempt for Janamejaya’s absurd plan:

You'd naturally assume first
that the man was joking.
And after you realize he's not,

that he's completely serious,
you may look at him closely, perhaps,
trying to remember the name of a good shrink.

Or tell him about your plan
to cleanse the earth of all ants
because one bit your mum. ("Sarpa Satra" 188, 72-81)

The problem here is not just that he is crazy, but also the fact that he happens to be the king who rules a large country.
When powerful people go crazy, they can cause great damage.

Those who have to stop this from happening are the wise counselors who are supposed to guide the king. But they turn out to be just selfish and mean, only interested in reaping benefits out of the king's stupid idea:

All the great rishis and maharishis,
so-called
great thinkers, all

the finest minds of our age,
even people like
Atreya, Uddalaka, Shvetaketu
—people who we thought of
until, oh, the day before yesterday
as living volcanoes of conscience
[...]
seem strangely silent
and worried about just one thing:
how to wangle a job for themselves
as officiating priests. ("Sarpa Satra" 190, 148-166)

The situation is very much like the contemporary Indian politics steeped in communalism. Political organizations that propagate hatred and resort to violence have a narrative of the past which paints their community as the victim. They need to gather as much intellectual support as possible to corroborate their version of history and thus to keep their political agenda relevant. Hence they try to get intellectual back-up for their perverted ideology by roping in intellectuals. Intellectuals, on the other hand, make it an opportunity to grab fame, power, and money.

Jaratkaru laments that even the great Vyasa, too, did not interfere and was just a spectator to this “theatre of the macabre” (“Sarpa Satra” 203, 560). Instead, he took it as a “not-to-be-missed opportunity to unleash his self-indulgent epic on an unsuspecting world” (“Sarpa Satra” 192, 196-197). The difference in the authorial stance that Kolatkar takes is evident in the narration of the story. Detailing the holocaust very minutely, Kolatkar opts for an emotive style of narration as opposed to the neutral, detached narration of Vyasa. With the profuse use of present tense, the poet brings an immediacy to the situation. The urgency of the troublesome times in which we live might have prompted the poet to emphatically assert his politics. Being a sensitive poet, Kolatkar could sense the pain of the helpless that is concealed by the abstract neutral narratives. As Laetitia Zecchini contends, Jaratkaru’s narrative of the snake sacrifice, on the other hand, details the pain of the victims:

If men, women, and children, identities and singularities, *specific* sufferings and histories are always subsumed or concealed behind the systematic endeavors of totalitarianisms that breed mass murders, Jaratkaru anchors the victims in a distinctive biography. She particularizes and singularizes pain. (Zecchini 141)

Jaratkaru is equally contemptuous of Takshaka, her brother, who is hiding to save his skin, leaving his entire species to pay the price for the crime he committed:

And I certainly not approve
of the way he’s hiding now
behind Indra’s throne to save his skin,

hoping his powerful friend
will help him escape the consequences
of an act we’re now paying for.

It only shows what cowards
all terrorist are
behind their snarling ferocious masks. (193, 243-252)

Kolatkar hits upon the psychological make-up of all terrorists who are quite the same in their basic nature, despite ideological differences. A huge gap exists between their words and their deeds. If Janamejaya decides to take revenge on Takshaka for killing his father, Takshaka, too, had a reason to commit that murder. Jaratkaru tells her son about the burning of Khandava forest, an atrocity which took away Takshaka’s family. She wants Astika to know the truth “before venerable Vyasa gives/his own spin/to the whole of human history” (“Sarpa Satra” 194, 267-269). Khandava was a large rain forest immensely rich in flora and fauna, “Gods own laboratory on earth / where life had been allowed to express itself / with complete abandon” (“Sarpa Satra” 196, 319-320). It was home to “five thousand different kinds of butterflies alone” and “a golden squirrel found nowhere else” (“Sarpa Satra” 196, 321-324); it contained many medicinal plants which were not found anywhere else. This great wealth of nature was burnt to ashes by Arjuna and Krishna by using their divine weapons. Jaratkaru wonders what prompted them to go for such an atrocious act: “Why did they do it? / Who knows! / Just for kicks,

may be.” (“Sarpa Satra” 197, 355-357) Kolatkar describes the burning of Khandava forest in a very poignant manner. Not only animals, birds, and plants were destroyed, but people as well:

children of the forest
who had lived there happily for generations,
since time began.

They’ve gone without a trace.
With their language
that sounded like the burbling a brook,

their songs that sounded like the twitterings of birds,
and the secrets of their shamans
who could cure any sickness

by casting spells with their special flutes
made from the hollow
wingbones of red-crested cranes. (“Sarpa Satra” 196, 353-364)

Takshaka, who was the care taker of the forest, was not around when this tragedy happened. He claims that he had gone for “having a dip in the holy Saraswati river to fulfill a vow.” But Jaratkaru suspects that he spent the night “in the arms of a Puluva girl he was involved with at the time.” What matters is “he was not where he was needed most.” And when he came to his sister after killing Parikshit, “to brag about what a mighty blow he had struck in the name of justice” Arjuna’s grandson, she could not feel any admiration for him, but was only “horrified at what he has done” (“Sarpa Satra” 199, 441-450). She also points out the ridiculous nature of Takshaka’s revenge. Instead of taking revenge on Arjuna who lived long enough, Takshaka killed his grandson after many years. Takshaka’s revenge bears close resemblance to the religious extremists of our times. They also do not find any absurdity in punishing the present generation for the crimes supposed to be done by their ancestors.

Jaratkaru calls Janamejeya’s project a “grotesque parody of the institution of yajna” (“Sarpa Satra” 203, 548). It is indeed a violation of the purity of the very institution of yajna. Yajna, is meant to be performed with a pure mind for the benefit of all living beings. It should not be used as a means to harm anybody. Jaratkaru is sure that gods cannot approve of what the king is doing. It is the worst insult to Agni, the sacred sacrificial fire, whose “pleasant duty” is to be a mediator between gods and human beings by carrying prayers offered by the latter to the former; but here he is given the job of “a common assassin, butcher, or a mass murderer,” using him to “exterminate an entire species systematically” (“Sarpa Satra” 202, 539-542). Religious rituals become meaningful only when it is performed with selfless devotion. Kolatkar, much like the Bhakti poets whom he admired a lot, believes that the affection and kindness that one feels for his or her fellow beings is the root of real religion. He might have completely agreed with Basava, the twelfth-century Kannada saint-poet who categorically

denied the possibility of any authentic religious faith without love and kindness:

Can there be faith
Without loving kindness, O Brother?
There must be loving kindness
For every living creature, O Brother.

Loving kindness

Is the root of all faith, O Brother. (untitled, *I Keep Vigil of Rudra* 129, 1-6)

Kolatkár also touches upon nationalism, the most sacred notion of contemporary India, a discourse that is used to justify any violence and which demands obeisance from all the citizens. Most often, it is used as a ploy to cover up the real issues that a society is facing. Jaratkaru says the “sickening smell of snake flesh” (“*Sarpa Satra*” 204, 581) has pervaded the air so much that to think of having fresh air has become anti-national. When like the sickening smell of snake flesh, we get used to violence and injustice carried out in the name of nationalism; anyone who talks about justice, freedom, and peace runs the risk of getting branded an anti-national. Nationalism has become a dangerous notion in current times. It is used by both the state and fundamentalists to camouflage systemic injustice. But in reality, the discourse of nationalism, when carried out with vested interests, results in nothing other than genocides. Arundhati Roy puts it pithily: “Nationalism of one kind or another was the cause of most of the genocide of the twentieth century. Flags are bits of colored cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people’s brains and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead” (Roy 15).

Wars, be it in the name of religion or nation, endanger the entire planet. In the mythic world of the *Mahabharata*, the earth is placed on the hood of a snake, Adishesha. If Janamejaya wants to exterminate all snakes, then he’ll have to kill Shesha too. But that will be the end of the planet itself, not just of a species. Either the King or his advisors, the so-called saints, do not have the common sense to understand consequence of the yajna they are conducting. The war-mongering cries of the rulers of the modern world are equally ridiculous because it is a war that, once begun, cannot be stopped at will. Already, many countries have enough arsenals to destroy the planet many times over. Without taking the impending nuclear threat into consideration, the contemporary geo-politics is handled too carelessly by politicians all over the world.

Kolatkár makes the snake sacrifice of Janamejaya an allegory of all political projects which are based on hatred towards a community. Quite often, genocides are carried out with tacit support of the state machineries. *Sarpa Satra* tells about the misuse of the sacred cultural institutions for personal vendetta by a king in a fashion that allows him to get away with the crime, since he did it within the institutional framework that sanctions authority. That is precisely what happened in India during the persecution of the Sikh community in 1984 and in the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. Justice evades the victims of the violence even after many years because there is not much evidence to the crime, thanks to the collusion of all government machineries. Both these genocides prove the painful fact that it is possible to butcher innocent people within the limits of a democracy while the perpetrators of the crime can evade the law without much effort.

In this bleak situation, the poet finds hope in the innocence of a child. Jaratkaru entrusts her son, Astika, to stop the Yajna. The name *Astika* means one who is devout and pure at heart. The insanity of a king who has power and the

meanness of the sages, who are his aides in his cruel intention of exterminating the entire Naga species, can have an antidote only in the innocence of Astika precisely because he has not lost the purity of soul that they lack completely:

You are too young
—true.
Still wet behind the ears,

some may say.
But that
Actually may be your greatest strength.

It means your eyesight
is good,
your vision clear.

...
It means the gangrene
of insensitivity
hasn't spread to your soul. ("Sarpa Satra" 206, 632-659)

Janamejaya's Yajna is a violation of Dharma, and the poet pitches Astika's innocence against the pride and arrogance of the king. As Laetitia Zecchini argues, Astika becomes the true embodiment of Dharma because he signifies the very essence of Hindu Dharma—that is selflessness, not having an egoistic mind:

Dharma is subverted; dharma in the strict sense of some of Vedic hymns that refer to the sacerdotal duties and rules associated with sacrifice; dharma as the normative divine, human, and cosmological law and order; dharma in its ethical aspect of righteousness. In the *Gītā*, Krishna defines the man true to his dharma as the one who is stripped of ego, violence, pride, desire, anger, and envy; someone who does not have anything he may call his own. In *Sarpa Satra*, only the child Aastika seems to embody such a decentered conscience. (Zecchini 141)

A mind devoid of egoistical desires is extolled in all sacred scriptures. The vulnerability of such a mind is, in fact, its greatest strength. The childlike innocence has also been a much endeared motif in many of the Bhakti poets especially in Kolatkar's favorite among Bhakti poets, Tukaram. In many of his poems, Tuka speaks like somebody who is not sure about anything living amongst those who are full of certainties. The world around him is a neatly categorized one where everything belongs to a predetermined slot. To be indecisive in such a world is to unlearn the oppressive mechanisms of thought that society implants in one's brain. Tuka's Bhakti is transgressive enough to step out of these certainties to a highly fragile and vulnerable state of being:

I'm insubstantial
Says Tuka;
Ash to the touch

Of the world. ("I've had My Days" 322, 10-13)

But saints like him who make this daring plunge to the unknown, giving up all social securities, initiate an alternate discourse that is out-and-out anti-establishment. They defy the dictates of the power mechanisms and institutions and connect with their fellow beings at a very basic level, often unsettling these establishments. Although Astika is not a saint, he has the potential to bring about the transformation that a saint could do because he embodies the basic quality of saintliness: the purity of mind.

But the poem does not end on a hopeful note. Even though we know from Vyasa's *Mahabharata* that Astika was successful in stopping the Yajna, Kolatkar reminds us that the cycle of revenge and hatred cannot be stopped forever. All that can be done is to find refuge in whatever goodness is left in the world. The repercussions of the acts of violence have always haunted history; Kolatkar ends the poem with a warning to not to get deceived by the verisimilitude of peace because violence and wounds of the past lurk behind it:

Life seems
to return to normal.
but do not be deceived.

Though, sooner or later,
these celebrations of hatred too
come to an end

like everything else,
the fire—the fire lit for the purpose—
can never be put out. ("Sarpa Satra" 213, 882-890)

The physical violence may end, but the traces of hatred that it leaves behind in human minds will stay and gradually spiral into another onset of violence, perpetuating the cycle of revenge and hatred. Kolatkar uses the myth of the snake sacrifice to remind us of the enormity of violence that pervades the social world we inhabit. Thus, *Sarpa Satra* is a deeply unsettling poem. Rather than giving a false solace, it foregrounds the dangers that we are in for.

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Book review

**HYPERBOREAL BY JOAN NAVIYUK KANE
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Joan Naviyuk Kane's second book *Hyperboreal*, published last year, can be described as a shared journey between poet and reader as the two attempt to define the indefinable, to, as the saying goes, say the unsayable. In the way that the horizon is simply an illusion of the sea and sky meeting, so becomes *Hyperboreal* in its graceful bend to bridge entities that are both removed and distinctively connected. Kane's book becomes that horizon for enigmatic elements such as myth and reality, thriving versus dying languages and cultures, and the conflicting sense of being home and not at home in the same place.

Kane's poems pose an alluring ambiguity to both create that clear bridge between ideas and illustrate the vague or illusory connection between two entities. In the title and opening poem, Kane writes "Arnica nods heavy-handed on the bruised slope. / Peaks recede in all directions, in heat-haze, / Evening in my recollection." The first stanza eloquently establishes the metaphorical and syntactical theme of the book: "Peaks recede in all directions" that are obscured by a "heat-haze," which de-familiarizes both the speaker and the reader from the physical location. When the speaker adds "Evening in my recollection," another layer of uncertainty is added, and this ambiguity of physical place—*evening* is both time of day and a becoming balanced—serves as the launching point for a book that delves into cultural issues specific to the poet and at the same time—and this makes *Hyperboreal* a true find for the reader—seamlessly connected to the broader readership outside the Inupiaq culture.

In the second of the book's four sections, "The Dissolve of Voices" reveals, "A love absolute of places unknown to me: / aḡnaḡuksram izrizrvia, ipkanaqtuat, aniraaq, / miziktaagvik, uavat, kassanait, qiniḡ.wik." The untranslated Inupiatun, which appears throughout the collection, works beautifully to evoke a sense of distance from what should be familiar. The unexpected turn to a nearly extinct language in a volume of poetry in English perfectly reflects Kane's running theme of the unfamiliar within the familiar, and vice versa. The two languages, strikingly different on the page, become a horizon within the book; Kane artfully melds these two languages into poems that then become a connection between the two seemingly starkly separated entities.

Likewise, in the poem "Field Notes," Kane writes "Motionless *Aegolius funereus*— / An omen: typical, resplendent" and this acts as a defining horizon, which comes into focus when one notices these two seemingly slight lines working on two levels of the same idea. On one hand, you have the scientific name for the Boreal Owl directly above "omen," forging a bridge between reality and myth in the space between the two lines. Secondly, "typical, resplendent," near antonyms resting within the owl, snugly sit next to one another separated by only a soft pause; the owl is able to embody with ease both seemingly contradictory adjectives.

This skill of Kane is also seen in poems "Composition with Transformed Birds," "The Orphan Girl," and "Nunaqtigiit," where the reader explores with the speaker the boundaries—which is also a connection—between one entity and the next. Oftentimes, the boundary between sea and sky is not as clearly defined as it is in poems like "Field Notes," but instead

of feeling defeated over being unable to define exactly what the poet is describing, the reader is left looking at a shifted kaleidoscope of images and emotion.

Though the forty poems in this thin volume may seem daunting at first, with unexpected and un-translated language, once the reader is drawn in and grasps the urgency of the poems to (re)connect and to bridge, each poem becomes its own distinct island in an archipelago; each poem represents a blurred existence while part of a larger landscape. At the same time Kane is writing from the brink of a culture on the brink of society's awareness, her poetry extends into universal human issues.

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