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Two Poems

By Mohammad Shafiqul Islam¹

Abstract

The poems “Other Fish to Fry” and “Lives of Others” reflect on how South Asian women fall victim to social systems and prejudices about gender. The first poem, “Other Fish to Fry,” metaphorically presents a mother bird and its kids, who represent women suffering from discrimination and torture. “Lives of Others” also depicts women who migrate to Middle Eastern countries in order to earn money and bring solvency to their families. But over time, they are victimized by landlords and brokers who regularly torture them. As a result, both poems address violence against South Asian women, including heinous crimes such as rape, acid attacks, and murder, as well as their silence.

Keywords: South Asia, Victimization, Gender, Violence, Rape, Acid attack, Silence

¹Mohammad Shafiqul Islam is the author of two poetry collections, most recently *Inner State*, and the translator of *Humayun Ahmed: Selected Short Stories* and *Aphorisms of Humayun Azad*. His work has appeared in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Critical Survey*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Poem: International English Language Quarterly*, *Journal of World Literature*, *English in Education*, *South Asian Review*, *English: Journal of the English Association*, *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, *Dibur Literary Journal*, *Lunch Ticket*, and elsewhere. His poetry and translation have been anthologized in a number of books, including *The Book of Dhaka: A City in Short Fiction*, *The Best Asian Poetry*, *Poems from SAARC Region*, *When the Mango Tree Blossomed*, *An Ekushey Anthology 1952-2022*, and *Monsoon Letters: Collection of Poems*. Currently at work on his third collection of poetry and a few translation projects, Dr Islam is Professor of English at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh. His ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9880-4645>

Other Fish to Fry

A mother bird feeds its starving squabs,
carrying food from the field
a farmer ploughs with bullocks.
Some tiny creepy-crawlies and corns
rise up from tilled furrows of turfs
as the farmer carries on ploughing the land.
Sometimes waiting for hours, the mother
comes back to the nest collecting
a slug or two or some brans in its bill.
The mother struggles to flap its right wing
to get to the nest but finally fails.
A small piece of ground is soaked in red
as blood emits from the left wing.
In this land of infinite dreams and prospects,
a young girl wishes to be reborn as a tree
like Daphne or Yeats's golden bird
or simply Das's myna or crow at dawn.
They are fated to carry grief,
they are condemned to obey commands—
Live in silence or be silent forever.
Bearing the brunt of acid or being videoed
while gang-raped, they survive
as if incarcerated in the deep pit of inferno
burning and burning till the end of time.

Lives of Others

Millions of people migrate from one country to another every day,
deliberately turning refugees, readily becoming secondary citizens.

Thousands of South Asians migrate to land in Middle East or Europe,
willingly accepting subordination in the binary opposition of classism.

Hundreds of factors induce the people worldwide to cross borders
and make a home away from home, but it's a dream within a dream.

Tens of thousands of women leave families in pursuit of happiness;
in search of money, they leave their parents, husbands, and children.

Brokers allure them of life in heaven filled in food, fun, and fame;
with a capacity to manage only a meal a day, they trust the touts.

A one-year old child cries here while the mother weeps tears there;
with dots of pain and breezes of grief, the women navigate two lives.

Millionaires of Middle East are well known for luxury and affluences;
scalpers give a big smile in having the women bite on their sleazy baits.

Month after month, even for years, they go through ordeals of tortures;
if one resents to respond to their lust, she's fated to starve and shed tears.

After trials and tribulations when they land in the airport back home,
they look scrawny and terrified with a soft tear in the corner of an eye.

We reckon how one deals with grief, how a woman lives with memories—
the sun still rises here, wind blows but silence seizes her over and over.