



OH
WITNESS
DEY!

Shani Mootoo

POEMS

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Book*hug Press

Descendants of the dust of the old

We, of the new, of the now

Our ancestors survived

Even the bubonic plague

Praise Be

SAMPLE

Praise Be

There is no racing
Past the backs
Of Samarsingh and Bulaki
What point pulling hair, digging dirt
With DNA shovels?
Fingernails scraping columns
Of a ship's registry
Entertaining fantasies of brotherhood
Forged in the house-home
Of a stinking hull
An emptying well
Just a(s) well

My ancestry is the Big Bang
My ancestry is pepper and spice
My ancestry is a Spanish Queen
My ancestry is a Genoese navigator
My ancestry is Taíno and Lucayan
My ancestry is sugar and rum
Everything nice and not so nice
My ancestry is the African Slave Trade
My ancestry is the British in India
My ancestry is coolie ships
My ancestry is an eighteen-hundreds village
Somewhere somewhere

Praise Be

*

Shrove Tuesday
parade-of-the-bands
finds you begrudging
a garden of snow

marrow in the
“in between”

I solemnly declare
to aspire

to achieve

old calypso’s irony
cum dissent, each note
of that now-distant pan
each trill, remains a calling
a pulse, a thrill

index fingers to leaden sky
shoulder to shoulder
drum-chants, streets aquiver
thousands of feet italicize

Powah Powah

*

beside birch and sumac
despite dogwood
and black spruce
salted veins pulse
oceanwards
the sailor's phantom straw
a limb of pomerac

love-letter-cum-apologia
where no caimans bask
no pan-man 9–5 beats a tune
roti shop comparisons

*who offers the most "authentic"
curried duck?*

*

as leatherbacks to North Coast water
so to the merciless Southern Cross

you're back home when...

...a tourist when

*

umbilical cords

of bake and shark, pastel, tulum,
pig foot souse, pone, salt prune
bus up shut, jeera pork, oil down
Charlie's black pudding

severed
like a lizard's tail
grow back

My Heart, That Island

Chimera tropic, where
Shackle and cutlass

Manacle the mind
Beggar the begging

You differ with Quebec:
To re-member you must forget

J'ouvert morning's street thunder
My silvery love's kiss, her eyes

Hills orphaned in poui-pinks
Peekoplats put out on porches

Armoured emerita scamper to the sea
6 pm, scarlet ibis gash the sky

In the square the brilliant pianist
Sleeps beside Mahatma

My brother, sister, how will they find you?
Recruited? Hungry? Alive?

On Canada's stretched white canvas
Re-membering is colour

Terminus Temporary

I'd like to have known my very first parents—

No, not the recent kala pani-crossing

Samdia, Dipraj, Samarsingh, Mathura, Bulaki et al—

Or their forebears: the nameless South, and Broadly East Asians,

Not the 16th and 17th century charioteers

(Who apparently hail from

Japan, Yakut and Mongolia),

Nomad-me, I roam, then, honestly
Generational powers—and defects—
realized and unrealized, are harboured here.

Can one assign credit/blame?

Nor the one that renders me 0.4% Native American,

Or the 4-percenter from the Neander Valley

Btw, was it from you,
honorable 4-percenter,
I inherited my love of plants?
Has your temerity been passed
down? Will we survive the
coming ice?

—No, no, no, not the heaving, thumper

Contract-expand-contract Amoeba

Rather

To the indefinite nebulous beyond

The can-only-be-fx-ed-to-be-imagined

Impenetrable darkness

Of time on the other side of time

The very very very first

!Kaboom!

Fourteen-billion-years, and counting

Pre-primordial, the unhelixed one

Q: How loud that
how long that
!Kaboom!?

A: Well, it was “actually” a hummer, something like:
aaaa (*ad infinitum*)
uuuu (*ad infinitum*)
mmmm (*ad infinitum*)

How far backbackbackbackback
can you heeeeeaaar?

Mica, mica, parva stella
Luminous spheroids, rent asunder
Into themselves their centres sucked
Expelling expansion, expanding expulsion
The origins of you and me
In the crucible of nuclear reaction
Gold, silver, uranium
Masses and charges

Quirky quarks
Proton electron neutron
Hydrogen, Carbon, Nitrogen, Oxygen
Mirror quaenam sis tam bella

Specific antecedent
Energetic, violent
Particles of foremother

Atomos

How small small small small small can you go go go?

Precise enough
To presage

!Moi!

~~~~~

I would like, like gods amazeable —

Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva,  
creator, protector, destroyer  
of the whole shebang

—to have witnessed  
The time-taking, logic-making  
Of seven octillion *Ahas*!

You who know it all  
Have you been moved to admiration?  
What astonishes *you*?

Domino-ing down evolution's parenting hwys  
Celestial sequins diamonding  
Segues gyral, non-sequence and con-sequence,  
Rungs mundane, yet reliable as night parenthesizing day  
To: *ta da!*

This here five-foot-four  
Semblance traceable

Definitely, those eyes  
those are the eyes  
eyes of an atom

To primogenitor honorable

Atom-san

~~~~~

7 octillion Atom-sans + matter from exploding stars + a whole bunch of energy ×
millions of millennia of the same + the 4-percenter from the Neander Valley + the
0.4% Native American + my ancestors who hail from Japan, Yakut and Mongolia
+ the unnameable South, and Broadly East Asians + Samdia, Dipraj, Samarsingh,
Mathuras, Bulaki et al + my more recent great great grandparents, great
grandparents, grandparents and my mother and father = the particular me-ness
of Me

I, Big Bang direct descendant
(lippy lips of an atom)
am (however)
childless

Bringing this fourteen-billion-year-old journey-adventure to