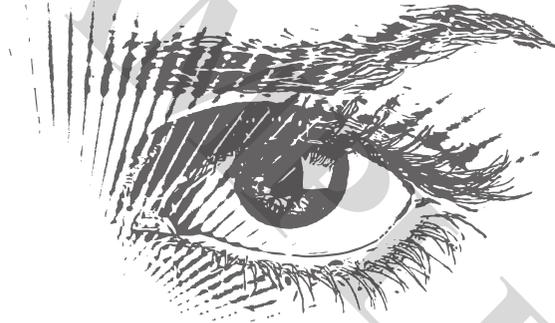


OH  
WITNESS  
DEY!

Shani Mootoo

POEMS

# OH WITNESS DEY!



**Shani Mootoo**

POEMS

**Book\*hug Press**  
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Book\*hug Press acknowledges that the land on which we operate is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. We recognize the enduring presence of many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and are grateful for the opportunity to meet, work, and learn on this territory.

# 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