

2009

## Gods r us

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GODS R US

by

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2010

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the

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**THE GRADUATE COLLEGE**

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**Alivelu Nagamani**

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ABSTRACT

**Gods R Us**

by

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Around Grecian orchards. On Trojan battlefields. In Siva's realm. Inside Hanuman's heart. Of gods, demons, and others who love us, hate us, serve us, interfere with us. Of humans larger than life. When gods were not in hiding. About a space not reached via explanations. Poems in *Gods R Us* come from Greek/Roman and Indic myths, they retell myths, comment on myths, and refer to myths – they could not have been without myths. Distillation and attentiveness create the time needed to be one in the spirit of the poem. I range from reverential to playful.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## PREFACE

Let me tell you why gods may not be seen physically by us. So they may not be disturbed. Camouflaged, they carry on with their work.

The question whether a myth points to something real or imagined is banal. Whether gods make humans or humans make gods, chicken or egg, they make each other possible. But the question is a distraction, not a problem. The divide between those who call gods myths and those who don't seems emblematic of oppositions, things arranged as conflicts: profane vs. profound, contemporary vs. ancient, explicable vs. mysterious, logic vs. magic. When experience is immediate, there is no debate.

Discovering versions or interpolations and identifying a date or author only seems to reduce a narrative to legend or history. Krishna's beloved Radha is not mentioned in the *Mahabharata* or even the *Bhagavata Purana*. She makes an appearance in the tenth century. This does not reduce the potency of the Radha-Krishna pair. Fact or fiction, Radha-Krishna grant 13<sup>th</sup> CE Chaitanya an ecstatic vision. Whether Ganesha was born from the dirt of Parvati's body or from Siva's third eye, whether he has one head or five, whether Ovid sourced from Hesiod or Epicurus, authorial re-vision is a part of the creation chain. It is a symbiotic relationship between gods and us.

I regard Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Zeus, Hermes, Artemis and other gods as personalities – friends, acquaintances or strangers from another species. It would be detrimental to have them stand for anything other than themselves, same as it would be for us. Gods are dynamic, as we are. Nourished gods thrive. Neglected gods pass. Gods point to a way of life, and a community. Text is liminal. Ganga is a river to some, but in North India where she emerges from the Himalayas, she is addressed as Ganga-ji. Read,

consider and appreciate “Ganga Jump” or “Ode to Kali,” but if you are untouched by Ganga-ji, or Kali-ma, then you have no access. There is only one route, grace. Grace is what you can be, and what can become you. Graceful, relaxed, you might just enter an other world.

This other world is not exclusive to the old world, it is present and forming now. I write from Greek/Roman and Indic narratives. My choice of these two particular worlds may come from the understanding between Latin and Sanskrit, or maybe familiarity breeds quick connections. The old Greek and Indic worlds mirror each other. Sky as location. Clear-cut territories and responsibilities, with some contested hierarchies. Ritual offerings of food and praise. Inter-species mingling to the extent of inter-breeding and intervention. Greek gods eat ambrosia, Indian gods eat amrit – a nectar-like substance in both cases. Indian gods and demons are cousins, Greek old gods and new gods are related. Rhea hiding Zeus parallels Devaki hiding Krishna. Sex-changed Caenus (Caenis) and Shikhandi (Shikhandini) evoke chauvinistic responses in battle. And contrasts are poignant : Sita and Helen, two women for whom seas were crossed and battles fought and the differences in moral standards; Savitri and Orpheus who crossed the portals of death to retrieve their spouses, with Savitri successful; love gods Cupid and Manmatha with meddling arrows, but Manmatha razed for daring to inflict Shiva.

To enter a permeable space, I armed myself with music and literature. There seemed to be no marked poetic tradition engaging with Hindu gods in English, so I listened to Sanskrit chants and songs. I dipped into Homer, Hesiod, Ovid and Virgil. These poets presented an unquestionable universe with an unreasonable patriarch. Hesiod’s genealogical catalogs gave me equanimity – the cunning person and the tender person,



the beautiful face and the heart of steel, regarded with the same tone. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* proved to be a comprehensive source for narratives, but the world it presented nauseated. In *Metamorphoses*, the process of transformation is not elaborated. It occurs in a final moment of judgment, as reward or punishment. Gods seduce or rape women, heroes are born. Goddesses are not free to love men. Subservience to gods is a prerequisite to protection. People are punished for showing pride in any form – vanity, insubordination, impiety, arrogance. When gods are reminded of their place as executors rather than law-makers, and disallowed to interfere in human destiny, it is because Fates have decreed it – an ironic reprieve. Pitiable humans are metamorphosed into birds or trees; and less than pitiable humans into newts, swine or stones. Very occasionally, a heroic or exemplary human is permitted to ascend and become a god, or a star. The order in the universe is not much more than the maintenance of a rigid hierarchy. Moral values apply to humans, not to gods. How can anyone who has lived in a democracy, or even heard of it, not be troubled by this scheme? Why abolish slavery on earth only to embrace it in other realms? Bernard Knox in the introduction to Charles Martin's translation of *Metamorphoses* writes that Ovid related sexual license to culture and refinement. Anything but. Ovid seems critical of the gods' sexual liberties and misuse of power. (This in turn raises a question about why, in *Ars Amatoria*, cunning, cruelty and irresponsibility is acceptable and even recommended, but becomes objectionable for gods). Ovid rebels against gods – he highlights abuse of hierarchy, disapproves of irresponsible gods and accentuates scenes of violation. Ovid's Arachne weaves scenes of gods' injustices when she competes with Pallas. I see Ovid's narrative as an exposé. Some of the poems in *Gods R Us* echo this demur.

Contemplating Indic gods was less disturbing. They are not responsible for what happens to us. They do not intervene in our lives except when there seems to be no human solution. Indic gods are pleased too easily, confer boons willy-nilly, and have to come up with ingenious ways of retracting these boons without losing their word of honor. Indic gods can be loving and impersonal, adorable and terrifying, at the same time. Kali is a scary mother, Siva's fearsome tandava is the subject of numerous hymns; and Yama is dharma incarnate. One does not adore Zeus's anger or Hades'/Pluto's role this way. I find my poems follow these traditions – towards Indic gods, my attitude is worshipful, whereas with Greek gods, my tone is sociable, even critical. It seems a fair difference, commensurate with their behavior. The writing, then, is also a process of becoming aware of my place and posture in cultural spaces.

Different poems in this collection used different processes. Some personalities stay hungry ghosts, and can only be appeased by retelling their stories – Cadmus, Philomela, Helen, and Draupadi. Hermes and his ingenious thievery are sublimated into the recent phenomenon of disappearing bees with a cactus as bystander. Kali is a terrorist mother. Siva, a long-standing friend, receives special attention.

I enjoy sound – rhythm, syllable, tone, weight, enunciation, air architecture. Condensation creates slowness, and slowness permits attention.

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## SIMILI

Narcissus drowning in oneliness  
The rest in duplicity

Ovid does not recommend being single. He punishes Narcissus for spurning Echo. I prefer to go with Tiresias, who said Narcissus would live to be old if he did not know himself first. Self-knowledge is a young flower with a bad reputation.

## IN THE SHOWER THINKING OF ACTAEON

Gaily the nymphs pretend  
To man her prudity  
Hard after a hunt Diana  
Flirts water at Actaeon

## STILL IN THE SHOWER THINKING OF ACTAEON

What Ovid does not offer  
What Slavitt does not explain  
It was the water I say  
It was the water she  
Squirted  
When you gawked that  
Masked your trail

Your curs fell on you  
Deaf to Actaeon

Chaste Diana, hunting, bathing, surrounded by nymphs ... a gay life! Along comes a man, Actaeon, who stumbles upon the nudes and is duly cursed. Actaeon beats a retreat, goes back into the jungle and is mauled by his hunting dogs. Does mere looking have such consequences? You'd think a liberal translator like David Slavitt might have a theory?

## VENUS AND ADONIS

Exactly the  
Accent I  
Like  
Olive in mouth  
Lets  
In the orchard  
    Pips around us  
Promise me you'll  
Speak  
Greek

What are you waiting for?  
The moon won't get any fuller nor  
Venus more voluptuous

Adonis prefers to hunt not  
Be chased in any case  
Mama Love's  
Too Romanesque for his taste

Venus is sticky and won't let Adonis go. What makes Greek heroes addictive? Why are Roman goddesses insufferable? Hidden in the resistance Adonis feels, the strong calling of death.

## JOVE'S COLLAR

How nice to have a wife  
Who's also sister you  
Fornicate in the street  
Then go home to eat

Those who like to bring up Europa, Io, Semele, Ganymede, Callisto and Leto are just jealous. Jove, smart enough to marry sister Juno, and smart enough to be chief of gods.



## OR US

Whose story isn't Orpheus

You've been in Hell made a mistake been afraid you've got song you're prophecy you're

God and you're not

Appreciated Decapitated

At the height of a party your wife keels over

That you don't want her back you're guilty in fidelity you turn gay the Maenads have a

field day the Maenads are our mothers

Orpheus starts a band The Regrets

Dark dark dark dark

Tar tar us

Place as place

Grey gag

Absent air

## CADMUS IS HISTORY

Stacked with crawl  
The dermis  
Malignant  
These jungle skins are one  
As Cadmus walks they sync

Don't come back without her begins his story  
Exile begins a hero

Above the ground the trees appear various  
He looks at the pointed faces leaves held like shields  
His immediate hand darts to hilt

What falls is trunk  
Any arborist will tell you that  
You can't uproot history  
History's staunch  
Axes scratch graffiti

For details go to Ovid  
I just give  
The gist of it we  
Confront what we are we  
Become what we battle

Cadmus is in search of his sister Europa who has been abducted by Jove. He gets advice from an oracle, founds the city of Thebes and vanquishes a pesky dragon. He sows its teeth in the ground, warriors spring up from these teeth, the fight intensifies, and all's well that ends well with five surviving warriors who become Theban lords. Not so fast, says the dragon's master, Ares, who demands compensation. Cadmus has to serve Ares for eight years, and later, after a long, heroic life, Cadmus metamorphoses into a snake.

APHRODITE:

Amorous  
But no amour?

Your cock-tip smiles  
Spurting  
Moonbeam

There's a mouth  
Doesn't lie

## ON THE TAIL

What did you  
Do with the bees  
Hermes

Every which way according to the  
Ithyphallic cacti

Ingenious Hermes steals Apollo's cows and lays confusing tracks to avoid detection. Apollo catches him by bribing a shepherd who was witness to the deed. Hermes was considered a phallic god of boundaries, so his name was engraved on wayside marker stones.

I AM LOOKING FOR THE EYES OF GOD AND ALL I SEE ARE HOLLOW

Your smooth lyre a lure  
You know the score Circe  
See my love dispossess  
I'll be swine  
I'll be godswine  
Bring hollows

## NODE TO SPONTANIETY

Sprung then summery  
Who's that laughing  
Fuck Nature  
Later the fairy queen will hang that flower

One has fury  
One is sorry  
Chronic jetlag  
Has one  
    Why Shakespeare?  
By the fifth act everyone's heartbroken

## OBJET D'ART

The gods covet us  
because they can  
see us

Io cowed  
Diana stumped  
Adonis domesticated

Sometimes I just want a non-memorial life

Visitors  
Outings  
Groceries

## CUPID AND PSYCHE

To p on you

To quote myself



## MIDAS

Indoor at the casino

Hats

Sunglasses

Midas

Asses

Talk to me goldfish

Where's Titanic

Take me literally

Make me Midas

Poor ghoul illit

In a gold crypt

Full of manuscripts

## AS PROMISED TITHONUS

There'll be clusters ... presses ... drinks ...

Aurora runs

Aurora reddens

In the vineyard

By the corky

Tendrils on the

Stalks :

    Raisins

Aurora (goddess, dawn) asks Jupiter to grant her beloved mortal Tithonus immortality, but forgets to ask for youth. Typical.

## MY DAUGHTER PHILOMELA

The desire at the back of it all the  
Right of a maker

Your  
Instinct draws love  
Trust commands duty

Little Philomela  
You knead my face-putty playdough-nose  
You enter verbs prod nouns  
Body – a fact you do not separate yet

Isn't it fun running in the open conquest of trees wrists knees crunchy hair

Twirling in a new dress Five husbands gawk Draupadi shuddering lockjawed  
what's thoughts where's mind whose funpark how to be wrapped Krishna

Arms crossed knees fetal your sleeping position's Leda

Every age imposes its season on you  
You regardless permissive

O Philomela A dog's fooled when lover returns as thief  
Jatayu's goosed at Sita's heist  
I did not even search his face  
I thought him son his  
Ardor manner procedure  
Honored your sister

Now nightingales  
Pity Tereus's father

Parent place the snakes on Medusa's head

Philomela is raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, and then locked up. Tereus cuts off her tongue to ensure her silence. Philomela reveals the gory details to her sister Procne by weaving the story into a tapestry. Procne and Philomela kill Itys, Tereus and Procne's son, and serve him up to Tereus at dinner. Finally, Philomela turns into a nightingale to sing her story for ever. | Draupadi – in the Mahabharata, stripped by the Kaurava brothers in public, prays to Krishna for help | Sita – in the Ramayana, abducted by Ravana | Jatayu – vulture who confronts Ravana's airplane with Sita on board; he loses, but proves an informant to Rama about the direction of Ravana's flight. | Leda – raped by a swan who is really Zeus.

## POEM, SISYPHUS

Moon, Sisyphus  
Full  
Null

Life, Sisyphus  
Chain

Who knows how many

Days in the  
Life of Brahma

Pebble, Sisyphus  
On a beach  
Wave  
Wave  
Wave  
Polishing

Up there  
Slick stars who made it

You must know how Sisyphus had to roll a massive rock up a steep hill, and how it would roll back down again. But do you know, a day in the life of Brahma = 4.32 billion years. So is a night. Brahma's life of a hundred years (36,000 days) = 311.04 trillion human years. Human life is not manifest during Brahma's night.

PAN ON PAN

I could be the god of ears for whom cicadas hula hoop  
I stand back for a caterpillar's hunchlop dragondance  
Around bones of trees I swathe bark and leaves  
Around dead stones insect sensations  
Drunk on the anesthetic of a leech that fattens  
Eyelids pregnant with slugs seeding you you you

## GANGA JUMP

Bhageeratha,  
At the end of your lives you are many  
Midwives blow kisses at you wide voices in the wind  
Your chill eyes shun revolving doors you sing backwards you want to be one

You are finally here  
The thick crust churns  
Pressing mothers far fathers great grand undone  
Your throats must be clenched  
Ears echoey  
Put down your stack  
Have a bath  
Expand

When sixty thousand voices said  
Only purity clears debts  
Who is Purity

Ganga laughed  
Earth to froth & sky to smithereens  
Old man death I'll bust his head  
Ganga laughed and jumped

Ash wish  
Ash wash  
A funeral called a waterfall

Entering territory she filled  
With weight and water

Spirit to giant at once  
Grew round her  
From her

Girth rippled firewater  
Tail trailed smokewater she  
Could not feel her ends

Sunsmear  
Windwhip  
Rockrawl  
Thunderplause

Airsplinters  
Milkcliffs  
Lightning's free tributaries  
Water braiding rockfaces  
Deadman's float  
Combed penumbra flowing    blue face

A new car's about to crash  
Earthlings ran  
Rang bells in temples  
Clouds locked

Shiva smiled  
When Shiva smiles  
The fragile face of Earth tucked into his womb  
For He who wears Nothing  
Sky's his Scarf  
Wind's his Wish

Strident Ganga  
Babe not stormrider  
Swept into a clutch of herringbone hair

Daddy Everest choked memory memento mori and invoked The Bull  
Nandi's tail took sliver moon and fastened Shiva's hair

Space shored  
Ganga rose  
Looked into mirrormoon and saw flow

Out of a round mouth  
Round water

Coconut crush on stone  
Brilliant inauguration

Bubbling eggs uncountable  
Legs flopped on the rocks

Milk curd honeyfingers  
Flowed over the eyelid  
Ushered by brows  
Dripped off overhang  
Ran on nosebridge

Verged at chin  
Long neckjar

Within distance in the quiet kutirs  
Children of fire glazed over  
Voices melted  
Ears opened  
Went over to the new pure  
And took a dip

Hushed mountains  
Mute cows  
O happy ditches O happy loos  
Shhhhhhhhhhhh

60,000 ancestors of King Bhageeratha have been cursed by Sage Kapila and turned to ashes by Sage Kapila. Their souls can only rise to heaven by a ritual with the pure water of Ganga from heaven. Bhageeratha goes to the Himalayas and does rigorous penance for a thousand years. Pleased, Brahma grants his wish, and Ganga has to land on earth. But Ganga's descent could prove a disaster for Earth, and everyone on Earth. Only Shiva can cushion her force. \*Shiva the destroyer is in charge of death. He likes to hang out in cemeteries, body smeared with ash. He wears his hair in a topknot, the crescent moon rests in it. Ganga is depicted as a diminutive figure coiled in his hair. | Ganga's dad Himavan is the Himalayas. | Nandi, Shiva's pet bull, must have a tail. | Coconuts are broken to inaugurate events. Idols are anointed with substances, usually liquids. | Shiva's idol is a lingam, the Shiva-ling is depicted with a single eye = Shiva's third eye. | Kutir is Hindi for hut.



## RAVANA'S GARDEN

The news is fragrance  
Godliness in Ravana's garden  
Sita's breath the breeze's swoon

Ravana's waylaid by a hair wave on the margin of a leaf  
At the leaf tip a punctual gliss

He holds the blade between his fingertips as infant hand  
Turns it over  
Looks at his palms  
Turns them over and back  
Eyes dilate  
A vine relaxes grip  
In the shade many shades  
Colors without names  
Where the trees keep their faces  
What's drooling in a dry web in a petiole

Listens  
Lessons rhythm  
Symphony expanding to the nth

Brahma's Blood  
Shiva's Pet  
Brahmin-Daitya  
Nectar-Navel  
Ten-Head  
Penance-Perfectionist  
Seer-of-the-ShivaTandavaStotra  
Ravana  
Turns to the sense in all this  
Sita  
To describe her

No adjective has Sita  
Sita's Rama's adjective  
SitaRam  
Life of Rama's life

Sita mindless

Heart pendant lotus

Rama's coming

Ravana's comet

Lanka's on a tail

Having been abducted by Ravana, Sita won't enter his palace; instead, she sits in his garden waiting for Rama to show up and rescue her. | About Ravana's epithets – Ravana's grandpa is one of the six human sons of Brahma. Ravana's father is a sage, and his mother, a daitya (demon). | The nectar of immortality, a boon from Brahma, is stored in Ravana's navel. | How it ends: Rama sends Hanuman to explore Lanka and locate Sita. Ravana's goons capture Hanuman and set fire to his tail. Hanuman grows gigantic and leaps about. Lanka burns.

## MONKEY PUZZLE

Large as the sky stands on a leaf  
Small as a thorn on Ravana's seat  
Try telling him  
The sun's not a peach

Can't find an herb uproot the mountain  
Ocean's vast so is devotion

Somewhat out of proportion Hanuman  
A heart so precise it  
Only has room for Ram

As a child, Hanuman leaps up and reaches for the sun thinking it edible. At the end of this incident, he receives the power to become as large or as small when he pleases. When Lakshmana is injured in the battle with Ravana, Hanuman is sent to fetch a healing herb; he cannot find it, and not wanting to waste time, returns with the entire mountain instead. Hanuman proves his ardent devotion to Rama by tearing open his chest to show who lives in his heart.

## ODE TO KALI

Kali Ma  
Tongue unshy  
Your necklace chatters  
Skirt tassles sigh  
Mercy Kali

Everyone's Ma  
Nobody's Lover  
Sister Daughter  
Slaughter

Although Kali is Parvati aka Mrs Shiva, she is an independent, and Shiva is shown prone under her feet. You would address her as Kali-Ma, i.e., Mother. In a battle with demon Raktabija who has a boon that every drop of his blood will give rise to new Raktabijas, Kali-ma extends her tongue and licks his blood before it can fall to the ground, while she hacks him. Mother wears a garland of skulls and a skirt of chopped-off arms.

## CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

mixing time twilight NEITHER DAY NOR NIGHT  
pronged on the threshold NEITHER IN NOR OUT  
Hiranyakashipu speedy years eye knots mouth jamd belly up  
flared on a knee NEITHER EARTH NOR SKY  
grisly hilts poise  
flash nails NEITHER ANIMATE NOR INANIMATE  
praise be Narayana's heights  
sudden stalactites  
roused from his everywhere lair  
Narahari at large NEITHER GOD NOR DEMON NOR ANIMAL OR HUMAN  
arms arrayed Narayana  
hair awry Narasimha

Demon Hiranyakashipu is pissed off that his young son Prahalad sings Vishnu's praises, and claims Vishnu / Narayana / Hari is omnipresent. Infuriated, Hiranyakashipu swings mace at a pillar, asking if Vishnu might be there too? Out breaks Narayana in the Narasimha (man-lion) avatar. Because Hiranyakashipu has had a boon (from Brahma) that he cannot be killed by man or beast, god or demon, inside or outside, day or night, and by weapons animate or inanimate, Narayana delivers a nemesis with these particulars. Simha = lion, Nara = man, Hari = Hari.

## BRAHMA'S MOMENT

Brahma unfolded  
Four petals on a shoulder

TimeSpace emanated  
Twinned at the hip

Quarreling who's older

## SHIVA'S DANCE

Piece by piece clothes fell skin peeled and flesh ran in lumps and gravy  
Her sidelong glance still tosses lazily on your hammock smile  
Icecube swirling provocation in your glass  
The bones are good to drum with  
Tusk plucked and thrown like a gauntlet  
Row of ivory pawns  
Pillars in war of no ceiling

You relieve the palms of superfluous arms and use their sawtooth blades to slice our  
necks  
Shells of infant heads you smash on trees  
Oil stains trunks as tears of elephants  
We play calm host to your furrowing worms  
Rats tentative in our gullies  
Radio flies  
When you tap for one last formal dance we show up in crossbone bowties  
Jiggling our hips we make the ratatat.tat of castanets  
Your raised leg swings the ball of your foot bounces tilting the earth the heel falls  
correcting the tilt  
Chandeliers heave  
Marbles Rrrrrr  
Our skulls your lost beachballs  
Somedaysome snake our scarf or rag will loop through our sockets to polish us

Nataraja is Shiva as the cosmic dancer who annihilates the world before Brahma can recreate, and depicted with one leg raised. Shiva's terrific dance, the tandava, is fast-paced and accompanied by a characteristic, relentless drum beat.

## YAMA'S BUSINESS

Fruit dump under the tree  
Smarting tender  
Under the sore why-me look  
A drool bedding noodle soup  
Worm hitch

Wriggling gone from the grass no winds frisk  
Collecting dry rivers  
Seas

The sea was no slake  
Cracked continent's crustaceous parts drifted upcreek

Said salt of the earth  
Tastes like mud  
Looks like chocolate

Outgrown the fish juts  
Glacier not much more than a hat tipsy on a lite draught

Blood thirsty stalks faint streets

Air wavers at mouth  
Toothless the well caves in

Lips do not blossom even if they meet

The speed with which air avages the plump  
Yah Yah The eeries ways of god  
Hot baker's fleur de mal

Yama, god death.



## FOR POOTANA'S SAKE

The beast  
now in the guise  
of a babe

Exuding  
Sweetness

Draining the  
Poisonous wetnurses

Having rubbed poison on her nipples, demon Pootana breastfeeds divine baby Krishna. Happy little Krishna, for the chance to suckle her dead.

## MAKE POVERTY HISTORY – INDIAN RESTAURANT, LONDON

The world over one wonders  
why some have nothing to eat  
in India are there no restaurants

Bless you rats says fat Ganesh  
The geckos know the Gita  
but stay on the wall for

In the eat-all-you-can place  
on Marchmont Street it's  
never easy to find a seat

It helps to have a statue of Ganesha in the foyer of Indian restaurants. | Another frequent prop is a painting that shows the scene from the Gita, with Krishna preaching to Arjuna. | Non-resident Indians are regarded as traitors, rats. | And the cheapest restaurants in London are Indian.

## DEMONTIME

Mused at your breasts  
Two at a time  
Creator harvester of histories  
Destroyer resident ghoul

You turn on the suck and flow but how  
do you keep them away from the new one the rubbery  
amniotic and chewy umbel as they loudly  
gnaw and chatter how

The infant heart must be stocked with fresh f & b  
And the gut  
Taut  
Clean  
Washed in milk

## SHIVA'S DIGS

Fragrant floured  
Nude blue bloat  
Last seen by the boy who  
Wanted to be a ghost

The scavenger hooks fingers  
In the rim  
Bone pots conk  
Dangling swing

Finger a ring ran away with  
Knobs and bits  
Found in ash spills

It's his job but gravely notes  
Soil bored with air  
Fluids laying cesspits

## PANCHALI

Five limp fingers  
A useless hand

Who draped Draupadi

Yudhistira sorry  
For himself

So sure he was  
The eldest son

Draupadi is called Panchali because she has five husbands (panch = five). | The Pandava brothers. Yudhistira (the oldest of the five) loses everything he owns including Draupadi in a game of dice. Draupadi is then disrobed by the victorious Kauravas in the royal assembly, while her helpless husbands watch. | The Pandavas' mother Kunti abandoned her first-born infant son Karna (born to the sun-god); the Pandavas do not know that until towards the end of the epic battle. | Traditionally, the eldest son has the most responsibilities.

## FATHER'S DAY

Stop wheels  
Hector's hurting  
Priam cries  
Dusty from playing in the yard Hector

Astyanax wails  
Faint Andromache  
Hecuba lactates

On Hecuba's weeping breasts  
Rest Priam's drooping cheeks

Whose guts  
Garland the dogs of Troy  
Not Patroclus'

Intact elevated  
Body feted  
A high friendship keeps you  
In good stead

Your funeral games over now  
Release Achilles Release Hector

A man who grieves for a boy  
Must have a soft spot  
A man Hephaestus shields  
Must be made of flesh

His heels I'll cuff with my wrists  
His knuckles I'll press my lips

Three children walked in hand in hand  
Paris - Helen - and Troy's ghost  
Waiting to bloat  
Priam's been waiting since

DING DONG BELL

The jetty's out  
Who's at bay  
War-mongrels Hera Athena

Stout Menelaus  
Slender Paris  
Homer leads the charge

Imperfection haunts beauty  
So imagination can rule  
Helen haunts imagination

In the center of her forehead  
Bloodthirsty star of the sea

## PEACE TREATY

What if Helen died

Cuckold crows  
Husband recalls  
Body face rites

Once broad Trojan devils  
Now cower in the shadows of walls  
Fearing skywitnesses  
Quaking at birdshit

Our boy came back  
From overseas with a  
Souvenir egg that ticked

A runaway wife's a rotten prize  
Unwanted alive  
And dead



## ILIAD BLUES

I like battles out at sea  
Hot spur  
Cold water  
Blood swimming both ways  
Salty meetings  
Sharks due  
At the end  
Level blue

## GLEAM

Not inaccessible but  
The return impassable  
Birds cleared the crumbs  
Ariadne's thread does not glint  
This new moon night

Downwind delivers the matador scent  
Minotaur froths and shudders  
Flecks the tight walls lichen-lodges

Waved in by one-way valves Theseus blood  
Pounding enters the heart  
Of Minotaur

\*

Pasiphae needs a sturdy body and has it made

Machinery

She climbs in  
Inside its womb she grows full she  
Reverses  
Becomes mother  
Extends her body's imagination  
Grafts her senses to the armor  
Feels through it

Reclamation  
New shore  
Poseidon's bullock ploughs

\*

The matador is ready  
Buttons carved  
Shoulders padded  
But the bulls today are memory and fantasy  
They ignore him and charge each other

A horned moon is the handle to void  
One turn and the gore spikes

Memory can poison fantasy

Fantasy can laugh

\*

The days of longing have come and gone  
The waiting is now clean  
Body leans toward the door  
The door's foreshadows

Who lifts a mist why is the steed on a hillock  
Figure tapering over it  
Black and grey

Speechless as though  
The last breath can be saved

Within the first three tinkles  
The heart thrashes mad

Around the neck  
A distinct eating line

Death rides a Bull  
Bull conveys a Death

\*

In fact he is all skin Marduk  
Same as Tiamat layer on layer  
To the core and even the core a  
Ball of skin

The fifty names of Marduk vault  
Poison mouthed chariots snort  
Arrow-pierced bellies blaze

The floor is a mess

Bulls galore. Pasiphae, wife of King Minos, loved the Cretan bull, and had an artificial bull made so she could copulate with it. Clever, but how did she feel pleasure through this machinery? The child born thus was monstrous Minotaur, who was kept locked up in a maze. Theseus enters the maze to fight it, who in the myth, uses the thread of Ariadne (Arachne) to find his way back, unlike Hansel and Gretel. The bull is also the vehicle of Yama, the god of death. The bull also represents Marduk, the Sumerian figure also considered a planet. Tiamat is Earth.

## STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Can't see the stairway for the planet balusters  
Strike them as they pass for music of the spheres

lightmeup	codechant
mockme	withmeaning
tossthis	tossthat
in	tothefire

## LOOKING FOR LETHE

Lingering waters Mnemosyne

Slave to recognition the sommelier sips

History's arias – mountain under ocean – crystal chambers – singing salt

Sudden body – undercurrent – slow release – cleansing nourishing bitter

Sharp – teeth – opening – vanishing citrus

Something buried – buried hint

Along her shores infinite coves

Amuse the helpless odysseys

At the end of each day

Livedness by people

NAG

Is this Sybil It is she  
Muttering nightlong  
Short of a gallop

Cadence of springs  
Barefoot Pegasus  
Barely audible

Sudden swarm  
At hair roots  
Cake-tipped termites  
Sweet brain,  
Crumble

Sibyl had the power of prophesy and a thousand year life granted by Apollo. Another of those who forgot to ask for eternal youth... she was a 700 year old hag when she helped Aeneas.

## MY PUMPKIN'S MISCARRIAGES

Hello creeps good morning I see  
You have fed and grown several feet  
Grisly hair grows everywhere  
A hair grove  
Such luxury  
You've snared the fence you're feeling the wall eyeing the roof  
But the pollen falls flat your cream babyfaces  
Never grow larger than lemons your yellow tophats  
Topple at the lightest tease

A fruitless year I can tell  
A ballet of leaves

Promise me  
Next year  
Gallopings carriages

## REJECT

The gods took one look and tossed him

Dented

De-fizzed

Rocket to space junk

Fell

Wayward washing

Ragged upon the crags

Penalty: not liver but a part more tender

A frequent-flowering incorrigible phoenix heart

Now flooded by the moon the startled thief

From the day he is engorged and cannot hide

To the day he is mute and will not show

In the shadow of the eagle he sees keeping watch

A luscious rested tongue

And thirsts for it

Here we are, warm in winter, while Prometheus who stole fire from the gods is out in the cold, bound to a rock, an eagle feeds on his liver for ever.



## LOCATION

Hiding in a tree trunk  
Looking through the hollows  
Firs in new wedding gowns  
Fire budding Christmas trees

It was the trees jangling interior bangles  
Tigers striped past silently  
Rugs on the floor of salvation wood

The first time I saw ginseng I understood the body to be root  
Until a slice of what I could only call steakwood

The river swears it's blue  
Will carry you across

Soon as you leap in  
Fast moving coils  
Who said the python's dead

Where is the hatch  
    Somewhere here but giant roots flowed over  
Is it sealed  
    Bloody me  
    Will we keep

Gone too far free out at sea why does the water wave as if pining for the ties of Shiva's  
braids  
The tangles at the fountainhead  
From here  
The view of the dance

## SLOUGH

Nude the poet has to fashion masks out of his own diaphanous slough  
Extract expressions and adore each as a face  
There is no face only a deft masker  
As shadow to body body to rhythm  
Follow the ruse this far this guise this guile

Slough must be eaten to the last shred  
On the last journey tracks made by the head must be covered up by the body  
Coil to the shape of a bracelet  
Place tail inside mouth  
Fasten clasp

The womb never leaves a child  
You wear it on your back even as you look for it in absent-minded mourning  
The new skins you grow are slough  
But this is flesh – kin –  
Slide back into its canoe  
Bark curved from memory  
And thus dressed go to the shore your bride death

Ourouburos

## EBRU

Up on the water lake of oil  
Up on the lake waiting painting  
A canvas lowered from the sky  
To take it away in mortal colors  
To air in the celestial pictures  
Between eyebrows

Ebru is Turkish water-marbling. Design drawn with oily dye on water, and picked up by an absorbent paper placed on the surface.

## CHORUS

You are the spheres  
Atmosphere

We know the nip  
Your sniffer dogs

You have us hemmed in breath stitch

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