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## Dr. Sonali Pattnaik

### anti-nationalist

this nation that was born  
*into* freedom and *of* it,  
finds today that to be what it was  
meant to be, indeed free,  
has become a brutal weapon wielded  
against its own body.  
the rhetoric of hate is  
the face of masochism,

freedom here held hostage  
and the ransom demanded  
a monolithic, cleansed identity  
a whitewashing of our mixed history  
a convenient and selective impunity.

but freedom is indeed  
an unwieldy thing  
for those who haven't been  
shown the joys it can bring,  
too busy obeying or subjugating,  
to them everything appears  
like a trade economy,  
freedom a dangerous anarchy  
they are the unfortunate inheritors  
of authority, of disguised deprivation  
and a vision binary.  
not weaned off historical privilege  
their blood-milk forever boiling,  
they resent the levelling  
of the parched ground  
beneath their feet.  
the nation is their mother, you see  
to be treated as a nursing machine  
'freedom' destroys the age-old  
hierarchies their ancestors built

so they could oppress the pre-othered  
and let the pre-chosen  
oppress their creed.

so we mustn't be surprised  
that they don't see the irony  
in calling free speech,  
the very tool and toil  
of our collective struggle  
to become a nation,  
an act of anti-nationality.  
nor wonder why  
their blood boils over  
love between strangers  
irrespective of caste and creed  
for love like that is autonomy  
a lesson in the power  
that elected freedom can bring.

so the oppressed aggressor,  
who has only learnt to form ties  
according to the will of caste and kin  
and stalks, gropes or rapes in between,  
hangs the beautiful lovers from trees.  
as an example of punishing  
the form of disobedience

that may have returned to us this country  
an example taken from  
the white-man's repository  
but who can explain irony  
to the pre-nationalists  
with their clubs and their spears  
and their lynchings,  
who will tell them, those who prefer  
the knell of hate to the music of conversation,  
if it weren't for freedom there would not  
a nation be, the one they are supposedly  
defending violently?  
They are only doing their immoral duty  
to a delusional vision  
of religious domination, 'nationalism',  
just a temporary short-hand  
to defend twisted and bloody dreams  
fuelled by those who fly in other lands  
as awakened creatures of a new world  
as they leave the henchmen to do  
their dirty deed.

not me, I cannot speak  
to those unable to listen.  
I speak a language polyphonic  
of multiplicity, a language of the people

and theirs is a monologue  
of limited vocabulary  
one that with its droning repetition  
threatens to silence any complex speech  
with three words cried out  
in exhortatory, militant zeal  
they speak of nation as though  
it is a multiple choice type  
examination and the papers,  
have been cautiously leaked.  
nationalism now needs passing, it seems,  
as it itself passes as several things  
while universities are forced  
to become factories churning  
skilled labour degrees for those  
who can join the rows of oil pumping  
completing the demand and supply chains  
of the neo-nationalist game.  
ultimately it is only rhetorical strategy  
the neo-nationalists hope to ride  
the patriotism bandwagon  
till the time they can be free  
from the truth of the constitution.

they know not though, what is in store  
these freedom bashers of tomorrow and yore

for when ball and chain come backlashing  
when lies are the only truth you are telling  
it's tough to see that the tail that's whipping  
the belly is connected by a single spine;  
you may be next in the hate-line.

when the thought of freedom ties you up  
in muscular knots so that you claw  
at those who in its fertile fields grow  
reaching heights much greater  
than your sins had allowed  
you attack urgently, not so much  
to control the speed of thought  
nor the possible spread of equality  
but from this damned  
freedom be freed.  
and so, if afraid of this  
beautiful, secular, democratic  
free thing that is indeed nation,  
as it was born and meant to be,  
you burn down the constitution,  
the people's collective grit  
upon which the nation is writ  
riddle me this,  
who indeed is the real  
anti nationalist?

## feeding

"if there are no spoons  
use a knife" they said  
she did as she was told.  
even after all these years  
she doesn't know  
that the thing that feeds the mouth  
need not cut the tongue.

## if music be

with music  
you and I  
we need not converse  
with our laden words  
or lend verse  
to unbearable thoughts  
of love's frightening possibilities.

just send me the song  
that last touched your soul  
or the one that  
always fills you up with hope  
and I'll play the beat that sweeps  
the ground from  
underneath my feet—  
let the songs meet.

we don't even  
need to speak  
the same language.  
music with its  
visceral strumming  
will set us on fire  
without one word

to each other  
having been breathed.  
their melodies twining  
around each other,  
the song-words lean over  
and sounds kiss  
perched on a rhythm.

and then I will wait  
for you to sing.



**Dr. Sonali Pattnaik**

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Dr. Sonali (PhD) is an award winning feminist poet, academic, educator and visual artist. She is the author of *when the flowers begin to speak* (Writers Workshop, 2021), a solo collection of poetry that marks a woman's journey through abuse, survival and hope, for which she was recently awarded the WE 'Intense Feminine Power' Gifted Poet Award 2023, and the inaugural WE Illumination Award. She is the recipient of the Orange Flower Award for Poetry in English, 2022.

Her poetry and art have appeared in several international and national anthologies including, *The Kali Project* (edited by Candice Lousia Daquin and Megha Sood 2021), *Of Dry Tongues and Brave Hearts* (edited by Semeen Ali and Reema Ahmad, 2022) and *Through the Looking Glass* (Indie Blu(e) 2021) and in *The Indian Express*, *The Bombay Review*, *Setu Magazine*, *Café Dissensus*, *The Pine Cone Review*, *The Yugen Quest Review*, *Fem Asia*, *Sampad* etc. Her book based on research on body politics in Bollywood

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cinema is forthcoming from Orient Black Swan.

A well published academic in the area of visuality, literature and theories of the body, Dr. Sonali is both an alumnus and erstwhile professor at Delhi University and is currently Visiting Professor and External Expert, Board of Studies in in English at St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad.

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