



To Omkara: My Forever Aum Maker

When I first say your name
my lips part and then meet for more
 like an omen that comes again and again
 vibrating every time time touches me
Manu making me chant you orally for a hundred and eight
and then demands for another ten thousand I wait
 as the sound just pounds and pounds into my brain
 each syllable I invoke melts as temperatures rise
 cosmic and primal, ornate as Autumn
 you come to me every morning
 and each momentary emergency
I pray and pulsate for your spells to mystify and bind
to that mesmerizing space between asleep and awake
 where copper cymbals tap incessantly
 perfect that technique you say
 as my ankle-bells spin to your thumri
oh my mouth and body chime for unison's beginning
an homage if you may to that midnight of supreme bliss
when finally it's my silent mind that speaks so reverberantly

 Eventually you relent seeing I can take no more
now please I beg of you just whisper my name in return
for only then incense will burn, ashen, and release

Introduced in 1861 during the British rule of India, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code states, “Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.”

The Resplendent History of a Hard Clap

It's not as easy as it looks
two palms facing perpendicular
kiss like black swans mating
trained to make that hallow space percussive
repeat it on two arched surfaces
all while they laugh at this veil
but throw coins at my feet

nothing now but for my body to move
tali supple as ash mixed with sindoor
I smear it across my chest and back
pleasure can hear that unbearable groan
gungharoots crumble every last chowk
and chandini sees dizziness meeting desire
born from a lineage of fullness and grace

when orders against nature draw their gaze
palanquins refuse to block cosmic skies
loving something banned and ungovernable
keep me wild gentle and true
blessings are a gift that need protection
so I tap my feet and snap my hands
processions quickly turn into a protest

nothing now but for som to start
this sound freed my banishment
dancing to honor an endangered act
performance as generational inheritance
hands positioned to an older practice
chanting over and over
ta thei ta ta thei

In March of 2023, Tennessee Senate Bill 3 banned public “adult cabaret performances” defined as “male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest.” This bill was the first bill of its kind to pass the state legislature in the United States, and was the first to be signed into law.

Suns Rise to Glory

unshaven for weeks
 yet still smooth
like cheese grated
 pedicured heels
flakes failing
 this prison blooms
with shame
 I gamble broadly
on myself but wait
 to dive in
drowning at sixteen
 borrowed from my brother
letter man jackets
 trimmed with black and gold
blemishes every time
 leave marks
evidence and reminders
 we long to see
models like
 Baldwin, Vaid, and Wilde
gold inheritance
 dangling from my ear
confined to hard
 labor with just a pen
triple x and neon pink
 signs taunting
for six months
 idle for hours
Jill Scott on repeat
 making me beg
honey molasses
 just when I am safe
temptations knocks
 dominoes of eighteen wheels
where bluebonnets grow
 confidently on I-10
sweat thick with thirst

vertigo displays
stars on paper-box squares
disappearing anguish
purple velvet curtains
not illegal
not lost or trespassing
past brazen
pale uncertainty
red glow of the exit
pushes me deeper
into dance
tv screens and
coin operated machines
watchful presence of
history, resistance, and love
born from private desire
a pirate eye next door
three feet above ground
swirls a finger
beckoning me
to come over

Unearthed Carrots

To rise up around 18:57
again
seize the dusk settle
another stolen day

Clocks patiently ticking a little longer
too
watch these tiger skins heal
even my eyes sense a need
to breath before opening

Hold out for unearthed carrots
fortified and kissed on red soil
new hands need practice making callouses
finally, I can
take off these gloves

Show Me

seconds of myself walking past the palm

or worse Mahavir made me venture alone
this temple is safe as last Sunday
this didn't have a menu or cutlery
sunny laughter is what we see
 pined by the row of identical options

as I crossed sat
scrolling for a connection with heat
 nurturing the horrors of different
language from which you speak
that bay left me without commentary

so I who loves to sing in Bengali, Sanskrit, and Urdu
 hesitation in 7-11 for its reservations only
surprises when three products of migration meet
choosing our kinship-in-foreign
 expectant
example of home tonight
when my parents sat to listen as I told them my story

NOTES

“Section 377.” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_377. Accessed 03 March 2023.

“Tennessee Senate Bill 3.” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennessee_Senate_Bill_3.

Accessed 03 March 2023.