

2. A Rain of Rites

Jayant Mahapatra (1928-2023)

Sometimes a rain comes
slowly across the sky, that turns
upon its grey cloud, breaking away into light
before it reaches its objective.

The rain I have known and traded all this life
is thrown like kelp on the beach.
Like some shape of conscience I cannot look at,
a malignant purpose is a nun's eye.

Who was the last man on earth,
to whom the cold cloud brought the blood to his face? [?]
Numbly I climb to the mountain-tops of ours
where my own soul quivers on the edge of answers.

Which still, stale air sits on an angel's wings?
What holds my rain so it's hard to overcome?

.....
Jayanta Mahapatra (1928–2023) was a famous Indian poet writing in English. Born in Cuttack, Odisha, he is known for his thoughtful poems blending Indian culture, spirituality, and personal experiences. He was the first Indian to win the Sahitya Akademi Award for English poetry in 1981 and received the Padma Shri in 2009.

Analysis

Jayanta Mahapatra's poem "A Rain of Rites" is a title poem of a collection by the same name. Jayanta Mahapatra's "A Rain of Rites" explores themes of desires, faith, identity, and disillusionment. Rain serves as both a natural element and a metaphor for spiritual cleansing. It reflects the poet's inner conflict between tradition and modernity. The poem delves into personal and cultural struggles, blending nature with human emotions to evoke introspection.

In the first stanza, rain symbolizes the poet's aspirations, which, like rain-bearing clouds, disintegrate before becoming reality. These unfulfilled dreams lead to feelings of emptiness and disillusionment. In the second stanza, the poet reflects on his efforts and realizes that his dreams, once important, now seem insignificant, like seaweed. He compares his inner turmoil to a nun's wavering faith, describing the pain as a malignant tumour.

The third stanza questions the reliability of dreams, portraying them as deceptive and often unattainable. Mahapatra wonders if anyone has ever felt truly fulfilled by realizing their dreams but finds no answer, leaving him convinced that fulfilment is elusive.

The poem ends with the poet questioning his guardian angel's failure to fulfil his desires. Has the angel lost its strength, or has faith itself become meaningless? This unresolved tension highlights the poet's existential doubts. Ultimately, the rain becomes a medium for self-discovery, symbolizing transformation and the search for meaning in life.



3. An Old woman

Arun Kolatkar

An old woman grabs
hold of your sleeve
and tags along.

She wants a fifty paise coin.
She says she will take you
to the horseshoe shrine.

You've seen it already.
She hobbles along anyway
and tightens her grip on your shirt

She won't let you go.
You know how old women are.
They stick to you like a burr.

You turn around and face her
with an air of finality.
You want to end the farce.

When you hear her say,
'What else can an old woman do
on hills as wretched as these?'

You look right at the sky.
Clear through the bullet holes
she has for her eyes.

And as you look on,
the cracks that begin around her eyes
spread beyond her skin.

And the hills crack.
And the temples crack.
And the sky falls

With a plate-glass clatter
Around the shatterproof crone
who stands alone

And you are reduced
to so much small change
in her hand.

.....
Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004) was an Indian poet, known for his poetry in English and Marathi.

His work often explored themes of modern life, spirituality, and urban experience. He was awarded with Sahitya Akademi Award in 2005 for his Marathi collection 'Bhijaki Vahi'.

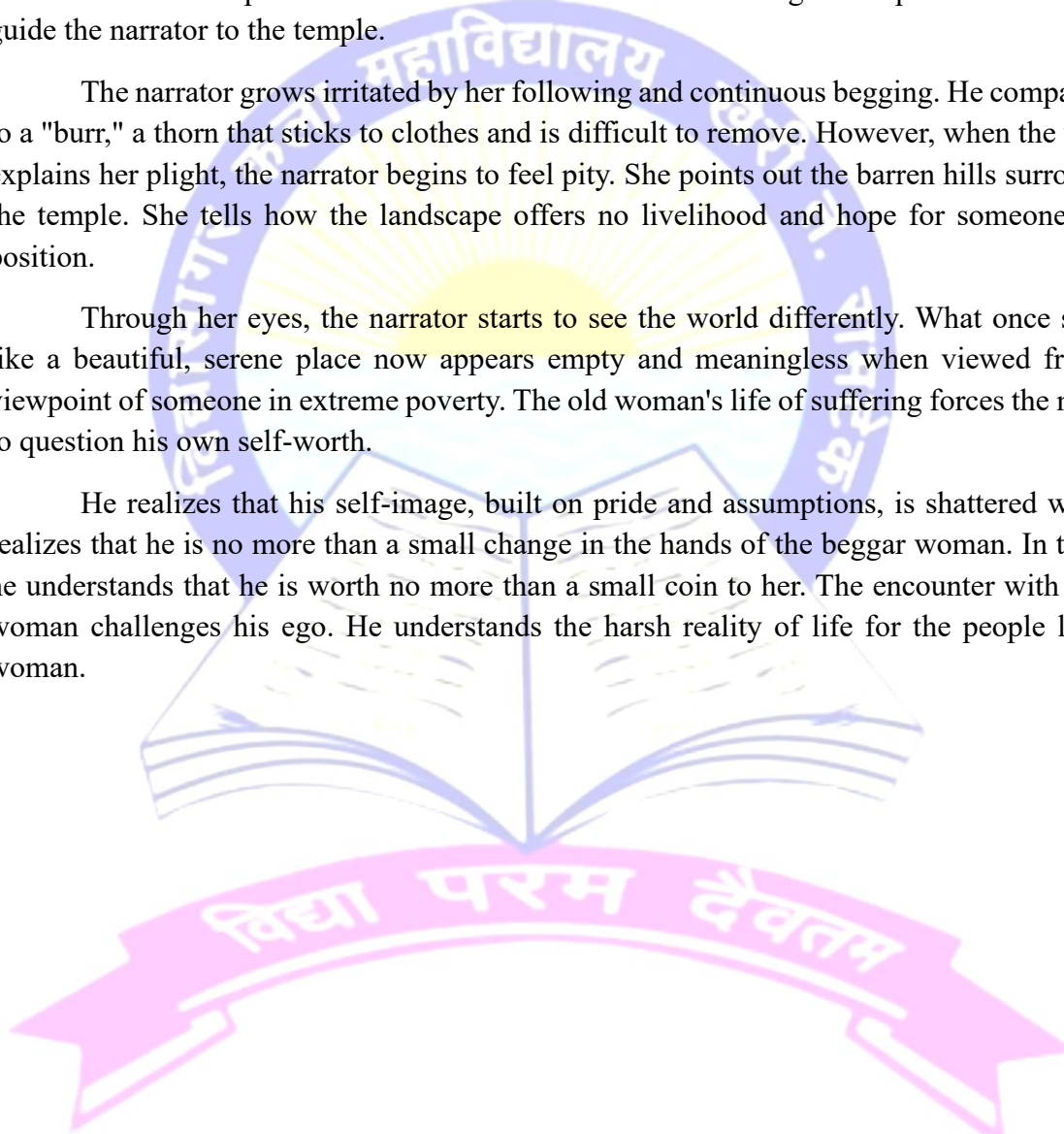
Analysis

Arun Kolatkar's poem "An Old Woman" explores themes of poverty, human pity, and self-awareness. The narrator encounters an old beggar woman outside the Khandoba temple in Jejuri, Maharashtra. This situation is common in India, where beggars often approach pilgrims for alms outside temples. The woman follows the narrator asking for help. She even offers to guide the narrator to the temple.

The narrator grows irritated by her following and continuous begging. He compares her to a "burr," a thorn that sticks to clothes and is difficult to remove. However, when the woman explains her plight, the narrator begins to feel pity. She points out the barren hills surrounding the temple. She tells how the landscape offers no livelihood and hope for someone in her position.

Through her eyes, the narrator starts to see the world differently. What once seemed like a beautiful, serene place now appears empty and meaningless when viewed from the viewpoint of someone in extreme poverty. The old woman's life of suffering forces the narrator to question his own self-worth.

He realizes that his self-image, built on pride and assumptions, is shattered when he realizes that he is no more than a small change in the hands of the beggar woman. In the end, he understands that he is worth no more than a small coin to her. The encounter with the old woman challenges his ego. He understands the harsh reality of life for the people like old woman.



4. Marriages are Made

Eunice de Souza

My cousin Elena
is to be married
The formalities
have been completed:
her family history examined
for T.B. and madness
her father declared solvent
her eyes examined for squints
her teeth for cavities
her stools for the possible
non-Brahmin worm.
She's not quite tall enough
and not quite full enough
(children will take care of that)
Her complexion it was decided
would compensate, being just about
the right shade
of rightness
to do justice to
Francisco X. Noronha Prabhu
good son of Mother Church.

Eunice de Souza (1940–2017) was an Indian poet, educator, and novelist. Known for her ironic style, she explored themes of gender, identity, and social norms in her works. A prominent feminist voice, her poetry often criticized patriarchal traditions and celebrated individuality and self-expression.

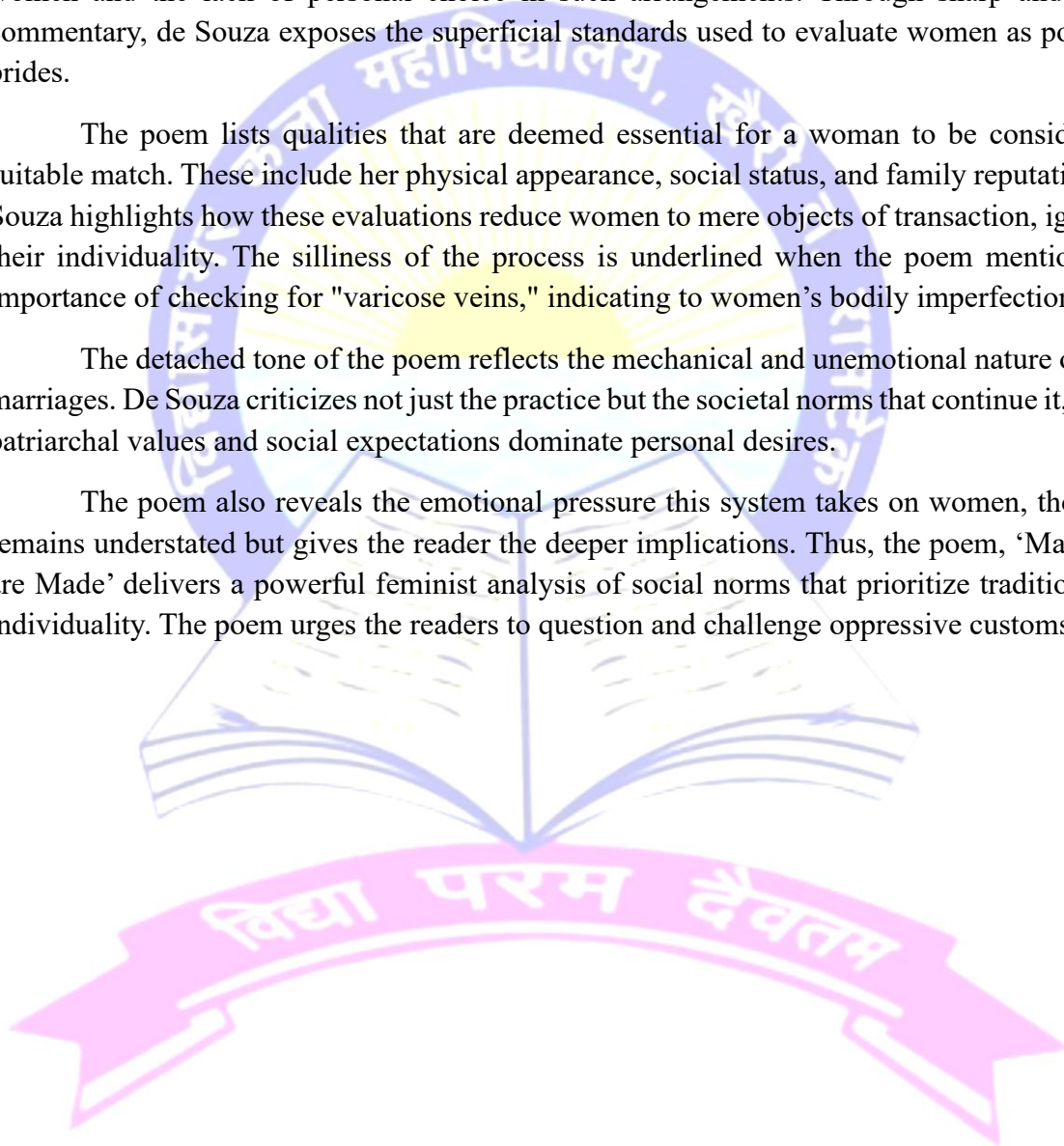
Analysis

Eunice de Souza's poem *Marriages are Made* criticizes the traditional, patriarchal system of arranged marriages in Indian society. The poem reflects the commodification of women and the lack of personal choice in such arrangements. Through sharp and ironic commentary, de Souza exposes the superficial standards used to evaluate women as potential brides.

The poem lists qualities that are deemed essential for a woman to be considered a suitable match. These include her physical appearance, social status, and family reputation. De Souza highlights how these evaluations reduce women to mere objects of transaction, ignoring their individuality. The silliness of the process is underlined when the poem mentions the importance of checking for "varicose veins," indicating to women's bodily imperfections.

The detached tone of the poem reflects the mechanical and unemotional nature of such marriages. De Souza criticizes not just the practice but the societal norms that continue it, where patriarchal values and social expectations dominate personal desires.

The poem also reveals the emotional pressure this system takes on women, though it remains understated but gives the reader the deeper implications. Thus, the poem, 'Marriages are Made' delivers a powerful feminist analysis of social norms that prioritize tradition over individuality. The poem urges the readers to question and challenge oppressive customs.



5. “Sea Breeze, Bombay”

Adil Jussawalla

Partition’s people stitched
Shrouds from a flag, gentlemen scissored Sind.
An opened people, fraying across the cut
country reknotted themselves on this island.
Surrogate city of banks,
Brokering and bays, refugees’ harbour and port,
Gatherer of ends whose brick beginnings work
Loose like a skin, spotting the coast,
Restore us to fire. New refugees,
Wearing blood-red wool in the worst heat,
come from Tibet, scanning the sea from the north,
Dazed, holes in their cracked feet.
Restore us to fire. Still,
Communities tear and re-form; and still, a breeze,
Cooling our garrulous evenings, investigates nothing,
Ruffles no tempers, uncovers no root,
And settles no one adrift of the mainland’s histories.

Adil Jussawalla (1940) was born in a Parasi family in Bombay. He is an Indian English poet, editor and writer. After his education in India, he went to England and worked there till 1969. He returned India in 1971 and taught English at St Xavier’s College, Mumbai. He was honoured with Sahitya Akademi award in 2014 for his collection ‘Trying to Say Goodbye’.

Analysis

"Sea Breeze, Bombay" is a poem that honours Bombay (now Mumbai) for being a city that embraces people from all walks of life. The poet, Jussawalla, emphasizes that Bombay is a city of immigrants, where people from different communities coexist peacefully. The sea breeze symbolizes the city's ability to provide relief and equality to all those who suffer.

The poem mentions historical events, such as the Partition of India in 1947, which caused wide displacement and trauma. People who lost their homes, families, and identities during this tragedy found comfort and a new life in Bombay. Bombay welcomed them like a surrogate mother.

The poem also mentions the refugees from Sindh and other communities, such as the Tibetans fleeing Chinese oppression. For these displaced groups, Bombay became a place of refuge and opportunity. The city's prosperous financial institutions, symbolized by banks and brokering, offered livelihood and a new beginning to the displaced people.

The poet uses symbols like fire, important in Parsi religion, to represent purification and renewal. The Parsi community, like many others, rebuilt their lives in Bombay after being exiled from their homeland in Persia. The city, accepts anyone seeking refuge and gives them a sense of belonging with its inclusive and non-judgmental character. Ultimately, Bombay is depicted as a city that does not turn anyone away and becomes a home to all who settle there.

6. When Landscape Becomes Woman
Arundhati Subramaniam (1973-)

I was eight when I looked
through a keyhole
and saw my mother in the drawing room
in her hibiscus silk sari,
her fingers slender
around a glass of iced cola
and I grew suddenly shy
for never having seen her before.

I knew her well, of course —
serene undulation of blue mulmul,
wrist serrated by thin gold bangle,
gentle convexity of mole
on upper right arm
and high arched foot —
better than I knew myself.

And I knew her voice
like running water —
ice cubes in cola.

But through the keyhole
at the grownup party
she was no longer
geography.

She seemed to know
how to incline her neck,
just when to sip
her swirly drink
and she understood the language
of baritone voices and lacquered nails
and words like Emergency.

I could have watched her all night.

And that's how I discovered
that keyholes always reveal more
than doorways.

That a chink in the wall
is all you need
to tumble
into a parallel universe.

That mothers are women.

Arundhati Subramaniam is an Indian poet, writer, and art critic known for her lyrical and thought-provoking poetry. She was born in Bombay in 1973, she writes about identity, spirituality, and human emotions. She has received several awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award. Her works include *When God is a Traveller* and *Love Without a Story*.

Analysis

The poem "When Landscape Becomes Woman" by Arundhati Subramaniam portrays a crucial moment in a child's life that reveals a new perspective on her mother. Narrated in the first person by an eight-year-old girl, the poem highlights themes of discovery, maturity, and the complex identity of women beyond motherhood.

The narrator describes an evening when her mother, stylishly dressed and hosting guests, captivates her. Observing through a keyhole, the girl is mesmerized by her mother's beauty and charm, feeling both shy and awestruck. This version of her mother is unfamiliar yet fascinating. The girl realizes her mother is more than the caregiver she has always known. The poet illustrates mother's presence, voice, and graceful behaviour, showing her as a woman with her own identity, separate from being a mother.

The child's curiosity leads her to a deeper understanding of adult's world and boundaries, symbolized by the keyhole and doorway. She senses an emotional and intellectual distance between her and the mother, discovering that her mother exists in a parallel universe of adulthood.

The poem's central theme is the child's realization that her mother is a woman with desires, intelligence, and individuality beyond her role as a mother. It captures the change from innocence to awareness. The poem reflects the multifaceted nature of women and the beauty of discovery.

