

Poets on Poets: Celebrating New Collections (Part 2)



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Seema Reza on Purvi Shah's *Miracle Marks* (Curbstone Books/Northwestern University Press, 2019)

These days, my world has shrunk. Tethered to the small footprint of my home, to the needs of a family, I rise and start the dough in the dishes, prepare meals, bathe, wake my sons, serve them soft bread kneaded by my hands.

“You

believe

you can

talk to river, calm it down, reason it. Woman,

have you not learned?

You may birth your ruler.”

The women we meet through these poems in Shah's collection are living (and dying) in opposition to patriarchal oppression. Through spanning Vedic texts and modern headlines and commentary, Shah traces the links of the chains that bound and continue to bind Indian submission and exclusion, and the extraordinary lengths of suicide and infanticide they go to in order to unfasten themselves from untraumatizing situations.

And those of us living in the 'liberated West'—where our self-determination exists only up to a threshold and under constant threat of our reflections. The same cycles of washing and bleeding and feeding inherent to caregiving. The same expectation of sacrifice that often despair.

“The value of water even before

a cyclone

*The value of women even
before the public sphere.*

*The value of a bed before
it is dusk, before you need*

to make it home with the day's wash or sloshing pots or tomorrow's tank.

How we live

for lineage, grains to mouths, spills to plenty, women to women. How we live,

as a lamp in service

of being lit."

"In many places, surviving birth as a girl child is a miracle." The poems march and meander and skip across the page. Here the use of s
aesthetic, but political—the words spread like oil on water, the marks cannot be contained. The miracles compound and morph: woma
woman as monster, woman as mark-maker and space-taker. And woman refusing: to offer herself as refuge, as sacrifice, as martyr.

It is a novelty, it is a choice, it will end, there are possibilities on the horizon, I remind myself as I go through the motions, my capacity to
world collapsed into caregiving. I stay home, as I've been told to.

"You hear the voices of women who never

drowned, who could actually

never be

drowned. You touch

your skin and mark

a ghost, perhaps

too many to count."

Miracle Marks echoes.