



**Five Poems by Archana Sahni**

**My Grandmother's Quarantine Bread**

My grandmother is long gone, but I'm eating her bread,  
golden-brown multigrain bread, straight from my oven,  
its aroma bringing in memories of fallen eucalyptus buds  
after rain, pumpkin vines glistening on moist earth, and  
the cries of hawkers outside our ancestral gate.

I visit a nearby store wearing a mask, and buy a packet  
of yeast to make her bread, my maiden attempt.  
There aren't too many places to go to these days. My  
favourite is the kitchen, and the other, within. Dolphins  
suddenly visible in the oceans, and deer basking  
in the winter sun on empty roads tell me all is not lost.

Hers is not the only bread I bake. I bake my mother's  
bread,  
my sister's bread, my neighbour's bread. I bake Irish soda  
bread,  
focaccia from left-over pizza dough, and medieval  
sourdough bread.  
I bake the bread of all the places I want to travel to but  
can't.  
Each time the alchemy of yeast and heat inside the dough  
makes  
the bread rise and brown, spreading aromas that meld time  
and space.

Mostly I bake my grandmother's bread. Her bread  
is the canvas on which I bake my dreams, discovering  
the magic of what hands can resurrect, and the privilege  
of going within. Her bread is now my bread.

### **Hidimba's Gift**

Bhima's thirst brought forth  
a girl's nervous laughter from  
behind a bush, then her dark body  
holding water vesseled in a leaf.  
Wild honey and wild fruit lay at her feet.

Not knowing the same  
language, all that was exchanged  
between them must've been  
a languid glance; then, their drinking  
of each other.  
This too, Hidimba explained to Bhima,  
was a marriage.  
A strange light, a strange love, shone  
in her eyes as she spoke.  
Aryaputra Bhima  
learnt something new that day.

It's still the same in the  
land of the *Mahabharata*:  
a different law of love for those  
who make history, and  
for those who sneak up  
from behind its pages  
with wild honey and wild fruit.

### **At Thornhill Cemetery** *for Clara Blackwood*

And I thought, there is a beauty  
in death and dying  
that life and living cannot equal.  
It is the difference between

the invitation of an empty wooden bench  
and the silence of a smooth white  
gravestone five steps away from it;  
the difference between  
the bare branches of this tree  
and the lush grass  
beneath it.  
It is the difference between  
my inhalation of this woody fragrance  
which is my eternal spring,  
and my exhalation in which  
I die a little, in every moment,  
with every breath.  
Love, find me  
somewhere between the two,  
walking my tightrope, twilight walk  
tonight.

#### **Elegy for a Butterfly**

I found a butterfly, wings  
folded and motionless, on my  
early morning walking path.  
Sometimes it takes an open  
burial to reveal nature's beauty.

#### **Rose Transfigured**

Every rose I see  
is the death of me:  
I cannot be the same  
as my eyes follow  
the swirl of petals  
unfolding, and folding in,  
holding nature's paradox  
of ultimate beauty  
and cruelty of love  
in one gaze.

Every rose  
pulls me in.

Every rose  
intoxicates me.

Every rose  
makes me meditate.

Every rose  
is become  
my mandala.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A Sanskrit word for circle, a mandala is a symbolic diagram or geometric pattern representing the cosmos or a spiritual path in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, often used as a tool for meditation and for performing sacred rites.