

## NILAMBRI GHAI

### For a mother who lost her daughter\*

Why do you hide behind your shadow?  
Look, the world has no veil around it,  
sometimes, it can be beautiful!  
It's close to your body, it wants to touch you,  
your isolation,  
your widow nights,  
your heavy smile,  
your half-open lips,  
your dry hands,  
your words.  
It wants to kiss them.  
Why don't your eyes rise to look?  
Are they unused  
to this?  
Is it like an insult  
to be without a veil?

Do you exist from day to day  
in the hope that something will change,  
that you'll be born again as a mother  
in a home where there might be a shortage of girls?  
Do you have only a veil to give to your daughter?  
The same veil,  
so bitter, and yet, so much like you, your own?

In the silence of the night,  
when you crushed the little neck  
with that veil,  
did it seem simple to end it all?  
Just like that, so simple,  
with such little effort of your hands?  
Did you feel numb once it was all over?  
The tiny life? the silent cry?  
How did you never let it reach your ears?  
Did you wrap it, never to open it,  
in your veil?

"My daughter," you said, "yes, it happened two years ago.  
It was God's will...She died quietly.  
It had to be done...  
There were too many of us around...".

\*This poem was written for a woman from Belukkurichi (a village in Tamil Nadu) who felt, like many others, that she had to put her infant daughter "to sleep."

*Nilambri Ghai is from India. She teaches functional literacy to adults in Montreal and is active in community women's groups and the theatre.*

### Waiting

Waiting to be born  
I was removed before time  
or after, who knows...

Waiting to hear the lungburst of a new born  
my mother tried to hide in shame  
for having not delivered completely...

Waiting to join others at play  
I alone saw my father's back  
bent over debt piles...

Waiting to tell my sister of my love,  
my wedding was arranged...

Waiting to be held by one I'd never known  
I lost my home...

Waiting for an identity  
I forgot how to raise my eyes or my voice ...

Waiting to build another home  
I lost myself...

Waiting for ever to come  
I stopped waiting,  
and went in search of lost lives,  
lost time, lost history...



A. Ramachandran from *Yayati, The Complete Man*, 1986.