

A Poem About Not Writing Poems

Meena Kandasamy*

Address

*Correspondence: @meenakandasamy

These days I write nothing
except my eyes, why share
my drugs of angst or absolute
godlessness when the price,
they have said, will have to be
paid in blood, why speak of meat

or beef, when the aftertaste of talk

Is not just a threat of televised gangrape,
but a village gathering to slaughter a man,
again, why force fit my words to capture
the state, its terror, this state of terror
when friends who planned to read marx
had prison cells waiting for them, so why
risk, why run for dear life, why rage at all?

"What cannot be said must be suppressed."

"Why show the scar on your thigh to strangers?"—
Lessons I once learnt in my bedroom
are lessons for life.

So, in lamp black, I only write my eyes
in the ritual way some Tamil women
draw a kolam each day, rice flour
out sparkling the early morning sun,



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rigid dots anchoring snaking lines, all discipline
a deception to hide the wildness, all symmetry
an excuse for keeping count.

Watch a woman's hands
dance an intricate design,
learn that it's her desire
that she is pouring out
on her doorstep. Like her,
this woman in the mirror
is a woman who pretends
to know her place. Each
night, she washes her eyes,
unwraps her word-wounds,
takes them to bed. At daybreak
she applies a fresh dressing.

Meena Kandasamy is a poet, fiction writer, translator and activist who lives in Chennai and London. She has published two collections of poetry, *Touch* and *Ms. Militancy*, and the critically acclaimed novel *The Gypsy Goddess*. Her newly published novel, *When I Hit You: Or, The Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (Atlantic Books, May 2017), explores the theme of domestic violence and marital rape.

To cite this poem:

Kandasamy, M. (2017). A Poem About Not Writing Poems. *Feminist Dissent*, (2), 83-84. Retrieved from:
<http://journals.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/feministdissent/article/view/16/172>