

## From Kauser Bano's Unborn Daughter

– By Anshu Malviya

Everything was all right, Amma!  
The tartness of the pickle you ate,  
your flavours of the earth,  
would often reach me...  
Filtering through your womb,  
the sun would find its way to me.

I was so happy, Amma!  
Soon I would take  
my first breath of air,  
I would feel  
my own pangs of hunger,  
I would see  
my own share of sunshine.

I was so happy, Amma!  
I had seen the silhouette  
of Abbu's palm on your belly;  
I wanted to see his face,  
I wanted to see Abbu for myself,  
I wanted to see my share of the world.

I was so happy, Amma!  
Then one day  
I was frightened... slithering like a fish...  
in the waters of your womb;  
What was this unfamiliar shadow over the water...  
I sensed you crawling,  
not walking;  
It was hurting me, Amma!  
I don't know what happened next;  
From the soft and cosy darkness of your womb



I landed  
in harsh sunlight  
and then...  
a raging fire.

That was a very major operation, Amma!

I saw  
with eyes  
that never opened  
big, big doctors bent over you, Amma,  
three-pronged surgeon's knives  
in their hands...  
They let out a shriek when they saw me!  
Why did they shriek, Amma...  
Were they overjoyed to see me?

The moment I was out,  
they gave me fiery toys, Amma!  
And then I was so lost in play,  
I didn't even look at you...  
But you must have sung me a childbirth song  
with your last breath, Amma!

I was never born, Amma!  
Nor did I ever die;  
Like an unborn child in hospital,  
stored in coloured water,  
I became immortal, Amma!  
But there is no coloured water here,  
only a searing fire!  
How long must I keep burning... Amma!

(Kauser Bano from Naroda Patiya in Ahmedabad was attacked by a mob on February 28, 2002. She was pregnant at the time. The murderers slit her stomach and flung her foetus into the fire. In this poem, the foetus is imagined to be an unborn girl to signify another dimension of sexual assault.)

(From *Dakshin Tola*, a collection of poems by Anshu Malviya. Translated from the Hindi by Javed Anand.)