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MALATHI RAO

Mother

Mother, you wore out this visit.
 I wonder now
 why like Durga at Navaratri
 you prowled the garden—
 the machete in your raised arm
 gleamed its deathly fascination on me

What demon did you seek, your eyes
 your body burning. O Fury, out to
 destroy the world, was it me,
 your daughter who was your quarry?
 Father performed the ceremonial
 while the family priest muttered
 mantras
 And you, mother, with accurate strokes
 of the machete
 denuded the coconut for the goddess.

You laughed at me, mother,
 You frightened me
 with your celebratory play with
 fire and water, your *puja*,
 in the face of Death.

You frightened me, mother.

Malathi Rao teaches English Literature in a women's college in Delhi, India.

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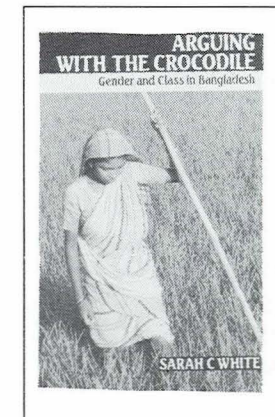
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