TARA ATLURI

Smells Like Curry

On the front page of the Times of India
A little boy starves to death.

His hips and ribs protrude
As the government colludes
To build a Mickey D’s
And Ronald McDonald serves Vegetable oil
To try to appease Auspicious Hindus
Who clamour and reach for pre-packaged soy
That never quite reaches the lips of that McFamished little boy

But wait with the farm land eroding
And baby’s tummy still bloating as America plants golden arches
Over golden Raj temples
Beef aint the only thing that stinks around here
You see
India used to be worshipped as Mother
As Sacred cow with rolling flesh
Loving arms and heavenly breast
Now Revlon sells fair and lovely lightening cream
And slimfast sold in supermarkets takes the place
Of home-grown lentils and beans

And maybe she’s born with it
Maybe it’s just a marketing scheme.

And where have we been
Hippy tourist with rail thin frame?
Dude I went to India
And besides the diarrhea
My life will never be the same
The same
The same
We all look and sound the same
Have identical faces stenches and names
Are you Radha Shamiksha Sangeeta Mohammed or Apu?
No
Oh so which Cab driver quickie mart proprietor job stealing

Doctor engineer illegal immigrant are you?
And the little brown girl in the suburbs grown thin to escape wastes away far away
From pictures of Fat aunties
What Hollywood says is a Paki, a coolie woman’s only fate
And Mommy and Daddy don’t want little Susie Q and Johnny Smith
To make fun of the Chapathi, Pumpadum and Daal
They say looks Runny like war wounds and Smells like Shit
So they feed baby fast-food fried fritters prepared by x-cons and teen moms made from sirloin strips of diseased beef Plucked from a cow once worshipped as mother
As we teach our daughters that life giving hips and just unnecessary blubber
And India imports the Hindu Big Mac

Cause the IMF says foreign investment encourages growth
But fuck health care
After all it’s time to trim the fat

And brothers and sisters with skin as dark as upper caste women
Starving themselves so lovely and fair
Are pumping out designer sushi and curry for yuppie hotel chains
That fund jails
But wait
When they’ve eaten all our food
Then what happens to this Asian invasion?
Funny how much they love roti and raw fish
But watch mouths and borders shut
When it’s time for immigration.

And I wonder what would it be like if we broke bread and not backs through Minimum wage slave wage imprisoned kitchen labour
Planted seeds not seeds of female insecurity
Shared meals not fences with neighbours
Instead of Cosmo and refried beans
Instead of size two two cents and hour two hundred dollar jeans
We sold our children their souls in soul food grown from the earth
Taught them to nourish their bodies from birth
Miss India became Miss Universe
And her stick thin frame was envied by a nation
Where middle class women diet to wear a crown like Queen Victoria
But British raj and beauty regimes
Never stopped mass starvation
And the little brown girl who learned to hide her colour
All her backwards traditions behind the progress of exlax, dexitrim and poor nutrition
Wastes away,
Body never comes to fruition
like Ripe mangoes that fall full and fresh and fully formed off trees in India
Where Hindus trade golden deities for golden McNuggets
And wise Indian mamas grow forlorn
She learns that Curry stinks and her round body is unhealthy
As starving child on world vision commercial becomes a pinup girl
For the wealthy socialite women ingesting American salad
Sucking marrow from our bones
And colour from our pallets
And curry aint even an Indian word
It's what the British made up
Cause they couldn't make sense of all our spice
The spice they stole
Taking so much more taking spirit from our flesh
And marrow from our bones
But somewhere in me there is a hunger that recalls a time before
There is a deep unsatiable growl
That can't be filled by all their cabbage soup and raw carrot sticks

Hollow name brands
Oops silly rabbit ecoli is for kids

Somewhere in me there is a hunger so deep and wide
It can only be filled by the bones and flesh of every fat auntie
Of every rich sauce and spice
That eats through their designer tofu designer shakes
Designed to turn our taste buds
Not to mention out booty's white

Somewhere in me there is the spice that some queen street hipster will market as Monday night Masala
A taste of the exotic
For an extra 9.95 you can have the concubine Kama Sutra special
just to make it erotic
Well Fuck those culture vultures
Who would have me buy back my culture for twice the price
Prepared by slave wagers from whom white masters still leach labour and spice
Honey I don't need no imitation
I am the sacred cow in her full incarnation
Save your prison produced produce and curry served up like death row sentence

If you speak the right language and your skin's light enough
We can make it extra mild
No thank you your sloppy seconds are not required
You see I am already Brown sugar
Sweet enough to feed every child

Tara Atluri is a Toronto-based spoken word performer. She wrote this piece a year ago while visiting her family in India. She uses poetry to connect with people and to connect small everyday struggles with larger systemic oppressions. She believes change will only happen when we start sharing our stories. Contact Tara at taralalturi@hotmail.com.