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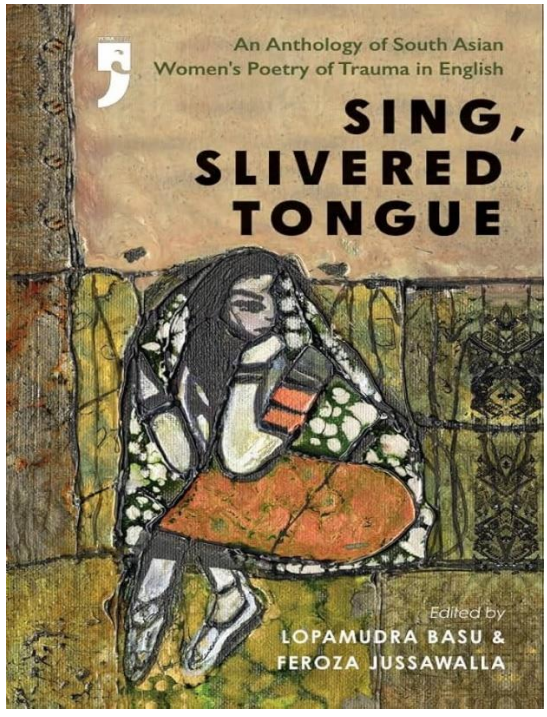

Sing, Slivered Tongue: An Anthology of South Asian Women's Poetry of Trauma in English, edited by Lopamudra Basu and Feroza Jussawalla is not merely an anthology of poems–it is a chorus of voices that has endured silencing, fragmentation, and exile, yet continues to sing with slivered tongues. This volume brings together a compelling collection of poems written by women from the past two decades, featuring contributions from South Asia and the South Asian diaspora, whose voices resonate with the urgency of contemporary experience. According to the editors of the anthology, the aim is to vocalise global experiences of womanhood even though the voices are South-Asian, the intention remains to create bridges. The title of the anthology itself finds resonance in Radha Chakravarty's poem "Severed Tongue," where the act of cutting becomes paradoxically generative: "But miracles never cease! The severed tongue, / cut loose, assumes a life of its own, / bleeds new wisdom, which flows / like molten lava from my volcano soul" (33). The articulation of emotional trauma born out of experience of violence is a recurring theme throughout the anthology. Roopali Sircar Gaur's

poem invokes the mythical echoes of Sita "walking through the Flames" (34). She reminds us of the brutal silencing in Hathras, "like they did the other day / in that dusty dirty town of Hathras" (50). The continuum of violence against women is laid bare in the lines that blends anger with pain. Through these invocations we are not allowed to forget the myth of Khona, the great female astrologer from Bengali folklore. Her truthfulness and efficiency in predicting the future ultimately led to the cutting of her tongue by her husband Mihir. This brutal motif underscores the historical marginalisation of women's voices, making Khana a potent figure of resistance and reclamation. Her story, marked by silencing and survival, with her mutilation serving as a haunting metaphor for the suppression of female intellect, echoes relentlessly across centuries. The severed tongue becomes emblematic of both trauma and transformation in the anthology – a site where pain is not only remembered but revoiced.

Throughout the anthology, there is a recurring tension between silence and speech. The opening line of the collection urges us to "Pay attention to the silence / silence is the most wilful mauler" (1). Silence is not absence; it is violence, erasure, and complicity. Yet the poems also show how silence can be reconfigured as space for reflection, resistance, and rearticulation.

Yet this is not a collection that dwells solely on pain. It is also a testament to endurance, adaptation, and agency. Usha Akella's "Porcupine" captures this beautifully: "I was born a girl I suppose, I've now become a porcupine, / all that touches me pricks, all that I touch is pricked" (5). Her poem "Naming" attempts to restore dignity to a rape victim, challenging the erasure embedded in silence and reclaiming the power of naming. In doing so, Akella foregrounds the politics of voice – how naming becomes an act of resistance, a refusal to be reduced to victimhood.

Vinita Agrawal's "Yashodhara" reimagines the Buddha's desertion not as spiritual transcendence but as emotional abandonment. The poem harps on the myth of Buddha, exposing the gendered asymmetry of renunciation. Dilruba Z. Ara's "Inheritance of Pain" laments, "My identity, fragmented and lost, / In the labyrinth of expectations I roam" (9), while "Legacy" exposes the burdens of familial and religious expectations: "Hiding behind a religious façade, / Parade in family charades, / where even God fears to interfere" (9). These poems speak to the intergenerational transmission of trauma, the weight of inherited silences, and the claustrophobia of domestic performance.

The anthology's literary lineage is vast and layered. It draws from the aesthetic systems embedded in the Vedas, the Bhakti tradition of Mirabai, and the devotional fervour of *dastans* and *ghazals*. The anthology draws inspiration from the perseverance of women in the Mahabharata, the fierce agency of

goddesses like Kali and Durga, and the complex subjectivities of epic heroines like Sita and Draupadi. *Sing, Slivered Tongue* continues this lineage, but with a contemporary urgency. It speaks from the fissures of modernity, migration, and memory as lived by today's women. The South Asian anthology seeks out the question whether English is a medium of betrayal or possibility? The poets here do not offer easy answers, but their fierce clarity compels us to confront the question with renewed interest.

Laksmisree Banerjee's "I Grow in Death" reminds us of Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus," transforming pain into poetic resistance: "My split tongue now / breeds poison… as you cut so I grow / more you suck more I flow" (21). Her poem "Thirst" evokes the loneliness of modern existence: "I wait for the drowsy sun / to drop into my lap lovingly / for a tranquil sleep –" (23). These lines speak to the eternal thirst for warmth and love, the ache of desertion, and the quiet grief of ageing parents and fading intimacy. The poems do not seek catharsis; they seek recognition.

Rachel Bari's "I Love" tenderly portrays a daughter's bond with her father: "My father all of 92, lying on the divan / Gave me a toothless smile…. Until I turned, picked up Maggi, / Showed it to him, the smile returned" (27). These moments of love often dismissed as sentimental are reclaimed here as radical testimony. Anuja Ghimire's "About Love, or I Wish Our Mother Complained More" interrogates the silence around maternal longing, asking why women's love is so easily boxed as excessive or irrelevant. Is it because women's emotions are deemed too porous, too unruly, too unworthy of philosophical weight?

The anthology also bears witness to collective grief – Covid losses, migration anxieties, and diasporic dislocation. Shyamasri Maji's lines haunt us as the poet remembers, "There is no shoulder to weep upon, / no shoulder to carry the corpse" (88). Lopamudra Basu's "At the Border" evokes the alienation of living abroad: "A lifetime later, now with a new passport / my palms dampen and throat dries at the border" (28). In "White Roses," she writes, "Today, life goes on as usual…/ do people even remember that / there was no firewood or earth to bury the dead?" (29). These lines force us to grapple with the truth of collective amnesia – often a necessity to bring back normalcy to life.

Jayshree Iyer's "Orphaned" echoes Kamala Das's "An Introduction," asking, "You want proof of my Indianness" (65) – a challenge to linguistic gatekeeping and cultural authenticity. The poem interrogates the politics of belonging, the burden of proving one's roots, and the violence of cultural suspicion. Feroza Jussawalla's "The Divorce Dislocation" asks, "thirty years of service / to you / husband, / where did they go?" (p. 71). These poems speak to

the quiet devastations of domestic erasure, the invisibility of women's labour, and the ache of unacknowledged loss.

Ratika Kaushik's "Sorry for Surviving" juxtaposes caregiving with academic excellence: "I am the fittest cook, cleaner, helper and caregiver before 9 am, / and most excited professor till 3 pm" (77). The poem captures the exhausting duality many women inhabit – the relentless performance of competence, care, and composure. It is a poem that refuses apology, even as it names the cost of survival. Nishi Pulugurtha delicately navigates the fraught terrain between caregiving and emotional reticence, as captured in the protagonist's internal monologue: "Do you remember what you ate?... Why is he asking me so many questions?" (111).

The anthology's refusal to offer closure is one of its greatest strengths. There are no neat resolutions, no redemptive arcs. Instead, it honours the unfinished work of mourning and meaning-making. The poems ask: What does it mean to survive? To remember? To speak when language itself feels complicit or inadequate? These questions are not answered, they are endured and borne out through living.

For readers attuned to feminist memory studies, trauma theory, and postcolonial poetics, *Sing, Slivered Tongue* is a critical intervention. It challenges dominant historiographies by foregrounding embodied, affective, and vernacular modes of knowing. It is also pedagogically rich and ideal for classrooms that seek to engage with gendered violence, diasporic identity, and the ethics of representation.

The modern woman must sing of love and its absences, of loss etched into memory, of longing that defies silence, of loneliness that lingers in crowded rooms, and of trauma that demands to be named. But above all, *Sing, Slivered Tongue* is a book of courage – Womensing, speak and weep in the poems collected here. It dares to name what is often silenced. It dares to sing, even when the voice trembles. And in doing so, it offers not just testimony, but solidarity, a reminder that in the act of reading, we too become witnesses.

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