

1.10 Anything but this

Anything: anything but
in the black vigil
it came to me.
Anything but this,
was I born for this?
My heart, a tree,
has slowly died, my hopes
all shed, dead leaves.
Did my own *amma* know
it would be this?
Did she know that I would end
without all choice, or only one –
to choose which end
of it all?

Let the waters close,
the blessed, filthy waters
close above my head.
O Kali, how do you allow
this life, this end – and
why do you withhold your power?
Anything but this life,
the beatings day and night,
the drink my terror:
the beating then the ravaging.
Durga, where are you?
My broken arm, my broken leg
my only night companions –
sleep, I did forget your name.

Just let the waters close –
O gods! my children –
are they to come with me?
Am I to leave them here with him
this *goonda* and his
cruel conspiring kind,
out-law in-laws?
Better they should put me
out of mind along with fruit
of that of which alone
I have the power to dispose –
my useless body.
Are they to come with me?
She has no other life
this little part of me:
but is he mine to kill,
to drown that little flame –
have I the duty, or the right?

Kali, guide me, why not fight for me,
lend me just one
of those, your fearsome arms?
Or will you be content to wear
my children's skulls for necklaces,
and is the bright blood
upon your tongue
to be my children's blood?

So I shall go
to the lake,
go as a bride for the
Lord of the lake –
Ah! that will be my deceit for them –
to his watery palace gleaming
beneath the sick,
unsmiling water's face.
Chandi, at least,
in my extreme,
on this morning of all mornings,
at least tread with me.

Tread with me, my
children, feet sink
into this foulest mud
water rise above the knee
flesh all consumed below,
let none deliver now, no
call divert, I pray:
Chandi, all I ask -
just let the waters close.

Chennai - April 2007.

*On reading south Indian press report about a
woman prevented from drowning herself with
her children in a lake*