

MARRIAGE

Marriage is
12 tolas of gold
2,000 bucks for a hall
plus 200 for the Maharaj,
invitations written in red,
500 mouths to be fed

with srikhand and puri,
vessels of steel
sarees of silk...
In addition a boy, a girl.
Marriage is
no trivial affair.

Nishtha Desai



MIDDAY MEAL

Purple brinjals grew black
like night
in a black bowl
and circled in
spluttering oil
hastened by climbing flames
of my kerosene stove.
The blood coloured pulp
of over-ripe tomatoes
too grew black
in the redness
of flames.
Then the first tear
since dawn
welled in my eye.
I don't know why.
My heart has been
too often grated
to find reasons any more.
And my mind too cluttered
with bills and frills
to seek repose
in clarity.
Add the spices and the salt,
stir to achieve
desired consistency.
The tears now unchecked
pour into my gravy
I stir, I stir,
I stir the tears,
the salt and spices.
Are my tears trying
to poison him?

The clock on the mantleself
goads me to hurry.
My mother-in-law's ghost
sits in that clock.
Hurry, hurry,
he will be here soon.
The clock now speaks
from within me.
I hear its metallic breathing
from within my heart.
Hurry fire, hurry,
burn the purple and the red,
burn the spices, salt and tears.
I stir the spices
and the salt,
the tears keep pouring in
helping me achieve
desired consistency.
I wash my eyes
that he may not see
red in my eyes
but only in
my forehead.
But why again and again
make believe?
He will think like
he's always thought
it's onions that make
my eyes bleed.
He comes to eat
and throws it down
the sink — which only
I must clean.
Too much salt! he curses.
Too many tears, I whisper unheard
and tears have salt.

Vishwapriya