



The Female of the Species

*Sometimes you want to talk
about love and despair
and the ungratefulness of children.*

*A man is no use whatever then.
You want then your mother
or sister
or the girl with whom you
went through school,*

*and your first love, and her
first child – a girl –
and your second.
You sit with them and talk.*

*She sews and you sit and sip
and speak of the rate of rice
and the price of tea
and the scarcity of kerosene.*

*You know both that you've spoken
of love and despair and ungrateful
children.*

—Gauri Deshpande

Neena's poem 'Silk prison' in Manushi No. 3 inspired Flavia from Bombay – one of Manushi's close friends – to write about her own life, focusing on violence within the family. This is Neena's response to what Flavia wrote.

Jigsaw Puzzle

*Breasts bruised, brains battered,
Skin scarred, soul shattered,
Can't scream - neighbours stare,
Cry for help – no one's there.*

*In the intervening silences
I gather up the jagged fragments,
Try to re-arrange them into some semblance of
The jigsaw puzzle I once called 'me'.*

*Try this one here, that one there,
Something's missing, can't tell where.
There still a hole, can't find the piece,
Must cover it with my silk sari.*

*In the hollow gaps
I try to make sense of senseless pieces that
Won't fit into any pattern,
Not even the new one
Which, they all insist, is 'me'.*

*Mustn't fight, must be mute,
That's your strength – turn your cheek.
All my fault people say,
What have I done wrong today?*

*In the vacant voids
I finally see I'll be lost forever,
Chasing isolated pieces of fantasy
Until I go out to find new pieces of
Another 'me'.*

*I see you've got some fragments too,
If we put them together, can we start anew?
There's lots of pieces everywhere
But the picture we make is one we'll share.*

—Neena Nehru

Exodus

(To my husbands, lovers)

“a going out or going forth, departure”

*Trust me no more –
Our bed is unsafe.
Hidden within folds of cloth
a cancerous rage-
i will serve you no more
in the name of wifely love
i'll not masturbate your pride
in the name of wifely loyalty
Trust me no more
Our bed is unsafe.
Hidden within folds of cloth
a desperate slave
You dare to dismiss my anger
call it woman's logic
You dare to claim my body
call it wifely duty
Trust me no more
Your bed is unsafe
Rising from folds of cloth –*

—Pat Parker

After the Wedding

*I sit rod straight, limbs stiff, chin up,
staring hard and cold, the sun
in his newt burning eye.*

I did not think I would try to die

*when yesterday they hennaed my hands
in the patterns of stars and moons
and flowers, for joy.*

—Meena Alexander

*Brother
I don't want to hear
about
how my real enemy
Is the system.
I'm no genius
but I do know
that system
you hit me with
is called
a fist.*

—Pat Parker (a black feminist poet)