

## Shooting Cool Guys In Mumbai

*Meeting Manju, Discovering The Eclipse*

When I saw her first  
that day in April,  
she had already passed  
into cold-floor  
dance memories.  
She was as offbeat  
and bent  
as probably any blue bird which flew by.  
Music was playing in the background  
polished images were on their way  
to the washing machine. It was a month  
for detergent.

She had a pygmy in her mind  
a Neanderthal Krishna. She was  
playing chess and civilization with  
passion. Trying to corner in a bee,  
the bell kept ringing.

When I saw her  
those first few times, in April  
she was visiting friends,  
writing letters. The rain  
was getting in the way  
the floormat was as fragrant as  
a dumpster and Sundays were  
*arithmetic*. Mumbai was a railroad  
Mumbai was first love  
for loaded taxi drivers. We enjoyed it  
when we were in no hurry  
unafraid to lose anything.

That April Mumbai was in infancy  
of its new revolution.  
TVs were turned on to nothing in particular  
and computer games were hot.

Last week I was there.  
I felt there was nothing left to do anymore.  
New Ideas are wise investments and New  
Players are good players.

She had her pullover on in spring  
and she was thinking of  
calendar events which she'd miss.

*Shifting Home Four Times, "Do You Know Pooja Bhatt ?"*

I met her friends  
and this is not her history, her history  
is a backdrop. Her friends wear  
jackets and leave tips, think of the next level.  
She doesn't like being cornered,  
but time corners her and asks sharp questions...  
wonder what she is doing walking a dog  
she should be driving a fire engine  
leaving doors open, so undertakers  
can abandon coffins and disappear.  
She should be climbing a ladder  
hanging bells which the wind can ring.

Last week, when we visited Mumbai together  
we saw multiplexes on every street.  
We saw each one showing  
newer films by newer filmmakers.  
If I poked around in the credits  
I would find at least 3  
who would be her friends  
her friends who wear jackets and leave tips.  
Her friends who didn't warn her of ditches,  
who act pricy and promise  
they'll call, knowing  
they never will.

I usually field her any name  
debutante or rising star  
and ask her if she remembers  
any link, a network  
any commonality at all.  
She usually feels flattered  
but sometimes gets irritated.  
after the credit song is over  
I can see ships and bridges floating in her eyes.

Evening tapers off  
and it is her small handwriting  
on the computer screen  
its her persistence her voice  
and my music machine.  
Once sleep sets in  
the house is an attic  
and the moon is a  
glow bulb, a fisheye,  
swimming in the dark.  
then its onward to the morning  
on a slow deliberate path.

*The Crossover Begins, "Money Comes Into Mumbai"*

Aamir Khan<sup>4</sup> helping a kid to the toilet  
Shahrukh<sup>5</sup> smoking like a chimney  
locking a guy out at night  
leaving parrots alone to fight.

What all do you do with a movie camera?  
make movies, make programs for TV, rent it out,  
point it to yourself and act silly,  
invite birds to fly in empty skies...

She places her glass of milk  
on the TV and asks for a hug.  
On the window someone has drawn a map

Of the wilderness  
rabbits hiding away in empty garbage cans.

Indians growing up in New York  
to be networkers officious activists  
building up stone altars to what never was  
setting up charities, smiling gleefully.

Money comes into Mumbai  
from around the world  
some companies have offices some don't  
some people know some people some don't  
you just need visiting cards, which burn in your pocket  
you need to be alone and you need to be judgmental  
you need to compare yourself with Shahrukh Khan  
Shahrukh has a bungalow worth 2 crores.

You need to have friends  
who'll namedrop you  
who'll protect you  
who will expect you  
not to poach their producers.

Eventually you will wear glasses  
you will use a 10 rupee note as a bookmark  
you will never use the trains  
keep a driver, drive a car  
call everyone home on Saturdays  
and drink a lot bitch a lot.

Mumbai is a city which moves  
its got tiny wheels  
it rolls around all the time.

---

4 A prominent Indian film actor

5 Another very popular Indian film actor

You can work your way up  
you can make friends with directors  
who'll make it big tomorrow  
go to sleep. Wait  
you can do favours,  
you can be good, be relaxed

"we are all in a rat race, but we're no rats  
we pick pockets and borrow  
we barge in and keep smiling."

Newyoricans club together  
they make pretty boats which sail  
they pool in dollars and call Shahrukh  
Shahrukh comes and dances  
pays some bills.

They make committees  
committees have many legs no direction.  
They invite Shabana Azmi, Rahul Bose  
Satyajit Ray's protégés to chair  
they all see Hindi films together  
and they all clap and give each other awards  
pat themselves on the back.  
The Bangladeshi in New York  
comes down at the parties  
and introduces himself.

At night they re-edit movies  
they take out the songs put in the bars  
take out the Hindi put in the cars  
put in liberty, search for India  
in garbage cans and old libraries and hifi  
hotels shops. They invite DJ's  
VJ's they mix it up.  
That's the edible feast,  
in the theatres next week.

*Buy A House, Buy A Car*

What all do you have to lose  
to climb a sugar cube and be shiny  
to speed a car and turn it around  
to always have shutterbugs bug?

Producers have malicious bouncers  
they strip you before you enter  
of all your airs and all your teeth  
dry from umbrage taken,  
they like to roll about words  
like industry culture public  
and you want to puncture their tummies.

Will there be a day  
when everyone'll be wearing  
crazy t-shirts which  
one can never buy on the streets?

Today everyone sits around with a pound of butter  
and a plastic knife  
a pound of butter  
and a plastic knife.  
They feel responsible feel powerful  
slip on waxed floors.  
Don't socialize idealize,  
sit up and listen.  
Talk into the mirror,  
claim a voice.

What all do you have to lose  
to stage a casting couch  
to exchange sex for work?  
What all do you have to lose  
to change your faith  
to marry his wife  
abandon your child?  
What all do you have to lose  
to be a film star  
frothing at your mouth,  
buy a house buy a car?

*Digital Democracies, "Puffing up the Heroine's Tits"*

She was an apprentice  
she had her tea after  
everyone else.

The cameras were  
kept in line  
she shot in the air  
screamed  
the parrots woke up.

The roses in their place  
the gardens frozen, lies brazen.

Assistants  
wiped shit off windshields.  
Puffed up the heroine's tits.  
Assistant directors  
were holding cigarettes,  
flushing toilets,  
eating Clorets,  
mopping dead floors.

It was Mumbai in 1992  
no one had yet thought of  
digital democracies  
liberalized economies  
bringing home the bacon  
volunteering for disaster.

No one had paid actors  
no one had negotiated rights  
Indians in NY  
were waiting tables  
pushing infants  
clearing throats,  
using serious detergent.

Shahrukh was a new-comer  
Aamir was slow  
the petrol pump was analog  
if you paid 200 you got 180-worth.

Into a rare wind  
have we descended ?

*Gambling For Higher Stakes*

She was out drying clothes  
on the balcony  
the phone rang and milk boiled over  
water had been boiling all morning.

When she puts out the empty crate  
exchanges bottles of beer  
she remembers that he had many visiting cards  
they went together to Chopra's office  
Chopra as in Vidhu Vinod Chopra.  
He offers her a cigarette  
She offers a napkin.  
together they burn wigs and windchitters.  
Chopra is eating bread & jam  
with him sits Anil Kapoor<sup>6</sup>  
Anil's elbow aches  
he gives her the eye  
he gives her the eye.  
Chopra offers her a job  
Anil is eager,  
she returns Chopra's visiting card  
she has nothing to think about.

Her friend says he must rush,  
to another meeting.  
She wears her sandals and takes the train  
she decides to gamble  
for a higher stake.

---

6 A Popular Indian Actor

*"Did It Hurt ?" "Oh! I've Slapped Him Before"*

He always asked her if he may  
that day he did not  
ask her if he may.  
Tulips rot in the flower pot,  
manic hair-dressers rub-on aftershave.  
That day he reminded her  
of a stain on plate no. 23  
with an engraving, - "Happy Birthday"  
the stain seemed to be egg  
was egg and cream and ketchup.

She threw the plate against a wall  
he didn't take her slap well at all  
"well, I was just doing.  
What I always am."  
She slaps him again  
he breaks down and wishes to be consoled  
she bangs her door shut  
returns his visiting card  
under the door.

*"Those Songs, Which Play In My Ears." "Can't Find No Peace."*

Running away  
running away  
time passes.  
First she runs away  
from songs  
which rhyme  
for habitual liars,  
and go-getters  
hill-burners torch bearers.  
Then she ran away  
from moments  
which reminded her  
of her dream  
of building ice-castles  
cracking the whip  
of building ice-castles.  
That dream had passed away.  
She was already  
running  
five shows a day  
I know you I don't know you  
ambition burns through  
like radioactive refrains.

"May The Wind Be On Your Side." "Sail on, Silverbird!"

You let her progress  
little child who dreams,  
let her roll her wheels  
slide down slopes, music on.

Do you know  
she digs up spots in your backgarden  
she hides dog biscuits  
little bells.

Her story was about  
spider webs catching fire  
to reveal collections  
of music and videos.

Now, its also about  
the way the film industry  
has changed challenged changed  
put up its dirty underwear  
out on the chair.

The way Mumbai has  
detached herself from  
production houses, clock towers.  
The way she has allowed  
a lot of us to float in and out  
in and out seizing bus doors  
door handles, when we need to.

Her story  
is now about  
a drum-machine  
starting up, after a break.  
A slow train  
chugging back, a back pain -  
reviving subsiding and  
forgetting its there.  
Forgetting its there.

---