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Akka ಅಕ್ಕ

Poems for Gauri

by Kavitha Lankesh

According to my sister and daughter
I made the most delicious
Mutton biryani!
We fought about million things
Big and small,
Sombre and silly
She with me
Me with her
When we were young and foolish
The fight lasted
A couple months,
Or maybe a few weeks.
As we grew older
The fight lasted
Just for the night...
The next day started as if we
Never argued, never hurled hurtful, vile words...
How wonderful it is to grow up!
Just a few months back,
She accused me of not paying a bill at office
And I blasted her to
Make it even for the free food I gave her...
Disgusting? Yes.
But the next day
As if nothing had happened
Life continued...
Till I saw the Tiffin box lying
In the car...
Untouched...
Which made breaking news!!
How I wish I could fight with her
One last time for not eating!





AKKA

You might be a photo on the wall
 You might be a placard held up by
 Hundreds of people
 You might be flex on the background of a function
 You might be a stage
 Dedicated to the voice that speaks
 Truth to power
 You are everywhere
 You are Dabolkar,
 You are Pansare,
 You are Kalburgi
 Most of all you are another Asifa,
 You are me and you are you
 You are Gauri, I am Gauri,
 We are all Gauri,
 We are all Danamma
 We are all Asifa...
 Torn, raped,
 Sometimes on the surface
 Sometimes deep inside
 Does it matter?
 Still raped...

Hurt but we fight,
 Torn but we survive...
 Somehow, somewhere...
 In a small village
 In the city or overseas
 You are here,
 You are there
 You are everywhere
 Yet nowhere....
 I miss you my Akka, my Gauri, my love.



How dare you!
 I am never ending!!
 Ten seconds. Three more bullets.
 And you were gone.
 Did Esha, Amma or I
 Flash through you?
 The love, the care, the concern?
 Did thoughts of your comrades
 Flicker in you?
 The same comrades who converted
 You from a little chirping sparrow to
 A roaring tigress?
 Till the last bullet ripped
 And stopped it all...?
 You lay there
 In a pool of blood.
 But have you stopped?

A thousand others continue
 Your fight
 Here, there, everywhere...
 Every drop of your blood
 A protest!
 With more fervour and vigour...
 Confusing me further
 If I voice for the voiceless
 Like you
 Am I you?
 If I am silent...
 Am I dead...?

A Void

There's a void,
Filled with silence...
And darkness...
A part of me is empty
A large part...
I see your smiling photo hanging on
the wall
Where you would always sit
Immersed, on your laptop.
When I wanted to pray,
You would walk away
For the statues of Gods were near you
In my small so called puja stand
You gave me that space
And waited patiently
Till I finished praying
And the cigarette smoke joined the
agarbathi seamlessly
Never complaining or ridiculing
My faith, my prayers
For you, appa, amma,
My Esha, my brother, his family
And the world at large.
Now you can't walk way
You just hang in there
On a frame, smiling...
I say cheers to you
To every drink I drink
To get lost,
Or to find myself...
I don't know.
I smell the towel you used
I smell the dress you wore
I smell your perfume
Or the lack of it I... just you
And I am engulfed in your smell
A smell that reeks of malice
Towards saffronization,

Towards fascist,
Towards bigots...
I wake up in the night
You are there, You are So here!
So alive!!
Saying something
Inconsequential or consequential
I am in shock, I sweat! I am petrified!
Why am I in shock???
Isn't it good t that you are here?
When the dead appear alive
Why is it so scary??
But to me you are not dead
You are alive
Appa said every time
Someone opens a book, dusts it off,
And leafs through it
The dead come alive
Your orations,
Your written words,
Your spoken words
Your vehement speeches
Retweeted, reposted, reprinted,
You are reverberating!!
Every time someone
Raise their voice
"I am Gauri"
You are alive!!
When a lady quietly walked twenty one
kilometres
In a village 600 Kilometres away from
Bangalore
And simply stood in a bustling market,
holding a placard
"Naanu Gauri!"
You are alive!
When the sketches of the probable
killers
Were released

My voice choked and I was mute ,
My hands lay limp by my side...
Impotent and dead...
But the voices of protest resonated
Again and again
Maybe I am still alive??
I have fought many a battle
But nothing that required me to
Raise my voice...
Or raise my fists
Unless I wanted to slap a wandering hand...
But this was beyond all that
How can one stop the voice that's echoing
"We are Gauri"
"I am Gauri"?
The shouts fill me-
Down! Down! The Killers are free!!
The innocents are arrested!
My very being is filled
With a sense of pride!!

Countless times I had asked
Who will come to you if you are sick?
Who will come to you if you are broke?
Who will come when you...
Are dead and silent?
Such a fool I was
As if we were the only ones...
Cheers!

Seems like I am a non-entity
Compared to your
Dear and near ones...
Who are holding you up
Shouting and screaming
Just like you cannot be silenced
They cannot be too!!
I hope I cannot be silenced too!
Cheers!!



My Sister, My Soulmate

She raved, she ranted,
Many times she burst out...
Upper caste this... Brahminical that...
At the inhumanity of it all...
At the injustice of it all...

Wait a minute...
Is it the same woman?
Who spoke soft words, and tenderly hugged
And embraced
Little kids,
The untouchables,
The Muslims,
The women,
The minorities...
The Maoists...

Few Rabids barked she is a bitch,
Some even called her prostitute,
Just because she was single
And lived her life the way she wanted to...

But hundreds called her sister, thousands called her mother
a million now are saying
“We are all Gauri...”

She blasted when someone threw a
Cigarette butt from the car window
Lest it would hurt a two-wheeler rider...

Her house is a garden
Where many a snake wandered
And she would wait patiently
For it slither by,

Not stopping, not harming, not killing it
Waiting patiently for it pass and continue to live...
But finally a snake came which didn't slither away,
A human snake
On a two wheeler
To stop the fire out of Gauri...
And silence her...

Silence Gauri?
Ha ha!! What a joke!!
She burst like sunflower seed
Scattered all over
In India
And across the seas...
Now the silence is chanting... echoing,
“We are all Gauri!!”



Cheers Gauri!

You must be so proud of me!!
Happy in heaven
Or knowing you
You probably prefer hell
You brought me down to
The streets and that I was arrested!!
First time!!
Cheers!!

Finally maybe I am worth being called your sister!
It's been three months
And our voices for the government has turned
Anti-government...
Cheers!!
That's what you and appa always stood for!
Anti-government...

I finally know
How a mongrel feels
When stray dogs are abound
In the neighbourhood
Watching, biting and mating
They are caught and left in another locality
We were like that yesterday..
A harassment to the general public
And the government
They took us for a ride on a BTs bus
And left us in another area
Hoping we will stop
The battle.
They don't know the war is still on...
Cheers!!

Your comrades shouted slogans and
Shook their fists
I simply looked at them
My eyes brimmed with tears,

I looked at it, quietly.
Did I feel Anger? No.
Hatred? No.
Revengeful? No.
Pity? No.
There is a void.
A void that is filled only by you.
Were you just an example?
A fore warning for the days to come?
Anybody as secular as you
Will be silenced?
Anybody who stands for the minorities,
The downtrodden,
The women...
The Dalits,
The Christians,
The Muslims
Trolled,
Insulted,
Called parentless
By a chaddi clad parivaar-less?
And finally gunned down?
My Gauri, My sister, my comrade
You are not lying silent even when you
are dead!!
Laal Salaam!!



The last 10 seconds

Sometimes I feel
You are here...
It's just one of those hectic days
So you haven't visited us.
But most times
Reality punches in my gut
And I know you are gone
Forever.
I churn,
I shiver,
I reel...
I feel like puking but my stomach is empty
Much like everything else
Agonized when awake,
Nightmares in sleep...
As I try to re-live
Your last 10 seconds
That's all the time it took
To end your voice
The cops tell us
Let me imagine those 10 seconds-
The killer a coward no doubt
Hiding behind a helmet
Rushes towards you
"Yako? What are you doing magane?
The first shot!
You! Bolimagane! Who the fuck are you?
Not my comrade,
Not my blood,
Certainly not my creed!!
You think you got have become big
Because your chaddi got longer
And now you wear pants?
Come, end me! Let's see!!



The Tiffin Box

Breaking news!!
What was in Gauri Lankesh's car???
A Tiffin box!!
Her dinner may be for that day
Perhaps for the day after
Which I had packed for her
The left over curries
And amma had rolled umpteen chapathis
She would eat
What she felt like that day
Or didn't... many a times
A bachelor at heart
That was who Gauri was
Immersed in her own journey,
Her ideologies, her activism
And caring for her many Comrades..
Perhaps more than us?
Late in the night mulling and spewing
Her thoughts on social media
She forgot... to eat
She just left the food
On the kitchen counter
For roaches and ants to crawl...
She joked to her friends
That she had many a choice
Of curries and dishes
Sadly she hardly ate.
But when did eat, she ate heartily
Beef, mutton, chicken, fish,
Or in her words "Anything that walks... or crawls!!"
My god how can you eat THAT?
What's in my plate is none of your business
She said as she happily sucked on the bones!
I am a vegetarian, yet on Bakrid,

This is a small sharing from Kavitha Lankesh, the sister of a friend and comrade in arms Gauri Lankesh who we lost to bullets of hatred on September 5, 2017. This collection of poems by Kavitha, written in the aftermath of Gauri's cold blooded murder, is not just testament to the bond the sisters shared, but also Kavitha's journey in coping with the loss of someone she considered her soulmate.

Gauri Lankesh will always be remembered as the fearless journalist who was shot dead to silence her powerful voice of reason and dissent. Gauri grew through every struggle in which she got deeply involved. She did not back down. Gauri always lived her life on her own terms, confident in her choices, comfortable in the love of family and friends. She threw herself, heart and soul, into the struggle of those finding a voice.

Different voices. Kavitha, seared by the violent loss of her sister, has more than stepped in, for so many of us, in different ways. Always understanding, even dealing in with the anger of loss.

"I am Gauri" that became the new rallying, battle cry for those demanding Justice for Gauri, also became the words of solace for Kavitha as she battles reason and emotion, travelling from the personal to the political (finding strength in how so many people have found voice and strength) to help deal with Gauri's death.

Kavitha has, for twelve months now, faced a deep and continuing loneliness, the physical loss of someone so much more than just a sister and a friend. But she has borne the loss with courage, grace and fortitude, not allowing herself time for personal grieving nor healing. In every way, so many ways, possible she has kept Gauri alive for us.

Every other morning, after a difficult night, I would find one of these poems in my mailbox. Through sleepless nights, shivers of loss and even fear, nightmares, Kavitha's feelings have poured out here... in the poems she has penned to Gauri.

Kavitha's second journey with Gauri after her killing is fraught with deep loss and longing, but most with a quiet and steely resistance and strength. To two amazing women who are also sisters, a small tribute.

We so miss you, Gauri. Kavitha, Amma, and Esha her warm and lovely niece/daughter.

As does the young man at the saloon in Rajarajeshwari Nagar who cropped her stylish hair.

To a fearless tigress-kitten from her loving sister.

Teesta Setalvad