

I Exist. Therefore I Am

By

Shirani Rajapakse

Excerpts from three stories:

Drink Your Milk and Go to Sleep

“We are sending back the gift from God and asking Him to send another in its place. A different type; a boy. God can keep the girl as His helper. She can clean the place and help keep it neat and tidy. There is more work waiting for her there in His house. She isn't needed here. She can be spared. The holy man will double the efforts to ask God to send a boy soon. After that the men in the family will take her with them. They will leave her in the place they leave everyone that is waiting to meet God and then they will return. The women will remain inside the house and will leave later. When there is nothing more to eat and no more conversations to make.”

On Death Row

“The fires flickered on the bank at the side of the river as it always did. The shadows moved in silence in and out of the narrow alleyways, winding this way and that, but always leading towards the flowing waters below. The night closed in yet the activity at the ghats never ceased. The fires rose high lighting the night and everything around in a ghostly pallor. The crackle of the wood would sometimes break the stillness of the night although it bothered no one, not even the men tending the fires. Sometimes a splash of something falling into the water could be heard over the other noises or of someone treading the water at the river’s edge, perhaps a late night stroller washing his weary feet in the rivers warm caress.”

Shweta’s Journey

“Shweta wasn’t really married to him. Not in the real sense. There was no huge marriage ceremony attended by family and friends that went on for days like most marriage ceremonies everyone was accustomed to. There was no mehendi ceremony either. No pretty clothes and jewelry and no announcement to the community that she was now a married woman. People were curious about their relationship. They were also concerned and they sometimes voiced it to him, telling him in no uncertain terms that it wasn’t fair to Shweta as she was a young girl and should rightfully be married and having a family. After a while he decided to make their relationship official in order to stop the questioning and the comments passed by people they frequently met. He surprised her in Varanasi when they went to meet Swamiji’s guru who had come from the Himalayas to spend some time in the city of the Gods. They had walked around the sacred fire in Varanasi and he had placed vermilion on the parting of her hair to pronounce her status as his wife.

But she wasn’t really his wife.”