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Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Volume 36, Number 3, December 2016, pp. 500-502 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press

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Tulsi Parab and I were married for just short of thirty-nine years. That's a long time. I am, and am not, the twenty-five-year-old who met Tulsi at a *shibir*, or camp, in the *tehsil* town of Shahada, organized by the Shramik Sanghatna, an organization of landless laborers belonging to the tribal Bhil community. This association, which was partly a trade union and partly something else (in a time before NGOs were working on a gamut of issues), had been set up by a few young men from the cities of Bombay and Pune who, inspired by Marxist ideology, had given up careers to live among the Bhil people in northern Maharashtra. Most of them belonged to a study circle group clustered around the Pune-based left-wing monthly *Magowa* (which means "pursuit").

Tulsi, too, had left a good job in the Maharashtra government secretariat to come to Shahada. But he was different from the others, most of whom came from secure upper-caste families and teaching posts in institutions like the elite Indian Institute of Technology. Tulsi was the son of a textile mill worker, a "master weaver," and had spent his childhood in the working-class heart of Bombay. He had started writing poetry at an early age and was already something of a name in the world of avant-garde literature when he left Bombay to work in Shahada. It was not just the form and the subject matter of the writings of these rebellious poets that was revolutionary, but also their social background. Their claim to modernity challenged prevalent conceptions of what literature was, and also who was capable of producing it. Tulsi became friends with a Dalit youth named Namdeo Dhasal who drove a rickshaw for a living and aspired to write poetry. It was a creative friendship in which each one (these two, and a few others) provoked and challenged each other, and influenced each other's compositions. Later Namdeo became one of the founders of the Dalit Panthers, a militant group that was inspired by the Black Panthers of the United States. Unfortunately, there were soon dissensions and conflicts within the group, and that was when Tulsi decided to leave his beloved Bombay to work with the Shramik Sanghatna in Shahada.

In Shahada he, like the other activists from the city, lived in a hut, ate what the *adivasis* ate, and roamed from village to village on foot or by bus. Tulsi had been there just a few days when one of the landlords sent a group of tribals from another community to attack the Shramik Sanghatna activists. Tulsi was still new to the terrain, and he bore the full force of the attack: his forearm was fractured and he had severe injuries on his head and leg. After some delay, he was brought to a Bombay hospital for treatment. As soon as he recovered, he decided to return. "Hell, they can't keep me down like this," or words to that effect. Though it is impossible to translate his habitual utterances, and these words don't have that effect.

Tulsi was also always a bit of an outsider to the core group of the Shramik Sanghatna, because the others never knew quite what to make of him. Some thought that he was working as proxy for a far-

Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East
Vol. 36, No. 3, 2016 · DOI 10.1215/1089201x-3699043 · © 2016 by Duke University Press

left party; some thought that he was just too hotheaded and apt to get into sticky situations; some resented the fact that from time to time he would take off to Bombay to spend some time with his friends and literary associates in Bombay, to drink, walk on the streets and refresh himself with some fresh urban air. He was always a poet even while he was an activist, and maybe it was just that which unsettled the others.

It was Tulsi who bore the brunt of a physical attack; it was Tulsi, along with his comrade Prakash Samant, who was jailed during the Emergency, when the Indian government led by Indira Gandhi suspended democratic rights and came down heavily on opposing parties and militant organizations. He was sent to the open jail in Visapur near the city of Nashik, and on Prakash Samant's insistence, the pair never applied for the status of political prisoner. They were confined with petty criminals, murderers, and some political rebels; Tulsi has written several poems about his time in prison. Some, but not all of them, have been published in his second anthology.

After the end of the Emergency in 1977 came marriage and, after two more years, the decision to leave the Shramik Sanghatna and concentrate on his intellectual concerns: to read, to write, perhaps to publish. He always went on writing but never bothered to seek out publishers; he was invited to contribute to special annual editions of literary magazines and often complied. He never sought awards and they did not come his way.

Tulsi's poems were usually difficult, with their many-layered allusions to both modern and traditional contexts and meanings and the continual play with words. The first two collections have some poems that are simpler in their language, but there are still contexts that will not be familiar to all readers. I find that in his most recent poems he moved toward a new simplicity, which was deceptive because although one felt one had understood a poem in the first reading, subsequent readings revealed new meanings.

He lived family life with the same vigor and restlessness, his speech peppered with swear words, his actions with his own brand of eccentricity. He never bothered to explain himself, not even to his children. We moved to Aurangabad in 1979, and lived there for (it amazes me now!) over thirty years. But Tulsi's roots were always in the metropolitan city, the Bombay of his youth and childhood, a Bombay that however was changing drastically over time. There were frequent trips to Bombay to taste its cultural life, and Tulsi's interests spanned world literature, visual art, and cinema, the trade unions and leftist parties, and even his sisters and their children, with whom he was affectionate and belligerent, ready to help but critical of their superstitions and their credulous beliefs. He worked in a local Marathi newspaper in Aurangabad for a time and enjoyed the late-night routines in that time of teleprinters and manual typesetting. He also took up writing on current political topics and world affairs. Of course, he never bothered to collect or anthologize his writings.

Though Tulsi was never really at home in the provincial town of Aurangabad, he interacted with the local literary world, with aspiring writers in Marathi and some Urdu poets of his age and older. He also tried to work with some left-wing organizations, but not for very long. There were problems with his health, and that slowed him down quite a lot by the time our younger son Daryan was going to school. So his third collection of poems, *Kubda Narcissus*, or *Hunchback Narcissus*, was published only in 2002.

Although he was always a nonbeliever, around 2007 and 2008 Tulsi suddenly developed an interest in ordinary people's religious practices. This led him to reread some religious texts, but he also made trips to nearby places of pilgrimage and stayed there for a few days, talking to devotees and priests and local residents. I never fully understood what he was looking for, but that was Tulsi's way of going to the root of something that raised questions in his mind.

In 2013, we moved to Bombay, but Tulsi had already been diagnosed with cancer. For the first year, he tried to confront the city as it now was, traveling by bus on routes familiar and unfamiliar to him. His delight at finding that he could buy a day-long bus pass allowing unlimited travel for forty rupees was typical of him. But his body was not keeping up with his mental energy. Distances in Bombay were long, and there were few visits from friends. Many of the closest ones were dead.

But whenever someone came, or when we visited someone, he would stamp the short encounter with his wackiness and his humor, his deep voice planting memories in so many people's minds. In his last days, that booming voice had faded to a cracked whisper, and that was the most painful thing of all. ||||