

# VISHVARUPA

## GANESH RESURRECTED

What was it like to be dead? Not crucified or entombed,  
but whichever way you turned, your head sliced from your body  
by Shiva's sword, while Parvati detoxed in a scented spa.

To be shaped from sandalwood by the hands of a goddess,  
to invite the gesture of a *mudra*, to be remodelled auspiciously  
by a north-facing elephant, a *svastika*, a seal of the ancient Indus.

Lord of the *ganas*, a woman's dangerous moods returned your life,  
improbable and half remembered. You are not the father's phallus.  
You guard the granaries, the terracotta tablets and inscriptions

of those cremated and uncremated. The heroes in temple carvings,  
comic books, television dramas, and gold-foil Tanjore paintings  
were recorded by you, for Vyasa, the sage. What tectonic affair,

what orogeny hurtled you into the present? I wonder by what  
Gangetic detour you arrived—Beas, Yamuna, Bhramaputra?  
Perhaps your chakra is subterranean and your mantra is a trinity.

Aum precedes the afterlife: in one incarnation, you are three worlds.  
Your appellations translate appearance undecayed: a single tusk,  
the fecundity of a pot belly and the feminine noun for wisdom.

I dreamed you came riding past my house on a skateboard.  
Christ chose a donkey. But you, a spiritual pest inspector, arrived  
to clean out the cobwebs, to expose the heart's furtive parasites.

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There were rodents and menaces of all kinds I needed to subdue.  
It was not by judgement, or prophecy, nor the visions of Ezekiel.  
I had no wish to restore the dry bones — all I wanted was release.

You bridge the living gap between brahmins and sudhras.  
Congress pitched you, a symbol of protest against colonial rule—  
god of everyman, everywoman, all sects. In the pantheon

of deities your rise is phenomenal. Ganpati, you're a celebrity  
dancing in stone, wood or plaster. Acolyte or principal divinity,  
you are a god of transitions, passages, doorways, merchants.

Once at Chathurti, I saw you on a bright red *pandal* adorned  
with *vermillion*, *kumkum* and *modakas*. Bhangra and hip-hop  
played as you sunk beneath silt to where the river touches earth.

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## TWO SOULS

My cat cries when I enter the garden, as  
if I have aroused her from winter's dream,  
or as if she wants to sing to me, her name.

What do cats dream of Lord Krishna?  
A coconut shell of milk, or a glittering fish?  
Now her slender limbs complete their asanas.

Now her neck arches, her jaw, an elastic.  
The sharp eye constricts, discerns wind  
in the quivering grass from a grass-hopper's

camouflage. But there's no mistaking *Maya*.  
My cat rehearses the accurate lunge of her paw.  
She cries, as one compelled; hungry, yet not.

Perhaps my being here, deserves an answer.  
For weeks, I too, have watched her, how  
she hunts. I've heard the moan of her catch

at dusk, which is your hour, Lord Krishna.  
Then, no bird sings and only a cat with two souls  
dreams of death, her stigma left on a lizard,

or on a butterfly, whatever moves towards  
the shadow of meaning. As I am born of fire,  
I burn, my Lord, but I sleep in your arms.

I am one Upanishad moon, on fragrant nights.  
By day I am the consort of oceans, rice fields,  
pale and invisible to you as the sky's temple.

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## KALI FROM ABROAD

Kali, you are the poster-goddess, sticking out your black tongue, like Gene Simmons from Kiss, a kick in the teeth, with your punk-blue leggings, your skull and scissor charms.

You swing a trident, a demon's head and dance on the bones of a pale Shiva. I recall the convincing eyes of a girl cripple carrying your bottled effigy, as our bus careened to a dusty halt.

Some say you morphed from Parvati, drunk on blood, others cite your superhero leap from Durga's brow to slay the self-cloning serpent before a Haka dance on mythic soil.

By a hundred Sanskrit names, India claims you in a single text, while in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, you are 'the grass and the dew', on screen, our contemporary Judge Judy

having a bad hair day. I'd argue for your cosmopolitanism, a global denizen, you're adroit in drugs and aphrodisiacs, a nude Dominatrix, a feminist export with a sadomasochistic bent.

As a symbol of partition you were cover girl for *Time* magazine. A Neo-pagan diva, your wholeness is darkness fashioned from light, moon-breasted, with eyes of fire, with Brahma's feet,

Varuna's watery thighs. You rise from the grave, step over carnage, feeding the world and your severed self with blood. Stripped bare as Duchamp's Bride, you set Bachelors in motion.

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## NOTES

*Vishvarupa*: universal form, all-embracing

*Svastika*: in its clockwise direction this ancient Sanskrit symbol represents Ganesh

*ganas*: attendants of Shiva. Ganesh was chosen as their leader: *gana-pati*

*mudras*: hand gestures used to depict the deities and used in traditional dance.

*Vyasa*: the sage said to be the author of the Mahabharata. Ganesh is its scribe.

*Aum* Ganesh is identified with the Hindu mantra *Om*, the trinity of fire, air, sun.

*chakra* according to Kundalini yoga Ganesh is said to reside in the base or foundation chakra, *Muladhara*.

*pandal*: platform covered in red cloth, used in the mount effigies for celebrations

*modaka*: sweet

*Chaturthi*: a annual festival for Ganesh when his *murtis* are immersed in water.

The poem "Two Souls" refers to the Hindu belief that there are two paths to liberation: one of action and one of contemplation. Krishna teaches this to Arjuna in *The Bhagavad Gita*

*Maya*: Ignorance as opposed to *moksha*: liberation

In the poem "Kali From Abroad", Duchamp's bride refers to *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*, or *The Large Glass*, by Marcel Duchamp, 1915-23 Philadelphia Museum of Art