

R for Refugee

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When simple foods such as *ragi* evoke disgust,
The need to own a house of one's own takes primacy,
The desire to go visit that village once before one's old bones don't allow,
When conversations veer towards life left behind in that country in the smallest pretext,
One knows then,
R is etched quite deep, seeped across in everyday life—
Tastes and thoughts, actions and emotions,
Successes and failures, desires and derisions,
Worries and dreads, dispositions and positions.

Refugee, is not just a word, lives are built around it.
The present and the future entwines into a continuous string of Rs.
It no longer is a geo-political issue. It just hangs on
In a father's strictures,
A mother's silences.
In the choice of lives the parents design for their daughters, confusing them ever more.
Splits in mind and body, past and present are borne such.

Fear seeps in,
Its residues continue to pass on generations.
No man's land is haziness,
Ambivalence is fearful!

Every day hundreds are stranded in the seas, on the borders of nowhere.
Nobody is responsible, they say!
The humanity despite sympathies looks the other way,
Demands documents, throws people out as waste.
This humanity is about guilt, it believes in 'Best out of Waste',
Creates landfills, later curates museums on its death bed.

Documents, they say, distinguishes a refugee from a citizen,
And they decide 'the Document.'
The lines are drawn by men and women,
Very ordinary—with extraordinary powers—humble and beautiful.
The power lies in their ambivalence.
One day they talk of common humanity and empathic living,
The next day they turn around and say,
'This fertile land cannot bear the burden any more,
For now she has to look after
Her legitimate children.'

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