

THE SYSTEMS WE CASTE



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INTERNATIONAL POETRY PRIZE

The Systems We Caste

By Neal Hall, M.D.

Dedicate to:

My esteemed editor Judith Williams
and our mutual love for India

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Forewords

In choosing to call this preface Forewords, I deliberately skirted proper usage. Forewords, to my mind, implies something more than an introduction to the poems and extends its meaning literally to "before the words" -- what happened, what I saw, heard or felt that propelled me to the computer to write. Quite simply, before the words . . .

My poetry has provided me invites to many international literary events and artist residencies to read and write my words.

Italy and Japan stand high amongst the many of the countries I have visited and enjoyed the most. None, though, stands as tall as India. The country and the places I were fortunate to visit – most notably Hyderabad, Bangalore, Varanasi, Assam, Mumbai and Kolkata – inspired me to pick up my writer's pen.

It was India that gave black America the doctrine of nonviolent civil disobedience as an effective "first" tool to loosen the yokes of injustice, inequality, and murderous disregard from the necks of black people.

India was for me, a microcosm of the world. What I experienced there occurs in some degree or another in every village, every town, every state and nation in the world.

My sensibilities were set ablaze in inspiring wonderment at the music, the colors, the foods, the cultures, languages, architecture, all unique to India. It was all there for me to see, smell and feel, all the joy and beauty. I made India mine.

The collegiate minds were vibrant, eager to learn, to know; desiring to change things for the better. But in many cases I wondered for the betterment of whom? Surely not for all.

As elsewhere, in every village and town, every state and nation in the world, the inhumanity I witnessed in India compelled my sensibilities to query our humanity. On full display was the vast array of institutionalized systemic -isms employed to separate, subjugate and exploit one from the other. From ghat to tea shop paraded all the socioeconomic, matriarchal servitude and abuse, all the political, religious, gender, color-coding casting of one another marshaled to gain and sustain a leg up on "the other."

It was all there for me to see and feel, luxuriating in all the joy and beauty yet, simultaneously witnessing, feeling all the pain and sorrow. The unrelenting reminders of exploitation. The brutal insistence on inherent inequality, seared me. Daily I saw object opulence shoulder to shoulder with its stepbrother – abject poverty. Amid bouquets of breath-taking beauty emerged the ever-present manmade disfiguring and physical deforming, the subjugation and categorization of innocent men and children.

I witnessed children with severed limbs, their awful stumps as enticements, appeals for those extra paise when set to the street to beg for their exploiter's required daily take.

I saw my Dalit brothers and sisters to be akin to the niggers of American, relegated to generational poverty and servitude based on immoral beliefs inconsistent with any form of humanity or moral tenet.

Many of the poems in this collection plumb these stark dichotomies, but they are only brief reflections of the joys, sorrows and pains I experienced in my beloved India. India, in all its complexities and contradictions, challenged me. Poems written during or inspired by my times in India include:

- Ownership to Word and Title
- Sacred Lotus
- The System We Caste
- Masala Chai
- HE
- British Teacups and Saucers
- Appalling Silence
- Always
- Varanasi Ashes
- Against the Rise of Sunrise
- Matriarchal Patriarch
- Dalit
- His Hands
- Abundantly
- She Wears
- He Was
- London After India
- I Want Mercy

Door of No Return¹

within the desiccated mouth of its moats,
its bloated gold coast walls purged in white

a coastal ghost in the eyes of black souls
dungeon'd one floor below godless men,
one floor above on bent knees singing
psalms songs of white ascent:

lord sang they, we give praise,
our inheritance, plundering seas,
ravaging coasts, burning towns,
keepers our brothers' skewered souls,
eating out their substance²

we give grace our pick,
our perverse will be done
to any one of them,
man, woman we pick
to have it done

¹ Elmina, Ghana-Slave Castle-
<https://theculturetrip.com/africa/ghana/articles/ghana-s-slave-castles-the-shocking-story-of-the-ghanaian-cape-coast/>

² 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence

we, mercenary merchants of misery,
godless holy white men one floor above
on bent knees bent on breaking the spirit
of broken black internees sheared crown to toe,
branded, bound, inurned one floor below,
bricked red, mortared in blood, smooth-surfaced
from shuffling, lumbering, catatonic back and forth
pacing of interned misery, manacled insanity

parasol'd umbrae,
crypted beneath arches arched low,
convex'd, bowed upward, outward
by the rising agonizing cries for mercy
one floor below, clamoring, clawing,
handcuffed hands dug dungeon walls
cryptic names, hieroglyphic prayers

groveling knee-deep in three menacing months
of accumulated communal feces,
surging putrescent menstrual flow,

no water, no food, no light, no air to breathe,
pleading their last rights to last say,
remember me

remember the lingering taste
of stench upon your tongue
of man, woman, emaciated, eviscerated
to break them, to weaken them
against resistance, against sane revolt

woman, man, dungeon'd, chained,
knee-deep a hellhole of eddied rising tides
of urine'd feces in search of resurrection
always, the rape to scourge, to break, to purge

diabolic darwinian thinning the herd of them,
unnatural selection through prescribed brutality,
a purgatory prep for passage, the strongest,
the fittest of them, the door of no return
from transatlantic barbarism

survivalists sold into four hundred plus years
of shackled generation-deep communal feces,
surging putrescent menstrual flow,
no water, no food, no light, no air to breathe

raped, woman, man, raped, always the rape,
to scourge, to break, to purge them
one floor below holy white men
on bent gold coast knees, one floor above
bent on breaking the spirit
of broken black humanity inurned

one floor below, holocaust'd
the door of no return, retching
lord, remember this demon david
and all his self-denials,³
our death, our destruction

one floor below spiritual men
one floor above on bent knees
singing their psalms songs of ascent

lord remember this,
our last rights to last say
remember me, remember me
urned⁴ in atrocities,

decanter'd carnage poured the door
of no return a floor twice removed
coastal ghosts two floors above on bent knees
singing their psalms songs of white ascent

lord, wailed we,
remember me
remember me

³ An adaptation of Psalm 132 – a plaque on the wall at Elmina

⁴ Urned as a verb:

<http://www.verbix.com/webverbix/English/urn.html>;

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/urn>

Ownership to Word and Title

Inspired by a conversation with Professor Usha Raman,
University of Hyderabad

holocaust – any mass slaughter of
reckless destruction of life⁵

who among the dead, the scorched,
the unheard screams the whole of night,
the emaciated, the raped, the gassed, the lynched,
the ripping, tearing of skin from flesh,
the tossed by a master race the ocean's depth
weighted about the waist in holocaust
can claim greater ownership to word and title,
as if one drop blood spilled is greater
than another drop blood spilled

who among the marched to certain death,
who assigned an identifiable mark of
permanence for death, a greater claim
to slaughter and destruction

is any mark any greater than another's
mark of permanence for death

⁵ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/holocaust>,
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/holocaust>
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holocaust>

what mark marks greater the mark
to claim greater ownership to word and title,
as if one mass slaughter is more reckless
than another mass slaughter

who that now march among those
who rape, who lynch, who emaciate, who scorch,
who close their ears to screams the whole of night

who among the silent who now mark
the flesh of others can rightfully
make proprietary claim to word and title -
holocaust – the mass slaughter and
reckless destruction of life

Culture

culture,
this species of order
of a class belonging
to a ruling kingdom

culture,
this second cousin to religion
in a family of tyrants that ask, too,
that you follow blindly
by faith without question

Sacred Lotus

this sacred lotus,
this eternal seed propagating within me

tuberous shoots of divine beauty, purity, divinity,
deeply spiritual, medicinal, ornamental

a hindu radiance,
a revered inflorescent
durga⁶, parvati⁷

this lotus of india, a tropical
tempered aquatic botanical,

obconic plumage, perennially afloat,
a centrally stalked sensuous leaf
floating above the water's shallow depth
running deep within the fertile mud loam⁸
of my floodplains, my shallow ponds and pools,

⁶ The Hindu goddess of fertility, love devotion; divine strength and power. She is the gentle, nurturing aspect of the Hindu goddess Shakti and one of the central deities of the Goddess-oriented Shakta sect. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parvati>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A soil with roughly equal proportions of sand, silt, and clay. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loam>

my lakes and lagoons,
every swamp and marsh wet of me,
her tuberous growing tips
propagate within me

The System We Caste

a class-conscious caste iron brew
of lotus black coffee grounds, severed along
foul malodorous vocations of black:

untouchable black . . .
coarsely ground roasted black
without the sugar

tolerable black . . .
sprinkled just a bit of sweetener

koshered black . . .
powdered an artificial sweetener
to taste just a bit sweeter than it is really is

sifted, finely filtered percolated black,
lotus black . . . room made its
class-conscious cup for home-made
shades of one percent, two percent less black,
made less black, poured condensed
whole white pasteurized moisturizing skin white

milked and curdled
with just a bit of black seen in it,
for it to think it's india's superior brown
medium roast coffee grounds
brewed a lotus caste iron coffee pot
of foul malodorous vocations
served the lower caste cracked cups
of untouchable black

Masala Chai

a hindu milieu,
a morning's light of evening tea,
steeped in parting tears
gently poured an amarillo cup,
whose encircling rim, her tear stained,
lipstick'd lips imprint the buddha's kiss
each sip and sigh, masala chai

an amarillo porcelain cup, saucer'd and sassy,
polished with purpose, appointed her
heart shaped handle she hands me to handle her
to pour her with gentle care a gentle pour

amour de ma vie, she pours,
an amalgamated aromatic extract of
black tea, fennel'd aphrodisiac
caressed in cinnamon,
possessed of green cardamom,
unclothed to clothe in cloves a gingered mist,
a black peppered corn estrus marinated
a watery milky sweet – steeped,
silver spoon stirred, slowly, sensuously
my four chambered fervent heart

a hindu masala milieu of you, infused
a morning tea steeped in parting tears
gently poured an amarillo, amoretto porcelain cup,
she hands me to handle her to pour her
with gentle care, a gentle pour of parting tears

HE

when he lifts his hand a strike
against she

he lifts the hand of another man
to lift his hand a strike

against

his grandmother

his mother

his sister

his daughter

his aunt

his niece

he lifts the hand of another against
the blood of his family

lifts the hand of another man against
the heart of humanity

British Teacups and Saucers

in their retreat of india,
the britishers left behind
their tea cups,
their saucers,
their tempered teapots emptied of tea,
their small stirring spoons
they would stir their indian black tea

in the retreat of the britishers,
the indian now sits behind
what the British left behind,
british tea cups,
their saucers,
their tempered teapots,
their small stirring spoons
Indians stir india's black tea

Appalling Silence

it's not the night,
but the absence of light

it's not the sweltering fervor of the desert,
but the rainfall that fails to fall

it's not humanity that loses its humanity
taking, denying humanity from its fellow man, but
humanity that fails to find its humanity fighting
back to give back, to grant back humanity
seen taken, denied its fellow man

it's not the strident clamor nor the vitriolic voices
of the bad people, but the appalling silence
of those who claim to be the good people⁹

it is not the night,
but the absence of light
that keeps us in the dark

and in the end, we must remember
not the words of our enemies
but the silence of our friends¹⁰

⁹ Martin Luther King

¹⁰ Ibid

Always

despite our pretense of kindness,
that sweet ocean breeze, the desert's arid floor,
there is always an air of arrogance

always,

our cleaning lady,
our grounds keeper,
our clothes washer washing away our daily sins,
our cooks who cook our nourishments
that we might sin again
our to and fro drivers,
our brothers, our sisters

always,

from our upward chin a downward line
of vision into their upward poverty eyes,
our half smiles, our insincere sincerity gleaming
in the face of their upward half smiles of
see me, feel me, be me
that you might save me from

always, your upward air of arrogance

Varanasi Ashes

varanasi ashes, a mid-summer's day
by the waters of the sacred river
adrift as if cherry blossoms drifting
like snow - flaked and flurried

ashes from embers from fires burning
the memories of bodies littered a scorched
landscape of smoldering imploded pyres,
doms¹¹ pile stacks of himalayan wood¹²
sunup to sundown a fate of fields chained
dead men cleansing the fields of dead men's fate

so much life living around death,
five fraternizing friends huddled in mirth
and merriment playing card games

stray dogs sniffing, puppies sleeping,
goats tied to posts, cow splattered manure
blight the grounds where so much of
life lives amidst and between death

¹¹ Doms are of the Dalit caste, the lowest rank of the Hindu caste system. Many earn pittance as cremators and grave diggers. One cannot enter heaven if their bodies are cremated without the presence of a Dom; Doms of Varanasi make a living among the dead. By [Priyanka Shankar](#), October 26, 2017

¹² Cremation requires about 500kg wood.
www.thebetterindia.com/126580/cremation-wood-gren-alternatives/

boatloads of photo taking tourists
anchor the shorelines beneath a high
in the sky kite tied a little lad cladded
in pants bellowing baggy in the wind

a wee wisp of pee pissed men
and animals in corners of buildings
bordering craters of incineration

so much life living amidst, between death

a rare tear found amongst cheers and
chanter's incantations carrying corpses
atop bamboo stretchers as pujas and pundits'
strawed hands circle to light the fires
doms dispassionately stoke to their rage,
collecting, piling, scooping pyre'd
ashes to ashes into fenestrated baskets
poured the sacred waters of ganga to be
washed and cleansed of evils, freeing
the dead perpetuities of death and rebirth
in their final ascent to eternity

they come, lifeless bodies, back logged,
arriving fast, too fast, faster than fire burns,

all ran out of time, now patiently wait in
the pyre's line, their turn, their place, their time
upon the wood stacked by drones of
dom colony worker bees and beasts of
burden hauling on their mule'd backs stacks
of wood from piles of wood stacks,
stacked sunup to sundown,
up and down the ghats¹³ of the ganges

so much life around the charred shells of
human forms of flesh reborn into air borne ashes
adrift as if cherry blossoms, falling,
like fingerprinted snow - flaked and flurried
all arriving with different names,
all bearing the same number, the same name,
called to float away a mid-summer's day
the sacred waters of ascent

all screen-sifted silky silt to ganges'
good keep and release the endless earthly
cycle of birth, suffering, death and rebirth
of varanasi ashes

,

¹³ A broad flight of steps situated on an Indian riverbank that provides access to the water; Merriam Dictionary

Against the Rise of Sunrise

against the rise of sunrise
up the streams of strands of hair of shiva,
flowing down the holy ganga up the bagmati,
where the mournful cries of life lost and lives left
behind ride the buoyant ashes of my fathers,
my mothers, flowing down the bagmati

against the rise of sunrise
the torrent winds push the sails to come
counterclockwise one turn the stupa,
to mute morning's resonates

the sails come still to make tired,
poor people pulled and poured
into huddles masses to mine the earth
of the people's minds and birthrights
to romanticize poverty as their paradise,
poverty, a pot emptied its gold
placed at the end of arched fabricated rainbows
colored the color of deaf gods, the color of
moans of mourning, the color of sullied purity,
the color of holiness harnessed by unholiness
whose forked tongues insert irony, hypocrisy in
their words pulling, pouring poor people to clean
the toilet of the divine

against the rise of sunrise,
against the streams of strands of hair of shiva,
flowing down the holy ganga up the bagmati,
where the mournful cries of life lost and lives left
behind flow down the ganga.

against the tides of sunrise
streaming down the holy bagmati to the ganga
where the day comes its end and sends them back
a setting sun against the rise of sunrise

Matriarchal Patriarch

fate is not in your stars,
but in part and parcel in you
that you are an underling¹⁴

the hand he raises is made of
the same hand you raised

you gave birth to, breastfed
and raised his hand

fault is not in fate¹⁵ but in part, in you,

you, this grievous weight bearing arch
shouldering a patriarchal fist

it's you who teaches the son,
it's his hand that sees in plain view
your hand when you raise your hand
against his sister, your sisters,
your daughters-in-law

you can't demand your yoke be lifted
while you yoke your sisters beneath you

¹⁴ Men at some times are masters of their fates. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are underlings - Act One, Scene 2 Lines 136 – 147

¹⁵ Ibid

fault is not in fate
it grows in you, you gave birth to,
breastfed and raised the man
who raises his hand

fate and fault are not constellations
but a distillation, a condensation of
culturalized, traditionalized condemnations,
birthed, breastfed to raise the backside
of its hand to your daughter's face that she
comes to know his will and her lowly place

it's you, your hard-handed, handiwork
mandating domestic vocations over
economic emancipation from his high-handedness

it's you, the pretty ones
and ones the pretty ones say
are not so pretty

it grows in you in hues of light,
lighter and the lightest of white,
it's your black specter cast from your black sun
beneath which the contours of your
dalit sister's darker darkness can't shadow
your deep well waters of matriarchal
privileges of light and lighter without being
brutalized within inches of her life

it's you, your lipstick'd matriarchal arithmetic
dividing, subtracting meager domestic wages on
a niggardly patriarchal abacus that does not add up
nor divide out evenhandedly from your hand

it's you, your hand that demands your
handmaid sisters enter separate doors
to sit lowly your floors before separate plates,
separate knives, separate forks, separate glasses,
made to eat separately sitting your cold
matriarchal floors

too many their bodies your floors,
sitting there

too many of their hopes your floors,
dying there

and you wonder why he raises his hand at you,
the mother of daughters and daughters-in-law
you who desecrate every universal law of dignity
against your daughters, your daughters-in-law

fate is not in fault
and fault is not in fate¹⁶
they're seeds in you to grow in you,
your daughters, your daughters-in-law,
who grow to become mothers and
mothers-in-law, who violate every
universal law of humanity against
their daughters, their daughters-in-law

you can't demand the man above you
to lift his yoke from you while you
yoke the woman beneath you

it is his eyes of his hand
that watch your hand clench
a matriarchal fist of misogyny

it's you who teaches the son,
you who gave birth to,
breastfed and raised his hand
that demand the dowry,
burns your flesh,
acid splashes acid to you
and your daughter's face

¹⁶ Ibid.

it's your hands, it's in your hands that
first uncle's hands first rape your first daughter
for the first time and her tears cry to try
to tell you for the first time and your first reply
to her tear-filled eyes is to bear this and
bury it in the wounds of her womb and
never speak of it a second time

it's your hands favoring, fostering, female fetal
infanticide to ensure the family's first child be
a male child whose hands' eyes are to see how
your patriarchal misogynistic fist handles females
in his sisters, your sisters, your daughters-in-law

fault is not in fate,
fate is not in fault
but in part, in you,
growing in you that
you are his underling¹⁷

it grows in you, you gave birth to,
breastfed and raised the man
who raises his hand against you

¹⁷ Men at some times are masters of their fates. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are underlings - Act One Scene 2 Lines 136 – 147

fate is not in your stars,
but in part and parcel in you,
that you are an underling of
your raised hand against you

To Be Told Something Otherwise

there are times when the cause of a
problem is that problem's solution

economics is the cornerstone cause
of why men enslave other men

it is the keynote keystone underpinning
subjugation and all that cascades from it

in vain, we foolishly speak to, appeal to
such men's hearts and minds when
such men have no hearts, no minds
to speak to nor to change

those diamonds on their watches on their wrists
do not tell us the time at hand,
do not tell us what time men of greed keep,
do not tell us subjugation is their method and
means of mining subjugated men for currency
- that medium of exchange of power –
that empowers, incentivizes subjugators
to make and keep slaves of other men for power

men of greed understand that wealth is the
medium of exchange of power and for such
they will do anything, in any kind of way,
to obtain more wealth to gain more power

on the flip side of that dark side, substrates of greed more often than not are brainwashed to seek currency to have enjoyment, to buy fleeting surface pleasures sold them by men of greed to further empower men of greed

given that power lasts longer than pleasure,
given that power is more powerful than pleasure
men of greed enslave everything and everyone,
for power¹⁸

a slave must understand that which is
invariably the cause of his slavery
is the solution for his freedom

a slave must understand currency is the
medium of exchange of power subjugators
used as a tool not as a goal

a slave must realize that currency is power
he must utilize as a tool to free himself, not
a goal to buy pleasures to pleasure himself

a slave of any kind, anywhere, cannot
wear across his ass what little assets
he has to obtain his freedom

¹⁸ A concept by Raymond St. Jacques, an American Black actor.

a freed slave of any kind cannot stay free
anywhere in the world wearing his assets,
his power across his ass

a slave must unite with other slaves
to weaponize their collective currencies and
buying powers to undermine and modify
men of greed's inhumane behavior of
enslaving them to mine them for currency

to be told something otherwise, someone
either does not fully understand the cause
of the problem or desires that you not fully
understand the solution to the problem
caused by that someone

Dalit

harijan, the lowest, lowly
human rung, hung the fabricated ladder
of socio-economic stratification
the white man's foot,
the brahmins' footsteps
first upon their climb to the top

His Hands

forced to clean with his hands
housed shit of another's house

a crime against a man,
his hands, his humanity
maligning, putting shit
in the palms of his hands

smear stains of shit in-between
the creases in the pads of his pain
of his unclean latrine'd fingers to
shit print his fingerprint identity
on everything his every finger touches

fecal matter embedded in the nail beds
of hands that do not matter,
nailed a cross of denigration

smear generational deprivation his hands
to keep his hands knee deep to torso in
housed shit to caste his fingertips - untouchable

down cast by the upper caste shitting
in the shit of the palms of his hands,
so that his hands can't hand them,
can't touch anything of theirs and them

shit, to affix to affirm to him
to inhumanely caste him - untouchable
a lowered unfit station to more easily,
piously, morally, eternally assign a man
a lifetime indebtedness cleaning all
your housed shit with harijan hands

a crime against a man,
his hands, his humanity
maligning, putting your shit, grime
and crimes in the palms of his hands
to heinously assign his hands - untouchable

Abundantly

do this thing and from this thing
shall we eat bountifully

so, he disfigured fingers of a hand
of a flailing child that it would beg a more
compelling beg, its extended hand

do this thing he said

so, they stole and sold to rape,
a young girl whose young pearls
they'd string the neck of those a traveler's check
who'd pay a pearl's price a young girl
strung about their rape and necks

do this thing and from this thing
shall we eat bountifully

so, they smite the sight of innocence a
caustic scar for pity to see in horrid eyes
from which pathos renders caesar's darkness
a bounty they would eat their plenty from

do this thing and from this thing
shall we eat abundantly

She Wears

because he cannot control his eyes,
she wears

she wears the burqa,
the dupatta hung her neck to
swing down across her modesty

he said, it's a man's world, so
he wears the mid-evening stroll through
cool night air warmed the black tea

she dares not walk without fear for he will dare
her walk without her fear of him, his wrath,
her undraped neck and breasts,
her view from beneath black blinds
where she stores her gaze stoically
within herself to reveal nothing of herself
except her fear of him

she can be controlled but
he cannot control himself,
so, she bares his weighted burden,
she wears his black burqa and dupatta

she wears 'cuz, he said,
it's a man's world,
so, she wears

He Was

there is no "he was "
because "he is" because
he lives a tributary of ganges flowing
within us, within places in spaces beyond us,
beyond all paths that take us there

giver of life receiving death,
our transitioning for transformation of
travelers traveling a thousand roads
all leading away from rome

giver of life receiving death
the calls of all one's ancestral voices
to one ear to hear the illuminations
of a thousand rays of a thousand lights
leading the one, the way back home

when all roads lead away from rome
there is no "he was,"
because "he is" at home, a roman
living amongst us still

London After India

when I disembarked london from india
the first thing I could see was
how white white skin appeared to be,
leered at me, ghostly in alabaster

I felt how the first black man,
the first red man, the first yellow man,
the first brown man, the first indian felt
seeing all those white skins disembarking
shorelines of sea bearing ships of bad tidings

when I disembarked london from india
it was eerie seeing the numbed pace they moved

my breath breathing again polluted air
of heirs of entitlement

my eyes seeing again their leer at me,
to remind me they are the most important things
my eyes would see

they invaded me, speaking louder than need be
in their listen at me, listen to me tenor and tone on
i-phones teleporting the importance of alabaster

look at me - they stood heirs of dominion
over everything blue eyes could see of
black and brown, of yellow and red

look at me – saying without saying
I am god to gods and king of kings

when I arrived back and
disembarked london from india
I was shocked, staggered the dark reminder
reminding me, telling me I was just black
with dominion over nothing
everything dark eyes could see

Thinking Too Light, Too White

you who thought your color
would never be dark enough,
your stations never low enough
to place you at the front
of the line of hate crimes

you, my asian brothers of
colored disregard and apathy who
stood appallingly, quiet at the back of that
long line of people of color, whilst
the darker people, at its front long suffering,
long enduring the crimes of hate
you now blatantly suffer in that same
light of day black men are slain in

you, who stood appallingly quiet,
back far enough to not hear
and not to be heard

far enough to not want to hear
the cries, pretending not to see,
the crimes against humanity
suffered those queued up from
darker hue to lighter hue
in front of you, blocking you,
keeping you, distancing you from
white crimes against humanity

thinking too light, too white
you thought your turn in line
would never come to be so
you sat quietly, appallingly
miscalculating how quickly any
colored one of us can be
the next one amongst us in
line for white hate crimes
against humanity

Tied To Time

tied to time, she said
change is tied to time
and takes time, and thus
it takes time for us to change

but the oppressed asked
who is us and whom among us,
tied change to time

why does it take time
and whose time,
who is the one
taking time,
needing time
to take their time
to change

the clock has been ticking
since seventeen seventy-six

whose watch do we watch
when we are not the watch nor
the watcher of the watch

whose watch do we watch
to keep the time we keep,
kept this side of tyranny

who gets to be the timekeeper
taking their time watching time
to say, now is the time, to say:
now is the time to make real the
promises of freedom and democracy
tied to time, tied to watches
and watchers of watches
that are not mine that
tie change to time

Change

but from what
do they change you
and
when, then,
do you turn back
to change into what
from that, but what

from what pieces
do you pull your pieces to change back
to piece together
pieces of togetherness
that is the wholeness of our oneness

from but what,
do they change you
and
what, then,
do you change back to
to be some good somewhere
where humanity needs
some good deed from that
which you change back to

I Want Mercy¹⁹

his approaching,
discomforting my comfort, my convenience

his eyes a palette of pain painted tears
un-dried a plaintive surface never to hang
The Louvre queued gutted souls
a palliative pass to view

un-eased I want mercy,
he wants food

his approaching,
discomforting my comfort, my convenience

the black his hair aged a dust
not of time but impurities
in air he holds down his head
to lift up his pathos

I want mercy,
despairing, he wants water

¹⁹ Approached by a beggar in India, his condition was extremely painful for me. I wanted mercy from his pain whilst all he wanted was water and food

approaching,

against his garments sown
a grim, a grime with threads of
our crimes against his humanity
mirrored in palms of hands he begs me
I'm made to see my reflection pleading
me to give to me an ease to me

un-eased, I want mercy,
he wants no more the inner curse
of want of food, of thirst

I want mercy

**Forewords,
*“before the words” . . .***

forewords,
more than an introduction to words,
it is “before the words” . . .
the wondering, the wandering between
wordlessness and words,

a revealing, a realization,
a foretelling of revelations within the moments
prior the contextualization of disconnection of
wholeness from oneness

it’s the action of kinetic potentials, uncovering,
discovering, the wonders detected before the
textualization of what happened, what I saw,
felt, heard “before the words” . . .

in shallowed breaths of air too wrenching to
breathe, it is an awakening of a reckoning of
institutionalized systemic “ -isms “ of despotism
deployed to separate, subjugate, exploit each of
us, one from the other

an existential witnessing sensing,
“before the words,” the political, religious,
socioeconomic color-coded casting, categorization
and castigation of one from the other, marshaled
to gain and sustain a leg up on the other

in the nothingness between wordlessness and
words it is the stark dichotomies of immense object
opulence abutting shoulder to shoulder
immeasurable, unimaginable abject poverty mired
in self-serving complexities and contradictions
morally draped in amoral culture, nationalism and
religious dogma

in the quiet of silence, it whispers the searing sights
of manmade maiming, disfigurement set to streets
to beg disfigured to enhance the enticements of
beggary’s desperate pleas for paise²⁰ to meet
the mutilator’s mandatory daily take

an unmasking, an unmuting of masked, muted,
experiential hearing of sounds before the mind
knows, tells, hears it as sound,

²⁰ Monetary subunit of the rupee -Merriam Webster Dictionary

a first trimester embryotic poring, foreshowing,
forecasting, “before the words,” . . . our kindred
connects and disconnects circumscribed the
circumference of circles we circle around
our circle of humanity

forewords,
sensed action potentials of actions
propagating, foretelling what happened,
what I saw, felt, heard “before the words” . . .
that created the words that compelled me
to write the words before the foreword

it's you, your hand that demands your
handmaid sisters enter separate doors
to sit lowly your floors before separate plates,
separate knives, separate forks, separate glasses,
made to eat separately sitting
your cold matriarchal floors

- Neal Hall, from the poem 'Matriarchal Patriarch'

The Systems We Caste is a collection of poems inspired by the harrowing nature of discrimination and violence. The narration interrogates the fabric of casual exploitation which is unnoticed in day-to-day life, slipping into a profound expression of grief. Neal's poems express both a personal and global journey, all embedded in the microscopic tales woven from the lives of ordinary individuals. In this collection, Neal reflects with visceral imagery and sensuous language on the continued victimization of the lower rungs of society.

Neal Hall, M.D., graduate of Cornell and Harvard Universities, is an internationally acclaimed poet who has composed poetry and performed readings in the U.S. and internationally. Hailed as the Malcolm X of international poetry, Hall is a poet of intellectual passion and artistic significance. Hall's poetry consistently champions socio-economic and socio-political issues pertinent to social advocacy. **Yasus Afari, Poet, Kingston, Jamaica**

Described as a warrior of the spirit, a warrior of the mind, an activist, a poet with a hypersensitivity to suffering – Martin, Malcolm and Jesus all had this hypersensitivity. His poetry has the capacity to change ordinary people's philosophy on social and racial issues. **Prof. Cornell West, USA**

His is poetry that scalds you into waking up to the possibility that you are perhaps one of those silent spectators. All in all he is a poet. And unquestionably one of the most significant voices of the century.

Vasanth Kannabiran, Hyderabad, India

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