Three Poems · Anurādhā Mahāpātra

Village Nocturne

That village next to the refugee camp, all headless sheep. The goddess of drought comes here, haritaki-flowers and famine in her hair. On the day of the angry immersion under the esoteric peepul-tree, all those old men will return, their silent corpses on the edges of the paddy field when the birds’ eyes droop. By the Terapekhyā River, with a straw sky and some rat poison, sit women never touched by the sun. Out of the hospital, accepting the calm of the unforgiving bed’s faithless night, this village’s stale grass, cold light of the oil lamps, the Rupnārayan River and black money that knows the unholy consciousness, all want the hedge-rooted child. Beside the refugee camp, the wild kalmī-leaf brings the savor of rice-paddy milk, the goddess of drought in the haritakī’s flower.

Note: Haritaki is a bitter nut with medicinal properties, also used as an offering during pūjās. Kalmī is an aquatic plant with edible leaves, a common source of food in rural Bengal during times of famine.