



the big dam

NEIL ENGGIST

The Big Dam

Narmada

The river

silt and divine

bed full of Shivalingas

all roundstones

waiting for a mourner

to carry them away

one day

Narmada

She flows through thick

jungles and narrow gorges

Her chaste waters cut through

800 miles of marble rocks

sandstone hills and coal deposits

dutiful through the hostile land

emptying her holy stones

into the Arabian Sea

Famous-India the site says

Narmada is the 'mother and

giver of peace'

No mention of her 3 thousand dams

the 25 million people standing in the river

against the name of her age

waking out of the village India lost in the dream

But whose dream is India?

Whose idea is country?

Who is allowed to have an idea?

Whose idea is allowed to hang in the judge's frame?

They'll give you a loan if you grow Monsanto cotton

so you can starve and still sell their product

That's the idea

They'll give you a job

serving tea to the Dam company men

And building their mobile dwellings

after your home is underwater

They'll provide the pesticide

to kill all except

what they have modified to grow

That's the idea



50 million are landless from the dam

denied their mother-

'the giver of peace'

Narmada 'most feminine

in her movements'

like a haldi rubbed bride

gifted to the World Bank

the bridegroom of the khakis

funding the arteries without the veins

The Dam men

selling their smokes abroad

when they can't back home

The sugarcane lobby

flooding the drought

and getting out

so many farmers drink the pesticides

when the water is gone

The river becomes the line in the sand

or is it where the river once was

and now is forced to run out

before it sees the sea?

What does it mean to dam?

Who disappears?

Whose stories are swallowed?

Who drifts to the superslum to learn about what he has none?

'How you can snatch a river away from one and gift it to another. How you can green a desert, or fell a forest and plant one somewhere else. You use caprice to fracture a peoples' faith in ancient things—earth, forest, water, air. Once that's done, what do they have left? Only you. They'll turn to you, because you're all they have....They'll vote for you even as you squeeze the very breath from their bodies. They'll drink what you give them to drink. They'll breathe what you give them to breathe. They'll live where you dump their belongings. They have to. What else can they do? There's no higher court of redress. You're their mother and their father. You're the judge and the jury. You're the World. You're God.'

-Arudhati Roy



To let the river run
if it just rolls for the kingfishers and
the thin river children to
jump in and swim against the name of her age
They name it a waste

No one knows our name
Our age is a ghost town
Home is no longer the meeting place of
the family and the fire
that collects circles
Home is only a measurement
of what we keep out

Who is given the power to name our time?

In one morning
all the animals are all unnamed
soldiers march us to the boom slum
We become black tigers and disappear
our souls stay in our river land

as our bodies move into darkness
Black tigers never leave their homes
when all else are zombie santacons
wobbling drunk down genocide sailor street
the tigers leap through the spirit world
in the red glitter devouring wave
Rat corpses awaken in new worlds
Cat eyes fall through the water
Scarecrows whip the green horses
Locusts on Locusts
bury the sky underground

We sense all the death in new water
but we are not even allowed
to drown on our land

All the big dams will fall
and the tigers disappear into the monsoon



Man the manager of nature has named his age
after himself

Anthropocene

It sounds both proud and ashamed

Man named as an undifferentiated whole

with the power now to create to destroy

to preserve and reproduce

But which Man?

The 'Project Affected Person'

whose land has been flooded, whose forest has been taken

and now forced to find wage labor on the edge of a wild highway

or in the center of roads of Delhi with Audis of new money rushing by?

(Ghost laughing)

Nature becomes the resource that allows certain economic reproduction to subjugate nature

(Silent following)

Only a few voices could name the age

But it is still unnamed

Perhaps now is the only time in human history

that we are aware that our age's name is changing

that the choices we make collectively

will determine what that name means

What strange and wondrous rings we have made in the old trees

Who will sense these rings

and finally disown them?

What happens when the dam breaks

as old dams will

or the big river dries before

it reaches the ocean?



Adaptation

by the global north

means waging the endless counterinsurgency

Adaptation

turns people on themselves

and tears away the fabric of community

Adaptation is the bomb

in the marketplace

rampant fear as control

the ability to name strangers as enemies

and this naming means the ending of life

from a drone screen in a mall in Missouri

It means life or death

but the life had already been refused a body

a family

an idea of divine love

The Climate and the Neoliberal regime

like drought and flood all at once

amplify and express themselves

through each other

through cold war proxy fallout

World Bank lending

elimination of the commons

The deification of privatization

erosion of borders and shorelines

open ended repression

the turn to technocrats

permanently deployed mercenary drones

roving guns and gunmen looking for the war

the state as private world police unit

the state collapse into ethnic war

the boiling Tropic of Chaos

and the politics of the armed lifeboat

in catastrophic convergence



The Last Map

is a shadow

A 'Hologram of overlapping sediments of group and other identities

atop the markings of city-states and the remaining nations,

themselves confused in places by shadowy tentacles, hovering

overhead, indicating the power of drug cartels, mafias, and private security agencies'

The Last Map

is borderless

and all border

'the "Last Map"—will be an ever-mutating representation of chaos'*



Two Sisters

India and Pakistan

Two Sisters

once one multiplicity

They share the open wound

of partition drawn with blood by the British

Their dance of chilly war

flaring up like burning silk

both holding on with nuclear arms

Their conjoined heart melting in the mountains is Kashmir

Kashmir where the children at midnight are clear blue

Kashmir the seething magisterial source of the Indus

and the rivers that irrigate

90% of Pakistan's breadbasket

With the Baglihar dam on the Chenab in 08

India begins to cut off water to the Indus

Enter the Dam as climate weapon and here is

The truest and most profound use of the dam

Not to harness clean energy

Not to provide drinking water to rural millions

It is to destroy and desertify the land and water of the opponent



Signs held by Pakistani farmers:

'If not water

then Blood'

When choosing between thirst and blood

They choose blood

They always choose blood

& 298 glaciers are

following the snow leopards



There are a slippery group of interchanging phantoms

The ones that can afford to risk the Earth for accumulation

The ones getting bailed out and barricading their summer homes

blaming the fanatics

zombifying the refugees

capitalizing on catastrophe

They will always have artesian water delivered to them from the melting glacier

These are the voices arming the lifeboat

These are the voices hailing the human genius

The believers of the technofix

Bill Gates or Bruce Willis will fix this

Get back to business

Plan B : the technofix

Now the geoengineering wild west

Imagine-

The drones capture carbon while they watch us

from a pale aerosol sky

The deserts have been sheeted in white as they

march through the suburbs

The oil tankers now vaporize the ocean into the sky

to scatter the sun

Enter the apocalypse sun management coalition

Plan B-dim the sun a bit by spraying sulfates into the air

through balloons and really long hoses to mimic

the eruption of Mount Pinatubo which cooled the

planet by a whole half a degree in 1991

That's the non-crazy Gates funded possible

Plan B

because plan A

has too many enemies

with too many plans

Plan B-

hook our earth up to life support

The image of the terminal blue planet

the beep of its heart in coma

monitored by a colorful team of

doctor engineer actors who

with measured compassion fatalism

and pride keep pumping its breath

But when we stop pumping sulfate aerosols into the atmosphere
we'll be hit with a tidal wave of heat
so we'll just have to keep pumping forever
until the next large volcano or
the Snowpiercer circles the earth

How will plan B play out?

There can be no way to know
and no way to reverse and recapture
what will be released

Computer scenarios suggest
there will be great disruption to the Indian monsoons
plant productivity in Africa and rains in the Amazon

Curiously enough Europe and North America see minimal impact

One can imagine a world where the techno-elites
monitors of Frankenearth decide
which areas to save and which to sacrifice

who is to live and who is to die
For the ones who live by the river
this way already is

Plan C is planetary exodus

(who gets a ticket onto this virgin ark?)



The Earth from space

Who is allowed to see it?

Who is allowed to leave it?

If I were chosen to see the Earth from space-

The world of rivers drying in our souls
The ocean rising over our closing fences
The world turning iron and red
The ocean revolving in broken motion
The cities of lost languages in held breath
singing the requiem of the Iron Epoch
like gods waking in the great fire
a trillion entwined homes close within
leaning out over the abyss with dancer's feathers
holding our children from falling in

How much more ocean we are than we imagine-
How we spill tarsand right into our arteries
Tar right in the trees of our breath
How our lights dissolve the shells in our bodies
to shatter with a promised movement
of snake under turtle shell
Skulls of creatures we never met
fill the dams like final dreams
blowing from a dry second monsoon
Up coming the baying of dogs before
the drum of water through church walls

waiting for the turtle to reemerge from the sea

The raven starts speaking in a language

only known in the circle on the mountain

where the first people have kept on a fire

in enraged forgiveness

around the circle and the fire

each singer sings from a small growing eye

of overlapping rings opening

being with the earth too long to see it

crazy and blue and far between oily fingers

reaching for something round in the river

round and somehow the shape of something

within

reaching in

suffering with a river

entwined in

all other forms and freedoms

of love of home within



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