

Malkaganj¹

What lasts longer than monuments?
Shall I speak of grass?
Of a place called Plataea,²
Battered by armies
Five centuries before Christ,
Wiped out by an earthquake
Only yesterday?
What survives?

On the dump outside the house
The neck of a discarded garha³
Lies like a heavy garland,
The link that trapped the jackel
Who went to steal molasses
Century after century,
Since when we hang the pots from rafters
And mice and jackels register complaint.

¹ Area in Delhi where potters live

² Site of the Greek victory over the Persians in 479 B.C., recorded by Herodotus.

³ Large earthenware vessel

The shard speaks
In syllables earthy and black.
From Greece to Italy,
From Malkaganj to Jerusalem,
The voice of the shard is
Heard in a wilderness of streets.
Let a million shards return to dust
- They will rise again.

O potter of two thousand,
Three thousand years ago,
Your hands
Breathe life
Into today's wet clay.
Let it not rain today.
Let today's batch
Bake well in the sun.

— *Margaret Chatterjee*