

name me rebel

Amal Rana

name me rebel
name me ashes rising from the phoenix
name me
besharam aurat
dangerous transgressor
too demanding for the cause
too emotional
name me sweetheart
bachi
dear
beautiful
abhorrent
deviant
unbeliever
name me scheherazade's tongue turned rebel
forking out in a thousand and one ways
dethroning the self-appointed gatekeepers of morality
and imperial emperors crowned with laurels made from drones

this is the time for a puja of accounting
call forth the butcher of gujarat
masquerading in the robes of democracy
this is the time for inqalibi namaaz led by women
demanding justice for their sisters
for 1984
this is the time for khadijah's pen
ayesha's warrior ululations
striking fear in the hearts of men
this is the time of the sword
blading its way through your silence

the erasing of so many histories into tales of male rebels

when they ask you who I am
tell them I am the forgotten lover, aapa, ammi, dadi, naani, mami, chachi, khala, beti,
who nurtured the heart, soul, body, mind, spirit
of all the ashfaqulla khans, bhagat singhs, sukhdevs, azads and rajgurus
tell them I am the mother who fed the men who made the history books
men whose photos hang at revolutionary melas with only a tiny handful of women
tell them I am the forgotten women of the komagata maru
inquilabi spirits still wandering the floor of the salish sea

tell them my name is durga bhabhi
kartar dhillon
gulab kaur
bhikaji cama
tell them my name is not just malala
but also momina bibi murdered by an american drone
aafia sadiqui
asia bibi
ask them why they claim to speak for us but refuse to say our names

tell them my name is much more than rebel
my name is life
the seal not of suleiman but bilqis

an armed uprising of jannat's houris shredding apart your orientalist dreams
and their feigned piety
my name is rebellion's lightning
my tongue azadi's forge
because freedom cannot be won by begging

o sisters
my resisters

when they ask you who you are
tell them your name is not just rebel
your name is
a burning in every pind
a raging in every shaher
a fever in every child's veins
a storming of every jail
a flooding of every river
a reawakening in every masjid, gurdwara and mandir
the rage of a thousand jallianwala baghs
the resilient roots of global uprisings
from gaza to manila
to lahore, ambala and jammu
to the unceded coasts of turtle island
a birthing of all the revolutions that have gone
and all those to come
your name carries entire oceans and seas
your name is a vastness so deep
the colonizers froth with fear
your name burns indelible,
coals beneath the ashes
our forgotten sisters breathing life into
new flames of ghadar

This poem is a homage to the forgotten revolutionary histories of South Asian women. It is inspired by Ghadar poetry. The Ghadar Party was an anti-colonial resistance movement for an independent India. It was founded by settler immigrant Indians (Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu) in the early 1900s. Vancouver was an active site for organizers, many of whom were Punjabi. Poetry played a central role in the movement, used as a means of communication to counter surveillance efforts. Interspersing Urdu words, "name me rebel" references famous male anti-colonial revolutionaries who resisted the British in India and asks what happened to the stories of the women who supported them.

Original Ghadar poems that served as inspiration (in Punjabi and English):

Ghadar Poem

Kade Mangyian Milann Azadiyan Na
Hunde Tarliyan Naal Na Raj Loko
Karo Na Minnat Ainwe Bano Na Kaiyar
Fardo Talwar Ehnah Nahin Rahna
Agge Veero Arjiyan Ne Ki Banna Liya
Zalam Firangyan Ne Desh Kha Liya

Freedom is not obtained by begging
By appeals political power is not won
Do not petition like cowards
Take the sword and they will run
What have all the petitions done?
The cruel foreigners have eaten our homeland

jo koi pooche ke kaun ho tum

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to kah do baaghi hai naam apna
zulm mitaana hamaara peshah
ghadar ka karna hai kaam apna
namaaz-sandhya yahi hamaari
paath pooja bhi sach yahi hai
dharam karam sach yahi hai yaaro
vahi khuda bhi o ram apna

if they ask you who you are

if they ask you who you are
tell them that your name is Rebel
that your occupation is to wipe out tyranny
that your work is to create *ghadar* (tumult)
that this is your *namaaz* and your *sandhya*
that this is the way you worship
that this is your only true religion
that this is your *khuda*, that this is your *Ram*
– Kartar Singh Sarabha, translation by Ali Mir

[*namaaz* and *sandhya* are respectively referring to Muslim and Hindu rituals of prayer, *khuda* is the way Muslims refer to god, and *Ram* is a major Hindu deity]