

I CONTAIN MULTITUDES

by

Priyanka Jha

Commissioned by and developed with Green Carnation Theatre Company.

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A children's playground. The equipment: a seesaw, a swing set, a roundabout, and a climbing frame – all faded with peeling paint. A sign saying No Dogs Allowed. There is a pile of dog shit on the path.

BAHUCHARA (17 years old, British Indian) dressed to the nines in female traditional Indian dress. They have heavy jewellery and make up. They step in the dog shit as they enter.

BAHUCHARA: Shit.

BAHUCHARA attempts to wipe off the dog shit. An agonising minute of silence follows, where they attempt to wipe it on the grass and on the path, and then the grass again and then the path, before giving up entirely and taking the shoe off.

They sigh, and take a seat at the swing. They rock themselves, gently. Soothingly.

BAHUCHARA: Trust something like this to happen. Just when I put all of this effort into dressing up and... Shit! Literal shit! On my nice shoes. The only nice shoes in the house that fit me. How am I supposed to go to the wedding now?

Come on, have a little courage. A little faith.

They close their eyes and pull the prayer beads from their pocket.

Lord Shiva, please let them take me in. Let them accept me. Let them continue to love me.

They open their eyes again.

BAHUCHARA: 5000 years ago. That's when I should have been born. Back then, I would have been understood. Recognised for what I am. Not cast away because of it.

They look down at their feet.

BAHUCHARA: Being cast away from my own sister's wedding? Surely. Surely, Shiva, they wouldn't be so cruel. Hell, I've been the one helping mum organise it for months. And yet...

My community would have accepted me. And that wouldn't have been in spite of my identity, no, it would have been *because* of it.

People would have come to me. For guidance, for the divine insight people like me possess.

BAHUCHARA sighs wistfully. They get up, turn away from the camera and go towards the climbing frame. They start to climb.

BAHUCHARA: What will they say, when I go back, Shiva? What will I tell them? How will I tell them? How can I explain? Explain something as simple and as complex as, well, me.

They are on the highest rung.

BAHUCHARA: I've always known I was different. Different in my core. You know this, Lord Shiva. Gods know how many times I reached out to you as a kid, begging you to make me normal. Able to blend in with the other boys.

I wouldn't have had to hide.

People would have seen me, for who I am not for what I was pretending to be.

I would have been a member of the third sex.

They jump down from the climbing frame, and emerge from a crouch.

BAHUCHARA: It's what they would nowadays call non-binary.

A rather modern term for an ancient identity, one that's been around for millennia.

They go to a patch of pavement and pull out a cardboard box of chalk from their pocket, as easily and casually as someone might pull out a pack of cigarettes. They shake one out and contemplate the pavement before them, before drawing a hopscotch spiral.

They alternate between hopping and jumping into each box, saying 'boy' softly as they land on odd numbers and 'girl' as they land on even numbers. When they get to the final box, they simply say 'me'.

BAHUCHARA: Here I am hopping in circles while out there somewhere mum will be trying to find me. I think she'll understand why I've been gone. After all, she even accepted it when Didi, the most sickeningly love struck sister there ever was, bought home her *Irish* man.

I still can't say his name. It's an Irish one I always get wrong. Tah-dig? Ta-dig? Tige??

She bought Papa around too. Well, eventually. A man from a different country. A different religion even. The most opposite religion I can think of to us Brahmin Hindus. Irish Catholic. Only one God, stuffy ceremonies, even stuffier holidays...

(I'll never understand the point of a festival if you can't dance, Shiva)

But as long as they had an Indian wedding... Mum and Papa are happy to give their blessing.

They sit on one side of the seesaw, struggling to arrange their skirts in such a way that they'll fit.

I bet Didi will tease me for stealing one of her lenghas. Maybe she'll even understand it when I say - when I explain that my kurta just... didn't feel right today.

We used to come here all the time, Didi and I.

This very playground.

They stretch their arms expansively.

We would just be goofing around, like siblings do. She would pretend to push me off the climbing frame. As revenge, I would push her too hard on the swings.

She's always been supportive. In her own way. She never even questioned it when I told her my favourite god, out of the many, many gods to choose from, was Lord Shiva. My sweet, cross dressing Shiva who took on a female form for one of his reincarnations.

But now? We barely talk like we used to. Because she can sense that I'm hiding something, and she doesn't want to push and ask what it is.

They go to the roundabout and sit.

BAHUCHARA: When I first found out about you, I was nine.

We were in India. Like we were every Summer, making the rounds and seeing our extended family.

It was scorching.

We were visiting a temple, one of the oldest in Bihar. Beautifully ornate, with statues and engravings everywhere. Of course, we had to take off our shoes.

They take off their other shoe.

BAHUCHARA: The gods clearly didn't appreciate my gesture of respect much, as my feet burned up immediately. The hot marble felt like coals beneath my child-size feet. I must have yelped out loud because my Papa, as dad's do, immediately came to stop the pain. He lifted me onto his shoulders.

And I could immediately see all the carvings so close up. Gorgeous. They were like fallen stars. Backlit with this glow from the sun that reached through the marble and lit up these scenes so they glittered.

They look upon a sight they see clearly but we can only imagine.

And it was you. My beloved Lord Shiva, dressed as a woman. I knew it was you by the River Ganges knotted in your hair and here *you* were in these gorgeous silk saris... glittering.

And even then. Even then. I was a child but immediately I knew. I could sense that something had shifted. Something big had happened. Even if I was surrounded by a bigoted society, the gods would understand.

My gods would accept me.

Shiva would accept me.

And my family: they'll accept me too.

It's funny what memories come back to you when you're stressed.

I am a proud, card carrying member of the third sex.

Sure, I'm not revered. I'm not worshipped like in the time of the Vedics.

But I can, and I will, be accepted. The gods themselves have decided it.

They look towards the park gate.

BAHUCHARA: Sorry, you'll have to excuse me for now.

There's a wedding I have to get to.

They go back to their shoes and consider them, before binning them and exiting the shot.

THE END.