Twelfth of February, 1983*

Hear me Maryam, hear me Khadija, hear me Fatima
Hear the good news of the new year
on the birth of their daughters
parents will now seek deadly injections for them
for law and power is in the hands of those
who write, speak out and adjudicate against
flowers, knowledge and freedom.
They govern, they are the rulers.

Yes, hear me Maryam, hear me Khadija, hear me Fatima

Today they make laws
which you must touch with your eyes
kiss with your lips
for which you must be grateful, thankful.
You are the queen of your home
mother of your children
head bent in servitude, how lovely you look
how protected and dignified
you have a right to a pedestal and Heaven
therefore, they tell you for your own good
want you to understand ‘the evidence of two
women’.*

Going out alone is not right
all these comings and goings are improper
this is a heavenly injunction

*Please see introduction
whenever denies this
is guilty of apostasy
deserves to be beheaded.*

To come out on the streets
to fight
to demand the right for freedom
is against the sanctity of the feminine principle
is the work of ruffians.
Why do you tire this delicate body,
exhaust it?
You’re a china doll
you’ll get noticed
going smashed, get shattered to pieces
you’ll melt in the hot sun,
you won’t be able to tell the truth in court
modesty and shame will make you silent
you’ll faint with embarrassment.

The flags of mourning were flapping
the handmaidens had rebelled
Those two hundred women who came out on
the streets
were surrounded on all sides
besieged by armed police.
Tear gas, rifles and guns
wireless vans and jeeps
every path was blockaded
there was no protection
they had to fight themselves.

*Another fundamentalist demand
Those pets and favourites
the hoodlums of the Jamiat*
when they raved along the streets
set fires and looted
swung spears and shields
terrorised the citizens
then these helmet-wearers
smiled from a distance
laughed affectionately
'They're only kids . . .'
they said, and fed them milk.

Let women be
Watch your own interests.
These hollow moral rules and restraints
for your own power
why do you explain these to me?
Is Islam that difficult?
Did people never pray before now
did they not fast?
Did they not believe in the Quran and the
Kalima?**

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*The leading Islamic party which collaborated with the army.
**The basic tenet of faith affirming the Unity of God and Mohammad’s prophethood.
Then why do you destroy youth?
Why be so cruel and relentless?
Why use the whip for every little thing
and torture?

I read the charter of freedom
And you?
The writing in front of us
is large and clear
written on the wall –
are you unable to read?

How did you think this?
I who give birth to you
would be too shy and embarrassed before you
would worry about speaking the truth
won’t be able to describe with my tongue
that relationship between the two of us
of love and hatred, of respect and contempt.

Are you afraid of a woman’s truth?
Am I numb?
Or is my mind so paralysed
that standing next to me another person of my sex
should remind me?
I remember every detail
I want to remind you
Remember . . . that cruelty
can be identified with reference to the law
can be understood.
You snatch from me the status of a human being
I refuse to give birth to you
Is this the only use of my body
that my womb should nurture a child
raise for you an army of slaves
blind, deaf and mute?
We know that if we support you
we shall be digging the graves of our children
so we shall not support you.

You ask for two
We two crores* of women
shall testify
against this tyranny and cruelty
hurled at our heads
in the name of the law of evidence

Not us, but you
deserve to be murdered
for being the enemies of light and truth
for being the murderers of love.

SAEEDA GAZDAR

*Equals ten million.