Woman and Salt

There are many types of respectability
the veil, a slap, wheat,
stakes of imprisonment are hammered into the coffin
of respectability

From house to pavement we own nothing
respectability has to do with how we manage
respectability is the spear used to brand us
the selvedge of respectability begins on our tongues
If someone tastes the salt of our bodies at night
for a lifetime we become tasteless bread
Strange market this
where even the dyer has no colours
The kites on the palm of space are dying

I deliver babies in imprisonment
the earth should be playful for legitimate offspring
Because you deliver children in fear today you have no
pedigree
you are known by the name of one wall of your body

How you conduct yourself has been made central to
your status
a beautiful gait
a false smile chiselled on your lips
you haven’t wept for years
Is that what a mother is like  
Why have your children turned pale  
Which tribe of mothers do you belong to  
That of rape, imprisonment, or a divided body  
or of daughters bricked up alive.  
Your daughters in the streets  
knead hunger with their own blood  
and eat their own flesh.  
Which of your eyes are these  
How many times has the wall of your house been  
bricked up  
You let my daughter be my name  
but your son’s name is the currency of the time  

Today, your daughter tells her own daughters  
I shall brand my daughter’s tongue  
blood-spitting woman is not a metal  
is not looking for bangles to steal –  
A battleground my courage, a spark my desire  

We were born wearing shrouds around our heads  
ot rings on our fingers  
which you might steal.

SARA SHAGUFTA
To Daughter, Sheely

Whenever someone gives you a sorrow name that sorrow, ‘daughter’.
When my grey hairs appear laughing around your cheeks, you can weep on the sorrow of my dream, you can sleep.

Those fields which are yet to grow in those fields
I see your brassière too.

I was afraid but only the first time, daughter.
How many were the times I felt afraid, daughter?

Trees hide the archers who lie in wait for you You were my birth, daughter, and your birth, your daughter will be

In the desire to bathe you my fingertips spit blood.

SARA SHAGUFTA
The Moon Is Quite Alone

The shadow of the cage is imprisoned too
I become the shadow of my apparel
My hands infused into others

The earth is alone
why did the lone river flow into the sea?
lonely the decision.

Aggrieved by those who die
I wake up in the fire
echoing in the stone
Drowning. What tree will grow from the earth?
Call my sorrows a child –
in my hands are broken toys
and before my eyes a man
Countless bodies beg me for eyes
Where shall I let myself begin?

The Heavens are younger than I am
flight has no floor
whose voice can hands be?

Suffer my lies
when you liberate the birds from the forest
Fire tastes the torch
And I dry clothes on the roof of my being
In my distances the eye
I am dressed in my sorrows.
Clad in a garment of fire

Shall I tell you the name of my shade?
I give you the moons of all the nights.

SARA SHAGUFTA