



Writer and Nature

Vayu Naidu

I'M FRAMING NATURE HERE as landscape, with seasons. Growing up in south-eastern India the seasons have classical moods that colour the landscape. For me, it is sea, rice field or coconut groves, valley, granite rocks, and for many of us, metropolitan Madras. While writing, the palette merged with blue-green-yellow and pollution had its own shades of grey. Each of these was accompanied with a heat of taste and temperature only southerners find comfortable with a large dose of humidity and seasalt.

I draw on that — and migrating to an urban landscape in London, I seem to have more of a relationship with nature.

When I moved to London from Kent with its slanting shadows of oast houses, I wondered what would take its place? Gherkin? Cheese grater, East wall, the bridges? Yes; and more.

The summer of Corona arrived. In the first lockdown there was more daylight. The limited outings didn't matter, as the long light from the window framed a new palette of colour from the distant silver birch, the shock of green from the lime tree, and the rage of birds singing and spitting from gutters to chimney pots suddenly made one aware of how much local noisy green there was in the urban allotment.

As Spring tore away from the calendar of seasons, summer sprinted on with face masks and hand washes, and the centuries-old talk about the weather had shifted to the uncertainty of regulations about Covid. When



the writing was knocking in the head for the get-out clause, I started heading out earlier in the mornings by the river into some of the lesser-known water features by the Pump House, now an abandoned art gallery, inside Battersea Park.

The swans had their watch at 10 am. They'd swim in a fleet with their three grey signets, doing an eyes-right to the natural embankment, watching humans standing in ovation to their beauty; breadcrumbs tossed like lumpy confetti at the magnificent family. Dogs went to fetch those doughballs — hissed at by the patriarch of the swan fleet.

My supreme intention was fresh air and washing my mind of words. I wanted absolutely nothing to do with thought, word, any construction that the human mind is capable of conceiving, complicating, and conquering. My quest was the frontier of an empty silent space.

The mallard had three broods each. As everyone Whatsapped little videos of silent skies and cities' birds entering conference centres, these were without registration. The Canadian geese decided not to migrate and waited in their Victorian coattails for a snack around 11:30 am. I unstuck from the friendly crowd. I walked across the tiniest of wooden bridges to watch the waterlily pad flicker with the swarming of insects. This was the stuff of exquisitely embroidered silk screens and I was out with my silent iPhone making nature captive.

I look up. A silver carp flies open-mouthed three feet above the water, wagging his tail fin. A necklace of waterbeads swirling; gravity and flight as a glimpse of genius.