

Tongue

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Khona (or Lilabati) was a legendary poetess and astrologer of Bengal, sometime between the ninth and 12th centuries AD. Married to the son of Varahamihira, one of the greatest mathematicians and astronomers of all time, her predictions were said to have surpassed even her father-in-law's in their precision. The envious Varahamihira (and his son), according to the legend, severed her tongue to silence her, but her vatic rhymes acquired oracular status and are widely recited in Bengal even today.

I am Khona,
whose tongue was her blessing—
and her curse.

They came and cut out my tongue,
for I was a woman.

Yet, look,
even now I speak—
in millions and millions of tongues
I speak.
Down the centuries,
I speak through my silence
and the silence of countless other women.

What can an astrologer
predict of her own future?
Her own wordlessness?
Our destinies are transcribed,
they say,
in the stars:

but a woman's lot
is always the same.



Words. Poems. Prophecies.
They cost me my tongue.
Varahamihira's jealousy
made him take up his brutal knife
to silence my genius.

Yet, my words still live on,
in the immortality of my silence—
I am tongueless,
but still unvanquished.

In Bengal, my rhymes are still on the lips
of young and old—
my utterances live on
in millions and millions of tongues.

Tongues. *Tongues.*