

*no one would make up  
such stuff. He also  
believed in miracles.  
For instance Mother.*

*Father always said  
she was a miracle and  
had made us all from dough.*

Some of the elements at work here may be obvious: the repetitions of “God,” “9 to 6,” “She was too busy,” or “miracle(s).” Poetic elements of imagery and figurative language are not at play in this poem. Instead, the poet relies on a narrative structure, on story-telling, unlike the older “Oror, Oror,” which gave us a metaphor of “Your crib is a silver boat.” But in contrast to the lullaby, this “Autobiography,” gives us more of a surprise ending to the poem. We expect the lullaby to end with words of “love,” but we don’t expect Van’s poem to end with the speaker saying they were made “from dough.”

It may be strange to compare an anonymous lullaby to a contemporary poem, but in doing so we remind ourselves that throughout history Armenian women poets have sung their children to sleep with poetry, and now, address issues of God and family in their stanzas.

The anthology includes what we would also expect, love poems, chiseled odes to one’s nation, one’s homeland. And all the poems matter. All the voices behind these poems matter. These are the women who have — in the face of much trauma and tragedy — created solitude somewhere, somehow and documented their beliefs and views in verse. These are women who today continue to voice themselves, hoping that future generations will read their lullabies of golden threads, will hear their many questions to God. 卐

“Oror, Oror” and “Autobiography” from *The Other Voice: Armenian Women’s Poetry Through the Ages*, translated by Diana Der-Hovanesian, edited with Maro Dalley, AIWA Press, 2005. Reprinted with permission.



Kay Mouradian

## Reflective moments

by Kay Mouradian

The year was 1976 and I was on sabbatical from my college in Los Angeles. I had submitted a doctoral proposal for developing a competency-based yoga curriculum for community colleges. When the proposal was accepted, I contacted several yoga centers throughout India and soon after was on a plane with a ticket so fat it impressed even airline personnel. The first of my 32 scheduled stops was Germany, followed by three touristy weeks in Egypt. Then I boarded Japan Air to fly on to India. I had been with family and friends up to this point, but for the next five months I would be on my own. Nervous but elated at the thought of finding a yoga teacher who could answer my questions, I sat in my window seat and watched white fluffy clouds gently disappear into the blue sky. Finally, when the 747 made its approach into Bombay, now called Mumbai, I viewed the ancient city in the morning’s first light. My excitement soared.

As my cabby drove wildly through the littered streets, I drank in the early morning sights. Life was still quiet. Men, women, and children clothed in lightweight white cottons slept on sidewalks close to doorways of paint-peeling apartments. Were they escaping India’s unbearable heat? This early September morning was already hot and humid. Our Indian Ambassador taxi had no air-conditioning, and my clothes were sticking to my body. Relief flowed over me when I checked into the air-conditioned Taj Mahal Hotel. I quickly unpacked, eager to start my interviews. I had assumed yoga was a way of life in India, and I wanted to

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understand that lifestyle. I’d hoped to meet that someone special who could teach me life’s secrets. When the student is ready, the teacher will come. Isn’t that what all the books said? And I was ready.

It didn’t take long to discover that being ready was not enough. I realized many of my questions would never be answered. My first interview was my first betrayal.

As I entered an old building that advertised a Bombay yoga center and walked up the creaky, narrow stairs, I found myself in what looked like an ordinary apartment with no furniture. I had traveled thousands of miles only to be greeted by a twenty-something American girl. The yogi, her teacher, was out of town. So instead of interviewing an Indian yogi, I observed this 26-year-old American from Florida teaching yoga postures to Indian teenage girls. Was this why I had traveled to India?

I refused to be discouraged. I had many more interviews scheduled. One, in particular, held intrigue. A government-sponsored research center housed a hospital, a medical doctor, and a swami. Research on the effects of yoga postures on insulin production in diabetics was in progress. This one interview would prove that the books and all their claims of yoga’s healing powers were true. But when I arrived, my heart sank. The small hospital was dirty, the doctor with whom I had corresponded was away in Madras, and the excited swami who was expecting me had Richard Hittleman’s yoga book, *A 28-Day Exercise Plan*, sitting on his desk. I’m sure he thought I was going to take him to America and make him famous. That was the day the magic ended.

*Look into a man’s eyes*

*Learn to read his spirit.*

*His countenance and his eyes*

*Tell you what quality is in him*

*More than the words he speaks.* 卐

reflection