

by Gord Sellar, from “The Danikbharata,”  
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## Shivji

The harder they fall, alright.  
Skin hard like cane reed, he squats low  
in some alleyway, syringes in his many hands,  
rubber tourniquet clenched between his teeth,  
ghee boiling hard in filthy spoons. It’s impossible to tell:  
is that his natural shade? or is the blue his withdrawal?  
Nobody can drag words back past the brink of his accent,  
not even in the shadowy corner of Kwaliti Tandoori  
on West 52<sup>nd</sup>; or is it in Harlem now, where he hangs,  
recounting stories of Parvathi’s lush addictions,  
explaining the roots of his interest in free-form jazz,  
the strange octopus beauty of Roland Kirk, with  
his rack of duct-taped horns across his chest, which  
convinced Shivji, eight-armed, he could do it, too.

When he woke at the top of Mt. Kaylash,  
she was gone. He searched for eleven years,  
found her shackled up with some musclehead  
Hittite, essentially a hit-man for a small  
cartel of Egyptian demigods, trying to make a comeback.  
He left her there, in plastic flip-flops, at Giza,  
and off he went, to America, to be a jazzman.  
A tactical error. The death of one saxist Coltrane  
came in 1967. Disarray. Sleeping under peoples’ porches,  
having to play tonal in funk bands just to eat,  
solos on tunes like “Big Mama!” and “Mama Come  
and Jump Me!” and “Red Hot Big Mama Song Hyunh!”

Eventually he sold his horns, pawned them off  
one by one. Took to drinking, syringe in hand, bitching  
at his loss of Vedic income to that slick  
bastard Krishna — “*that slimy populist*”, as he says.  
Too broke for ghee, doing regular unsalted  
butter in the darkness of numberless alleyways.  
Spitting randomly at Hittite-faced cabbies and paperboys,  
wishing on fire-escapes that he’d never bloody heard  
of Rahsaan Roland Kirk. Always comparing  
himself to Krishna, whose cham was always a little  
more glittery, “*the Elvis of the Ganges, he were,*”  
And Shiva will then point out to you, the name  
*Elvis* contains within it Evil in the plural.

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## **The Elvis of the Ganges, At His Height (in 1968)**

No more chariotside lectures for Krishna. He's ridin' high.

Coat scruffed with mantric sequins, pinned by lights  
and screeching guitars to the wall, a sort of rock'n'roll insect;  
forget rivers and fiery oblation. Forget statues bleeding milk.

He's done his time in limos, in flower-decked tour buses,  
once kept George Harrison awake all night as he drove  
from somewhere in Italy all the way to the Western coast of France.

He gets fan letters from teenaged girls, smeared throughout with cheap perfume.

*"If you're not willing to fake it, you know, act a little," he says,  
"then you need to find another line of work. If you can't  
stand a little crappy music and bad breath, you'd better forget it!"*

Lately, he's cutting in on the Devil's market, swapping record deals for souls.

Worst of all, he hates it. The music is crap, and nobody talks  
to him straight anymore. They figure him for a con man. But he's  
never been other than what he is now. His own hair stirs his abhorration.

But what's he supposed to do? Business is business is business.  
It's the fashion. And he's damn good at it. If only it weren't for all  
those annoying bald kids making noise in all the bloody airports.

*Must do something about that, he resolves... they could give a fellow a bad name.*