



Anta(h)shira

অন্তঃশীরা

Raqs Media Collective

The Bengali word *anta(h)shira* is untranslatable, and uncommon. Except that it is found in specialized »medical« literature and a few obscure Bengali medical dictionaries, where it is taken to mean »intravenous.« This is the sense in which we parse it to capture a shadow of the subterranean forces and flows that shape life. Today, the world needs to draw sustenance, inspiration, and strength from within the *anta(h)shira* forces in all of us, and to engage in remaking the relationship between the microcosm of the embodied self, and the macrocosm of the cosmos.

It is intriguing and instructive to think of *anta(h)shira* in terms of a flow that is ubiquitous and subtle, close to and under the skin, but invisible to the naked eye. It is capable of profoundly affecting the body through which it courses, but remains largely misunderstood.

In cultural terms, it could be seen as a capillary conduit for the transit of ideas and concepts in the social body, a transmitter of the mood, or sense, of a time. This may not be immediately graspable or apprehensible, and it may linger, or hover, around utterances, signs, and actions, just as wisps of breath or vapor attach themselves like comic-book thought-bubbles to speech-acts on wintry days; present, but pointing to what else is present, rather than drawing attention to themselves. It is the meaning of what it takes to be the bearer of meaning.

The intravenous flush of warmth that touches the skin for a moment (from the inside) in accompaniment

to excitement is anta(h)shira. It may result in the tumescence of expectation or arousal as much as it may signal the need for momentary withdrawal. It can be the secret of the cultural equivalents of goosebumps, of hair-standing-on-end, and of bloodshot eyes. It can contain a spectrum that ranges from the inviting to the combative or protective, from the defensive to the curious, from the camouflaged to the transparent, from the introspective to the extroverted, from the thoughtful to the instinctive, and from the surprised to the surprising. What unites this diversity of responses is the capillary force that acts in each instance, leading to the subcutaneous dispersal of an intuition, a feeling, a hunch or a deliberative sensibility between entities that may be mutually distant, or even ordinarily not in contact with each other.

We know it when we know it because we know it; in our veins, in our guts, in our bones. And then we never know it alone.

Sometimes, such as when we sense that something fundamental has shifted, we feel the anta(h)shira manifest. It brings into awareness the latent flux between many. It precipitates the surge of sense and sediment from the reservoirs of that which is in common. This can happen when an encounter with a quiet but determined gesture, an utterance transmitted word-of-mouth, or an orphaned sign (of which we may know neither provenance nor parentage) becomes a catalyst for a contagious series of

transformations in the consciousness of a city's inhabitants. Nobody can claim authorship of such a moment but everyone can make it their own.

At other times, it rises in us like a tidal bore swelling to the pull of a celestial force; something that we know will keep us awake at night until we step out into the uncanny radiance of moonshine or nightshade, and find ourselves in the company of other joyful or disturbed insomniacs.

Like many things subcutaneous, the anta(h)shira may be misunderstood as being »dormant.« Just because it lies under the skin does not mean that it is buried. It remains alive and in reserve. In a majority of instances, the reality that we are referring to is hibernating, or, on a different temporal register, »power-napping,« conserving its energies, waiting for a serendipitous moment when it can unfurl itself to its fullest extent. Until that happens, it courses through the arteries as potential, waiting to be called upon. Meanwhile, it learns new things through the porosity of veins.

The anta(h)shira bides its time to flood.

#### USAGE

– Her words, otherwise thought lost, were protected and kept alive within the flow of anta(h)shira. They reappeared, after a few centuries, with a new force.

– The *Annihilation of Caste*, both as text and as idea, was kept aglow over the last seven decades – in spite of dominant amnesia – in the anta(h)shira of millions.

