

MELANCHOLIC AFTERTASTE

By Gayatri Jayaraman

"I relate very strongly to Jeet (Thayil)'s poetry. Especially the manner in which he is able to strike a deep melancholic note, like a *dhrupad* maestro," says curator Nancy Adajania, explaining why the first line of his poem *After* spawned the exhibition, *Your Name is Different There*.

The group exhibition with artists Sheba Chhachhi, Ranbir Kaleka, Sonia Khurana and CAMP (a triad of artists Shaina Anand, Sanjay Bangar and Ashok Sukumaran) centres around the identity of the displaced; particularly of those who stand at its threshold. The artworks do not "report" on the global condition of displacement and dislocation. "They are not illustrations, they are probes," Adajania says. She has designed the mise en scene of the exhibition in the form of a chamber of broken echoes, with each project occupying its own space, but ricocheting off one another.

The five key figures are drawn from Thayil's poem: the activist, the *bairagi* or renunciate, the marginal or the tramp, the one who has witnessed violence, and the neighbour. None of the identities of these survivor figures are watertight, sometimes merging into each other.

Thus the historical narrative of the Shoah, the Holocaust (Kaleka's *Consider*) is counterpointed with that of the Nakba, the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland by the Jews (CAMP's *Al Jaar Qabla Al Daar/ The Neighbour Before the House*). In Khurana's *Tramping*, a tramp-flaneur meets a real beggar; Chhachhi's women ascetics cross paths with Khurana's Flower carrier, where the only focus of meditation against the ugliness of the world is a flower.

Adajania says she does not think in binaries. Instead she is interested in a distributed sense of belonging. "These works allow us to experience the fact that displacement and belonging are a ratio, not an either/or," she explains. The ratio changes from moment to moment and place to place. It defines how you live and what you call yourself. Or what others call you.

'Your Name is Different There' is on exhibit at Volte Gallery, Colaba, Mumbai, till 5 January.