

# *Arundhathi Subramaniam*



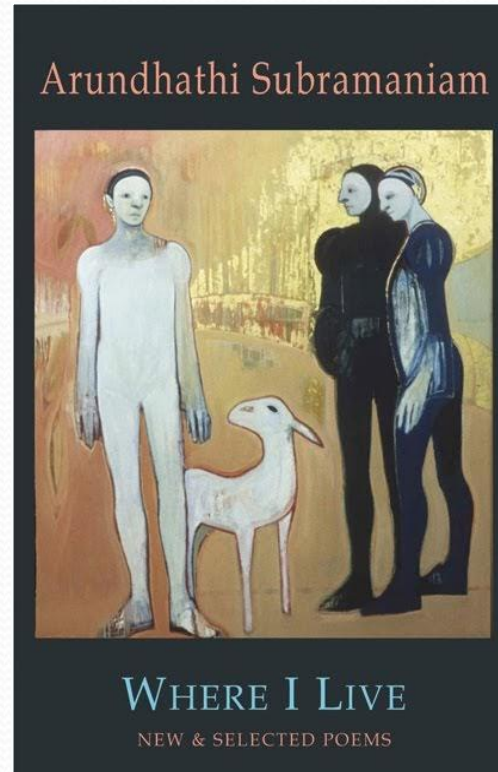
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Adrian Miranda Magadia, Sorana Mindrila, Marcantelli Irene

# Biography

Arundhathi Subramaniam is an Indian poet, dancer and art critic born in Bombay, India in 1967. She is better known for her collection of poems: **On Cleaning Bookshelves (2001)** and **Where I Live (2005)** but she is also known for her book **The Book of Buddha (2005)** where she tells Buddha's journey of spirituality.

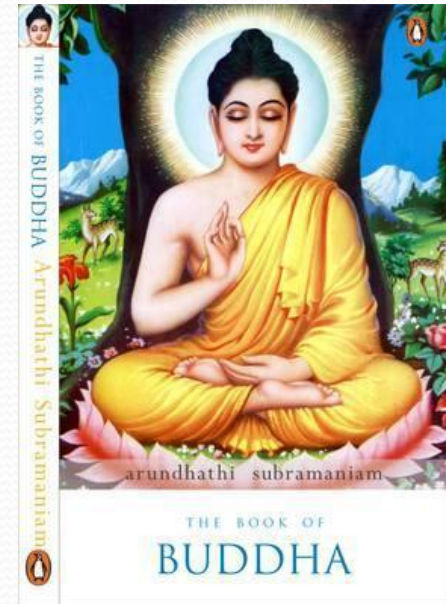
She has won awards all over the world for her outstanding poems (Italy, UK and Spain to name a few). In fact in 2009 she received the **Raza Award for Poetry** and in 2015 she received the **Premio Ceppo Internazionale** for her wonderful career as a poet and an artist.

Her work has been translated in many languages including Italian, Spanish and Hindi.



Book Cover of Where I Live

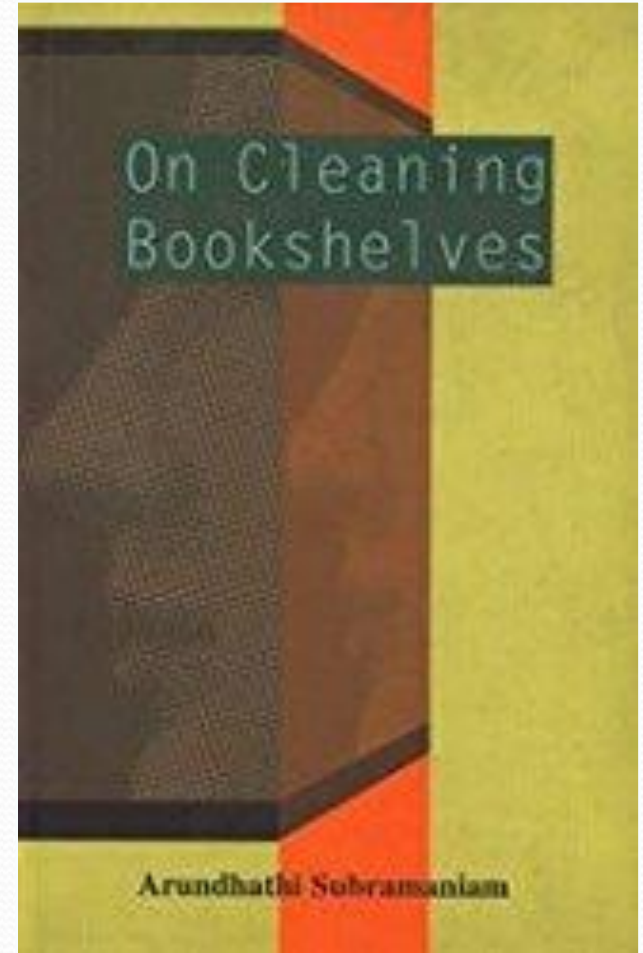
Book Cover of The book of Buddha





# Poetry

Arundhati Subramaniam is a poet who has many themes and topics that she talks about. She is committed first of all to depict with her great writing style and language the urban reality of a **Bombay-Waste**. The most relevant characteristic of her poems is the commitment to try to use the English language to represent a reality different from the western world and ideas that are complex and that have been swept under the rug for many years, such as the **condition of women** in India. Sometimes her feminism is very explicit (*I Am Impressed*) and sometimes it's more metaphoric (*Sari, Maggot Mission*), but it is always effective. Her Approach to writing poems vary a lot. Many poems **express the struggle** for a home, a sanctuary, a habitat or community, even while being aware that there aren't any easy recipes to have those. Her poems can make you understand that when the concept of home is stabilized, it can be oppressive, dangerous -a new form of terrorism. "Give me a home/ That isn't mine/ Where I can slip in and out of rooms/ without a trace" (*Home*). The main concern of Subramaniam is to build a place where she **feels safe** in a situation full of oppression, social fanaticism and "armed prudery", and in this type of situation, apart from the questioning of one's true identity, who does poetry is also subject to another type of chauvinism (anti feminism): some cultural establishments in India run by Diktat "teach" them how to be "post-colonial", "Indian" or "women". Many poems from her collection *Where I Live* talk in various ways about this topic of her "**I under attack**" and of her previous identities constantly threatened.



Book cover of On cleaning bookshelves



# Poems

## HOME

Give me a home  
that isn't mine,  
where I can slip in and out of rooms  
without a trace,  
never worrying  
about the plumbing,  
the colour of the curtains,  
the cacophony of books by the bedside.

A home that I can wear lightly,  
where the rooms aren't clogged  
with yesterday's conversations,  
where the self doesn't bloat  
to fill in the crevices.

A home, like this body,  
so alien when I try to belong,  
so hospitable

when I decide I'm just visiting.

### **Meaning:**

In an interview made with *Corriere Della Sera* after her interviewer quoted some verses of this poem she stated that she thinks that the feeling of belonging somewhere doesn't have to be connected to where someone lives or is born. In fact in this poem and in many others in her collection *Where I Live* talk about this distance between the person and the culture around him. In her case she feels like she doesn't belong to a reality in which she doesn't see herself in, even if she is part of it. That is why she wrote this poem, because she wants to find a home that is not hers, in which she feels safe.





## **BLANK PAGES**

I am, for just this moment  
conquistador of the blank page.  
My words stabbing  
the white autocracy of silence,  
as I survey the topography,  
contours, ravines, craters,  
of an uncertain empire-  
the splash of calligraphy,  
the tentative smudge of syllable  
on unmapped paper.  
And you who look away  
as I seize this moment  
and ride it fleetingly,  
do you fear that if you look me in the eye  
at this terrifying instant of omnipotence  
that I shall insidiously  
surge into your frontiers  
and claim for my own  
the sleeping mohenjodaros of your mind?



### **Meaning:**

This poem is probably one of the more captivating ones we've seen from the poet. In this masterpiece of hers, she writes about being the one who conquers a blank page, breaking a silence held for many years, maybe even decades. The entire poem can be interpreted as the attempt of a woman to fight against the old male mentality, in which women are considered inferior. She even coins the term mohenjodaros; which is derived from Mohenjo Daro, (an important archaeological site of the Indian valley, which is now found in Pakistan), to underline the antiquity of a mentality that puts one gender above the other.