

Blessing



SUMMARY

People's skin becomes so dehydrated in this climate that it cracks like a seedpod. There's an endless water shortage here.

Picture water drops falling, plinking, ringing in a tin mug, as if they were the expression of a benevolent deity.

Occasionally, there's an abrupt burst of good luck. A city water pipe breaks, and silvery water cascades all over the street, causing people to shout with surprise. A crowd emerges from their humble homes. Everyone in the surrounding streets jostles toward the water, carrying brass, copper, and aluminum pots and plastic pails, reaching out desperate hands.

Naked kids shriek in the sunlit shower of water, gleaming as if perfectly scrubbed, catching the light as the miracle splashes over their tiny, frail bodies.



THEMES



SCARCITY, POVERTY, AND DESPERATION

Imtiaz Dharker's "Blessing" portrays a community with a hot, dry climate where water is scarce. When water suddenly gushes from a broken "municipal pipe," the whole community crowds in to cool off and collect water while they can. Though the resulting scene is joyful, it's also "frantic" and ominous; though there seems to be plenty of water for now, the speaker notes, there "never is enough." And while the poem shows how shared hardship can create scenes of communal "congregation," it depicts scarcity and poverty, on the whole, as sources of constant desperation and fear.

The poem establishes that this is an impoverished community desperate for water. The community lives in "huts," or simple houses, and children are "naked," suggesting they lack adequate clothing. (While it's also possible they've undressed just to bathe, nakedness is often associated with exposure and deprivation.) The speaker says that "There never is enough water" to go around, and the dehydrated "skin" of the residents "cracks like a pod." In other words, the lack of water is stressful and painful. The community daydreams about just "the drip of" water, seeking or awaiting it like "the voice of a kindly god." These fantasies speak to how desperate they are—a desperation the speaker urges the reader to "Imagine."

In this environment, the occasional overflow of water feels like a "Blessing," one that fosters joy and communal togetherness. But the poem hints that it also breeds competition and desperation—and it's not a real solution to the problem of scarcity. Whenever "The municipal pipe bursts," the community

greet it as a "sudden rush / of fortune." This is the "Blessing" of the title, and the people crowd around it like a religious "congregation," cooling off in the hot "sun" and collecting the water like precious "silver."

While the scene seems ecstatic, it's also disturbing. The abundant water is a freak accident, not the product of socioeconomic change—or, for that matter, divine favor. Meanwhile, the crowd doesn't just congregate; it "butts in," jostling competitively to gather the water. The local children "scream[]" at the water's arrival. While they're presumably excited, the word choice is a disturbing reminder that, on other occasions, they've likely "scream[ed]" out of frustration, fear, and/or thirst. In the poem's final image, "the blessing [of water] sings / over their small bones." It's an image of temporary abundance, but also a stark illustration of the children's vulnerability. It carries the suggestion that they may be undernourished (skeletal thin) as well as dehydrated, and it [symbolically](#) raises the specter of death—a possible consequence of scarcity.

While the poem doesn't name its [setting](#), its descriptions evoke various hot, arid, and impoverished regions of the Global South. These are regions where water scarcity is a real and growing problem—one that other countries and the wealthy elite often cruelly ignore—so "Blessing" can be read as a political poem illustrating contemporary struggles. More broadly, it reflects the complex communal experience of poverty and scarcity, including the way sporadic relief from deprivation can seem like both a "Blessing" and the sign of a larger cruelty.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-23



LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

*The skin cracks ...
... is enough water.*

The poem begins with a compact two-line [stanza](#). The first line is a [simile](#), and the second offers context for that simile:

The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water.

These lines begin to describe the poem's [setting](#) without naming a particular place. This is a location that suffers from a chronic water shortage, perhaps a community located in a hot,

dry climate. In fact, "water" is so scarce here that "The skin cracks like a pod," or seedpod. As people (and animals) struggle with chronic dehydration, their skin painfully chaps and cracks. This opening [simile](#) is a subtle reminder that humans are part of nature; we're forced to contend with the climate just like plants and other creatures.

From the start, the poem's sound helps bring its [imagery](#) to life. The /k/ [consonance](#) in the opening line—"The skin cracks like a pod"—sounds harsh and unpleasant, like the condition this line describes. The /n/ consonance in line 2 drives home the fact of scarcity: "There never is enough water." Though the poem is written in [free verse](#), devices like consonance and [assonance](#) add lyricism and dramatic punch to its language. Meanwhile, the short, sparse lines of these opening stanzas seem to reflect the shortage of water—especially compared with the freer-flowing lines of later stanzas.

LINES 3-6

*Imagine the drip ...
... a kindly god.*

In the second [stanza](#), the speaker suddenly addresses the reader. "Imagine the drip of it," the speaker urges, meaning the faint sound of water in this terribly dry climate.

The next few lines describe the water in sensuous and [metaphorical](#) terms:

the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.

The image of droplets falling in "a tin mug" works on two levels:

- First, it's highly specific, helping readers conjure up the faint, metallic plinking sound in their minds.
- Second, it's the first specifically *human* reference in the poem (since the "skin" in line 1 could belong to humans or animals), so it provides a glimpse of the human response to this arid climate.

Evidently, people in the area collect "small" drops of moisture (from occasional rain or dew, perhaps, or unreliable plumbing) in cheap but sturdy "tin mug[s]." They receive each drop that falls in the mugs as an expression of divine benevolence: "the voice of a kindly god." As the title hints, this is a place where water—any water—feels like a "Blessing."

Short /i/ [assonance](#) ("Imagine"/"drip"/"it") and [internal rhyme](#) ("in"/"tin") echo throughout these lines, mimicking the "echo" of dripping water. Again, the short, sparse lines seem to reflect the shortage of water, or perhaps the need to conserve energy in this hot, thirsty place.

LINES 7-12

*Sometimes, the sudden ...
... a congregation:*

In lines 7-12, the poem takes a turn. "Sometimes," the speaker says, this water-deprived community experiences a "sudden rush / of fortune." This good luck comes in the form of a literal rush of water, which spews forth when the local "municipal pipe bursts."

Suddenly, the people have an abundance of the water they crave. It "crashes to the ground" like a "flow" of precious "silver," prompting a surprised, joyful "roar of tongues" throughout the neighborhood.

"From the huts"—simple dwellings or shanties—surrounding the broken pipe, "a congregation" of locals pours forth. The word "congregation" can mean any kind of gathering, but it often refers specifically to a *religious* gathering, such as a group of worshipers in church. The [connotations](#) of this word imply, once again, that the thirsty locals treat water as a divine gift, a sign of favor from a "kindly god." Similarly, the phrase "roar of tongues" might [allude](#) to the practice of [speaking in tongues](#), a form of worship or spiritual expression found in some Christian sects and shamanistic traditions.

The word "huts" suggests that this community is water-deprived in part because it's *economically* deprived, not just because it's located in a hot climate. (Dharker based the poem's unnamed [setting](#) on the Dharavi slum in Mumbai, India.) The residents of these shanties aren't stuck in the desert, but they seem to be among the poorer residents of their "municipal[ity]" or city. Presumably, they're hit especially hard by water shortages because the city doesn't devote enough resources to their area.

In this setting, the water from the broken pipe seems to shower down like the "Blessing" of the title. Notice the [irony](#), though: the water isn't actually a divine gift or even the product of human generosity or political competence. It's an *accident*, seemingly born of the same political neglect that aggravated the water shortage in the first place. In other words, the same "municipal" leaders who have left this neighborhood desperate for water have also left the water pipe in disrepair, so that it breaks not once but "Sometimes." No one at higher levels of leadership, in their country or elsewhere, has intervened to help either. So while this gathering "congregation" might treat—or be forced to treat—the burst pipe as a gift from heaven, the situation is really a sign of human inequality.

LINES 12-17

*every man woman ...
... frantic hands,*

Lines 12-17 continue to describe the gathering around the burst water pipe. The language takes on the rapid, "rush[ing]" quality of the water, even omitting commas in the phrase "every

man woman / child for streets around." It's as if punctuation here would only slow things down—and as if the men, women, and children themselves blur into a single mass.

Notice also that line 12 ("a congregation: every man woman"), like line 8 ("of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,"), is longer than any line in the first two [stanzas](#), and this third stanza is significantly longer than the previous two. The poem, like the pipe, seems to have broken open and started to flow more freely! The form of the poem mirrors the abrupt narrative shift, the [juxtaposition](#) between extreme deprivation and sudden abundance.

The phrase "for streets around" helps confirm that this water-starved [setting](#) is a city neighborhood (not, say, a desert outpost, as the reader might have predicted). Everyone who runs to the pipe "butts in," or elbows forward, to collect the water in various containers. The speaker lists a few of these containers, in lines full of lively [consonance](#) and [assonance](#):

[...] butts in, with pots,
brass, copper, aluminium,
plastic buckets,
frantic hands,

Notice, for example, the /ts/ sound in "butts," "pots," and "buckets"; the [alliteration](#) of "butts"/"brass" and "pots"/"plastic"; the assonance between "pots" and "copper"; the shared /an/ sound in "frantic hands," and so on. This jumble of echoes, which includes a number of percussive /p/ and /b/ sounds, helps convey the jostling, fast-paced chaos of the scene.

As for the containers themselves, they're a motley assortment (from sturdy copper pots to cheap plastic pails), suggesting that people are grabbing whatever's at hand before rushing toward the water. Some even collect the water in their own "frantic hands." The word "frantic" ends the stanza on a note of hard realism: this gathering might seem almost like a spontaneous block party, but the participants are desperate for water to drink and bathe in.

LINES 18-23

*and naked children ...
... their small bones.*

The final [stanza](#) picks up on the rush of sound and [imagery](#) that began in line 7. The speaker describes a sight that seems innocent and cute, but contains darker undertones:

[...] and naked children
screaming in the liquid sun,
their highlights polished to perfection,
flashing light,

In slightly [metaphorical](#) language ("liquid sun," "polished"),

these lines describe kids playing around the gushing pipe as if under a sprinkler. They're shrieking excitedly as the sun shines down on them in a watery blur. They look fresh-scrubbed, or polished, by the water, and sunlight glints off their skin in flashing "highlights."

While this image sounds playful—and the kids seem to be enjoying themselves—the fact that they're "naked" and "screaming" also reminds the reader that they've suffered deprivation. They may be undressed simply to bathe in the water, but they may also have relatively few clothes to wear. On other occasions, they may have screamed or cried out of frustration, thirst, and so on.

The closing metaphor strikes a similarly haunting note: "the blessing sings / over their small bones." The water may seem to come as a gift from the gods, "sing[ing]" like a choir as it gurgles and splashes. But that's only because these kids, and their community, are terribly vulnerable. Indeed, "small bones" sounds like a quiet reminder of death—a possible consequence of water scarcity. The gushing water is the result of human error, not divine providence, and it offers only an accidental, temporary relief from a problem that's likely to continue.



SYMBOLS



WATER

Because water is essential to survival, it's a [symbol](#) of life, energy, and vitality. (Think of [idioms](#) like "overflowing with joy" or the [metaphor](#) of "an oasis in the desert," meaning a source of sustenance amid hardship.) Because it's used in washing, it can also represent purity and cleanliness. In many traditions, it's associated with holiness and spiritual renewal (think of baptism ceremonies, for example).

"Blessing" plays on all these associations. In the arid climate of the poem, the smallest "drip" of water seems holy, like "the voice of a kindly god." Occasionally, it bursts into the streets of the community as a "bless[ed]" force of renewal. It flows from the municipal pipe like a "rush / of fortune," almost a divine gift. It seems to restore the energy of the community, which throngs around it like a religious "congregation." As "naked children" bathe in it, it contributes to an image of purity and innocence. Water, in the poem, is more than water; it's a symbol of divine favor, luck, and miraculous good fortune.

All this symbolism implies what the poet has said explicitly about [Dharavi](#), the Mumbai slum on which the poem's [setting](#) is based:

If the monsoon arrives, if the water comes by some miracle of God, by some act of kindness or some great mistake, which [the people] wait for—if that water arrives, it's a miracle.

That water is considered such a "blessing," meanwhile, emphasizes the poverty and deprivation of this place, where something essential to life becomes a luxury.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "There never is enough water."
- **Lines 3-6:** "Imagine the drip of it, / the small splash, echo / in a tin mug, / the voice of a kindly god."
- **Lines 7-11:** "Sometimes, the sudden rush / of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts, / silver crashes to the ground / and the flow has found / a roar of tongues."
- **Line 19:** "screaming in the liquid sun,"
- **Lines 22-23:** "as the blessing sings / over their small bones."

- **Lines 7-8:** "Sometimes, the sudden rush / of fortune."
- **Line 19:** "the liquid sun"
- **Line 20:** "their highlights polished to perfection,"
- **Lines 22-23:** "as the blessing sings / over their small bones."

IMAGERY

The poem is full of striking [imagery](#), most of it visual but some of it related to sound and touch.

Line 1, for example, states that "The skin cracks" in the harsh, dry heat. The speaker is referring to anyone's skin, the skin of people in general during a water shortage. This is both a visual and tactile (touch-based) image, since cracked, dehydrated skin is something one can both see and feel.

By contrast, the imagery in the second [stanza](#) is mostly sound-based. The speaker invites the reader to "Imagine the drip of" water in this place where water is scarce—where the residents themselves longingly "Imagine" water. (Notice that "drip" is an [onomatopoeia](#), or a word that mimics the sound it's describing.) With vivid specificity, the poem describes the "small splash" and "echo" of water droplets "in a tin mug," comparing this tiny, metallic ringing to "the voice of a kindly god."

From the third stanza on, the imagery is intensely visual, with a few key sounds in the mix as well. The speaker conjures up the "silver" flow of water from the broken "municipal pipe," followed by the avid "congregation" of people that "butts in" to collect it. In the process, the speaker singles out such details as the "pots" and "buckets" the people carry, the "frantic hands" they extend toward the water, and the "highlights" of sun "flashing" on the bodies of children. At the same time, the speaker notes the "crash[]" of water, the surprised "roar of tongues," and the children's eager "screaming," so the description appeals to the ears as well as the eyes. Overall, the rapid flow of imagery conveys the blurred confusion and uproar of the scene.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 3-5
- Lines 8-21
- Line 23

JUXTAPOSITION

The whole poem hinges on a [juxtaposition](#). It contrasts the discomfort of a chronic water shortage with the sudden (though temporary) relief of a gushing water main. The first part of this contrast occurs in the first two [stanzas](#) (lines 1-6, "The skin cracks [...] kindly god."); the second occurs in the last two (lines 7-23, "Sometimes, the sudden [...] small bones.").

The opening stanzas illustrate a community's experience of



POETIC DEVICES

METAPHOR

The poem uses several [metaphors](#) (and one [simile](#)) to illustrate the importance of water in its arid [setting](#).

First comes a simple but disturbing simile. In this hot, dry climate, according to the speaker, "The skin cracks like a pod"—in other words, the way a seedpod cracks open (to release the seed inside). It's a blunt, effective image of painful dehydration, as well as a reminder that human beings are part of nature. People are as affected by the climate as plants and other creatures.

The second stanza compares the "drip" and "splash" of water (what little water there is) to "the voice of a kindly god." This metaphor connects water with the sacred or divine—a connection that runs throughout the poem. When water is scarce, the speaker suggests, even a "small" droplet seems like a "Blessing" or gift from heaven. Similarly, any overflow of water seems like a "sudden rush / of fortune," as the metaphor in lines 7-8 makes clear.

The last [stanza](#) compares the sun itself to a "liquid" as water from the burst pipe jets into the sky. (In other words, the sun looks visually distorted through the spray.) The kids playing under this sudden sprinkler look "polished to perfection," scrubbed clean by the water drenching them. Finally, the speaker compares the splashing water to a "blessing" that "sings / over their small bones." Once again, the poem links water with the divine, suggesting the power it holds within (and over) this hot, dry region.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "The skin cracks like a pod."
- **Lines 3-6:** "Imagine the drip of it, / the small splash, echo / in a tin mug, / the voice of a kindly god."

water scarcity: the painful "crack[ing]" of skin, the slow and sacred-seeming "drip" of what little water is available. Bluntly, the speaker says that "There never is enough water" in this climate. The last two stanzas describe a burst water pipe, which represents a "sudden / rush of fortune" for the community. These stanzas are full of lively, chaotic imagery, all centering on the fountain of water and its effect on a dehydrated crowd.

The main *similarity* between these two sections lies in the religious language they apply to water. During times of scarcity and abundance alike, the people seem to treat water as a "blessing," a gift from "a kindly god."

Notice that the last two stanzas are longer than the first two, as if a trickle of language has turned to overflowing abundance. Several individual lines in these stanzas are unusually long as well. (None of the lines in the first two stanzas are longer than eight syllables.) In other words, the poem's form reflects its central juxtaposition.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-23

CONSONANCE

[Consonance](#) intensifies the poem's language and helps bring to life the extreme scenes it describes.

In line 1, for example, harsh /k/ sounds evoke the painful cracking of dehydrated skin: "The skin cracks like a pod." In line 4, the repeating /s/ sounds of "small splash" call to mind the drip-drop of water. In lines 7-8, the combination of /s/ and /p/ consonance (plus the short /uh/ [assonance](#) of "sudden rush") vivifies the description of bursting, rushing water:

Sometimes, the sudden rush
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,

Lines 14-17 are peppered with /b/, /t/, /ts/, /k/, and /l/ sounds, which give the language a staccato quality that matches its rapid jumble of images:

[...] butts in, with pots,
brass, copper, aluminium,
plastic buckets,
frantic hands,

These vivid, complex sounds seem to echo the "frantic" excitement of the crowd. (Assonance once again adds to the effect: note the shared vowel sounds of "frantic hands.")

A similar effect continues in the final [stanza](#), which is particularly rich with consonance. Examples include the snappy [alliteration](#) of "polished to perfection" (line 20) and the /b/, /s/, and /ng/ sounds of the final lines:

[...] as the blessing sings
over their small bones.

Together with assonance ("blessing sings," "over"/"bones"), consonance makes these lines intricately musical, so that the language seems to "sing[]" like the rushing water itself.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "skin cracks like"
- **Line 2:** "never," "enough"
- **Line 4:** "small splash"
- **Line 7:** "Sometimes," "sudden"
- **Line 8:** "municipal pipe," "bursts"
- **Line 10:** "flow," "found"
- **Line 12:** "man," "woman"
- **Line 13:** "streets"
- **Line 14:** "butts," "pots"
- **Line 15:** "brass," "copper"
- **Line 16:** "plastic buckets,"
- **Line 17:** "frantic hands"
- **Line 18:** "naked"
- **Line 19:** "screaming," "liquid"
- **Line 20:** "highlights polished," "perfection"
- **Line 21:** "flashing light"
- **Line 22:** "blessing," "sings"
- **Line 23:** "small," "bones"

ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) adds lyrical intensity to the poem's charged descriptions. At a few moments, it reinforces the [imagery](#) the poem is describing.

In lines 3-5, for example, the thin, repeating short /i/ sounds evoke the tinny drip of water:

Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,

With each successive /i/ syllable, readers can almost hear the water droplets plinking against tin. The last two /i/ words, "in" and "tin," form an [internal rhyme](#), creating an "echo" in the language itself.

Later, short /uh/ assonance accentuates the phrase "Sometimes, the sudden rush," emphasizing the suddenness and force of the gusher of water. Similarly, the quick repetition of /an/ sounds in "frantic hands" calls up the rapid, desperate movements of the crowd. The repetition of consonant and vowel sounds in "highlights" and "light" helps *highlight* the dazzling imagery of lines 20-21.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Imagine," "drip," "it"
- **Line 5:** "in," "tin"
- **Line 7:** "Sometimes," "sudden rush"
- **Line 11:** "From," "huts"
- **Line 14:** "pots"
- **Line 15:** "copper"
- **Line 17:** "frantic hands"
- **Line 20:** "highlights"
- **Line 21:** "light"
- **Line 23:** "over," "bones"



VOCABULARY

Pod (Line 1) - The poet probably has in mind a *seedpod*, a pouch that grows on plants and can be "crack[ed]" open to release the enclosed seeds.

Municipal pipe (Line 8) - A city utility pipe carrying water (as here), sewage, or gas. A *municipality* is a town or city.

Congregation (Lines 11-12) - A gathering of people. The word often has religious [connotations](#) and indicates a gathering of worshippers.

Aluminium (Line 15) - UK spelling of "aluminum," a metal often used to make cans and cheap containers.

Highlights (Line 20) - Here meaning lighter or sunlit areas on the children's bodies.



FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Blessing" is a [free verse](#) poem divided into four stanzas of uneven length. The [stanzas](#) break up the narrative into organic pieces, like paragraphs in a story. For example, the first stanza crystallizes the poem's dramatic conflict in two pithy lines (an [image/simile](#) followed by explanatory context). The third presents a more extended, complex description of rushing water and gathering crowds. Meanwhile, the poem's lines range from three to ten syllables in length.

The choice of free verse suits the spontaneous, disorderly scene that the poem describes. An orderly, predictable form would have clashed with this image of crowd commotion. The stanza lengths are also significant: the first two stanzas, which describe a severe water shortage, are extremely concise. The last two stanzas, which describe the gushing water main, flow at greater length. The longest individual lines in the poem also occur in these last two stanzas. In this way, the poem's form reflects the transition from scarcity to abundance.

METER

"Blessing" is a [free verse](#) poem, so it doesn't have a [meter](#). Its lines are generally on the shorter side, but they range from three syllables. This variation affords the poet flexibility in describing a complex, chaotic scene.

More broadly, the unpredictability of the lines seems to reflect the nature of life in this "municipal[ity]." Here, "fortune" itself can be stingy or generous from moment to moment. For example, the residents may go weeks or months with very little water, then experience a "sudden rush" of water. (Though there "never is enough water"—one reason, perhaps, that the lines never become long and flowing.)

RHYME SCHEME

As a [free verse](#) poem, "Blessing" has no [rhyme scheme](#). However, there are occasional, subtle [rhymes](#) or [slant rhymes](#) at the ends of lines: for example, "pod"/"god" (lines 1 and 6), "ground"/"found"/"around" (lines 9, 10, and 13), and "huts"/"pots" (lines 11 and 14). Though these rhymes may seem incidental, they add to the poem's musicality and emotional intensity. (Notice that they cluster around the passage where the long-awaited water "bursts" forth.)



SPEAKER

The poem is narrated by a third-person speaker, whose identity (age, gender, etc.) is never specified. It's possible that the speaker is speaking on behalf of the community they describe—this neighborhood in which "There never is enough water." However, the speaker never uses a collective "we" and could be an outside observer as well.

At one moment, in the second [stanza](#) (lines 3-6), the speaker addresses the reader directly:

Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.

This effect makes the community's plight more immediate, encouraging the reader's sympathy.

Dharker has said that she based the poem on her observations of Dharavi, a poor neighborhood in Mumbai, India. Hence, the speaker could be read as the poet herself, reporting on the sights and sounds of the city where she lives part-time.



SETTING

The poem is [set](#) in a community that experiences chronic water shortages. This seems to be an urban setting, since it features a "municipal [water] pipe" surrounded by crowded "streets." The

people live in simple "huts," so it's likely a struggling city or a poor neighborhood within a larger city. The persistent dry spells—"There never is enough water"—indicate a hot, dry climate, perhaps somewhere in the [Global South](#). (Many parts of this region face a real and worsening water crisis.)

Dharker has revealed that she based "Blessing" on real events in [Dharavi](#), a large, crowded slum in Mumbai, India. However, the poem keeps its geographical location unspecified, perhaps in order to suggest that its description could apply to many places around the world.



CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Imtiaz Dharker is a British poet who was born in Lahore, the capital of Pakistan, in 1954. She grew up primarily in Glasgow, Scotland, where her family moved when she was one year old. Dharker studied at the University of Glasgow, graduating with an M.A. in English Literature and Philosophy. She now divides her time between London and Mumbai, whose hot, dry climate and Dharavi neighborhood inspired this poem's [setting](#).

Dharker has published numerous books of poetry, mostly with the publisher Bloodaxe Books. Common themes among her books include questions of identity, home and exile, cultural displacement, and community. Similar themes can be found in Carol Rumens's "[The Emigrée](#)" and W. H. Auden's "[Refugee Blues](#)." Other poets have also used the home as a metaphor for human relationships, as can be seen in Simon Armitage's "[Mother, any distance](#)."

Dharker's poetry is well-established, featuring on the GCSE syllabus in the UK and earning Dharker a Cholmondeley Prize in 2011 and a Queen's Gold Medal in 2014. She is also a member of the Royal Society of Literature. In addition to her poetry, Dharker also works as an artist and a documentary maker.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Dharker has [explained](#) that she had the slums of Mumbai, India in mind when writing this poem. Despite India's recent rapid economic growth, over 40 percent of the population of Mumbai (India's largest city, formerly known as Bombay) lives in slums. The largest of these poorer neighborhoods is Dharavi, which has a population of around 700,000. Much of this population density stems from migration, as people move to the city seeking greater economic opportunity.

"Blessing" depicts the kind of water shortages that frequently afflict this area. According to Dharker, during the "stifling, jostling heat" of the dry season, the arrival of water—whether via monsoon, an "act of kindness," or a "mistake"—represents a "miracle" for Mumbai's poorer residents:

[...] In England, if the sun comes out, life changes, clothes come off, people's attitude, people's life changes. In many ways, in a magnified way, the moment when water arrives, [that's] what happens in that Bombay slum. This poem is really about that.

At the same time, the poem highlights the vibrant expression of life that these slums represent. Though they are difficult and impoverished places to live, their residents persist with their lives in the face of immense challenges. And while Mumbai was the "municipal[ity]" that inspired "Blessing," the poem doesn't specify a location, suggesting that the kind of scene it portrays occurs in cities around the world.

In particular, the so-called Global South (including parts of Southeast Asia, South America, and Africa) faces a mounting [water crisis](#). Climate change and global income inequality already threaten millions of people's access to clean, reliable water sources. This crisis poses one of the major political challenges of the 21st century; it's the kind of problem an occasional happy accident or "blessing" can't solve.



MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [The Poem Aloud](#) — Imtiaz Dharker introduces and reads her poem. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3g44WpITChA>)
- [An Interview with the Poet](#) — Dharker discusses her life and work. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrBzWmCi6ps>)
- [Dharker at the Poetry Archive](#) — A short biography and exhibit about the poet. (<https://poetryarchive.org/poet/imtiaz-dharker/>)
- [The Author's Website](#) — Check out Imtiaz Dharker's personal website, featuring media coverage, the poet's visual art, and more. (<http://www.imtiazdharker.com/>)
- [Water Scarcity and Climate Change](#) — "Blessing" describes a problem that afflicts many communities worldwide. Read an NPR report about water shortages in the Global South. (<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/08/13/750777462/report-theres-a-growing-water-crisis-in-the-global-south>)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER IMTIAZ DHARKER POEMS

- [Living Space](#)
- [Tissue](#)



HOW TO CITE

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