By Harnidh Kaur

THE CONFESSIONS OF AN INDIAN POET

Every * added is an apology, this English is not mine, it’s stolen words, smuggled, not like mangoes from a covered basket, on ripe summer mornings, but like confessions drawn in darkened rooms by darker faces.

Every word italicized is an unwarranted acquiescence to the fact that my words are just watery reflections, every added syllable, another stumble, another way I sully the gift that was given to me unwillingly.

My syntax fits like a glove a size too small for my wrist, and one too big for my fingers, and the hand that spills out words does so inelegantly, vowels tripping over themselves as I confuse my ‘w’s with ‘v’s.

My names change too, they become smaller, blander, the smell of spices gives way to lists of Top Ten English Baby Names, easy names, names with no history, no contexts that need structured representation, no personal history.

I seem to speak for, and to, in lieu of voices and tongues too strange and wild, tamed with translations and subtitles, peppered with constant hesitations, the mark of being master to a feral beast, each iron-clad rule of grammar, a chain-link marking safety.

My English is an ill-gotten, ill-wanted gift, a constant, guilty ability, pulling
me up away from my context, and being the only way I can belong enough to command an audience for the words and worlds I gave up to try (and fail) to represent.

The smell of an afternoon in Virginia is familiar in words, more than one in Delhi will ever be- southern summers with icy sweet teas, are now easier to describe than dust dervishes, and the taste of kaala-khatta, because that’s all I’ll ever read.

And when I try to describe the way my childhood smelled, the chutneys become jellies, the achaars, oil stains meant to be washed away from pristine whites hidden away from sight, greasy, saunf scented reminders of my words never being mine.