

**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.