

## Things I learnt in America

I wore braids with threads one day  
A white woman looked in wonder at the long dark hair  
Wow, it's beautiful. I wish I could...  
Not that I would. It's your culture and I'm not  
Trying to appropriate it...she hurriedly added  
...It looked really good ON YOU", she again emphasized  
I didn't know what to say

When I was a young girl  
A family friend had stayed with us during her gap year  
Invited along to a Feast  
My mom lent this white girl a bright Kurta  
Everyone fawned over her  
"You look so good" everyone said  
In broken English they tried to share their happiness

Growing up, I'd always wanted more equality  
How we should have equal share in housework  
I thought America would be where I'd get it  
But hearing people talk here  
I don't know where I belong anymore  
There's a left and there is a right  
But they both seem to be wrong  
I just want to go up, or at the very least not down  
I learnt in America that it isn't a melting pot  
it is a hotpot, oil at the top and broth  
separated in fiery clashes of red

That's what I learnt in America

That everything is a battle

I learnt in America that I am a "person of color"

An "alien" or an "immigrant"

Before I was just me

In America, eighteen-year-old college kids school me on politics

Lecture me on how to be a minority when they too are "privileged"

They won't worry how to pay for tuition

or visa laws

Whether you've spent too much money to leave

But not enough to be guaranteed a stay

This is a contest, isn't it?

Of guilt and retribution and reckoning

Who's suffering more? If I am, do I get to tell you what to do?

Right wings tell me they don't want me here

Companies tell me it's too hard to hire me

Because of policies

Left-wings seem to be on a blame-game spree

I learnt in America

That if someone stabs me I should keep the knife

So I can stab them back

I learnt in America that

Fearful white people walk on eggshells

About things I don't believe are issues

And yet non-white people live in fear

For their lives,

All this

While people are dying, starving, diseased, murdered

To my naive self, what people choose to argue about in America

Is puzzling,

I called my mom and said, "I don't know if this was the right decision.

People here are crazy."

But I made my choice when I boarded the airplane

And I am learning deep self-reflection

to drown out people's shouts

to question everything

to see the good in this place when things are going bad

to choose empathy and decide how I want my own life to be

These, these are the things I learnt in America