

Priyanka Srivastava

A Celebration

The corner sweet shop
at the end of the street
— the smell of fritters in the air.

A shelf is lined
with syrupy sweets and Indian pastries.

I clutch the paper bag
and eat one.

He sees my eyes.

We smile.

Bindi

Without a dot on the forehead
a young Indian woman faces questions.
What is your age?
When will you stop studying?
Why do you want to earn money?
Learn cooking. Get married.
Soon, you will be twenty three.

One morning, the vegetable vendor in Lyon asks,
“Are you from Pakistan?”
I wished to tell him, without a bindi,
we are the same.

At a gathering in Singapore,
a stranger asks,
“Are you Muslim?”
She didn't ask my name.
I smile, amused
at how much difference
a bindi can make.

A conversation

“Where are you from?”

you asked.

It took me to the place

I once called home.

The fragrance of earthy cumin,
tulsi leaves steeped in hot water,
the courtyard with a jamun tree,
husks of rice in the breeze,
my grandmother’s smile.

Parched soil waiting for rain
and amidst all the fragrances
of warm food
— smiles and soft looks.

Everything comes back.

I collect myself

and see the saffron sky.

I wait for the milky moon to dip in ink.

I hold myself, pass you a cup
with tea tinted a perfect brown.

I smile and say: I carry them all, still.