

## Ode to Urban Estate

Inspired by *Ode to Richmond Hill* by Rajeev Mohabir

**Awarded the Scholastic Silver Key**

every time the car turns  
around the corner, you expect the driver  
to slow down to avoid the pothole,  
waiting for the tires to just sink  
in, and when the horn blows  
the kids playing cricket  
go off the street marking the  
entry of the chariot—that  
must be given way or the *uncle ji* driving  
will curse his way through—and the  
time out from the innings will resume  
until the ball can no longer be seen  
or makes its way to Gupta aunty's house  
where only your *dadi* can retrieve it  
but that also requires going home  
which you don't do unless  
that urge for food has beaten  
your self-control, which is when  
*mummy's roti* and *sabzi* topped with *ghee*  
are finally appreciated  
unlike, you being woken up by  
the daily assembly of the school  
across the street, which has a higher success  
rate than an alarm still a lot better  
than being trapped home, watch the  
same movie for the fourteenth time,  
play carom when the monsoons  
flooded the streets, thanks to  
the nonfunctioning sewage  
systems ignored just like the  
time when the *pujari* in our temple  
was accused of pocketing the money  
to get a new Shivling, *Now don't*  
*be silly, Gopi Lal bahut acha admi hai!*

you remember that the poor farmer  
selling his crops at the *mandi*  
is to be bargained with, but religion remains uncontested  
driving past one last time  
my thoughts sink in and  
ask Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh  
*Oh, lord. Do I have to leave?*

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## Translations

*dadi*  
paternal grand-mother

*roti and sabzi* topped with *ghee*  
flatbread and vegetables topped with butter

*pujari*  
priest

*Gopi Lal bahut acha admi hai!*  
Gopi Lal is a very good man!

# L(ost)In(anguage)

Lost In Language

**Awarded the Scholastic Honorable Mention**

you speak four languages.  
you use these words to be you.

and yet you still don't know  
if language empowers you?  
if your language and their language is the same language?

I.

you have an identity crisis—  
or at least your lousy English makes you think you do.

There have been too many times that you've been laughed at  
for your sentence not making sense to them  
for your writing not being up to their standard  
for pronouncing something just so mildly wrong  
for you are clearly not one of them

not the end of the world, right?

*NO, not when your thoughts are invalidated. not when your voice is minimized.*

II.

you don't think in English.  
मैं हिंदी में सोचता हूँ॥

you're always worried that the next word  
coming out of your mouth won't make any sense,  
or that your out-of-place accent that  
should've been deported by now,  
might just make a guest appearance  
on your reality TV show.

and then at that point,  
it is no longer about *colour* and *color*  
but about sheh-jool and sheh-dyool.

III.

पर हर भाषा में सबसे ज़रूरी बात होती है  
आपने उस चीज़ को कैसे कहा ॥

we cast aside the beauty of language.  
because we are too focused on  
the not-so-important mistakes made  
in our world of synthesis and pronunciation.  
rather than the emotions and thoughts  
in the world of ignored art.

if only we cared about how we said things more,  
तो गाली निकली भी दुआ लगती ॥

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## Translations

में हिंदी में सोचता हूँ ॥  
I think in Hindi.

पर हर भाषा में सबसे ज़रूरी बात होती है  
आपने उस चीज़ को कैसे कहा ॥

but in language the most important thing is,  
how you say the thing.

तो गाली निकली भी दुआ लगती ॥  
then even a curse would seem like a blessing.

## Oh, Charming Prince of East

While growing up, my life has always had a quest: To be American.  
Every day is a new test.  
Is it the descent, language, ideals? What explains it best?  
Or is it the color of the skin and we leave aside the rest.  
Is there a binding force that flows throughout this nation?

In the nation proclaimed as the land of the free,  
what makes it different when  
there is a glass ceiling: the top isn't accessible to all.

In a nation of immigrants,  
*immigrant* is derogatory to be called.  
Your skin limits the avenues your life can take,  
your race determines the education you receive.  
And yet all we talk about is the American dream.

It sometimes becomes personal: this theme of limitation.  
The brown male with a beard  
on the street eyed as another national threat.  
The not-so-subtle stares  
with a million judgments per second with little rationale  
of who you are, where you come and whether you belong.  
The years of struggles of immigration and adoption of a new  
lifestyle comes crashing down.  
Oh, Charming prince of east,  
you cannot attain the American crown.

I've heard the slurs,  
felt the blows,  
but never fell to humiliation.  
What makes it worse is  
I am not the first or the last in this situation.  
It was imposed on every generation,  
so I have to stand firm and not let myself give in to constant subjugation.  
The doors to be American,

depend on the strong voice of our silent action.

In this melting pot of cultures,

when diversity defines unity.

We seem to have forgotten that

it's not the appearance,

but our shared values that define nationality.

“One nation based on liberty and justice for all,”

the more I think of the virtues that make America American,

the fight to overcome the inequalities,

the more hope I have in

wearing the crown.