

## 2 Must We Go?

To place myself in my grandmother's shoes,  
her chappals paired in the bedroom cool,

the mahogany dark,  
lying on the prayer mat, facing Mecca,

awaiting her smaller, browner feet –  
to plant my feet there,

or here, in a line of words  
securely on the page.

\*

To move house is one thing,  
to leave your country another.

But to leave ~~a~~ country  
because it no longer desires

to attach itself to you,  
doesn't at all wish

to be the ground under your feet,  
to feel compelled to leave it

~~country~~ *Land of one's own*  
for ~~a~~ country which you had always known  
to be a corner of your own,

but has become quickly and deliriously  
another –

and which beckons  
as if it had a hand to beckon with,

and which calls you,  
as if a country had a single voice.

\*

*Amma* they demand,  
her clamouring children.  
*Amma, must we go?*

*Can I take my cricket bat to Pakistan?  
Will we go to school?*

Only Athar had no questions.

name

Iba-father  
My grandfather, himself a doctor,  
had travelled far and wide,

taken him to the best physicians,  
but none could cure his son.

\*

The cards had been dealt  
by a firm, if not a sure hand.

Ludhiana to India. West Punjab to Pakistan.  
West Bengal to Pakistan.

Amritsar to India. Srinagar to India.  
Lahore to Pakistan.

The Empire held fast like a sheet –  
and shook out.

\*

Doubt was an awkward thing –  
there was no room for doubt.

At the margin of the great convulsion  
her small household convulsed.

\*

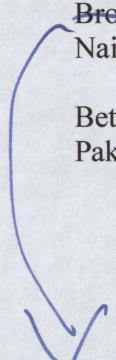
Pakistan was what it amounted to  
Pakistan.

In the salting of lassi  
in the knuckledents in dough  
Pakistan.

In the pleating of a sari  
in the sweeping of the porch  
Pakistan.

Rumours flew on the wind  
Broken glass on the wind  
Nails of steel (on the wind)

Between the question and its answer  
Pakistan.



\*

Honour was the jewel,  
not mother, sister.

Bonfires were lit  
and the women burned.

*They asked me to do this,  
but I ran away.  
I couldn't set fire to my sister.*

\*

*90 women jumped into a well.  
There wasn't enough water  
to drown them all.*

\*

The wisdom was to go.

Departure,  
the noble,  
fruitful,  
hopeful thing –

\*

Already  
her neighbourhood was emptying –  
whole families had stolen away.

Which way to face?  
She wrote to her son in England:

*I pray for our safety at this time.  
We will go by bus to Lahore.*