**Presents From My Aunts In Pakistan**

They sent me a salwar kameez   
            peacock-blue,   
                  and another   
   glistening like an orange split open,   
embossed slippers, gold and black   
            points curling.   
   Candy-striped glass bangles   
            snapped, drew blood.   
   Like at school, fashions changed   
            in Pakistan -   
the salwar bottoms were broad and stiff,   
            then narrow.   
My aunts chose an apple-green sari,   
   silver-bordered   
            for my teens.   
  
I tried each satin-silken top -   
   was alien in the sitting-room.   
I could never be as lovely   
            as those clothes -   
   I longed   
for denim and corduroy.   
   My costume clung to me   
            and I was aflame,   
I couldn't rise up out of its fire,   
   half-English,   
            unlike Aunt Jamila.   
  
I wanted my parents' camel-skin lamp -   
   switching it on in my bedroom,   
to consider the cruelty   
            and the transformation   
from camel to shade,   
   marvel at the colours   
            like stained glass.   
  
My mother cherished her jewellery -   
   Indian gold, dangling, filigree,   
            But it was stolen from our car.   
The presents were radiant in my wardrobe.   
   My aunts requested cardigans   
            from Marks and Spencers.   
  
My salwar kameez   
   didn't impress the schoolfriend   
who sat on my bed, asked to see   
   my weekend clothes.   
But often I admired the mirror-work,   
   tried to glimpse myself   
            in the miniature   
glass circles, recall the story   
   how the three of us   
            sailed to England.   
Prickly heat had me screaming on the way.   
   I ended up in a cot   
In my English grandmother's dining-room,   
   found myself alone,   
            playing with a tin-boat.   
  
I pictured my birthplace   
   from fifties' photographs.   
            When I was older   
there was conflict, a fractured land   
   throbbing through newsprint.   
Sometimes I saw Lahore -   
            my aunts in shaded rooms,   
screened from male visitors,   
   sorting presents,   
         wrapping them in tissue.   
  
Or there were beggars, sweeper-girls   
   and I was there -   
            of no fixed nationality,   
staring through fretwork   
            at the Shalimar Gardens.