

In the Land of My Mother

In the land of my mother lay fertile soil,
paddy fields, darkened hands, honest toil.
The green mango glows orange, then red —
its juice dribbling down chins of children underfed.
This land, she holds but millions of tales.
Look deeper, seek the minute details.

In the shade of his shop, a man wipes sweat off his brow,
then sips hot cha¹ on the one break a busy day will allow.
He watches in silence as people rush by,
air heavy with pollutants, tarnishing his every sigh,
but sweetened with golden Bangla² that runs both soft and loud.
'71's victory, for which many stood proud.

In the land of my mother, Asr³ draws near
and mu'adhhdhins call out the adhan, their voices clear.
Under a masjid dome, brothers gather, well dressed.
They ask Allah for forgiveness, to be blessed.
At home, the sisters bow in sujud.
whispering words of praise, full of gratitude.

By the dim light of a kerosene lamp, a boy reads
William S. Maugham's "The Luncheon" and his imagination feeds
on descriptions of asparagus, salmon, and caviar.
Asparagus in America! A wish that feels far.
Mid-dream, his ma enters, calling him to eat
white rice, daal, and aloo vorta⁴ — could asparagus compete
with such comfort food? Licking every finger clean,
he returns to the story, to a world that remains unseen.

In the land of my mother, a young girl wakes before dawn
and slips out of her home. In an instant, she's gone.
Long braids fly behind her, pink ribbon trailing close,
she stops to pick night jasmines right by the meadows.
A childish bravery she puts on display,
stuffing her kameez with flowers, keeping serpents at bay.
As the sun begins to rise, she dashes towards home,
a fairly straight path, but she first turns a corner to roam.

¹ The Bangla word *cha* means "tea."

² Refers to Bangladesh's national anthem, "Amar Shonar Bangla," which means "My Golden Bengal."

³ Asr is the third Islamic prayer of the day

⁴ Daal and aloo vorta are lentil soup and potatoes mashed with onions, dried chili peppers, and mustard oil.

Swiftly stealing guava off a neighbor's tree,
she brings fruit and flowers back, brimming with glee.
Skilled hands, skilled fingers soon move with grace,
as she weaves a floral necklace as dainty as lace.

In the morning rush, mother gives her ma the fragrant gift,
with a kiss on the cheek, every movement swift. She heads
off to school, in her uniform of royal blue, as her ma
murmurs, "Alhamdulillah⁵ for a daughter like you."

⁵ *Alhamdulillah* means "praise be to Allah."