

Rakhshan Rizwan

Urdu/Hindi

(after Agha Shahid Ali's 'Ghazal')

My voice is the mirror that breaks in Urdu,
in each piece, is the light of flowing Hindi,

My finger traces the edges of Urdu,
but always falters in the uneasy continent of Hindi,

My grandmother longed for a home in Urdu,
while she warmed her tea with leaves of Hindi,

I have cousins who learnt of life in Hindi,
but write letters to us in chaste Urdu,

Bahadur Shah cried in ghazals of Urdu,
his tears fell on cheeks of Hindi,

At Wagah, we watched the enemy in Hindi,
the hollowness of the heart is always Urdu,

Look, my mother said, this is where they bombed us in Hindi,
but I only see mortar shells of Urdu,

They fought these wars for the triumph of Urdu,
all the while, Noor Jehan sang only in Hindi,

The bride was sent off with promises of Urdu,
her gold *jhoomar* hung from her forehead like Hindi,

In my dreams, I remember the monsoon which fell in Urdu,
the smell of the soil bore traces of Hindi,

There are houses in *andaroon* Lahore that remember Hindi,
we erased their memories with whitewashed Urdu,

Their old owners haunt us in nightmares of Hindi,
we exorcise them with prayers of Urdu,

We apply henna on our hands in colours of Urdu,
the country bleeds in hues of Hindi,

What terrible times, the mothers are feeding in Hindi,
children that should be breastfed in Urdu,

Underage beggars beg for alms in Urdu,
their breath against the glass is Hindi,

Haye, the politicians are slitting our throats in Urdu,
while they sleep in feather beds of Hindi,

Exile is always experienced in shades of Urdu,
the stranger gazing at the vastness is Hindi,

I remember childhood in snatches of Hindi,
hibiscus grew in a shade deep as Urdu,

When Lahore spilled the blood of Urdu and Hindi,
Amrita Pritam wept for neither Urdu nor Hindi.