

snapshots at the junction

your ammi stirs the morning chai,
with a spoon chafed with brown residue.
milk, sugar, loose leaf black tea
percolates in the scuffed pot,
the spicy, sweet scent travels--
 no, it skates around the house,
 it dances out the front door.

bright shalwar kameez,
 with sequins and beads that come loose
 and hide in the cracks of the floorboard,
rest at the back of the closet.
blouses, button-ups, pastel dresses,
 simple, structured, sophisticated, so
 why can't I wear an american dress,
 to the family party, mom? you'd protest.
western clothes march in the front,
as if leading the other like a conductor.

first and last names
atop red squiggly lines,
an unpronounceable mix
during attendance.
 a surrogate pronunciation evolves
 from your great-grandmother's name
 the purest woman I know,
 your abu often proclaims.

"where are you from?"
 "no, like, where are your parents from?"
 "oh, cool, do you speak indian?" x5

henna tattoos,
chai tea lattes, and
rhinestones glued to foreheads.
 but you can only count the number
 of desi-american celebrities
 and change-makers

from pinky to thumb,
you thirst for representation.

you hold your breath when
there is a shooting on the news,
eyes darting to each red headline,
throat dry, legs numb,
hoping to never see the words
 “TERRORIST” or
 “ISLAMIC EXTREMIST.”

progress continues to
 inch forward slowly,
 like a silver-haired dada’aba,
 walking down the street
 with a wooden cane.