

ਪਰਦੇਸ਼ Pardēs

If my childhood were a meme
it would scream: “*aajoh khaloh!!!!!!*”
with an image of Mum fearlessly
charring rotis on an open flame.
Dinner. Is. Ready.

Our culinary senses
came alive every night
when we were served an array of spicy preserves:
pickled onion, tangy tamarind chutney, cumin-y cucumber raita...
it was condiments galore
and meals got more and more
adventurous
as Mum got more and more
curious
of white Australia.
Aloo tikki burgers and naan bases for pizzas
graduated to mac and cheese and spicy fajitas.
However, hot chips
always had turmeric stains
thanks to Mumma McCain
who forgot to change the
pakora oil that day.

The façade of an actress and hostess
(obsessed with Mr Bean)
Mum was a jokester
and queen of sarcasm.
She preyed on the polite.
If a friend ever stayed for a bite
she'd pretend to charge them for their dal makhani:
“*That'll be \$5.49, plus GST.*”
And when they looked at me mortified
she'd clarify: “*Oh, that's the discounted rate for mates...*”
Poker faced, she thrived in awkward pauses
while Papa provided awkward performances
during school lunch times
he'd be in the front garden
kneeling and weeding
while my friends and I
paraded and masqueraded
around the school oval
like Total Girl goddesses.
Papa would make eye contact
I'd try and distract my mates
but I was always too late,
“*Beta, tuck your shirt in!*”
they saw him

all of him
as he gestured at us
topless?!?
He's still immune to irony.

On the weekends
we washed our manes
soaking up that vitamin D.
The intimacy, the ritual
of drying our thick black locks
considered pretty unorthodox
for our neighbours
as they tried to get a glimpse
through the crack in the fence.
We'd fight for the title of
'Longest Hair in Leeming'
as we hopped into the Tarago
for another weekly ritual
synonymous with
the Khalsa *parivaar*...
fruit picking.

Hail or scorching summer heat
we'd be at Rosie's farm in a beat.
My ears wouldn't have even popped
from the journey to the hills
and Papa would be popping
juicy loquats into my mouth:
"*aajoh khaloh!*"
I always wondered
where this obsession with farms and fresh fruit
came from?

Maybe it's in my roots...
My people, the Sikhs
came from lush landscapes
of crisp corn crops,
succulent spinach fields
and moon-lit meadows of mustard.
Where farmers were forever fortunate
for the fertile soil
that kept their families fed
in the land of five rivers.

If my childhood were a thread
it would connect all the vibrant colours
into a *phulkari*
and remind me
to be proud of my *parivaar*
my family.