

The Name My Mother Gave Me

I wish I could tell you how I've layered the politics of my name to fit the mold of every room I walk into
White fascination lined my throat every time I coughed up a version of my name that sounded softer solely created for the comfort of the tongues of foreigners
I have had to bend pieces of my existence to make room for myself in rooms built on the lies of freedom

How can this country be a beacon of liberty
When I haven't had the liberty to be myself since I was brought to these oceans
Every time I walked on that school bus and got called a terrorist
I understood, smiling and laughing was easier than confronting the demons of forced assimilation
Will you tell my mother her accent isn't something she needs to mask and hide under the pain of her sacrifices

Will you tell my mother that she rightfully belongs here
Please tell your mother who looks at mine like an exotic bird who in her white eyes must be saved that me and mine have fought wars yours couldn't begin imagining
That we sacrificed our own souls to give birth to our dreams
That we pave ways in uncharted territories waiting to spit us out with nothing
That we build empires out of bare hands
And sand that scars

My mother walked through fire to put food on our table
What makes you think I'm afraid of your anger, white girl?
Why must we smother our heritage so you could feel more comfortable reveling in your western fantasies of what my people are supposed to look like

I am standing in front of you and you refuse to see my colors
You refuse to acknowledge that I am the book you are trying to be pages in
But you must know that if the sari doesn't fit your figure
If the bindi doesn't rest on your forehead
If the food is too spicy for your tongue
Then it wasn't for you

It is not for your taking white woman
Your privilege doesn't make your screams louder than mine

They just make the world think you're danger is more important to tend too
 But the world has taught me to look at my danger in the eyes and spit fire which
 will slit his throat
 I have had years of what did you say your name was line the insides of my tongue
 I have turned cold in the face of your English is so good for a Pakistani girl
 you're so pretty for a Pakistani girl
 You don't even look Pakistani
 I have had mockery made of my bare being in spaces where people's minds were
 too small to accept that I am real

I am standing before you and refuse to acknowledge my colors
 I am the hues of orange, red and turquoise
 I am the gulabi, surkh and ferozi colors of my people
 the soil is twisted with the blood of ancestors I never knew
 I am the manifestation of my generational prayers
 I am the first of many

Mannal {muh-nal}
 Mannal {maa-nal}
 Mannal {mi-naal}

I am finally proud to say

That beginning to be proud of my roots
 Has poured courage down my throat
 And lined the insides of my bones with pride
 I can now easily say my name the way my mother intended it to sound when she
 named me

mannal {may-naal}
 kambyabi