

## For My Son

Why don't you call me "Mamoni" anymore?  
That, you know, worked very well for us  
Ever since you learned to talk, eleven years ago,  
Far, very far away in the sunny world we call home.

You don't remember that distant land,  
Where the sun-scorched sky is more placid  
Than the dreamy hue of lapis lazuli, more brilliant  
Than the dazzling glints of illuminated sapphire,  
And the rain-resonant bellowing sky is as mystically dark  
As the chariot-steering Krishna heralding the Kurukshetra;  
Where the straggling roads are old fragmentary labyrinths,  
And obtrusive houses smother the sultry space in between,  
Where people stroll breezily on sun-baked or rain-drenched  
    rooftops  
And fling invisible nets to fish for friendship across the walls,  
Seeking it in the undercurrents of suddenly emergent silvery  
    voices,  
And scooping it from the depths of winding rivers of furtive  
    glances.

You don't remember those days of your babyhood  
When you were the youngest grandchild  
And I was my father's restless daughter,  
Those vibrant days when your grandfather read you  
Stories — frisky, flouncy, pellucid tales — from your first book,  
Rode frantic little rickshaws for a jouncing hour,  
And climbed four interminable flights of stairs,  
With you in his snuggling arms, time and again.  
You don't remember those primordial days  
When both of your grandmothers spent  
Whole days of work and watchful nights with you,  
You used to call me "Mamoni" then.

And even last year when you were eleven,  
You weren't toying with "Mami" — your attempt  
At consonance between English and Bangla.  
Perhaps you chose a Bangla word to  
Act as a quasi-substitute for "Mommy,"  
Or perhaps you long to meet your aunts at home,  
Perhaps you're tickled by the feather-lined voice  
Of your father's little niece who calls me "Mami,"  
Or perhaps you're simply embarrassed to call me  
"Moni," perhaps the mesmeric euphony  
Of the languages you hear have Pied Piped you  
Into a fluty mountain of cultural melange.

But I long to hear you call me "Mamoni" again,  
And not the linguistic compromise you chose  
In "Ammu" from the "Amma" we borrowed  
From another distant land a few generations ago.

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*Mamoni*: In many Bangalee families, children are taught to call their mothers "Mamoni," a combination of "Ma" (Bangla for "mother") and "moni" (Bangla for "dear" or "darling").

*Kurukshetra*: Literally the Kuru-field, that is, the battlefield in the war between the Kurus and the Pandavs in the *Mahabharata*. Krishna acts as the charioteer of Arjuna in the Kurukshetra.

*Mami*: The maternal uncle's wife is called "Mami" in Bangla.