

## EXILE

Ravi Shankar

There's nowhere else I'd rather not be than here,  
But here I am nonetheless, *dispossessed*,  
Though not quite, because I never owned  
What's been taken from me, never have belonged  
In and to a place, a people, a common history.  
Even as a child when I was slurred in school—  
*Towel head, dot boy, camel jockey*—  
None of the abuse was precise: only Sikhs  
Wear turbans, widows and young girls *bindis*,  
Not one species of camel is indigenous to India...  
If, as Simone Weil writes, to be rooted  
Is the most important and least recognized need  
Of the human soul, behold: I am an epiphyte.  
I conjure sustenance from thin air and the smell  
Of both camphor and meatloaf equally repel me.  
I've worn a *lungi* pulled between my legs,  
Done designer drugs while subwoofers throbbed,  
Sipped *masala chai* steaming from a tin cup,  
Driven a Dodge across the Verrazano in rush hour,  
And always to some degree felt extraneous,  
Like a meteorite happened upon bingo night.  
This alien feeling, honed in aloneness to an edge,  
Uses me to carve an appropriate mask each morning.  
I'm still unsure what effect it has on my soul.