**Weave**

Naima Rashid

Like a broker of brocades,

a sea of cloth around her,

it was always like this that I found her—

rosary still in hand,

prayer still on lips.

She was a devotee simply continuing

an act of worship.

I came to her temple

like a heathen at a wrong address,

with a kind of dread

and a kind of awe.

She would ease into it gently,

begin unfurling the mounds of memories.

The tea-towels were her wedding gift from an uncle

who wore the tallest turban in the village,

who walked on foot in his polished black shoes

all the miles to the village where he had fallen in love with a married woman,

whom he ultimately made his bride.

You could find them no more, these khais from Faisalabad,

her nieces had hand-woven them on a spindle;

they had a rare weave.

The nieces don’t talk to her anymore because of a family feud;

these are all she has of them.

I couldn’t trawl that mine of memories

across the mountains I have to trek,

and the oceans I have to sail.

The sum of my life

fits snugly in a North Face bag.

These pieces were not from her;

her soul was grafted on to them—

the way she would caress the cotton,

slide her hands over the silk,

touch the tassels of a gifted prayer rug,

she was honouring the souls of the gifters,

catching the breath of the parted ones,

touching up in her mind

the homes of those to come.

And all this while I’m thinking

Isn’t she planting a garden of pressed flowers,

plucked from between the pages of time?

Why isn’t she more interested in buds?

A macramé that was the only adornment

she could afford in their first house

which they rented at ten rupees a month,

a wedding dress with hair-like golden thread

at the helm – the only object she carried

when they fled Ludhiana for Lahore,

embroidered platitudes she sold

to make ends meet.

The fabric was fraught with her fight,

it held the stories she knew would never

make it into history books.

Her legacy was sprawled around her,

the question trembled in her eyes.

I couldn’t bring myself to look up,

lest she read that

I am no worthy caretaker

of this sea of yards and yarns.

My style is cross-body;

I live hands-free.