

canadian, eh! or depends on who you ask!

second class -1970
air india to london to toronto to vancouver
jatts -the peasant caste
the poolside landowner
*jameen ta thoree ah*¹
the poorer side of the green revolution
*par m.a. kithi*²
english literature master
an education bought by mortgaged land
the first to be someone we are not

punjabi university, patiala
no st xavier's college, bombay
no delhi university degree
from patiala to delhi to embassy
officer: "yes mr singh, canada has need for professionals
like yourself"
while officer-sahib thinks of servitude
good office cleaning staff

pierce the time wall
land on cold earth
entry suspicions
custom direct
red line filled with brown
broken by walls
by walls within walls
while white ones
move to the green line

who are you, why did you come?
we need to verify your identity!
have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence?
do you have any communicable diseases?
your education is not recognized in canada
you must begin again

basement suites, babies already! babies
your fault for coming here
begin again

¹ *jameen ta thoree ah*: the amount of land is less than average

² *par m.a. kithi*: but do not have a MA (master's degree)

*chitti*³for *bharat*⁴
*rishthidar*⁵ expect canadian dollars
to pay for your education
employment counsellors and welfare officers say
work now, educate later

opportunities in the service sector
do you know how to drive?
how about cleaning?
the mills always hire “your kind”

street lamps
strike over eyes
emptying out garbage cans
auden and spender remembered
spelt out the
tyranny of the past
on an ineffectual present
wrapped and insinuated itself
around the invisible
the sleeping poor
and ran a choke hold

four years and a test
citizenship officer: “who was the first prime minister of
canada?”
translator: “uncleji, where do most punjabis go to eat a
chicken burger?”
“macdonald”
canadian
eh! or

canadian
double shift nightmare
shape shifts into grey
wife latches on,
holding her ground
one day
after adding up all the double shifts
holidays and weekends
bought the rest of the house
on the wrong side

Phinder Dulai

³ *chitti*: letter

⁴ *bharat*: motherland

⁵ *rishthidar*: relatives

Analysis: Assignment 2

Stanza 1

- The speaker perceives his life as a hierarchy -the phrase, “second class” is used as a metaphor to represent how his family's poor socioeconomic background continues to define his life.
- “green revolution:” The speaker takes the reader to the motherland, specifically the land of five rivers, Punjab where the deteriorating condition of farming communities affect the “*jatts* - peasant caste.” The negative state of the farmlands pushes the speaker to immigrate to the west in hope for a better, prosperous future. Thus, the “1970s” was the prime time for immigration from North India to Vancouver, BC, -specifically east Punjab.
- “english literature master:” The speaker held a respectable career as an English teacher in his village, nearby villages or cities. The use of the term “master” expresses a double meaning in terms of how the students and other school staff members saw him as a superior because he was the “English” teacher. English, symbolically represents the colonial history of India -where the British held higher status before the partition. Thus, people of India subconsciously still perceive the English language as superior or elite than Indian languages. The term “master,” is currently used to address the teacher in Indian schools even today.
- “education bought:” While an education is normally earned, the speaker perceives his education to have been bought in order to get him the english degree from “patiala university.” While his parents may have thought that “mortgaging” their family farm was a sacrifice, the speaker, clearly sees it as a trade. Education, according to the speaker, is not a commodity, but a virtue that can only be earned without sacrificing basic modes of survival -in his case, the family farmland.

- “the first to be someone we are not:” This line foreshadows the speaker’s future life in Canada. The speaker begins to question his professional identity early in the poem.

Stanza 2

- “punjabi university:” One of the recognized universities in east Punjab. From deep within, the speaker wants to express his pride for the university; however, he keeps his emotion suppressed because a state university is not seen as elite, or progressive such as the colonial one, “st. xavier’s college” and “delhi university” from India’s capital city, Delhi. Furthermore, the speaker continues to struggle with his identity and he shows this through the population of the three universities -representing a different student body population. Majority of Punjabi university students are Sikhs from east Punjab, Delhi University has predominately Hindu students and St. Xavier’s has a high Christian student population. The speaker, therefore, may be perceiving religion as a barrier to succeed in his home country; thus, immigrating overseas has opportunities, but he fails to realize that he will be of a different religion from mainstream citizens in Vancouver, Canada.

Stanza 4

- “we need to verify your identity!:” The speaker uses an exclamation mark at the end of this line to imply the higher status of the Canadian. The immigration officer sets the “us versus them” tone as he asks the speaker questions about his “identity,” “convic[tion] of criminal offences” and “communicable diseases.” The speaker challenges the invasion of privacy at the airport.
- “your education is not recognized in canada:” A degree, even if it is an English degree from the east is unrecognized in Canada because the law considers the degree to be invalid since it is from a third world country. The degree from Punjab is viewed as foreign, and inapplicable in the Canadian workplace context.

Visual Resources

Links

- google image of Patiala University

<https://goo.gl/maps/j89a5Upb6et>

- Vancouver Airport iframe image

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- Punjab to Delhi Map

<http://www.dhimanindia.com/images/map.jpg>