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**SHRADDHA ADITYAVIR SINGH**

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**My Ma's Sari**

My Ma's sari fills the void she left behind.  
It is her essence. It still carries her fragrance.  
The nine yards are:  
the nine years symbolic of her absence.

In the pleats of her sari,  
I used to bury my head and  
wish the cares of my life away.  
And, they'd actually be gone.

Clinging on to the fall of her pallav,  
I knew I was holding my anchor.  
It was also my touchstone.  
And sometimes, I would wipe my brow with it.

Ma's saris, so fondly collected,  
to be passed on to her daughters,  
are still hanging in her closet.  
I visit it time and again; and borrow from it.

In wearing her saris, I feel a sense of pride;  
a surreal embrace that envelops me,  
of clutching on to the nostalgic past,  
which slowly slips away into memory.

But, there is this one sari belonging to my Ma,  
which I will never wear.  
Never will I take it out of her closet.  
I dare not move it or, wash it, or air it.  
I will not share it,  
because  
when everything else is a matter of the mind  
and all words and deeds of comfort fail,  
this one sari is what I can hold in my hand  
bury my head in,  
and  
still smell Ma in it.  
My only way of filling the void that she left behind.

**Mind it!**

Most often during the day,  
I find myself saying “No”, repeating,  
sometimes softly;  
At other times almost screeching.

At the receiving end,  
is my bright-eyed baby girl;  
Mostly perplexed, at other times sullen-faced  
on being instructed to abandon her play.

I reason out to myself,  
“my ‘No’s are meant to keep her safe!”  
Keep her from harm’s way:  
From tripping on the staircase for fun,  
or poking her eye out with a toothpick  
Or, from stepping out into the blazing sun.

I am trying to watch out for her;  
Mostly, forgetting my own childhood,  
when, in the name of play,  
I would jump from one backyard to another  
Not knowing what or who I would encounter.

I was a risk-taker;  
at best, an adventurer.  
Often cycling way past my permitted zones,  
Wandering off to places just to explore.

Now that I am a mother, I wonder  
Had my mother discovered my passion for the unexplored,  
would she have asked me to abandon my enterprises?  
Would she have limited my surprises?

Now that I am a mother, I know  
that she knew what I was up to.  
Or, at least must have figured out,  
upon seeing me turn up at our house:  
every late afternoon,  
resembling a cross between a monkey and a raccoon.

How different have our challenges been?  
Our day-to-day is no longer the same.

And yet, when I am treading that thin line between being indulgent or authoritarian;  
so as to not crush my toddler’s feisty spirit,  
I think of my guide, my touchstone,  
and follow her footsteps, and quietly thank her  
for the freedom she gave me, and more,  
and allowed me to soar.

**Parents - together**

Together, when we lie in bed these days  
we look up and see glow-in-the-dark stars  
and little fairies dancing on the ceiling fan.

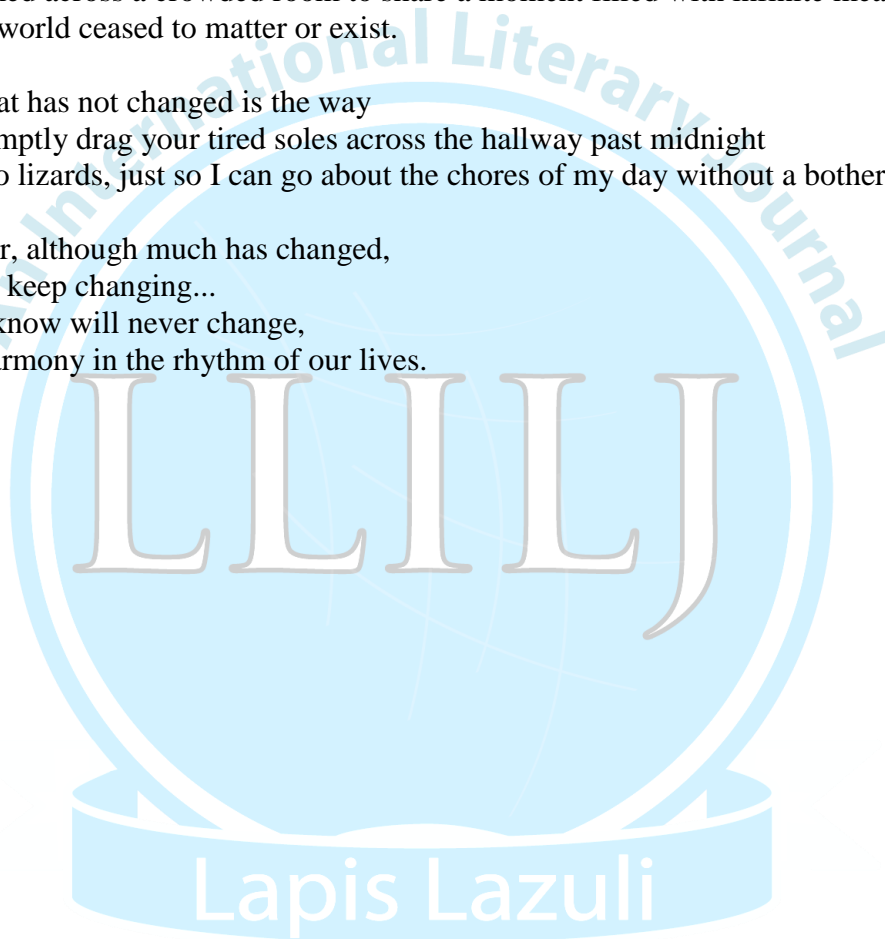
Much has changed from the time when  
a star-studded sky and dull winter breeze lulled us to sleep  
on a houseboat in Alleppy on our honeymoon.

Together, we are forever busy making sounds  
pointing objects and singing nonsense rhymes  
that have no meaning for the world at large.

Much has changed from the time we stole glances  
and looked across a crowded room to share a moment filled with infinite meaning,  
and the world ceased to matter or exist.

But, what has not changed is the way  
you promptly drag your tired soles across the hallway past midnight  
and shoo lizards, just so I can go about the chores of my day without a bother.

Together, although much has changed,  
and will keep changing...  
What I know will never change,  
is the harmony in the rhythm of our lives.

**BIO-NOTE**

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Shraddha Adityavir Singh teaches Literature in English at Zakir Husain Delhi College (M), University of Delhi. She is a Commonwealth fellow, has several academic publications, and has presented papers at national and international seminars and conferences. She is a bilingual poet and has read her poems at poets' meets in Montreal, Canada; and more recently at the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

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