

Saree: A Spectacle

In all the fifty five years
I have worn the saree
I have never been conscious
of wearing it
Not even in a
conservative US midwestern
town
where all predominantly white
eyes
were on me

I must have been excited
wearing it for the first time at
fifteen

Just like anyone else
I bought and wore the latest
I felt excited stitching
a cross stitch border and pallu
for my sister-in-law and me

How I stole time
angered my mother
while I went every day
to my friend's place
to secretly paint roses on a saree
for my mother
These and many more
 associations
come to mind
when I think of a saree

But now
why do I become a spectacle
when I walk in my saree

The cleaning woman at the
 airport toilet
at Chandigarh, Hyderabad or
 even Chennai
thinks I am one who doesn't know
how to use a toilet

Madras in my childhood
memories of sarees and half
sarees

Today I search for one
even among people in their fifties
Ironic

a westernised name for a city
full of South Indian traditional
wear

Championing our culture
the city changes its name
but where have the sarees
half sarees

disappeared

In the North of India
I am not surprised
I am the only one
or perhaps there may be one or

two others
in this 'strange' contraption
all eyes looking at me
wondering if I am a freak

I am reminded
of a story
wound around the saree
I read to my child
she loved it then
its beauty its usefulness its playfulness
but the same child now grown up
wonders how anyone
can be comfortable in it
I tell her
wearing it
my mother played tennis
ball badminton
I played shuttle table tennis
I wore boots with a saree
trudged through slush and snow

got down rugged ravines
 climbed up ragged hills
went canoeing and rafting
People wonder
if I am concocting stories

Let their imagination
concoct stories
For me
the saree is the real thing
it's me
my identity my life

Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh
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