The Po-Co Kid

maatahet logan bol na sake hai
darsana nahin maral, mUrjhaake

Let’s get one thing queer—I’m no Sabu-like sidekick,
I’m the main drag. Ram Ram in a sari; salaam

on the street. I don’t speak Hindu, Paki, or Indian,
can’t control minds, have no psychic powers.

I clip my yellow nails at dusk; on Saturday nights
I shave my head. Forgive me Shiva,

forgive me Saturn. I’m Coolie on Liberty Ave, desi
in Jackson Heights—where lights spell Seasons Greetings
to cover Christmas, Diwali, and Eid—
where white folks in ethnic aisles ask, Will your parents

arrange your bride? while Ma and I scope out fags,
gyaff, and laugh while aunties thread our eyebrows.

“The subaltern cannot speak. Representation has not withered away.”
Aji Recording: How Will I Go

dulhin rowe rowe piya ke ghar jana
kaheki rowe piya ke ghar jana
piya ke ghar jana, piya ke ghar jana
kaheki rowe piya ke ghar jana

sasur mare mare baans danda leke
sasur mare mare nanad gari aawe

saiya mare mare baans danda leke
saiya mare gale mein bahi dalke

kaise ham jaibo sasural
chunari mein lagal daag

kaise ham chipao
chunari mein lagal daag

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Dulahin cry fe go a ’e husban’ house
’e cry an’ cry

Faddah-in-law an’ muddah-in-law does beat me
Sistah-in-law does send insult
me husban does gimme lash wid one piece bamboo
me husban does beat me afta ’e grabble me t’roat

mow me go go a me faddah-in-law,
me orhni get one stain—

mow me go hide ’am,
me orhni get one stain—

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The bride cries, she must go to her lover’s—
she cries because she must go.

My in-laws will beat me,
my sister-in-law will curse me out.

My love will hold my neck
and beat me with a bamboo rod.

How will I go to my in-laws
with a stained veil—

how will I hide it,
the stain in my veil—

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Kalapani

means water’s black
means sea crossers, means
to forget secrets and rituals, means
conversion, means cloud cover,
means night means
sunset, means loss, means
water in the breath,
means to mislay
your name, means orphaning,
means taking the name
Coolie, means breaking
under bundles of cane stalk,
means Guyana, means
migration, means America, means
voyage, means to remain
living, means planting
seeds in your ancestors’ sweat,
means salt and sea-
change, means a story’s new
lea, means a yield
of fruit, means
to generate, means
to rise as the sun