

The Day India's First Woman Prime Minister Was Assassinated

NANDINI DHAR

"export the dictator
from the province next door
the twentieth century
could be home"
—*Kimberly Alidio, Songs of Americas*

Sister Nora shaved Amritjit and Balwinder's hair—

walked them home herself

by noon, school was over

trains stopped running, so did the buses

my uncles walked home from work—

five hours it took them—from Dalhousie Square to Garia
Station Road.

Because there was no TV in our house, my father kept
turning the radio channels—

listening to the same news over and over again; a smile of assurance deepening on his lips with each reiteration.

They sang—the men—holding hands, without standing up—

the anthem to the nation-state called Utopia,

their passports to which were lost in mail.

In lieu of such abiding affirmations, what they had were temporary residence permits—once.

A.k.a. Party-cards, which now shredded into several pieces, were good for nothing but bookmarks.

My mother, like all other celebrations in our house, worked in the kitchen:

brewing tea leaves, straining them, pouring sugar in the cups, frying pakoras,

peeping in to the living room to serve men their teas. I sat, with my father and uncles, listening—

storing up fragments of their dreams, trying to find my way into the histories of their silences.