Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you then please share your story.

Home

When driving home, bumpy roads scare us the least. The same cannot be said about the herds of sheep that claim those roads.  Both greet us unfailingly, each time we go.

Every summer, my family and I make a pilgrimage to our home in Kashmir. We are first greeted by the wind; a remedy in torment: bleating sheep traffic or otherwise. Then withthe trees, a *corps de ballet* of Russian Poplars that decorate the National Highway 44. I can never forget the sight of the tall beasts- how they swing in hypnotic rhythm against an impossibly blue sky- beating in unison with chaotic swirls of wind. Then we reach Anantnag, my place of birth, where my grandparents laid the stones of what I liberally refer to as home.

It has been eleven years that my parents brought us to Delhi in pursuit of a better life. I juggle between these two cities now;

One a rustic, crystal heaven. The other an enormous, polluted haven. And I am grateful for both.

I have a tangible relationship with Kashmir, my mother and complement. When I am in Delhi- the land of tall skyscrapers, my eyes wander in a wish to find the mountains (colossal guardians looking over the valley) that seem to follow travelers everywhere in Kashmir. When I stand on a street vendor’s stall in New Delhi, gobbling dumplings, I feel eternally connected by a line straight to myself somewhere in Kashmir, eating fried lotus stem. In embracing both parts of me, I feel most beautiful, most strong.

Sometimes, I also feel an icy presence of pretense. I find myself practicing my native tongue in the mirror, almost afraid I'll fail some test. My family dissects my incongruous accent, measured by the number of language blunders I make,reminding me of the time I have spent away from Kashmir.  I can't help but question, "Am I Kashmiri enough?”

It is a pulsating song, absurd when heard for the first time, but frightening. Sometimes I can hear the voices of millions of others -their hands steady in formation like a great big wave- chanting to someone, somewhere, “Am I man enough?" Am I beautiful enough?”

Kashmiri music becomes my escape when I am unsure. My favourite song is Rasheed Hafiz’s 'DapyomasBalyaras'; the words belong to the great sufi poet, SochKral. Hafiz sings, “I asked the beloved, what lies inside and what lies outside.”

The answer echoes an ache, “That which is outside, is inside.” It means many things but one I hold most dear: I believe, only in an exploration of dichotomies, as I carry the rich, delicate lenses of two invariably intertwined cultures, I understand better.

I continue to explore everything through Kashmir’s lens and my own.  Kashmir has bestowed on me all her charm and I wish to reciprocate in any way I can. It helps that in my exploring, I can close my eyes no matter where I am, and think of the river Jhelum, the mighty mountains that adorn her, and the mist covering its sheen. I think of five huddled penguins wandering in a big lost city. It is then that I feel Kashmiri enough, Delhiite enough, unfazed by a million floating questions. I feel home.