Poetry - 'Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan'

Q. Annotate the entire poem in detail; identify different literary techniques used and make brief interpretations.

They sent me a salwar kameez
   peacock-blue,
     and another
  glistening like an orange split open,
embossed slippers, gold and black
     points curling.
Candy-striped glass bangles
     snapped, drew blood.
Like at school, fashions changed
     in Pakistan -
the salwar bottoms were broad and stiff,
     then narrow.
My aunts chose an apple-green sari,
  silver-bordered
     for my teens.

I tried each satin-silken top -
  was alien in the sitting-room.
I could never be as lovely
     as those clothes -
I longed
for denim and corduroy.
  My costume clung to me
     and I was aflame,
I couldn't rise up out of its fire,
  half-English,
     unlike Aunt Jamila.

I wanted my parents' camel-skin lamp -
  switching it on in my bedroom,
to consider the cruelty
     and the transformation
from camel to shade,
  marvel at the colours
     like stained glass.

My mother cherished her jewellery -
  Indian gold, dangling, filigree,
     But it was stolen from our car.

The presents were radiant in my
wardrobe.
  My aunts requested cardigans
     from Marks and Spencers.

My salwar kameez
  didn't impress the school friend
who sat on my bed, asked to see
  my weekend clothes.
But often I admired the mirror-work,
  tried to glimpse myself
     in the miniature
glass circles, recall the story
  how the three of us
     sailed to England.
Prickly heat had me screaming on the
way.
  I ended up in a cot
In my English grandmother's dining-room,
  found myself alone,
     playing with a tin-boat.

I pictured my birthplace
  from fifties' photographs.
     When I was older
there was conflict, a fractured land
  throbbing through newsprint.
Sometimes I saw Lahore -
     my aunts in shaded rooms,
screened from male visitors,
  sorting presents,
     wrapping them in tissue.

Or there were beggars, sweeper-girls
  and I was there -
     of no fixed nationality,
staring through fretwork
     at the Shalimar Gardens.

Moniza Alvi

Poetry Essay

Q. Explain how identity is important to the poet? Comment on the themes, literary devices and the structure of the poem.

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