

for curtain cloth
and sofa cloth
canopy me.
I have new brown veins.
In the evening bazaar
very deftly
an unknown girl
is hennaing my hand.
I am clinging
to these firm peacock lines
like people who cling
to the sides of a train.
Now the furious streets
are hushed.
I'll scrape off
the dry brown lines
before I sleep,
reveal soft as a snail trail
the amber bird beneath.
It will fade in a week.
When India appears and reappears
I'll lean across a country
with my hands outstretched
longing for the unknown girl
in the neon bazaar.

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UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

This poem describes the poet's visit to India and the time she had her hand hennaed by a girl in the bazaar. It was an experience she never forgot.

The poem makes many connections between western and eastern culture. The 'unknown girl' seems to stand for the true spirit of India, which has now been influenced heavily by aspects of western culture (often called 'westernisation'). India is seen as colourful and beautiful and this is reflected in the decoration of the henna pattern, with its complicated peacock design.