

## Punjabi

By Mehnaz Turner

Punjabi, a rhapsody in my heart,  
flounders on the tongue an out of tune  
instrument. Yet a sip of a string  
of words, and the weaker side of me  
becomes a lute of iron. The Muslim  
in me becomes Hindu, and the Hindu  
in me becomes Sikh. The woman in me  
becomes man, and the man in me becomes animal.  
Partitions dissolve into the heat of mixed melodies.  
The body a lit match, the effect of a cause.  
Scrambled syllables of a language  
I will never speak echoing in my chest,  
and suddenly the miles between Los Angeles  
and Lahore seem yellowed with snatches:  
fragments of songs, memories of voices.  
Here in America my thoughts open in English,  
but the unfinished sentences make me think  
of the biology of language, the Punjabi  
in my blood, prior to English in all respects,  
so that even as I write this poem, I am translating.