

They'll Say, 'She Must Be from Another Country'

AUTHOR Dharker, Imtiaz

GENRE Poetry

OVERVIEW Imtiaz Dharker is one of the most important Indian poets currently writing in English. A recurring theme in her poetry is the danger of exclusion, as she noted in a recent interview: "In a world that seems to be splitting itself into narrower national and religious groups, sects, castes, subcastes, we can go on excluding others until we come down to a minority of one." The title of this poem--which is the refrain--reminds us how quickly we often dismiss those whom we categorize as "other." The narrator wonders if there is "another country" for such outsiders, though notices that "from where we are it doesn't look like a country, it's more like the cracks that grow between borders." Published in 2003, Dharker's poem raises questions about the possibilities of transcending one's own culture and prejudices.

FULL TEXT* [Read the poem](#)

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TYPE Reading - Short Enough to Read Aloud.

THEMES [Connection and Relationship](#) [Crisis and Conflict](#) [Diversity and Difference](#) [Exclusion and Belonging](#) [Impact and Outcomes](#) [Justice and Equality](#) [Organizing and Activism](#) [Race, Ethnicity and Culture](#) [Social and Political Change](#)

BIG QUESTIONS [Is difference a problem, an opportunity, a challenge or a gift?](#) [How do we respond to strangers?](#)

PUBLICATION Civically Engaged Reader

SPANISH VERSION

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your impression of the narrator? How would you describe her?
2. Who are the "they" she refers to? Are they always the same or do they change?
3. Why is the statement "She must be/from another country" an answer to all the situations Dharker's narrator describes? What is meant by it?
4. What does the narrator mean by "country of freaks"? Who lives there?
5. What does the narrator mean when she says the country "where all of us live... doesn't look like a country"?
6. To whom is the narrator referring as "we" in the last stanza?
7. Why is the narrator finally "happy to say... I must be/from another country"? Why is she happy? Do you believe her?
8. Have you ever heard anyone say, "he or she must be from another country"? If so, what did they mean? How, if at all, did you respond?

THEY'LL SAY: 'SHE MUST BE FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY'

When I can't comprehend
why they're burning books
or slashing paintings,
when they can't bear to look
at god's own nakedness,
when they ban the film
and gut the seats to stop the play
and I ask why
they just smile and say,
'She must be
from another country.'

When I speak on the phone
and the vowel sounds are off
when the consonants are hard
and they should be soft,
they'll catch on at once
they'll pin it down
they'll explain it right away
to their own satisfaction,
they'll cluck their tongues
and say,
'She must be
from another country.'

When my mouth goes up
instead of down,
when I wear a tablecloth
to go to town,
when they suspect I'm black
or hear I'm gay
they won't be surprised,
they'll purse their lips
and say,
'She must be
from another country.'

When I eat up the olives
and spit out the pits
when I yawn at the opera
in the tragic bits
when I pee in the vineyard
as if it were Bombay,
flaunting my bare ass
covering my face
laughing through my hands
they'll turn away,
shake their heads quite sadly,
'She doesn't know any better,'
they'll say,
'She must be
from another country.'

Maybe there is a country
where all of us live,
all of us freaks