

ANJALI ARONDEKAR

Only You

Suppose a photograph is a lyric for the future.
Suppose a photograph is only you.

My Aai has dementia.
Her memory suffused with
the changing shades of a life
lost and found.
Will I find myself again, she asks me?
A question without a focal point.

Each day we spend together,
we look at old photographs, feeling the edges
of a luminous past folded into family albums.
Each day, the same image holds Aai captive:
a grainy portrait of her with my aunt, her best friend.
Standing tall, she looks straight ahead
at the camera, defiant, joyous, youthful.
I was staring into the future,
she jokingly tells me,
and I saw you, only you.

Suppose a photograph is make believe.
Suppose a photograph is a practice of resistance.

I do not know what Aai was thinking in that picture.
Neither does she. Not then. Not now. But always,
with care, we revisit its forms. Remember,
she cajoles me, we can make up our own stories.
Once upon a time, a life refused simplicity,
eschewed the occupation of description.

I write about histories of subalternity and sexuality,
histories that are full of joyous indiscretions
and staged archives, shaped and determined by
caste-oppression. Aai's photograph summons that
history of abundance, asking not to be restored
to memory, but to be set adrift on a voyage of
identifications. Perhaps such abundance leaves us
inarticulate, or we are daunted by the weight of
its promise. It might be time to heed the call, and
set our photographs free. Only you. Only you.



Pramila Laxmeshwar and Leela Shirodkar (circa 1962)

160dpi
→300dpi